

THE CAVALLIER

MARCH
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THE CAVALIER

Vol. II.

MARCH, 1909.

No. 2.

TWO MILLIONS AT LARGE.

BY MARY C. FRANCIS,
Author of "A Son of Destiny," "Dalrymple," etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

"HAVE YOU FOUND PAUL?"



WAINWRIGHT hung up the receiver and turned again to the stenographer.

"Will you kindly read that last again. Miss Barton?"

"And in consideration that this fee was received for the services enumerated in the accompanying bill of—"

The telephone rang again. Wainwright, frowning, picked up a pile of memoranda, ran through it hastily, and, with an impatient exclamation, pressed an electric button with one hand, while with the other he disconnected the receiver and stood it on the desk with a thump.

The little stenographer surveyed her shining finger-nails approvingly. On days when things went wrong she didn't have so many letters to write.

"Jimmy," said Wainwright to the boy who promptly appeared, "ask Nelson to come here at once."

"Yes, sir," said the boy. He turned and almost collided with the tall young man who had followed him.

"Pardon me, Mr. Wainwright," he said, "but 4x00 Bryant is calling in the outer office, and says it's a matter of life or death to speak to you."

Wainwright caught up the receiver and

called eagerly through it: "Yes, yes! What is it?"

A few sharp staccato sounds floated out.

Wainwright's face changed. "All right. Tell him I'm coming. Be there as soon as possible."

He got up quickly. "Nelson, John Garrett is dying. Look after the Jones-Morris case. I don't know when I'll be back."

He strode hastily out of the office and walked to the Subway.

Less than twenty minutes later he stood in the tapestried drawing-room of John Garrett's suite at the Court Hotel. Garrett's man, pale and agitated, greeted him as if relieved.

"Oh, sir, thank Heaven you've come at last! I thought I'd never get you on the phone."

"Is it true?" asked Wainwright.

"Yes, sir. A sudden stroke an hour ago, and the doctor says—"

The falling of portières in the doorway behind them made a faint chime of Japanese wind-bells as a gray-haired professional man entered and held out his hand.

"Ah, Wainwright, you've come not a minute too soon. Glad to see you. There's no hope. Paralysis. Heart action weak, and general condition very bad. He has something to tell you. Go in alone. I've done all I can."

The valet led the way across the drawing-room, through the adjoining one-half den, half library, and parted the heavy brocade hangings. Wainwright stepped softly to the side of the bed.

The dying man seemed unconscious of his presence. Iron-gray hair, falling back from a broad forehead, showed the strong, clean-cut face, pinched now by the gray pallor of the Great Enemy. There was something unmistakably pathetic in the set of the features.

Wainwright, looking at the lonely, dying millionaire, felt the grim irony of wealth. He stooped and took the limp hand in his own.

"I'm here, Mr. Garrett. Wainwright. Do you hear me? What can I do for you?"

The sick man opened his eyes and looked vacantly at his visitor.

"Paul," he murmured. "Paul—have you found Paul?"

"Not yet," said Wainwright gently, "but we hope to soon."

"Oh, find him," pleaded the faint voice. "Find him and bring him here. I want to see him. I must see him."

"Mr. Garrett," said Wainwright firmly, "Paul is not here, and he cannot be here, because we do not know yet where he is. Rouse yourself. Do you hear me? Do you understand? What is it you want to say to me?"

The wandering, empty eyes came back from the world of shadows whither they had traveled, settled on Wainwright's face, and slowly filled with a dim sense of recognition.

"Wainwright," he whispered. "I'm going—going fast."

"Nonsense," replied the lawyer, cheered by the returning mind. "you're just having one of your bad spells, that's all."

A deep, penetrating gaze answered him. "When you're going, you'll know it, too. Twenty-five years, and no sign of him yet. Have you the will safe?"

"Yes."

"Don't give up the search—don't ever give up. Promise me you won't."

"I promise. I will never give up the search."

"Then you will find him. You will find Paul Hamilton, and he shall have the money—two million dollars. Thank

God, I know I can trust you, Wainwright. I couldn't rest in my grave if it were not for that. I want him to have the money and enjoy it. I was a long time getting it, and I haven't been happy since. It must do somebody some good."

"It shall," said Wainwright. "Rest easy. He shall have it and enjoy it."

"And Corinne," said the fading voice—a thin thread of sound that came out of the motionless body—"Corinne, too. She is to have the other two million dollars and be happy."

"Corinne St. John will be an heiress, thanks to you. Two millions of dollars ought to make any woman happy."

"Reach under my pillow, please—I cannot lift my arm—and get the envelope that is there."

Wainwright drew out a long, thin, blue envelope, addressed in Garrett's hand, "For Paul Hamilton, care Henry Wainwright," and held it before the still figure. "Is this it?"

"Yes. Keep it safe. Let no one see it or touch it but yourself. I want no one but Paul to read it. Look for him all your life, and if you don't find him have this destroyed at your death. I have never been happy in all my life, and I want them to be, Paul and Corinne."

"You want them to marry?"

"Yes, yes; but for love, not for the money. Oh, if I had only—"

The troubled eyes filled with agony. Wainwright, deeply touched by the suffering of the fast-departing mind, bent over him tenderly.

"Mr. Garrett," he asked, "have you told me all you know? I have so little to go on in this search that if there is anything else you can tell me to help, you ought to do it now. For instance, the Millers, of whom you have spoken—can you give me any better clue to them than you have given?"

The face of the dying man twitched with pain. It seemed as if he was making an effort to raise himself. His excitement showed itself in the eyes, which took on a glassy glare.

"The Millers!" he cried. "They know! They know! I've looked for them for twenty-five years, and I'll look for them twenty-five years longer. I'll—"

The voice ceased abruptly, and his head sank a little to one side.

Alarmed, Wainwright stepped to the door and beckoned the doctor, who, hurrying in, felt his pulse, and then laid his hand on the heart.

He answered Wainwright's inquiring look with a shake of the head, saying: "He is sinking rapidly. I doubt if he recovers consciousness."

He had scarcely finished when Garrett opened his eyes again, and stared straight into vacancy with a hollow gaze.

"Gone—gone, all gone," he murmured. "Jennie, Jennie, we'll be happy. Paul—where are you? Gone! I haven't seen him since—yesterday. It won't be long now till—"

Wainwright and the doctor, watching him intently, could not tell whether he was expressing any coherent idea. Already he seemed like one speaking from beyond the grave.

The lawyer laid his hand on the man's arm and spoke as one might to a child: "No, it won't be long now. It's all right."

"Jennie—I'm coming to you—we will find Paul. We will find him—"

He lay quite still, and over his face there passed a strange, softening change. The doctor gently pressed the eyelids down.

Wainwright stood motionless, scarcely realizing that the final scene was over. The silence was sharply broken by Garrett's man, who hurried across the room and flung himself by the side of the bed, sobbing aloud.

Presently he lifted his face, and in choking utterances said: "I've been with him for seven years, and he never said an unkind word to me."

Wainwright thoughtfully fingered the long blue envelope. "I'll take care of you, Ward. You may come with me as soon as you like. Doctor, I suppose there's no one but you and myself to arrange about the funeral, so we might as well attend to it at once."

CHAPTER II.

PLANNING THE QUEST.

THREE days later Nelson answered a summons to the private office, and found Wainwright deep in a pile of papers. The young man sat down

and waited for the abstraction of his chief to find utterance in words.

He had not long to wait. The lawyer swung around in his chair and said: "About this Garrett case—I'm the executor of the will, but I'm too busy to take up the details myself, and I'm going to turn the active work over to you. There's going to be a lot of out-of-town inquiry on it probably, and I can't be running all over the country on a clue."

"All right," said Nelson. "I'll gladly do my best. What's it like?"

Wainwright looked at him carefully. "Nelson, you're all right. You know as well as I do that the next thing for you is partnership in the firm, and by this time next year the name on the door is likely to be Warner & Wainwright instead of Bailey & Wainwright. This morning's cablegram from the old man at Berlin says he's no better. Three famous specialists have diagnosed his case as three different diseases, all incurable, and he's just starting for Vienna to consult another one and see if he can't get a fourth added to the list. You know how peculiar he is, and if you can make a good job of this case and find the missing man, I'll see that you get full credit for it."

A warm glow lit up the face of the young lawyer, and he turned a comprehensive look full on the face of the elder man.

"I'll run him down or know why," he said lightly, but with an undercurrent of earnestness. "Give me a pointer and let me start off on the trail. From what little I've heard you say of the case, there's not much to go on."

"There isn't. That's the trouble. There's less to work on than in any case I ever had. Garrett's four millions, as you know, are to be equally divided between Corinne St. John, now having her voice cultivated in Paris, and this unknown man, Paul Hamilton, who, according to Garrett, is now twenty-six years old.

"Garrett, so far as I know in my three years' acquaintance with him, never married, and his man, Ward, whom I have questioned closely, knows nothing that can throw any light on the subject. When Garrett sent for me, three years ago, to draw up his will, he talked to me

for the first and last time until he lay on his death-bed.

"By the way, this will and Garrett's address on the sealed envelope are the only specimens of his handwriting in existence, so far as I know. Probably the Millers have more, if we can find them.

"He confessed to me that the nervous strain of the long search he had conducted by himself for so many years was telling on him and, to use his own words, he felt that in time it would kill him. For my part, I have no doubt that it did. The death certificate read 'paralysis.' It might better have said that he died of a broken heart."

"But who is Paul Hamilton?"

"That is exactly what I do not know. If I did there wouldn't be any mystery or any hunt. Whoever he is, and wherever he is, he evidently is not aware of his good-fortune and, apparently, not of his own identity, but we cannot go beyond what we know, which is virtually almost nothing."

"And who is Corinne St. John?"

"She is the daughter of Mrs. Robert St. John, dead for a number of years, and for some time living in Paris with her aunt, Mrs. Clarkson. Unknown to Garrett I made a quiet investigation regarding Mrs. St. John, and found that her maiden name was Jennie Dawson, and that there had been an early love-affair between her and Garrett."

"Very likely a hidden scandal somewhere."

"I thought so at first, but I ran down a lot of apparent clues in such a direction, only to find that there was nothing to base such an idea on. Mrs. St. John's record is above suspicion. She died about eight years ago, after a year or so of widowhood, when Corinne was a child of eleven. Mr. Garrett immediately assumed all expenses of Corinne's education and support, and by regular monthly payments has kept her and her aunt in comfort. She is now nineteen, and by the provisions of the will is to come into her half of the four millions at once.

"I am directed to find Paul Hamilton as soon as possible, when he is to have the other half. Also it was Garrett's lifelong wish that he and Corinne St. John should meet, love, and marry, but apparently the thing that lay nearest his

heart was that the match should be one of affection. If the two young people should not fall in love, no pressure is to be brought to bear on them."

"Lucky for them," said Nelson. "If a few more millionaires would make such wills there might be a few less unhappy marriages."

"Yes, but all the chances are that they won't fall in love. In fact, the girl is probably entangled with a good-for-nothing foreigner, a Count von Baritz, who has been dangling on her heels in Paris for almost a year past. I have cabled her to return at once, and as soon as she gets here one of your duties will be to take her round some and make yourself generally useful—opera, theater, all that sort of thing. I have to keep an eye on her, and count on you."

"It looks to me as if I'd have to keep an eye on her. Do I get a night off once in a while?"

"Oh, I see! Miss Lambert will object?"

"Marion is a sensible girl. She and Miss St. John will probably be very good friends."

"I hope so. You never can tell anything about women. My immediate object is to gain some time to look up this alleged count. Of course he'll follow her over—hot on the trail of an heiress. That's one reason why I sent for her. I'll have my wife give a dinner and throw him off his guard by some delicate social attentions, while I find out if he really has a commission in the Kaiser's favorite regiment, as he claims."

"He may be the real thing," said Nelson.

"Possibly. Another reason why I want the young lady right here is that I wish to see the photograph she has of Paul Hamilton, one of the only two in existence. The other one is in the possession of the Millers, who are as elusive as Paul Hamilton himself."

"A photograph!" echoed Nelson, surprised. "Why, if you have a picture of the man, what more do you want? Publish it in the papers, and—"

"Not exactly," replied Wainwright dryly. "You see, this photograph was taken when he was only a year old. Do you suppose you would know yourself at that age, unless you were told?"

The young man laughed. "Well, upon my word, it looks to me like a wild-goose chase. Hasn't Paul Hamilton even a strawberry mark?"

Wainwright ignored the levity. "Garrett's interest in Corinne St. John is fully accounted for by his love-affair with her mother before she married. With regard to Paul, I have not been able to trace anything beyond the time when the child was one year old, and left in the care of people by the name of Miller—Mr. and Mrs. John Miller—who at the time were living in Rockville, New York. They soon moved from there, saying they were going to Missouri, where they had relatives. I've raked Missouri with a fine-tooth comb, but never found the slightest trace of them."

"How does it come that Miss St. John has one of the photographs?"

"Mr. Garrett gave it to her mother. If we ever find the people with the other one, we will either have the right ones, or at least something definite to go on. Since I have had the case I have discovered about a couple of thousand Millers, and six or seven promising Paul Hamiltons, one of them seeming to be the right one up to the last minute. I was glad afterward that I didn't tell Garrett about it. His anxiety on the subject increased constantly, yet he never seemed to discuss it willingly, and simply grew sadder and sadder, and more and more quiet. We usually talked about it after dinner, and he would smoke in silence, say nothing and nod his head."

"Well, he never told all he knew—that's certain."

"No. He kept the real truth to himself, died with the secret in his heart. Besides the photographs, the only actual data I have are these receipts."

He lifted a large envelope, and drew from it some creased and yellow slips of paper, and laid them before Nelson. There were three of them, dated at Rockville, New York, respectively, on April 21, June 3, and August 15, 1883. All three read exactly alike:

Received of John Garrett Ten Dollars,
JOHN MILLER.

This was all. The ink had faded, and the queer, half illiterate writing showed indistinctly on the old papers.

Nelson looked at them carefully. "Receipts, but they don't even say what for. To my mind, when a man's supporting a child it's ten to one that—"

"Nelson," broke in Wainwright sharply, "of course you may think what you like, but it is my firm opinion that when this mystery is unraveled, if it ever is, it will not contain a scandal. John Garrett had no disgraceful secret in his life. I have never known a purer-minded man."

"I'll take your word for it," said the young man. "You must admit that it would look that way to an outsider. I remember very well, though, that his face as he lay in his coffin was that of a refined and sensitive nature—the whole expression noble."

"He was as noble as he looked, and this search is a legacy from beyond the grave. It's like tunneling in the dark. While we may be following an apparent clue that will lead us to the ends of the earth, Paul Hamilton may be working round the corner as a fifteen-dollar-a-week clerk, and we may rub elbows with him in the cars."

"Just at present there's a Paul Hamilton in Medford, Massachusetts, to look up. Lloyd has the papers. As I've been retained as associate counsel in the Park-Melville litigation, and that and the other things on hand will take all of my time for at least two months, I want you to get busy with this."

"I'll go right at it," said Nelson. He looked closely at the receipts, and added after a moment: "I wouldn't mind at all if the chase were to take me West now. Father is sick again, and mother writes that he keeps asking for me to come out there."

"There's no telling how soon you may go," replied Wainwright. He dropped his businesslike manner and added, with an almost paternal air: "I'll let you go anyway, if I can possibly spare you, Nelson. I know you're a good son."

"Well, I ought to be," said Nelson promptly. "My father and mother are not rich, but they did all they could for me, and father's great desire was to send me to college. When he found that he couldn't, and I worked my way through, it took that much off his mind, and was probably that much better for me."

"Very likely," said Wainwright. "It

doesn't hurt anybody to make an effort for education."

Just then a tall, athletic young man entered, and without a word held out a cable envelope.

Wainwright tore it open and read aloud:

"'Cannot sail on Saturday. Yachting trip to Mediterranean. Corinne St. John.' Ah! Very likely the count is one of the party, and a sudden little wedding in some out-of-the-way spot. Not if I know it, my fine lady. Send this, Lloyd." He seized a blank and hastily scribbled: "'Sail on Saturday, as per cable. Must sign papers before receiving legacy.' That will bring her, all right. I never knew a woman that wouldn't sign anything from a sight-draft to a death-warrant without reading it. Nelson, produce the missing legatee. I've made up my mind that those two people shall be married, whether they want to or not."

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPLOSIVE LUNCHEON.

A MASS of small details, with reference to various cases, kept Nelson closely confined to the office for several days, and he realized as he looked at his watch on the fourth day that he would probably be late for his luncheon engagement with Marion Lambert at Watts's Hotel. His knowledge of the somewhat imperious temper of his fiancée caused him to forecast trouble. His anticipation was fully justified.

She was sitting in a window in the Turkish room, and she turned on him angrily: "Late again! You have done nothing but keep me waiting ever since you began this wild-goose chase. How long do you suppose I'll stand it?"

In her anger she was more handsome than ever. Her haughty mood flamed darkly in her big brown eyes, and their velvety depths had grown hard and sparkling. Her tall, superb figure was held erect in her new dahlia cloth autumn gown, and the long, shaded plume on her picture-hat swept the masses of her shining hair to the shoulder. There was rarely a handsomer woman in sight anywhere than Marion Lambert; and Nelson, who was captivated by her

beauty, looked appreciatively at her flushed cheeks and the pouting line of her red mouth.

"Not so loud, Marion. The Stewarts are just behind you. Come in to lunch and I'll explain." He led the way to their table. "By Jove, you look stunning! Got on new clothes?"

"I think my dressmaker has really done me some credit this time," she replied, half mollified. "My fawn cloth wasn't fit to wear, and I sent it to Fozetti's. I suppose the next time I meet Hope Huntley she'll have it on. I wish one's friends wouldn't patronize second-hand dealers. I'm beastly hungry. Order a stuffed goose, or something like that."

"With pleasure, but you won't get into that thing again if you indulge like that. You're just on the safety line for the present fashion now. Hope Huntley looks better in white than anything else. Beverly Parker is going some in that direction lately. Strikes me it would make a good match. What salad do you want?"

"Grapefruit. If you think Hope is pretty, I can't imagine what you ever saw in me. Beverly Parker has more sense than to marry her. He has to have money. I told him, the other day, he would be a fool to throw himself away on any poor girl, and he laughed, and said there was no danger. Positively, he's the most fascinating man I know. And sometimes I think there's a mystery about him. For, with the exception of a few remote relatives, I've never heard him mention a word about his family. But he must have good blood. His manners are absolutely perfect."

Her eyes challenged him over the rim of her glass, and he returned the challenge with a straight, serious look.

"Marion," he said, "of course Beverly is one of the best fellows I know, but nowadays a man needs something more than fascinating ways and perfect manners."

He paused a moment and thought deeply.

It occurred to him that he had known Beverly only three years, and that the only introductions he had ever known him to have dated from Paris or London. His few indefinite allusions to

"my people" had never conveyed any clean-cut information, either regarding himself or his ancestry.

The thought of mystery regarding Beverly had crossed his mind in a vague way once or twice before. Now it presented itself a trifle more definitely, and, as though in audible contradiction to it, he said:

"His family is probably all right, but he has some special reason for not mentioning them. They may all be dead or estranged, for what we know. This is a strange world, and it seems to me that happy and united families are becoming more and more rare. Beverly ought to marry just the right girl and settle down."

"Well, the right girl for Beverly will have a bunch of money, or there'll be nothing doing. I'll bet a hat he'll make a dead set at Miss St. John the minute he lays eyes on her."

"Beverly!" cried Nelson, startled. "Great Scott! Well, it might be worse—that is, unless the unknown heir turns up, and they fall into each other's arms in the most approved style."

A look of distinct disapproval clouded Marion's face. "Oh, I suppose it will be the same old way. Money can always get money. A poor girl like me has no chance to make a decent show. I hate respectable poverty, and I'll be obliged to meet and associate with an heiress to a couple of million when I haven't a rag fit to wear. And all because you are booked to search all over the United States for the mate to the other two millions, who may be goodness knows what!"

Nelson looked discouraged. It was not the first time Marion had uttered her opinion of the situation, but never before had she been so emphatic. He waited in silence while the waiter served the salad, and then spoke calmly.

"Marion, we may as well understand things clearly, right away. You're not a poor girl, and you know it. You have fifteen thousand a year in your own right. That's not poverty; and you know very well, when we are married, it is to continue to be yours solely, in addition to what I can give you as my wife. I am what may be called poor; and even after I become the junior mem-

ber of the firm, I shall not be a rich man, as rich men go in New York, at least not for a number of years."

He paused for an instant and looked at her closely, but her lowered eyelids did not encourage him. He continued: "You know, too, Marion, that although I do not expect to overcome my parents' aversion to living permanently in New York, I do expect them to spend some time with me. Mother is so pleased because I am engaged, and this morning I had a letter from her saying more than she has ever said before about a little visit to New York." He felt in his pocket, and drawing out a letter, was about to open it when Marion hastily broke in:

"Oh, that's all right! Of course, I understand perfectly, but please don't inflict any family correspondence on me when I'm eating. I abhor it, and it takes away my appetite to discuss domestic affairs at the table, anyway."

Nelson replaced the letter with a grieved look. Marion's utter lack of interest in his father and mother had always hurt him, and her evident distaste for even hearing any details of possible future association with them had impressed him much more than he had ever let her know. He changed his tone and said:

"Well, are you going to be foolish and unhappy just because some other girl has more money than you, or because you are not marrying a wealthy man instead of me?"

"Nelson! How silly you are. Don't preach. I want you to have money, for your own sake. A man never can understand what a difference clothes make to a woman."

"Some women make more difference to their clothes than the clothes do to them. You needn't worry about that. You must remember I'm a self-made man, Marion; and a fellow who has worked his way through college by tutoring, and doing anything between times that turned up, is likely to be thankful to have as good a chance as I have, if he has any sense. Give me time, my dear. I'll do something good enough for you yet."

She smiled, half reluctantly. "Oh, you're away ahead, anyhow, Nel." she

admitted graciously. "But you know very well I can't put up a show with a wealthy girl like Miss St. John; and it's always my fate to be mixed up with a crowd that goes walking around with more on their backs than I have in a year. There's Betty Lyon! That girl does wear the stunningest things! I always feel dowdy when she's around."

Nelson bowed to the smart beauty who swept by them to a table on the other side of the room, accompanied by a languid, blond youth irreproachably garbed. The two girls exchanged the smiling greetings peculiar to a merciless social judgment, and the fair Betty passed on amid a stare of eyes from the assembled guests.

"Did you see her look at my gown?" asked Marion. "It's her great stunt never to seem to know about clothes, but I've made her take notice for once."

"Good!" said Nelson warmly. "Teach her her place. Not so dowdy, after all, maybe. Let's have some coffee, and then I'll have to break away. There's a pile of work waiting for me at the office. Hallo, there's Beverly this minute!"

He caught the eye of a man who had stopped to speak to Betty Lyon, and beckoned him over.

"Are you never going to give me another afternoon, Nelson?" complained Marion. "Come for a drive with me, and let's make up a party to go to the Russian theater to-night. I want to see the new play that's making such a sensation."

"Impossible," replied Nelson. "What do you want to see that for, anyhow? It's an awful thing, a couple of men dying in a Russian prison—one kills the other and then commits suicide."

"I want something new for a change. Ah, Beverly!" She smiled radiantly on the man who came up. "Sit here, and cheer us up. I have palled on Mr. Warner, and he has refused to accompany me to the theater to-night."

"Go with me to the theater, or fly with me to the ends of the earth," replied Beverly, bowing over her hand. "Nelson, you're a dog."

"I know it. Have a comforter, Beverly?"

"Thanks; I will." The newcomer

sat at Marion's right with the air of devotion that made him so popular with women.

His tall, well-built figure was always attired in the latest fashion, and the ease and grace with which he addressed himself to the fair sex had rendered him a favorite as a dinner guest. Without being exactly handsome, he was what most people would call distinguished. Possibly it was his prematurely gray hair, perhaps it was his way of looking at a woman out of his dark eyes. At any rate, he basked constantly in feminine smiles, and it was tacitly agreed that when he got ready to marry he could have his choice. He turned to Marion now with his most ingratiating manner.

"Why do you waste your time on this unappreciative person? I am at your feet. Command me."

"I am at the disposal of my future lord and master," she replied.

Her intonation meant danger, and Nelson, catching the look out of the corner of Beverly's eye, rose in masculine prerogative.

"That's the right talk, my dear Marion," he said. "A little experience before you take the fatal vow is a good thing. I can't go anywhere to-night, Beverly, because the new cases that have come in lately have about snowed us under, and Wainwright and myself have been working nights to catch up. I want to get some things out of the way before Miss St. John arrives on Saturday."

"Ah!" said Beverly. "the newest heiress is due, is she? Spencer, who met her in Paris, says she's a beauty, and a charming creature in the bargain."

"That's odd," said Marion. "The Bud Stewarts, who know her very well, told me that she was plain, and that she lacked *chic*."

Nelson laughed outright. "Did Bud say that, or Mrs. Bud?"

He got a haughty look for a reply, and Beverly turned to her consolingly. "You and I are positively the only unprejudiced people on the earth. By the way, Nel, how is the search for the missing heir progressing?"

"Oh, rather slowly. Nothing especially in sight at the moment except two more or less indefinite clues, one leading

over to the wilds of Jersey, and the other pointing West. I am hoping the latter will develop sufficiently to take me out there on a trip, so that I can run home for a day or so. Father has been quite ill, and a letter from mother this morning says he is very anxious to see me."

"Well, for your sake I hope you'll have to go. Along what line are you making inquiries?"

Nelson felt within his pocket. "We have inserted this advertisement in two hundred and fifty newspapers over the country."

He handed a small slip across the table to Beverly, who read aloud: "A liberal reward will be paid for information leading to the discovery of Mr. John Miller, who about 1883 was living in Rockville, New York, or of Paul Hamilton, who at that time was living with him. Address Bailey & Wainwright, New York." He looked inquiringly at Nelson. "It sounds quite mysterious and interesting. I've heard a dozen different versions of the case. Won't you enlighten me?"

"With pleasure," began Nelson, but he was interrupted by a swish of feminine draperies.

A pretty, blond woman came up, saying: "Come along, all of you, over to Long Island with Bud and me to look over our new house. Bud's car is here, and Betty has hers, and we're all going together."

"Thank you, Mrs. Stewart," replied Nelson, "but I'm just leaving for my office. I'm awfully sorry, but—"

Marion rose with her most imperial air. "Oh, Fan, Nelson never goes anywhere any more. Come along, Beverly, we'll have lots of fun."

Beverly looked grieved. "Pardon me, but I'm going to let Nelson tell me about this strange case."

"Well, for goodness' sake!" cried Marion, "is everybody bewitched?" She turned to Mrs. Stewart. "Fan, I've been driven almost distracted. Take me away, anywhere."

"Good-by," said Mrs. Stewart, over her shoulder, as the two moved off. "I hope we won't turn out to be such a pair of lunatics as you two." Her laugh floated back to them tantalizingly.

Nelson took Beverly by the arm.

"Come down to the office with me, and I'll tell you about it. That Stewart woman always did give me the worries."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HEIRESS.

THE great steamer lay majestically at her pier, and Wainwright and Nelson dodged hither and thither under the heels and wheels that made an almost inexplicable tangle, and pushed their way with all speed through the noisy crowd, articulate with the joyous greetings and exclamations.

"Rotten luck!" ejaculated Nelson, "to be delayed this way. A few minutes later, and—I beg your pardon, madam!"

His right arm flew out and caught a stout woman who had crowded in before him and had stumbled over her own belongings. She glared at him as he picked up a huge paper parcel she had dropped and took it back without thanks.

"Such brutes!" she said to the woman at her left. "They think nothing of punching a woman's ribs in a crowd. Some day I'll send as good as I get."

Wainwright gave Nelson a decided push ahead and squared his strong shoulders through a dense knot of jabbering Italians.

"This way," he said. "Mrs. Clarkson will have a fit if we're not the first ones at the gangplank."

"Mr. Wainwright!" rang out a clear voice at his elbow.

Nelson looked eagerly at the owner of the voice, and saw a fresh young face, glowing with health and spirits, blue-gray eyes sparkling under the small hat with the flowing gray veil, and an abundance of golden-brown hair waving over her forehead and escaping in trim coils from the nebulous frame of the veil. A gracefully molded figure was set off to advantage by a snug dark-blue cloth gown, and the mannish London tweed traveling coat thrown back in front revealed not a trace of decoration save the touch of white at the throat and wrists.

Nelson's sense of beauty and fitness was gratified before she fairly held out her hand to Wainwright, saying: "Positively, I believe you were going to miss us, and auntie's gruesome predictions

would have been fulfilled. Here's a list of what we have to declare. Do you suppose you can get us out of here before noon?"

"My dear Miss St. John," said Wainwright gallantly. "I would have committed hari-kari had I missed you. I'll see to it you're away from here in less than half an hour. Ah, Mrs. Clarkson. I'm glad to see you." He shook hands with an elderly woman with a discontented expression who was charging a maid to be careful of a small dog, and said, "Miss St. John. Mrs. Clarkson. let me present Mr. Warner. Nelson, make yourself useful while I see about this luggage."

Nelson felt his interest deepen as Corinne's merry eyes looked laughingly up at him, while she gave him a frank grasp of the hand.

"I am delighted to be of service," he said. "Give me your hand-bag at once."

"I dare not," she said in a tragic whisper. "It has *the* picture in it. I feel like a detective with the evidence of a murder case. Actually, I've dreamed about it."

"Oh, the photograph of your better half!" laughed Nelson. "Well, I'm due to have a look at it, you know. When may I see it?"

"Where's the count?" wailed Mrs. Clarkson. "Corinne, how shameful of you to drag me off this way. What will he think? Oh, Mr. Warner, find Count von Baritz."

"Where are they?" demanded an excited voice, in a strong German accent. "Oh, here you are! What has happened?"

A blond, athletic man, with glasses, a thin mustache and an autocratic manner, elbowed his way to Corinne, and without noticing any one else, said, anxiously: "I was alarmed for you in this crush. Why did you not wait for me?" He attempted to take her bag, saying with an air of proprietorship: "Permit me."

"Don't get excited, please. I'm with my friends."

As Nelson shook hands with Von Baritz and caught the glint of cold blue eyes behind the glasses, he instinctively felt the undercurrent of hostility in his mind, and across the barrier of the for-

mal meeting each man sent a shaft of dislike. The count made an effusive effort at cordiality.

"We have had a most delightful voyage," he said, as though asserting a personal achievement. "Such congenial people, and so much of interest." He glanced at Corinne. "I am glad to make my first visit to this your great city."

"We offer you the hospitality of our town," replied Nelson. "Some of your countrymen have already appreciated it. We really think we have some opportunities for enjoyment here."

Wainwright came up, and, after greeting Von Baritz, announced that his car was waiting, and escorted Mrs. Clarkson through the crowd, while Nelson and the count followed with Corinne.

"I was very fortunate to get the Houghton house for you while they are on the Continent," explained Wainwright, as the three men stood bareheaded by the machine, "and I hope you'll like it. I'll be up this evening after dinner, and we'll go over some details I want to make clear to you."

The count gazed appealingly at Corinne. "Do take a good rest," he pleaded, "and give me a few moments at five this evening."

"You may take a chance on it if you like," she responded, "but I'm just as likely to be driving in the park. You see, I'm not a bit tired. Come up to-morrow at ten, Mr. Warner, and get your look at the photograph. Mr. Wainwright has said I may keep it until I make a little water-color of it."

A merry smile floated Nelson's way as the car swung out of the jam, with a cab close behind, containing the two maids, the dog, and a miscellaneous assortment of small luggage.

Von Baritz lifted his hat stiffly, declined Wainwright's offer to take him to his club, and excused himself.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Wainwright.

"Charming!" was the response. "That unknown doesn't know what he's missing."

"Anyway, I think I see the count's finish," mused Wainwright. "Get Miss Lambert to go with us to-morrow evening, I'll have a couple of boxes at the theater, and we'll set the ball rolling."

The crisp sunshine of brilliant October got into Nelson's veins as he walked up the avenue the next morning to keep his engagement, and he wondered how the news of what seemed to be a clue worth following for the heir might be received. The morning mail had seemingly made the trail lead over to New Jersey, and he was to take the trip within a few days.

Miss St. John turned from the little table where she was sitting, and advanced several steps to him with outstretched hand. "I am glad to see you. Come and sit down. Auntie will be in as soon as Fifi is properly bathed and perfumed. Fancy having a dog perched on your dressing-case while you have your hair dressed! What is the worst news? Have you a Paul Hamilton concealed in the dressing-room?"

Nelson caught the battery of her laughing eyes steadily as he replied: "Your *Prince Charming* has not the pleasure of being so near. Do my eyes deceive me, or do I see evidences of actual industry?"

Corinne laughed. "You do indeed. See what I am attempting—a water-color of my future husband." She pointed to the loose sheets lying on the table, and Nelson, stooping over her shoulder, surveyed them carefully in comparison with the little photograph propped on a small easel.

For a moment the two were silent. The somewhat faded face of the child seemed to look out wonderingly at them from the dazzling frame of small diamonds in which it was set, their brilliant rays flashing like an aureole about the curly baby head. Nelson uttered an exclamation.

"This is a valuable frame. You had better keep a close watch on it."

"Indeed I will," she replied.

The room was in the rear of the second floor in the Fifth Avenue house which Wainwright had been able to lease for them for a year, and it had been converted into a cheerful, luxurious studio for Corinne's use. An enormous white bearskin almost covered the polished floor. The concert grand piano, the book-shelves and desk laden with books and magazines, and the table by the sunny window gave an aspect of artistic recreation. Ameri-

can Beauty roses, on superbly long stems, rose over the corner of the table from a Pompeian jar.

Nelson picked up the little faded photograph and studied it closely. A fat, chubby infant, round-eyed and bland of face, looked at him. One pudgy hand firmly clasped the arm of the chair in which he sat, and the other was lost in the folds of a light flowered dress from under which his feet stuck straight out. His look told of a surprised obedience, in which he had been taken unawares.

"If he has fulfilled his early promise of beauty," said Corinne, "he must be an Apollo by this time."

Nelson put the picture down, glancing at the vague outline on one of the sheets. "I trust to your art to improve on Nature. I hope you will be pleased to hear that undoubtedly the real heir is at last discovered. All that remains is for me to break the news gently to him."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Clarkson, coming forward with a small, curly head sticking out of a white Shetland shawl, whence came a faint yapping. "Another one! Two others were a carpenter, a shoemaker—and Heaven knows what this one will be!"

"Possibly a multimillionaire, with diamond mines in South Africa," suggested Nelson, offering her a deep chair. "In which case he can love Miss St. John for herself alone."

"No such luck!" groaned the lady. "He'll either be as poor as Job's turkey or be a miserable fellow of some kind, scarcely able to read and write. That is the way my cousin Sarah Jewett's nephew turned out, and he got nearly all of my great-uncle Robertson's fortune, and disgraced the whole family by eating soup from the point of a spoon, right before the bishop!"

Corinne's merry laugh rang out musically, and Nelson turned to her gratefully. "It was awful," she said, "but the way the bishop tried not to see it was so funny I nearly died."

"No wonder he didn't leave you anything," said her aunt fretfully.

Nelson rose to go, and offered his hand to Corinne. As he held hers, soft, white, and firm, their eyes met for a moment, and underneath their clear gaze he saw an appeal.

"What is it?" he asked.

"If he's—impossible, what will you do?"

"You will leave it to my judgment?"

"Oh, with joy!"

"It will depend on circumstances. I may shoot him on the spot, or I may grapple firmly with him, carry him to the edge of the cliff and drop him to the bottom of the cañon with a dull thud."

"Lovely! You have taken a great burden off my mind. Now I am saved."

"But you don't have to marry him."

A troubled look filled her eyes, and an expression so pained swept over her face that Nelson was astonished.

"I cannot explain to you," she said, "but I feel that there is some strange fate back of all this. How could it be otherwise? The thought of that sealed envelope always frightens me. How do we know what is in it?"

Nelson was taken aback. The same idea had occurred to him.

"Cheer up," he said. "He may not be able to read or write, and we can tell him he is requested to go to night-school. Of course, you will remember that no one else is to see this photograph, won't you? We can't take any chances."

The complaining voice of Mrs. Clarkson pursued him down the stairway, and his humor was not improved by meeting the count on the outer steps. Nelson felt disposed to pass with a barely decent salutation, but Von Baritz seemed to be genial.

"Ah, Mr. Warner, is it so that I am to have tidings of the Mr. Hamilton this morning?"

Nelson looked him straight in the eye. "Not this morning, count; but possibly sooner than you expect."

He felt secretly irritated all day; but that evening in the theater, a few minutes before the curtain went up, as he followed Marion to the box, his spirits rose, for his fiancée, in a pale-pink gown, was a picture of artistic delight. Corinne, looking as blooming as a freshly opened rose, smiled radiantly from her chair, a fair vision in white; while the count, firmly mounted on guard behind her, betrayed marked appreciation of his vantage. Marion was in a mellow mood, and she greeted Corinne with the buoyant warmth which she occasionally displayed.

"I'm overjoyed to meet you at last, Miss St. John. Actually, I was afraid the ship would turn round in midstream and go back. So original for you to insist that we be here before the curtain went up, too. People who come late only do it for display."

She had scarcely finished when Beverly Parker appeared in the box. His eyes fell on Corinne with unconcealed admiration, and the instant Nelson had presented him he established himself by her, and in less than two minutes had engaged her in a low-toned conversation.

The count seemed not to notice it, for he promptly devoted himself to Marion, and when the curtain rose they retained their positions. The woes of the stage lovers were well set forth, but as the evening wore on one or two undercurrents of dissatisfaction crept to the surface; and Marion, hearing Beverly Parker ask Corinne to take a gallop with him in the park, said: "Oh, we must all go out some morning. Wouldn't you like it, Count von Baritz?"

"I would like anything with you," he replied, bending a deep look on her. Marion, flattered enough for once, expanded into the atmosphere of vanity that was breath to her and redoubled her attention.

Beverly and Nelson exchanged glances. "You are losing a title," whispered Beverly to Corinne.

She laughed softly. "It is not mine to lose."

"I congratulate you," he replied. "You ought to marry an American. Titled foreigners don't make good husbands. They cannot comprehend the spirit of our women."

She lifted her eyes and looked at him. "I think you are right," she said simply. "I am so glad you feel that way about it."

Nelson was about to speak, when he saw that they were unconscious of his existence. He looked at Marion and the count, and discovered them in a like condition. He got up and went into the next box and devoted himself to Mrs. Clarkson and Mrs. Wainwright for the rest of the evening.

As he held Marion's sumptuous coat for her after the play, he said: "Well, I see you think she's charming, too."

"Oh, rather insipid. She lacks distinction, but the count is too interesting for anything. Gracious me—why, look there!"

Beverly Parker had anticipated Von Baritz, and was assisting Corinne with her wrap, while the two men exchanged swift glances.

Wainwright's voice came from the other side of the curtain: "Are you all ready? Beverly, don't forget dinner with us on Thursday evening."

"I'll be there," answered Beverly. As the girls went ahead with their host, he fell back beside Nelson and said: "Egad, old man! She's the sweetest creature I ever met in my life."

"I hope she thinks as well of you," replied Nelson.

CHAPTER V.

PANIC.

THE night of the dinner-party at Wainwright's country home, near Dobbs Ferry, was a mild, clear one, and the guests trooped up the broad stairway from their motor-cars in gay spirits.

Mrs. Wainwright greeted Corinne warmly: "My dear, how lovely you look! I've given you my own special den for your room, as you're to stay until after Sunday, and Donia will help your maid look after things. Remember you're not a guest here, and everything is to be just as if you were at home."

Count von Baritz, Nelson, Beverly Parker, and Gus Spencer, grouped in a corner of the drawing-room, critically eyed the fair arrivals in the brief interval before dinner.

"I hear that you are hot on the trail of a dozen or so Paul Hamiltons," said Spencer. "How many of him do you expect to be the right one?"

"Enough to satisfy a hydra-headed curiosity," replied Nelson coldly.

The count's eyes sparkled behind their glasses, and his sardonic smile crept slowly under his mustache. "But it is the pleasant duty to find the fitting husband for Miss St. John. *Prince Charming* is hiding behind many masks—don't you think so?"

Despite his self-control, Nelson's face

changed slightly, but before he could speak Beverly Parker broke in.

"We're all masked," he said, "but, mask or no mask, I'm of the opinion that Paul Hamilton will be found, and through Nelson, too. 'A bad beginning makes a good ending.' Who of us will dare to say that when the heir is discovered he may not be just the right man for our fair heiress?"

The count bowed ironically. "Such optimism is beyond me, but I admire your altruistic spirit. I confess I am too much enslaved myself to be generous. Ah, the ladies!"

Corinne, Marion Lambert, Mrs. Clarkson, Hope Huntley, and Mr. and Mrs. Bud Stewart entered the room, and instantly everybody was talking at once.

Nelson caught Beverly by the arm. "Come, let us pay our court to Miss St. John." The count, suddenly cut out, approached Marion Lambert with his most deferential manner, and did not fail to note the jealous shaft from the corner of her eye.

"Beverly, you're a brick," said Nelson in an undertone. "If you hadn't said what you did, I believe I would have punched that smirking ass."

"Don't mind him," replied Beverly. "We all know you're the real thing."

Nelson heard no more; for Corinne, tall and radiant in white and silver, turned with a dazzling smile and held out her hand to him, and until dinner was announced the two men devoted themselves to her. Then they were separated. The count took Corinne in, Nelson was paired off with Mrs. Stewart, and Beverly had Marion Lambert for his partner; but Nelson had the felicity of sitting opposite Corinne, and they talked with their eyes so effectively that the count became restless, and Marion's flush told of inner dissatisfaction.

Mrs. Wainwright was a clever hostess, and under the skilful direction of herself and her husband the talk ran lightly on the surface of things. Beverly Parker, always a most desirable dinner guest, made himself especially brilliant, for which he got more than one grateful glance from Nelson.

Dinner was almost over, and the hostess was secretly congratulating herself that all had gone well, when the acid

voice of Mrs. Clarkson, directed at Bud Stewart, cut sharply across the table.

"And so I told Corinne that just as likely as not this dreadful man would probably turn out to be an escaped criminal of some sort. I'm sick of it already. The climate here isn't agreeing with me. We might have been in the Mediterranean on Lord Divor's yacht by this time, and dear Lady Divor had been so kind!"

There was an instant awkward silence.

Then the count laughed softly, and Corinne murmured: "Oh, auntie!"

Wainwright came to the rescue.

"My dear Mrs. Clarkson, don't distress yourself unnecessarily. I grant you Nelson hasn't produced the heir yet, but I have hopes. Give him time, and perhaps he may unearth a bank president in disguise, who knows? Or, possibly a gambling director who wrecks a trust company by speculations transacted on the quiet."

Mrs. Wainwright gave the signal to rise, and in the general disintegration of couples that took place, Nelson presently managed to find himself by Corinne again. His attempts at entertaining Marion had resulted in a cold snub, and foreseeing another row at the earliest possible moment, he resolved to make the most of what pleasure he could snatch.

It was not long before they found themselves alone in the music-room, and Corinne's light touch of the keys was merely a veil of delicate sound to shield their conversation. Nelson looked half longingly at the velvety white fingers as they softly swept the keys. The curve of her shoulders, the way her fine head was poised, the clean, graceful lines that outlined her whole figure, all presented themselves as parts of the harmonious whole that had first attracted him. A certain delicate, yet half-haughty air marked everything she did. Nelson unwillingly admitted to himself that she would adorn any title.

She lifted her long lashes. "You are quiet."

"Yes; I am thinking."

"And of what?"

"You."

"How dare you!" she flashed.

"I dare anything," he said coolly.

"Give it up!" said Corinne, with

sudden earnestness. "I mean, give up the search. I've had an awful time with auntie about it."

"I should think you'd have an awful time with her, anyhow."

"Well, of course, but I can manage her most of the time. But this is different."

Nelson held her eyes with his own as he replied: "I'm sorry to distress your aunt. Very sorry, indeed."

A bright color swept up into her cheeks, and a fresh beauty vivified her face. Her eyes did not waver as she said:

"You distress me much more than you do auntie."

"There is nothing I would not do to save you from the slightest distress," he said.

"Listen," she returned, with sudden intensity. "of course I do not expect you to take the same view of it that I do, but see what it means to me to have an unknown man looming in the future for my possible husband! All jesting aside, you know very well that he may be anything undesirable. How can I be at peace?"

"Nothing easier. All you have to do is to say you will not marry him."

"You forget," she almost whispered. "Mr. Garrett and my mother loved each other when they were young. His wish is like a voice from the grave, and I have a strange presentiment of evil. Don't, don't look for him."

Nelson felt strangely moved. "Dear Miss St. John," he said, "I beg of you not to conjure up a phantom to torment yourself. I must look for this man, for his sake as well as for your own, for a fortune belongs to him. Yet, your lives need not be united. It rests with you. Follow the dictates of your own heart, and all will be well."

"I would rather give up my own fortune than not be free," she said, her eyes shining. "Thank you for what you said. I'll try not to imagine anything."

"Are you two people going to moon in here all night?" demanded Beverly Parker, entering in the wake of Hope Huntley. "Your conduct is positively scandalous. The count swears he'll call Nelson out in the morning, and I don't blame him. Miss St. John, won't you be so good as to sing for us?"

She ran her fingers lightly over the keys. "I'd like to, but why not make it a duet? They tell me you have a very nice voice."

Beverly bent over her with the air of devotion that made him so popular with women.

"That's so sweet of you. I have a trifling cold to-night, but make an engagement with me for an early trial together, to see how our voices go, and we shall arrange our own little repertoire."

"Oh, how delightful! I haven't had any one to accompany me since I came back. It will be a real treat."

Nelson and Hope Huntley were sauntering toward the library.

"It's perfectly hopeless not to be the center of a mystery," she laughed. "Here I am, just a plain, everyday girl, no fortune, no unknown hero, not a scrap of romance. I'm desperate. I wish something would happen."

"I'll try to see to it for you," said Nelson. "Give me time and I may be able to arrange something."

A loud, frightened cry from above startled them. A door slammed upstairs, and there was the sound of rushing feet and hysterical cries, and as the guests ran out of the rooms into the wide hall, Mrs. Wainwright's maid fled down the stairway crying loudly:

"Come quick! Miss St. John has been robbed!"

"Which way did he go?" cried Nelson, raising his voice above the commotion of the women's outbreak.

"I don't know, sir!" replied the butler, showing a white, agitated face above. Wainwright dashed out on the lawn, followed by nearly all the men. Mrs. Clarkson, shrieking loudly, fell bodily into Beverly Parker's arms.

"Oh, we shall all be murdered!" she wailed. "Oh, how horrible!" She went off into hysterics, while the maids scurried away for restoratives.

Corinne ran up-stairs as the men returned from their brief inspection of the grounds, which revealed only a few foot tracks of the thief near the open window, and the company flocked into the pink-and-white room.

The dainty bower, strewn with the

luxurious confusion of a woman's toilet, showed but few traces of a burglary, though the open window to the veranda made clear a way of approach.

Corinne sprang to the dressing-table and gave a cry of distress that alarmed every one.

"What's missing?" inquired Wainwright anxiously.

"Everything! My money, the diamond bracelet, four rings, and—" she stopped and nervously tossed the things about looking for something.

"Oh, Margo," she turned to her maid, who stood trembling. "Margo, Margo, did I put it anywhere else?"

"No, Miss St. John. It was right there."

"What was there?" asked Wainwright.

"The picture! The photograph! Oh, what shall I do!"

"The picture!" gasped Wainwright, as the results of such a loss struck him. "Do you mean the photograph of Paul Hamilton?"

"Yes. I brought it with me to make the water-color."

A gleam of light came to Nelson. "Why, you had begun on it a week ago. Didn't you finish it?"

"No; I never touched it again. Oh, forgive me!" she cried to Wainwright, tears welling in her eyes. "Please don't blame me! The thief has taken my jewels and two thousand dollars in money, but advertise and say that he may have them if he will bring back the photograph."

"What!" cried Nelson, "do you mean to say that you had that much money with you!"

He caught a look from Wainwright, who gently laid a hand on the shoulder of the weeping girl.

"Never mind. Don't cry. We'll do the best we can about it. Nelson, come down into the library with me. We'll notify the police at once, and see what's best to be done."


"We've got the dickens' own job on our hands now," said Nelson to Beverly as they descended the stairs. "Two millions at large and our most valuable bit of evidence in some scoundrel's hands."

(To be continued.)

"UP THERE."

BY DONALD KENNICOTT.

A SHORT STORY.

 HIS story records an instance of evolution, exemplifies the mechanism which takes up the work where selection, survival, and adaptation leave off, and concerns itself with a development in the fourth dimension.

Therefore, it is about a café pianist and a waiter in a Denver beer-garden.

It happened on a June evening that when the girl who played the piano at the Colorado Roof and Concert Garden passed the waiter in charge of the tables by the band-stand steps, she turned to glance back at him. What she had seen would have been rather difficult for any one else to discover. Standing there by a table with a napkin over his arm, the young fellow looked very much like any other waiter. A certain something in his eyes, perhaps. It is very often that.

As she tripped on up to the platform, the waiter watched her also; but in that there need have been nothing noteworthy. Every one stared at her. It was what Simonini, the little Italian who owned the place, paid her for.

Ostensibly, of course, she was employed to play the piano; but she did it so badly that no one was deceived. Old Periolat, the violinist, would often swear horribly in the middle of the *Valse Bleu*, and with considerable emphasis advise her to shut the piano. Her real occupation was to wear what purported to be a Hungarian peasant costume—a short-skirted, low-bodiced, bespangled confection—and thus make the orchestra attractive to the eyes of Simonini's patrons as well as to their ears.

The girl's mother, it may be added, had given her the name of Elizabeth, and her father that of Brown, but the good Simonini had made revisions. On the programs it was Ysabella Ladislowna.

Next afternoon Ysabella Ladislowna arrived at the garden somewhat before the other musicians. She saw the waiter at whom she had glanced the evening before standing by the railing and looking out across the roofs of Denver toward the white peaks of the mountains.

She started on toward the dressing-room, stopped, hesitated an instant, and then, buttoning up the light cloak which she wore over her professional costume, walked across toward the unoccupied tables near the railing. The man glanced at her, and then looked quickly away again. She said nothing for a moment, then moved a little nearer to him.

"Looks cool up there, doesn't it?" she ventured.

The man turned to her and smiled wistfully, it seemed to her. "Yes," he answered; "yes, I reckon it does."

"They say it's a long way from here," she pursued after a little. "But they don't look far, do they? Ever been there?"

The man nodded. "Once," he said, "up in the Cochetopas."

The girl wrinkled her forehead as if perplexed. "What are you doing here, then?" she queried.

For she did not see him as he was, but glorified by a dawning illusion into a different being—a man somehow shamefully betrayed into servitude—a prince in livery.

The man felt this—and his healthy egoism told him it was half true. He drew himself up a little, but did not look at her.

"Oh," he said awkwardly, "I don't know. It was mighty lonesome up there. And it's a hard life."

She regarded him for a moment without speaking. Then she said: "Do you like doing this?"

There was a look of pity on her face as she spoke—pity for captive majesty.

It was captive—potential—majesty that answered her. "I hate it," the man said, with a sudden vehemence.

Of course, whether or not the man lied in so saying were a nice question. The day before, certainly, he had not particularly hated his position. He had not been conscious of so strong a feeling as that toward anything. As he had said, he had lived up in the hills. As he had told her, also, he had found life there hard and lonely, and not particularly inspiring. He had worked for one of the cattle companies, coming through Denver now and then with a shipment of stock, and, like his fellows, each time indulging in a bit of a spree. The last time he had waked up "broke" in a saloon, had taken a job as porter in order to get money to go back, and had never gone.

He had not been conscious of any particular fall from virtue, but had drifted along with the sluggish current. He still went on a spree occasionally; not, however, the light-hearted celebration of the cowboy in town, but a dull, sordid adventure that hardly more than accentuated the hebetude of his daily life.

He no longer walked with the stumbling gait of the habitual horseman, but shuffled about lazily. His shoulders stooped a little, and his skin was a sallow white. No, he had not previously been conscious of any vivid antipathy toward serving as a waiter. Yet, when he answered her, his voice had a certain ring of conviction that spoke to him as well as to her.

And it was that, perhaps, which encouraged him to turn and look at her—at this woman who, of all living creatures, had understood him, had discovered him to his own soul as well as to hers.

"Yes," he said again. "I hate it."

He stopped and looked at her a long time. Dimly he was becoming aware that there was a strange, undiscovered beauty about her, that he stood before a celestial princess masked in tinsel.

"And you," he said at last, "don't you hate it, too?"

The girl flushed a little, and looked

away in her turn. "Yes, I suppose so," she answered somewhat wearily. She pulled down a frond of an artificial palm-tree, and commenced tearing off little strips of the fiber. "But when a girl's got to take care of herself—" she went on slowly. "You know it's not so easy to do that. When I first came out here, I worked in a laundry. Have you ever been in a laundry—in the summer?"

"No—not where the work was, anyway. I expect it was pretty hard. Still, I should think you'd rather do that than this."

The girl considered a moment. "Yes," she said at last. "Yes, I suppose I would—that is, if I cared much what becomes of me. But after a while you get tired of caring for that—by yourself."

The man turned away from her. He stood much straighter than before, and the expression of his face was a little less like that of a slave, a little more like that of the prince.

"Yes," he assented, a little unsteadily, "yes, I reckon that's it. If—"

He stopped as he saw Simonini coming toward them, down an aisle between the tables. The girl moved off slowly toward the dressing-room.

II.

AND great Dame Nature, high in her own white habitation, may have smiled as she saw the fourth engine in her slow mechanism of evolution begin to revolve. Survival, selection, adaptation; then, with conscious creatures, whose world has a fourth dimension, the fourth factor.

It is an old element in the lives of men, this fourth factor. In the evolution of the universe, it would seem to be a relatively new device. And we have no exact name for it. . . . Love? That is a word which has come down to us from another conception of things. With all its clinging associations of pleasant sentiment, of splendid passion, and of tender intimacy, it does not bring home to our understanding the truth of the matter. Love? Well—for want of a better word. . . .

Things went badly at Simonini's that night.

The waiter in charge of the tables by the band-stand saw fit to resent the whistle by which one of the patrons summoned him, and had to be reprimanded.

The girl who wore the Hungarian peasant costume ruined it by adding a black scarf over the shoulders, and played the piano even worse than usual—so badly, in fact, that old Periolat not only advised her to close the piano, but, when the concert was over, threw up his hands in bitter despair and sought Simonini with words of furious protest.

Simonini listened to him, promised a change of pianist, and after permitting himself one chuckle, assumed an expression of preternatural gravity.

For there was more in the purpose of the good Simonini than met the eye.

From day to day he had studied Ysabella Ladislovna, very much as an experienced hunter may, without moving, watch a foolish doe drifting down a mountainside toward him, until the moment comes for the easiest shot. Now, it would seem, Periolat had driven the game straight to his feet. The instant for action had come.

At the close of the evening concert, it had for some time been the custom of the kind, paternal Simonini to invite his pianist to supper, and to escort her to the boarding-house where she lived. It was a pleasant and inviting place, where the smell of immemorial fish and onions seemed to have soaked into the very walls, where the sound of rattling dishes and clacking tongues seemed never to cease, and where the other women, after the peculiar and sisterly manner of their kind, took pains to make her unhappy.

To-night, therefore, after he had assured Periolat, in the hearing of Ysabella, that a new pianist should be engaged immediately, he joined her as she descended to the floor, and led the way to a table.

"Well, my dear," said he, when the greasy head-waiter had brought them supper, "I'm sorry, but the old fiddler, there, wants me to give you the go-by."

The girl regarded him sullenly and a little absent-mindedly.

"Well," she said at last, "you going to do it?"

Simonini's face took on an expression

of reproachful surprise. "What—me?" he demanded. "Well, not quite. I ain't the sort that goes back on my friends. No, sir. When I take to anybody, I stick. Of course," he concluded, wrinking his forehead with a fine air of perplexity, "I don't know about the piano job. I'm afraid that's played out."

The girl turned to him with a hard look. "What other job is there?" she inquired. "Dish-washing? I'd as soon go back to the laundry."

For a moment or two Simonini made no answer. Then, moving his chair closer to hers, he leaned toward her.

"You want me to find you another job, do you, little girl?" he asked in a voice silkily caressing. "Well—I'll offer you the best there is. I know where there's a little flat that would just suit you. You know I've got plenty of money—and you needn't do a thing but just look pretty and help me spend it. You've only got to say the word."

The girl stared at him as if hypnotized, without moving a muscle. For some time she had been expecting this; and it must be said that she had almost made up her mind how she would answer.

Yet somehow when the moment came, when she heard the words spoken, it frightened her horribly.

She looked away with hot cheeks, and the tears came to her eyes. "I thought you had a wife, Mr. Simonini," she faltered.

The man laughed lightly. "Oh, yes—yes," he admitted. "That is, an old woman. But that don't make no difference. I could be just as good to you. I—" He stopped as he saw the look on her face. Then, cannily remembering the gesture of repugnance with which she always opened the door of her boarding-house, he added: "But there's no need to answer right this minute. Just wait for me a little, while I count the cash and close up for the night. We can talk about it some more on our way home."

He reached across the table, patted her shoulder with a very fair imitation of affection, and walked over toward the cashier's cage.

III.

WHEN he was gone, the girl got slowly to her feet and, as if seeking a place

of refuge, moved over between the tables to the railing.

It was a very clear night. Stars and moon were shining with crystalline clarity. Straining her eyes, she fancied she could see dimly the white peaks of the mountains to the west. Always before, they had seemed to her cold, distant, unapproachable as the white clouds overhead. Now her feeling toward them was changed. Very large they seemed to her, and cool, quiet, friendly.

A black bulk stirred by a palm, and she saw a man moving toward her. Not until he came quite close did she recognize the waiter with whom she had talked that afternoon, for he carried himself differently—walked with the stumbling gait of the horseman.

“Cain’t hardly see ’em at night, can you?” he remarked as he joined her. “Waitin’ for Sim to go home with you?”

The girl did not answer his question, but peered at him as if trying to see his features distinctly.

“What,” she asked presently—“what did you do when you were up there?”

“Up in the hills? Oh, just worked.”

“What at?”

“We raised spuds mostly, up on our farm—spuds and oats. It was too high for alfalfa, though we did cut a right smart of wild hay. Then after we lost the place and my folks died, I worked out—with cattle mostly.”

“What made you leave that?”

“Oh, just like I said. It was lonesome, and I wanted to try city life for a while. And then there didn’t seem to be much chance for a young fellow with cattle there. The big companies was too strong to fight.”

They were silent for a moment or two. Then the girl asked abruptly: “What do the women do—up there?”

“Well, what the women does most everywhere, I reckon. It sure is tough on the women, though. They have to work mighty hard, and they can’t wear pretty clothes as much as you do here, and then the lonesomeness is worse for them. Sometimes, in winter, you’re snowed in for weeks. And nights you can hear the bob-cats yell, and the wind up in the pines. It makes you feel scared and creepy. Yes, it sure is tough for women there. There’s a sayin’ that it’s

a good country for men and cattle, but hell on women and horses—not meanin’ to swear, ma’am.”

The girl’s eyes filled with a sudden gratitude toward him for she knew not what.

“I don’t know,” she answered. “That don’t seem so bad. I used to work mighty hard back home sometimes, but I didn’t mind it. It was for my own folks. Don’t you ever think of going there again?”

“Well, I hadn’t been, much. To-night, though, I did think of it. The hills looked so cool and good. It’s a pretty country. There’s flowers and things in the spring, and the hills sure is fine to look at when the pasture’s good. You feel fine up there mostly, too. It’s the air, I reckon.”

With a little unconscious gesture of appeal, the girl stretched her hand toward him.

“Why don’t you?” she urged. “You don’t seem to be the sort to be doin’ this kind of thing. Isn’t there something you could find to do—up there?”

The man laughed a little bitterly.

“Thanks,” he said. And then: “Yes, I reckon so, if I had a mind to. There’s a place I know up in the Cochetopas where a man could do pretty well. My brother has a claim there that he’d be glad to have me live on, too, but what’d be the good of doin’ it?”

“It would be something besides this.”

There was that in her voice which made the man straighten up like a horse that has been flicked with the whip.

In a different tone she added: “Why don’t you? I can tell you, I would, if I was a man. I’d go ther^e myself, if I could alone.”

“Why?” He turned to her suddenly.

“Why?” Her voice had grown high and tense and strained. “Do you think I like this?”

“No—no,” he assented gravely. “I don’t expect you do. You don’t look like that kind of a girl, that’s a fact. But life’s mighty hard up there for women. Though, of course, now the railroad’s through, it’s not so bad as it used to be. Still, it’s mighty hard.”

“Hard, yes, but what of that? It would be—it would be—” The girl’s voice trembled and stopped.

For a moment she fought back the sobs

that were choking her. Then she slowly sank to her knees, and, clinging to the railing, buried her face in her arms.

Very awkwardly the man bent over her. "Don't do that," he said simply. "Would you sure like to—to go up there?"

The woman made no answer, but almost fiercely caught at his hand.

The man bent lower. "Because," he said huskily, "I reckon we could make a go of it if we went together. I could build a log cabin by the spring, and we could run cows up in the aspen, and cut wild hay for the winter. We could go right off. To-morrow we—"

IV.

A STEP sounded from somewhere among the tables, and Simonini appeared, threading his way toward them.

The waiter lifted the girl to her feet. When she caught sight of her employer, she moved to escape, but it was too late.

Simonini halted before them. "What you doin' here?" he queried suspiciously. "I've been lookin' all over for you. Come, we'll go along now."

The waiter moved forward, but the girl stopped him.

"No," she said slowly—"no, I'm not going with you, Mr. Simonini."

"Oh, you ain't!" the man growled. "Where are you goin' then?"

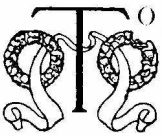
The girl smiled at him, not at all unkindly. There was a radiance in her face that for some reason caused the man to shrink back. Turning, she stretched her hand to the west, where very faintly the white summits of the mountains caught the moonlight.

"Up there," she said.

THE WAGES OF COURTESY.

BY CHARLES WISNER BARRELL.

A SHORT STORY.



TO state the case plainly and unequivocally, Owen Mason was financially down and out. The collar he wore had already seen three days' service,

though, thanks to December weather, it was still not impossible; but he was obliged to observe a most circumspect repression of movement in order that his cuffs might not slip forth shamelessly from the protection of his coat-sleeves.

There was no gainsaying the fact that his hair needed trimming, though he belonged to the profession that theoretically, and only theoretically, disdained the well-mown scalp. He had managed to achieve a shave that morning, but the ordeal had brought tears to his eyes, owing to the sad condition of the implement that grim necessity had put into his hands. His overcoat, while a perfect fit, was last season's cut, and his hat was beginning to grow shiny at the brim.

As he walked down Thirty-First Street toward the Great White Way, already aglow against the invading darkness, Mason bitterly fumbled a medium-sized and solitary coin in the change-pocket of his overcoat. A thief, with only the sense of touch to guide him, might have imagined the coin to be a five-dollar gold piece, but Mason knew only too well that it was a paltry white quarter and, furthermore, the last piece of currency of any description that he could call his own.

Even that would have to be broken a few moments later at the L station on Sixth Avenue, in order that Mason might reach his One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Street lodgings without the expenditure of more valuable shoe-leather. He had been notified to vacate these quarters on the morrow, but the icy breath of winter, sweeping in across the North River, made it incumbent upon him to accept the last few hours of grace

that could be wrung from a hopelessly commercial landlady.

Six months before Mason would have shuddered to contemplate the questionable tactics he was now forced to practise almost daily in the struggle for the mere creature necessities of life.

The most embittering feature of the little tragedy Mason was now living was that this very afternoon he had glimpsed an exit from the harrowing third act—had even been given his cue fairly and unmistakably—but had lacked the vital leverage of lucre to move himself off the scene before the disastrous climax which was imminent.

After five discouraging hours spent in making the usual round of agents' and managers' offices, Mason had, a little after four o'clock, dropped in at the Garrick Club, on Thirty-First Street, to rest a while and warm himself before starting back to encounter the female Cerberus of One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Street for the last time.

As he sat before the snapping grate fire in the smoking-room, ruminating on the length of art, the fleetness of time, and the crass imperception of the rulers of theatrical destiny, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and he looked around to see Carl Pickering smiling down at him.

He and Pickering had come to New York at about the same time, and had met when Pickering was assistant press-agent for the firm that had given Mason his first good part. They had formed a friendship then that lasted even after Pickering had jumped into sudden fame with his successful romantic drama, "The Garden of Dreams;" and Mason, through an unfortunate whirl of the wheel of fortune, had been tossed from the promising position he had occupied in Mrs. Malgrove's company.

It was now fully a month since they had met, and during that time Mason had sunk steadily deeper into the slough of despond which inevitably encompasses the unsuccessful applicant for work. Pickering had grown sleeker, better groomed, more optimistic and smiling as the royalties from "The Garden of Dreams" came rolling steadily in.

"Why, hallo, Mason, old boy!" he cried genially, as Mason arose to take his

outstretched hand. "Did you tuck yourself away in this corner to dope out a new character conception, or will you accept a friend and a stogie to share your enjoyment of the sweet solitude?"

Mason forced himself to return the smile. On the occasion of their last meeting he had borrowed twenty-five dollars from the playwright, so just at that particular moment there were men in whose company he would have felt more at ease. However, he said:

"Mighty glad to see you again, Pickering. I was just wandering in a nightmare of idle introspection, and as keeper of the garden of decent dreams, you've arrived just in the nick of time to pull me out of the mental swamp. That reference to character conceptions was unkind, though. Didn't you know I'd applied for a job as an elevator chauffeur or as stoker in a hotel? I've forgotten just now which of the two parts I'm supposed to fill, but their business doesn't call for any of this doping-out process you refer to: and if I wasn't a fool of the deep purple, capital D variety, I'd be holding down one or the other of them now."

Pickering had been reaching into his upper vest-pocket while Mason spoke, and he now held out two plump perfectos. Mason selected one, with thanks, bit off the end, lit it and slowly settled back in his chair, as Pickering took the seat on his right.

"So General Hard Luck still holds the Temple of Thespis?" the author of "The Garden of Dreams" murmured in a tone of sympathetic reflection.

"Yes, he's got every blamed loophole manned, and mines planted for half a mile all around the premises. The fellow that gets in there this time of year will either have to use an air-ship or dig an underground passage with his finger-nails. That kind of housebreaking seems to be beyond me, and I'm going to give it up and go into something dignified and lucrative, such as coal-heaving or elevatoring."

"And if Sarah Malgrove had not fallen ill, and knocked the bottom out of your prospects for this season, you would now be a happy-hearted worker in that same temple, drawing your hundred dollars a week with thoughtless

levity, and basking in the warmth of public admiration that plays upon the handsome and talented young matinée idol."

"Yes, I suppose so. Ill fortune and poverty make more anarchists than any two other agencies in the universe. It's pretty hard to be a conservative and a gentleman when you can't find a chance to make a living at your trade."

Pickering was puffing reflectively on his cigar.

"Why, say, Mason," he said at length, "just happened to think of it—but I know of the place where you'd fit in as cozily as the letter 'h' in Hohokus."

"Where?" demanded the actor eagerly.

"Smoke up, man, and I'll tell you about it. I just came in from Washington this morning. Was down there a week working over 'The Primrose Way' with Raymond Dixon, the lad who staged 'The Garden.' The piece is a go, all right, and I think will hit this town between the eyes; but it has a big drawback in the person of George Norton, who is playing the lead to Elsie Tremarre. He is punk. Got elephantiasis of the mazzard from his success in 'Compromised,' and this season he seems useless.

"Dixon has been wearing himself out over him, and I guess he'll go down in nervous prostration unless he gets rid of Norton. We had a stein together before I left, and he told me he would break Norton's contract in a minute if he saw anybody else in sight that would fit his dimensions, and also have a few brains to top off with. And, now I think of it, you're just the man who would do that. If you go down there and introduce yourself through me"—Pickering pulled out a card and began scribbling on the back of it—"he'll give you a try-out; and, what's more, I think you'll make good. In fact, I'm sure of it. Take a train to-night, and you'll get there in time for the morning rehearsal."

II.

As he neared Broadway, Mason recalled these directions with bitterness. Pickering might as well have directed him to go to Mars as to attempt to reach

Washington on a capital of twenty-five cents. He had not divulged fully the desperate state of his exchequer, the playwright had not offered to advance the necessary expenses of the trip, and Mason did not possess the hardihood to ask Pickering for another loan.

Moreover, there was no one else to whom he could turn for monetary aid and comfort at this crisis, as he had already exhausted all such resources. Hence, he viewed the world with chagrin, not unmixed with acrimony, as he hurried along over the cold pavements toward the darkling tower of the Sixth Avenue L station outlined against the winter sky.

With paradoxical nonchalance, Mason bought his means of transportation to One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Street at the ticket-agent's window, dropped the two remaining dimes into his pocket, and proceeded by the slow lock-step which the line of home-bound patrons of the road forced him to maintain, out upon the platform already black with waiting passengers.

Directly a long train came rushing up, and stopped with a grinding roar. Twenty iron gates shot back simultaneously, and the crowd on the platform threw itself forward in the mad abandon of the seat-hunt.

Mason had been born and raised in Philadelphia, and this wild scramble in boarding public conveyances was one of his pet aversions among the objectionable customs of New York life. He was one of the last ones to get on the train; and when he entered the car on his left, he found all the seats occupied and many strap-hangers choking the aisle. As usual, a large proportion of the seats were filled by men who studiously held newspapers before their faces in an effort to advertise their pretended ignorance of the fact that women with bundles or babies might be standing.

Mason picked a tortuous path down toward the center of the car, and at length came to a stop at the wooden partition which formed the back of one of the four cross-seats. He braced himself as comfortably as possible against this; and as the train swayed and heaved on its roaring way, he began an unspoken recapitulation of the series of events that

had reduced him to his present unhappy condition.

Opportunity, as pointed out by Pickering, had stared him in the face less than an hour before, but the unfortunate contingencies in the way seemed to completely disqualify Mason as a contestant for the prize which the elusive spirit mockingly waved before his vision.

A straight railroad ticket to Washington costs nearly six dollars, and without at least that sum Mason knew he stood no more chance of joining the cast of "The Primrose Way" than he did of joining the Four Hundred.

As the train plunged along farther up-town, the strap-hangers began slowly to disappear from the particular car in which Mason rode. At last, at Eighty-First Street, the stout old German who had been occupying the seat nearest him got off, and as there appeared to be no lady in sight, Mason slid gratefully into the space and closed his eyes to shut out the tantalizing vision which haunted him of a stage director beckoning eagerly from the end of miles upon miles of railroad track; while a gruff, cold-eyed official sat in a cage at the entrance to the road to fame and fortune, and repeated the impossible conditions that must be met ere one could gain admission: "Single fare, five sixty-five. Round-trip ticket, ten dollars."

The undisturbed luxury of a seat was not vouchsafed Mason for any considerable length of time, though. At the very next station, three persons—two men and a woman—entered the car. The men stopped near the door and took their places with the little handful of strap-hangers there; but the woman maneuvered her way through the group and came farther down the car.

Newspaper screens began to rustle shamelessly into position at her approach. Mason had opened his eyes in time to see her coming. She was young, but undeniably plain. The actor let his eyes drop shut.

When he opened them again the young woman was standing two seats from where he sat, seemingly absorbed in an advertisement above her head. Mason had been bred to regard the conventional courtesies of life. He arose, caught her eye, and with a bow, muttered:

"Won't you sit down, miss?"

The young woman smiled a smile which was a revelation, and moved forward to take the proffered seat. As Mason, however, reached for a strap on the opposite side of the car, he was surprised to have her turn to him instead.

"Thank you very much, sir," she said in a low voice—a rather sweet voice, matching her smile.

"Why, why, you're perfectly welcome," Mason stammered, as he felt the curious gaze of the other passengers upon him.

"And now would you kindly give me your name and address?" the young woman went on in the same dulcet undertone.

In spite of his calcium-light experience, Mason was frankly embarrassed. He regarded the young woman uncertainly for almost a moment. Then, as if mesmerized into action, his hands slowly sought his card-case and the pencil-stub in his vest-pocket. He scrawled the One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Street address on a card bearing his name in engraved script and passed it over with palpable reluctance.

While busying himself thus at her behest, Mason had not noticed that the young woman had swiftly opened the hand-bag she carried and taken something from one of the side-pockets.

He was, therefore, completely non-plused when, in return for his card, she deftly slipped into his palm a new and crackling ten-dollar note. As she turned to take the vacant seat, he caught her arm impulsively.

"Tell me—tell me—why, what is this for?" he demanded. "What are you—"

The young woman smiled back at him brightly.

"Why, you see, sir," she returned. "I am a reporter for the *Evening Nation*, and as an advertising scheme we have started to-day to give away ten dollars to every gentleman who offers his seat to a lady in an L. Subway, or surface car, provided he will first let us have his name and address. You'll see all about it in the paper."

Mason flushed and swallowed hard. "Oh, so that's it," he said. "But, then, you know, I can't—"

"Oh, yes, you can—and must," the young woman returned decisively.

And opportunity seemed to echo loudly in her tones; for though his fellow passengers smiled wonderingly and heartlessly at his discomfort, Mason found himself saying an instant later:

"Well, then, if you insist—thank you."

But he lost no time in beating a hasty retreat to the wind-swept platform outside; and when he got off at the next station, it was to rush to the street below and seek the stairs of the station opposite to begin the first stage of his triumphal descent upon Washington and the engagement which Pickering had laid open for him.

THE DUKE'S PAWN.*

BY FRANCES OLIN.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DON LUIS DE FERIA, in love with Mercedes de Toledo, ward of the Duke of Alva, is on his way to a clandestine meeting at the house of Countess Emanuele. It is carnival night in Madrid. A stranger hands him a sealed package, with a message of warning, mistaking him for Florence Montmorency, Baron Montigny, to whom Feria bears a wonderful resemblance. At the mansion Feria finds the countess's maid in terror, the countess in a swoon. Screams issue from an inner apartment, where he discovers Mercedes on her knees before a man who is threatening her. He calls upon the man to draw, and recognizes Don Carlos, heir to the throne. Feria disarms the prince and announces Mercedes as his affianced wife. Don Carlos leaves in a rage. Countess Emanuele, realizing Feria's danger, counsels him to leave Madrid immediately. Mercedes gives Feria a miniature, and receives in exchange his signet ring, telling her to send it to him if she is in peril. As he leaves the house, he is set upon by three masked figures, who bear him away in a litter.

The Duke of Alva is anxious to win the confidence of the Netherland Counts Egmont, Horn, and Orange, and lure them to Brussels. He is advised by his natural son, Don Ferdinando, to use the Baron Montigny for this task; or, as this is impossible, suggests his double, Don Luis de Feria, to be used as a pawn. The duke visits Feria at the Alcazar, where he has been imprisoned by Don Carlos, offering him the hand of his ward, Mercedes de Toledo, in exchange. Don Carlos is present at this interview, and, on attempting to strangle Feria, is imprisoned by the Duke of Alva.

Feria hesitates to accept the duke's proposal, but finally consents to go to the Netherlands, posing as Montmorency. Mercedes leaves for a convent, and Don Carlos escapes from prison.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASTLE AT WEERT.

THERE was unusual excitement within the great castle where Count Horn had been sulking since his rupture with the cardinal. The countess had been giving orders to the servants all the morning, and maids were running to and fro, taking out bed-linen, building fires, and polishing the best silver plate.

The great rooms opening on the hall were thrown open, the coverings that concealed the rich damask furniture were

removed, and the castle assumed a gala aspect it had not worn since the arrival of the count and countess from Brussels some months before.

The countess hated Weert. The saddest days of her life had been spent there! It was at the castle that her only son sickened and died. It was there that she had had a wasting illness, and it was there that her husband came when his harsh and imperious temper was ruffled by some fancied slight of the king. And the countess loved Brussels.

She loved the gaiety of the court, which she had graced as a girl under the emperor, and later as a fair and stately matron under the king and his ministers.

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for February.

But since Philip's departure for Spain, and the rule of the duchess and Granvelle, things had not gone well with them.

Count Horn, indeed, would not brook the insolence of the haughty minister, and had declared his intention of remaining permanently at Weert. To the countess this had been a heavy blow, and she had read that morning with unfeigned joy a brief note her husband handed her as they were breakfasting together.

It was from the Duke of Alva, and ran:

The Duke of Alva presents his compliments to Count Horn and desires to see him particularly in Brussels. The reason for this request will be made clear by a special messenger, now on his way to Weert.

"Who can that be?" the countess had asked in surprise.

"Possibly Don Ferdinando," the count returned indifferently. "Alva is fond of sending his son to do his errands."

At this hint the countess had thrown her whole soul into the task of preparing for her guest. Alva had just arrived in the Netherlands, and it was most desirable, from the countess's point of view, to make friends with the successor of Granvelle!

The guest-room was aired and made ready. Great fires blazed on the hearth, and the cook was ordered to put forth his best efforts! It was about noon, when one of the pages announced the arrival of a knight, with six attendants, before the drawbridge.

As Feria entered the great hall, somewhat out of breath with his rapid riding, he looked quickly around for some hint as to the first move in this new rôle he was to play. The count was not there, but the countess, resplendent in a new silken robe, was standing before the fire. She uttered a cry of astonishment when she saw him:

"Florence de Montmorency!"

Feria felt a great relief! It had seemed to him impossible that Montigny's own family could be deceived by the resemblance. He stepped forward and kissed the countess's hand.

"Fie, brother!" and the handsome woman gave him a warm salute on either cheek. "Since when have you assumed

these stately manners? Philip!" she called eagerly.

Count Horn appeared in the doorway, a heavy and massive figure. He started when he saw Feria:

"Florence!" he said incredulously.

It was a desperate rôle to play. Feria had never seen the Baron Montigny. His tricks of speech, his temperament, his physical peculiarities, were entirely unknown to him. And his voice—a sure betrayal! But Feria, like other young gallants of his time, had many accomplishments. At the masked balls, so frequent at the Spanish court, he had learned completely to disguise his voice by assuming a slight huskiness. This stood him in stead now. And he spoke French without an accent.

"Yes, brother!" he said warmly, and stepping forward saluted him on either cheek. He suddenly remembered that the duke had spoken of Montigny as being somewhat hot-headed and impetuous.

Count Horn held Feria at arm's length, regarding him with keen scrutiny.

"A high color and much leanness you have brought from the court of Spain, brother!" he said at last.

Feria laughed. "Yes! A husky voice, fine clothes, and some new accomplishments also!" He turned suddenly, for a small terrier was snapping at his heels.

"For shame, Tito!" said the countess, picking up the dog. "Why, he was so devoted to you, Florence, before you started for Spain! What has come over him!"

"I must make friends with him all over again," Feria said with assumed carelessness—the brute instinct was so much surer than the human. "But I am famished. Can I have a bite?" He had the feeling that at table things would go more smoothly.

Count Horn was a man of few words but deep thoughts. He had received a letter from his younger brother but two days before in which Montigny had warned him of the machinations of Philip, who was evolving some dark scheme for the Netherlands. The immediate appearance of his brother after his letter was an incident of ill-omen. When the three were left alone together after finishing their repast, the count turned to Feria:

"You have come unexpectedly from Spain on some special matter? Let me know the worst at once!"

Feria looked at him with affected surprise: "There is no 'worst' about it. I bring greetings of great kindness from the king!"

"But the plot!" said Horn sharply.

Feria hesitated. He had no clue.

"Whatever I may have written," he began—

"Whatever you may have written!" echoed the count. "Why, read over what you have written and explain it, man! We are alone, and I have no secrets from the countess."

Feria glanced hastily through the letter. It gave him his cue.

"When I wrote that," he said composedly, "I was disturbed by the rumors about the court. Carlos was anxious to head an expedition to the Netherlands, and we all feared the worst. But Alva was put in command, and the king gave explicit orders that all Flemish nobles should receive the reward of their fidelity."

The words choked him, for deceit was distasteful. He did not know Alva's whole intention, nor that the appearance of Horn in Brussels would compass his death. He was only a pawn in the game, and what was asked of him was blind obedience.

The count regarded Feria with surprise. "And you have lost your fear of some treachery on the part of the king?"

"Entirely," said Feria gayly. "I trust the duke, and he has come with royal prerogatives. He wishes to reward you for your past services and desires your presence immediately at Brussels to bestow on you some signal honor."

"Oh, Philip!" cried the countess joyfully. She hastened to her husband and threw her arms about his neck, regardless of the presence of Feria. "I always knew the king meant well by you, and that the cardinal was the cause of all our troubles."

"But Alva is no more trustworthy," said the count suspiciously. He looked at Feria with lowering brow. "You ever took things too much at their face value, brother."

For answer, Feria unrolled a paper he had in his possession. The duke had

foreseen it would be necessary to submit some tangible proof of his good-will. The paper was a document with the royal seal, giving to the person mentioned therein the governorship of an important province. Count Horn's name was written in full, but the name of the province had not yet been inserted.

"There are two provinces from which you may choose," said Feria eagerly, "but the duke desires a personal interview before filling in the name."

The count's brow cleared. He had always held high positions until Granvelle's enmity had been turned against him. Love of power was his one weakness, and it would be sweet to triumph over his foes.

"I told you, Philip," the countess nodded sagaciously, "that Granvelle would be recalled, and there would come brighter days for us."

"I did not expect such speedy honors," the count said slowly. He fixed his somber gaze on Feria:

"How comes it, brother, that you came so speedily to Flanders, when an earlier letter said you were virtually a prisoner at the court of Spain?"

"That was too strong a statement," Feria said cautiously—he was getting into deep waters—"and I am here only on a mission for the king. I have instantly to return to Madrid!"

"Your poor wife!" said the countess, pityingly. Feria felt his difficulties increasing.

"I beg you will not send her word of my presence, for I will go to her at the earliest possible moment." He wondered if she were in Brussels, and desired the information.

"Her last letter must have miscarried, for I do not know at present where she is!"

"Why, in the country, where you left her, Florence," the countess said in astonishment. Indeed, Mme. de Montigny had not seen Brussels since her husband's departure.

This was an immense relief to Feria, for an interview with Mme. de Montigny was what he most dreaded. As all that he had to do must be done quickly, it was possible he might elude her altogether.

"You will stay with us a while, brother?" asked Count Horn.

Feria shrugged his shoulders. His orders had been to bring the Count and Countess Horn to Brussels with the least possible delay. Alva was eager to begin his dangerous program at once.

"Only until to-morrow, I fear. I have several commissions to execute for the duke. I must see my wife in the country, and Alva wishes my presence at the great tourney which Egmont has arranged in Brussels."

The countess clapped her hands. She loved the bustle and excitement of the court life, and the tourneys were her especial delight.

"Philip," she said entreatingly, "let us go to Brussels to-morrow with Florence. I need a new robe for the tourney."

This was what Feria had hoped. The countess would aid him in getting Horn away from his stronghold.

"The duke bade me say," he remarked carelessly, "that the matter of the governorship is really pressing. There are two provinces to choose from, and Count Matteo is to have the one you reject. He particularly wishes you to make the choice."

This masterstroke sealed Horn's doom. Next to Granvelle, Matteo was his most implacable enemy, and must be thwarted at any cost. Perhaps a word of his to Alva might prevent Matteo from getting either province.

"I will try to go back with you for a few days," he said with decision. "I cannot leave Weert for any length of time, but I will confer with the duke, and let Carlotta have her tourney."

It was arranged they should make an early start the following day. The evening was to be got through in some fashion, and Feria was at his wit's end to pass the long hours without betrayal.

He played a little on the mandolin and lute, but dared not sing. He taught the countess some steps of a new Spanish dance, and talked incessantly of the court life at Madrid. With one or two slight breaks, he managed to avoid suspicion until, at the close of the evening, a small incident jeopardized his entire scheme.

They were seated at cards, when a maid came in and whispered for a moment with the countess.

"Why, yes," said the countess good-naturedly; "let her come in!"

Horn looked at his wife in surprise.

"Who is it?"

"Only Justine!"

Before the count could remonstrate, the door of the room where they were sitting was gently pushed open, and an old woman entered. She was neatly dressed in Flemish costume, with the high white cap of the period, which set off her fine, old, wrinkled face. She stepped cautiously, blinking continually, until she was close to Feria.

"Justine has grown almost blind," said the countess in an undertone.

The old woman sank on her knees, and put Feria's hand to her lips.

"It is not my lord's hand!" she said suddenly, looking up at him with her dim eyes.

"Spanish tournaments have changed it, perhaps," said Feria lightly, but he felt a sudden sinking of the heart.

"Nor my lord's voice," moaned the old woman.

"But it is the face of Florence de Montmorency," said the count kindly; "how do you account for that?"

Justine was an old family servant of the Montmorency's, who had trundled both Philip and Florence on her knee. The younger boy had been her pet and idol, and Baron Montigny had never gone to his brother's house without some substantial token for his old nurse. Feria dimly suspected her relationship.

"May I touch my lord's face?" she asked after a pause.

Feria dared not refuse.

The trembling fingers passed over his hair and brow and chin, and the old woman drew back with a cry.

"It is not my lord's hair! That used to be as fine as silk, and his chin was more square!"

The count and countess looked at Feria with an amused smile. He had grown very pale.

"You must not be so critical," he said in his assumed husky voice. "We all change somewhat when we live in a foreign country."

The old woman stood motionless, a perplexed and doubtful figure.

"Did my lord remember his promise to Justine?" she said at last, harshly.

Feria gave a deprecatory smile.

"My leaving Spain was so sudden—my business for the king is so urgent—I fear I have forgotten many things!"

"Then you did not bring Justine what you promised?"

Feria spoke hesitatingly: "I fear it was forgotten!"

"Does my lord remember what it was?"

The countess turned to rebuke the freedom of this speech, when she noticed Feria's extreme pallor. Something held her tongue.

"I fear I will have to confess that it is all forgotten," said Feria hastily, and growing a shade paler.

The old woman turned triumphantly to the countess:

"It was in this very room, my lady, before my lord Florence started for Spain, when you and my lord Philip were present, that he promised to bring back a Spanish mantilla for old Justine!"

The countess looked smilingly at Feria.

"It was indeed so, brother! Do you not remember that last evening at Weert, when Justine helped buckle on your armor, you said she was worth a dozen Spanish maids, and that she should have a real lace mantilla when you came back from Spain?"

Feria's brow cleared. He saw a way out of it. "To be sure!" he laughed heartily. "But the truth is, Justine, I was sent off too hurriedly to have time for the mantilla. I had to bring you something else." He took, as he spoke, a small object from his doublet, and handed it to her. It was a rosary of lapis lazuli, set with gold—Feria's own rosary—of beautiful workmanship.

"This was all I had time for, Justine, but the next time I will not forget the mantilla!" Feria bowed as he spoke, and patted the wrinkled hand.

The old woman stood a moment in bewilderment, and then pressed the rosary to her lips.

"I beg your pardon for doubting you, my lord," she said humbly; "but, somehow, you seemed altogether different!"

She made him a low curtsy and retired.

On Count Horn the little episode seemed to make no impression whatever;

but the next morning, while they were waiting for the countess's litter, the countess drew Feria into her boudoir. She stepped up to a carved cabinet and took out a small object. Coming close to Feria, she suddenly held out to him an exquisitely painted miniature, studying his face intently meanwhile.

Feria beheld a small, oval face, with large, serious eyes, dark hair, and a mouth that in its downward curves expressed dejection and unhappiness. But the beauty of the face was striking! A sure instinct told him who it was, if he only could have known her name! He pressed the miniature to his lips with an impassioned gesture.

"She looks so sad!" he said.

The countess's brow cleared. Impossible for any human being to resemble another as this man resembled Montigny! Some little tricks of speech and gesture seemed different, but Montigny was the most imitative of mortals, and he had been a long time at the court of Spain. She smiled cordially:

"Sophia had it painted for you six months ago. I was to keep it, and send it to you if anything happened to her."

It was the portrait of Mme. de Montigny.

The trip to Brussels was a gay one. Count Horn went in state, with forty retainers. When he occupied his Brussels house he assumed a state of almost royal magnificence. In former days he had vied with the Prince of Orange, and the fame of his banquets had extended even to Spain. At Weert everything was different. There he affected a style of extreme simplicity except when he entertained, so that the countess, who was extravagant and lavish in her tastes, fretted and pined in her frugal solitude.

She chatted merrily with Feria, who rode beside her litter. She was in high good-humor, planning fêtes and festivities while they should be in Brussels. She asked many questions about the duke.

"Why, pray, did the king send the duke to the Netherlands instead of the Prince of Eboli?"

Feria gave an evasive reply.

"You know his coming with so many Spanish troops is most unpopular in Flanders," she continued; "and the Prince of Orange has gone to Germany."

She looked up searchingly at Feria.

"Tell me, Florence," she said archly, "why you changed your mind so suddenly after you sent that warning letter to Philip?"

Feria flushed. Luring these two unsuspecting people into a trap was more distasteful than he had dreamed.

"The king gave me such assurances," he stammered.

"Well, Egmont trusts the king, and so must we," she said gaily; "but if anything happens to Philip his blood is on your head, brother."

"Oh, no!" said Feria involuntarily. The countess looked at him in surprise, but they were approaching Brussels, and all was excitement and confusion. The count rode up.

"You will come with us in Brussels. Florence?"

"Impossible at this time," Feria answered hastily. "I stay with the duke for the tourney, and then depart immediately on a special mission for the king."

He made his adieu, and rode with his own retainers to Culemborg House, which Alva had immediately occupied on entering Brussels.

As he dismounted, in the courtyard of the castle, he noticed a fellow hanging about, dressed in black from head to foot, with his plumed hat drawn low over his forehead. As Feria passed the man, he looked up, and Feria noted the high-cheek bones, an ugly scar on the left cheek, and the curious expression of the eyes, which looked at him with a strange malignity. The sound of a gay cavalcade passing on the street suddenly emptied the courtyard of the duke's retainers, and the two were left momentarily alone. Feria started to enter the castle, when a blow from some blunt weapon felled him from behind, crushing in his helmet and stretching him insensible on the threshold.

CHAPTER V.

THE TOURNEY.

THE great duke had not been idle these first few days after his entrance into Brussels. His soldiers had been carefully stationed in all the fortresses commanding the city, and

large bodies of Spanish troops were being distributed in neighboring towns to await his orders. But all things were done with a semblance of amity and order. It was the wish of the king that Flanders should be garrisoned by Spanish troops, and it was Alva's policy to lull the suspicions of the people before striking the first blow.

It was most important to get rid of the more powerful nobles at once, for without leaders Alva knew the people would be powerless to make an organized resistance to his army. To entrap Egmont and Horn, their suspicions must be averted, so that the duke entered with earnestness into all the fêtes and festivities Egmont had prepared for his arrival. While Feria was making his visit at Castle Weert the duke was giving and attending dinners, and the whole city was agog at the great tourney which Alva was to give in the public square, in return for the attentions lavished upon him.

The tourney was to be followed by a banquet given by Don Ferdinando, and the arrest of Egmont and Horn was to follow the dinner. The delicate task of assuring the presence of these two unfortunate noblemen at the banquet was to be given to Feria, who had justified the duke's estimate of him by the prompt and skillful manner in which he had brought Count Horn to Brussels.

Feria had been picked up insensible on the threshold of the duke's house, and when brought to consciousness could give no very lucid account of his assailant. No one answering to Feria's description was among the duke's retainers, and the incident remained shrouded in mystery. It seemed necessary to give his henchman more minute instructions, and Feria was summoned to an interview. He obeyed, with curious misgiving. He was, indeed, bound to the duke, who held his future in the hollow of his hand, but the nature of his task was repellent to him.

The duke looked at Feria keenly as the young man entered his private room. He marked his pallor, and the ugly mark on his cheek left by his recent fall. He also noted his expression.

"Sit down!" he said curtly.

It was necessary to have absolute control of his pawn if the game was to be

successful. Any reservations on the part of a subordinate would be fatal to the success of his scheme. He divined that Feria was wavering.

"You were successful in bringing Count Horn to Brussels!"

"Yes, your grace." Feria spoke sulkily.

"Your next task will be to accompany Horn and Egmont to the banquet given by Don Ferdinando, and to sit between them at dinner."

"Why is it not sufficient if they accept the invitation and come without me?" said the young man hastily.

"Because I prefer to take no chances at the crucial moment." The duke spoke sternly and rose, looking down on Feria from his commanding height.

"We will understand each other. Are you in the service of the King of Spain?"

Feria looked up in amazement.

"Certainly, your grace."

"Are you my subordinate as commander-in-chief of the forces in the Netherlands?"

"Yes, your grace."

"Then I command you, on penalty of death, to execute my instructions without comment, without hesitation, without reservations."

Feria had risen. He was very pale, but he looked the duke steadfastly in the eye. He realized that he owed implicit obedience to his military chief, and it was true that he was in the service of the King of Spain. Dark deeds were done in those days in the name of war; duplicity and deceit paraded as handmaids of religion.

"I will do your bidding, your grace." His voice was low and firm.

"I require the blood oath!" said Alva harshly.

Feria started. In those days, to make men's vows more binding, they were frequently written in blood. To Feria the practise was repellent on account of a secret superstition which he was loath to acknowledge.

"I will obey your commands without that," he said proudly.

Alva paid no heed. He took quill and paper, hastily writing a few words and handing the paper to Feria.

"Sign that with your blood!" he commanded.

Feria flushed hotly, but the iron will

of the duke mastered him. He pricked his arm, and wrote as the duke commanded.

On the paper was written:

I, Don Luis de Feria, in the service of the King of Spain, do swear to obey, without reservation, the commands of the Duke of Alva, commander-in-chief in the Netherlands.

DON LUIS DE FERIA.

The duke's brow cleared. He knew, intuitively, that bound by this oath he was sure of his cat's-paw. He assumed the benign expression that the Countess Emanuele had learned to fear.

"I will take you into my confidence," he said suavely.

"It is not necessary, your grace!"

Feria spoke hastily. He preferred to execute his orders in the dark.

"It is necessary that you should know exactly what is to be done," continued the duke. "The outcome of what you do need not concern you. For reasons of my own I must have the three noblemen, Horn, Egmont, and the Prince of Orange here in Brussels. Horn and Egmont are already here, and the next move in the game is to arrest them. They can easily escape from the city if they become alarmed, so that I must first lull their suspicions and then take them unawares. I will put the tourney in your charge, and it is to be a magnificent one—no expense spared. We will show them what a Spanish-Moorish tournament is like.

"You, as Baron Montigny, must keep constantly with Horn and Egmont, and I hold you responsible for their appearance at Don Ferdinando's banquet, which will immediately follow the tournament. You will be placed between these two noblemen at dinner, and when word arrives that I wish to see them at Culemborg House, you will accompany them here until they are in my presence. I will then dismiss you, and you are to leave Brussels that night for Germany.

"You will proceed to Dillenburg to the Prince of Orange, and as Baron Montigny, you will stay with him days or weeks, if necessary, until you induce him to go with you to Brussels. No hope of favors from the king will move the prince. The only possible chord to touch is the chord of compassion for his intimate friend Egmont, and your brother,

Count Horn. You are to represent these two noblemen as under arrest in Brussels on charges which only he can clear, and that, without his intervention, his two friends may summarily be put to death. Promise him safe conduct to and from Brussels."

"Is it a genuine guarantee, your grace?"

"That is not your affair," said the duke roughly. Feria winced. He knew well that he was to lure Orange to his death. He straightened himself and set his teeth. After all, the King of Spain considered these men traitors, and he was but a puppet to do his bidding.

"Very well," he said firmly, "I will carry out your orders, but may I not go to the Prince of Orange in my own person?"

"Impossible!" the duke said shortly. "The one reason you are selected for this, is your chance and wonderful resemblance to Baron Montigny. You have already imposed on Horn; with Egmont and Orange you should have less difficulty."

"But a slight incident may betray me," said Feria, thinking of the old servant at Weert.

"The more difficult the task, the greater the honor," returned the duke calmly. He looked keenly at Feria. "I said you might remain days or weeks with the Prince of Orange. But every day counts! I wish to do nothing with my prisoners until Orange arrives in Brussels, and we have to keep down disorder and possible rebellion. If you bring Orange to me in Brussels within a week from the time you reach him, I will send you back to Spain immediately to claim the hand of Mercedes de Toledo."

The young man flushed from brow to chin. This so exceeded his wildest hopes that the dishonor of his adventure seemed suddenly blurred. He satisfied his conscience by calling it strategy.

In pursuance of the duke's plans, Feria thought it wise to interest the women of Egmont's family in the tourney. The Countess Horn had entered into the festivities with enthusiasm, and it was desirable to capture Egmont's family as well. Rumor has swift passage through women's tongues, and Feria desired that the splendor of the tournament should be

their engrossing theme. To that end he went immediately to Count Egmont's palace.

Count Egmont, a man of extravagant tastes and large income, lived in almost royal splendor. His sojourns in France and Spain had given him much knowledge of the customs of other countries, and he combined Spanish magnificence with French taste in the appointments of his palace. Feria gazed with surprise at the tapestried walls, inlaid furniture, and exquisite carvings of the great rooms through which he was ushered, which were worthy the Escorial itself.

His first interview was with the eldest daughter of the house—the beautiful Rosalie Egmont. She was seated in a small white-tiled room at the rear of the palace, surrounded by her pet doves, who were flying in and out of the casement windows. Feria gazed in admiration at the pretty picture, for he was not at first observed. The fair girl, her hair tumbling over her shoulders in picturesque disorder, with swift movements of her white arms and hands was endeavoring to feed and at the same time protect herself from her pets, who were whirling about her and endeavoring to alight on her head and bosom. She caught sight of Feria and flushed a rosy red.

"Why! This is—Baron Montigny!" She spoke the name slowly and scrutinized him keenly as she gave him her hand. The real Baron Montigny had played with her often as a child, and had made an indelible impression on her sensitive, romantic temperament.

Feria felt uncomfortable beneath this searching gaze. He had asked for the Countess Egmont, but she was not in the palace. He assumed an air of playfulness.

"I did not expect to stumble on Venus with her doves when I asked for the countess," he said in his husky voice. The girl gazed at him dreamily.

"This is Florence de Montmorency who played games with me, and whom I haven't seen for six years." Her clear eyes searched his face.

"Why did you get married?"

Feria flushed crimson. There seemed no end to the complications he must meet.

"I don't know," he stammered; "it seemed best to marry!"

"And do you not love Mme. de Montigny?" asked the girl solemnly.

Feria forced a laugh. "Naturally, a man loves a beautiful wife!"

"Is she then very beautiful?" the girl asked wistfully.

"Very!" Feria returned quickly, "but I want to ask you, *mademoiselle*—"

"Rosalie, please," said the girl softly.

"Rosalie," corrected Feria, "if you will honor me so greatly as to be queen of the tournament the Duke of Alva is to give in Brussels?"

He had intended to ask the Countess Egmont, who was still a very handsome woman, to play this rôle and distribute the favors to the knights. But this fair young girl was an ideal tournament queen.

For answer Rosalie Egmont looked at him long and inscrutably. Florence de Montmorency had been the *Prince Charming* of her childish dreams. The man before her was of striking beauty and distinction. What subtle lack did she find in him? She did not directly answer his question.

"Do you remember that you once asked me to be your little wife?" The girl looked up at him with her clear, direct gaze. Feria moved uncomfortably.

"But you were so young!" he stammered.

"Yes, I was but fifteen," said the girl slowly, "but you kissed me once and gave me a troth-plight." She took a slender chain from around her neck, and handed him a curious gold charm—two clasped hands cut in gold.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked solemnly.

Feria inwardly cursed his double. He had never seen Mme. de Montigny, but anything more exquisite than this young girl could not be imagined. How could Montigny have given her up! He floundered hopelessly through some explanation, which, to his joy, was broken in upon by the entrance of the Countess Egmont. She came up to him with marked cordiality.

"I have only just learned that the Baron Montigny was in Brussels, and I want to add my congratulations that you have escaped from Spain!"

"Escaped?" said Feria involuntarily.

The countess looked at him sharply.

"Yes! Your last letter to Count Egmont said you were virtually a prisoner at the court of Spain, and that you were planning an escape."

Feria forced a laugh. "Well, I am here now with the duke on a special mission for the king, and so far from planning an escape that I expect to return almost immediately to Spain."

"Oh, no!" said the countess quickly.

Rosalie moved nearer to her mother and took her hand. "Don't ask any favor of him!" she said earnestly.

The countess looked at her in astonishment.

"Do not trust that man!" The girl fell on her knees and buried her face in the countess's robe.

"I never told you, *maman*, but the Baron Montigny asked me to marry him six years ago and gave me a troth-plight." She slipped the charm into her mother's hand. "I loved him, *maman*!" she sobbed piteously.

The Countess Egmont drew herself up and threw a glance of withering scorn on Feria:

"So you trifle with my daughter, Baron Montigny, and then have the effrontery to seek her without an explanation of your conduct!"

She was the personification of outraged motherhood. Of all her children, this beautiful daughter was the nearest her heart—the very apple of her eye.

Feria turned very pale, but he carried himself with dignity.

"I deeply regret my boyish impetuosity," he said slowly, "but I never dreamed that—Rosalie—cared so much! She was only a child, and I a boy. We were separated, and, years after, it seemed best for me to marry. I repent deeply—"

The girl sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing. She seized the charm from her mother's hand and gave it, with a magnificent gesture, to Feria:

"You need not repent, sir! I hate you now as much as I loved you then! Your falseness is written in your face!"

"Tut! tut!" came a deep voice from the door. The three turned quickly, and faced Count Egmont.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said sternly. Count Egmont was a kind man, but he was master of his house. "I am told that Baron Montigny is in my

palace, and I find him with two angry women who are forgetting their hospitality."

And then Feria's natural tact and frankness saved the situation.

"I am sadly at fault, my lord, for I made love to your pretty daughter six years ago, when she was a charming child and I a boy. We exchanged favors, and I left the country for years. I never forgot her, but she was always the beautiful child to me, and after a time I married. It was rank discourtesy to *mademoiselle* that I did not write to her and tell her of my marriage. But I hoped she would forgive me, and I came to-day to ask her to be queen of the tournament."

Egmont's brow cleared, and he looked expectantly toward his daughter. To him the boy and girl love-affair had no significance whatever. He looked much higher than Baron Montigny for his daughter, and had, in fact, a French alliance with a noble house in view for her.

Rosalie had turned pale and quiet on her father's entrance into the room. She adored her father, but the two did not understand each other. She turned toward Feria and spoke mechanically:

"I am grateful to Baron Montigny, but it will be impossible for me to be queen of the tournament."

"My daughter, I wish you to be queen of the tournament."

Count Egmont spoke with decision. He was in high good humor at the graciousness of Alva's treatment of him, and he had received a flattering letter from the king. Suspicion was foreign to him, and his vanity was pleased at this mark of distinction coming to his house.

"I wish it, Rosalie," he repeated. The girl shrank back, but Count Egmont's word was law, and there was no escape.

Before Feria left the palace, Rosalie Egmont had promised to be the tournament queen.

Brussels was alive with keen anticipation of the duke's tourney. Already many fêtes were planned in honor of the king's embassy, but this tilt of Moorish reeds was something new in Flanders.

The Countess Horn entered heart and soul into the preparations, and kept the count from grumbling at the tardiness of

the duke in giving him the governorship he so much desired.

"Wait until after the tourney and banquet," she said. "Can't you see the duke is occupied with many details? After Don Ferdinando's banquet he will have time for your business." For the duke had guarded himself from an interview with Horn until the time should be ripe.

It was the Countess Horn who assisted Feria in the wonderful street decorations which Brussels remembered for years to come.

Garlands of fruits and flowers were festooned over all the streets through which the procession was to pass. Paintings by the old Dutch masters were hung from balconies, and exquisite Flemish tapestries concealed the fronts of many houses.

Hidden bands of musicians were placed on every street-corner, and Alva's private band—brought from Spain for these festivities—preceded the fantastic cars in which the Flemish ladies rode in the procession. This band, made up of natives of the Indies, wore on their breasts broad silver escutcheons on which Alva had had his private arms emblazoned. They shared the attention of the multitude with the Spanish cavaliers, who were superbly mounted on Arabian horses.

No sign or portent as yet disturbed the serenity of the splendid pageant. The noble ladies of the court, attired in robes of sumptuous brocade, were drawn slowly along in their glittering cars, tossing flowers and confetti to the gaping throng. A hundred Flemish nobles, escorted by pages, took part in the procession, and Rosalie Egmont, dressed in silver gauze, with a jeweled crown on her fair hair, was drawn in a chariot modeled after those of ancient Rome.

In the great square of the city a temporary throne had been erected, on which the queen of the tournament was seated. Upon her devolved the duty of crowning the victor in the tilt of reeds with flowers; and at her feet were three of the most beautiful maidens in Brussels, attired in white, who held curious banners which were to be given to the successful knight.

Improvised seats were built around the square, and every nook and cranny of the houses in the vicinity were filled. There was a roped enclosure, and the soldiers

were busy keeping the throng from pressing too closely against these ropes, so intense was the eagerness to see every maneuver of the novel spectacle.

For this was a tourney introduced into Spain by the Spanish Arabs, and the swiftness of movement, the dash and fire of the horses, the superb horsemanship of the cavaliers, and the adroitness in throwing the reeds, made it unlike the clumsy European tourney.

The Spanish cavaliers were divided into six factions, each marked by a particular color. On their heads were turbans twisted Moorish fashion, and to their slender lances were attached long streamers of the color of the faction to which they belonged. Even the horses were gaily caparisoned to match the livery of their masters; and when, at a signal from the duke, the six compact bodies of horsemen took their places in the square the brilliancy of the scene was indescribable.

Feria, as master of ceremonies, placed the combatants with great skill. He had chosen carefully the leaders of the several quadrilles, and they were all horsemen of reputation. He, himself, was the leader of one faction, and Don Ferdinando, who excelled in the tilt, was the leader of another. The two had often met in the tourneys of Spain.

The brilliant sunshine, the gay dresses of the ladies, and the kaleidoscope of color made by the maneuvers of the knights made the scene spectacular in the highest degree. Lightly equipped and mounted, with wonderful agility and grace, the cavaliers threw their lances, evaded thrusts, and parried attack. Through the long afternoon the mock combat continued, with victory now for one faction, and now for another, the great audience in wildest excitement, and the square ringing with their cheers. The Duke of Alva, with the Counts Egmont and Horn, were seated on a raised dais near the throne of the youthful queen, who watched the maneuvers with a strange intensity.

At last the contest was narrowed to two factions—the crimson and the blue—and Feria and Don Ferdinando met, as many times before, to decide the issue of the day. Both were superbly mounted, and both were consummate horsemen, but Don Ferdinando had not the resources of

his opponent. Feria, ardent and daring, was as skilful in assault as in defense, while Don Ferdinando preferred the waiting game.

Skilfully Feria drove his rival across the square in a sudden furious onslaught, and before Don Ferdinando could parry, the younger man was upon him, his lance leveled and victory apparently certain, when a curious thing happened.

Rosalie Egmont, suddenly standing up, uttered a sharp cry, and before the bewildered spectators realized what had happened, Feria's horse had reared, plunged, and thrown his rider. Great was the confusion and hubbub while they were picking up the unconscious man, but as he soon opened his eyes and had apparently sustained no injury, the tourney was concluded by the crowning of Don Ferdinando victor of the tournament.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BANQUET.

IN the instant before Feria fell through the sudden swerving of his horse, usually under his complete control, a startling sight met his eye. He was close to the rope which fenced off the spectators, when his eye, by chance, fell on a tall figure leaning over the rope with a small, sharp missile in his hand. The man was leveling this missile at Feria's horse, and in a flash Feria marked the scar on his cheek and the sinister eyes of the man who had attacked him in the courtyard of Alva's house on his return to Brussels.

The people, who could not see very clearly from the pressure of the throng, did not mark the action of the man who so swiftly and unerringly shot his missile at the critical moment. Nothing but a miracle saved Feria's skull as he crashed to the pavement under the very feet of his startled horse.

He was instantly lifted and carried into the nearest palace, which chanced to be Count Egmont's. It was there, after some minutes, that he opened his eyes on the frightened group of noblemen gathered about him, and assured them that he was unhurt.

"I have a secret enemy!" he said.

They laughed at him and refused to believe his tale of the man with the scar and the sinister eyes.

"There is no such fellow about the court," Egmont declared stoutly. "We have never seen him, and you certainly have not brought him from Spain!"

"It sounds like a description of Carlos himself!" laughed one of the young blades who had not been in Spain.

Feria started. Carlos did indeed have a scar cut on one cheek, but this face was not the face of the heir to the throne.

A great hubbub arose in the palace. Some were on their way to Don Ferdinando's banquet, others preferred to take their cards and wine under the count's hospitable roof. All tongues were wagging over the tournament, and the great hall rang with jests and laughter. Egmont pulled Feria's sleeve.

"Come to a quieter place! I would see you alone a moment before the banquet."

The two edged their way through the throng of cavaliers, who kept up a rattling volley of pleasantries and jests, until they reached a small anteroom overlooking the garden. Here were luxurious divans and cushioned seats, and the sound of fountains came alluringly through the open casement window.

"Sit down," said Egmont, and seated himself.

At that moment the heavy draperies behind them stirred, and Rosalie Egmont, in her dress of silver gauze, with her fair hair in disorder and her eyes dilated with fear or excitement, glided in like a wraith and threw herself at her father's feet.

"Oh, do not go to the banquet!" she sobbed.

The two men exchanged glances.

"Why, Rosalie, *mein liebchen!*" murmured the count, stroking the fair hair, "what is the meaning of this?"

Rosalie sprang to her feet and crossed her slender hands on her breast.

"It means, father, that I have been warned by God, in a dream, that you are not to go to this banquet."

It was an age of superstition, when dreams and omens had their weight even with men.

"What dream, my daughter?" Egmont asked gravely.

"Last night," said Rosalie slowly, "I seemed to myself to be in a vast banquet-hall filled with men. On the wall were many curious devices, one of which was a panther and a lion fighting. That seemed to be on the center wall. There were great beakers of gold and silver on the tables, and men were drinking and laughing together. All at once the door opened and a herald entered, dressed in black. He blew a trumpet and said: 'I am the herald of death, and I want two men!' Then, father, you and Count Horn went with him. You were ushered into a chamber hung with black, and in it was a scaffold—and it meant death to you and Count Horn!" The girl sobbed afresh, and clung to Egmont. "Do not go, father. Do not go to the palace to-night."

Egmont changed color. He was of a sanguine, pleasure-loving temperament, and did not take fright easily; but he was superstitious, and had received several warnings. He thought uneasily of Orange, safe in Germany, and knew there was still time for him to cross the border. He turned to Feria, who was very pale.

"What do you say, Montigny?" he demanded.

Feria set his teeth. This was his task, his mission, "in the service of the king."

"I say," he returned composedly, "that I, personally, shall trust the king and go to the banquet. I would advise you to do the same."

Egmont's mercurial nature responded. He laughed a little loudly.

"Well, this is the very question I brought you here to ask—whether or not I should attend Don Ferdinando's banquet—and you have given me your answer. I also will trust the king, and go with you."

He gently unloosed his daughter's arms, and turned to go. The young girl sprang before Feria, barring his exit from the room. Her face was deathly pale, and in her eyes a look of hate and fear:

"Baron Montigny, you have seen fit to influence my father to go to this banquet. I shall hold you responsible for his safety." Her whole aspect was threatening.

Feria took up the challenge: "Very

well, *mademoiselle*, you may do so. Your father is a free man, with the privilege of a choice. I only advise him to do what I am to do myself."

The girl's glance wavered. She could not account for her fierce hatred of this man. Surely that childish love-affair could be wiped from her memory. She shuddered, and hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, that chamber of death, father!"

Egmont did not, in truth, go to the banquet with a very good grace. Certain happenings of the past two days had raised a vague uneasiness. In spite of the fêtes and the tournament Alva had persistently refused to grant a private interview to himself and Horn. He, too, had his grievances against Granvelle, and he wanted more than specious promises from the duke.

The two men walked in silence to Janissy House, where Don Ferdinando was to give his banquet. Each was busy with his own reflections. Feria was thinking of his instructions to sit between Horn and Egmont, and to accompany them to Culemborg House when the message should arrive. A throng of people were entering Janissy House. In the jostle a man in a black mask stepped close to Egmont and slipped a bit of paper into his hand.

"Show it to none," he whispered, and was gone.

Egmont frowned heavily, but he managed to peruse the paper when no one was looking:

Make some excuse to leave the banquet and fly for the border. Your life depends on it!

He did not show this to Feria.

It took two hours of drinking and revelry to raise Egmont's spirits. He had the fatal vice of procrastination. Thoroughly startled by this succession of warnings, he realized that it was wisdom to flee, but persuaded himself that the next day would answer. It was highly improbable that Alva meditated treachery on the very day of his tournament, and the count told himself that he would send off his family and jewels the next morning and depart secretly himself.

Horn, also, suspected no immediate treachery. Thoroughly angered by Alva's evasiveness, after his peremptory

summons to Brussels, he had decided that the following day he would demand of the duke an explanation and return immediately to Weert.

Feria, as had been arranged, sat between the two noblemen, and as the wine gradually unloosened their tongues the three argued, with great vivacity, the respective merits of Spain and Flanders. Then, being so near his goal, Feria tripped:

"Here's to Spain!" he cried gaily, and lifted his glass. "Here's to the country that gave me birth, nourished me, and sent me to Flanders to fight her battles!"

The glasses fell from the hands of Egmont and Horn with a crash. They acknowledged the sovereignty of the king, but Flanders was to them the apple of their eye, and the entry of a foreign army an indignity almost too great to be borne!

"What do you mean by that?" said Horn angrily. "You are no brother of mine to talk of fighting Spain's battles in Flanders. We want no foreign troops."

Egmont regarded Feria with a sudden, sharp suspicion. "What do you mean by being born in Spain? You were born in Weert—eh, Philip?"

Count Horn looked his astonishment. He had not particularly noticed that slip of Feria's.

"Of course," he said with asperity. "Florence was born at Weert when I was quite a lad, and when our grandfather was head of the house."

Feria tried to cover his confusion with a jest:

"But I always had 'castles in Spain' from the time I was born. You know I always wanted to go there, brother."

Don Ferdinando created a diversion:

"Here's to the Duke of Alva and his peaceful occupation of the Netherlands!" All drank the satirical toast standing, while the hall rang with their cheers; but few dreamed of the seas of blood that the toast implied.

One of the doors of the banquet-hall suddenly opened, and a messenger in a plumed hat and black livery entered. He approached Don Ferdinando and handed him a folded paper. Don Ferdinando read it, and bit his lip. With the singu-

lar inconsistency of a stern and relentless nature, he at times was capable of passionate friendship. Such a friendship he had conceived for Egmont, who was the most magnetic and winning of men. The two had been thrown intimately together since the arrival of the Spanish army in Brussels, and each day increased the fascination felt by Don Ferdinando for the brilliant and able soldier.

It mattered not that the entire scheme of the banquet and arrest was Don Ferdinando's own, and that it was he himself who had suggested to the duke Feria's part in it. His one thought at last was how he might save Egmont alone from his cruel fate. Horn and Orange he would willingly sacrifice, but he must save Egmont.

The paper brought by the messenger was one prepared by the duke and Don Ferdinando to summon the men wanted to Culemborg House.

Don Ferdinando mechanically read the message:

The Duke of Alva desires the immediate presence of the Counts Egmont, Horn, and Montigny at Culemborg House on a matter of importance.

He looked directly at Egmont, but the count was not regarding him. He had grasped Feria by the sleeve and was whispering to him:

"In Heaven's name, look at the wall yonder!"

Feria followed his glance. The great room in which they sat was hung with tapestries, weapons, and shields of curious device. In the middle of the wall, facing them, was a huge shield on which was emblazoned a panther and a lion fighting. Feria gazed at it, uncomprehending.

"The dream, man—the dream!" whispered Egmont in an agonized voice.

Then Feria remembered. This had indeed been foretold by Rosalie Egmont in the recital of her dream. He winced. It must be his fate to lead this man to his doom. Before he could speak, Egmont grasped his arm:

"And the messenger in black!"

Great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. Count Egmont was the greatest general in Flanders. Of physical fear he knew nothing. His great victories at St. Quentin and and Grave-

lines had been won through his utter recklessness and bravery. But here was a mystical, unseen foe! Here was a prophecy in part fulfilled! All the superstition of his nature was aroused.

"I shall not go to Culemborg House!" he said in a strangled voice.

An inspiration came to Feria:

"Your daughter was wrong," he said calmly. "She spoke of two being led to the death-chamber. You see there are three of us!" He smiled as he spoke.

A look of relief passed over Egmont's face. He tried to recover himself.

"True," he murmured—"true, there are three of us!"

Count Horn, on the other side of Feria, had not marked this little episode. He had been listening to Don Ferdinando as he read the duke's message. To him it was an agreeable one. He had been trying to secure a private interview with the duke ever since reaching Brussels, and with his two friends present he desired to make his petition.

"Let us hasten," he said impatiently.

Egmont rose reluctantly, Feria with alacrity. The latter now desired to have the disagreeable business over as quickly as possible.

As the three men turned to leave the room, they passed Don Ferdinando, who sat at the head of the table. He abruptly touched the arm of Egmont, who came last, drew him down, and whispered something in his ear.

When Egmont joined his friends in the anteroom, his eyes were glassy, his face the color of marble. The three were temporarily alone, although servants were coming and going continually. Egmont sank onto a divan.

Horn, who was greatly alarmed at his appearance, hastened to him.

"Are you ill, Lamoral?" He bent over his friend.

Egmont fixed a look of anguish on the two faces regarding him:

"Fool not to have taken the warnings! This last one has come too late!"

"What do you mean?" said Horn harshly.

"I mean," said Egmont more quietly, "that when I passed Don Ferdinando's seat he pulled me down to him and whispered: 'Saddle your horse instantly and fly for your life for the frontier!'"

Horn's face grew dark with suspicion.

"Another infernal Spanish plot!" he muttered. "This may be a trap laid for you, Lamoral."

The three looked silently in one another's face, each brain busily at work. At last Horn clapped his hand on Feria's shoulder:

"You shall decide this, brother. You have been much at the court of Spain, and understand the king better than us. Shall we take Don Ferdinando's advice and fly at the last moment, or shall we risk this interview with the duke?"

And the pawn—as was his duty—muttering to himself, "In the service of the king," spoke:

"In Spain one can foretell nothing with certainty, but would it not seem like treason to attempt to fly, when summoned to an important interview with the duke? Would not the king so regard it, in case the flight were unsuccessful? Is it not better to leave the country quietly to-morrow, so that it may not seem like flight?"

And the two noblemen, who were indeed loath to leave Flanders, and who knew themselves loyal to the king, after a moment's silence acquiesced.

The great apartment of state at Culemborg House, where Alva transacted all his business, was partially filled with engineers and some of the prominent nobles when the three arrived. Before them on a table were scattered plans of various kinds, and there was a babel of tongues as the three friends entered the room.

Nothing could have seemed less like a plot, or less sinister, than this business meeting.

Alva was in high good humor:

"I tore you away from the banquet, gentlemen, because we are planning fortifications for Antwerp and Brussels, and I was unwilling to decide on the plans without your cooperation."

It had been carefully planned by him to utilize the hours between the banquet at noonday and night, when he wished to make the arrests, with some plausible discussion of new fortresses to be held by the Spanish army.

As he had foreseen, the subject was a sore one and the wrangle of tongues was long and bitter. While the Flemish nobles submitted to the country being occupied

by a Spanish army, it was gall and worm-wood to plan defenses which might at any moment be turned against themselves.

Into this discussion Egmont and Horn entered with vehemence, and Egmont, seeing here an opportunity of proving his loyalty to the king, loudly advised in favor of the new fortifications, the plans of which the engineers spread before them.

Alva waited until the hubbub reached its most acute point, when no one man could be heard through the clamor of voices, and spoke in a low aside to Feria:

"Follow me from the room."

Without attracting any attention, the two men slipped quietly from the room and crossed the great hall to the duke's bedchamber. Here Alva motioned Feria to be seated.

"You have followed your instructions to the letter," he said graciously. "and have met with such success that I almost dare to hope we shall get Orange! But this is the gigantic part of your undertaking! You have to deal with a man who is at present out of our power, who is the subtlest and most cautious of men, and who is nearly at open enmity with the king. His only possible motive in returning will be the hope of rescuing Egmont and Horn. You must make the most of their danger and his influence in their behalf, and you must guarantee him safe conduct to and from Brussels in the name of the king."

The duke handed as he spoke a document to Feria, to which was appended the royal seal.

"A horse from my stables is saddled and waiting for you, and you are to go with all haste to Dillenburg. I wish the prince to hear the first account of the arrest from your lips! On the way you put it to him, depends the success of our scheme! Remember, on the day you bring William of Orange into Brussels you sail for Spain and Mercedes de Toledo."

The two noblemen left in the chamber of state did not, at first, miss their companion, but on Alva's return to the room they looked about for Feria.

"Where is Montigny, your grace?" asked Egmont uneasily.

"He is looking after a little matter for

mc," the duke returned pleasantly. He then gave the signal for breaking up the meeting. As the others passed out of the room he laid his hand on Egmont's arm.

"I wish a word alone with you, Egmont!"

The count stiffened. Instinct told him that his hour had come! When the two were left alone Alva gave a signal. The great doors of the room opened and a company of Spanish soldiers entered. The captain stepped up to Egmont.

"I demand your sword in the name of the king!"

Silently Egmont handed it, and looked at Alva.

"This is poor reward for what this

(To be continued.)

sword has done in the service of the king," he said bitterly.

Alva made no reply. The curtain was going down on the first act in the tragedy of the Netherlands!

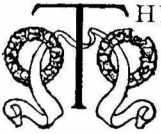
Egmont was placed in an upper room of Culemborg House, which was strongly guarded. As he entered the room he noticed it was draped in black.

Horn, who did not at first notice that his friend had remained behind, waited for him in the courtyard below. According to instructions, he was surrounded by the Spanish guard and his sword demanded. Wholly taken by surprise, he gave it up without a word, and was taken to a room similar to Egmont's in another part of the castle.

A TRIANGLE OF TERROR.

BY GRACE TABOR.

A SHORT STORY.



HE rose glow was fading overhead and the laboratory grew dim in spite of its enormous skylights. It seemed to

Dr. Mortimor, as he glanced round, that a gray mist was settling down over all the familiar objects, and he shivered a little, although he knew and recognized it as a common phenomenon accompanying the gathering dusk in a room that is lighted only from above.

There was nothing more to be done. He had finished at sunset. Not until the sun had risen and set, and risen and set again, and was once more flushing the eastern heavens for a third dawn would there be aught here for him to do. Yet he lingered, loath to go away, loath to go out among the people whom he knew, to talk, to eat and drink—to follow all the usual routine of living.

"My everlasting, iron-clad New England conscience again, I suppose Vigas would say," he soliloquized with a nervous laugh and a look toward the far end

of the room where the big laboratory-table was outlined, a bulky, vague shadow. "He's right, too. A man cannot be brilliant if he's constantly hampered by misgivings, that's certain."

And then he quoted to himself the words of his friend, spoken in good-natured impatience that very morning, in answer to Mortimor's "suppose you were wrong."

"Suppose," said Vigas, "that we had always stood back and just supposed! What would we have accomplished? There is no place for that in our creed. Leonard Mortimor, and you know it quite as well as I do. We believe, *we know*, you and I—we don't 'suppose.' 'I have the power,' not 'maybe I haven't it.' I have it. I know I have it—and that's all there is about it."

Dr. Mortimor took one more look round and went determinedly to the door. "Of course," he affirmed as he opened it, "that's all there is about it." He closed the door carefully behind him and went out into the summer night.

But when he had crossed the long bridge and reached his club in the city, he found himself still in no mood for the company of others. Nor was he ready for food. So, instead of dining there as was his custom, he turned abruptly, almost as soon as he was inside the entrance, and went out.

"I'll go east till I come to a 7 and a 3," he said, following his boyhood custom of mapping out a tramp, "then south till I strike three 9's, and then west as far as two 1's—and then I'll get a bite where I find myself or take the nearest road back and get it here."

So he set off at a swinging pace, and while his way lay through the busy city, his mind dwelt resolutely upon problems that were close at hand. Later, out where it was still and there were trees and the scent of flowers and dew sparkling upon the grass under a splendid moon, his resolve gave way and he let himself look deep into the dark dream-eyes that were always there, waiting for his gaze; thrilling as he looked, just as he always thrilled when the eyes themselves were really before him.

Her slim form seemed to glide beside him with the curious silent movement which years of self-effacement had taught her, and he clenched his strong jaws on the pity and sorrow that swept over him—pity for her and sorrow at his own powerlessness to help her.

He covered a number of miles, making the first turn at a corner saloon where the first combination of figures faced him above its door; the second, when he came suddenly upon a disabled automobile, whose license tag was 1999. At the third a sudden reaction came and dreams of the unattainable gave way to thoughts of the present and actual.

A strong impulse to return to the laboratory took hold of him, but he shook it off impatiently, thinking again of Vidas and how he would scoff at it. He had started for the club, and to the club he would go.

It was late, and the grill-room was deserted when he settled himself and ordered the substantial meal which his fast and the fatigue of his walk demanded. but a number of men soon came down from the card-room.

"Hallo! here's Mortimor!" cried one;

"the phone has been hot for you all the evening, old man. We've been urged to produce you twenty times at least."

"Indeed," he answered, "I'm glad you told me. Erastinius has overlooked it. I'll speak to him."

Erastinius, anxious and apologetic though he was, could tell him very little beyond the fact that it was strange—the whites of his eyes showed impressively—"mighty strange, 'n deed, sah." The inquirer had left no name nor message, but had kept repeating, "Dr. Mortimor, Leonard Mortimor, Dr. Leonard Mortimor, Dr. Mortimor," until the operator was ready to go out of his mind. The calls had ceased about half an hour ago, but up to that time they had been incessant since the end of the dinner hour—about nine o'clock.

Dr. Mortimor finished his supper and started for home, when again the impulse to go to his laboratory came over him.

This time he decided to indulge it at least to the extent of a walk past the building. After all, it was not really out of his way, he reflected as he boarded a slow moving car.

At the corner of the quiet, elm-shadowed street where he alighted, he found an unusual number of people, and as he walked somewhat hurriedly a pair of the splendid fire department bays trotted leisurely toward him, the bell of the engine sounding the homeward call.

He caught a word here and there in the crowd. "Eminent scholar"—"discovered in time"—"learning makes them all mad."

Finally, in a feminine treble: "The Dr. Mortimor, of course. He's a doctor and surgeon, and occupies the chair—what? Oh, yes, psychologist and metaphysician and all those weird things, too. Gives me the creeps—"

He broke into a run at this that brought him quickly to the building. It was the laboratory, then, that had been on fire!

They had broken into it, they— A hand on his shoulder stayed him just as he was about to pass through the open door.

"Pardon—one moment," said the man. "I am not mistaken, am I? This is Dr. Mortimor?"

"Yes, yes," he answered impatiently,

"but I cannot see you now. Don't detain me—later, later—"

The grasp was unrelaxed. "You are my prisoner, Dr. Mortimor," said the voice—"you cannot go in there."

"But I must go in there! What nonsense!"

He started forward, but was forcibly held back.

"I'm very sorry," said the officer. "but you cannot. You are under arrest, sir."

"Arrest! What do you mean?"

"Just that, sir. You are under arrest for the murder of Mr. Felix Vidas—and attempted arson to conceal the crime."

II.

DR. MORTIMOR stood absolutely still and silent, his eyes wide open and staring for such an interval that the officer, in recounting the dramatic moment later to representatives of the press, ventured the opinion that he "seen things right then and there." Suddenly he blurted out: "I see. Where are you going to take me? Please be quick about it."

They went down the steps and were on their way down the nearly deserted street to headquarters so swiftly that Officer Hagen was fairly bewildered.

"Can you tell me something about this?" asked his prisoner shortly, after they had gone some distance.

"Well, sir," answered Hagen. "there's very little to it—an' I ain't supposed to tell that. A passer-by seen smoke comin' from the skylight in the front, an' he turned in the alarm. 'Twas only a bit of a blaze." He glanced sharply at his prisoner as they passed under the glare of a street light. "They say it was some chemicals as sets one another afire had got together, but was found before any wood got to burning."

"Then there was no damage?" asked Mortimor.

"No, sir, none to speak of. Of course, they bu'sted in the door and smashed some of yer dishes—but not much, considerin'."

"And Vidas?"

Surprise showed on Hagen's good-natured face. "Officers ain't expected to talk to prisoners, sir," he said.

"But I *must know!* What did they do with him? They couldn't leave him there. Where did they take him?"

"By St. Patrick, 'tis a confession!" murmured Hagen, looking at him again as another arc shed its light upon the doctor's face.

"Tell me," demanded Dr. Mortimor—"you can tell me that. It can't matter, and I must know. What did they do with him?"

"I'm supposed to warn you, Dr. Mortimor, that anything ye say now to me is used ag'inst ye at the trial," said the officer stiffly. "Here we are, sir," and they turned into the station.

The fire's revelation and the detention of so distinguished a man—for, in spite of his clean-cut, athletic youth, Dr. Leonard Mortimor's name was famous in the scientific world—on such a charge was, of course, the sensation of the morning's news.

With his breakfast a thoughtful sergeant served also—not perhaps as innocently as might seem, in that he kept the prisoner under surveillance while he read the account—the newspaper which could always be relied upon for a lurid rendering of such a feature.

Dr. Mortimor read much that was startling about himself, a little that was true, and one thing that gave him an idea.

It was toward the end of an exhaustive personal analysis and biography of himself that he came upon it. The writer said:

This eminent and extraordinary man meets the situation in which he now finds himself in what may be only a characteristic manner, though it seems to indicate a marked degree of mental unbalance. It is well known to students of criminology that the scene of the crime lures the guilty one back sooner or later, so there is nothing to remark upon in his midnight visit to his laboratory. That was to be expected. But the fact that he expressed no surprise nor indignation when placed under arrest is significant. Taken in connection with his manner and appearance since the arrest, it is highly important and of the keenest interest to the criminologist if not to the alienist.

During the hours that have elapsed since the key was turned upon him he has remained apparently wrapped in thought, either oblivious to his surroundings or else indifferent to them. And, more remarkable still, he has made no requests and sent no messages. Almost the first act of what might be termed the normal criminal is to

get a message to at least one friend or an attorney. Dr. Mortimor had made no attempt to communicate with any one. He treats the situation as if it were not in the least unusual, and sits on the side of his bunk as absorbed as though he were engaged upon some highly interesting problem or experiment in the midst of his crucibles and retorts, his test-tubes and batteries, and all the paraphernalia of his wonderfully appointed laboratory—which, by the way, is one of the finest private institutions of the sort in the world—the scene last night of this remarkable crime.

“Curious that hadn’t occurred to me,” he mused. “Devon could have done something even by now perhaps. I’ll send for him immediately.”

He sent for Devon, and also for other newspapers, which he read while waiting for an answer to his note. There were the same biographies, with slight variations, of himself and of his friend and co-worker—the victim, Felix Vigas—in all of them.

One or two dwelt at some length upon Vigas’s recent return from the unknown, unexplored, ancient fastnesses of India, whither he had penetrated under inconceivable difficulties and perils, and where he had sojourned for three years, ardently pursuing his investigations and studies in occultism. The results of his labors were to be incorporated in an exhaustive work, upon which he was engaged at the time of his death, etc., etc. The motive for the crime remained as yet hidden, unguessed at even. The two were lifelong friends. The coroner viewed the body immediately after its discovery by the firemen, and gave permission for its removal to the Vigas residence. [Dr. Mortimor caught his breath as he read this.] The inquest will be held on Friday morning at ten.

The circumstances of the crime seem very simple, though there are one or two unusual features. The fact that the body was clad only in white-duck trousers and canvas shoes, being stripped above the waist, is explained by the statement of the victim’s wife that her husband and Dr. Mortimor were in the habit of dressing thus when in the laboratory.

The cause of death was an elongated stab wound, carefully delivered between the fifth and sixth ribs in such a manner that the heart was cut transversely, almost fully across. There were no signs of a

struggle, and, more remarkable still, no blood. The blankets in which the body was wrapped as it lay on the big table, the room, the wash-basins, the surgical instruments—with one of which the crime was doubtless committed—the towels thrown carelessly into a hamper, all were found to be quite free from stains. Even the wound itself shows none.

Evidently the murderer chose a time when his victim was sleeping, or if not sleeping, lying flat upon his back and totally unsuspecting; and everything was restored to perfect order after the fatal blow was struck.

What disposition was to be made of the body can, of course, only be surmised. If the mental condition of the accused is as clouded as the general circumstances seem to indicate, and as his friends and admirers are compelled in desperation to hope, then it is useless to expect or to look for logical action or forethought in connection with the crime.

The victim’s wife is prostrated by the terrible tragedy, though she bore the news so calmly that at first it seemed to those who told her she did not comprehend. The main facts were supplied in response to her request, whereupon she thanked her informants—and fell senseless as they turned to leave the room.

“Ruth, Ruth!” Dr. Mortimor stretched out his arms as he murmured her name, in the first rush of feeling that had come to him. “My poor Ruth!”

III.

MR. HENRY DEVON’S voice roused him from the reverie into which the thought of her had plunged him. He sprang to his feet eagerly.

“Thank you for coming at once, judge,” he said. “I ought to have thought of sending for you before. There’s not a moment to be lost.”

“This will be soon enough, I think,” said ex-Judge Devon, “providing you have been wise enough to keep your own counsel, and not discuss the case with any one.”

“Oh, no. I haven’t been in the mood for talking—been too busy thinking. There’s something I want done now—right away! And then you must get me out of here. Do you know, this is more serious than it seems?”

The jurist looked at him curiously, but Dr. Mortimor hurried on.

"That's why I asked you to make haste. I must be out of here within the next thirty-six hours—forty, at the outside—*no matter what it costs!*"

"Thirty-six hours! *Thirty-six hours!* Why, man, you're—" Judge Devon stopped short, and looked keenly at his client with lips compressed. "You are surely aware that such a thing is impossible," he said, speaking more quietly. "Why make such a suggestion?"

Dr. Mortimor frowned. "It is not made as a suggestion," he replied. "It must be done. That's all."

"You are unacquainted with the law, of course, Dr. Mortimor," said Judge Devon, "and I must allow for that, I suppose. Yet, even thus allowing, it seems remarkable that you should seriously contemplate immediate release, under the circumstances. There is no court in the world would admit a prisoner to bail pending the inquest, with such direct evidence—or evidence of such a seemingly direct nature—before it."

"And do I understand that you will make no effort to carry out my request?"

"My dear Mortimor, it would be folly. I'd be a laughing-stock—or else disbarred as a lunatic. Now calm down, put that idea out of your head, answer the questions I am going to ask you and—"

Dr. Mortimor turned away.

"There is no use in our discussing the case further," he said, "if you will not undertake to accomplish my release within the time stated. Never mind—let it go."

Judge Devon nodded slowly to himself. "Stark, staring," he muttered. Aloud he answered heartily and sincerely: "I'm sorry, Mortimor. Perhaps you'll change your mind. I'll come in this afternoon, anyway—just in a friendly way, you know. And was there something else—something you wanted done at once?"

"Yes," said the prisoner, "something I want done immediately—a very important thing. I was going to ask you to do it first, anyway. Devon, go and see Mrs. Vigas for me, will you?"

The round, cheery face of Judge

Devon was petrified into a grimace of surprise, but Mortimor took no notice.

"Go as a friend, I mean," he went on, "not as a legal machine. This is terrible for her. She needs a word to cheer her up and reassure her. Go and speak it to her, and take a note from me—will you? And bring me word how she is? And of all the—the—arrangements?"

"Reassure her? To be sure—yes, yes," gasped the judge. "I should be delighted—*de-lighted!*"

Dr. Mortimor wrote a few lines hastily. "Tell her, from me," he said as he folded the paper into the envelope, "that everything is all right. Tell her that I ask her not to worry, nor feel distressed at the situation. Will you say just that to her? And go at once? She'll see you—send word that you come from me. And come back quickly—quickly!"

Much to his surprise, and not a little to his disgust and indignation, ex-Judge Devon found himself proceeding upon this distasteful errand.

"Big business," he reflected—"messenger from the slayer of the lady's husband to the lady! Big business, judge, *big business!*"

IV.

THE second day strengthened the general impression that Dr. Mortimor was hopelessly insane. He slept almost constantly, refused to talk, and took a prodigious amount of milk, though not much solid food.

It lacked, perhaps, a quarter of an hour to midnight when the doorman—the same one who had locked him in two nights before—came to his cell, impelled by curiosity, no doubt, and looked in.

Dr. Mortimor was not sleeping—no, not sleeping? His eyes, are they open? Yes, they are open; gray eyes they are, quite dark gray—and the *pupils, are they not large—and deep—and black!* Dr. Mortimor is all right—all right. *This door shouldn't be locked—no. It should be unlocked—UNLOCKED—UNLOCKED!* Of course—unlock it. *Now it's unlocked—as it should be—unlocked. And there'll be no need of coming to this door again to-night. It's all right—and there are many other things needing attention. This is all right!* He turned

away, the blank look of the sleep-walker in his eyes.

The sergeant was sprawled forward on the desk, his head pillowed upon his arms, snoring gently, when Dr. Mortimor passed through and out into the street.

He moved quickly, but not hurriedly, turning at the corner without hesitation, according to a definite plan, apparently. It was a walk of ten minutes, and then he went in at the gate of an old-fashioned white house, standing well back in its grounds.

The door opened almost as soon as his foot touched the step, and he was quickly inside, closing it himself, and standing before it in the darkness.

"Put the light on, please," he said in a low tone, "and don't be frightened."

A switch snapped, and in the dim radiance of the eastern lamp hanging above her head, slender, dark-eyed Ruth Vigas saw him. She started violently, but held herself in hand.

"You!" she gasped. "Yourself—not a messenger, not another?"

"Yes. Forgive me for not telling you it would be I. I dared not in the note. Do not stop to ask anything of me, I implore you. But do, in every way, just as I bid you—will you?" He was intensely earnest. "It is a matter of life and death, as I wrote. It will take all your wonderful nerve and patience, Ruth, before it is done—but I promise no harm shall come to you."

Neither of them noticed that he had called her by the intimate personal name, though it was the first time it had ever slipped from his lips in speech with her. She stood still and silent, wondering, until he went on.

"Don't be afraid—that's all. You've never been afraid of me, Ruth?" She shook her head. "No—and you need never be. And don't be afraid for any one else. No harm will come to—anybody. Keep that in mind, please. And now—" His tone and manner changed. He spoke briskly: "Where is Felix?"

She showed no surprise, though her heart leaped to suffocation. It was true, he was really mad, then, as they said. Well, that was better than what she had feared, better than that he should have struck desperately, because—

"Felix is in there," she said, indicating the closed door of the drawing-room at her left.

Dr. Mortimor nodded. "Let me have the key to the garage," he requested, "and get eggs and two or three quarts of milk and bread, and pack them in the lunch hamper. I will take his revolver."

He opened the drawer of the antique table, and slipped the pistol into his pocket as he spoke. Then he went silently through the house, and out to the motor-car in the garage at the rear.

"He means to escape," flashed through her mind—and she flew to the task of filling the hamper, working with nervous, exultant haste, and adding this and that which he had not mentioned.

He came presently and took it from her, and went silently out. Then, while she stood, relaxed and trembling, listening, dreading yet anxious to hear the chug of the motor which would announce his departure, he came back.

"All right," he announced quietly; "everything is ready out there. Now—let us go to him."

She hesitated for an instant, looking at him doubtfully, fearful of the delay. Then she turned quickly and led the way, opening the door, and standing aside for him to enter first.

He advanced directly to the bier whereon all that was mortal of Felix Vigas, as yet uncoffined, rested, and stood for some time studying the passive face. Then he laid his hand upon his friend's cheek, and next upon his wrist. She watched in silence.

"I cannot do without your help," he said suddenly, turning to her—"would that I could. But I must have it, Ruth—after I have told you what I am about to do." He came toward her a little, then stopped and spoke slowly: "I am going to the laboratory, and take him—and you—with me." He watched her closely for the effect of his words, his gaze both apprehensive and commiserating.

A quick, gasping breath escaped her, and instinctively she groped for the support of a neighboring chair. Otherwise, she met this proposal of a disordered brain quietly.

He marveled, as he had often done, at her self-control. "I know," he went

on after a moment, "that I seem a madman—maybe I *am* mad, maybe he was—but I do not believe so. However, I could not convince you, nor any one, by arguing that I am not—which is the reason I have taken this revolver. I hope to reach the laboratory without meeting any one. If we are not so fortunate, however, I am prepared for the emergency—for *to the laboratory we must go at any cost or risk!* You will understand in due season if—" He broke off abruptly. Then: "Will you get your wraps and help me with him, please?" he said, turning back to the silent form. "We'll fold this blanket round him, and if you will keep his feet from the floor, I shall be able to carry him without great difficulty, I think."

She looked at him without stirring, resolving the situation in her mind quickly.

What should she do? That he was mad, hopelessly mad, she was almost sure. Yet, of personal fear she felt none. It was only pity that surged over her while she wondered what fanciful delusion dominated his reason now. What was his idea? And how could she distract him from it? How should she deal with it?

Almost as if he read her thoughts, he answered her. "I am going to carry this thing through, Ruth," he said, looking steadily at her, "and there is no time to lose. If you give an alarm, I warn you fairly that I shall shoot—not you, no, no, *no!* Never that—but whoever responds to it. And I'll never be taken alive."

Without a word she went and brought wraps from the hall, and stood tying her veil with trembling fingers, while he folded an Indian blanket round the body. Then, together, they picked it up and went carefully and slowly out of the room to the motor-car.

V.

FORTUNATELY, or unfortunately, the laboratory building stood in the midst of a spacious plot, and, therefore, at considerable distance from all other buildings. The grounds were well planted with both trees and shrubs, and a driveway, which, though seldom used, led to a side rear entrance, and simplified the problem of getting inside unnoticed with such a burden as they carried.

Without incident they covered the comparatively short distance from the Vigas home, and without incident the two bore the body into the building and into the room whence it had been carried some twenty hours before, and laid it upon the table where it had been found.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Mortimor, "thank Heaven!"

"Why do you say that?"

It was almost her first utterance since the one surprise at seeing him when she had turned on the light at his entrance. Her voice sounded strange and hollow in the stillness of the lofty room.

Dr. Mortimor turned from the table and looked at her. She was ghastly pale, and her eyes were burning with the light of her indomitable will, which alone was sustaining her. He came directly to her and took her trembling hands in his.

"I thank Heaven that we are here," he said, "and that the night is speeding. Bear with me, with all this horror, just a little longer, Ruth. It sickens me when I think what I am submitting you to—but there is no other way. Pray that it may not be in vain—pray, pray, *pray!*"

She looked at him for a moment bewildered, confused, frightened; then suddenly burst into uncontrollable weeping.

He stifled a groan. "Ruth," he said, "my poor Ruth," and caught her by the shoulders, shaking her gently. "Don't do this—not now," he pleaded. "It's frightful, I know—but try to be strong and calm just a little longer, won't you? For your own sake, for his—and for mine! Ruth," he raised his voice and spoke sternly, "be quiet."

She did not heed him.

After a moment he put a hand confusedly to his brow and eyes, then "Stop!" he cried, with a note of such agony in his tone that it penetrated and warned her of something, she knew not what.

She looked at him, startled out of her weeping.

"Listen," he burst forth, "there's desperate need for all my strength to-night. That must be the first consideration, both yours and mine. I ask you to be steady that I may be steady. Be brave and still as you've learned so well to be. I shall fail if you do not, and *I must not fail!*"

And so—you must not fail! I cannot tell you more now—all that it means and all that—but you shall know soon. Meantime," he led her to a door and, opening it, pushed her gently through, "there is also work for you to do here. Lay aside your wraps and I will show you," and he left her.

Bewildered, but, curiously enough, no longer sick with repugnance and apprehension at the whole abnormal affair, she obeyed him. When he returned with the hamper she was waiting, quite composed.

"Here are electric heaters, you see," he said, as he lifted the basket to a marble shelf running along one side of the room. "several of them. I want saline solution—you might make four quarts of it—and here is everything," he threw open the doors of a cupboard, "that you will need. The proportions and the temperature are all on that list. When you have this ready, warm two quarts of the milk to blood heat—and then keep them both at the right temperature until I ask for them. I'll tell you when I'm ready."

He looked at his watch. "It is after two," his tone was lower and gravely reflective. "ten minutes. Twilight will come soon—and the sunrise is not so far behind, on a summer morning. So, you to your task—and I, to mine."

He paused an instant outside the door after closing it, and drew his breath slowly and deeply a number of times. Then he went quickly to a locker and clad himself in his customary white laboratory garments.

A hasty inspection showed him that the fire and the firemen had done no serious hurt, though the usually spotless and orderly room was sadly disarranged, with broken glass on floor and shelves, and sloppy footprints everywhere. The electric machines were unharmed, however, and the cases and cabinets were intact, though their contents had been handled in the search made by the police. He found the various articles which he needed without trouble and collected them all upon a little wheeled table with porcelain top, where they gleamed under the lights.

He was busy with preparations for perhaps an hour—and then, for half that time, possibly, he worked eagerly, with

deft, quick fingers, over the still figure upon the table. As he dropped the last instrument the twilight had gained enough overhead to reflect its pallor dimly down into the room. He moved still more swiftly when he saw it.

Physically, he was worn and exhausted, but he succeeded, nevertheless, in transferring the body from where it lay to the glass platform, raised some eighteen inches above the floor, beneath and between the electrical machinery. After this he rested a while. Then he went to the door beyond which Ruth Vigas had spent the weary passing of the night.

She was standing at the window looking out at the faintly flushing sky, but turned quickly as he came in.

"You want something?" she asked.

"Not just yet," he answered, "only to know that you are all right. There is wine in the locker, there—take a glass, please. Then watch again in the east, and when the sun has reached this point with his rays," he indicated on the wall, "open the door and tell me."

She saw his weariness and look of exhaustion, and hurriedly poured two glasses of the wine. He shook his head as she offered it, smiling faintly.

"No wine," he said, "but I will take a glass of the milk if you will let me have it."

She gave him this and watched while he drank it, sip by sip. Her heart thumped violently against her side, and twice she drew her breath to speak, but her courage failed. At length, she conquered the timidity which held her back.

"I do not know," she said, "what it all means—but I know that you are suffering, too. I thought at first, with the others, that you had killed him—that's why I fainted when they told me, I fancy—but now—oh, I don't know what I do want to say! But, only, I'm so sorry I ever had such a thought about you! It's the only one I've ever had of you that was not wholly good. You, who have been my true, good friend as well as his; you who have—understood."

Her voice sank until the last word was almost a whisper; and following it there was a long pause.

At last he answered. "Yes," he said, "I have understood. You know what the feeling in my heart for you is,

that has made me understand, do you not?" She flushed slightly. "I am glad that you do. I could never tell you, of course. Sometimes I have feared that you knew, sometimes I have dreaded lest you should, but now that I know you do, I am glad! For your knowing will never make any difference, of course—so you do not mind?" He looked anxiously and questioningly into her face.

She shook her head. "No," she said with grave directness; "indeed, I am grateful for the knowledge."

The brave, sad smile that always wrung his heart broke over her face. She extended her hand for the empty glass, and with that simple, matter-of-fact movement let fall again before her soul the veil that had been momentarily lifted.

He turned away. "Are you very tired?" he asked.

"Not very. I am strong and well, you know, so do not be troubled on that score."

"Do not reproach yourself for anything you may have thought," he said, as he moved toward the door. "Do not condemn, or judge. Just wait—and watch the sunrise."

She was left alone again to her vigil.

She watched the sky until the sun appeared. Then she watched the point on the wall where its ray was to strike. Lower and lower it came as the crimson globe rose higher until at last it reached the spot he had indicated.

She moved to the door and softly opened it. The whirl of a static machine fell on her ears.

"It is the time you said," she called.

There was no sound for a moment, then a movement and Dr. Mortimor appeared in the doorway. His face was transfigured by the triumph shining there.

"It is done!" he cried exultantly; "it is true! *He lives*—and has already spoken! Come—come in and see!"

She did not swoon, though time and place and space were annihilated to her. She felt him catch her hand, and knew that she was being drawn toward the whirring sound and within the radiance of a great light, a light more brilliant than the sun, which warmed and thrilled her.

Directly beneath it, on the glass platform, she saw her husband. His eyes

were closed, but his breath came and went easily, though a little hurriedly. He was clad again just as he had been when the fire led to his discovery, and she could see the blood pulsing through the great vein at the side of his bare throat. The wound above his heart was covered by adhesive strips, and the throb of this wonderful engine was so vigorous that the walls of the thorax vibrated at every stroke.

Spellbound, she gazed until he opened his eyes and saw her.

She fell on her knees beside him. "Felix," she murmured; "Felix, Felix!"

"Hush!" he said quite naturally, frowning a little. "It's all right. Of course you don't know, but—Mortimor, tell her to be quiet. And, Mortimor, I'm hungry."

"The milk," said Dr. Mortimor to her.

Roused to action, she went quickly and brought a glass and held it for him.

"I'm still famished," he said, smiling quizzically as he finished it.

At a signal from Mortimor she brought another.

"Ah!" he said, sighing comfortably, "that is good. And now that I am fed, come here both of you, and sit beside me. I must talk. I have much to say."

"But it can wait," said Dr. Mortimor. "You are not going to talk now?"

Vigas nodded. "Why not?" he demanded, with all his usual spirit. "I'm perfectly fit and ready for anything, if it weren't for staying under this light a while and hastening the tissue repair in the heart. And I've had a long nap, you know, so I'm not sleepy," and he laughed.

"But—"

"Now, now, Mortimor! Up to your old tricks, eh? No, sir; I must talk now. I've much on my mind, and it will be better for me." His tone was mocking. Then seriously: "Come, sit by me, both of you. The light will rest your weariness, worn as you are."

Dr. Mortimor silently pulled a chair within the circle of its rays, motioning Mrs. Vigas into it. "The strain has been heavy, Vigas," he remonstrated, "and the circumstances very critical. It would be well not to try your wife too far—to say nothing of yourself. I'll tell you fully about it later."

Vigas laughed again. "There is no need," he said, "I know. But this is good to hear, this that I have to say."

"And I am all right," she urged; "calm and ready to listen, please?"

Mortimor said no more, but seated himself on a stool close at hand. Vigas looked long and keenly at them both, the smile fading and returning while he did so.

VI.

"My friends," he said at last slowly, "I have learned some things that I cannot tell you, and some which I can." He paused reflectively. "Some that I can. This experiment of ours in astral projection has been successful in a far greater measure than either of us dreamed or could have anticipated, Leonard. All your doubts are proved groundless."

"My misgivings," corrected Dr. Mortimor. "I hardly think I entertained any actual doubts, old man."

"Well, perhaps you didn't. But the misgivings were strong enough to stand in our way a good while, which made them as bad as doubts," insisted Vigas. "However, the fact that reinhabitation was established without the slightest difficulty to me, in spite of so-called 'mortal lesions,' is almost the least of the wonders of it. And now I can and shall go on—and on—and on. There seems to be no limit. I have found the way, and I dare not turn back if I would. And I would not if I dared." He paused, and drew a deep breath.

"What do you mean?" asked Mortimor in a low voice.

Vigas resumed, as if the question had not been asked. "We have long been agreed, you and I, Leonard, that the ultimate destiny of man is to know all truth; which means that he will some time *know* those laws which are as yet only suspected—know them, and perfectly live by them. The supernatural will be the natural to the perfected race, just as the little glimpses which we have of it are already natural to you and me and some others of us. How many cons away that may be I have no idea. It doesn't matter. I know that in the fulness of time it will be so."

Dr. Mortimor nodded slowly.

Ruth Vigas watched her husband,

wide-eyed, fascinated—and shivered involuntarily. There was a long silence.

"Now, this great realm of truth," Vigas resumed finally, "is an unexplored, uncharted region. Although there are some paths which skirt it, and others which now and then go in a little way, none go far. And there are risks for all who venture to explore, perils unknown, and therefore more to be dreaded than the worst that we know."

"Yes, yes," broke in Mortimor; "hazards more dreadful than have ever threatened mortal. 'Tis that way madness lies—and worse."

"That's only for some," said Vigas; "and, at any rate, it must be explored, it must be charted, trails must be blazed whereon those who come after may journey safely and without hindrance. And there are those who must do this work, those who are urged and goaded to it by that within which never rests nor allows them to."

He stopped suddenly, absorbed in some transcendent thought, then, half to himself, went on exultantly: "I am one of those. Long since I was called, and now I have been chosen. Whither it shall lead me I know nor care not. But I know that I must go, and that I must go alone. Even if this were not so I would choose to go alone."

He turned to Mortimor, hesitating an instant. "*Alone*," he repeated. "You will understand that it is of her I am thinking." He made a movement of his hand toward his wife.

"Yes," said Mortimor, and shut his teeth upon his lips, breathing hard.

"I have remembered her as little as I was able," Vigas went on; "and she has studied to avoid reminding me. Nevertheless, the fact of her existence as my wife, and that she bears my name, even though she in no way shares my life, is not good. I must be free—completely free, you understand, and that is what I want to have settled here and now."

Mortimor flushed slowly, and the veins in his temples raised like cords beneath the skin. He turned pitying eyes upon the silent, slender woman.

She was sitting very still, and she had listened, with no evidence of surprise or emotion, to all that her husband said, watching him quietly until the last sen-

tence fell from his lips. Then she turned to Dr. Mortimor.

"Surely," she said, "it is well to have it settled at once, if he wishes it so much."

Mortimor was dumb.

"Yes," said Vigas; "indeed, it must be so. And you can help," with a keen look toward Mortimor.

"I?"

"Yes, you, Leonard." He studied him in silence for a moment. "You love her as women like to be loved. As I never have loved her. I want you to take her. Will you?"

With an inarticulate cry, Ruth Vigas buried her face in her hands.

Mortimor stirred slightly.

"You are calling this brutal," Vigas went on; "but that's because you do not understand. I do, and I know that it is not brutal. You are a man and a woman who love each other—"

"Vigas!" cried Mortimor, starting up. "By Heaven—"

"There, there," he stopped him coolly, "don't do that. It's the truth. You do love each other. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You belong to each other. I am an abstract being, who has passed out of the realm of human relationship—or, rather, who never dwelt within it. She never belonged to me—she could not; nor I to her. There is no claim upon her in the world but yours."

"You may have passed beyond the realm of human relationship"—Mortimor's voice was strained and tense—"but I insist that you show respect to her and to human institutions while she is here with us."

"With all my heart," assented Vigas fervently; and then, with the little smile flickering around his mouth again: "But your fancy that it is necessary to insist on this shows more and more how little you understand me—and the situation."

Mortimor made an impatient movement. "I understand something of what she must suffer," he said shortly. "It is for her that I am concerned."

"And so am I," responded Vigas—"for her, for you, and for myself. That is why I urge the truth upon you both. Surely you will agree that there is no claim upon her if I make none, will you not?"

There was no response.

"Well and good. Now, I affirm that there is not a portion of abstract matter in the world that is farther from human relationship, of an individual and personal nature, than I am. I live to serve the race, to press on. Because I do this, and must therefore be free—free actually as well as in spirit—I suggest this rational and perfectly suitable way out of the one and only difficulty which hampers and worries me."

"You can be as free as you wish for your work—easily, easily. But spare her the—the—rest," urged Mortimor.

Vigas turned away almost irritably. "I should say 'rubbish' if you weren't so serious in your misconceptions," he said at length. He paused, for his wife lifted her head and studied him with her wide, dark eyes.

"Are you less—or more—than human?" she breathed at last.

He answered the spoken thought seriously. "Neither less nor more—simply a different type, one created for a different purpose than most of his fellows."

"Why," she cried, with a sudden choking, passionate vehemence—"why did you ever make me your wife? Why did you fetter me hand and foot—for this?"

"You are not fettered hand and foot except by chains of your own forging," he answered.

"My own forging?"

"Precisely. My claims are nil, and I have fully declared them to be so. What, then, are your fetters?"

She did not answer, but covered her face with her hands.

For a long time the rhythmic whirring of the machine was the only sound in the room. It was Vigas who finally broke the silence, and, though he spoke gravely, there was a certain carelessness in his tone that told more plainly than words of his absolute impersonality.

"It is a happy coincident," he said, "that the adjustment of outward circumstances which is best and most favorable to the ultimate good of the greatest number, because it is best and most favorable to me, means joy and happiness to all of us, instead of sorrow and renunciation, as so often happens, to one or two.

I am glad that it is so, glad and grateful. but I should do exactly the same if it were not. Come, Leonard, do you agree? Will you take her?"

Dr. Mortimor sat very still, the strong angle of his rigid jaws sharply defined under the light, his gaze steadfastly fixed upon the floor save for the two or three times that he glanced at Ruth.

She did not lift her head, nor could he see that she moved, yet she seemed to have shrunk farther into the depths of the big chair. And suddenly the love in his heart revealed to him all the awful shame and anguish her womanhood was suffering.

"Vigas," he cried, springing to his feet, "this is monstrous! Are you a man, to torture a woman so? The days of chattels are over. Ruth"—his voice softened into a caress at the name—"won't you go home? I will take you. I can leave him now without risk."

She moved uncertainly and lowered her hands, but did not raise her eyes.

Mortimor bent over her. "Ruth," he said, "dear, dear Ruth! My love has never availed to serve you in any way, and it cannot shield you now. But—must it always be so?"

Slowly she rose and lifted her head until their eyes met. Then, though the color flamed up to her temples, she searched the translucent depths before her long and earnestly, for minutes that seemed ages to the man. At last, shyly, she put out her hand and laid it in his, which was waiting, warm and strong, to clasp it. She turned to her husband.

"It has been a bitter mistake, Felix," she said—"more your mistake than mine, but more bitter for me than for you. As soon as I saw how it was, I studied to avoid reminding you of my existence. I shall not fail now, you may be certain, to do all that I may toward rectifying the error—without your bribe of happi-

ness. Happiness is an incident of life, not the object. If it comes to me some time, I shall give it welcome and be glad. If it does not, so be it."

She turned back again to Dr. Mortimor, with her brave smile trembling about her lips. "Am I not right?" she asked.

For answer he caught her other hand and held both between his own silently until she made a movement to free them.

"Look," she said, pointing above, "the sun is well on his way. There is much to do and explain. But first we must have food. That is here, and shall be ready soon. Then we must have friends to help us—and the telephone will bring them. These are the things of now—of to-day. Let us leave the things of to-morrow"—she moved away from them and toward the door of the smaller room—"until then, until to-morrow."

Both men followed her gliding figure with their gaze—one calm, smiling, inscrutable; the other with love in his eyes.

She glanced back at the threshold and met the look of the one, and then of the other. Suddenly a lovely color flooded her pallor and she lowered her eyes quickly, with almost girlish confusion. Mortimor was beside her instantly.

"Look up at me, dear," he commanded. She hesitated. "Please," he urged gently, "I want to tell you something."

Shyly she obeyed at last, trembling at the pride and joy in his voice.

"Do you know that you are *my* Ruth," he said slowly, lingering over the words—"that you have been mine always? My true mate from all time—verily mine at last!"

Motionless they stood looking into each other's eyes as the thought warmed and quickened their souls.

And Vigas, watching them, forgotten, smiled indulgently, a strange look of earth-free exaltation in his shining eyes.

MARCH VIOLETS.

MAIDEN spring danced down the vale;
 March, the piper, blew a gale,
 Shrill and loud, like old god Pan.
 Spring, the maiden, turned in fright,
 Fled from him, but in her plight
 Dropped her violets, as she ran.

Rachel Barton Butler.

WHERE'S MA?

BY BARBARA COOPER-CUSHMAN.

A SHORT STORY



WHEN we finally decided to go to Chicago to live, Nettie said: "Well, we must take the canary and the coffee-urn, and—Ma." Ma just put her

hand up to her face, so—a way she has—and smiled. She said nothing. That usually means considerable anxiety for the family. It certainly did this time.

Pa went first, a week or two ahead, then Ma was to go to finish settling, and Nettie and I—Nettie is twenty-five and I am only nineteen—were to follow two weeks later. The main thing was to get Ma off.

Everything went beautifully as far as we were concerned. Nettie left the office—Nettie works; she's very clever; I just help Ma keep house—well, as I said, Nettie left the office for a whole morning to get Ma a through ticket and check her baggage, and we both saw her aboard the express for Chicago.

Truly, we nearly missed the train even then, because Ma had packed her best bonnet. We hunted high and low for it till nearly train-time. Then Nettie finally concocted some sort of an affair out of a piece of crape that no one had packed because we didn't think it good enough.

"Now, Ma," she said very solemnly, "you must try to look sadly sweet and very imposing—to fit this bonnet, you know." Then, as Ma looked at her in a sort of frightened way: "Just keep it on straight and try to look melancholy, and you'll get through all right."

Now, you see, Ma is so quiet and almost timid that you quite forget, sometimes, that she has even property rights. But Ma likes to tease people, and she certainly does liven up the family when she starts in. I always did have a lot of

respect for Ma, but since that Chicago trip my respect has increased.

Well, I think I told you before, we saw Ma off, crape bonnet and all. Then Nettie sent a telegram to Pa in Chicago, saying:

Ma left on the noon train. Meet her tomorrow.
NETTIE.

Nettie and I were pretty busy that afternoon and evening. Several people came in, and there were a dozen and one things to be done about the house. Of course the storage men were to pack things, furniture and so on, but it is not easy to move even your individuality so far.

So that night Nettie and I slept the sleep of the just. We thought we knew where Ma was.

Next day Nettie went to the office as usual, and I was busy sorting out the papers in my desk, destroying some letters and a picture or two—and that always takes time. I was so occupied that it was late when I started out, and almost six o'clock when I came in from shopping.

Nettie had not gotten home yet, but, just as I turned the corner into our street, I saw a telegraph-boy mount our steps and ring the bell. Maybe I didn't hurry then! I just snatched the telegram from that boy and tore it open. I knew it had something to do with Ma. I barely glanced at it, and then sat down on those stone steps so hard I bounced.

This is what I read:

Noon train in from New York. Where is Ma?

It was signed "Pa."

Nettie came along the street just here, and I rushed to her like a maniac, wa-

ving the paper at her and shouting in a high key:

"Pa wants to know where's Ma."

Nettie stared at me in dumb amazement. Then she took the telegram from me and read it. For a moment she looked as blank as I had felt. We stood gazing at each other silently. Then light came, and with it revelation.

"Pat, she has stopped off at Philadelphia," declared Nettie solemnly.

I forgot to tell you that Ma's father, Grandpa Klein, lives in Philadelphia, and her brother and youngest sister, Nettie sent them word to meet her at the station, just to say good-by for the short while the train would be in the Philadelphia depot.

That is a sort of an Irish sentence, but I am going to leave it. It must have been the Gilpatrick, not the Klein, in me which was speaking. Ma was born in Germany, but Pa came from Ireland when he was very young. Indeed, Nettie and I are Americans.

Well, when we got Ma placed in Philadelphia, mentally, we felt better. However, Nettie telegraphed back to Pa to ease his mind:

Ma left Tuesday. Probably stopped Philadelphia. Where is Ma?

NETTIE.

That last sentence she just put in for sarcasm, but at the end of a week it had come to be so well known at the telegraph-office near our home, that the operator thought that it was some sort of signal or code phrase. She used to try different ways of spelling it to see if it mattered. Once she had it, "Where is Maw?" Another time, "Where's Ma?" Sometimes she put an exclamation point after it; sometimes a question mark. Once she just had, "W's M?" but we knew what it meant.

Our telegram became such a daily affair that it was like the newspaper or the milk. Every night we had a telegram for dinner. In the meantime, where *was* Ma?

!?

OF course, we found out afterward. Indeed, while we were fussing in New York, Ma was taking her ease and a lovely vacation in Philadelphia.

On the arrival of the New York-Chicago train at Philadelphia, no one was visible to meet her. So Ma went to the ticket-office, got her ticket validated, or extended, or whatever it is that postpones the trip from one train to another, and then found that she had forgotten my uncle's new address. Ma thought a few minutes, and then went to the telegraph-office, and there if she didn't trace Nettie's telegram! She found the address.

Just as Ma started up the street, she was met by a colored maid, who, recognizing her from a picture that she—the maid—had dusted many times on the mantel in aunt's sitting-room, stopped and asked her if she was Mrs. Gilpatrick. Naturally Ma said yes. She soon came to the house, and was welcomed with open arms. It seems the telegram had not reached them, through some delay or other, so they did not know about meeting the train.

The family would not hear of Ma's leaving that night, and they coaxed and cajoled her day by day until she had stayed a week.

All this time we had no word from her, and Nettie and I were getting frightfully worried.

Finally, at the end of the week—we had telegraphed to the City of Friends twice—we received a despatch saying:

Stayed over Philadelphia. Am leaving tonight for Chicago. MA.

Nettie and I sighed relievedly. We thought we had Ma located. We sent word to Pa that same morning.

Next afternoon we got our daily. It was changed slightly:

Ma not here. Where is she now?

Nettie groaned. I shrieked with laughter.

"There's Bud in Wilmington, and Aunt Harriet in Washington," I gasped between my spasms of hilarity. It did seem *too* absurd. By the way, Bud is my younger brother.

But Nettie looked unhappy.

"This is too awful," she sighed. "Will she ever get there?"

This time we were at a loss. Ma might be in Wilmington, she might be in Washington, or she might not have left Phila-

delphia. So we decided to await developments. And indeed we did. We waited another week.

In the meantime, Ma had started from my uncle's home with the best intentions in the world. She was going to Chicago.

However, when she got to Wilmington the temptation was too great. So off went Ma to see Bud, my brother. She went for an hour, and stayed two days. Poor Pa!

Well, Ma thought she wouldn't worry us with any more telegrams—that's what she said—so she decided to send no word from Wilmington, but to go straight through to Chicago, which was now her one and only thought—until she got to Washington. But why continue? Exactly two weeks from the time Ma waved a fond farewell to us at the Jersey City terminal she landed in Chicago. The trip usually takes twenty-eight hours, except by the limited, when it takes eighteen.

Pa, by this time, had business which took him to Duluth. He was staying at a hotel not far from the house which we had leased, waiting for Ma to come and

finish settling. When it became a necessity for him to go to Duluth for a day or two, Pa racked his brains considering how he should describe Ma to the hotel people well enough to have them put her in his room and look out for her until he got back.

Finally he thought of her picture, which he always carried in his watch, and he gave it to the clerk.

"This is my wife," Pa said. "Now, if she arrives before I get back, don't let her go away again. Put her in my room, give her the best of everything, but don't let her go away."

This was on Friday. Early Wednesday Pa came back from Duluth and found Ma sound asleep, snug and warm abed.

That evening Nettie received a telegram:

Congratulations are in order. Ma's here.
PA.

A week later, when Nettie and I started to join them, I sent a telegram. It read:

Nettie and I are starting for Chicago. Where's Ma?

ACROSS THE WAY.

O LITTLE maid across the way,
A tangling web you deftly spin—
Lovers who greet you, day by day,
By it are proudly gathered in.

You have the most consummate art
Their hearts to sweetly hypnotize.
Your circling curls their charms impart—
And Love is mirrored in your eyes.

The azure sky has not their blue,
Nor night the blackness of your hair.
They symbol Love forever true,
Yet make the stoutest heart despair.

I know not of your hopes, or name,
Your nation, or your wealth, or race;
I only know but few can claim
The glory of so fair a face.

But something says my plea is late,
Some youth, perhaps, has spoken in time—
And I must stand outside the gate
With this lament, in sorrowing rime.

Joel Benton.

AN AMERICAN KNIGHT ERRANT.*

BY EDWARD BEDINGER MITCHELL.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

RONALD LAMPTON has inherited with his uncle's fortune the guardianship of Doris Revere, a girl of twenty, whom Ronald has never seen, and whom his uncle adopted as a child in the Orient. Seated in a Paris café, Lampton is reading a letter from Doris Revere, announcing her approaching departure from the convent in which she has grown up.

He remarks two rough-looking men spying on a stranger of distinguished air. A pedler of matches approaches the stranger and whispers a few words. The stranger leaves the café. He is followed by the two rough-looking men, whom Lampton in turn follows. In a dark archway the stranger is attacked and wounded, by the men, and Lampton helps him to drive the ruffians off.

From the house before which the fight took place the stranger summons Dr. Cleon Menon, whose name is known to Lampton as that of the most famous surgeon in Paris. The doctor introduces the stranger as Michael Kara, and requests Lampton to harbor him while he is recovering from his wound. Kara and Menon both seem to dread publicity. Lampton accepts Kara as his guest.

Tom Rawlins, a New York friend of Lampton's, calls and takes Lampton to dinner. In the restaurant they defend a woman who has been struck by her escort, whom they expel from the place. They take her home, and learn she is Mme. Julie Lecompte. As they are about to get into the carriage with her, the match-pedler who warned Kara slips a box of matches into Lampton's hand. On the box Lampton sees written: "Danger!" At Mme. Lecompte's, Rawlins chatters of Michael Kara. Lampton notices an odd look in her eyes as Kara's name is mentioned. Smoking a cigarette of Mme. Lecompte's, Lampton loses consciousness. When he recovers, he is being taken home by Rawlins. He discovers that the letter from Doris Revere has been taken from his pocket.

CHAPTER VI.

A DARING CHANCE.



AWOKE in the morning with a clear head and only the loss of Doris's letter to remind me of the night's adventures. Even for the loss of that there

might be a hundred prosaic explanations. Indeed, by the time I had dressed and joined Kara in the sitting-room I had half persuaded myself that my imagination had run away with me.

I was soon undeceived. My guest was sitting a little to one side of the window, looking out with a more serious expression on his dark features than I had seen in several days. He turned as I entered and answered my greeting with a slight smile.

"Did you find the café interesting last night?" he asked.

There was more to the question than a polite inquiry. I glanced at him in surprise.

"A trifle too much so," I replied. "Why do you ask?"

"First tell me what happened," he said. "I am rather curious about it."

"Well, I was drugged and robbed of a letter," I said. "It was done by rather a clever trick."

He listened without comment to my recital, merely nodding his head now and then as he grasped the significance of each detail.

"I thought it was something of the sort," he said when I had finished. "And now, if you will take the trouble to glance casually out of that window, you will see why I asked."

I strolled over to the window and looked out. The Rue Racine bore its usual, commonplace appearance.

In front of a house almost opposite

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for February.

us, a maid was in conversation with a baker's boy. A little farther down the street a man, whom I took to be a small shopkeeper, was coming slowly toward us, swinging a stick and puffing at a cigarette. There was no one else in sight.

In some wonder, I turned away. "There is nothing there," I said. "What do you want me to look at?"

"Isn't a man down there?" said Kara.

"Yes," I replied, "of course there is. What of it?"

"He has walked past this house five times," remarked Kara. "Now, look at this."

He led the way to the window in his bedroom, opening on a small yard at the back of the house. My apartment was on the third floor, and I could see over the high yard walls—topped with broken glass—into a narrow alley beyond, running parallel to the Rue Racine.

In the alley, camped with their backs against the wall, were two rough-looking customers. Now and then one of them ran his eye over the row of back windows. With this exception, they seemed to have no thought but to bask in the spring sunshine.

Their clothes were different, and their faces I could see none too distinctly; but it flashed over me like an inspiration that these were the ruffians with whom I had fought in the archway.

"Why, the house is watched!" I cried.

"Precisely," repeated Kara dryly. "The house is watched. The missing letter bore your address. I presume."

"The deuce take me for a blundering fool," I cried. "I've led you into a trap, and you were my guest."

"My friend—" Kara laid his hand on my shoulder. The firm lips were set, the heavy brows drawn together; but in the depths of the black eyes that looked so bravely into mine were both affection and trust. "My friend, but for you, to-day there would be no Michael Kara to trap. You saved my life once, and may do so again. Moreover, you need not hasten to put me in my grave. I have been in tighter places than this."

"There is the roof," I muttered. "The scuttle—"

"Others have already thought of the roof," he said, with the quiet, little smile with which he seemed invariably to greet the thought of danger. "*Madame la concierge* informed me some hours ago that tinsmiths were repairing it. For tinsmiths, they are singularly silent in their work."

"But there must be some way out," I said. "We can't sit here like helpless lambs, waiting for the slaughter. I'll get the police."

"You could set out," returned Kara, "but I doubt if you would arrive. They know you, my friend."

"Then send the *concierge*."

"With what message? No, no, Lampton. For me the police are worse than useless. Some day I may answer all the questions you have been kind enough not to ask. Now I must ask you to take me at my word.

"We will not send for the police, but they will do us this much good—in broad daylight our friends the enemy will hardly dare to storm an apartment. We cannot get out, but they cannot get in—for a time, at least. When it is dark—"

He broke off abruptly, eyeing the branch of an elm that swung to and fro a little below the window and some ten feet away. The tree grew in the yard of our house, but so close to the side wall that the greater part of its branches hung over the property of our neighbors. I had long admired the elm, considering that it added greatly to the attractiveness of my apartment; but of what service it could be to Michael Kara I could not imagine.

"And when it is dark, what then?" I asked, for Kara had not finished his sentence.

"A hard-pressed man might do it," he said, more to himself than to me. "Perhaps—it is well to have thought of it, anyway. Come, I will play you a game of chess, Lampton."

At that period in my life I flattered myself that I played a good game of chess—much better, in fact, than the average.

Kara, himself no mean adversary, had previously declared that I was clearly his superior; but the exhibition I gave that morning would have disgusted a boy of ten. Strive as I might, I could

not force myself to bestow a modicum of attention upon the fate of the wooden pieces in front of me. We were the pawns in a far bigger game than this. I thought, and it was folly to waste our time contending with toys.

At length my blunders exhausted even the extraordinary patience of the man whose life was that instant at stake.

"I could, of course, take your queen," he remarked, "but upon my word, I haven't the heart to injure so helpless a creature as you."

He pushed back his chair and drew out a cigar. "If you are concerned over me," he went on, "I can assure you that your alarm is premature. The door is locked, and they cannot use a battering-ram without disturbing the neighborhood."

As if in answer to him, there came an authoritative rap from the hallway. It was repeated twice before we recovered from our surprise. Then Kara motioned to me to investigate.

"Who is it?" I called. "What do you want?"

"The police," came the answer. "Let us in at once, or we'll break open the door."

Kara started from his seat so suddenly that he upset the board. The chessmen clattered to the floor.

"The police!" he murmured. "They are clever. I had not thought of that. But it may be a trick. Here, Lampton." He handed me my loaded stick. "Open the door and see who they really are. If it is a trick, hit, and hit hard."

Together we moved over to the door and I opened it wide enough to peer into the hallway. Kara kept carefully out of the line of vision of those without.

Three men confronted me. Two were dressed in the regulation uniform of Paris policemen. The third was a strongly built fellow of about thirty, smooth-shaven save for a long black mustache, clad in a frock coat and silk hat, and possessing an unmistakable air of distinction.

Obviously he was an individual who was, or fancied himself to be, of some importance in the world.

The instant that I opened the door one of the policemen thrust his foot into the crack.

"Come, *monsieur*," he said, "you have kept us waiting long enough. We have a warrant for one Kara. Are you he?"

Before I could answer, the silk-hatted person took the words out of my mouth.

"No, no," he said, "that's not the man. The other's inside somewhere."

At the sound of the man's voice, I felt Kara start violently. Then he whispered in my ear, "The warrant—have they a warrant?"

"Where is the warrant you talk of?" I demanded of the policeman. "Show it to me if you wish to enter this apartment."

He shoved a legal document into my face. "Be quick," he growled. "We are not going to spend the day here."

Pretending to hold it to the light, I spread out the paper in such a way that Kara could see it.

He studied it for a second, then whispered:

"It's legal. You'll only get yourself in trouble if you resist. But hold them a minute if you can."

He darted back toward his own room, while I proceeded as slowly as I dared to fold up the warrant, my useless stick tucked under one arm.

"*Messieurs*," I began with the utmost deliberation, but I was cut off abruptly.

Kara's foot struck the empty box of chessmen lying in the path of his flight and sent it crashing against a table. With a cry of rage, the individual in the frock coat and silk hat flung himself at the door, followed by the two policemen. Taken unawares, I was easily pushed aside, and almost before I knew it, the three unwelcome visitors had stormed the gates of our fortress.

Through the open door of the bedroom we could see Kara's tall form fumbling with the window fastening. After him rushed the four of us, and I recall vividly the satisfaction with which in the confusion I contrived, by a dexterous twist of my foot, to send the officious civilian sprawling on the floor.

His fall delayed the policemen the fraction of a second, but it was enough. Before they could reach him, Kara had flung aside the French sash and leaped to the sill. As he did so, the gold watch-chain that he wore across his waistcoat caught on the bottom of the sash.

Long afterward I learned that the ring by which it was fastened to his watch had been torn loose; at this moment all that I saw was a gleam of gold in the air and Kara's hand reaching in vain for it.

For an instant he hung, poised on the sill, while his voice came back to me.

"The ring, Lampton! Get the ring."

The policemen were upon him and he leaped—leaped far out and shot downward from my sight. Unnoticed by his baffled pursuers, lay at my feet the gold chain that had been wrenched from his waistcoat. Attached to one end was a great signet-ring. I snatched it from the floor and ran to the window.

Over the shoulders of the policemen, I could see my friend. He had lighted in the elm, grasping the bough which he had earlier realized might be his last resource. Now he was crawling along one of the lower branches that overhung the neighboring yard.

He was safe from pursuit from above. No one but a desperate man would have taken that leap, and the two policemen were not desperate. With a gasp of admiration at the fugitive's daring, they brushed past me and I heard their heavy boots clattering on the stairs, the dapper civilian I had spilled close on their heels.

But from the alley rose a shout of excitement and triumph. The two ruffians on guard there were no longer dozing in the sunlight. They had seen Kara leap and, as he dropped from the elm into the adjacent yard, they were already hammering upon the gate which opened from it on the lane.

It was a flimsy affair. The first onset had weakened it perceptibly, and though the feeble bolt might hold a moment or two longer, Kara had no time to spend in loitering. Where he was to go I knew not.

The Rue Racine was unquestionably guarded, and his retreat through the alley blocked by the men at the gate. Possibly in the house, in the yard of which he then was, his nimble wit might find some refuge. It was a slim chance, but his only one.

The same thought must have come to Kara, for he took a step toward the house. At the same instant the ruffians in the alley hurled themselves savagely

at the gate. Its ancient timbers quivered before the assault, and the straining bolt gave still farther. One more onslaught and they would be in the yard.

To my amazement Kara stopped dead. Turning his back on the only remaining avenue of escape, he ran toward the gate. I could not shout a warning to him. The spectacle of my friend, rushing deliberately to his fate, held me paralyzed with horror.

In the alley the ruffians were gathering themselves together for the final assault. The weakened bolt that barred their way could not hope to resist it. And then—

But while I shuddered in helpless agony at the window, Kara reached the gate. Noiselessly he slipped back the bolt and jumped aside. Even as he did so, his two assailants flung their weight once more against the barrier.

This time they met with no resistance. The crazy structure burst open like a paper-bag, and the foremost, overset by the violence of his onrush, fell headlong on the gravel path.

The second was less fortunate. Before he could recover his balance, Kara had leaped across the sprawling rascal and sent his fist crashing square to the point of his comrade's jaw.

The fellow fell back like a dead man, his head striking the brick wall with a thud that reached my ears, three stories above the ground.

Without a glance behind him, Michael Kara darted through the open gateway, turned to the right through the alley, and dashed into the street.

CHAPTER VII.

FORBIDDEN PARIS.

"MR. LAMPTON, your story is an extraordinary one. I am aware that America is a young country, but I did not realize before that its inhabitants possessed so much childlike simplicity."

The pudgy little magistrate with the goggle eyes who was lecturing me did not like America or Americans, and he had been at no pains to conceal his feelings.

"In the absence of any proved inten-

tion of wrong-doing, however, and considering the fact that your standing in your own country has been sufficiently established," he went on, "I feel justified in discharging you from custody. But you must leave Paris within twenty-four hours. In the eyes of the law—and French law is intelligent. Mr. Lampton—in the eyes of the law, I repeat, you are now a suspicious character. It is a thousand times to be regretted, but such is the fact.

"If you decide to remain in Europe," he concluded, "I should recommend you to change your method of selecting your friends. To what degree of liberty or license you have attained in America I do not know, but the tyrannical police of the Old World do not look with favor upon criminals or upon those who harbor them."

The sneers and sarcasm of the pompous idiot drove me wild.

"I am no criminal, nor have I harbored any," I broke out. "Why should I leave Paris, and of what is Mr. Kara accused? I have listened to a lot of nonsense in the last twenty-four hours, but nobody has yet had the sense to tell me that."

The magistrate's round eyes fairly jumped from his fat face as he glared at me.

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he roared. "You are nonsense. Am I to be insulted in my own court-room? Who are you to know of what one is accused? Even I, a magistrate of France, I do not know, and you demand to be informed! It is scandalous!"

"Well, how in the name of folly am I to know—" I began, when the hand of Liscom, third secretary of the American Embassy, was clapped over my mouth.

"Be still, Ronald," he ordered. "You've got yourself into a mess, and now you want to make it worse. Your honor must be patient." He turned to the incensed magistrate with his best diplomatic smile. "Mr. Lampton is naturally a trifle bewildered, but he is a gentleman of repute, well known to the embassy. Your honor will now permit us to depart?"

"Yes, yes," cried the little man. "Take him away; take him from Paris. I have instructions."

Liscom seized me by the arm and marched me out of the court-room. Once in the street, he drew a long breath and stopped to light a cigarette.

"Magistrates," he remarked, "are queer animals the world over, but they are queerest in Paris. And now that it's past," taking my arm and guiding me toward the *quai*, "suppose you tell me what the row is all about."

"I have told you all I know already," I returned. "When they found that Kara was gone, they arrested me instead. Now they have let me go. They won't tell me what Kara is supposed to have done, and I don't believe he has done anything. Certainly the fellows he bowled over in the alley were no policemen."

"They might have been," said Liscom, "but I don't believe it. Anyway, what that fat Solomon said was true. You have become a suspicious character, and as long as you stay in Paris you'll be in hot water. If you are keen for a long legal fight, we might keep you, I fancy, but it's hardly worth while."

"I was bound for home in a month," I replied, "and I may as well leave now. I am obliged to you for getting me out of the scrape."

"Oh, not at all," he said, "but if you'll excuse me I'll jump into this cab and be off. I'm a bit late as it is. See you in New York."

With a wave of his hand he was gone, and I turned off toward the apartment of Dr. Menon on the Boulevard St. Germain. Before I was driven from Paris I was determined to make at least one effort to return to my friend the signet-ring I had in my pocket.

But it was not destined I should receive assistance from Dr. Menon.

The famous physician was enjoying a holiday, the *conciergerie* informed me. Who knew when he would return? Was he not a great man, and could not a great man come and go as he willed?

Reluctantly I made my way to the Rue Racine and packed my belongings. My resolution to depart was strengthened by the arrival of a minion of the fat magistrate's court on an errand of investigation. Then, leaving my New York address, in the hope that some message might come, I drove to the station.

Kara had gone. From the moment he

vanished round the corner of the alley, the day before. I had neither seen nor heard anything of him. Only the ring and chain in my pocket remained to remind me that I had made him my friend.

I drew out the ring and looked at it. On the seal, the archangel Michael, with one foot on the neck of prostrate Satan, brandished his triumphant sword.

A fitting crest for a brave man, I thought, and then, as the train that was taking me from him slipped out from Paris, I heard in the rumble of the wheels the last words of my gallant friend:

“The ring, Lampton! Get the ring!”

I unfastened it from the chain and placed it on my finger. I might never see Michael Kara again, but if I did he would find his ring and the service of Ronald Lampton waiting for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

DORIS REVERE.

THE voyage across the Atlantic allowed me ample leisure in which to consider the problem of Doris Revere. Hitherto the turmoil which accompanied the advent into my life of Michael Kara had prevented my reaching any definite conclusion as to ways and means, but from the first I had been resolved not to permit my ward to persevere in her talk of independence.

From my uncle I had inherited more than a comfortable fortune. The one condition which he had attached to his bequest was that I should continue to care for Doris as he had done. Unless I had utterly failed to comprehend my uncle's character, he would not have tolerated for one second the idea of her going forth alone to struggle with the world. Therefore it was clearly impossible for me to permit it.

Up to this point nothing could have been plainer. It was when I came to consider the alternative that I was led into a blind alley. How was I, an orphan of twenty-seven, to assume the care of a young woman of twenty? And if I did not, who was?

Upon the horns of this dilemma I was empaled for four wretched days. Then the inspiration came. I remember that

at the time I was leaning over the rail of the promenade-deck, staring down at the steerage-passengers, and in particular at one squat, dumpy woman who lay stretched out in misery beneath me. What possible connection my brain could have found between this obscure Slav and my esteemed relative, Mrs. John Courland, I cannot imagine, but it is certain that at that instant the image of Mrs. Courland flashed across my mind as the solution of all my difficulties.

She was my father's cousin, a woman of whom I had seen little, but of whom my uncle—I never knew my father—had always spoken with the greatest respect. Now, as I thought of her, she seemed to have been created for the sole purpose of chaperoning Doris.

Before the days of mushroom millionaires, when there were no hideous palaces of bad taste lining Fifth Avenue, the Courlands were people in New York. Even now the name aroused the society editors of the newspapers from the lethargy of skepticism. If Mrs. John Courland stood sponsor for her, no one would question Miss Revere's right to all New York might offer.

Fortunately for my plans, the Courland name carried more weight in the society columns than in the financial page. In an apartment-house in Gramercy Park Mrs. John was then living in obscure dignity on the memory of a vanished glory. A stately lady of fifty, I knew well that she would far prefer starvation to the merest hint of a desire for aid. In my rashest moments I had never dared to suggest that a portion of the Lampton millions were at her disposal.

Nevertheless, Mrs. John Courland loved the world. Let her once grasp the fact that I was asking, not conferring, a favor, and she would leave Gramercy Park without regret. A vision of a rosy future dawned upon me as I stared down at the teeming, squalid steerage. I would open the old house on Washington Square. The blank wooden shutters would no longer frown in frozen hostility across the square at the tawdry front of Fourth Street. I would open the house again. Perhaps, who knew, I might step into my uncle's shoes and give the firm, of which he had been so proud, an active

head once more. So solidly had he established the business that I could not but succeed. My ships would line the wharves of South Street. In Washington Square, Mrs. Courland and Doris—

Doris! The house of cards I had erected tumbled to the deck. What did I know of Doris? I had paid the bills, to be sure, and so I knew that she was, or ought to be, well educated. But education is not all powerful. Quite probably she was some impossible creature with whom Mrs. John would refuse to live on any terms. In that case—well, in that case I would have to think it out all over again. For the present the problem was solved.

I turned from the rail, and started along the deck. A swarthy quartermaster, coming in a great hurry down the bridge ladder, ran into me, knocking from my hand the book I had been reading in the intervals of meditation.

With a semiarticulate apology, the sailor picked it up. I had reached out my hand for it, when the fellow fell back before me. He was a stocky little man, with straight black hair and narrow gold bands in his ears—a Levantine, probably, who had taken to the sea instead of the push-cart.

Now his mouth and dark eyes were wide open in amazement. The unfortunate book had dropped unheeded to the deck, where it slid back and forth as the ship rolled.

"Confound it!" I cried, "don't throw the thing around like that. If you don't want it, I do."

Muttering, the man picked it up again and handed it to me, his eyes never leaving my face.

He was still staring, rooted to the deck, when a hoarse bellow of rage burst upon us from above. It was the third officer. He had seen his messenger standing like a petrified interrogation point before an insignificant passenger, and the sight did not please him.

The quartermaster fled before the storm. But before he turned his back upon me he made me a bow so cringing in its humility that it left me gaping at his retreating figure. Was the man crazy? Unusually obsequious waiters occasionally favored me with such attentions, but to this fellow I had given nothing.

An hour later I saw the man again, walking along the deck, with the deck steward in tow, and scanning the faces of the passengers stretched out in the long rows of steamer-chairs. This time he did not bow before me, but, as he passed, I saw him nudge the steward. That worthy glanced at me for a second; then the two of them went on. Presumably the quartermaster had enlisted the services of the steward in discovering my name.

Whatever it was that he wanted of me he did not reveal. The rest of the voyage passed as ocean voyages always pass, and I found myself at last in the streets of New York. My luggage I sent to a hotel, while I betook myself without delay to Gramercy Park.

Mrs. Courland was most gracious. What was more to the point, she saw the matter in much the light in which I had hoped she would.

"It would have been better," she remarked, "had your uncle taken some of the family into his confidence. As it is, I do not see what else you can do. It all depends, of course, upon the young woman. For myself, Ronald, you know that it has not been from choice that I have lived here these long years."

She glanced around the dark, cramped drawing-room, at the languid rubber-plant in the window, the worn furniture, and from her lips came the nearest approach to a sigh of which I ever knew Mrs. John Courland to be guilty. She recovered herself in a moment.

"Tell me," she said, "just what are your immediate plans?"

"If you will be kind enough to attend to the house," I said, immensely relieved at having passed the crisis of the negotiations, "I think I shall run up to Quebec and get Doris. We might as well learn our fate at once, you know."

Mrs. John Courland looked at me severely.

"Ronald, you amaze me. You return from two years in Paris as ignorant as a Fiji Islander. Did you ever hear of *les convenances*? Do you imagine that I will permit you to go traveling alone about the country with a young girl of twenty, or that the good sisters would tolerate— Ronald!"

Mrs. John's lecture came to an end in

snocked surprise. I had sworn in her presence. For the crime my only excuse is the long vista of false situations her words created. I was the guardian of this wretched young woman, and I couldn't go and get her. She couldn't stay in the convent, and I couldn't take her away. If this sort of thing were to go on after we were established in Washington Square, every time Mrs. Courland chose to take a walk, I would be sent to vegetate on a park bench. I wondered if *les convenances* were suspended in the rain.

An oppressive silence descended upon the dreary drawing-room. Through the window I watched with envy a group of young men turn into one of the college clubs across the square. They had never heard of *les convenances*, I would wager.

I knew that Mrs. John was looking at me, and I faced about. In her large gray eyes I was relieved to perceive a very decided twinkle.

"You have hardly grasped all the difficulties of your undertaking," said she; "but there is a way around this one. You might take me with you."

I arose and bowed low over her hand.

"We will leave by the night train," I said. "I will send a cab for you. Good-by."

The Convent of St. Catherine stands on a slight eminence some miles from Quebec. In front green fields stretch down to the St. Lawrence. Behind rise the wooded slopes of the hills that close the valley of the mighty river. As we drove through the morning sunshine toward the old, gray walls the whole building seemed enclosed in beauty. I endeavored to say as much to Mrs. Courland. In return she favored me with a queer smile.

"Fine feathers do not make fine birds," she remarked. After that the conversation flagged.

The mother superior, to whom I explained my identity and our errand, said that she would send Doris to us. We were left alone in the formal reception-room to await the coming of my ward.

Mrs. John Courland was above nervousness—or, at least above any display of it. Seating herself in a spot which commanded an excellent view of the

river, she proceeded to study the scenery with much apparent satisfaction. From her attitude no one would have guessed that the whole course of her future life depended on what the opening of the door would disclose.

My attempt to imitate her proved a dismal failure. With a touch of genius she had possessed herself of the right window. The one which she left to me revealed the inspiring spectacle of a chicken-yard, surrounded by a high paling and backed by a wooden ice-house. In such a vista it was absurd to pretend to be absorbed. I thought of a cigarette, but I did not consider the atmosphere of a smoking-room the proper one in which to meet my ward.

Finally, throwing aside all pretense, I took to striding up and down the narrow room. All that I asked was that Doris should be bearable. Then she and Mrs. Courland could settle down in Washington Square, my uncle's behest would be fulfilled, and I would be a free man, responsible to no one, under obligations to no one. It was not much to ask of fortune, but I glanced at the figure by the window and shivered. Mrs. Courland was particular. If she failed me, my only known resource was gone.

My tramp had taken me to the farther end of the room when the door opened and a young woman entered. I advanced hastily with outstretched hand, though the smile on my lips was a forced one.

"I am delighted," I began bravely. "I—"

The stolid, broad-faced individual facing me, dropped me a clumsy curtsy.

"Miss Revere will be here in a moment," she said in the *patois* of the French-Canadian. "She wishes to present her regrets for the delay."

My hand fell to my side and I glanced at Mrs. John. She was still studying the distant St. Lawrence, but the corners of her mouth twitched. With a laugh, I dropped into a chair by her side.

"What idiots we are!" I said.

"We?" she returned. "Perhaps, but it is scarcely polite of you to remind me of it."

"I beg your pardon," said I. "It is for you that I am nervous. You are the one who must be pleased."

She made no reply and we sat in silence, the solemn ticking of a great clock on the mantel the only sound in the room.

At last my ears caught the tread of light footsteps in the corridor. the door opened once more and I started to my feet.

This time there could be no mistake. A slight figure, clad in a white waist and brown linen skirt, advanced to meet me. Above the broad, white forehead a mass of dark hair was parted in the center and gathered low on the neck. Long, black lashes veiled the eyes, and the delicate cheeks were now flaming crimson.

I choked down a gasp of admiration, and then a wave of pity swept over me. This helpless, fragile child a governess? The crime would have dragged my uncle's spirit from the grave to hound me through my life.

The fringe of lashes lifted and two dark eyes gazed straight into mine. "Mr. Lampton," she said.

I took the hand which she extended, and looked at her. This time I murmured nothing about being delighted. Instead, I blurted out precisely what was in my mind.

"We've been a pair of old fools!" I cried.

"Upon my word, Ronald!" Mrs. Courland brushed me contemptuously to one side, took the astonished girl by both hands and kissed her on the lips. I do not care to calculate how long it had been since Mrs. John Courland had kissed any one before.

"I am Ronald's cousin, Mrs. Courland," she said. "He wants us both to live with him in his house in New York. It will be good for both of us, my dear. Ordinarily, he is quite an intelligent creature, for a man."

Doris glanced at me and a quick smile sparkled in her eyes and flashed across her face. It passed almost instantaneously.

"Mr. Lampton is very kind," she said gravely, "but I cannot do that. I cannot be a burden to him all my life."

"My dear Doris," I said, "there is no question of kindness. I have plenty of money, but I have it only on consideration that I care for you. You are as much entitled to share in it as if you—er—as if—as if—you were my daughter."

Mrs. John coughed suddenly, a cough that irritated me. I suspected that Mrs. John was amused. Another fugitive smile played over Doris's lips.

"But I am not your daughter, Mr. Lampton. In fact," and a touch of sadness crept into the young voice, "I do not know who I am."

"You are my ward," I answered promptly, "and that is what concerns us now. In New York, Mrs. Courland will try to make you happy, and you will make her so. You will come with us, won't you?"

Doris did not answer. For a moment her dark eyes searched my face—then she turned and looked at Mrs. Courland. Without a word she walked over and took that lady's hand.

Mrs. John bent down and kissed the flushed face. "Doris will come, Ronald," said she.

CHAPTER IX.

AN EMERALD AND MISCHIEF.

THAT summer passed with the speed of the wind. Released at last from the long imprisonment in the little apartment, Mrs. Courland grew years younger. To Doris she became devotedly attached, incessantly devising new schemes for her entertainment. She was amply repaid by the love my ward bestowed upon her. From the moment when we drove away together from the convent gates, the possibility of a disagreement between these two never entered my mind. and I went about my affairs, happy in the knowledge that the problem my uncle left me had been solved.

The problem was solved, but why it had ever existed remained a mystery. Of Doris's early history and the reasons which had prompted my uncle to bring her to America, we still knew nothing.

In one of my visits to the office I had discovered, in a corner of my uncle's private safe, a chamois bag. It was covered with strange hieroglyphics—characters which I could not read but which I regarded with dislike, for they recalled vividly to my mind the decorations on Mme. Julie Lecompte's box of Constantinople cigarettes. Pasted on the

bag in the midst of these oriental embellishments was a plain piece of white paper, bearing in my uncle's handwriting the words: "For Doris."

I took it to her and we opened it together. A cry of delight broke from her as I emptied its contents on the library-table. Before us, flashing in the sunlight that poured in from the square, blazed a magnificent necklace of diamonds and rubies. I knew little of gems and Doris less, but the beauty of these stones could not have escaped a savage.

It was no ordinary creation of the jeweler's art. The jewels were strung in a double row, the diamonds above, the rubies below, and from the center, suspended on a gold chain, hung a huge, unpolished emerald. Graven in the flat surface of this stone were three characters, at the significance of which I could not even guess.

At sight of the fortune lying before her Doris fell back bewildered.

"Ronald, Ronald!" she gasped, "what does it all mean?"

I did not attempt any reply. Instead, I searched the bag in vain for some explanation. There was none. Save for the great necklace and its emerald pendant the chamois bag held nothing.

With a sigh Doris gathered up the gems and let them slowly slip from her hands into the bag.

"Are you sure they are mine?" she asked at length.

"Yes," I answered. "That much we do know. They are yours."

"Then I will wear them to-morrow night," she said. "After that you will sell them for me. They are no fit possessions for a penniless girl."

"I will do nothing of the kind," I cried. "I will keep them for you till you are married. They will be a splendid dowry."

Doris jumped from her seat so suddenly that the chair went crashing to the floor. Then the door slammed, and I heard her running up the stairs.

Completely bewildered, I sat in the deserted library, staring at the overturned furniture. What crime had I committed now? Sooner or later Doris was bound to marry. As I sat alone in the silent room I devoutly hoped it would

be later. There was no sense in her upsetting things and running about the house at the mere thought of a husband.

But my ward was not given to causeless tantrums. Something had occurred to trouble her, and these wretched jewels were to blame. Had it been mine, I would have hurled the chamois-bag, with its treasure, through the window. As it was, with a heavy heart, I dropped the accursed thing into my pocket.

My hatred for the necklace was not diminished the next evening. It was the night of the Rawlins's ball, the great annual function at which Mrs. Courland had decided that New York society should be made aware of the existence of Doris Revere. We had not been in the room fifteen minutes when I perceived that New York society was quite well aware of it—entirely too much so, I thought, as I stood by the wall and watched the ever-increasing throng of men about her.

It was all very well. Doubtless Mrs. John knew exactly what she was about, but why were our quiet evenings in Washington Square to be interrupted for the benefit of the pack of black-coated idiots at that moment fluttering about my ward. Times had changed, and the gems that sparkled round her throat, the huge emerald pendant, were symbols of the change.

I did not care to dance with any one else, and I could not dance with Doris. So I stayed in bitter discontent by the wall, following with my eyes her white form as it glided by, rewarded now and then with a quick smile, and paying some slight attention to the remarks of my old friend, Tom Rawlins, as he stood by my side, his foreign travels safely achieved.

"Mother's all smiles to-night," said the young man. "That's because the room is chock-a-block with big guns. The Levantine envoy came on from Washington on purpose. Here he is now."

A nudge from his elbow recalled my wandering wits. Close beside us, his coat blazing with orders and decorations, stood a tall man, surveying the room with an insolent stare in his heavy, cruel eyes. Everything about Kalat Bey was heavy and cruel, the eyes peering out between little rolls of fat, the mouth covered by a drooping black mustache, the

sensual jaw, the great body itself. Handsome many called him. It occurred to me that he was sure to meet Doris, and I did not fancy the idea.

As I watched him the great man gave a violent start. The cold insolence died in his eyes, and in its place came a look of wonder and excitement. He thrust his big head forward, as if to see better, and the expression on his face was not a pleasant one.

Dancing with some young jackanapes, Doris passed us, with a bow to Tom and a smile for me. Kalat Bey whirled about and seized Rawlins by the arm.

"Who is she?" he cried. "The girl with the necklace—who is she?"

Tom stared at him. He did not care greatly for Kalat Bey, but it was his own house, and he could not be rude.

"Miss Revere, I believe," he said coldly. "The ward of my friend, Mr. Lampton. This is Lampton."

He indicated me with a motion of his hand, and I stepped forward with the curtest of bows. For a second the envoy frowned at me with unconcealed hostility. Then the diplomat showed.

"You are fortunate in the beauty of your ward, Mr. Lampton," he said suavely, stroking his black mustache. "I have seen many beautiful women, but, I assure you, she quite took my breath away."

"Apparently," I answered dryly, and continued to look at him.

Kalat Bey was not so easily put down. A slight flush rose in his dark cheek, and he shot an evil glance at me, but his voice was unchanged as he went on:

"Such loveliness is a rare treat. I am fortunate in beholding it. Perhaps Mr. Rawlins will do me the honor to introduce me."

Before poor Tom could do more than give a helpless squirm the envoy had taken him by the arm and was marching him across the floor. The effrontery of the man was amazing, but it was safe. Rawlins could not refuse without openly insulting his mother's guest. For me to interfere would be to create a scene that Doris would find intolerable. Moreover, if she were only to meet those men I liked, her acquaintance would be somewhat restricted.

Mrs. Rawlins descended upon me as I was fuming in impotent wrath against

the wall. She was at no pains to hide her displeasure.

"You do not dance, Mr. Lampton," she said. "How are my guests to enjoy themselves if the young men do nothing?"

For an instant I was tempted to inform her that I neither knew nor cared. Instead, I followed meekly in her wake, was introduced to various tiresome individuals, and at length found myself free to return to my solitary meditations. Almost at once they were interrupted again, this time by young Rawlins.

"I say, Ronald," he began, "it's none of my business, you know, but I don't like it. That beast Kalat Bey has carried Miss Revere off into the conservatory. I'd like to slap his face for him, only mother'd turn me out of the house if I did. She—"

But I waited for no more. Striding across the room, I made my way into the shaded recesses of the conservatory.

In a seat under a palm I saw the white dress of my ward. Above her towered the heavy form of the Levantine envoy. He held something in his hand, and the light in the conservatory was not dim enough to hide the look of triumph on his face. So pleased was he, indeed, that he did not notice my approach.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Revere," he was saying. "The clasp was worn. You must permit me to atone for my clumsiness. I will borrow the emerald and return it to you with a new chain—a souvenir of a delightful acquaintance."

Doris stammered some answer—I did not hear what. Her face was pale, and in the great eyes fastened on the man in front of her was something akin to fear. The sight drove me wild.

"I will take the emerald," I said, stepping forward with outstretched hand. "Your excellency need not trouble yourself about such a trifle."

Kalat jumped at the interruption, and his hand tightened involuntarily around the gem. He faced me with the same hostility he had evinced earlier in the evening.

"To me it is neither a trifle nor a trouble," he said. "Further, it is a matter between Miss Revere and myself."

It was an unfortunate remark. The mere thought of anything between this

coarse brute and my sweet ward drove from me all pretense of self-control.

"Give me that stone," I said peremptorily.

Kalat put his hands behind his back and mocked me with his cruel eyes.

"You make a mistake. I give orders, not take them. Stand aside, if you please."

It was not a brave act, and I have never been proud of it, but were I in the same position to-day, with Doris's trembling figure and pale, frightened face beside me, and that hulking ruffian sneering in my path, I would do it again.

With a savage upper-cut, sent in so quickly that he had no warning, I caught Kalat Bey square on the point of his protruding jaw. He staggered back, tripped over the leg of a chair, flung out his hands to save himself, and fell sprawling among the palms and potted plants.

Dropping from his opened hand, the great emerald rolled to my feet. I thrust it in my pocket and, with Doris, shaking on my arm, left the conservatory and the ball.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEALER IN RUGS.

"VERY unfortunate, I call it," said Mrs. Courland. "I still don't understand what it was all about, but I do know that Mrs. Rawlins will be furious—and quite properly, too."

"She can't be furious over something she hasn't heard of," I retorted, "and who is going to tell her? I certainly am not. As for the envoy, if he feels like proclaiming to the world that he was knocked down for an insolent cad, he is welcome to do so, for what I care."

We were at luncheon on the day after Mrs. Rawlins's ball. The heavy clouds of a dull winter day hung over the square, and the motor buses moved up Fifth Avenue like huge green caterpillars crawling under a leaden sky. Within, it was hardly more cheerful. Mrs. Courland seemed disposed to resent the manner in which I had upset her plans by an abrupt departure. Doris looked pale and worn, and, I thought, depressed and nervous.

Mrs. Courland resumed the attack.

"Why did you go into the conservatory with him?" she asked Doris. "You should be more careful."

"I don't know," my ward answered wearily, "unless it was because the room was so hot. Then he was a diplomat, and I thought a Turk would be interesting. Why shouldn't I have gone?" she went on, a sudden flash of anger shining for an instant in her dark eyes. "I couldn't know that he was going to be so horrid. He said a lot of silly things; and then he took hold of the emerald, and it came off in his hand. Then Ronald came."

The girl's voice trailed off, and she seemed ready to cry. I was sick of the whole business.

"Doris did quite right," I said. "We are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. The jeweler can mend the necklace, and Kalat Bey's people can brush the dirt off his clothes. And that ends it."

But in my heart I knew it did not. There was no worn clasp. The emerald had not merely "come off." The chain had been snapped, and Kalat Bey had snapped it. Although, for what I knew, the envoy might be addicted to stealing jewels from young girls, it did not seem likely. Yet he had made one determined effort to secure that emerald. Would he make another?

This question I would put to Mrs. John when her temper was improved. In the meantime I would take Doris for a drive. She had fretted quite enough over the incident, and some diversion was needed.

My hand was on the bell to order the carriage, when the maid entered to announce the presence in the hall of a man who wished to see me.

In the hallway a wizened old man, dressed in rusty black, confronted me. He had deposited a big bundle on the floor, and when I came upon him was leaning against the wall, like one who was weary of struggling with the world.

"Mr. Lampton, sir," he began, straightening up and speaking with an accent strange to me. "I beg your pardon for intruding, but I am a poor man. I have a treasure here without price—a work of art—a rug of the real oriental."

"My good man," I interrupted, "my

warehouse is full of such things. I do not buy rugs—I sell them, or my manager does for me.”

“But that is why I came to you,” he said, throwing out his wrinkled hands in a gesture of appeal. “These things are not for every one. You know—you will not rob a poor man—see!”

He unrolled the bundle and spread at my feet a small rug. At a glance I saw that the man was speaking the truth. The rug was a real Bokhara. I had not been brought up among the products of the Orient for nothing, and I knew that what I saw before me did not often find its way into the Western markets.

“How much do you want for it?” I asked with more interest.

The old man shrugged his narrow shoulders and bowed.

“That is for the gentleman to say. He will not rob a poor man,” he replied in the true manner of the Oriental about to drive a hard bargain.

I glanced at the rug again, and it occurred to me that here was a better gift than the hated necklace, which had caused such turmoil.

“Doris,” I called, “look here a moment. What do you think of this?” I went on, as my ward obediently appeared in the doorway.

Doris bent to examine the rug, and a little exclamation of delight burst from her lips as the full beauty of it dawned upon her. “Oh, Ronald,” she cried, “how lovely! Are you going to buy it? What will you do with it?”

“I was thinking of putting it in your room,” I said. “I want you to have something that diplomats will not attempt to steal.”

The old man rolled his treasure quickly up and swung it on his shoulder.

“Permit me to spread it in the lady’s room,” he said. “Then it will have the surroundings that it merits. Here we cannot see with the just eye.”

I caught a glimpse of Doris’s gentle face, flushed with pleasure and happier than it had been since Kalat Bey first came to trouble us, and my mind was made up. She should have the rug. Motioning to the man to follow, I led the way up the stairs to Doris’s room.

Even in the gray light of the gloomy afternoon, it was a cheerful place, the

windows opening on the square, with the white arch standing out against the bare branches of the trees.

Mrs. Courland had arranged the room, doing her work well, as she always did. But there was one defect. The three of us saw it at the same time.

“Behold!” and the old man flung down the rug in front of the bureau, kicking contemptuously to one side an insignificant thing that had been spread there. “Behold, it is made for the room. Now it is perfect.”

“Leave it there for a day or two,” I said. “If we like it, I will settle with you on the price.”

“As the gentleman wishes, but first let me repair this trifling damage. It is of no importance—a few minutes of work.” He lifted a corner of the rug and pointed to a small tear on the under side.

“Good,” I answered. “And now, Doris, we will have our drive.”

Of that drive I remember little save that it was pure delight, and that some time in the course of it we stopped at the jeweler’s. There I returned to earth long enough to realize that my suspicions were confirmed by the facts. The fragile chain had been snapped, the man declared—no difficult feat for strong fingers—but of the significance of the characters cut in the emerald he could tell me nothing. It was a remarkable stone, he said, and the necklace itself was equally extraordinary. Nothing of the kind had ever come into his hands before. With an unuttered wish that it had never come into mine, I left it with him and drove away with Doris by my side.

An agitated maid greeted us at the door on our return. “That man, Mr. Lampton,” she began, “that old thing with the rug, there’s something queer about him.”

“Very likely,” I answered, “but what has he been doing?”

“I caught him poking through Miss Doris’s things, sir; and when I asked him what he was about, he told me to mind my own affairs; and he looked that black, sir, I thought he’d knife me the way them Eastern people always do. And then he smiled sudden-like, and said he wanted a small needle. People like that oughtn’t to be in the house, sir.”

"Burglars don't usually cart oriental rugs about with them," I said, "and that's a true Bokhara, if ever I saw one. He's an old fellow. Possibly he's a bit cracked. I'll have him watched when he comes again."

Come he did in a day or two, as wizened, as humble, and as enthusiastic as before. This time he brought with him, instead of a rug, a stocky young chap—a cousin, he said—who had been living in Malta. The young man, it appeared, had found life difficult in Malta. Therefore, he had decided to try his fortune in America, where alone was industry rewarded and justice free.

Now, he most ardently desired to buy an interest in a little shop. To this end he was eager to sell his one precious possession, some lace that was an heirloom in his family—lace that, hung as curtains in the windows of the young lady's room, would make of it a veritable palace.

All this the old man recited volubly with many gestures, while the cousin stood by with a sheepish grin. Then another bundle was unrolled and for the second time I was called upon to admire a treasure of the East. Of lace, I personally knew little and cared less, but in this case my opinion was hardly asked.

For once Mrs. Courland forgot her habitual restraint. In unreserved rapture of enthusiasm, she declared that Doris should have those curtains if she had to pay for them out of her own pocket. And over the face of my ward, with the vision still in her mind of the severe simplicity of the convent above the St. Lawrence, came a look of such suppressed longing that I did not dream of opposition.

Once more I guided the pedlers of oriental art to my ward's room. There I left the man from Malta, measuring and pottering about the windows, with Doris and Mrs. Courland to superintend the work, while I descended to the smoking-room to wrangle with the ancient rug merchant concerning the price of his wares.

It was a long and tedious process. The old fellow's prices were as monstrous as his manner was apologetic. My remonstrances were met with eloquent harangues on the rarity of rugs and laces, on the poverty of himself and all his

relatives, and on the obvious necessity of buying bread in a cruel world.

It was in the midst of one of these, when I had almost resolved that to disappoint Doris was more endurable than to listen further, that I chanced to glance out of the window. A half-starved horse, harnessed to a covered wagon as dilapidated as itself, was drawn up in front of the house. Just visible on the seat was the lounging figure of the driver, sleepily puffing at a pipe.

"But, Mr. Lampton knows that a man must live," droned on the old man, "and surely it is but the smallest of profits that I ask. Where else can—"

But my patience had fled and I cut him short.

"What's that fool doing out there?" I cried, pointing to the disreputable equipage at my door. "If he is waiting for you, tell him to move on. This is no junk-shop, and what's that?" Through the closed door my ear caught the sound of boards creaking, as though some heavy weight was passing stealthily over them.

The rug merchant rose to his feet and moved between me and the door.

"A thousand pardons," he said, raising his shoulders and spreading out his arms in the deprecatory gesture with which he punctuated most of his remarks. "He came for my cousin. It is ignorance. I will send him away."

"But, first, Mr. Lampton, look at this." He turned abruptly back and spread before me a huge handkerchief of the gaudiest colors. "This is the rubbish I sell to those who know nothing. Would you ask for a true Bokhara at the same price?"

"Oh, rot your handkerchiefs! Take your stuff away!"

I motioned him to one side, but the old man did not move out of my path. He was standing more erect now, holding the ridiculous handkerchief at arm's length in front of him, his black eyes shining with excitement. As I looked at the rusty black clothes and the hawk-like face above them, the cringing pedler vanished from my sight and in his place there seemed to stand an unclean vulture.

Suddenly he thrust the handkerchief directly under my nose.

"Look, look!" he cried in a thin, shrill voice.

While I stared at him in astonishment, with a quick, deft movement he twisted the cloth about my neck and nostrils. A deadly odor struck straight into the very core of my brain, robbing me alike of the power and the will to resist. Once I hit out, blindly and in vain. The noise of a sudden tumult in the hall rang in my ears and then I fell back, overcome.

And as I fell, there floated before my eyes the vision of a certain charming boudoir in Paris, with Mme. Julie Lecompte smiling at me over the little table laden with coffee-cups, and Tom Rawlins sipping his liqueur, absolute bliss written plain upon his broad young face.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ODD EPISODE.

IT was Rawlins's face again that I saw when I opened my eyes; but now it was flesh and blood that I looked upon, and I was safe in my own prosaic smoking-room in Washington Square. Tom was bending over me, a glass in one hand and a bottle in the other. Oddly enough, the first thing that I noticed clearly was that the tie of the ordinarily immaculate young man was now tucked under his left ear. Moreover, his collar was torn and stained with blood that trickled slowly down from a small cut in his lip.

"Where's that infernal scoundrel?" I cried, staggering to my feet, only to fall back on the lounge again, giddy and sick.

"It's all right, Ronald—no harm done," said Rawlins soothingly, pouring out some brandy and handing it to me. "Lucky I came, though."

Under the influence of the stimulant my head cleared and I looked about me with intelligent eyes. The room was as I had always known it. Some boys I had seen playing in the Square were still there. Nothing was changed save that the battered vehicle by the curb had vanished.

"What happened? What was it all about?" I asked of Tom.

"Search me," replied that individual cheerfully. "That's what I want you to tell me. Every time I see you, you are in the thick of some mystery or other, with all sorts of disreputable characters

hanging about. I don't think it's safe for a decent young man to know you."

He helped himself to a drink, lighted a cigarette, and drew up a chair.

"I am coming to see you about a little matter—I'll tell you what it is later," he went on, "and I was just about to ring the bell when the door opened. A queer kind of a guy started to come out with a big, huge bundle, a rug or something like that, you know, in his arms. Well, sir, the minute he saw me he jumped back so quick he nearly dropped the thing, and then he let out a lot of what I took to be bad language, only I couldn't understand a word of it. I'll swear it wasn't Italian or French or any of the ordinary tourist lingo, though.

"Whatever it was, it made me pretty hot, for I didn't think that was any way for a gentleman to be received who comes to pay a little call. So when he went back, I went forward. He tried to shut the door, but he had his hands full with the bundle, you see, and I was too quick for him. We both arrived in the hall about the same time.

"When he found he was cornered, he dropped the blamed bundle. I knew then it wasn't all rug, for it went down like a ton of lead. And he showed fight. He was a squat little chap, but stocky and good all right. He caught me one here—Rawlins pointed to his lip—and mused me about some, but I was doing nicely until this door burst open and out flew an old codger like a jack-in-the-box, and headed for me.

"I landed on him once, but he had a knife, you know, and between that and the two of them, they got me away from the door. They might have got the bundle, too, for what I know, but just then down the stairs comes Mrs. Courland, yelling blood and thunder, as I never hoped to hear her yell in my life, and behind her every servant you've got.

"That finished my two gentlemen. They took it on the run down the steps, jumped into some sort of a ramshackle wagon, and the last I saw of them they were headed for Sixth Avenue."

He paused and took a long puff at his cigarette.

"I am obliged to you, Tom," I said rather wearily, "but I'd like to know what the mischief they were after. They

had good stuff, and oriental rugs and laces are too valuable for ordinary burglars to throw around."

Tom laid down his cigarette and looked at me.

"They didn't leave any rug," he said. "One of them snatched it off the bundle before he ran. Do you know what was inside?"

"How the deuce should I?" I asked. "The family silver, I suppose."

"No," said Tom deliberately. "It was Miss Revere."

"What!" I was on my feet in a second. "Doris! Where is she? What do you mean?"

"Now, now—easy does it." Rawlins blocked my way to the door. "She's all right. Mrs. Courland's looking after her. They gave her the same dope they gave you, I guess. for she lay like a log on the floor and her face was like chalk."

I brushed him to one side and rushed up-stairs. At the door of my ward's room I encountered Mrs. John. It is only charitable to suppose that the occurrence of the afternoon had upset that lady's nerves, for her manner was distinctly rude.

"Go away," she said acidly. "Go away, and don't make such a clatter about it."

"Where is Doris?" I demanded.

"In her room, resting—and small thanks to you for bringing a pack of ruffians into the house and then leaving the child alone with them."

"I left her with you," I retorted, somewhat taken aback by this unexpected assault.

"And you thought I was never to stir out of the room again, I suppose. That villain, the lace man, said he wanted some pins, and I went to get them for him. I wasn't away a minute, but when I returned Doris was gone and all the drawers of the bureau pulled out and emptied. Anything might have happened to the girl while you were idling about in the smoking-room."

Deeming it rather worse than useless to attempt to reason with my incensed cousin, I returned to Rawlins, satisfied that Doris had suffered no serious injury.

Tom had employed the interval in adjusting his cravat, and now, restored more nearly to his normal appearance,

was gazing meditatively out of the window. He turned as I entered and regarded me with a puzzled air.

"What I want to know, Ronald," he said, "is why you are always in some kind of a muss. You go about fainting all over the shop in Paris and rooming with all sorts of queer ducks you don't say a word about, and here in New York you fight with diplomats, get drugged in your own house, Miss Revere kidnaped, and Heaven knows what else."

He stopped, more because he was out of breath than for any other reason, and I sank back on the lounge and gingerly felt my aching head.

"I don't know anything more than you do," I answered, "except that I certainly did not faint in Paris. But how did you know of the row with the Turk?"

"Oh, he came up to my mother looking a bit the worse for wear, soon after you left the grand party, and said he regretted that a violent headache compelled him to retire to his apartment. I asked him if he contracted it in the conservatory, and very politely brushed some dirt off his coat for him. He looked black as thunder at me, growling out something about insolent puppies—so I guessed you and he hadn't agreed very well."

Tom broke off with a chuckle, and drew out a fresh cigarette from his case.

"That reminds me," he went on. "What I came to see you about was that dinner dance at the country club on Staten Island. You and Miss Revere are going, I know, and I want you to let me take you down in the governor's automobile. I've borrowed it for the occasion."

Rawlins stopped to laugh again, before he continued:

"You mustn't go back on me now, for I got ginger blue from mother on your account. You see, old Kalat What's-his-name is still hanging round our house. He seemed so interested when I told the governor why I wanted the car that I suggested he had better come, too, and enjoy your society."

"Casar's ghost! I thought that man would have a stroke on the spot. He got a bright purple and just mouthed at me. Finally he managed to say that he took no pleasure whatsoever in Mr. Lampton's society. I told him that was his loss, not yours, and then things warmed up some."

"Afterward mother was quite severe with me. She said that she most emphatically would not permit her guests to be insulted in her house, and a whole lot of that sort of rot. But the governor does not like the Turk any more than I do, so he let me have the machine. Now, you'll come, won't you?"

"If Doris is well enough, we'll be delighted," I laughed, "and, as it's a week off, I fancy she will be. But I say, Tom, don't row any more with Kalat Bey or you'll have Mrs. Rawlins down on the whole lot of us."

"Oh, that's all right," said the young man. "What I say doesn't count, you know. And now, having rescued the Lampton household from battle, murder, and sudden death, I'll take my departure."

CHAPTER XII.

A TERRIFYING ADVENTURE.

LATE in the afternoon, just one week after Rawlins's timely arrival had thwarted the still inexplicable attempt to kidnap my ward, I walked into the drawing-room. Doris was there, gazing through the early winter night at the bright cross of the Judson Memorial, blazing high above the dark square.

I had expected to find her—in fact, I had come there to meet her—but I had not expected that my heart would leap as it did when I shut the door and saw the slender figure standing by the window.

She was dressed for the dinner dance to which Rawlins had promised to take us, dressed simply in white, and she wore her hair parted in the center, as it had been when I first saw her in the far-off convent. As she turned to greet me, the smile that always lurked in her dark eyes passed to her lips.

"I told you I'd be ready," she said. "And see—I've put on my necklace, for there will be no Kalat Bey to-night. Isn't it beautiful?"

I looked at the flower-like face before me and then at the great gems flashing with an evil light around her white throat, and I hated the gorgeous thing.

"Beautiful—yes," I said; "but a mystery, and I don't like mysteries."

The smile fled from her lips and eyes alike.

"I'm sorry," she said, turning back to the window. "for, you see, I'm all mystery myself."

"That's not fair," I cried, taking a step toward her. "You know what I mean. Before that beastly thing was found there was never a word between us. The first time you saw it you ran from me, and since then it's all been trouble and worry and mystery. Without that you are just Doris Revere, my ward, and I wouldn't give her up for a million necklaces."

Without looking at me, Doris raised her hands and unclasped the jewels from her neck.

"Take it, then," she said, holding it out. "I thought you'd like me to look as well as I could."

Like most men, I had no sooner got what I wanted than I was sorry for it. Something in her tone puzzled me. I could not understand it, only in some way I felt that I had grieved and disappointed her. The thought was not to be endured.

I took the necklace from her hand—none too gently, I fear—and bent to fasten it again around her throat.

"You will wear it," I said. "You will wear it to please me."

Her hair touched my face, her cheek was close to mine, and in that instant necklace, dance, my duty, and her position were swept from my mind. I only knew that I loved my ward, and that she should be my wife.

The priceless necklace dropped from my hand and blazed in unheeded splendor on the floor as I took Doris in my arms. For one second she lay quite still, her head thrown back, her white face pressed against my breast, her glorious eyes gazing straight upward into mine, until the black lashes fell as I kissed her for the first time.

For a second, I say, she remained motionless in my arms. Then her cheeks flamed with sudden color and she sprang erect, pushing me violently from her. A brief instant she confronted me, her slight form drawn to its full height, the black eyes afire with a light I had never seen. Suddenly her head drooped and I saw her lips quiver.

"Oh, Ronald, Ronald!" Her voice struck me like the wail of a lost soul. "Ronald, Ronald! It's all spoiled now!"

The pride that had braved me a moment before had vanished. In every line of the wilted little figure, her face covered by her hands, I saw despair itself. All the joy and laughter which had greeted me five minutes before I had killed. Now I stood like a murderer beside the soulless body of his victim.

In impotent wrath, I turned away and strode down the room, kicking vigorously at the smoldering fire as I passed. The sound of a sob came to me like the thrust of a dagger, and then there was silence.

For what seemed an eternity, I stood gazing into the black emptiness of a back yard—that forlorn wail hammering at my heart: "Ronald, Ronald! It's all spoiled now!"

What was spoiled? A flash of hope crossed my brain like lightning before the eyes. Clumsy, senseless fool that I had been! For all these months, I had faithfully and rigorously played the guardian. How was the girl to know that I loved her? It had been hard, and ever growing harder as my eyes were opened to the full glory of the treasure in my keeping, but, hitherto, I had done my duty. And, now, without one word of explanation, by a sudden fit of passion to drive her from my house! How was Doris to know that I was no scoundrel, availing himself of her helplessness?

I threw back my shoulders and wheeled about. At the far end of the room, her brow resting on a table, her arms stretched out upon it in front of her was Doris. At my approach she raised her head and looked at me, her face deadly pale and in her eyes the same despair that I had heard in her voice. I winced with pain at the sight, and stood humbly before her.

"Doris," I began, and then the door opened.

"Mr. Rawlins is here, sir," announced the maid, "and he says you're late already."

"Tell the fool to wait," I snapped.

In my mind is an indistinct recollection of a bewildered face in the doorway, mouth and eyes wide open with astonishment, but the door closed and I do

not doubt that poor Tom received some sort of a decent message. Certainly he never showed resentment.

"Doris," I began again, "I have to ask your pardon, but I cannot say I am sorry. I cannot hide the truth longer. I love you. Doris—I love you. You have been my ward. I want you to be my wife."

I paused, for her face was turned from me and she was studying once more the lights of the cold Square. At the thought of what I was about to lose, my heart stopped, but I struggled on as steadily as I could.

"I shall go away to-morrow. In a week I shall return for my answer. Only remember, if"—the words choked me as I strove to utter them—"if you do not care for me, you are still my ward. Your place is still here. I shall go—not you."

I stopped abruptly, too racked by suspense to care how badly I had spoken. Silence fell upon the drawing-room, broken only by the crackling of the fire. How long I stood waiting by the table, my eyes fixed on Doris as she sat motionless, gazing through the window, I cannot even guess.

At last she moved. Pushing back her chair, she slowly rose to her feet and faced me.

"Ronald!" was all she said.

It was enough. One glimpse of her face, one look into her eyes had given me her answer. I waited for no more. For the second time I took her in my embrace, for the second time our lips met.

Her arms were still round my neck when Rawlins's voice sounded in the hall:

"I say, I'm not going to wait out here in this confounded hall any longer. What are you doing in there such a deuce of a while, anyway? I'm coming in to see."

We had barely time to spring apart before the door opened and Tom appeared, apparently convinced that he was the most welcome of visitors. Doris beamed upon him.

"Just a minute, Mr. Rawlins." She picked the necklace from the floor, where I had dropped it and handed it to me. "Won't you fasten this, Ronald! I expect something nicer, soon, but in the meantime this will have to do."

Tom gaped at the great jewels.

"That's nice enough, I should think," he said. "In the meantime, I can tell you we are mighty late."

We were far later for that dinner than Tom expected—so late in fact, that we never reached it. With grave doubts as to the propriety of the proceeding, Mrs. Courland had yielded to a severe headache and consented that Doris should go without her.

Although I had no cause to wish the worthy lady harm, I felt grateful to that headache, as we bundled into the tonneau of the big car. I knew by experience the futility of any attempt to hoodwink Mrs. John, and I had no wish at that moment to subject my new-found happiness to her critical examination.

As it chanced, however, even her keen eye would not have had time to detect anything suspicious about the silence in which Doris and I started on our journey. Not daring even to glance at Doris, as she sat, wrapped in furs, by my side, I stared past Rawlins into the night in bewildered contemplation of my supreme future.

Then, as the machine gathered speed on its way to Broadway, my eyes fell upon a group of push-cart men gathered at the corner of University Place, and because my happiness was too great a thing for my brain to grasp at once, it fell to wondering idly why those poor devils chose to stand aimlessly about in the cold, and whether they had no homes of their own in which to seek refuge.

We were close upon them when one detached himself from the group. Trundling his cart in front of him, he started to cross Waverley Place in front of us. Although at best it would have been a close shave, the chauffeur's quick eye told him that there was no absolute need to slacken speed, and he contented himself with a vigorous blast of the horn.

It fell upon ears deaf beyond imagining. Possessed, apparently, by a sudden fit of madness, the pedler stopped dead in the middle of the street. Turning his back upon the advancing car, he proceeded to shout some unintelligible gibberish to his companions.

With a cry of warning, I half rose from my seat. It was too late. I heard the chauffeur swear once, felt the breakers jammed on, and then Doris, Rawlins,

and I were heaped together in the bottom of the tonneau. From ahead came the crash of splintering wood, from the corner a chorus of wild yells.

Out of the tangle of fur-ropes, I struggled to my feet as best I could and looked about me. The street was strewn with the wreckage of the pedler's stock in trade. From the park benches and sheltered archways had come that mysterious army of vagrants ever lurking about the square. Like vultures they had scented their prey and were now squabbling over the harvest of apples and oranges, dates and grapes, flung out before them.

But there was something more serious before us than this horde of hungry unfortunates. About the chauffeur clamored the group of push-cart men, headed by the fellow whose cart we had wrecked. One of them struck wildly at our driver, and I fancied I caught, in the light of the street light, the flash of a knife.

My eye took in the situation in an instant.

"Trouble, Tom!" I cried, and then I turned to Doris.

She was not hurt, but she, too, had seen and understood, and she clung to me in silent alarm. I snatched up a robe and flung it hastily about her, for the shock had loosed her wraps and the necklace was flashing forth the story of its wealth to all the starving eyes about us.

There was little time to care for Doris. Even as I leaned over her, a fist struck at me. There was no doubt about it—the uproar was becoming ominous.

The pedlers were yelping like wolves about the chauffeur, and already I had heard a stone whiz past my ear. Once let the ever-increasing throng about us conceive the notion that it was a child and not a cart that we had run down, and no one could tell what might happen.

With the keen eye of a general Rawlins appraised the situation. Leaping out of the car, he headed straight for the leader of the vendors. The fellow was on the hub of the front wheel, striking at the terrified chauffeur with a stick at least two feet too short to be of effect. I saw Tom's fist shoot out. It landed on the man's chest, a harmless enough blow under ordinary circumstances, but in this case powerful enough. The man

went over backward, striking the asphalt so hard that he lay quite still in front of the machine.

As a strategic diversion in aid of the hard-pressed chauffeur, Tom's sally was a brilliant success. As one person, the whole gang turned upon him.

This time the flash of steel was unmistakable. The peckers appeared to be in the grip of unreasoning fury, and I knew that in the Levant, from where these hotheads came, a man's life was of little account.

Since the night in Paris, when I had been fortunate enough to rescue Michael Kara, I had never been abroad in the evening without the loaded night-stick my uncle had bequeathed me. Now, with the stick in my hand, I jumped to Tom's side.

The boy was fighting like a demon. For all their knives, the crew about me gave way before him, preferring to wait a chance for a blow in the back rather than face his driving fists. The chance might come at any minute. A red stain on Rawlins's shirt-front told me that at least one knife had found its mark.

The leather-capped steel top of my stick fell upon the nearest head, and it went down without a sound. Before a wide-armed sweep or two of my formidable weapon, the rest of the gang shrank back, and Tom and I found ourselves at peace in the center of a throng of intensely interested and worthless spectators.

A second later, above the heads of the gaping vagrants, I saw the caps of a pair of belated policemen. Their clubs made short work of the crowd, and then they confronted us.

"What's all this?" demanded one. Apparently, in the eyes of this guardian of the law, it was a serious crime to be attacked in the streets. "Who hit this fellow?" He pointed at the prostrate figure of the man that I had knocked down.

"I hit him," I replied, "and just in time, too. I want him arrested for stabbing my friend here. Are you hurt, Tom?"

The officer scowled at me.

"I'll attend to my business, young fellow. Don't you—"

"You attend to it badly, then," I interrupted, thoroughly enraged at the man's insolence, "and you took your time about coming. The commissioner will hear of this."

It was about as stupid a thing as I could well have said. I learned afterward that the man had been having a thoroughly enjoyable time in the back room of the saloon whose lights shone like great eyes across the square when his attention was at last called to the uproar on his post. Now, internally alarmed at the possible consequences, he decided that if complaints were to be made, he would at least get the start.

He raised his club and shook it at me.

"The sergeant will hear of it first, I guess," he growled. "I am going to run the whole lot of you in for disorderly conduct. Better ring for an ambulance for that fellow, Joe. I'll take a nice little ride to the station in my lord's automobile. Step lively now."

In disgust, I turned to explain to Doris. Huddled on the front seat was the trembling fur-robed figure of the chauffeur. Behind him yawned an empty tonneau.

I sprang to the side of the car. Half crazy with fear, I threw out the robes in the wild hope that she had taken refuge under them. Of my ward there was no sign.

"Doris! Doris!" I shouted. "Doris! Doris!"

The black night gave me back no answer but the distant rumble of an Elevated train and the sound of many footsteps on the pavements of Washington Square.

(To be continued.)

DESTINY.

As hidden springs afar in woodlands deep
Find through rough paths their certain seaward way,
So—though the years are long, the journey far—
I know that Thou and I shall meet some day.

Arthur Wallace Peach.

RED HATE.

BY R. J. PEARSALL, U.S.M.C.

A SHORT STORY.



WE had shipped together at St. Louis, and had been bunkies ever since; so, naturally, I knew more about it than any one else. Indeed, I may be said to have been the only outsider that knew anything about it at all. Usually we enlisted men are not at all slow to express our opinion of an officer—that is, among ourselves—especially if that opinion be an unfavorable one, and the officer a shave-tail. But death itself couldn't have been more silent than was John Emmett, to all but me.

In the first place Emmett shouldn't have come into the service. A man of his make-up has no business there. He was too high-strung; things that a soldier has to bear every day he never could get used to. He electrified the whole post at Mare Island, while still a recruit, by quite coolly and deliberately knocking down a corporal who mingled profane abuse with his instruction of the manual of arms.

For that he got ten days in double irons. But that doesn't matter. The point is that he would have done it just as coolly and deliberately if he had known that he would get a hundred. High-tempered? No, I wouldn't say that. I couldn't imagine him losing his temper. I couldn't imagine him quarreling with a man who had wronged him. But I could imagine him shooting that man—dead.

I saw it begin the day we were turned to duty in Olongapo, Zambales. Emmett was number four of the first squad, I was number one of the second; so, when we formed in company front for inspection of arms, I stood next to him.

Second Lieutenant Martin had the front rank. Emmett's elbow touched my own, and, when Mr. Martin stepped

in front of him to take his gun, I felt it quiver. When the officer had passed I stole a hasty look at him, and I thought he had paled. When he had struck the corporal at Mare Island he had been white as a sheet.

That afternoon the man in the bunk next mine was transferred out of the company, and Emmett took advantage of the vacancy to move over. We naturally got to talking about our new surroundings. The company commander, Captain Smith, was mentioned. Emmett expressed his approval of him; I agreed. Then I said something about Lieutenant Martin.

"I don't like him," said Emmett, after a moment's pause.

"I thought he seemed all right," I returned.

Emmett's mouth closed grimly.

"It's hot," he said. He got up and removed his khaki shirt and trousers and sprawled on his bunk in his underclothing, six feet of magnificent bone and muscle.

"I hate him," he said in a low voice, but with conviction, "and always shall."

I could see no reason for his attitude. My one glance at Martin had shown me nothing distasteful. He was of medium height, slender, well set-up, distinctly good-looking in an aristocratic sort of way. He was imperious of disposition—I could tell that from the lift of his head and the ring of his voice; but he looked like a good soldier and a good officer. I had made up my mind to like him, and I did like him to the end. But in spite of that and of Emmett's manifest fault, my sympathies were with the latter.

I remember well their first exchange of words. On the second day, at review and inspection, Emmett inadvertently followed an old custom and, at "Open chambers," opened his magazine also.

Mr. Martin stopped in front of him.

"Why do you do that?" he asked.

"I was taught to do it in Brooklyn, sir," Emmett answered.

In the words there was nothing. But the tones of the men startled me, like the first rattle of skirmishers along a battle front. I knew that the officer had recognized and returned the feeling of the man in the ranks. And this feeling, causeless—if you call that causeless which springs from the very root of things—grew under the hot sun of the Philippines, which inflames the passions and dries up the patience of the white man, until it became hate, unreasoning, implacable, primordial.

I report word for word a conversation I had with Emmett some six months ago after we landed. Much of it I could not understand; cannot now. One afternoon, when we were both off guard, after liberty call had sounded, I proposed a walk, and Emmett indifferently assented. We went out through the native village, across the red bridge, and struck out over the trail to the south.

Once out of sight of the garrison, Emmett's apathy left him. He strode on furiously, as if trying to tire himself out. He did tire *me* out; and when at last he paused, I threw myself down upon the grass, breathless.

"Have mercy on a fellow, with those long legs," I pleaded. "It's a pity you weren't out here for the Stotzenberg hike, if that's the way you go."

"It's a blame good thing I wasn't."

"Why?"

"Why! Do you suppose I'd have done it? Do you suppose that because some high mogul wanted to break a record I'd have tramped through this country sixty miles in two days, with a blanket-roll on my back? Not me. They could have locked me up. I wouldn't have pretended to try. And the officers riding ahead in carabao-carts!"

"Some of the officers hiked with the men! Our C. C. did, and so did Martin."

The remark was an unfortunate one. Emmett relapsed into gloomy thought. I lay idly, throwing stones over the steep cliff into the sea.

"I wish we had that hike over again to-morrow!" he broke out. "To Stot-

zenberg—and farther. A hundred miles—to walk till we dropped. I'd like to wear him out, mile by mile, step by step, and then when he fell to stand over him and laugh at him."

I looked at Emmett, fascinated and half afraid to speak.

"I may be going mad," he resumed. "I think I am. I hope I am. I'd like to go mad, and some day when he stands in front of me to see if I keep my gun and my clothes and my face—by Heaven, *my face*—clean," his voice rose into a positive shriek. "I'd like to jump on him and strangle him to death. I'd do it. Once I got hold of his throat the whole company couldn't pull me off."

It seemed to me that there was the light of insanity in his eyes already. I tried to reason with him.

"Why, John. I don't see—he never did anything—"

"Oh, I know he didn't. You don't understand. Nobody understands but he and I. *He* does. But you're the only man I can talk to, and I've got to talk to somebody. It was born in both of us, I guess. I can't help it. I wouldn't if I could. Can you help hating a rattle-snake?"

II.

PURE luck gave me, of all the men of the garrison, a glimpse of the first working out of Emmett's hatred. It was a few nights after pay-day, and I had been down among the Japs, trying to get rid of my small store of pesos, and finding little difficulty. I was returning to quarters a little after midnight and, as I passed post number ten, I caught a glimpse of the sentry. He was walking from me, but it was moonlight, and I recognized Emmett.

I was about to speak to him, when I saw Lieutenant Martin coming up from the opposite direction. I don't know why I stopped, but I did, waiting in the shadow of the Post Exchange building. I heard the hail, "Halt, who's there?" and the reply, "Officer of the day." The officer was advanced, recognized, and saluted. He returned the salute and stood face to face with the sentry.

I couldn't hear what was said. I supposed—and still suppose—that Mr. Martin only asked Emmett the customary

questions. But, suddenly, Emmett's gun went clattering to the ground, and Emmett sprang upon the officer.

I was glued to the spot by a horror which can be understood only by a man who has served in the ranks and understands the gravity of the offense, which outweighs sometimes the killing of an ordinary man. I had no time to recover my wits, for the struggle ended almost as suddenly as it had begun. With a strength and cleverness for which I had not given him credit, the lieutenant slipped away from his assailant.

Springing back, his hand shot to his hip. With one and the same motion he loosened the flap of his holster and drew his revolver. He could easily have shot Emmett. But instead, his arm swung over the private's head, with the pistol held by the barrel. It fell, and Emmett fell, too, even as his fingers were closing on Mr. Martin's throat.

Peering from the shadows I saw the second lieutenant bend over the unconscious man. He felt of his heart and then of the wound on his head. Then he raised the muzzle of his revolver and fired into the air.

"Patrol, post number ten," he cried.

I heard the call repeated by sentry number nine and the corporal at the gate; I saw a party come running from the patrol-shack and another from the guard-house; I saw Emmett carried off in the direction of the sick-bay. But my recollection of these things is dim; Shave-tail Martin's words to the relief parties overshadowed everything else.

"Carry this man to the hospital," he commanded tersely. And then to the patrol sergeant: "I found him unconscious. He has been struck in the head by a blunt weapon and may be pretty badly hurt. It was probably a native."

Then followed directions as to the search for the criminal. But I could hear no more for wondering. My brain could hardly contain itself for the strangeness of the thing.

In a few days Emmett was out of the sick-bay, and in a week he was turned to duty, well as ever, physically. But mentally, he seemed changed. He was sullen and morose; he went for days without speaking, even to me. I thought I could read his emotions—the humiliation

of defeat, the agony of obligation to one whom he hated, blind resentment of the officer's use of the pistol after he had thrown away his own gun, a mad desire to again match his strength with that of his enemy and to overcome him in fair fight, limb to limb.

And, eternally aggravating all these, was the misery of constant subservience, of useless formalities and routines, and of an enforced subversion of self, which to a man like Emmett must have been the worst of torture.

I spent many hours in useless worrying over his attitude. For, although I could see no reason and no right in his hatred of Lieutenant Martin or in his attack, I still loved him. And I felt that there was something in the situation which I could not understand and, consequently, could not judge. The officer's action in shielding Emmett was past all explanation as well as past all rules of discipline. And I knew that, had it been any other man in the post, he would have been rotting in the brig in double irons.

The days and weeks passed and nothing happened. Emmett grew daily more moody and silent, and the atmosphere between the men more electric with hatred. Still, Mr. Martin was outwardly the same. I cannot remember his ever taking advantage of his position to treat Emmett unfairly. And, if I knew Emmett, this very fairness grated upon his spirit far more than any severity.

Along in May our company moved up to the Maquinaya rifle-range for target-practise. The range is only about four miles from Olongapo—it has to be that, or a stray bullet would wander into the garrison occasionally—and the men used to hike in over the trail to Olongapo once in a while on duty.

One day the top soldier sent Emmett in with an order for some mess supplies from the commissary. He was to remain in the garrison all night and hike back next day. In the morning the news was spread over camp that our second lieutenant was recalled to Olongapo. It was usual to send a boat over for officers; but Mr. Martin liked a hike, and he started over the trail about eight o'clock, with a canteen on his shoulder.

A little before supper Emmett came

back. I remember, when I saw him coming, a misgiving that he had met Lieutenant Martin seized upon me. And when I saw his face it changed into certainty. Something had happened. But what?

It was late in the evening. We wandered, by common consent, up the beach, away from the camp. We sat on a piece of driftwood, and he told me the story.

III.

"WELL, it is ended," he said. "And now I can't see why it should ever have begun. But we couldn't help it. He and I were born to hate each other. Why? God knows—maybe.

"I saw my chance in the post adjutant's office yesterday. When I went down to report there wasn't any one there, at first. And while I waited I saw a telegram lying on the desk. I read it before I knew. Then I read it again. It was from Martin, and it said that he would be in over the trail this morning.

"I pretty nearly dropped when I realized that. But I managed to hold myself together. And I was off early this morning and ready for him when he came.

"You know that place where the trail bends in close to the shore and there is a straight drop of a hundred feet down into the bay? Well, that was the place. It was high tide this morning and I knew that the water would carry away—anything that was thrown over the cliff.

"I lay there waiting for hours, with my hand on my gun. I thought he'd never come. But he did. He came along with that old swing of his, and liked to have stepped upon me before he saw me. When he did it never fazed him. He just stared in a cool sort of way and then stopped. He stood quiet, for I had him covered, and my hand was steady as a rock.

"'Well?' he said.

"'Well,' said I, 'unbuckle your belt and let it drop.'

"'And if I don't?'

"'I'll shoot you. If you do I'll give you a chance for your life.'

"He unbuckled the belt, and it and his revolver fell to the ground.

"'What do you want now?'

"'Turn your back,' I told him, 'and walk that way ten steps. Then stop.'

"'Shoot me, if you want to,' he said quietly. 'I'll turn my back on no man.'

"I told him it didn't matter, to back away, then, and when he had done it I picked up his revolver and threw it, with my own, far to one side.

"'We are equal now,' I said. 'Only one of us will leave here—maybe neither.'

"It seemed to me like the fight lasted hours. Maybe not. But we were well matched, which makes it better, doesn't it? What a fighter he was! But at last I got him. The bushes were turning round like whirligigs, and I breathed like a heaving horse, but I had him.

"He lay on his back, quiet, and I lay half across him, because that was the easiest way to hold him. When he came to, I was rested some. He tried to twist under me, but he couldn't; he was all in.

"I commenced to drag him toward the edge of the cliff. It was only a little way, but I had to stop and rest. I got him there, though. Then I bent over and looked at his eyes. Some way, they hurt me. There was no fear in them.

"'Do you know what I'm going to do?'

"'What you said, I suppose.' He almost whispered. 'Why do you wait?'

"There was no fear in the voice, either. I dragged him closer. I rolled him half-way over the edge so he could look down on the sharp rocks and deep water. The sun was shining, and there was a shark lying below in plain sight. I pulled him back again. Jim, he wasn't afraid yet. I could see it."

"Go on, man. What did you do?'"

"What could I do? I told you he wasn't afraid."

"You let him go."

"I carried him into Olongapo on my shoulders. Then I went to the guard-house and gave myself up."

"But—"

"Yes, I'm here. He denied everything I had said. He told them he'd been attacked by a party of gugus and I rescued him. And what he said went. The doctor said my head was affected by the blow I got a month ago. But I think he knows better."

"And—and you and Mr. Martin?'"

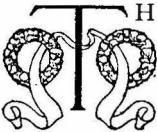
"Jim—I'd die for that man."

And afterward, in a brush with the Moros, he came close to proving it.

A MIRACLE OF LOVE.

BY WILLIAM L. SHANNON.

A SHORT STORY.

 HE big, kindly man, resting a bronzed elbow on the cloth, glanced wistfully across the breakfast-table at his wife.

"It's a charm I'm lookin' for, betune this sunup an' sunset, Oonagh, darlin'." he said, putting down the saucer and wiping his mouth on the back of his brawny fist. "seein' we're three days married now."

Oonagh, on the other side, a slim, pretty girl, with wistful blue eyes, answered softly as she sank her head:

"Three days, Jerry. An' what charm is it you're expectin'?"

Jerry eyed her fondly. "Not expectin'," he amended. "just hopin'!"

The girl flushed and threw a half-frightened glance at him.

"Hopin' for what?" she asked with a slight quaver in her voice.

Before replying, Jerry reached a big fist across the table and gently took Oonagh's hard little hand, that had been nervously crumbing a bit of bread on the red-checked cloth.

"It's hopin' I am, mavourneen." the words were vibrant with eager longing, "that to-day I'll be havin' a kiss from you—of your own free will entirely."

Oonagh winced, and the pink went out of her cheek.

"Oh!" she moaned, her lips quivering, her eyes brimmed with tears. "not yet, Jerry, not yet!"

"Why, Oonagh, darlin'." he urged, the yearning still in his eyes, though the joy had died out of his face. "shure there ain't no harm in kissin', now that you're my wife!"

"I'm knowin' that," she groaned, toying miserably with her knife; "but I must—get used to you, Jerry!"

A brief silence followed. Pain and disappointment lined Jerry's countenance as he drew his hand away from Oonagh, who hid her face in her arms and wept.

"Is it as bad as that?" the man muttered at length, the words rolling out slowly, heavily.

The sorrow in his voice hushed Oonagh's wo.

"I told you, Jerry," she said after a minute, looking up at him, and deep sympathy was mingled with the sadness in her eyes—"I told you before the weddin' that I didn't love you. An' when Larry said I was to marry you, Jerry, I told him, too."

"I know," he answered, "an' it's not that I'm thinkin' you deceived me, Oonagh—but I hoped it would be different. For more than a year an' a half I was lovin' you above my own soul. An' I wanted you so bad, mavourneen, that, whin your brother said it was you that was willin' to have me, I couldn't wait for you to love me. An' I took you, Oonagh, trustin' that by kindness an' my love, that's never been given to another, I'd make you fond of me, Oonagh, dear, so that some day we would be happier than all the folks in Ireland. But if it's that, after almost two years of courtin' you, and three days of married life, that you feel that you must get used to me, Oonagh—ah!" he cried out bitterly, his voice breaking, "Heaven pity the two of us!"

Oonagh just stared before her, her hands clutched in her lap, while Jerry, pushing back his chair, got up unsteadily from the table and took his hat from a peg in the kitchen wall.

Pulling it on, he lifted his shovel from the corner and opened the door. Half-way out, he turned back to Oonagh.

"Now, don't be workin' yourself to death, dear," he warned her; "an' run out an' see the neighbors, an' forgit this unwholesome talk we've had."

II.

WHEN he had gone she wept for a few minutes, then dried her eyes and brooded. Rising at length, she mechanically cleared off the table and washed the few dishes they had used at breakfast. After that a few dexterous changes had almost ordered the little room, when a loud rap sounded on the door.

Though Oonagh started at the summons, she did not answer it at once. Instead, she hurriedly doffed her apron and smoothed the gingham dress, set snugly to her body. Her red eyes had to be rubbed, and her disordered hair tidied. The neighbors were not to think that she had quarreled with Jerry.

Her preparations finished, she opened the door. A tall, dark, handsome young fellow, abnormally pale and thin, whose tight black suit served but to emphasize his lankness, faced her on the threshold. His sunken eyes sparkled with joy at sight of her.

"Oonagh!" he exclaimed. "My darling!"

She was as pale as the man when she gasped, "Patrick!" and backed out of his reach as he tried to catch her in his arms.

"What?" he protested, remarking her evasion. "An' is this the greetin' you have for me after these two long years?"

"It's glad I am to see you, Patrick—very glad!" she faltered, and strove to smile the welcome she dared not offer.

"Shure, I know it," he agreed, glad to interpret her manner favorably. "It's near killed you are with the surprise, an' it's a brute I am, dear, not to send you a word of my comin'. Yet I was that anxious to put eyes on you that no messenger could have beat me to Roscommon after I reached Dublin. But now, Oonagh, shure there must be a kiss for the wanderer come back!"

Again the girl moved out of his reach. While he spoke her face, even her lips, had grown chalk-white.

"It's too late, Patrick. I'm married!" she gulped, and fled, weeping, into the house.

Like a man stunned by a club, Patrick followed her into the little sitting-room, where, face-down on a sofa, she was sobbing out her grief.

He took her hand in his slim fingers and soothed her softly, and begged her to tell him all—to come, darling, and tell him all.

"Oh, Patrick!" she burst out at length. "Why didn't you write. It was for my not knowin' of you that I've a husband now!"

Patrick's eyes were moist; and he coughed before he spoke:

"But what made you hurry so, Oonagh, darlin'?" There was mild complaint and deep sorrow in his voice. "I would have waited for you for a thousand years. Shure, after the words we spoke, before my sailin' to America—after the ring I gave you, an' the strength, as you said, of your love for me, it's never this that I was expectin', at all, at all. Indeed, dear—don't think me reproachin' you—but it's believin' I was that if I came back in my age, my old sweetheart would still be here waitin' me!"

"I couldn't help it," she wailed, wringing her hands; "my brother Larry made me. What could I do? He's master here since mother an' father's gone; an' he was set on my marryin' Jerry. Father Ryan, too, advised me for it—an' I couldn't find you, Patrick! I didn't know but that you was dead. Oh!" she cried. "you should have wrote—you should have wrote!"

"Shure, Oonagh, don't you know I can't write a stroke? An' what I had for your ears was not for another's hand to pen."

He strode to the window and gazed out over the swelling farm-lands, dotted with smoke-crested cottages and a castellated abbey in silhouette against the sky.

III.

THE first keen pang of the meeting had by now worn dull, and much-calmed Oonagh rose and approached Patrick. She put her hand on his.

"We'll be dear friends still, Patrick," she pleaded wistfully, "sha'n't we? An' we'll tell Jerry everything—how we were to marry and loved each other, Patrick. He ought to know."

"Shurely." Patrick gazed down at Oonagh only swiftly to turn his head away. "'Tis your goodness," he sighed, "that makes the losin' of you hurt so!"

"No—no, Patrick. Don't! It's killin' me to hear you talk so!" She swallowed hard for a minute, then: "Tell me about America an' the luck you've had."

"Luck!" Patrick echoed with a mirthless laugh, continuing to stare out the window. "What luck is luck, Oonagh, seem' that I'm unlucky here!" Two tears trickled down his white cheeks, and he coughed again.

"Don't, Patrick!" the girl gasped. "You're stabbin' my heart with this sorrow!"

"It's a beast I am, Oonagh, darlin'." Patrick said, facing her, "to grieve you so. It's that sad I am an' disappointed, I'm beyond myself. I can't think but of you, for all my tryin'! Shure, dear, it's the habit I fell in of thinkin' of you while I was workin' in America. The thought gave me strength for double work, I was that anxious for the money to bring you over to the little cottage, where you an' me an' the childer was to be so happy the livelong day!"

"An' now it's all over," Oonagh broke out, "an' all because of me!" She buried her face in Patrick's arm, and he stroked her hair as he would have stroked a child's.

"Not at all, at all!" he soothed, trying to brighten his voice. "Shure, 'tis not for the weddin', dear, that I've come back."

Oonagh looked up bewildered, and her gaze asked, "Why?"

"Arrah, it's only you, dear, that I have in all the world; 'tis the *Wanderin' Jew* I am, it is—an' that's why I come back. I was that lonesome an' so craved to hear you speak an' see you near me, that I returned, trustin' that yoursel' an' your brother would let me live with you!"

"To live with us!" The girl stared at him in wide-eyed wonder. "I don't understand you, Patrick."

"'Tis easy understandin'. If you was free, darlin', I couldn't marry you, for—now, dear, don't be startin' at the tale—the consumption's-got me from the work in the mills. That's why I'm here to

have you near me for the short time. An' it's the killin' of this last hope, mavourneen, that I'm saddened at your marryin'!" His utterance grew husky.

In a surge of grief he grabbed the girl and pressed her to him wildly.

"Oonagh!"

IV.

BOTH started. Pale as death, Jerry stood in the doorway, looking at his wife hugged to Patrick's breast.

Slowly, stupidly, she freed herself from the arms of Patrick, who walked to the window and coughed. Jerry followed him and put his hand on the consumptive's shoulder. Twice he tried to speak before a sound came.

"Patrick—"

"Don't be thinkin' wrong of Oonagh," the sick man interjected; "it's only a corpse—"

"Wusha!" Jerry broke in, pressing Patrick's shoulder. "I'm thinkin' only good of the two of you. I heard all you said—"

"Jerry," Oonagh put in, "to listen at the wall!"

"No—no, Oonagh," the husband explained, "I come back fur my pick an' dared not move fur the fear of disturbin' you."

Oonagh said not a word, but sat down and wept. Patrick, breathing in short gasps, resumed his survey of the landscape from the window. With an unsteady hand, Jerry again pressed his shoulder.

"Patrick, I want you to stay an' live with me an' Oonagh. 'Twill be the pleasure of us all." The words rolled out painfully. "An' it's sorry I am—for Oonagh's sake—that we are married; for I love her, Patrick—I love her that well to want her happy!"

Abruptly he thrust his hands into his pockets and strode out into the kitchen.

Dumfounded Oonagh heard him, hardly grasping what he meant. When the truth came to her she rushed into the kitchen after Jerry, and found him seated at a window, his face clasped in his hands and silent sobs racking his body.

She threw herself on her knees beside him, crying. "Jerry, darlin'!" and wound her arms round his neck when he looked up.

"Oonagh!" he breathed, amazed.

"Why are you cryin', my dear?" Jerry caught her to his breast.

"Oh," he moaned, "it's that you have so much love, Oonagh—an' yet no bit for me!" Convulsively he hid his face in her hair.

"Darlin'," she whispered, "I do love you! How can I help it with your big heart?"

Jerry stared at her with doubt wavering in his eyes.

"You're flatterin', Oonagh," he sighed at last; "I'm afraid you're flatterin'!"

"Shure, I'm not!" she protested. "An' here's the proof of it."

She took his head between her hands and kissed him twice.

"This is my proof. It's your wife I am now, an' Patrick's nurse."

Again she was snatched into Jerry's hungry arms, and heard him mutter in choked tones:

"'Tis the charm come true."

THE CLEVERNESS OF CARDILLAC.*

BY ROBERT BARR,

Author of "A Woman Intervenes," "Tekla," "Young Lord Stranleigh," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

VICTOR DE CARDILLAC comes to Paris, bearing a letter from Charles d'Albert de Luynes, favorite and master of the young King Louis XIII. Cardillac meets Tresor, confidential servant of De Luynes, who tells Cardillac the letter is a hoax. Tresor offers Cardillac a chance to meet De Luynes. Cardillac goes to a rear gate of the palace, whence, as specified, a man, supposedly De Luynes, comes forth. Cardillac provokes him to a duel and is wounded. He discovers that his antagonist is not De Luynes, but the Duc de Montreuil.

The duke and Cardillac are suddenly surrounded by the guard. The duke pretends that Cardillac has been wounded by footpads. He invites both Cardillac and the sergeant to his house; and wheedles from the sergeant a *lettre de cachet* signed by the king. Then the duke proposes to furnish Cardillac with funds, if Cardillac will undertake to recover his kidnapped daughter Thérèse, who is detained in a royal convent.

Cardillac gets into the convent by using the *lettre de cachet*, but the abbess divines his ruse. He is forced to flee to avoid arrest. In his flight he surprises a girl who has been eavesdropping. She tells him she is Marie Duchamps, waiting maid to Mlle. de Montreuil, and that *mademoiselle* wishes him to escort her to Blois to take service with the queen.

They escape from the convent and, traversing the forest, lose their way. While resting near the main road, they hear the password given to the patrol by two horsemen, who discuss Cardillac's escape and say that the roads to Blois are being searched for him. Marie makes known her intention of going to Blois alone. Cardillac objects. She threatens him with a dagger. She discovers he is wounded. He faints, and she sees the patrol approaching. She declares the wounded man is her husband whom she has struck with a dagger because he attempted to beat her. The patrol lets them pass, and they cross the Loire to Montrichard, where they are beyond pursuit. Cardillac gets food from his saddle-bags, and they take their meal together in the moonlight under the trees.

CHAPTER XXI.

AVOWALS AND ADVICE.

BUT you met me in a convent, and that, one might think, should have given an impetus to your first resolution."

"Did you ever meditate upon taking the veil, Marie?"

"Often; but lately I have changed my mind."

"Ah," cried the young man with eagerness, "why was that?"

"Because," replied the girl languidly, "my recent experience of the cloisters shows that they are no protection against man. He breaks in and steals. He grasps one by the wrist, he shakes one by the shoulders, storms, threatens, makes

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for October, 1908.

uncomplimentary remarks; or, worse still, tries flattery. No, the convent was a disappointment toward the last."

"Well, Marie," demurred Cardillac, "you were eager enough to leave it."

"I was commanded by a woman and coerced by a man, so what could a poor, defenseless creature like myself do?"

"Do? Why, she could revenge herself on the man afterward; threaten him with her stiletto, and torment him with a thousand uncertainties that sting worse than the sharpest steel. Nevertheless, I am sorry I treated you roughly, Marie, and I hope you will forgive me."

"Oh, I have forgiven you long since, *monsieur*. You did nothing very drastic after all, but for an indolent man you seemed to be in a tremendous hurry. I never saw one so breathless before. First, you tumbled over me at the door; then, as I suspect, went headlong across the well-curb, and at last came heedlessly down that rope to the discomfiture of your wound, so now it is amusing to hear you speak of your love of leisure."

"You find nothing but comicality in my conversation, perhaps, *mademoiselle*," complained Cardillac.

"Be assured you have been very entertaining, *monsieur*. I never before spent so interesting an evening in my life. I am sure no companion of yours could justly complain of *ennui*."

"Are you ever serious, Marie?"

"Oh, very often, *monsieur*; sometimes intensely serious."

"It is possible, *mademoiselle*, that you find it difficult to take me seriously."

The girl pondered over this remark, and seemed half asleep, as he watched her closely. At last she said:

"I should be very unfair if I did not take you seriously now. At the request of the Duc de Montreuil, you undertook a task of extreme difficulty, which you have carried out with a persistence that is marvelous. You have shown determination, bravery, and resource, and even at the last moment you snatched victory from defeat."

"Ah, yes, but I did not snatch *mademoiselle* from the convent."

The girl, with half-opened eyes, looked quizzically across at him.

"Do you so bitterly regret that *mademoiselle* is not here, *monsieur*?"

Cardillac sat up suddenly.

"Now and then, Marie, you say something that illuminates my mind as a torch lights up a dark chamber. Disappointed as I was at missing *mademoiselle*, I am now thrilled with a holy joy that she is absent; that there is no one here but yourself and myself."

"Am I to take that as a personal compliment, *monsieur*? Surely the company of such as I cannot be held the equivalent of a great lady's society?"

"Yes, Marie, it can. I'd rather be here alone with you than share the comradeship of Mlle. de Montreuil."

"You astonish me, *monsieur*. If what you say is true, then there is nothing in that distinction of class upon which you insisted so strongly when we first became acquainted. Respect for caste has been ingrained in me ever since I could walk, but you teach me that I am still very young, with many vital points of life yet to be unfolded to me."

"Marie, I speak with deep regard and a great respect for you when I say that *mademoiselle* would not have done what you did to save my life. I should like to put my admiration into words; yet, unskilled as I am in language, I venture this far, trusting that you may believe in the sincerity of my gratitude."

Marie's eyes were no longer visible to him: she spoke in a whisper that only the deep silence of the forest rendered audible.

"M. de Cardillac, you are unjust to *mademoiselle*. Believe me, that whatever I did to save a friend, Mlle. Thérèse de Montreuil would have done. I thank you for your appreciation, and we must never speak of this again."

"The subject is banished forever, Marie, and now let me say that I am most anxious to earn your approbation. The moment you are safe within the Château of Blois, I shall return to the convent at Beaugency, and this time I shall not fail, for I am inspired by another thought than that of money. I shall lead *mademoiselle* in safety to her father. I shall refuse his thousand pistoles, but, being selfish, will come to you for my reward. Will you form such a compact with me, Marie?"

The girl looked quickly up at him, with alarm in her eyes.

"No, no," she said. "I would be madness; 'twould be suicide. All that district is alive with enemies searching for you. I cannot permit it; I will not permit it."

"My enemies!" cried Cardillac grandly, with a wave of his hand, "I shall brush aside. The only serious disadvantage of the task is that I may be compelled to make a night journey with *mademoiselle*, wishing all the time that you were in her stead."

"If you do not obey me," insisted the young lady, her former arrogance returning, "I shall never permit you to see me again."

"But—but think of that poor creature immured in such a grim prison. Think of her helpless and—"

"*Monsieur*, Mlle. de Montreuil remains where she is by her own desire. Your heedless intervention would frustrate all her plans."

"What are her plans?" demanded Cardillac, taken aback by her vehemence, yet flattered to think perhaps her motive was his own safety.

"It is not for me to disclose them without her permission, even if I knew what they are, which I neither admit nor deny."

"But my word is pledged to her father, Marie."

"Your anxiety on that point, *monsieur*, will be speedily resolved. All I ask is that you shall wait until you hear from the Duc de Montreuil himself. I bear a letter from his daughter which will be forwarded to him. There only needs to be added to this letter a statement of your whereabouts, when the duke will communicate with you, and I shall be surprised if you do not find him entirely of his daughter's mind. I may add that, although under the late régime the duke ruled France, *mademoiselle* rules the duke. You will be requested by the duke himself to forego any further efforts to release his daughter."

"You bear a letter from *mademoiselle* to her father? How can that be, Marie? The lady had no time to write more than that hurried scrawl which you gave to me on the high road."

Marie's reply showed that she was far from pleased at the doubt thrown upon her veracity.

"I told you before, *monsieur*, that you were longer cutting the rope than you imagined. The question is, are you or are you not going to obey me?"

"I shall obey you in all things, Marie."

"Then, why so many objections?"

"Because I regret that you take from me the one opportunity I possess of proving my devotion to you."

"Do you really desire to prove that?"

"Marie, you know I do."

"Then, instead of selfishly selecting your own path, why not act like a knight of olden time, and request the lady to present you with the opportunity presumably desired so much? It is possible she might be pleased, if asked to name an emprise dearer to her heart than the rescue of Mlle. de Montreuil, and there is a likelihood—although of that I cannot at the moment speak positively—that she may reward you suitably, if you are successful in your essay."

"Marie, name the adventure, and, always promising that the Duc de Montreuil releases me, I shall undertake it."

"*Monsieur*, you seem very desirous of flying to the aid of a young woman not yet twenty; one who is wealthy, said to be beautiful, and admittedly capricious."

"Marie," declared Cardillac earnestly, snapping his finger and thumb in the air, "I do not care that for Mlle. de Montreuil. It is only that my word is pledged to her father."

"Very well. Would it not be more chivalrous to assist an old woman who is in dire necessity, one imprisoned in a strong castle, and not in a convent; one not surrounded by nuns, but by ten thousand of the king's troops?"

"Oh, you mean the queen?"

"Yes, I mean the queen."

"But why are you so much interested in her majesty? I thought it was Mlle. de Montreuil herself who, according to what her father said, was absorbed in that enterprise. Are you so devoted to *mademoiselle* that you adopt every cause she favors?"

"Yes, *monsieur*. I am. She is tire-woman to the queen; I am tire-woman to her; therefore, you see, I am but two steps from the throne. *Mademoiselle* and I are equally faithful to Marie de Medicis."

"Then, Marie, the question is settled. The queen will leave Blois very shortly under my escort, and her ten thousand jailers may go hang."

Marie laughed quietly, but with a certain note of satisfaction.

"*Monsieur*, you are very confident."

"That is because the reward I promise myself is one very greatly desired by me."

"I make no doubt, *monsieur*, that your reward will be ample. I am sure that the Duc d'Epéron, the Duc de Montreuil, and all the wealthy adherents of the queen will make you a rich man if you are successful in your undertaking."

"Marie, that is unkind. The knights of old whom you mention did not work for a wage in gold, neither shall the chink of coin urge me on, but, rather, the notes of a woman's voice."

"I hope the woman will prove worthy of a sentiment so lofty. In these days of bribery it is refreshing to meet a man uninfluenced by cupidity. Now listen to one woman's voice, and pay heed to her recommendation. You must do nothing recklessly, nor in that haste which you so much deplored a while since. I counsel you to rest until your wound is completely healed. The farm of Maloche seems a little too near Blois to be a safe residence for you at the present moment."

"I advise, therefore, that you retire to Montrichard, and stop there until the hue and cry for you has ended. By that time your arm will be well again, and if I have succeeded in gaining admittance to the castle, I shall have become acquainted with the situation and the guards, and so be in a position to aid you: I inside the walls, and you without. Perhaps we could arrange a meeting now and then, either in the town of Blois or on the farm of Maloche, which is like to prove the safer spot. There I can inform you minutely of the dangers to be encountered, and, perhaps, may be able to furnish some hints of value."

"I see I am going to like this task," said Cardillac.

"I hope you will succeed in it, *monsieur*."

"Well, Marie, considering the warning I have given you, I am delighted to hear you express that hope."

"And now, *monsieur*, I think you are

forgetting your horse. He is looking yearningly toward the remnants of our bread."

Cardillac sprang to his feet, gave the horse another feed, then led him down to the margin of the river that he might drink. On his return he saw that Marie had laid her head upon the saddle, and was already sound asleep. She had drawn her own cloak round her shoulders, and in the dim light looked very young, almost babyish. Cardillac sat down with his back against the tree, but, drowsy as he was, the throbbing in his arm, which had swelled considerably, banished sleep; therefore, like the knight of old, he kept vigil.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FARM OF MALOCHE.

AT daybreak the pair on horseback came out upon the St. Aignan road, a short distance south of the farmhouse that was their destination. Maloche and his industrious family of young men and women were at their morning's work, when the old farmer was astonished to see Cardillac come riding into the courtyard with a comely young woman behind him. Maloche had heard nothing from this youth since he had stopped with them some months before *en route* for Paris, but the splendor of the lad's costume seemed to indicate that he had met prosperity in the great city.

It had been agreed between the two travelers that nothing should be said of their coming from Beaugency; and, indeed, their arrival from the south caused the farmer to believe that the young man had been visiting his own home, and was once more on the way to Paris. Cardillac did not dispel this illusion, and introduced Marie Duchamps as a friend of his family, who desired to take service with the queen.

Maloche, who drove daily into Blois with supplies for both château and garrison, said that it would be difficult for the girl to get such a place unless she were well recommended and her loyalty to the present régime fully established. To this Cardillac replied that he had been informed in Paris that all the queen's ladies in waiting, with one or

two exceptions, had been allowed to accompany her to Blois. This Maloche admitted was true. The queen had been permitted to choose such of her former adherents as she wished to have in attendance during her imprisonment; but a girl coming from the south, like Marie Duchamps, could not hope to enter this inner circle unless she were personally acquainted with the queen and her name submitted to the authorities in Paris.

Aside from the queen's personal body-guard, as one might term it, there were numerous other servants engaged who were selected because they were loyal to the king and unknown to the king's mother. They were chosen by the commander of the garrison, and it was well known that their presence was not primarily intended for the convenience of the queen; but rather that they were expected to spy upon her and all who belonged to her. A stranger might possibly gain admittance to this outer circle of service: but, as a rule, those in charge of the queen's safekeeping selected servants personally known to them. Maloche said that one of his own daughters was employed in the palace, and he met her nearly every day.

Phyllis Maloche did work that required strength rather than mentality; work that came easy to a stalwart country girl, but which a fragile creature like Marie Duchamps could not accomplish. Maloche seemed to think that Marie was herself too much like a lady to obtain a position as servant, but Cardillac assured him that in the higher branches of service were many girls of beauty and culture whose manners were quite equal to those of their mistresses. Maloche replied that he had heard such was the case, and added that the palace swarmed with servants of all grades; and that he did not doubt, if patience and a little common sense were used, a place might be found entirely to the satisfaction of Marie Duchamps. But being a practical, common-sense man himself, he stated quite emphatically that it would be futile for Marie to enter Blois alone and—without recommendation that could bear the strictest scrutiny—expect to gain admittance even to the precincts of the palace.

If, then, she would rest content at the farm for some days, he would make inquiries of his daughter that very morning, learn what positions were vacant, and then set about getting one suitable for Marie. It was quite possible, he said, that a girl so pretty and engaging might attract the attention of the queen herself. But if she were thus singled out by such high favor, and if the authorities sanctioned the selection, Marie would then herself become a prisoner, for none of the queen's coterie was allowed outside the palace. Indeed, they were not suffered to leave the first floor, where the queen's apartments were situated in the wing of Francis I; whereas, if Marie got a situation among the ordinary servants of the château, she would retain full liberty to come from castle to town—or even into the country without hindrance—unless she became suspected of carrying information, in which case her speedy dismissal took place.

Maloche had been told at Blois that emissaries of the Duc d'Epemon had time and again endeavored to establish communication with the queen; but these plans, he understood, had been discovered and frustrated, and it was believed that several executions had taken place, the victims being spies caught red-handed. All this information had been given by Maloche to Cardillac in conversation during the first morning of his stay. Marie had disappeared in company with one of Maloche's daughters, and the old farmer talked quite freely with his young friend.

Maloche was a typical peasant of his time; a grave, stalwart old man and an indefatigable worker, shrewd in making a bargain, greedy in the accumulation of money, living in the midst of plenty with great frugality, undisputed master of his own house, no member of his family daring to thwart him. For the nobility he possessed an inherited respect, and was flattered that a young scion of a noble house, like Cardillac, visited him now and then. Doubtless, the son of his former landlord was the more welcome in that he was lavish with his money when he had any, and during this last sojourn he seemed to be plentifully supplied with gold, which Maloche shared without troubling about its origin.

He supposed that, directly or indirectly, it came from the king, because when Cardillac, a few months before, had made the farm a point of call, the young man was then on his way to Paris with the avowed intention of entering the service of De Luynes, the new head of the state. Maloche took it for granted that every member of the aristocracy who went well recommended to Paris became rich, and Cardillac had flaunted an invitation from no less a personage than the prime minister himself; so it never occurred to the farmer that Cardillac had changed his colors, and was now an avowed partizan of the queen-mother and an enemy of her enemies, including her son, the king.

Like all agriculturists of that day, Maloche betrayed no interest in politics. All that he wished was to be left alone; and luck being his friend, he had chosen a farm most fortunately situated for his purposes. Less than a league south of Blois, the property was situated in that large wedge of country south of the Loire, which, by tacit consent of king's men and queen's men, was regarded as neutral territory.

Although small parties of either faction might traverse it, they did so peacefully; for if either side had invaded it with a large body of men, the other would be bound to counteract that move, and so there would be danger of a battle being precipitated that might deliver over the country to the horrors of civil war.

Briefly, the situation was this: Every day that De Luynes gained without a conflict was so much to the good; and as the eventless days went by, the king became more and more firmly seated on his throne. By a masterly arrangement of his forces De Luynes had checkmated the opposition. Although all France was in a state of tension, nevertheless the tension would relax rather than increase with time, because there were continual desertions from the queen's partizans to the party in actual power.

De Luynes counted on the almost universal desire of human nature to be on the side that was apparently winning, and the side *de facto* in office, and events were proving him right. But once allow the passions of battle free rein, let De

Luynes lose an important battle, and the whole situation would be in the melting-pot; a melting-pot heated on the red furnace of war.

On the other hand, the Duc d'Épernon, commander of the queen's forces, dare not risk a fight until he obtained possession of the queen, because any hostile move on his part might result in the instant execution of her majesty if De Luynes possessed the courage to commit such an act. De Luynes was as yet an unknown quantity, no man among the queen's forces being aware whether he was brave or the reverse, therefore, the strong force under the Duc d'Épernon lay for the moment nullified.

Thirty years before these events Europe had been given a drastic example of what a courageous monarch might do in similar circumstances, and Europe was thrilled with horror when the head of Mary, Queen of Scots, rolled bleeding to the dust. The results growing from this execution were such as to strengthen the hand of De Luynes, and render D'Épernon still more cautious. Although all Europe execrated the deed, it was now a matter of history that it had brought peace to the island, and sixteen years after the execution, Elizabeth died, admittedly the greatest monarch that ever sat on the English throne, and well-nigh mistress of the world.

Why should not the French king do what the English queen had done, and save his country from bloodshed by the sacrifice of one woman, whom at least half of France regarded as a foreigner and an attempted usurper of power that rightfully belonged to her son? Once Marie de Medicis was eliminated, all opposition to the new king must of necessity cease, for there would then be no center for the forces of an executed queen to rally round: thus two armies, nearly of equal strength, stood on the alert, neither daring to fire a shot.

But this balanced situation made the adventure of De Cardillac all the more exasperating to the authorities in Paris. He had done worse than win a battle: he had made De Luynes the laughing-stock of the country. All France was smiling in sympathy with the impetuous lad, who seemed to typify the dash, the bravery and the humor of his land.

The story of his exploits was permeating to the most remote districts, losing nothing as it traveled. It became known that for months he had waited day by day, with the utmost patience, in the public hall of De Luynes's own house, while that great man had never accorded him the favor of a word or an interview. The minions of De Luynes undertook to trap the guileless youth, but he baffled the police of Paris, supposed to be the most acute in the world, leaping, unscathed, out of the capital past all its guards, bringing with him the powerful noble De Luynes wished to hold in his clutch, fooled the king's army as he fooled the Parisian police, and actually entered the convent, under the support of a king's officer in uniform, while four of the king's soldiers were detailed for escort.

Defying alike those two almost omnipotent bodies, the church and state, he broke into the convent, barred his enemies out, and utterly disappeared with the girl who had been hostage for her father's good behavior, while her father had safely attained the impregnable fortress of Loches.

One poet in Paris advised De Luynes to search for Cardillac in the planet Mars, for from thence such a warlike, resourceful youth must have come, or the planet Venus, for thither he must have taken the most beautiful young woman in France. As day followed day, and nothing whatever was heard of the pair, although innocent couples were arrested here and there all over the land, the goodwill of their countrymen and countrywomen went out to the errand pair, and the laughter at De Luynes increased, while all the sleuth-hounds at his disposal searched every nook and cranny in vain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CIRCUMVENTING THE PEASANT.

THE young people had lived quietly for a week under the economical roof of the frugal farmer, paying a price for their accommodation that should have entitled them to a palace. The pair had discarded their finery, and adopted the peasant dress of host and hostess, not wishing to attract any undue attention

from chance passers-by. Day by day Maloche had gone to Blois with his cart-load of market produce, and each morning he saw his daughter in the palace, thus learning what progress was being made in the search for a situation that Marie Duchamps might fill. At last, he was asked to bring the girl with him on his next visit to the town.

Having been promised a most satisfactory fee for his good offices in this matter, the old man left the palace door with some satisfaction. As he walked across the square his attention was attracted by a troop of soldiers convulsed with boisterous laughter. Some one was telling a story, gesticulating dramatically, and his recital seemed to be very successful.

Maloche was not a humorous man, and was moving glumly on, when the name De Cardillac caught his ear. He paused and listened with ever-deepening horror. This was the first he had heard of the escapade of which nearly everybody else was talking. Had he been sheltering a man whose head was forfeit to the state, and whose soul was condemned by the church? It seemed incredible; and yet he must unconsciously have been harboring the man for whom all France was in search; a villain guilty of rebellion and sacrilege.

At first a cold anger rose slowly in the heart of the old man as he bethought him how selfishly this frivolous youth had placed his family and possessions in extreme jeopardy; for no one would believe his own assertion that sanctuary had been accorded to Cardillac in innocence. This, then, was the source of the gold that the young man had flung away so recklessly, and which the farmer had taken with no doubt of its loyal origin.

Maloche at once determined to lay information before the commander of the palace that would lead to Cardillac's capture, and he turned toward that officer's residence, his steps in no way impeded by the thought that a great reward would be his.

The soldier had said that the king was willing to give a prince's ransom for this culprit, dead or alive, and no harm could come to any who killed Cardillac, for he was already outlawed by the state, and banned by the Bishop of Tours, while

excommunication was expected from the Pope himself. It was bad enough to break into any convent, but to violate that of the Sacred Heart, held in the highest esteem by the church, and presided over by a princess of the royal blood, made his crime unforgivable by either church or state.

Arriving at the antechamber of the commander, he was gruffly ordered to seat himself on a bench along the wall, and there for half an hour he was allowed to cool his heels and likewise his anger. Well he knew the tyrannical nature of these officers and the brutality of the soldiers. Being a shrewd man, he began to estimate his own danger, and thus became more and more impressed with the fact that no one would believe he had visited Blois day by day for nearly a week and yet knew nothing of this event about which all France was talking.

The commander might not take into account that he was a taciturn man, who attended strictly to his own business and did not mix with gossips. His first anger had alloyed his reasoning powers, which on ordinary occasions were very acute. If the king was so anxious to capture Cardillac, then it was certain that the commander was on that instant using all his efforts to secure so valuable a prize. Maloche's own cunning began to show him what the commander would do. He was more likely than not to throw the informer into a cell, and then gallop with a troop of horse to the farm and himself capture Cardillac, taking all the credit as well as all the cash.

There came to his mind the many conferences he had held with his daughter during the past week, and as these conferences were for the purpose of placing within the palace an unknown girl who, doubtless, was as bad as Cardillac himself, Maloche began to tremble as he realized the incredibility of the story he must tell if he stuck to the truth. The result would be loss of liberty and the confiscation of his property.

Inwardly cursing Cardillac, he rose and cautiously made his way out into the open square unnoticed, the soldiers on guard paying little attention to him, supposing he had merely some complaint to make about the price he was paid for his cabbages. He hung about the town all

day, haunting cheap drinking-shops along the river and getting, bit by bit, fuller particulars of Cardillac's adventure. Gradually he made up his mind that he must get rid of his dangerous guests, but he would first threaten them with arrest, and thus wring from them full compensation for the danger he had run.

When Maloche reached his home, the last meal of the day was laid on the table, and his family, with their guests, were laughing and talking while they waited for him, as the repast could not begin until he arrived.

All present were struck to silence by the sight of the thunder-cloud on the old man's face. Not too genial at his best, each knew that something disastrous had happened. Maloche took his place at the head of the table, saying no word, and the meal was eaten in silence, although the dark eyes of Thérèse de Montreuil flashed now and then with indignation at the pall which had fallen on the company through the incoming of an ill-natured man. When supper was finished, Maloche turned to his elder guest.

"Is there another man of your name, M. de Cardillac?"

"Oh, yes, and a better man, namely, my father."

"Did your father break into a convent?"

Cardillac laughed.

"Not to my knowledge," he replied. "My good Maloche, you've been hearing something."

"Yes, I have heard in what danger you have insolently placed me, and, by Heavens, you shall pay for it! You have been condemned by the king, who has ordered his subjects to take you dead or alive; you have been banned by the Bishop of Tours, and will be excommunicated by the Pope."

Cardillac, who heard unmoved the sentence of the king, became a little white around the lips when he heard the intention of the Pope. The girl watched him intently, her eyes ablaze, casting now and then a glance at the truculent old man. All the others were appalled into silence.

"I am sorry that I have brought danger to you," said De Cardillac slowly. "If you will carry out your promise regarding the position that Mlle. Duchamps desires, I will relieve you of my presence

instantly, and if captured I give you my word that I shall say nothing of my residence here."

"I made no promise, and I will keep none."

"Then, perhaps, you will be good enough to give back to the lady the money you exacted."

"The lady!" growled Maloche, with bitter contempt. "'Tis likely this Duchamps woman is as bad as yourself."

"Or much worse," snapped Marie.

All the Maloche family gasped with dismay at her temerity. The old man scowled across at her.

"Will you keep silent, hussy!" he roared.

Marie placed her elbows on the table, clenched her fists, and placed her little chin in them, as if forcibly to hold her mouth shut. Cardillac rose quietly, left the room, and presently returned with his sword in his right hand.

"Gaspard Maloche," he said, "I have never yet touched with my weapon an unarmed man, but if you do not address this lady with civility I'll tickle your ribs with sharp steel."

Saying this, he sat down on the bench again, his sword across his knees.

"You must not think to frighten me with the sight of a rapier," snarled Maloche, whose expression, nevertheless, showed that he was not too courageous. "There are plenty of armed men within call."

"Well, that is a pity," said Cardillac, "for, whatever happens to me, I shall kill you before I am captured."

"This is strange requital for my hospitality," complained the farmer.

"Your hospitality was requited in gold. It is your treachery I requite in iron."

"There is no treachery on my part. You came to my house under false pretenses."

"Nevertheless, if I had entered a heathen Arab's tent in the same circumstances, I had been safe; but you, I suppose, have surrounded this house with soldiers."

"No, I said nothing at Blois, and there are no soldiers nearer than that town; but if you are to escape, I must be well recompensed for the risk I have taken."

"That is but justice, and I am quite ready to make terms with you, so long as the terms are pleasing to the lady who accompanies me. But no one leaves this room until your promise this time has been registered on oath. Even if I am threatened with excommunication, you will nevertheless have charged your soul with perjury if you break your word to us."

"I shall make no terms with this man," said Marie decidedly.

"Keep silence, *fille de cuisine*," roared Maloche, bringing his huge fist down on the table, but the roar swelled into a howl as Cardillac gently pricked him in the elbow with the point of his sword.

The girl was standing up, her face flushed with anger, her eyes snapping black lightning.

"You base-born, groveling peasant, do you dare to address me in such language? You talk of danger to us without the sense to realize the peril in which you yourself stand. At a word from me my father shall gallop across from Loches at the head of a thousand horsemen, and will burn down your homestead over your slit ears. Not all the ten thousand soldiers in Blois can save you, even if they consented to take the trouble, which they would not. They value you as little as they do their own swine."

"You dare taunt Victor de Cardillac with excommunication! I tell you he shall not be excommunicated, and the ban of the Bishop of Tours will be dissolved by an edict from his superior, the Archbishop of Toulouse, who is my friend, and my father's friend, and the son of the Duc d'Épernon. Pope Paul V when he learns the truth will issue no edict of excommunication, or if he does, it shall be against De Luynes, who first violated the convent by placing therein a state prisoner."

"If De Luynes was justified in placing me a prisoner in a convent, De Cardillac was equally justified in breaking my prison and getting me out. If the captain of a troop make a garrison of a church in time of war, the enemy is held blameless who fires upon that church. But, apart from all this, Pope Paul V is a Borghèse, a member of the wealthiest family in Italy, and he will

launch no excommunication against a brave man who is partizan for his countrywoman, the De Medicis. My father, the Duc de Montreuil, is a favorite son of the church, and it is not possible that excommunication should be hurled at one of his followers."

She snapped her fingers in the air.

"That for your paltry Bishop of Tours and his ban! I come of a family that deals with popes and cardinals!"

"In Heaven's name, lady!" gasped Maloche, frightened out of his stolidity. "Who are you?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A REVELATION.

THE question seemed to bring the girl to her senses, and the color left her face as she stood staring across the table at him; then a faint smile came to her lips, as slowly she turned her head until she met Cardillac's astonished gaze.

"Ah, Victor de Cardillac," and now she spoke very softly, all impetuosity departed, "you see what a fate threatens you. But, dear comrade, you have been warned in time. 'Twill be you now who accuses me of false pretenses, but in that you will be wrong."

She turned toward the old farmer.

"You wish to know who I am? I am Mlle. Thérèse Marie Duchamps de Montreuil, only daughter of the Duc de Montreuil, and if he at Loches had heard the words you dared address me, he were already in his saddle galloping hither. Victor," she turned to the young man again, "you will get to horse at once, and gallop through the night by way of Montrichard to Loches, carrying with you a letter I have written to my father. Ask him to send to Toulouse and acquaint the archbishop with the ban of Tours."

"There is no need of that" said Cardillac. "The archbishop, with five hundred of his men, is at Loches, having arrived there shortly after the queen was imprisoned at Blois."

"Ah, I did not know. They kept all news from me at the convent. Then all the better, and no time lost. The archbishop must send a messenger to Rome, to acquaint Pope Paul with the facts.

Shall you make your headquarters at Loches?"

"No, I must be nearer at hand. I shall find some method of acquainting you with my whereabouts."

"Tell my father of the compact you made with me in the forest of the Loire at midnight. He will give you the thousand pistoles."

"I cannot accept them, Marie—I mean Thérèse."

The girl gave him a friendly smile.

"Either or both names will do, but the money is yours, not my father's, and I command you to accept the sum."

"Very well, Thérèse Marie. Your commands are my law."

"My father will tell you more of the object we both have in view, so that you can act with a knowledge of what has already been accomplished, if anything. He will also give you the money for carrying out your plans."

"Ah, Marie, you must allow me to use my own money, as my heart is set on success."

Again Thérèse smiled at him, and nodded as though pleased that he made such a proviso.

"And now Farmer Maloche must write me a letter that I can give to his daughter in Blois."

"I cannot write," gruffly stated the farmer.

"Then M. de Cardillac will write for you, and you may append your mark, or whatever symbol you use when your name is attached to a business document. This letter I shall take with me at once to Blois, for it is yet early in the evening."

"You do not propose to go there alone and unattended?" protested Cardillac.

"Yes, and I ask you to see that no one leaves this room until I have had time to reach there, and also to exact from this man an oath that he dare not break, and if he attempts to break it, I can assure him of the most drastic vengeance."

Maloche groaned dismally.

"Let us exact the oath now, and I will then accompany you."

"No, no. You must to Loches as quickly as you can. I am in no danger, even if detected. De Luynes knows better than to harm me. If he did, 'twould all be to the good, for every noble partizan he possesses would desert him, and

ne would find himself with an army of leaderless men."

Cardillac took down the crucifix from the wall, and placed it before Maloche. The farmer reluctantly laid his great brown hand upon it, and his unwelcome guest administered to him an oath so sweeping in its everlasting penalties that even the bronzed face of the yeoman blanched to a sickly green as he pressed his lips against the sacred emblem.

"And now," said Mlle. de Montreuil, who had put on her hood for the journey, "remember that we have not coerced you, but have taken the only plan with you that provides safety for yourself and your family. If you faithfully carry out your avowment I will see that you are made rich. Your danger arises in double measure through any tampering with your affirmation, for you will receive no mercy from the partizans of the king, and you are not likely to escape vengeance from the followers of the queen.

"The fact that your daughter is in the château now; that you, for a week, have been endeavoring to place me in the service of the queen, while all the time you were harboring De Cardillac, makes it impossible for you to convince the most credulous that you are not up to the lips in conspiracy, therefore, be sure that confession will only bring the swifter punishment upon you from both sides. You will find yourself between the upper and nether millstones, and not much will be left of you when they cease revolving."

Cardillac replaced the crucifix.

"Marie," he said, "I wish a word with you in the next room. Maloche, see to it that no one moves until I return."

Once outside, the young man caught her by the elbows, pressing them closely to her. Marie made no effective resistance, but stood there smiling at him.

"Dear girl," he said, "I wanted to tell you that I shall make Montrichard my home until I have perfected my plans. My headquarters there will be the hotel of the Black Head, a hostelry with which I am already well acquainted.

"Montrichard is filled with my friends, and there I shall be quite safe. The hillsides of Montrichard are honey-combed with secret passages and cave dwellings, with every tenant of which I am acquainted, and no man need be cap-

tured who knows this labyrinth as I do. And now, dear girl, farewell, and Heaven be with you. There is still one question I wish to ask you. Do you think I should be justified in accepting an advance of money for carrying out the liberation of the queen?"

"Oh, surely, surely," cried the girl, although her face showed disappointment that he had thought better of his first proposal to use his own.

"I am glad you approve, though I shall not touch a stiver of the money. I merely wished your consent to the general principle that a man undertaking a task which he feels certain of accomplishing may be justified in seeking in advance a modest instalment of the reward he expects, if this instalment will encourage him to face the difficulties he may be called on to encounter, so, Thérèse—"

Twice he put his lips to a better purpose than that of speaking, and flattered himself he had taken her completely by surprise. She frowned, and pushed him back with no great expenditure of strength, then laughed a little.

"I take it, *monsieur*, that there is nothing personal in what you have done. You merely wished to begin your campaign by settling your debt. I shall, therefore, regard this as the return of what was formerly bestowed."

"In that case, Thérèse, I have the instalment still to seek;" but Thérèse merrily eluded him, not to be caught a second time.

"No, no," she cried, "too lavish an advance payment makes a careless workman, and, on this employment, I must enlist all your faculties. Now, listen to me. Do you know the château at Blois?"

"I have seen it," replied Cardillac.

"I am well acquainted with every part of it," continued Thérèse, "for I lived there on several occasions while the court was in residence. They tell me the queen's present apartments are on the first floor. The side toward the courtyard is like to be well-guarded. The north façade, however, is so precipitous, and being without an exit, her majesty's jailers are there probably less vigilant. At the northeast corner there is an open gallery. Every afternoon, at four o'clock, the queen is asleep, and from four till half past I shall walk in that gallery.

You will doubtless venture into Blois as occasion may require."

"I am certain to do that," replied Cardillac.

"You will come disguised, but I think I shall recognize you. Still, to make sure, wear in some fashion the scarf I gave you to act as a sling for your arm, and which, honest man, you never returned to me."

"I had hoped, Thérèse, you would not miss it."

"I did not. I freely present it to you. But I must not chatter any longer. Time is passing. During the week we have spent here, I have obtained several unsuspecting articles that may be of use to me when I share the queen's imprisonment, and among them is an ample length of thin cord. If I see you on the street below, and we are unobserved, I may pass down to you a letter, if there is anything to communicate, and you may tie to the cord any missive intended for me."

"I shall remember that. As an alternative means of communication with me, it might be well if you made friends with Maloche's daughter in the château; then a message given to her could be passed on to her father, and he might send some one of his sons to me at Montzichard."

"You think we can trust Maloche?"

"Yes; first, because of his fear, and second, because of his cupidity. He has nothing to gain, and everything to lose by betraying us. Still, it will all depend on the estimate you form of his daughter, but, in any case, I should not use this method except as a last resort. I am certain the old man will make no move against us, but the girl may have some confidant in the château to whom she tells everything, and thus, although staunch herself, she might prove the spark to the powder."

"You are very woman-wise, M. de Cardillac."

"No, merely human-wise. For instance; I would tell you everything I know, and yet proclaim myself a man. However, it is not man nature or woman nature, but human nature, as I have said, and the fewer confidants we make the safer we are."

"That is true. As it is, I think we have told one another everything we know already. And now I must away."

She eluded his efforts to detain her, opened the door, and retreated into the room they had left. Every member of the family sat rigid, as if they had not moved an eyelid since the two departed. The girl took her place upon a bench by the table, and poured out for herself a glass of milk, which she sipped. Cardillac sat down opposite her, beside the grim farmer, to whom he had still a few words to say. Before he could open his mouth, however, the room resounded with two sharp knocks, as if caused by a sword-hilt, and, next instant, the door was flung open by an officer, who entered, followed by two troopers. Cardillac whisked his own sword out of sight under the table, and placed the point of it close against the body of Farmer Maloche.

CHAPTER XXV.

INTO LOCHES.

THE first thought that occurred to Cardillac was that Maloche had betrayed him before he left Blois, and that the military party had been sent to effect the arrest of himself and his comrade. For a moment Maloche's life hung on the tip of the sword, and perhaps the old man himself never suspected that he sat cheek by jowl with death. The officer proved to be a good-natured, genial, talkative fellow, who did not express that contempt for the honest, industrious peasantry which all soldiers felt.

"Farmer Maloche?" inquired the officer.

"Yes."

"There is a girl here whom you offered in service to the château?"

"Yes."

"Is she an ordinary country wench, or ladylike and presentable?"

"There she sits," said Maloche.

The officer turned toward her.

"Oh, you'll do," he cried. "Have you been used to waiting on ladies, *mademoiselle*?"

"Yes, *monsieur*," answered Marie.

"Ah, that's great good luck. There's been another frustrated plot to liberate the queen, and two of her maids of honor are sleeping in stone cells to-night; therefore, *mademoiselle*, you will

take your place in the direct service of Marie de Medicis, for we'll accept no more of those rips down from Paris. We've had enough of such conspiring minxes. I'd chop off the heads of the whole coterie if I had my way. Give me an honest, good-looking country girl like you, *mademoiselle*. And now, Farmer Maloche, a few questions. The commandant told me to give warning that you will be held to strict account if your words are not made good. What's the name of this girl?"

"My name is Marie Duchamps," quickly interpolated the person referred to.

"Thanks, *mademoiselle*, thanks. And now, Farmer Maloche, are you personally acquainted with this damsel?"

"Yes."

"You guarantee her honesty, good faith, and all that?"

"Yes."

"She is thoroughly loyal?"

"Yes."

"Do you think she can be bribed or cajoled into doing wrong?"

"No."

"You pledge your personal surety, forfeiting life and goods if she mixes with any of these treasonable conspiracies?"

This time Maloche hesitated for a moment, and the sword-point penetrated his clothes, and touched the bare skin.

"Yes," he said.

"That's very satisfactory, and I shall so report to the commandant. And now, *mademoiselle*, can you ride a horse?"

"Oh, yes, *monsieur*."

"Are you ready to go with us at once, or must you make some preparations?"

"I am ready now, *monsieur*," said the girl, rising.

"Good. I like you, and hope to see more of you at Blois, although I suppose you will not be allowed to leave the queen's apartments."

"So I understood, *monsieur*."

"Anything you want, *mademoiselle*, can be got at Blois, or will be sent for to Paris. The pay is good, and the duties light. I rather think you'll like the situation, Marie."

"I am sure I shall, *monsieur*."

"Very well; this is all quite as it should be. And now, *mademoiselle*, latest maid of honor, may I present to

myself the gratification of escorting you to your horse?"

"The pleasure is mine, *monsieur*," said Thérèse, extending the tips of her dainty fingers to the outstretched hand of the bowing lieutenant. And thus, as if about to engage in a minuet, the two disappeared through the doorway, followed by the sword-clanking, spur-jangling troopers, Thérèse throwing over her shoulder a sparkling smile at Cardillac and a "Good night, all," to the assemblage.

In the silence that followed they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and Cardillac wondered why their approach had not been noticed by any of the company.

"Maloche," said Cardillac, "even if you had not given me your oath, you understand, I hope, that there is only one course now possible for you. I need not say that I am very sorry to have been the cause of involving you in such a tangle, but that is a risk all must run who live in these troublous times. Many innocent people have been compelled to do something similar to what you are forced to do, but they have been without hope of reward. Now, I give you my word that I shall be careful not to betray you by speech or action. I am determined to succeed, and will succeed; and when I do, you will be largely the gainer."

"There has been enough talk," growled the old farmer. "I shall do what I said I would do."

"Ah, which of the two things you said you would do? Give information to the king, or keep silence?"

"I shall hold by my oath."

"Very good. In that course, you will find safety and profit." Cardillac took out his wallet, and poured a little mountain of gold upon the supper-table.

"Here is an earnest of more to come. I shall keep one pistole for emergencies to-night, and leave the rest with you. It is all I possess now, but good luck being my friend, I shall have a thousand more of these yellow tempters to-morrow."

The old man's sullen eyes gleamed greedily as he gloated on the little pile of wealth. Here at least was an argument he could understand. King or queen were as nothing to him so long as he kept his clutch upon sufficient gold.

"It is really a very simple matter, Maloche," continued Cardillac with careless good humor, as he pushed the heap toward its new owner. "If the king wins, you will nevertheless be rich enough to slip out of this belt of danger and return to Gascony, where you may live unmolested. If the queen wins, you will receive abundance of wealth, and she will confirm you in possession of this farm. So long as you keep a close mouth, it matters not to you what happens, and thus I bid you good night."

Cardillac, carrying his sword, departed to his own room, where he doffed his peasant garb and donned the costume of the courtier. Then to the stable, where, quickly accoutering his horse, he sprang astride and turned the animal's head toward the west, taking the thoroughfare through Russy forest that led to Montrichard—a road that was little more than a cart-track and a woodman's way for the hauling of logs, but nevertheless a great improvement upon the path through the wilderness he had formerly traversed.

The moon was a week past the full, and therefore contributed little to the enlightenment of Cardillac's journey. At last he came to the end of the forest, and the road ran among cultivated fields and pastures where cattle lay at rest. In the belated waning moonlight he saw standing high against the western sky the splendid square donjon-tower of the castle, constructed six hundred years before by that master builder of fortresses, Foulques Nerra, Count of Anjou. A hundred years later it was captured by the English king, Richard Cœur de Lion, hence the hill on which it stands, united with the name of the English king, gave title to the village and castle which it bears to this day.

Cardillac skirted the foot of the castle hill, and then, just before reaching the river Cher, turned to his left down the main street. The contrast between Montrichard and any of the northern towns was very striking. Beaugency and the rest swarmed with soldiers night and day; the streets paraded by sentinels; the air vocal with challenges and replies. Here all was still as Pompeii—not a light visible, no human being in sight, the town sound in a peaceful sleep.

He passed, on his right hand, that ancient hostelry, the Hôtel de la Tête Noire, to which he would return and stop, and well he knew its comfortable accommodation. He felt inclined to rouse the silent town with a shout, but repressed his boyish exultation, and rode on until he came to the Church of Notre Dame de Nanteuil, to which Louis XI was accustomed to make pilgrimages. He rather expected to find this structure guarded, but no one disputed his crossing.

Once over the river, he rode a short distance up its left bank until he came to the favorite swimming-place of his youth. Unbridling his horse, he allowed the patient animal to feed on the lush grass by the river-bank, and throwing off his clothes, he plunged shoulder first into the familiar crystal flood and swam from Touraine to Blaisois and back, for the clear Cher forms the boundary between the two districts. Attiring himself once more, and feeling as if he had slipped off half a dozen years with his clothes, he made a supper of black bread and red wine.

More than half of his journey had been accomplished, and the bells in the fortresses were now ringing midnight across the still waters of the river. He did not wish to reach Loches before day-break, and so stretched himself at full length in the tall grass and slept for an hour or two. Young as he was, he already possessed Henri IV's knack of falling asleep at any moment he chose, and of arousing himself at any time he had set.

In two hours and a half he rose, refreshed, and proceeded on his journey. Dawn lightened the forest and set the birds singing just before he arrived at Liège, and the sun appeared as he forded the river Indroye. Emerging from the forest into the lowlands near Beaulieu, there burst upon him, reddened by the rising sun, the full splendor of the strongest fortress in France, the massive conglomerate structure built by half a dozen kings—supreme and impregnable—the royal Château of Loches.

The young man drew in his horse and sat there, hand on hip, regarding this aggregation of buildings with a sigh of content. The little picturesque town by the

riverside huddled contentedly at the feet of this lordly castle, secure in its protection. Here, less than a century before, Scotland's most picturesque king, James V, was married to the daughter of Francis I, and now the doom of James's ill-fated daughter, Mary of Scotland, was in the minds of those who ruled Loches—men who were determined that another foreign Mary, whom they regarded as monarch of France, should not meet a similar catastrophe at the hands of her enemies.

Their very determination was bringing the tragedy within practical nearness, through their constantly frustrated attempts to liberate Marie de Medicis; and Cardillac, sobered by this thought, resolved to carry out his already half-formed project with a caution that seemed absent in more experienced heads than his own.

Crossing the Indre from Beaulieu to Loches, he found the town aswarm with

armed men, the air musical with bugle-calls from the heights on which the castle stood, the cobble-stoned streets asound with the tramp of marching troops. Into this fanfare the young man on the horse came modestly enough, and was challenged at the end of the bridge.

"Who are you? Whence do you come, and why?"

"My name is Cardillac. I come from Beaugency. I bear a message to the Duc de Montreuil."

And now, for the first time in his life, our young friend, who had hitherto met little but rebuffs and personal danger, was to drink a goblet of that intoxicating wine, popularity—a draft that had never touched his lips before. An officer stepped forward.

"You are surely not the man for whom all France is being searched—he who rescued the Duc de Montreuil's daughter from the convent at Beaugency?"

"Yes," said Cardillac.

(To be continued.)

THE COURAGE OF CONVICTION.

BY ETTA ANTHONY BAKER.

A SHORT STORY.



ELEN RANDALL, daintily clad as usual, tripped lightly up the clubhouse steps and entered the assembly hall. The consciousness of a most becoming gown and hat is apt to conduce to airiness of tread; besides, life was a roseate affair to this gay, care-free young matron—she enjoyed it to the full. As she noted several pair of observant eyes turning to follow her entrance, she obligingly paused beside the bulletin-board and glanced carelessly at the various items posted conspicuously upon its black surface.

Suddenly she stepped closer, with a quick indrawing of breath, and eagerly reread one of the bits of pasteboard. For several moments she bent over it

absorbed, although it was simply the customary new-member card:

MRS. EMERSON ALDEN.

Proposed by Mrs. Howard Durward.
Seconded by Mrs. Frank Ambler and Miss Georgina Harper.

"Mrs. Emerson Alden!" she repeated half aloud. "I didn't know she intended to move to New York. Surely it must be a mistake—she doesn't go out at all. It's not a common name, though. Can there be another Mrs. Emerson Alden? Could that woman— Pshaw! Even *she* wouldn't have the effrontery to try to force herself into such a club as this—it's impossible! Besides, *she* was in Chicago, too. Only a coincidence in the names, no doubt."

Just before adjournment, the president, Mrs. Durward, called the attention of the club to one or two matters of new business which had been overlooked, in the press of reports, earlier in the day.

"Ladies," she ended, in her most winning tones, "we are all interested in the coming fair. Its proceeds, as you know, are to be devoted to the new riverside pavilion for our poor people. We have decided to use the extra money in our philanthropic fund to provide music on two evenings a week. That is," she added, "if the club approves."

"Guess it's a foregone conclusion," whispered little Mrs. South, Helen's intimate friend. "Regular heavenly body, we are—she's the comet and we're the tail! There, the tail's followed for that music! I knew it would!"

"Now, ladies," proceeded the president in even silkier tones, "one more bit of business before we adjourn! Mrs. Emerson Alden, a recent and welcome addition to our ranks, has offered us the use of her place for our fair. This not only means an increased attendance, as the beauty of the house and grounds will attract many, but also the saving of several hundred dollars which would otherwise have been spent for the hire of a suitable hall. This same good fairy has promised us the services of her own chef for the luncheon and supper, and has donated to the various tables many artistic and valuable articles picked up on her recent tour. Is Mrs. Alden present? Will she kindly rise?"

As the lady in question, a handsome, black-eyed woman, magnificently gowned, calmly stood up and bowed graciously amid a perfect storm of applause, Mrs. Randall herself half rose, in her excitement, then sank back white and trembling, while the president smilingly continued her report, after waiting a moment for the enthusiasm to subside.

"Counting upon the loyal support which you, as a club, have always given to your officers, we have ventured to put upon the ticket for our next annual election the name of our new member, Mrs. Emerson Alden, for first vice-president. Will some member kindly make a motion to this effect? I leave this matter entirely in your hands," she added confidently, as she resumed her seat.

"But I thought this woman's name was only posted to-day!" gasped Mrs. Randall.

"Proposed by the president, seconded by officers—time is a mere matter of detail!" answered Mrs. South airily. "Say, Helen, what kind of a club did you belong to, out there in Chicago—The Angel Band, or The Innocents at Home? You are so refreshing!" Mrs. South ended with a gleeful laugh.

"I move that the name of our new member, Mrs. Emerson Alden, be placed upon the ticket for first vice-president," came in stentorian tones from Mrs. Durward's chief henchman.

"Second the motion!" flashed simultaneously from several "trusties."

"The motion has been moved and seconded—" began the president, when suddenly Helen Randall found herself upon her feet quite without her own volition.

"Madam President!" she began; and scarcely waiting for the surprised "Mrs. Randall!" she added tersely: "The motion is out of order. The annual election takes place next month, and the candidate in question has not yet been accepted as a member of the club."

Mrs. Durward drew herself up haughtily. The winning smile had quite disappeared, and her voice was sharp and angry.

"I myself"—with deep emphasis—"am proposing Mrs. Alden, while our treasurer and recording-secretary are the seconds. Under the circumstances, there can be no possible doubt as to the action of the membership committee."

"Madam President," Mrs. Randall continued calmly, without awaiting further recognition from the chair, "I trust you will pardon my insistence, but the name in question was placed on the board for the first time to-day. The constitution of our club requires that each candidate for membership be posted for two months before becoming a member. Therefore, it is impossible to put Mrs.—Mrs. Alden's name upon the club ticket."

Toward the end of her speech Helen's face flushed painfully, and it was only by a sharp exercise of will-power that the trembling knees upheld her. Were there only two hundred members in the club? To her excited imagination there

seemed to be at least two thousand, and scarcely one friendly look upon all that sea of faces gazing up at her in surprise.

As a summer rain begins, lightly, hissing, gathering force as it goes along, so the comments, favorable and unfavorable, ran from seat to seat, from row to row, throughout the length and breadth of the hall. A few faces glanced admiringly toward the intrepid young member, but most of them turned only contemptuous stares upon one who dared to question a name—such a name, presented under such auspices—for a mere quibble of constitutional right. The president's icy tones fell upon the patter of comment, congealing it instantly.

"I beg that Mrs. Alden will overlook this strenuous holding out for a mere technicality. Although many of us—most of us, I may say—feel that in this instance"—bowing gracefully in the direction of the cause of contention, who toyed indifferently with her card-case, a queer little smile upon the full red lips—"such insistence is entirely unnecessary, still the objection has constitutional right upon its side. Will some one kindly move that a rising vote of thanks be given our incoming member, for her generous offer in connection with our fair?"

So many "some ones" sprang into the breach that the motion was made, seconded, and carried almost unanimously. The president's acid smile changed; her winning manner was once more in full play as, after a triumphant glance toward her discomfited opponent, she thanked the club, and the motion to adjourn was carried immediately.

II.

"Poor taste on Mrs. Randall's part," was the consensus of opinion, as the members trooped toward the tea-room.

"Of course, I believe in adhering to the club constitution," began one woman indignantly, "but in this case—"

"I understand Mrs. Alden intends to entertain largely," answered her companion. "With that house and all their wealth she certainly can do it. I think she'll be a decided acquisition. Poor Mrs. Randall!"

"Poor Mrs. Randall" marched straight from the hall the moment the meeting adjourned. Tea? It would

choke her. So burning with righteous indignation was she, that an iceberg could scarce have quenched the fires of wrath raging within her. Tea!

"Mr. Randall! Is he home yet?" she demanded breathlessly of the footman, as she swept through the hall.

"Yes, madam. In the library, madam," answered the man, staring in surprise at the absence of the usual cheery greeting which so endeared the little woman to her servants.

Helen rushed through the library door, closing it behind her with a bang, and before her husband could do more than glance up in surprise at the cyclone, she had thrown herself into his arms with a choking, "Oh, Hal!" and was sobbing her heart out on his breast.

Mr. Randall, completely taken aback by such an outburst from his usually sunny-tempered helpmeet, held the slight form close and patted the soft hair soothingly, after gently removing the obstructing hat, while he waited in deep anxiety for the storm to abate. Finally, Mrs. Randall dried her eyes on a much-bedewed ball of lace and linen, and told him the whole story, ending with the words: "And it's *that* Mrs. Alden, Hal!"

"Yes, dear, I know; they came while you were away. They've taken the Ransom place on Forest Avenue. I intended to write to you about it, but forgot. I've seen Alden several times on the train. It's the same old story, Helen—nothing's changed since they lived in Evanston."

"What shall I do? She ought not to come into the club if—"

"Well, I guess not! Not if I have any voice in the matter! Go straight to Mrs. Durward, dear, and tell her all about it; then the name can be quietly withdrawn. I feel sure the Aldens didn't know we were living here, or they would not have come. Don't worry, sweetheart,—it can easily be straightened out."

Alas for Mr. Randall as a prophet! When his wife called upon Mrs. Durward she was met by the terse announcement: "Not at home." A second, and even a third call met with the same announcement, although the lady herself sailed through the hall in sight of her caller.

Next, Mrs. Randall drove to the residence of the treasurer, only to meet with the same reception, or lack of it. When

she essayed the secretary's, that lady met her almost on the threshold, regretting, in icily distant manner, her inability to discuss the matter, and wishing her visitor a decisive good-by. To cap the climax, the letter, with a full explanation of the whole affair, was returned by the chairman of the membership committee, unopened.

Meanwhile, true to the promise given her husband, Helen resolutely refrained from talking of the affair to any one, and went on her way, silent, almost deserted, save for a few close friends, whom no gossip could alienate. For the other side had not been idle. Rumors were rife that Mrs. Randall's attitude was due to petty spite for a snub administered by the new member, when both were residents of the Chicago suburb. As no word of defense or denial was forthcoming, the malicious rumors waxed stronger and stronger.

Again and again had poor Helen argued the matter with herself. Suppose this woman should come into the club—the injury would be irreparable! On the other hand, suppose she had repented and was trying to lead a better life—should Helen's be the hand to drag her down? That would be far more terrible! If a thought of the unpleasant notoriety for herself—which placed her at the mercy of the charge of spite and revenge—obtruded itself, she thrust it resolutely away, while over and over again she weighed the two sides of the question, trying to determine upon the right course to follow. Finally, in despair of arriving at a solution, she resolved to carry the war into the enemy's camp, and pluckily sent in her card to Mrs. Emerson Alden herself, although filled with grave doubts as to her reception.

A very elegant camp it was—rare old tapestries and paintings, beautiful rugs and bric-à-brac, liveried footmen at every turn, wealth, and good—if slightly exuberant—taste on every side. The mistress of all this magnificence, herself a fitting accompaniment, only raised her eyes inquiringly as her visitor was ushered in, then settled back comfortably among the pillows of her couch.

III.

FOR an instant Mrs. Randall hesitated, nonplused—only for an instant, however

—then, with characteristic Western bluntness, she drove straight to the point.

"You must not join the Friday Club!"

"Ah! must not? Why, if I may ask?" the tone of the questioner was full of lazy amusement.

"You know why! Oh! Won't you treat me frankly? Won't you withdraw your name voluntarily?"

"Why?" again came the indifferent little drawl.

"Why? Because it's a club of respectable women," Helen flashed back hotly. "You cannot come in unless you are—"

"But I'm not! I don't intend to be, either," was the insolent retort. "Don't let that fact agitate you, though. Respectability's too slow for me! I prefer the other thing and this!" with an airy wave of the bediamonded hand toward her surroundings. "So you can dismiss any charming ideas of reform you may have in that meddling little head of yours, once and forever."

"Then she has refused—"

"Yes, she still decorates the earth—Chicago, I believe—and is still Mrs. Alden. But what does it matter?"

"You shall not join the club!"

"*Shall not!*" The words shot forth with startling emphasis, in marked contrast to the former indifferent drawl. Mrs. Alden sat bolt upright now, the hard look on her face matched by the hard tone of her voice. "And who, pray, will prevent my joining? Mrs. Durward? Bah! Her husband owes his very existence to us. We saved him from failure—disgraceful failure—do you hear? As for the rest of the officers—I have them *right here!*" and the white thumb was pressed firmly down upon the mahogany table. "They like to increase their incomes, and I help them—that's all! So much for Mr. Alden's power in the Street. It amuses me to make these ultra-respectable puppets dance when I pull the string. I myself have no yearnings whatever for respectability—at least, not so you'd notice it," she added coarsely. "As for you—already they are laughing at you. *You stop me—me!* You can't do it! I defy you!"

On the day of the annual election, the white-faced, large-eyed young woman who walked quickly to a seat in the as-

sembly hall, bore little resemblance to the gay young creature who had made such a triumphant entry just one month before. One or two members turned aside hastily to avoid greeting the newcomer, while sarcastic shrugs and questioningly upraised brows followed her.

When the president reached the report of the membership committee, in the business routine, she said smilingly: "As soon as we have heard this announcement, I feel sure the club will wish to acknowledge the help given by the new member, who did so much toward the wonderful success of our fair. We will then proceed with the election. And let me add that Mrs. Alden is up for first vice-president, by unanimous request."

The chairman rose to her feet, with the words: "We take pleasure in announcing the election of Mrs. Emerson—" but was interrupted by a young voice.

"Madam president!"

"The chairman of the membership committee has the floor!" said the president sternly.

"By all means allow the member to speak," snapped the chairman sarcastically, and could have bitten her tongue out the instant she had said it.

Mrs. Randall remained standing, erect and unsmiling, throughout this little controversy. Without waiting further recognition from the chair, she said firmly: "Madam president and ladies: When the members, who propose and second a name, refuse to listen to any objections, however well-founded; when a letter of explanation is returned by the member-

ship committee, unopened—then I must appeal to the club itself.

"I knew Mrs. Emerson Alden in Chicago. She was a noble woman, a perfect wife and mother."

The club stared in surprise. What was Mrs. Randall driving at?

"When I saw her home broken up, almost breaking her heart at the same time, can you wonder I feel no pity for the cause of her trouble? We point with pride to our Refuge. Such a work is unusual among club women—it shows broadness of view—but, for the sake of its other inmates, even we make one condition for admission and that is—repentance. Are we prepared to receive into our club and our homes a woman who would be debarred from our Refuge—who, by her own acknowledgment, 'does not yearn for respectability, but enjoys making her respectable puppets dance'?"

Here the gavel dropped to the desk with a crash as the president sank back, overwhelmed with shame, while two other "puppets" became deeply engrossed in the engagement tablets which their fingers almost refused to control.

"My friend is still Mrs. Emerson Alden. I leave the matter in your hands, deeply regretting the necessity for this publicity, which could easily have been avoided, had our officers so willed it."

For a few moments absolute silence reigned. Then Mrs. South turned to her friend with an ecstatic little hug.

"You brave ducky darling! I wonder if we can find pencils for all who want to scratch the ticket?"

AFTER THE STORM.

They tell me he's gone, and they chide me loud for staying
 Alone by the wall, while the fishing-fleet comes home.
 They say there's no hope, and it's past the need of praying—
 Oh, the horror of the rocks, and the cruel bars of foam!
 And they weep, and lead me home, when I try in vain to spy
 The little sail, the white sail, against the evening sky.

I knew they were wrong—though they say 'twas God that told me—
 Alone by the wall, as the fishing-fleet came past.
 But I prayed to Him for comfort, and His courage did uphold me
 Till the men raised a cheer when they sighted it at last!
 And I longed then to weep, but my straining eyes were dry.
 Oh, the little sail, the dear sail, against the evening sky!

Martha Haskell Clark.

SIR HUGH AND THE PRINCESS.

BY ELEANOR VAN ALLEN.

A SHORT STORY.

DEEP, soft shadows lurked among the rafters; shadows draped the corner of the hall; and on the face of Sir Hugh Craig de Montagne, the king-maker, were the heavy shadows that told the tale of a weary spirit.

The long, narrow refectory tables of this whilom monastery had been cleared. The guests had gone. The lights were out, and only Sir Hugh's favorite minstrel dared to linger beside the great fireplace, where the logs still crackled and flamed high.

Sir Hugh paced the length of the hall in somber silence. Now he paused, planted his legs wide apart before the fire, and spoke aloud:

"Lo! I have all things in my hand." He closed and unclosed a sinewy brown hand. "And, my poor minstrel, nothing is worth having. Verily, I believe thou art richer than I, for thou livest in thy dreams that are yet to be. I can already see the end of my realities. Thou wilt never capture thy dream, though it already shakes thy sleepy head. Go thou to it," he added kindly.

The fair-haired stripling rose, kissed his lord's hand, and went from the room. Sir Hugh watched the heavy folds of the curtain sag together behind him, then dropped heavily into the great chair beside the fire.

"First lord of the kingdom and ruler of the king am I," he reflected. "My mind rules the state. Under a strong hand the country flourishes. Thus I labor—to what end? The well-being of a pack of fools. The few strong peers who tower above the rest hate me, and show their teeth when they dare; for they know they are safe. I have no enemies save those of the realm. Power I

have; and they want it. If they had it, they would know, as I do, it is only dust and ashes, mixed with a few live coals of gratitude, like yonder fire. If I had a son"—his voice broke and he rose and paced the hall, struggling with an old regret and longing.

He came back to the fire and struck his clenched fist into the other palm. "My heart and my hearth are empty, and I am growing old. Autumn is hard upon me, and the leaves fall. What is left?"

The tramp of mailed feet through the corridor startled him. He laid his hand on his dagger.

Betrand, his squire, held back the tapestry, and a gray-haired giant strode in, carrying a bundle wrapped in bearskins, which he set gently upon the floor.

"My lord," quoth he, "Princess Marjory de Rothlands and her servant Diccon crave shelter for the night from this blinding storm."

He hastily stripped off the bear robes, and Princess Marjory stood forth blinking in the firelight. Tall she was and fair of skin, but dark of eyes and hair, slender as a willow wand, lithe as a boy. Her face was a delicately pointed oval; her brow broad, white, and not too high; and beneath straight eyebrows and heavily fringed lids her eyes flashed direct and stern.

She might have passed for a handsome boy, save for her mouth, which was ripe and womanly.

Albeit she could scarcely stand for numbing cold, her eyes met Sir Hugh's with neither fear nor favor. Thus they gazed; he with some wonder at her haughty hostility, till he bethought himself and asked her to rest beside the fire.

"'Tis a rough night for so fair a lady," he began.

"Needs must, my lord, when one goes a hostage over seas."

"Ah! you are the daughter of Prince Lledrow of Rothlands?"

"Whom Sir Hugh Craig de Montagne might have ransomed, and he would have laid a tax upon the worthless peasants," she answered.

The veins of Sir Hugh's temples swelled. Then he remembered her youth, smiled, and said:

"Do you not wish to go to the gay court of France, my princess, to see the finery and furbelows and gay gallants?"

Rage crimsoned her cheeks. "And you, my lord, would you wish to go to court as hostage? To smile at my plight befits not. Were I a man, I would not go to France." She sank on her robes, exhausted.

"Perchance, your father may yet be ransomed, princess."

"Never will I be vassal of King Guillaume," she flung.

"That need not be." He bowed her gravely to the corridor.

As the princess followed the torch borne by her servant, she thought: "How unlike my Ralph! How stern and grave! Yet his eyes were not old."

And then she fell to dreaming of other eyes, brown and pleading, the eyes of Sir Ralph de Bois Noir. She fumbled at her neck for the locket which held the lock of hair she had cut off with Ralph's dagger before he went away to court. With the locket in her hand, she fell asleep.

In the hall Sir Hugh sat writing. Presently he called: "Betrand!"

"When morning dawns, Betrand, ride to the palace and ask audience in my name on state business. Give the king this missive. Now, light me to my chamber."

II.

DAV dawned crisp and clear; and Sir Hugh rose, pricked by a strange restlessness. A mellow voice rang in his ears; a haughty, deep-eyed face floated before his eyes.

He sent for Diccon. In the presence of the giant he felt a strange embarrassment, and for a few moments he paced the hall without speaking. Whirling suddenly, he said:

"I have sent a ransom to France for thy master. It is my will that the princess shall await him here in charge of my sister, Lady Isabella. What now, sirra?" answering the look of distress in Diccon's face.

"Pardon, Sir Hugh," Diccon answered. "Is it also the princess's will?"

"What talk is this of woman's whimsies?" His anger rose.

On one knee sank Diccon. "Sir Hugh!" he entreated. "Good Sir Hugh, my little princess knows no will save her own. The prince was ever shut within his room with books. It was not so before her mother died. Some say his great grief makes him seek her mother's soul with divers charms.

"My little princess grew alone with horse and hounds and all free creatures of the woods. My master had said: 'Diccon, 'tis the soul of a youth in the body of a maid. Teach her those things a youth should learn. Teach her to ride, to hunt, to speak truth, and to honor her word as a knight does his sword. Let her follow the light of her own soul and her own will.' This she hath done, Sir Hugh, and she knoweth no fear and no will but her own."

"If you taught her this, you have done well. Go, Diccon," said Sir Hugh.

"A strange princess," he mused as he paced the room, "but what a mother for great men!" While he rubbed his hands before the fire, the arras parted and the princess entered.

"Diccon hath told me of the ransom, and I thank you for it and for your hospitality. We leave this day for Cornwall."

Sir Hugh led her to the narrow window of the tower which looked down the valley, now wreathed in whirling, blinding snow.

"Look, princess," quoth he; and then with his winning smile he added: "My sister Isabella sits alone in her tower. If you will tarry with her, these days will pass, and ere long spring will come, and with your father you may journey through a flowery land to Cornwall."

A timid hand slipped through her arm and a soft voice whispered, "Stay, princess."

Looking down, the princess saw the Lady Isabella.

A girlish friendliness smiled in her haughty eyes as she answered: "Sir Hugh, I thank you. For a few days I will remain."

With the fair Isabella still clinging to her arm, she swept away toward the inner tower.

"I like not your brother," she said. "He doth kindnesses the while he treats me like a wilful child. I like him not."

Isabella rubbed her soft cheek against the other's shoulder.

"You know him not," she said. "Though there be many who like him not, yet those be there who do suffer from his justice and who know not his tender heart."

Winter sped away, and an almost chivalrous tenderness and a clinging trustfulness grew between the two maids.

III.

ONE evening in the great hall Sir Hugh unrolled a parchment which read:

For my freedom, Sir Hugh, I thank you. Yet I have no strength to profit by it. My servant, Alaric, will lay my bones upon this rocky coast and come to you with all speed. As I am a dying man, Sir Hugh, I give you my daughter's hand. Give her my blessing, as she has my lands. And so, Sir Hugh, farewell.

"A sorry news to break, and one that can well wait till morn," said Sir Hugh.

On that bright spring morning only a few rare fleecy clouds floated in the blue. The birds were singing merrily; and the apple-buds, though flushed, were not yet open. Isabella and Marjory walked the narrow paths in the formal garden, shut in by high gray walls.

Suddenly Marjory paused, watching a lark winging his way upward and singing from a full heart. She caught Isabella's hand.

"Lo, there am I!" she cried, pointing to the lark. "So full is my heart this day of song, so free I feel in this my life, that I could fly." She stretched out her arms in longing.

"Would you leave me?" reproached Isabella.

"But for a little season. See! Here's Sir Hugh, a parchment in his hand. Isabella, he looks so grave!"

Isabella already read the omen. She

laid a hand upon her brother's arm, but her eyes sought Marjory's.

"Ill news for so fair a morning, princess," he said gently.

She whitened.

"My father, Sir Hugh?"

"He lies asleep upon the coast of sunny France," he answered tenderly.

"Would I had gone as hostage! Your pardon, lord," and with rapid steps she left the garden.

"Proud and brave," Sir Hugh mused, with wet eyes.

Then he picked up the spray of apple-blossoms with which she had been toying, and, twirling it thoughtfully, reentered the castle.

The next day the princess sought Sir Hugh.

"My lord, upon the morrow I and my servants do depart for Cornwall. I pray you, add to your favors that of Isabella's company with me."

Sir Hugh's face darkened.

"Nay"—she raised a slender, protesting hand—"say not so. Lend her to me but for a little while, Sir Hugh."

He answered nothing, but waved his hand toward the broad valley through which the river wound, a silent, silvery serpent, to the sea.

"Is it a fair country?" he asked.

"Yea, a goodly country, lord."

He turned about and indicated the great forest. "Is there a nobler hunting-ground in your domain?"

"Nay, lord."

"You love power, my princess, and, thanks to the king, I rank first of the nobles. Your father gave his blessing. Will you be my wife?"

She felt the winning sweetness of his look, the compulsion of his powerful personality. Yet she answered steadily: "No, my lord."

"This is no time for the whims of a girl," he answered roughly. "Why not, my princess?"

"Because my troth is already plighted," she flung back haughtily.

"Your father knew it not?" he demanded.

"Nay, we were but boy and girl together."

Sir Hugh's brows drew apart. He threw back his head and gave a full-throated laugh.

"Nay," she answered hotly, "you do wrong to laugh. I gave my pledge, and my troth holds."

My lord's manner changed upon the instant. "The name of your betrothed?"

"Sir Ralph de Bois Noir," she answered.

A little flicker of compassion flitted over his face.

Very gently he said: "Did you not know Sir Ralph de Bois Noir was married at the court of France six months past?"

"I do not believe—" she began.

"Men doubt many things. They do not doubt my word, lady," he answered, a cold gleam in his eyes.

She turned away.

"Lady, you are proud. You cannot have loved him. You were all too young to love. He returns to his domain. I have heard. The remedy lies here," and he struck his chest with his powerful hand.

She turned to him, and he was amazed to see the haughty anger that blazed in her eye and whitened her tense nostrils. Her reed-like figure swayed slightly toward him.

She laid a slender hand on his arm. "Do you love me, my lord? I know your power. Can you wait the dawning of my love?"

"Aye, that I can," he answered, winding her in his arms. "I know that you are mine, though you know it not. I can wait."

Pale and gasping, she slipped from his arms and fled to a chamber, where she sank upon her knees, wringing her hands and wailing "*Sainte Vierge!* Oh, wo is me!"

Isabella found her thus and comforted her.

Daily Sir Hugh's love was more apparent to the king and court. Daily Princess Marjory grew paler and colder and more remote.

One bright day Sir Hugh came to the garden, where Princess Marjory sat with folded hands, her eyes on the distant valley and ever-winding river, and, stopping before her for a good moment, he said in gentle tones, though sad: "My princess, I have news."

"News?" she echoed indifferently.

"Yea; to-morrow's early sun should see me on my way to France to help our

ally. I would leave my wife behind. What say you?"

"Nay, Sir Hugh, not yet," she entreated with the agony of a wild, trapped creature.

He drew himself to his full height. "I leave, my princess," he said, "with all my powers and titles; but no wife have I, until she come and lay her hand in mine and call me 'husband.'"

In the dim torchlit chapel, before the king and court, they were married that night.

The early dawn saw Sir Hugh, at the head of a gleaming army, marching down the valley. From the tower window Marjory and Isabella watched the men disappear. Isabella wept and shrank from Marjory.

"If you had not been so hard of heart, he would not have gone," she sobbed.

Marjory answered, apparently unheeding:

"He never looked or turned his head."

IV.

THE first days lagged; the hours were long. Weeks grew to months, and many duties fell to Princess Marjory. King and councilors showed her much respect; and learned men from foreign courts sought her in their journey through the country. Her undeveloped qualities blossomed, and she became a power in the land.

Isabella watched her growth with some astonishment and much pleasure, for her love was untinged with envy or selfishness. Yet she waited in patience for the flowering of her dreams. Marjory leaned upon the gentle Isabella for council in affairs which needed tenderness and insight, and thus the months neared the end of the first year.

One night at court a rich, familiar voice sounded in Marjory's ear: "Marjory, my princess!"

She turned and found Sir Ralph de Bois Noir bowing low before her.

He answered her look: "I crave your pardon, gentle lady. You called to memory those long rides through the ancient forest, beside the sea, and, forgetting king and court, I called to the little girl I rode with then."

"And you are, Sir Ralph, newly returned from Palestine?" she questioned,

assuming indifference to the familiar caress of his voice.

Piqued at her tone, Sir Ralph answered:

"I am late from France, where I left my lady wife and a son of too tender age to brave the sea. Your husband, princess, doth prodigies like the paladins of old, despite his wounds. 'Twas he that sent me hither, bearing messages to the king."

"So you bring news from my lord, you are more than ever welcome," she said.

In the flux of emotions that stirred her she had only one conscious thought—loyalty. But when she sought her chamber she sobbed to her Madonna: "The voice, the eyes I have loved so long. He hath a fair son. . . . My lord lies wounded, and he sent no word."

Summer had come again—a warm-hearted, lavish summer. Flowers sprang from every conceivable nook and cranny. Soft winds blew. Little lizards basked in the sun. In the forest the birds flew to and fro, looking for food for their young. The deer, now plentiful, grazed in peace beside the bridle-paths. Peasants made ready their gear. It was nearly time for harvest.

Since Sir Ralph had come to court, on many occasions he had sought the hand of the princess in the dance or had ridden beside her in the chase. Ofttimes, too, his horse and squire stood in the courtyard, while Sir Ralph, within, told tales of strange adventures in foreign lands, sang love-songs in the manner of the troubadours, or looked mute love and longing out of a pair of soft brown eyes at Princess Marjory.

At first Isabella, quietly observant, said nothing. If Sir Ralph had had time to notice the gentle lady, he might have seen an occasional twinkle in her eyes. Latterly her manner changed, and although she was, to all appearances, as smiling and serene as before, her heart was disquieted.

Thus it happened as Isabella and Marjory rode to court through the fields covered with sparkling cobwebs, quoth Isabella, with troubled brow:

"You know that Sir Ralph rides to the coast on the morrow to take ship for France."

"Yes," answered Marjory, with tightened lips, "I know. What of that?"

"Haply you send some line of greeting to my brother?" ventured Isabella.

"Did your brother send aught to me?"

"My faith! He had other work besides to hold a pen," defended Isabella.

"Aye, so have I," thrust Marjory.

At that moment there was a sound of galloping hoofs, and a gaily plumed and dressed company of knights and ladies swept upon them out of a byroad from the castle to the king's highway.

"We ride to the summer pavilion in the forest," called one blithe dame.

The horses of the little cavalcade wheeled and joined the others. Sir Ralph unostentatiously rode beside the princess.

With jest and laughter the party sped on, up through the dense forest, where even the birds were quiet, for it neared the hour of noon.

Princess Marjory was sad, she knew not why. The jesting suited not her mood, and her palfrey lagged. Sir Ralph, who had been studying the drooping face intently, also lingered. The road wound up beside the gorge, and narrowed as it neared the crest of the ridge. All the broad valley lay beneath them. At the base of a great boulder they paused and looked away over the great gorges, where the two rivers ran and at last joined and swept on as one wide river, encircling first the palace of Sir Hugh, and next the castle of the king, and lastly writhed its way in many curves through the valley to the far-off seas.

"See the rivers, Marjory?" said Sir Ralph, every inflection in his voice a caress. "So were our lives, and so they should have flowed into one and on forever till they reached the mighty sea."

As from a dream Princess Marjory answered somberly:

"So it might have been."

"Marjory, Marjory, do you remember the early days, when we ran the wild wood with the hounds?"

"Aye, I remember when you stood before me, dagger in hand, and, with blade and hounds, drove off a mother wolf who sprang at me."

"Ah, Marjory, I loved you, little maid, I love you now. Leave this forlorn state and come with me beyond the seas. My ship lies in the harbor. We'll sail back to the Holy Land, where I will seek a service of the Sultan."

The revived love of years spoke in his voice.

The faint ghost of Marjory's early love answered it; but, more, her spirit leaped at the thought of strange adventures in foreign lands.

Like a hawk that has been tethered long, she yearned to fly into the unknown. Through her mind fluttered visions of sandy plains under a burning sun, herself in armor charging in the forefront of the battle among wild Arabs; the flash and cut of steel; and death, glorious death in Sir Ralph's arms, after a man's work.

Thus Sir Hugh might hear and know that she was not to be scorned; that she, also, was fit for a great life and the death of a great warrior.

With clasped hands, Marjory spoke:

"Would you treat me as your younger brother—give me a suit of armor and take me into battle at your side?"

"Nay," quoth Sir Ralph tenderly. "How could I treat you except as the lady of my love? You should rest within a tent of gold, surrounded by the dark-eyed maids of Palestine, breathing the perfumes of Araby, lulled to sleep by soft music borne on the warm winds of the southland. And then when evening came I would return, my love."

A sick horror seized Marjory.

"Stop, false knight," she cried. At the look of dismay on his face, she added gentler: "Nay, Ralph, you have humbled my pride enough. But I forgive you. Perchance you were not all to blame. I live too much in dreams. For many years I loved you, trusted you. It was hard to forget."

"And so you sought this revenge?" Sir Ralph laughed venomously.

"Nay, vengeance sought I none," said Princess Marjory, startled.

Never as on that day had Sir Ralph so charmed the king and court with wit and grace and gallantry. When he rode away that afternoon many a gentle lady followed him with longing and regret. But he carried a sore heart.

V.

SLOWLY crept that summer away. Autumn came, and a goodly wind brought home Sir Hugh Craig de Montagne and the remnant of his army. It was a gala day for the wives of those who came

marching up the valley, but a sad one for the widows.

Behind the king and his councilors stood Princess Marjory and Lady Isabella. They saw Sir Hugh bend the knee, and, ere he could well bend, his liege had him taken up and kissed.

Presently he bowed with much stateliness over his lady's hand. Isabella sprang close to his heart and nestled there.

As she stood looking at the two, Princess Marjory saw the scar of the wound which had so nearly cleft Sir Hugh's head. It flushed to scarlet under her eyes: and Sir Hugh led Lady Isabella into a deep bayed window, where the curtains fell and cut them off from view.

The court hummed about her. She, in her robes of state, moved about, playing her part with graciousness, but conscious above all things else of the curtained window.

Had false reports reached Sir Hugh? Was he wearied with his long journey? Was it the contrast between her and the beautiful French ladies that irked him? Wherein was she amiss?

The leaves of autumn fell, and snowflakes began to fly. It was ever Isabella who crept close to my lord's heart beside the fire, who sewed upon his gloves, who kissed the scar on his face, as brother and sister sat in the great chair beside the fire.

With a few words of commendation to the princess, Sir Hugh had taken up his old duties. Marjory's hands were empty, save for woman's work, and her hours were spent alone. Isabella was much with her brother, lingering about the portal when he rode forth, sitting on a stool at his right hand in the hall, listening for his footfall in the corridors, and repeating his every word as if it were the message of an angel.

Princess Marjory found the situation unbearable. She had neither work nor friend. Sir Hugh treated her with cold courtesy and indifferent esteem. With her customary decision, she cut the knot.

The logs were crackling merrily on the hearth in the great hall, as on the night when first she entered there. Lady Isabella sat quietly beside her brother, her cheek on his shoulder, watching the dancing flames.

Then Marjory stood before them, handsome, slender, and imperious.

"I would speak with my lord alone," she said.

Isabella, wounded and amazed, sprang to her feet and, curtsying, left the room.

"My lord, I again crave permission to go to my own land," she said in a voice which trembled in spite of herself.

"Why should you leave your home?" gravely asked Sir Hugh. "Has aught gone amiss?"

"Yea, verily," she answered passionately. "All, all is amiss. I can no longer breathe this air. I long for mine own home and my poor people."

Sir Hugh rose to his full height and answered nothing, till at last she moved impatiently. He turned and said sadly: "I fear I made a grave mistake. You are free. Have your wish."

She made a low obeisance and turned to go, her throat too full of sobs to answer. Her eyes too blind with tears to see, she struck sharply against the table.

Sir Hugh was beside her in a stride, and, with one look at her tear-stained face, he swept her up in his arms.

"What is this, little princess — why these tears?"

"Because I hurt myself," she answered childishly.

Sir Hugh tipped up her dimpled, defiant chin. "Answer me truly," quoth he, "was that all?"

"Nay," she answered truly, "it was not all."

"And what else?" he insisted quietly.

"I did not wish to go to Cornwall."

"And yet you asked me?"

"Yea," she answered, her head in his tunic.

"And why?" His voice was grave, but his eyes sparkled.

"Because I could not endure to see Isabella kiss that scar."

He winced, and sighed. "Ah, yes! I feared you would shrink from that scar."

Princess Marjory raised her head in surprise, and looking him full in the eyes, said softly:

"I wanted to kiss it myself, my lord and husband."

Raising herself on tiptoe, she would have done so, but her lips met his instead.

YOU LOVED ME.

ALTHOUGH you love me now no more,
It comforts me to know
That even though the bliss is o'er,
You loved me long ago.

Though now in vain with eager eyes
For smiles I scan your face,
I recollect the glad surprise
That once I used to trace.

Though now in vain with bated breath
I wait for just one word,
I recollect—and will till death—
The ones that once I heard.

Though now in vain with heavy heart
I seek a single sign,
I recollect all Cupid's art,
Your lips, beloved, 'gainst mine.

Although you love me now no more,
It comforts me to know
That even though the bliss is o'er,
You loved me long ago.

Harold Susman.

LOVE AMONG THE CLIMBERS.*

BY BARRY LITTLETON.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

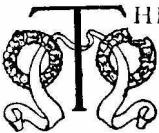
RICHARD HADLEY, a young man of good social position and numerous debts, proposes to Marian Farwell and is rejected. In a fit of rage at his treatment by her, he tells his friend, Tommy Glenn, whose offer of marriage he knows has also been declined, that Marian has described to him just how ridiculous Glenn appeared when proposing to her. He inspires Glenn with the idea of taking revenge by having her marry a spurious nobleman, and mentions a restaurant musician who will perhaps aid them in their scheme.

After interviewing the musician, a young Hungarian named Stephan Aranyi, Glenn decides that he will fit the part of bogus nobleman. Aranyi has watched Marian drive by in the park, and once rescued her in a runaway. At first, he indignantly refuses Glenn's offer, but, after receiving a certain letter from abroad, suddenly decides to accept. He meets, by chance, Marian's granduncle, Obadiah Williams, in the park, and they have a long talk.

Glenn brings Aranyi and Marian together aboard his yacht, the *Diana*. One evening, when most of the party is away in the launch and Stephan is canoing with Marian, Glenn and Hadley confer on the subject of the supposed nobleman. Hadley denies any part in the plot to pass him off on society, and coolly threatens to expose him in case anything happens to prove him an impostor.

CHAPTER VII (continued).

HADLEY'S THREAT.



THE night was breathlessly still, and the surface of the harbor had the polished smoothness of a mirror. Sound carries a long way on a night like

that. Out in the canoe Stephan leaned forward with a sigh, and poised his paddle.

"If those fellows get to talking any louder," he remarked in explanation, "we shall begin to hear what they are saying: we shall find ourselves involuntarily eavesdroppers."

He brought the head of the canoe around with a single skilful stroke, then pushed on ahead, with the evident intention of putting a quarter of a mile more of distance between themselves and the shadowy white yacht.

"I suppose the better way out of the difficulty," observed Marian, "would be to shout to them that we are coming in, and then do it."

"It shall be as you command," he said, pulling the paddle out of the water

and balancing it across his knees. "But are we such reckless spendthrifts as to throw away an hour like this? Are there so many perfect, flawless gems strung on the rosary of your experience that you can afford to throw one away? There aren't on mine. Shall I hail the yacht?"

She shivered a little, but she smiled.

"No, not for a little while," she said.

There was silence after that, except for the soft rustle of the water about the paddle-blade.

The canoe slipped along like a thing of no material substance—like a mere shadow—across the gray and silver surface of the harbor. The sound of voices from the yacht died away to a murmur.

"That's one of the things," the girl said at last—"one of the things that makes it hard to realize that I haven't known you for a long while—the way you said that this was a perfect hour for us; the way you assumed that it had been a perfect hour for me, instead of laboriously pretending to be afraid that it hadn't; that I might be bored and wanting to go in."

"It couldn't have been a very perfect

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for January, 1909.

hour for me if I had been afraid of that," he said. "Its perfection was that we shared it."

"Oh, it's all very simple," she admitted, "but it doesn't happen so very often, for all that—to be understood in that way, I mean. And it made you seem an older friend than you really are."

"The superstition of time," he laughed. "What have minutes and weeks and years to do with this?"

"Oh, really, they have a good deal to do with it. That's one of the things that, though obvious, happens to be nearly always true."

"Isn't ten minutes longer than a month, sometimes, so far as friendship goes?" he asked.

"Y-e-s," she hesitated. "But after the ten minutes are over, common sense and habit and convention need the rest of the month to catch up in. And, after all, they are a pretty large part of us."

"Is it common sense, habit, and convention that make it hard for you to find a way to address me?" he asked. "You always wait until you catch my eye before you speak to me."

She colored a little.

"That's true," she said, "but I hoped you hadn't noticed it. No, that's because I'm provincial, for one thing, and am not accustomed to titles; and the rest of it is, you have a name I can't pronounce."

"There is at least one of my names that can offer no difficulty," he said.

"Are you seriously suggesting," she laughed, "that I should call you—"

"Go on," he commanded, for she hesitated. "Finish the question."

"'Stephan?' There, you see I couldn't do it. I stammered over it then, and it was in quotation marks. And my mother would die of horror if she heard me saying it in any other sense."

"On the contrary," said he, "you did it very well. With a little practise you could do it easily. If you wish to redeem me from the inexcusable rudeness of calling you 'Marian' without a license or permission, you will begin practising at once. Every time I speak my tongue all but betrays the way I really think of you."

She turned her head a little as if listening.

"There is the launch coming back," she said. "It's a long way off yet, but it goes horribly fast, and we must be back at the yacht as soon as they are."

He took up the paddle, and in another moment they were flying along yachtward. He did not press his request, and spoke little until they had come alongside and he had handed her up the accommodation ladder. Hadley and Glenn were waiting at the head of it to receive her.

"Your mother left a message with us for you," said Hadley, after they had exchanged a few words about the beauties of the night and the imminent return of the rest of the party to the yacht. "She wanted to see you when you came in."

"In that case, I'll say good night," said Marian. And she shook hands with the men.

To Tommy Glenn there was nothing to differentiate the leave she took of Stephan from her farewell to Hadley and himself. He would have sworn that the hand that met Stephan's had been as cool and passive as the one he found in his own. He had been looking for something, too; in a savage, self-tormenting sense he was eager for it. As far as he was capable of being so, he was in love with Marian—more in love with her than he had been when he proposed to her.

But his vanity was infinitely the greatest thing about him, and that had suffered a venomous wound while he listened to the words in which Hadley had pretended to repeat her description of his proposal. And the wound smarted all the more when he reflected on the contrast between her apparent good-will and friendly kindness toward him, with the perfidy she had shown in ridiculing him to Hadley.

She had humiliated him, and he could not be happy until he had inflicted a humiliation, ten-fold deeper, upon her. He had hoped that to-night's excursion in the canoe would mark a long step in the successful consummation of his plan, but so far as he could see it had really advanced matters very little.

Hadley, however, was a better observer. He had sharp ears, sharp eyes, and a very sharp, alert mind. He was perfectly sure that when Marian turned away, leaving the man called "Count

Aranyi" in the companionway, he had heard her whisper the word "Stephan" under her breath. In that case, matters were distinctly progressing. It was time for his investigation to begin in good earnest.

He really meant what he had said to Tommy Glenn. The threat was no idle one. He intended, before many weeks wore away, to have Stephan's full career spread before him, in black and white.

He had entertained a suspicion ever since the early days of the voyage—a suspicion whose nature he never breathed to Tommy Glenn, and the very existence of which would have surprised that young man out of his boots, as the saying goes. Hadley knew where Tommy had found the bogus count, knew he was the man he had seen sitting on the park bench and loitering on the curb. He was perfectly familiar with the terms of the bargain that Tommy Glenn had made with him.

And yet, in spite of all that, Richard Hadley suspected something.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW FRIENDS THAT ARE OLD.

THE slanting early morning sun burnished the surface of the little harbor till it shone like polished metal. Out in the middle of it, at no great distance from where the yacht lay tugging idly at her moorings, was a squat little rowboat containing a single fisherman. To Stephan, on deck early in his bathing-suit for the luxury of a before-breakfast swim, the rowboat was just at a convenient distance to test his powers.

When he had swum out to it and back he would feel ready for his coffee. Also, if the old fisherman proved as interesting as he gave promise of being, seen thus from the yacht, it might be worth while to clamber into the little boat and have a talk with him. He would probably prove an antidote, anyway, to some of the men Stephan had had to talk with here on the yacht.

It was impossible to see much of him, for his broad-brimmed straw-hat and his white beard pretty well concealed his face. But he had the air, somehow, of one having a good time, rather than of one who merely sought his breakfast.

Stephan climbed the rail, dived cleanly and deep to prolong as far as possible that first exhilarating thrill of the cold salt water. Then he came up, got his bearings, and, with the lazy, powerful stroke of the practised swimmer, struck out for the boat.

He swam on his side, very low in the water, and paid scant attention to where he was going until he found himself in the shadow cast by the little boat. Then he rolled over on his back and turned round for a look at its occupant.

"Better climb in and rest a minute," said a voice. "That's a pretty good swim."

As he spoke he gave Stephan a first full view of his face. For an instant the younger man looked puzzled. Then he reached swiftly forward, clasped the gunwale of the boat with one hand, and stretched a bare, wet arm across to the old man.

"This is the very best kind of a surprise," he said. "There's no one I less expected to see, and no one I wanted to see more."

Recognition came a little more slowly in the old man's face, but when it did, he made up for its tardiness by the warmth of his greeting.

"Well, I declare," he said, grasping the outstretched hand. "Come right in here. Let me give you a lift."

But before he could move to put his offer into execution, Stephan had hauled himself over the side and dropped down on one of the thwarts.

"You look all right," commented the old man. "If I had seen you in the water, that day we met in the park, I'd have thought you was probably out tryin' to drown yourself. Things must be lookin' up."

Stephan laughed.

"Yes," he said; "I hope so."

"United States of America gettin' out danger?"

Stephan acknowledged the joke with a smile, but he answered rather seriously: "I don't know that I guarantee it. I've been seeing some pretty bad symptoms lately. I've been on a two-weeks' cruise in that yacht over yonder."

The old man nodded.

"Yes," he said; "the symptoms that come in here on private yachts aren't,

for the most part, what you'd call encouraging. Not but what there are exceptions," he added hastily. "I happen to know of one or two myself."

"Well, I've quit worrying about the United States, anyway," said Stephan. "I'm busy with something of greater importance."

The old man asked no spoken question, but his keen, kindly, authoritative old face was searching the younger man's with an intensity almost hypnotic.

Stephan had not meant to say more; he felt, in fact, that he had rather given himself away in the course of their previous interview. But the same impulse that had come upon him then to confide in the old man, came now.

"Do you remember," he asked, "consoling me that other day with the remark that I still might have my dreams, and that dreams were what the most of us had to be content with?"

His companion nodded.

"Well, you may be right," Stephan continued reflectively: "but that's a hard thing for a young man to make up his mind to. I just now am having a shot at trying to make my dream come true. I may win, or I may lose. If I lose, I shall probably lose the dream as well as the reality. But, anyway, there'll be the satisfaction of having tried, in place of the torment of wondering whether I might not have won if I had tried. It's rather a dangerous game to play. There are fresh dangers with every succeeding day; and it gives me a sort of waking nightmare every now and then, that is pretty bad for a while."

"When you say it is dangerous," questioned the old man. "do you mean dangerous for you, or for somebody else?"

"Oh, for somebody else, of course," said Stephan. "I should hardly call it a danger if it involved only myself."

The old man nodded rather doubtfully.

"Oh, I know," said Stephan. "that what I'm doing doesn't square exactly with the copy-book maxim. But tell me, have you been able to order your life upon such easy saws as those? Haven't you ever had to cut loose, with no greater support than your own inner sense that what you were doing was

right, and with the knowledge that the average cut-and-dried moralist would call it wrong?"

"Well, my boy," said the old man, holding out his hand, "I hope that inner voice of yours isn't lying to you."

"I hope so, too," said Stephan. Then, with the feeling that, if he did not take care, he would be telling the whole of his story—names and all—to this casual old gentleman who had twice crossed his path so opportunely, he added: "Well, I think I must be swimming back to the Diana. I shall be about ready for breakfast by the time I get there."

"The Diana?" said the other sharply. "Is that yacht over there the Diana?"

As the boat lay, the old gentleman had his back to her, and Stephan, looking over his shoulder, commanded a complete view of her. Had not something he saw on the deck just then attracted his attention, he would have noticed the quick change that came over his companion's face—a look intensely curious and almost apprehensive.

But what he saw precluded any such observation. A slender, girlish figure, clad in a bathing-suit, was mounting the yacht's rail, with the evident intention of repeating his dive and having a before-breakfast swim herself; and, though too far away for her face to be distinguishable, he was perfectly sure that it was Marian.

"Do you mind letting me pull the boat over in that direction?" Stephan asked. "There's a girl in our party there who's just gone overboard for a swim. It's rather colder than she's likely to realize, and she'll find a stronger run to the tide than she expects. There is nobody aboard the yacht to keep an eye on her."

The old gentleman disregarded Stephan's suggestion of doing the rowing; but he shipped the oars himself, and began rowing with a short, steady, deep-sea stroke toward the yacht.

The swimmer had evidently taken the little rowboat for an objective, just as Stephan had done, for when she came up from her dive they saw her strike out straight for their direction.

Presently they heard a hail in a clear, girlish voice: "Ahoy, rowboat! Will

you take me aboard for a five-minutes' rest? The tide runs a bit stronger than I expected."

The old man dropped his oars with an exclamation of astonishment. A few moments later a pair of white hands clasped the gunwale, and Marian drew herself up over the side—Marian, rosy with her morning plunge, the little tendrils of her hair that had escaped from her bathing-cap curling tight with the salt water and dripping with brilliants—Marian, looking, in fact, quite lovely.

She was facing Stephan as she drew herself aboard, and greeted him with a flush and a half-affectionate little nod.

Then she turned and looked at the other occupant of the boat. It was in that moment that Stephan got one of the greatest surprises of his life; for the girl gasped, then cried out: "Uncle Obie?" and flung her arms around the old fisherman's neck and kissed him.

He seemed to take the demonstration very much for granted, although he beamed with pleasure over it. He kissed her heartily on both cheeks in return.

"Well," he said, "I'm getting all sorts of fish this morning. It didn't look like very good fishing weather, either."

"Why," said the girl, "I thought there was something familiar about this place when we put into it last night, but I never dreamed it was your own private little harbor that we had turned into. But, oh, how glad I am that it was. This is worth all the rest of the trip put together."

Then, turning, she caught sight of the look of astonishment on the younger man's face.

"Shephan," she said—her use of his name turned him crimson to the forehead—"Stephan, let me introduce you to my uncle—my granduncle. Mr. Obadiah Williams. Uncle Obadiah, this is Count Aranyi."

"Oh, I've known him a long while," said the old gentleman, shaking hands again, "but I didn't know that was his name. And he, I reckon, hadn't much idea that I was 'Uncle Obadiah' to anybody he knew."

He rowed them back to the yacht, and the sum total of his conversation during the trip was a series of vigorous refusals

to Marian's equally insistent invitation that he come aboard with them for breakfast.

"Me on a yacht, and dressed like this?" he exclaimed picturesquely. "And your mother likely to come into the dining-room at any minute? Don't make me even think about it, my dear. It makes me feel queer."

But when he pulled up alongside the accommodation-ladder, and Marian urged the invitation once more, to her great surprise the old man reluctantly accepted, and began making fast his painter to the rail.

The girl had an impression, which, however, seemed too fantastic to take seriously, that some sort of silent signal had passed between Stephan and her uncle. This was, however, exactly true, and the young man, as he followed the older one up the ladder, added under his breath:

"I'll be dressed in a very few minutes, and will join you out here on deck. I want to have a talk with you, and the sooner the better."

Uncle Obie merely nodded.

It took Marian some little time to dress, for the bathing-cap has yet to be invented that will keep sea-water out of the hair of reckless young women who will persist in diving; and when so great a quantity of hair as that which crowned Marian's lovely head gets thoroughly wet with sea-water, the case is serious.

When at last she was ready for breakfast, she more than half suspected, and decidedly hoped, that the other two early risers had not waited for her. They were probably breakfasting, she thought, on the awning-covered after-deck, and thither she went to look for them.

She found them there, indeed, but neither of them, apparently, was thinking about his morning meal. They were standing side by side at the rail, looking out seaward, and the old man's hand was on the young man's shoulder. She could see her uncle's face in profile, and it was very grave.

"Well," she heard him say as she approached—"well, you may be right. God grant you are, and I'll do what I can to help. Let me know when you want me."

The two men caught sight of her

simultaneously, and she was sure that they both started a little. The whole thing was so unaccountable that she felt slightly troubled, and the gaiety of her greeting did not ring quite natural on her own ears. She could not be sure whether they noticed it, but she thought they did.

However, her mother came on deck just then and caught sight of Uncle Obie, so for the next hour or so Marian's attention was pretty well occupied.

CHAPTER IX.

"DO YOU LOVE ME?"

FAR down the beach the glowing coals of a dying fire threw a warm light upon the faces of a little group that gathered round it, and sent colossal, distorted shadows back across the sands. It was the non-sentimental residuum of Tommy Glenn's yachting party that constituted the group. The others, two by two, had strolled away, up or down the beach.

Around the fire they were singing, or trying to, by intervals, under Tommy Glenn's enthusiastic, if not efficient, leadership. When they didn't sing they told stories, and from the periodic bursts of laughter which came, softened by the distance, up the beach, it appeared that the stories were good.

They were not sufficiently alluring, however, to draw Stephan and Marian from the log where they were sitting, just out of reach of the now receding tide.

"It must seem strange to you," Marian was saying, with a little gesture toward the group about the fire. "Strange, and altogether different from anything you've known. Doesn't it make you feel about a million miles away from home?"

There was some reason for her supposition. They had been enjoying, that evening, an old-fashioned clambake on the beach, and their host had been no less a person than Uncle Obie Williams. Uncle Obie had, in some perfectly unaccountable way, suddenly asserted himself, in spite of Mrs. Farwell's undisguised horror over his appearance on the deck of the yacht that morning, and had remained, not only for breakfast, but for

lunch. He had capped the climax of intractability by suggesting a clambake for that evening.

Mrs. Farwell's downright dismay over the impression likely to be produced upon the aristocratic sensibilities of Count Aranyi, by the necessary accessories to such a festival, had been entirely without avail. Marian had greeted the scheme with delight, and Stephan, naturally enough, had seconded her. The rest of the party had indorsed the plan readily enough, even Richard Hadley assenting to it with a sort of good-humored disdain. So Marian's mother found herself in a magnificent, but highly ineffectual, minority.

They had really had a very jolly time. Even Mrs. Farwell herself, after watching in an agony of apprehension for the supercilious sneer with which she was sure the count would signify his contempt for the plebeian nature of the entertainment—after observing, with incredulity, that he seemed to be having more fun than anybody there—after finally watching him and Marian stroll calmly away together, with no attempt to disguise their preference for each other's society—after all this, she had, at last, drawn a long breath and begun to enjoy herself.

But there was no thanks due Uncle Obie for this happy outcome of the affair. His absurd party might have wrecked everything just as well as not. Simultaneously with the discovery that all was well, came the conviction that success was attributable, directly and exclusively, to the tact and dignity with which she had conducted herself.

Stephan took a little time before he replied to Marian's observation.

"I suppose it ought to seem strange to me," he said at last. "The curious fact is, though, it doesn't. I've never seen anything like it before, but, in some strange way or other, it makes me feel more at home than I've ever felt before. I think that really I must have been born, by some strange accident, with an American mind and a set of American feelings. I hated the atmosphere in which I grew up. I knew there was something I wanted, and that something seems to be your American democracy."

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed if you are as democratic as that," she said,

"because really we aren't. We make a great pretense about it."

"I had begun to be afraid that might be true, until I met Uncle Obie. He proved a good antidote for much mis-giving."

"Uncle Obie—" she laughed affectionately. "Yes, he's a dear. But I'm afraid the rest of us aren't much like him."

"You're like him," he said—"in that particular, at any rate."

She shook her head.

"N-no," she answered hesitatingly, "I'm a little bit sorry that I'm not, but still I'm not."

"Why," said he, "what is your fondness for him based on? Wouldn't you love him just as much if he weren't rich and big and successful; if he hadn't beaten New York at its own game? If he were really just the plain, simple-hearted, old fisherman-farmer that he seems to be to-night?"

"Of course, he's my uncle," she said defensively—"my great-uncle, I mean."

"No, it's not blood that does it, either," he went on. "You would care for him just as much if he weren't related to you at all—of course, with this proviso that you might never have got acquainted with him under those circumstances."

"I wonder if that's true," she mused. "It seems rather a strange thing to be doing—making a merit of loving Uncle Obie. Still, I don't know that I have so many merits that I can afford to throw one away. I'm afraid perhaps that's your idea; you're trying to bolster me up a little. Possibly if I hunted about I could find some other items to add to the credit side of my account."

"I don't know anything," he said, with a short laugh, which, nevertheless, held a serious cadence, "anything that I'm less anxious to investigate than the number and shape of the petals that make up the flower of your soul. But I know this much, Marian—"

He hesitated an instant. His voice was growing quieter with every phrase, but there was a rising intensity in it for all that—an intensity which, of itself, seemed to compel a pause. His hand closed over hers in a light caress which she did not attempt to terminate.

"But, Marian, I know this; I know the flower is fragrant, and I know that to breathe its fragrance is all the happiness there is in the world. It is a fragrance which haunts me, whether or not you are near. If you were taken away from me now—if I were never again to see you or to feel the touch of your hands, still I believe that the fragrance of that flower soul of yours would perfume, somehow, every breath of life I should ever draw in the world, quite—quite to the end."

The girl made no answer; perhaps because she could command her voice to none; perhaps because she felt that the hand, which lay trembling a little against his palm, was giving him answer enough.

Suddenly, however, he relinquished her fingers, rose from his seat beside her, walked three or four paces down the beach, then came back.

Looking up into his face she was surprised at what she read there—read in every tense, expressive line of his figure; in the contracted brows—the compressed lips—the interlocked fingers.

With quick intuitive sympathy she rose and confronted him, and, after a moment's hesitation, rested her hand timidly on his arm.

"What is it, Stephan?" she asked. "What's the matter?"

"Sit down again," he said. "I—I mustn't be touching you. There's nothing the matter, but I've a rather hard thing to say—something I don't quite know how to say."

She looked at him, bewildered a little, but not hurt, for his manner robbed his words of any possible sting.

"Marian," he went on at last, "I haven't asked you if you love me, but I want to ask you just this: Could a man command your love, all of himself—just a man? Do you think you could ever stand before a man and say, 'I know your soul, and I love it—the thing itself. I love it so much that, what you have been, or what you may become—what the world understands or misunderstands about you—whatever rags of circumstances Fate may have clothed you in—whether to other eyes you are great or small, noble or mean, is a matter of indifference to me? Could you say: 'I know your soul and I want it, through all my life, close, close beside my own—"

so close that they are not two, but one' ? Do you think a man could command your love as far as that, Marian? "

She sat drooping there upon the log, and he, looking down from his height, could not see her expression. Presently she buried her face in her hands.

He dropped on his knees beside her, and his arm slipped round her waist.

"Marian, dear," he said, "perhaps I can put it a little more simply. Suppose you loved me—a man exactly, exactly like me—and he should say to you to-night: 'You know me for what I am; you know the real man in me; you know his mind and heart and soul, but the circumstances in which you have seen him—the things that, perhaps, at first were what gave him his interest in your eyes—the tinsel glitter about him that first attracted you—all that is nothing but a dream. The man himself is true; he is the very man you love—he has shown you the very heart of his heart. But the cloak—the magic cloak, which an enchanter loaned him, will change back to-night, like poor little *Cinderella's* ball-gown, to the rags he wore when the enchanter found him.'

"If he were to tell you that, and were able to make you believe it true, could you say to him: 'I don't care about the cloak—love will be our enchanter now, and it will weave us another; but you are alive and real, and you are the man I love' ? Would you say that to him, Marian? "

He had finished. He was waiting for his answer. But for a long time she sat there, silent, still in the embrace of his arms, her face hidden in her hands.

But at last she sat erect, and, with a little gesture, asked him to release her.

"You mustn't touch me now," she said. "I'm not quite sure what the truth is, and with you so near I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to find it. You want the truth, I know. I must tell it to-night if I ever tell it in my life."

He obeyed her, rose and stood before her in his old attitude, his hands clasped tight in front of him.

It was a long while before she spoke, and, when she did, her voice was scarcely audible.

"While you were talking," she said—"while you were saying all that to me. I

believed that the answer was yes—that I shouldn't mind if the cloak were nothing but enchantment. But down in my heart, even then, was a fear. If love were all a moonlight night, Stephan—if there were no world at all to live in—just a lovely, flowery wilderness, then the answer would be easy. But the world is there; it isn't any farther off than that fire down there on the beach, and the people sitting about it—their voices come to us even now.

"Those voices would come to us every day of our lives; they'd be the ones we should hear the oftenest. Those voices would sneer at the ragged cloak, and—yes, I think the sneer would hurt. Perhaps it's a little hard for you to understand that. The world has never sneered at you; if it were to try, you could laugh at it. I'm afraid you'll despise me for saying I want the cloak, too. And it would be so easy—so terribly easy to say the other thing. But, somehow, I can't lie to you; I have to tell you the truth."

He drew a long, deep breath.

"Well," he said, "perhaps you're right. Perhaps I shouldn't have talked as I did if I had had any real fear that the enchanter would take my cloak away. But it has lasted a long while now—a good many generations. It's a little worn, but it's pretty clean and not badly tarnished. Its glory is not quite what it was in my great-great-grandfather's day, but it's still a sufficiently imposing covering to shield one from the slings and arrows of the world. Marian, will you be my wife—my countess? Will you take my name and share my place in the world with me? Do you love me enough for that?"

"But you," she cried, "do you love me? "

Again he dropped on his knees beside her; this time within the circle of her own young arms.

"I love you—" he whispered. "I love you better than my own soul!"

CHAPTER X.

NEW GUISE OF AN OLD FRIEND.

WITH a long sigh of complete satisfaction Mrs. Farwell sank down into a great carved chair placed in a niche which screened her somewhat

from her thronging guests, and fanned herself. She wanted to be alone for just a minute, to let the strained nerves and muscles relax, and to try to grasp the stupendous fact that it was all true—that it was actually accomplished.

Ever since that night last summer when Marian had told her of her engagement to Count Aranyi, she had gone about like a woman in a dream, haunted by the terrible fear that she might wake up. She had told herself that it was too good to be true; that it couldn't possibly be true. She had begun saying that, indeed, when she had witnessed Aranyi's first introduction to Marian; but without the conviction—the poignant conviction that nothing so perfect could possibly last—that she had felt since she had learned that the engagement was actually an accomplished fact.

Marian a countess! She, herself, mother-in-law to a count! The wildest of her dreams was surpassed. She had got acquainted with Stephan; had got over, somewhat, being afraid of him.

She was aware—oh, this was only in the background of her thoughts—that her dream of her own personal social triumph was coming true. People here to-night were taking account of her who had never taken account before. Here, this evening, at the wedding reception were people in her drawing-rooms whom she had never hoped to see there.

But all that was minor and subordinate. Her own triumph was lost sight of in the blinding illumination of the fact that Marian had become—was actually at this moment—a countess. That was an achieved fact. Nothing that could happen would matter now. She could come back to real life again without the fear that all the cloud-capped palaces of her imagination would suddenly be swept away in some cold wind of actuality.

She surveyed her guests with an almost apathetic eye. Many of them were no more familiar to her than the sight of their pictures in the Sunday papers had made them to the rest of New York's four millions.

But here and there was a face that suggested some connection personal to herself. She saw Richard Hadley, with his languidly supercilious expression

which once had caused her so many uncomfortable moments. She need never be afraid of him again, at any rate.

Presently, through a vista in the gorgeous crowd, she caught a glimpse of Marian herself, and the girl's loveliness, her radiance, the perfection of her happiness, which transfigured her already beautiful face, brought to her mother, for the first time, a purely maternal pang.

She had won her game; she had attained the heights of her ambition, but she had lost her daughter in the process. The girl was going away now, in an hour or two. After a brief honeymoon, she was to sail directly for the continent. For the rest of their lives all intercourse between them would be a matter of casual visits, brief and probably unsatisfactory.

She remembered having seen Uncle Obie a short time before, and having remarked that his eyelids were red as if he had been weeping. The sight of him had offended her then—Uncle Obie was not a decorative figure, at best. But now she began to feel a certain sympathy with him. A very little more and she might weep herself.

Her view of her daughter was still unobstructed, when she saw Tommy Glenn go up to speak to her. She was surprised to see the girl's eyes brighten at sight of him; still more surprised when Marian put out both hands, instead of one, with a little gesture much more impulsive than was her wont, to greet him.

Glenn himself was as much surprised at the demonstration as Marian's mother had been. He had gone up to speak to the girl, torn by the conflict of strong emotions.

He was more in love with her than he ever had been before, and little as he was in the habit of studying his states of mind, he was aware that this was so. But, at the same time, he hated her, or thought that he did. All the friendliness she had shown him up to now had been to him nothing more than an instance of her hypocrisy and deceit. She was probably still laughing at him, although her confidant now was undoubtedly Stephan.

That thought in itself was wormwood. Well, he had avenged himself, fully and completely. He had no intention of exposing Stephan himself. The thing

would be done automatically. He would simply cut off the man's supplies, and let the girl find out the wretched truth for herself. What Stephan would do, he did not know. He might desert her when he had come to the end of the last thousand Tommy had let him have. Or he might confess to her and rely on her own pride and on her mother's to shield him for a while longer.

Tommy tried to assure himself that he didn't care much whether that confession should implicate himself or not. He was not even sure whether, if taxed with his share in the imposture, he would admit or deny it. Either course would be easy.

He had come to the wedding rather reluctantly, but this act was clearly necessary to carry the imposture through. He had not meant to go up and speak to Marian, but the sight of her standing there for a moment, quite alone, had drawn him to her irresistibly. And then

had come that sudden brightening of her eyes and the impulsive gesture of both hands.

"I was afraid you weren't going to come and speak to me," she said, "and I wanted you to so much. You've been very, very good to me.

"I hope you'll be my friend always, because I know, and I want you to know, too, how much you have had to do with making me the happiest girl in all the world."

Her words had fairly staggered him. The honesty of her was so patently apparent. No evidence in the world to the contrary could have made it possible to doubt the sincerity of what she said, at least not while one stood there looking into her eyes.

Just as it happened, when his distressed gaze strayed from her it fell directly upon the sneering face of his old friend and present enemy, Richard Hadley.

(To be concluded.)

A MATTER OF TEMPERAMENT.

BY LOUISE DRISCOLL.

A SHORT STORY.



ELSWORTH pushed the little electric button and turned to look again about the neighborhood. A long line of brownstone houses stretched on either side of the way, little pointed baywindows displaying a variety of cheap net or Nottingham lace-curtains, the character of the inmates being indicated by stages of freshness or elaboration in the drapery.

The street had never been fashionable. Numerous ash-barrels stood quite frankly on the sidewalk, and the mistress of the house, as a rule, answered the bell. A maid admitted Elsworth, however, regarding him with the indifference born of long service in a lodging-house. "He ain't the kind to stay," she decided, assuming that he was looking for rooms.

"Madam will be right down," she said, and left him standing in the narrow parlor.

He recognized some of the furniture. There was a rocking-chair he had chosen himself. He felt a little pain creep into his throat as he looked at it. It was as though the inanimate thing had risen to strike him. And there was the piano.

So Rose had kept the piano. It showed the effect of having been moved more times than was good for it. One of their first quarrels had been over that piano. He had known they couldn't afford it. The pain in his throat deepened into a sensation like faintness as the past touched him.

There was an air of disorder in the room, little wads of dust lay on the floor against the wall, where the rug didn't

meet the base-board. The table was overlaid with a light cloud of dust. There were enormous yellow bows on the net curtains, and a cluster of red artificial carnations had apparently been a long time undisturbed in a green vase on the mantle. A number of unnecessary scarfs were draped in places where they did not seem to be needed. It was all very much like Rose.

An impulse to run away seized him, a new fear joining the old repugnance; but he conquered both and rose to greet her, looking quiet, only his eyes were tense.

Rose had come in carelessly. She supposed he was looking for rooms and didn't care whether or not he liked what she had. She had put on a dressing-sack trimmed with a profusion of lace ruffles, and she held it together at the throat with one hand as she stood to greet him. Her light, pretty hair was massed over a high pompadour, and her cheeks were touched with rouge.

Rose stared at him a minute, startled, and he could not think of what he had intended to say. She broke the silence.

"Well, of all things!" she said, and sat down suddenly; and then: "I suppose you're looking for rooms? Ain't it funny?"

Elsworth found his voice. "Why, no," he said. He found it was not easy to tell her the truth. "You see—I was looking for you." He hesitated. Rose forgot the dressing-sack, and it fell open at the throat. She looked like a pretty, painted child. He put up his hand involuntarily to his temples, where his hair was growing thin. How long was it? Then he found himself explaining.

"I met Sara Walton in London last month. She told me about you. All you had been doing these last years. The time you were on the stage—in the store—keeping boarders—"

She interrupted him. "You didn't think I was living on what you sent, did you?" she inquired tartly.

"I sent all I could," he protested, "and as long as I knew how to reach you; but after Desborough died I couldn't find out where you were. I have more money now. My last book really paid—you find it hard to believe that?" he smiled for the first time.

She refused to meet his jest.

"I got along," she said sullenly.

He felt very awkward. He put out his hand to the chair he had once bought for her. It seemed like another person there who understood the situation. It seemed like the definite expression of his right to be there.

Rose watched him from under her eyelids that fell almost to her cheek. It was an old trick. Rose hadn't changed. He laughed uneasily.

"We made rather a mess of things, Rose," he said.

She flashed another look at him without making any answer, so he spoke again:

"It was rather a shock to meet Sara as I did. She brought it all back to me so vividly. She set me wondering how much of it could have been helped. I know I was wrong a good deal of the time. I want to be fair about that." The man was talking to himself as much as he was to her, and Rose recognized this with a flash of her old impatience.

"You haven't changed a bit," she declared hotly. "You just sit there and talk; and you'll sit there and talk all night, if I'll let you."

Elsworth was slightly offended. It was all ridiculously like the past they had both dropped.

"I only wanted to make the thing clear," he told her; "if we could talk it over quietly, we might both feel better."

Rose shook herself impatiently. "What's the use of talking it over?" she exclaimed. "Who wants to talk it over? I've got along all right, and you look as though you had. People are good to me—I'm that kind. You got notice of the divorce, didn't you?"

"Yes—yes," he said. "From Dakota. Yes. To tell you the truth—I confess—I didn't pay much attention to it. I've never thought of marrying again, and I was so busy with my book—"

Rose sniffed audibly. "I can believe that," she remarked with some asperity.

"Perhaps I gave too much attention to my work," he confessed. "I can see that now. At first it was with the idea of making more money—you always needed money, Rose." He was very uncomfortable. "What ground did you give for divorce?" he asked with a new

curiosity as he reviewed their life together.

"Non-support and extreme cruelty," replied Rose glibly.

He laughed involuntarily, and Rose stiffened perceptibly, half insulted.

Then he rose and paced the little parlor; twice and three times he went before he stopped in front of her chair.

"Of course that's all nonsense," he said. "You know that as well as I do. I gave you more than I could afford, and you didn't know what cruelty was. I probably did spend too much time over my work. You needed a lot of things I never thought of. I don't blame you for being dissatisfied. I was so tired of quarrels and worried with debts that I wasn't really sorry when I found you'd gone. We may as well be honest about that. I just went into my work a little harder and left the country before long.

"I sent you money through Desborough as long as I could. After he died I couldn't seem to reach you. Two or three letters came back to me, and then I gave it up. I was wrong there. Then I met Sara Walton and she brought it all back to me. You've put up a good fight, Rose. I'm sorry you've had to work so hard." Then he stopped, for she looked like an untroubled child except for the rouge on her cheeks. The work had left no mark. She caught his thought and answered it.

"Oh, I got along," she said. "I always do. I'm the kind people look out for. I got paid pretty well in the chorus because I'm pretty, and they put me in the front row. But I couldn't learn to dance, so I couldn't get in the next show. Then I went in Oppersham's and sold lace for a while till they put me in the millinery to show off hats. I put them on, you know, so that ladies could see what they looked like, and then they'd buy 'em and think they looked like me." Rose grinned appreciatively. "Then I had a friend who had a boarding-house and she wanted me to come with her, so I did and stayed until she died. We did pretty good, but since then I've only kept lodgers because I wasn't going to bother to try to suit people with meals."

II.

ELSWORTH stood looking at the rocking-chair. It seemed to understand him

better than she did. When he had chosen it, he had thought he had a home like other men. He had been selfish and cold, without doubt. What a farce it all seemed! "Extreme cruelty." He laughed aloud as he recalled the words. Rose watched him angrily. She had always hated this trick of thinking and talking by himself as though she were not there. After a minute he came back to her.

"There is one thing, Rose, I've got to know," he said. A few hard lines had settled about his mouth. "Sara said—the child—was that true? Was there a child, Rose?"

Rose's eyes went wide with a look that flashed deep into his soul. She clenched her little hands and opened them before she spoke.

"That was soon over. It was born dead," she said.

"When?"

"It was eight months after I left. I didn't know till I'd gone. Then it was too late. I went to a hospital. It was born dead. It was a girl. I didn't think I had to tell you."

"How you must have hated me," he said.

Rose moved uneasily. "Oh, I don't hate you now," she assured him. "I'm like that. I get over things."

Elsworth paced the floor and came back to her again. He was trying not to see the yellow bows on the curtains and the dusty carnations on the mantle, but both obtruded unnaturally upon his consciousness. He was trying to face conditions honestly and deal with them in all honor.

"Will you try it again, Rose?" he said gently. "I was very wrong. I wish you'd try it again."

Rose edged away from him, shrinking. "Oh, no!" she said. "Oh—no—no! It's too late. You're all right. I'm not mad at you. Only—"

The door-bell rang briskly three times. A sudden change crept into Rose's manner, a shade of anxiety came into her blue eyes.

"You better go," she urged. "You're all right. I'm not your kind. It was a mistake always. You'd be sorry. I wish you would go."

She pushed him gently out of the room.

It was impossible to mistake her sincerity in wishing him to leave.

At the door he passed a portly, red-faced man of prosperous appearance who vouchsafed him a civil nod and entered as one who knew the place.

Elsworth hardly saw him, but stood for a minute looking back at the house before he went on down the shabby street. He had no regret for what he left, but his breath came unevenly because he thought he felt a little hand laid on his heart.

The prosperous gentleman gave Rose

a cordial greeting. "Got a new lodger?" he inquired.

"No," said Rose. "He's not going to stay. I'm awful sorry I'm not ready—I hadn't finished dressing."

"That's all right," he said indulgently. "You run along and get ready. I'll wait. And, say—don't take any more lodgers, anyway. We better get married right away. There ain't no use waiting as I can see. I don't want you working so hard."

Rose looked at him with real affection. "You're awful good," she said.

THE TWILIGHT-ROOM.

BY MARGARET R. PORTER.

A SHORT STORY.

BLEAK HOUSE, it should have been called; but, despite the large shadowy rooms, the gray walls and towers, the surrounding park of pop-

lars and maples that murmured and sighed through the summer, and in winter raised gaunt, empty arms skyward and mourned for lost summer—despite its general atmosphere of solitude and gloom, it was called Sunnyside.

The interior, from the dark book-lined walls of the library—where the master of the house sat brooding among the shadows, himself the somberest of them all—throughout the house, all was gloomy and silent. Even the music-room, which was situated in the east wing, and would have been the most cheerful room in the house, was dark, and never used. And through its chill gloom the white covers of the furniture loomed up straight and silent like ghosts, waiting expectantly, as if hoping to hear half-forgotten melodies from the yellow keys of the piano, on which no one ever played.

The same silence pervaded the halls, broken only by the monotonous "tick-tock—tick-tock" of the grandfather's

clock or the occasional quiet tread of a servant.

But high up in the top of the south tower there was a room with many windows, where the sun might enter at all hours. There, peeped the first flush of dawn; there, all was flooded with the brightest warmth of the noonday sun, and there, too, lingered the last glimmer of day.

When all below was wrapped in shadows and the lamps were lighted, a soft, mellow radiance still filled the room till the last streak faded from the sky and the night fell. And so it was called the Twilight-Room, and the Twilight-Room was a nursery.

In the master's heart, also, there was a Twilight-Room. It had long been empty, the shades drawn, and the door locked fast.

Several years before, he had brought to the old house a young wife, thinking to fill it with happiness—make it a home. But she was very young—scarcely more than a child—full of life and the joy of living. The life at Sunnyside was to her what that of a butterfly would have been, shut up in a dark box, when it longed for the sunshine and flowers.

Between the girl-wife and her husband—who was years her senior—there was no understanding, no harmony. So the great gray house never became a home.

Then one day the room high up in the tower—the Twilight-Room—became a nursery, and the breach that had been widening ceased growing. Every day at twilight a man and woman met here and looked at each other across the fair head of the child, their son, and there seemed to be in their glance a spark of understanding which might have burned into something deeper had the distance not been so great.

There one day, when the child was not yet three months old, she came to him and asked to return to the home of her parents. He, being too proud to ask her reason, and conscious of the constraint that had recently been between them, consented.

Shortly after, his best friend, a man many years his junior, left his house near Sunnyside "to travel through the Southern States," as rumor put it. One day he read in the society column of a certain Southern newspaper that the Hon. John Manse, of York, had stopped in Rushton during his Southern travel, and, being delighted with the climate, would probably spend the winter there. Just below this was the announcement that Mrs. Sherwood, of Sunnyside, had returned to Rushton with her infant son, to make her parents a visit of indefinite length.

Seeing his wife's name so closely connected with that of his friend, under the circumstances, brought a dark thought to the mind of the master of Sunnyside. Perhaps there had been more than friendship between the two, and they were merely awaiting a conventional length of time before—!

He put the thought hastily aside, for it was distasteful to him; and there was the child to be thought of. They had an understanding about the child. It was to remain with its mother until, having attained its fifth year, it should spend the summer months at Sunnyside with its father and return at the first breath of autumn to the mother.

The first two years of the separation he spent in traveling—sometimes on the Continent, sometimes in the States—but returning always in the summer-time to

Sunnyside. He lived there entirely cut off from the outside world, with only his books and his thoughts as companions. Many times his thoughts were of the summer that would bring the child.

II.

SPRING of the fifth year merged into summer, and the air was warm and bright with sunshine. The trees and grass were fresh and green, and a thousand birds filled the air with song. Inside, the master of the house sat before a fire which burned up cheerily, trying its best to do the work that the sun should have done—that of drying out the damp and mustiness of the winter and spring, for the master had been away and the house closed for many months.

He sat in his accustomed chair unconscious of the brightness and warmth of the summer-day, oblivious to everything but the chill of the room and the note that he held in his hand as he leaned forward closer to the fire while he read it. It was brief; and stated that—in keeping with their contract, and the time having arrived—the child, accompanied by his governess, had started that morning and would arrive at Sunnyside almost as soon as the note itself. Having read it for the third time, he folded and placed it in the envelope, lighted a cigar, and leaned back in his chair to think.

Masters had gone to meet the train and would soon return. How should he greet his son? What should he say? Perhaps he would have to be amused all the time, perhaps cry for his mother and want to go home.

He, the great stern man, who aved all who knew him, was filled with sudden nervous dread at the thought of meeting this very small person, his son. Then he thought of the pony and cart that stood in the stables waiting for their young owner, and also of the piles of new toys high up in the Twilight-Room, and he grew somewhat comforted.

The smoke from his cigar rose in clouds and hung about the room like a veil deepening the gloom. And through its haze he looked through half-closed eyes to a far corner of the room, where seemed to burn the wavering forms of the three gray women, the Spinner, the Weaver, and the Clipper of Threads. The faces

of the first two were beautiful but sad, and seemed to look at him pityingly, but that of the third was old and haggard and wore a leering, mirthless smile.

The Spinner had done her part, but it was the Weaver who had made the mistake in weaving together threads of such different texture. They were in a hopeless tangle, his life and hers, but there was a bright, strong thread that still held them together, and he dismissed the face of the third gray woman from his mind with the thought of the Twilight-Room.

Just here his reverie was broken off by the crunching of wheels on the gravel drive and he rose suddenly to his feet. The carriage stopped. There was a stamping of small feet coming up the steps, a clatter along the veranda, then the door opened wide and a small, sturdy figure came into the room.

At first he stood and blinked his eyes trying to see about this room, so different from the bright sunlit world from which he had just come. Then as he grew accustomed to the dark he saw the tall, silent man standing back where the room was darkest, and started across to him, but paused half way and asked doubtfully:

"Are you my father?"

And because he did not know what else to say, his father merely answered, "Yes."

The child moved toward him again, but went only a few steps.

"Are you quite sure?" he persisted, "because I thought you'd have a long white beard and carry a cane."

"And, why?" asked his father, a gleam of amused curiosity in his eyes. "Did you think that I was so very old?" He wondered if the child's impression came from the mother's description.

"Oh, because Marie told James that you were quite old," was the answer, "and that you were a book-worm. What's a book-worm?"

"Come here—" began the man, then stopped suddenly, realizing that he did not know his son's name. As a baby he had been taken away before being christened, and in the years that followed, the messages, that came at rare intervals, mentioned no name but spoke of him as "the child" or "the boy."

However, his son had not noticed the

omission of his name, but came over and stood looking up at his father, who stooped down, took the hat from the flaxen head and smoothed his hair. If he did it awkwardly, he did not seem to think it unusual to be taking off large sailor hats and smoothing down rumpled hair. Then he lifted him to a chair and sat down opposite, looking at his son critically. The color of hair and eyes was like his mother, but he marked—not without a feeling of pride and satisfaction—that the shape of the face, the expression of the eyes and the firm mouth were his own.

"What is it," he questioned, "that they call you at home? That is," ending lamely, "have they pet names for you?"

"Oh, yes," he was assured sweetly. "Muvver calls me Buddie Boy, and Marie sometimes calls me Laddie, and sometimes," he leaned forward and whispered, "little imp."

The master of Sunnyside raised his eyebrows at this, the lines about his mouth deepened into what might have been called a smile, and his eyes twinkled.

"Quite a variety of names," he remarked, realizing that still he did not know his son's name. "But I think that 'Buddie Boy' is a very nice one, and I shall call you that."

He leaned over and touched a bell, and its echo had scarcely ceased sounding through the house before a man in livery appeared.

"You may take my son to the nursery," he said, "and the governess—was there a governess?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "she is waiting in the morning-room, sir."

"Ask her to come here a moment, wait for her and show her to the room adjoining the nursery."

The man bowed, and taking the child by the hand went out. A moment later a pale woman in a black dress entered the room. The master of the house turned as she entered.

"You are my son's governess?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, for these past five years," she answered.

This, thought the man, is Marie. Then aloud: "Your name is—"

"Marie."

"And my son, what does he call you?"

"He has always called me Marie, sir."

"And you, what do you and his mother call my son?"

The woman hesitated. "You are asking me for your—for your son's name?"

"Exactly," he answered; "and as we are to be in the same house together for some time, I think that it would be as well if I knew it." His voice was more than stern; it was harsh, and held a bitter tinge.

"Oh," she said, her voice taking on a gentle tone. "I did not know. Your son's name is Robert."

"Thank you," he replied briefly—"that is all I wanted."

At the door, she turned and glanced back at the bowed head of the father, and as she hurried up the stairs, whispered softly to herself: "I did not know."

III.

MANY days passed at Sunnyside—bright, warm, sunny days, the brightness of which seemed to steal into the old house in the guise of childish footsteps and laughter, now echoing along the upper corridor, now down the stairway, coming near the library at times, but never quite into it, where the father sat listening and wondering how to become better acquainted with his son.

Sometimes the small person would slip quietly along the hall and peep in the door where his father sat listening, and as quietly slip away, till, when he reached the upper floor, called back by Marie, a burst of childish relief would ring through the hall and echo down in the room below, where the man sat and waited.

Here once, in the silence of the night, he heard a pattering of feet along the hall, and turned to see a wee white figure standing in the door.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What's this?"

"It's Buddie Boy," was the faint reply. Immediately the little feet continued their pattering, until Buddie Boy reached his father's great chair, where, both hands clasped behind him, baby eyes wide, he whispered, in an awed

little voice, that it talked and talked, and wouldn't let him go to sleep, and what did it say?

Mystified, the man bent forward, thinking that the child must have walked in his sleep, and held out his arms to carry him back to the nursery. But the wide eyes of his son were quite serious, and the childish lips again formed the question. "What did it say?"

So he merely sank back into the chair, and asked him gently what he had heard talking.

"Why, the tree," said the small person, pointing a chubby forefinger in a direction that lay anywhere between the great fireplace and the picture of the beautiful lady, that hung on the far side of the room.

The man rose, and in a voice meant to be playful, but which had been gruff and stern for so long that it failed utterly, said:

"Well, my little man, this seems to be a mystery that it will take two to solve. Come and let us look into it together."

So they started across the room, he holding the child's warm hand in his, and trying to keep pace with the short steps which were leading him toward the door at the south end of the room.

The door was open, the air was warm and soft, and the night was flooded with moonlight.

"There it is," said the child now, pointing with a steady hand out into the night.

Just beyond the shadow of the house, towering straight and slender in the moonlight, stood a great aspen-tree, and its topmost branches reached even beyond the room in the top of the tower. Many years had the tree stood there, almost as long as the house itself, and the silver of its leaves seemed almost a mark of age. Looking closer, the man saw that a young aspen-tree had sprung up close by the side of the old tree.

The night was wonderfully still, but as he stood there a mere breath of wind awoke, and set all the leaves dancing and whispering and gleaming in the moonlight. The little breaths of wind died out, came again, and again grew faint. This time they whispered, grew silent, and whispered again, like the low, sweet

cadence of a beautiful voice. A whip-poorwill in the edge of the park hushed his song and crept out to listen. The aspen-tree was talking.

A warm little hand touched that of the man.

"It's talking again," whispered a wee voice. "What does it say?"

Then the father sat down in a chair near the door, and the small white figure climbed to his knee, and so into his heart. Quite naturally and comfortably the yellow head sank into place in the hollow of his arms, and the large eyes did not waver until the voice, that never before had told a fairy story, had finished.

"Once upon a time," began the voice—for was not that the way that all stories began?—"once upon a time there was an aspen-tree that grew quite alone on a smooth, grassy lawn near a great, gray house. And although the winds that blew were soft and warm, and filled with the breath of flowers, they sighed and sighed through the branches of the great tree: for it was all alone. Then one warm day in summer a little aspen-tree sprang up at its feet. And the great tree was happy, and the warm winds sang through its branches in a happy little lullaby, for day by day the little tree grew taller, straighter, and its leaves were silvery, and it even tried at times to mingle its faint murmurs with the greater song of the older tree. Then many birds came and built their nests in its branches, and in the long, summer evenings, when there were tiny birds in the many nests, the great aspen-tree grew happier, because in her branches were so many homes. So it sang a longer, sweeter lullaby, partly for the little tree at its feet, partly for the baby birds in its branches, and partly for the little boy who slept in the great room way up near its top."

The childish eyes grew large and dark with excitement. "Was that little boy, me?" he gasped. "And is that the tree, and is that what it was saying?"

"I haven't the slightest doubt," responded his father, in answer to all of the questions. "In fact, I am quite positive."

Master Robert gave a shrill scream of delight, and his eyes fairly danced. "Oh!" he exclaimed emphatically,

"that is the very best story I ever heard."

A deep silence followed, broken only by the "tick-tock, tick-tock" of the grandfather's clock in the hall.

Then a tiny hand crept up to the man's face.

"You aren't young and pretty, like my muvver," he murmured drowsily, rubbing at a deep furrow across his father's brow with a pudgy forefinger; "but I love you."

At the touch of the small hand and the words uttered so simply, something warm surged up in the heart of the master of Sunnyside, and as he looked down at the serious face of the child, the furrows, of their own accord, grew less deep, and he looked as if he were going to smile.

But the expression of his son's face grew deeper, and a faint frown puckered the smooth white of his forehead.

"Where *is* my muvver?" he questioned suddenly, sitting upright. But the man was spared an answer by the twelve slow, ponderous strokes of the great clock that resounded through the house, then ceased, making the silence more intense. At the first stroke the child started, then nestled back, hiding his head under his father's coat and drawing his bare feet up, until the final vibration was hushed. Then he sank farther back, his head falling into place in the hollow of the arm that held him, the heavy eyes closed, and the sand man claimed his own.

Then the man rose with his strange burden and a happy warmth about his heart just where rested the heavy yellow head, and passed through the room and up the stairway, slowly and stealthily, lest he should awake the sleeper.

At the door of the Twilight-Room he turned and looked back. The child stirred slightly, then sank again into dreams; and through the window came the low, soothing murmur of the aspen-tree.

He closed the door softly, and as he went down the stairway the warmth in his heart flamed up suddenly and lighted his face with a smile.

IV.

LOST one day among some rare old volumes, the master of Sunnyside

chanced to see from the corner of his eye a bright gleam pass through the door where no ray of sunshine had ever dared enter. Glancing up hastily, he saw the fair tousled head, dimpled hands, and sturdy legs of his son, but no more, for clasped tightly before him, with considerable difficulty, was a large book that completely hid the rest of his small person.

Assured now of his welcome, he did not linger at the door, but, taking a firmer hold of the book, stumbled across to the table, stood on tiptoes and pushed it up among the other books, and then climbed to a chair by his father.

The book was large of surface, but not thick. The cover was torn and marked past recognition, and some of the yellow pages, on which were pictured a whole menagerie of queer animals, protruded far beyond the binding. It was a child's geography, and looked as if it had been used by others before Master Robert.

"The animals want to come out," he explained, smiling sweetly.

Opening the book, he began turning the pages, passing with a regretful sigh all the queer-looking animals, the spouting volcanoes, and the high mountains, covered on the top with snow like the sugar on top of an apple-dumpling. All these things were much nicer than maps, but he turned on steadily until, in the back of the book, he came to a page marred by two huge round pencil-marked spots on opposite sides of the States.

"Here it is," he said. "Marie showed me, and then I marked it so I could find it again. Here," he went on, putting his forefinger on one pencil-marked spot—"here is where you live. And," tracing across the map to the other mark, "'way, 'way over here—it's miles and miles and miles, Marie says—lives my muvver. Why?"

The directness of the question surprised the man, and in his mind he searched about helplessly for an answer that he could give to the child.

"Well, you see," he explained, "it is a much prettier, warmer country down there, and ever so many nice people—and it is very lonely here."

"Yes," broke in the child politely, "but it is very nice here, and," with a little earnest ring to his voice, "I like

you better than any one down there, and muvver would, too, if she knew you."

"And, then," went on the man hastily, trying to divert him from what might have led to a rally of unanswerable questions, "and there are parties there, and we never have parties here."

"Yes," assented the child, in a weary little voice. "there are many parties, and muvver goes to them all. Manse takes her in the car, and it's always morning when she comes back; but I'm asleep, and so I don't see her all day, because Marie says when muvver dances all night she must sleep most all day to keep beautiful. My muvver must sleep a long, long time, because she is very beautiful."

A wooden-faced man in livery entered the room noiselessly, and, without moving an eyelash and scarcely his lips, announced, "The pony-cart awaits Master Robert."

The child slid to the floor and started across the room. "I must go now," he called to his father. "but I'll come back soon."

"Just a moment," hesitated the master, looking cautiously at the motionless figure in the doorway. "Was that—that man Manse you were telling me about the—the chauffeur?"

"Oh, no," was the surprised reply. "he was just—just a man, and he took me riding in his car, too; but only once. I guess he likes muvver better because—"

"There, there," interrupted his father, "that is all I wanted. Run along now and have a nice drive," and the master of Sunnyside turned to his book, at which he gazed steadily for half an hour before realizing that it was upside down.

V.

SUMMER waned and merged into autumn, with its chill winds and brilliant forests.

The master of Sunnyside, returning one afternoon from a day in the saddle, saw a bright fire blazing in the great fireplace of the library, and, finding it comfortable after the sharpness of the September air, sat down before it to rest. Outside, the wind blew in fitful puffs and whirls. All through the golden afternoon the leaves were falling, falling, drifting down where they lay in masses of

gold and scarlet and brown, or dancing along in puffs of wind which carried them a little way and then let them lie and rest and wait for the next puff to carry them farther on.

As the afternoon deepened into twilight, the wind blew more steadily, bringing down great showers of leaves and whirling past the corner of the house with a low, moaning cry. The man shuddered and drew his chair nearer to the blaze. As the wind rushed on faster, its moan rose and fell like a voice crying that summer had gone and that winter was coming rapidly in her footsteps. To the man it meant a great deal more than the change of seasons. It meant that the child must go, and that he would be left alone in the solitude of the house, which would seem more lonely after the brightness that it had held for even so short a time.

The twilight deepened, and the room was lighted only by the dancing light of the fire. Through the dusk and silence, from the chill gloom of the music-room came the soft accompaniment of the piano and the low, clear voice of a woman singing.

The man listened in wonder. The song grew very soft at the close, and the voice of the singer trembled ever so slightly. Then the song was hushed, the accompaniment died away, and the singer rose from the instrument.

He heard the click of high heels and the swish of a gown coming nearer and nearer until it reached his side, and, rising suddenly, he turned and stood facing his wife.

A great flash of surprise swept over his face, and he stood spellbound, not able to move or speak. She paled slightly, but with great composure held out a cold little hand, saying: "I did not know that you were here, or I wouldn't have disturbed you."

"You never disturb me," he answered as naturally as he could. "Won't you sit down?"

She took the chair opposite him and, not waiting for him to speak, began:

"I have been touring with some friends for several weeks, and as it was so near the time for him to return home, we decided to stop for a day or two at Great River and meet him and his governess

there. Yesterday I telephoned here, and your servant said that you had gone away and would probably not return until some time to-morrow. And so," she went on apologetically, "it was such a short distance, I couldn't resist running down for the boy myself."

He wondered if she had intended taking the child away in his absence, but he only said: "You are always welcome in your own home, Lucia."

The surprised happiness that had shone in his face at first seeing her had gradually faded, leaving it cold and stern again. He did not turn to her as she went on, but kept his eyes fixed steadily on the flame in the fireplace, now slowly dying down.

"I had written a letter to be left here for you; but now that I have seen you, I can make you understand better than the letter could." Here she hesitated for a moment, and when she spoke again her voice had lost its assurance: "I want to speak to you about the child—my son."

"Our son," he corrected quietly.

"Yes—yes, I know," she went on. "I know that he is yours as much as mine—and yet not as much, for am I not his mother? Oh, yes, you will say that it is selfishness and not love, but you don't understand. You have other things to fill your life, other thoughts to take your time—your books, your profession, your— Oh, so many other things! While I—he is all I have. I won't be unreasonable," she continued pleadingly, "but let me keep my boy while he is still a baby. I have been wretched just the few months he has been away from me. Let me keep him until he grows up. It will all come soon enough. He will be a man and naturally turn to his father, whom he is very much like even now. But let me keep him now." She sank down as if she would kneel at his feet, but he put out his hand and would not let her.

"No, Lucia, no," he said, "not that. The child shall not be kept from you."

She stooped suddenly and raised his hand to her lips; and, because of her bent head and the moisture before her eyes, did not see the pain that fluttered across his face. And in a far corner of the room where the shadows were deep-

est hovered the three gray women—the Weaver, the Spinner, and the Clipper of Threads. The faces of the first two were hazy and indistinct; but that of the third, with the great shears hanging at her side, loomed up sharp and clear, and on her face was a smile—mirthless and mocking as ever—but with an added expression of triumph.

Then, as his gaze turned toward his wife, a flame leaped up among the dying coals, and for the first time she noticed the snowy-white of his temples and the added lines about the mouth that could be both stern and tender.

“Why is it,” she exclaimed impulsively, “that you are always so kind and generous to me? I, who so little deserve it?”

Then he answered her with another question. “Don’t you know?” he asked in a tone that made her glance down quickly and flush. His deep, serious eyes were piercing her as if they would know her very heart, and she, for the first time, saw deep into his. A moment later she impulsively stretched out both hands to him, but he did not see, for he had turned and was looking steadily into the bed of coals.

Then she realized that she would have to go the whole distance between them. At that moment she would have gone to him and asked that they start all over again, the three of them, when a sudden thought flashed through her mind. Perhaps he had done all for the child. Perhaps she had mistaken the tone of his voice and the look in his eyes. Thus she wavered, and, turning suddenly, fled from the room, leaving him alone before the fire, now dead, except for a few coals that still glowed dully.

VI.

Two hours later a heavily wrapped and veiled figure rustled down the stairway and paused at the library door, and by her side stood the child, wrapped, too, as if for a journey.

“Robert and I have come to tell you good-by,” she said, as the man rose from his place before the fire that now blazed up brightly, filling the room with a ruddy, dancing light. But he did not seem to hear her words nor notice her wraps or the child’s, and in his eyes there was

a determined look—and something else. Something that made her lower her eyes as he stood gazing at her so steadily. Then he raised her chin gently and forced her to look at him.

“Lucia,” he asked, “are you going to marry John Manse?”

“You don’t think,” she answered with a bitter ring to her voice, “that I would run the risk of making another mistake like this, do you?”

He did not answer her, but led her across the room to the table where lay a child’s torn geography, opened at a map marred by two large pencil-marked spots on opposite sides of the country. Then, almost as simply as it had been told to him by his son, he told her the story of the marks.

She stood quite motionless, with downcast eyes and scarlet cheeks, but not a word escaped her tightly pressed lips.

“Did Manse ask you to marry him?” he asked bluntly.

“Yes,” was the scarcely audible answer.

“And you said—?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Don’t you know?” she asked, at the same time answering what he most wanted to know, yet could not believe. And the smile on her lips, as she raised her eyes to his, cleared away all the doubt and misunderstanding.

“Lucia,” he cried, and his voice was not harsh and stern. “Lucia, shall we erase one of these spots?”

“Yes,” she answered simply.

Glancing over his shoulder he saw that their son had climbed into the great chair before the fire and was fast asleep.

Together they carried him to the Twilight-Room, and put him gently into the little white bed. He stirred uneasily and opened heavy eyes to see two figures bending over his bed. Then he smiled.

“I knew muvver would like you if she knew you,” he murmured.

A faint streak of light still lingered in the west, and a faint, mellow light filled the room. The wind died down. Through the half-opened window came the soft soothing murmur of the aspen-tree, and mingled with it a woman’s low-voiced lullaby.

THE SWORD OF TARROLOYS.*

BY BANNISTER MERWIN,

Author of "A Knight of To-Day," etc.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SENESCHAL.

BEFORE the *seneschal's* pavilion flared a torch. In its light stood a guard, who halted us with one word spoken in a low voice. He explained softly, when we had come to a standstill, that his master, who had suffered intensely from the pain of his wound, was now resting, and had given orders that he was not to be disturbed unless by the Count de Rainemont.

"Moller will speak only to the *seneschal*," said Simon Crouây—and I grunted. "He has important news," continued Simon. Then, to Pierre and the guard: "You have heard of the strange happenings at the castle?"

"No," said Pierre, and he and the sentinel drew closer to my companion.

"The Count de Mescun and the Seigneur de Cornay are both dead."

"What?" The whispered exclamation came simultaneously from both the listeners.

Simon threw a significant glance at me before he began to tell the story of the tragedy. He had drawn them several paces from me, apparently that the *seneschal* should not be disturbed. The meaning of his look flashed on me. I was standing close to the entrance of the *seneschal's* pavilion, and there was no one to prevent me from entering.

Stepping as quietly as possible—and it is not easy to move quietly in armor—I raised the flap of the tent and walked in. The gloom of the interior was partly lightened by the flare of the torch

without. On the opposite wall my own shadow wavered grotesquely, as huge as that Goliath whom Prince David slew.

The *seneschal* was reclining on a low couch. He raised his head when I entered, and apparently he expected to see the sentinel, for he muttered: "Less noise outside, La Motte."

I walked close to him and lifted my vizor.

"Sir *seneschal*, do you know me?" I asked.

His one eye glared. He raised himself higher.

"Foucart!" he exclaimed.

"The same," said I.

"How did you get in? La Motte shall pay for this."

"Don't blame La Motte," I said. "He took me for one of your men."

"But he failed in his duty," muttered the *seneschal*. "Well, since you are here, what is it?"

I could see that he was in pain. His wound was in the shoulder, but as the bandages were unstained I inferred that there had been little loss of blood. Sometimes a bolt, finding a weak joint in armor, will bruise rather than cut.

"I had to talk with you," I said, "in the interest of the Lady Clothilde of Mescun and Cornay." He started when I mentioned the titles. "Rainemont would never have let me see you." I hastened to add, "You have heard of the tragedy at the castle?"

"I have heard of the *seigneur's* murder."

It was as I had supposed. Rainemont, balked in his main design, had convinced this faithful servant that the foul lie against the lady was true. Carefully,

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for December, 1908.

exactly, though interrupted many times by his impatience, I laid the true story before him. He was not fully convinced.

"Why should I believe you, Master Foucart?" he remarked when I had done.

"Why should you believe Rainemont?" I replied.

"Why, indeed," said he. "Why believe either of you? Where two stories are told by opposing factions, the truth usually falls between. If your story is true, I should go to the support of the lady; if Rainemont has stated things as they are, then I should continue to oppose her."

"Can any oath that I swear convince you of my honesty?" I asked.

He laughed harshly.

"I know King Louis's oaths. Confidence in one of them lost me an eye at Montelhery. Shall I then believe the oaths of the king's agents?"

This was one of the humiliations that we of the king's service often had to meet.

"Simon Crouay is without," I said. "He is one of your own men, and he also witnessed the tragedy. Let him corroborate my story."

"Wherefore should I do that?" The *seneschal* groaned at a sudden twinge of his wound. "He has been under your influence. No, Master Foucart, I cannot accept your story now. But to this extent have you influenced me, that I will also refuse to act on Rainemont's version. My position is difficult. I will hold off altogether from this issue until I can get the truth of it."

This was, perhaps, as much as I could hope for from him.

"Then you will not join in another attack on the castle?" I demanded.

"I will stand aloof," he replied. "If my master was murdered, the murderers must pay for it. If not, then the Lady Clothilde shall receive the allegiance of Cornay."

"And meantime she, although innocent, may suffer through your failure to help her."

"We will leave that to God," said the *seneschal*.

At this moment the sentinel, La Motte, stalked into the tent. His first glance at

me disclosed his terror over his own remissness. Then, as he noted the unfamiliar features disclosed by my raised vizor and saw that I was not Moller, he forgot the presence of his commander and swore a frightful oath.

"Dog," said the *seneschal*, "is this the way you do your duty?"

La Motte put his hand on my shoulder.

"Here, come away," he ordered.

"Let him be," said the *seneschal*. "You are under arrest. Place another sentinel, then surrender yourself to the provost."

La Motte saluted. He knew his master well enough to offer no excuse. As he was passing out he paused, however, and said: "The Count de Rainemont is on his way hither. A messenger brought the word to me."

The *seneschal* nodded, and La Motte disappeared.

"For your own safety, Master Foucart, you had better get away," said the *seneschal* grimly.

Quickly I closed my vizor.

"Let me remain," I urged.

There was no time for an answer. The Count de Rainemont suddenly appeared in the entrance and, with a penetrating look at me, walked over to the *seneschal's* couch.

"Ah, Baisignan," he said. "I trust your wound is easier. Who is this fellow?" He pointed to me.

"One of my men," replied the *seneschal*.

"Then send him away," demanded Rainemont. "I want no hearer of what I say."

I fully expected the *seneschal* to acquiesce. But, whether he resented the young count's imperiousness, or whether he wished me to be a witness to the interview, he replied: "It is Moller, the Swiss. He does not understand our tongue. Let him be, for I may wish to send him with a message."

Rainemont shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he said. "I came because I have learned that your men are spreading a false version of the happenings at the castle. You will have to stop it, Baisignan, or there will be disaffection in the camp."

"I, too, have heard the version which

you call false," said the *seneschal*. "I do not accept it, but it influences me to this extent, that until I am better convinced I shall remain inactive. You may as well know this. Rairemont: either we suspend hostilities and make a thorough investigation, or you carry on the siege alone."

The young count's face flared red with rage.

"What!" he shouted. "Do you turn traitor? By the saints! Since you have joined the enemy, I will treat you as such. My force is as strong as yours. I declare war against you here and now. We settle this to-night."

"Would not that well suit the purposes of the Seigneur de Tarroloys?"

It was my voice that broke in upon the count's rage. I do not know even now why I so forgot myself, but the desire to point out the weakness of his position was too strong to resist.

He was before me in three strides.

"So this is Moller, the Swiss, is it?" he said.

I raised my visor and looked at him squarely. The act was not so courageous as it may seem. I realized that if he thought me a common soldier he might strike me down recklessly. If not, he would, sooner or later, learn my identity. Therefore, I quickly determined to have the advantage of surprise.

He looked at me long. His rage seemed to turn to satisfaction.

"Ha! Master Fox," he exclaimed at last. "So you have been bringing your lies to the *seneschal* and poisoning the ears of his men! Well, I have you now."

My heart was thumping, but I managed to smile.

"Not so fast, hot-head," said I. "You affect to despise King Louis, but remember, I am his agent, and if I am harmed you will suffer for it. Also, as you well know, I have brought not lies but truth to this camp."

He showed amusement.

"A fox," he said, "may fight when he is cornered. Well, master, you are my prisoner. I will determine later how to dispose of you."

I turned to the *seneschal*.

"Do you permit this to be done in your pavilion by a man who has just declared against you?"

The *seneschal* frowned, but Rairemont, quick to see his mistake, made apology.

"Forgive my rash challenge of you, Baisignan. I was enraged for the moment to find that the lies from the castle had so swerved you. Withdraw your forces, if you choose, and await the issue. It may take many days, but we shall learn the truth."

I saw his cunning. He still wished to gain time, in order that his story might spread and bring him support, and he choked back even his own temper to resume his policy. How could I sting him into a precipitant action that would defeat him?

The *seneschal* was casting his single eye from one to the other of us. With him there was no wish other than to remain uncommitted until he could determine which way his allegiance should lie. I saw that he would leave me in Rairemont's hands, but strangely I had ceased to fear for myself. Rairemont's weak points were easily reached.

"Well, sir count," I said, "I presume, then, that I am to regard myself as your prisoner. Fortunes of war! But let me warn you not to come face to face with the Seigneur de Tarroloys, who, by virtue of his approaching marriage, will soon be Count de Mescun and Seigneur de Cornay."

Rairemont laughed derisively.

"Just as he chastised you once," I went on, "when you were trying to abduct a defenseless lady, so will he chastise you for trying to fasten upon that same lady a cowardly lie that shames your knight-hood."

With a snarl, he made as though to strike me.

"One would think," said I, not flinching, "that you feared to meet him again."

He stamped his foot.

"I would meet him in hell," he shouted—"with lance, sword, or bare hands."

"You will go there after you have met him," I taunted.

This time he did strike me, under the lifted visor, and so hard that I fell to the floor. The blow shook me. I arose slowly, with a rage in my heart that almost made me reckless.

"You could not do that to Tarroloys and live," I said.

He paced quickly back and forth.

"Why didn't he await me at the bridge to-day? I would have fought him?"

"What? With your men at your back, ready to push him aside and rush into the castle? He could not risk treachery."

"I am an honorable knight," stormed Rainemont.

"No doubt," said I, "and Tarroloys would challenge you if he were sure that you would not murder the man who brought the challenge. He will gladly fight you under the rules of knightly combat—lance and sword."

"Let him send his challenge." Rainemont was gesturing violently and his face was convulsed with anger. "His messenger will be safe with me. Let him challenge."

I drew myself up.

"Know, then, Guy, Comte de Rainemont, that I have come from Jehan, Seigneur de Tarroloys, who challenges you to mortal combat, for that you have maligned with base lies his affianced lady. He has deputed me to reach you and to deliver his word to you."

He faced me with a look of mingled eagerness and doubt.

"This is welcome word," he exclaimed. "By St. Julian! I will punish him for his sudden attack on me. But are you his accredited messenger, or is this some trick of yours?"

"He will fight," I said firmly. "What answer shall I bear from you to him?"

"Tell the Seigneur de Tarroloys that he is a coward and a knave. Tell him that I will fight him to the death. Tell him— But, wait; you shall tell him nothing. Rouge Croix will bear my answer. You remain my prisoner."

"What!" I exclaimed. "After all your protestation that his messenger would be safe?"

"How shall I know that you are his true messenger? You may be trying to trick me to save your own skin. No, you will wait till the morning, when my pursuivant shall go to the castle. If Tarroloys did not send a challenge to me, then shall he receive mine. And you, if you have lied to me, shall have your punishment."

So far as the saving of my own skin was involved, my ruse had failed. But Jehan would fight—of that there was not the least doubt, and, indeed, I knew that he would welcome the opportunity to lay low this breeder of trouble. Moreover, I would not have suggested the combat had I not felt certain that Jehan would be victorious. By slaying Rainemont he would end all controversy, and the leaderless forces of the fallen count would then march back to their own country.

But I must reach Jehan before the arrival of the pursuivant. I must save myself, and I must also show Jehan how by this one stroke he might bring peace. Also, I must tell him of Rainemont's slander against the lady.

All this time the *senechal* was watching us. His mind, I know, was settled. He would await the event, and he would not interfere between Rainemont and me.

"Come," said Rainemont.

Seizing my wrist, he led me to the entrance and placed me in charge of two of his men. "Place him in a tent and guard the walls," he said—"a tent apart from the others."

The men saluted and marched me away, while Rainemont returned to the *senechal*. He would try, no doubt, to weaken the impression I had made.

CHAPTER XII.

WOMAN'S WAY.

THE tent in which my captors placed me was old and so darkly weather-stained that the light within was dimmer than I had been led to expect from the torches that flared without. A low pallet, however, was discernible in one corner, and my captors threw me upon it, armor and all. Then one of them produced stout ropes.

"Will you not let me remove all this ironwork?" I asked, rapping my knuckles on the corselet.

The fellow who held the ropes laughed.

"It will serve to hold you down," he chuckled. And with that he tied my legs together, winding the ropes many times around my greaves. He then turned his attention to my arms, tying them loosely to my corselet.

"You'll lie quiet now," he muttered, as he and his companion left me. Soon I saw outlined against the walls of the tent the indistinct shadows of the guards.

Rainmont was determined to keep me safe.

The supposition that I would be hard to hold stimulated my desire to get away. You will remember that Moller's armor was loose upon me. This fact my captors had overlooked. My body was fairly free within the corselet; my legs had room for play within the greaves. Thus it was that by careful manipulation I gradually got my body out altogether.

Just how I did it cannot be explained, for it was a matter of twisting here, turning there, and straining at all points. My helmet had never been laced, so that it came away easily. In about half an hour the armor lay bound upon the pallet, and I stood beside it, in my black scholar's garb.

The armor, as it lay there, was surprisingly like a human figure, and in that dim light it would have deceived any except the most searching glance. I tiptoed over toward the entrance.

A man surer of his physical strength would have found it easy to strike down the sentinel, who was just outside. That plan did not appeal to me. I feared that I should not strike hard enough, or that I might miss the exposed parts of his head. Then, too, he might cry out, or make a noise in falling. A bungling attempt would not only send me back into captivity, but insure for me rough treatment.

At last I hit upon a way. Going over to the pallet, I struck three ringing blows on the corselet, then sprang back into a position near the entrance and flattened myself against the tent wall. As I had expected, the guard raised the flap and peered in.

"What's the matter with you?" he growled.

No answer came from the pallet.

"What's the matter?" he said again.

In the silence that followed I was conscious that he hesitated. Would he enter? Would his curiosity take him to the pallet? Another moment, and he strode across the tent.

This action was what I had counted upon. His face was, for the moment,

turned away from me. Silent as a shadow I glided through the entrance.

The open space in which I found myself was well lighted by the torch. Ten feet away was a clump of shrubs. If I could reach that protection unseen, my chances of escape would be bettered. The guard might merely look at the figure on the pallet. On the other hand, he might persist in trying to rouse what he believed to be my sleeping or unconscious person. My intention had been to make a sound loud enough only to arouse his curiosity without stimulating him to a thorough investigation, but for all I knew, I might easily have done more than I had planned.

However, I darted across to the shrubbery. It proved to be the merest patch—hardly more than enough to hide me—and beyond it were tents and flaring torches. I lay still, watching the tent from which I had escaped.

Presently the guard came out. Had he discovered the deception? Would he call the watch? No; he yawned, and leaned against the tent-pole.

A voice came from another side of the tent.

"What was the matter in there?" It was one of the other guards.

"Nothing that I could see," replied the investigator. "He's asleep. I could hear him breathe."

So great is the saving power of imagination!

Waiting until the guard turned his head away from me to find a more comfortable position, I arose and walked quietly but quickly in a direction in which no tents loomed and no torches flared. I could not tell whether I was going toward the town or toward the castle. All I knew was that I would have to get my bearings and work through the outer ring of sentinels. As I proceeded, shadowy figures passed me at a little distance, or crossed my path ahead. I was still well within the confines of the camp.

At last I stood motionless, daring to advance no farther until I knew better where I was. The line of sentinels could not be far ahead. Before me stretched the plain. In the distance, at my left, shone a few lights—the castle or the town, I knew not which. From my back

came the rough noises of the camp—men cursing, men singing over their wine, and even, faintly, the hollow rattle of dice where they were gaming.

Suddenly a hand fell heavily on my shoulder, another hand was clapped over my mouth. I did not struggle. To what advantage would that have been?

And then a voice spoke softly in my ear:

“Master Foucart, it is I—Simon Crouay.”

Welcome words! I relaxed my stiffened muscles. The hand was drawn away from my mouth, for Simon knew that there was no longer danger of my shouting.

“I have been watching you,” he explained. “I followed when they took you to the tent, and stood at a distance. It was a clever escape you made. I kept behind you when you walked this way, thinking I could thus give better aid if you were challenged than I could were I with you.”

“On which side of the camp are we?”

“The town side — see — the lights off there to the left.”

“Can we get to the *seneschal*?”

“Rainemont has set a ring of sentinels around the *seneschal*'s force.”

“Then,” I said, “let us make for the castle.”

“At once. It is well that we are on this side of the camp. The sentinels will be less watchful here, and if one of them sees us pass, he will think we are slipping through the lines to go to the town for wine or pleasure.”

He led me forward, perhaps a hundred paces, then pointed silently. A little ahead, at the top of a ridge, I distinguished a standing figure—a sentinel. At equal distances on the right and left were others.

“They are stationed so close,” I whispered, “that we cannot deal with one without being seen by his neighbors.”

“Leave that to me,” said Simon.

He now turned to the right, and we traveled a short distance parallel with the line of watchers. At length the ridge was cut by a gulley, through which, I presume, a brook trickled in its season. The watercourse was filled with undergrowth.

“There will be a sentinel down there

in the stream bed,” said Simon. “His neighbors cannot see him. Wait for me here.”

“You will be heard in the bushes.”

“Oh, no,” he whispered. “I have snared too many pheasants in this country not to know how to be silent in the brush.”

With that he was gone.

I sat down on the ground, to decrease the chance of detection, and waited for some minutes.

At last Simon returned. He was carrying his sword, and when he had come up to me he stooped and wiped it on the grass.

“I had to kill him,” he said, returning it to its scabbard. “Come.”

Slowly we worked our way down the stream bed. I marveled at Simon's agility. He seemed to see every stone in the dark.

“Have a care!” he whispered to me once, and my feet struck against something that clanked. It was the dead sentinel.

After a time the undergrowth thinned out. We were well beyond the lines, and Simon turned off to the right. In a wide semicircle we bore around the camp, going cautiously, and in the course of an hour we approached the postern-gate of the castle. I knew not why, but I now felt more fearful than at any other time since my escape. It would be some minutes before we could be admitted. In that period a pursuing party might cut us down while we were at the very gate. The nearer the refuge, the greater the sense of danger.

Simon whistled. There was an answering whistle from the wall, and presently the gate was opened. We advanced to the edge of the moat and made ourselves known. Then the foot-bridge was thrust across the moat, and a few steps brought us once more within the walls. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

The night was late, and I was very tired. Nothing could be done before dawn.

“Come,” I said to Simon, “we have earned a rest.”

We summoned a varlet with a torch, and proceeded toward a chamber. But in the corridors we were stopped by

Mirelle, the tiring-woman we had once rescued.

"The Lady Clothilde is awake," she said, "and wishes to speak to you."

We followed her to the lady's apartment. Mirelle announced us and then retired, laughing at a quip which that rogue, Simon, threw at her.

I wondered at the alertness of the lady. But for her pallor and the compressed line of her lips one would never have guessed that she had that day passed through an ordeal such as few women meet. She even held in check her anxiety over the outcome of my errand, and smiled gravely at me.

"Well, Master Foucart," she said, "I am glad that you are safely back—you and your companion. What of the *senschal*? Did you see him?"

"Yes, lady, I saw and talked with him."

"Where does he stand?"

Her questions were simple and direct. I gave her a direct answer.

"His ears have been poisoned, but after I told him the truth he agreed, though not fully convinced, to hold himself neutral until the issue is decided."

"That he may then jump to the winning side?" Her voice was cutting.

"Not exactly that," I said. "You must not forget, lady, that he is a man whose chief thought is loyal allegiance. I do not overpraise him in saying this. Like all men of deep loyalty, he is cautious in attaching himself newly. His allegiance is now rightly with you, but the false stories of what has happened here will have to be disproved to him."

"And you could not do that, Master Foucart?"

"Not in one hearing. The best I could get from him for the present was a promise of neutrality. The Count de Rainemont interrupted us."

"Is he as bitter as ever?"

"More so, lady." Then I made a blunder, elated as I was with the success of my mission, for I added: "But the Seigneur Jehan will put a stop to him."

"How? What do you mean?"

She leaned forward, her dark eyes intent on me. I found myself again admiring the ivory whiteness of her face, set in its mass of flowing black hair.

"What do you mean?" she repeated.

I hesitated.

"May we not leave that till the morning's council?"

"No; tell me now." The words were swift.

"Why," I answered, "I meant no more than that the Seigneur Jehan's superior knowledge of warfare would quickly defeat our assailers."

She gazed at me scornfully.

"Do not try to put me off, Master Foucart."

"Lady," I said desperately, "you do not fear for the Seigneur Jehan in battle?"

"No."

"Then you need not fear for him in a combat with the Count de Rainemont. He has defeated him once; he will do so again."

She gave a little cry.

"Do you bear a challenge to my lord?"

"Lady, I offered one from him to Rainemont."

"He sent it by you and said nothing to me?"

"He did not send it," I replied, "but he will sustain it."

For the first time I saw her angry. How her eyes blazed at me! How her fingers pressed together until the blood was forced from them and they grew all white at the tips! I faced her wrath with as calm a bearing as I could maintain. Had I not followed the best course?

For a long time she looked and said nothing. When at last she spoke her voice was soft, her manner less constrained.

"Very well, Master Foucart," she said. "We will leave the rest until the morning council. Thank you for all that you have done."

I bowed, with no slight sensation of relief, and rejoined Simon at the door. Together we went to a chamber, and were soon asleep. Once my slumber was troubled. I seemed to hear in a dream the sound of horses' hoofs making their slow clatter in the courtyard. But the sound was dissolved in my memory, and at dawn it was only a faint recollection.

We were roused at the first light, and I hastened to Jehan's chamber. He was already awake, and he placed his hand

on my shoulder with kindly affection and asked for the story of the night.

My account of the *seneschal's* determination seemed to please him.

"That leaves only Rainemont to deal with," he said. "Now it may be, I shall reach him again, man to man."

This was my opening.

"That will be easy, M. Jehan. His pursuivant, Rouge Croix, will come this morning to answer your challenge to a mortal combat."

"My challenge?"

I smiled.

"M. Jehan, I delivered a challenge for you last night. He will accept."

In his delight he embraced me.

"The saints bless you, Master Foucart! You are a true friend. Oh, how glad I am to have this chance. I have yearned to meet him ever since this fighting began."

"You will yearn the more," I said, "when you know that he charges the Lady Clothilde and yourself with the murder of her brothers!"

He simply stared at me. No words could express his horror at such villainy. But his bewilderment was followed by a noble rage in which his eyes were fired by a strong resolve that boded ill for Rainemont. He would mete out punishment to the false knight; there was no doubt of that. With it all, he was cool in his judgment. My words had pitched him to his highest strength.

"When, do you think, will Rouge Croix come?" he asked.

"There should be no long wait," I answered, "for Rainemont is eager. He considers that you have humbled him."

"I hope it may be soon." He buckled that long sword of his to his side, and his fingers rested lovingly on the hilt. Then his brow clouded. "I wish," he said, "that word of this might be kept from Clothilde."

"Why so, M. Jehan?"

"She believes greatly in my strength, but she is fearful of treachery. It may be that she will try to prevent the meeting."

"That," I said, "would be contrary to chivalrous training."

He meditated.

"She would not think so. You are subtle, Master Foucart, but not with the

subtlety of a woman. Her thoughts are all for those whom she loves, and for them she will contrive in ways that a man cannot guess."

"But," I protested, "she would wish you to vindicate your courage."

"Yes, if it were called in question, and if she thought the field was fair. But she will admit no fairness in Rainemont, and she holds that he has forfeited all knightly claims."

There was nothing for it but to tell him.

"The Lady Clothilde," I said, "already knows. She intercepted me on my return and drew the story from me."

"You told her?" His voice was anxious.

"I could not deny her authority to demand the truth which she already divined."

He gazed at me sorrowfully.

"Ah, Master Foucart," he said reproachfully.

Then, in a burst of action that ignored my presence, he called a varlet and sent him to ask the lady to receive us. While awaiting the answer, he paced back and forth, his young brow furrowed.

Presently came to us Mirelle. She faltered as she entered the chamber, but collected her wits and said: "The Lady Clothilde has asked me to deliver to you this letter."

Jehan strode toward her.

"Will she not see me? Where is she?" he exclaimed.

Mirelle dropped her eyes.

"She wishes you to read the letter," she stammered.

Pressing the folded sheet into his hand, she turned and hurried from the chamber.

Jehan thrust the letter into my nerveless fingers.

"Quick!" he said. "Read it! Read it!"

I opened it and read:

MY LORD:

Word has come to me that you have challenged Rainemont and that Baisignan will do no more than remain neutral. A meeting with Rainemont, my lord, would expose you to treacherous risks which I am unwilling that you should face. Therefore, I have gone, with an escort, to Baisignan, hoping that, as his liege lady, I may be able

to persuade him to action. May Holy Mary quickly bring us again together!

CLOTHILDE.

The letter was snatched from me. Jehan towered over my head like an avenging fury.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BATTLE.

I THOUGHT the youth would kill me in his terrible indignation. By an effort, however, he calmed himself.

"Tell me," he said, "can you get to the *seneschal's* camp?"

He might as well have the whole truth.

"Rainemont has put his own sentinels about the *seneschal's* camp."

"Then she is in Rainemont's hands?"

"Unless her escort fought its way through the sentinels."

"There is that chance," he said. "But we will put no dependence upon it."

He rushed from the room, while I thanked St. Denis for the fact that this youth had joined to the quality of knightly courage that patience which helped him to refrain from harming a friend who, in trying to serve him, had made a mistake. For I had made a mistake in telling the lady about the challenge. Even when she questioned me my mind was filled with misgivings which were quieted only by her apparently calm acceptance of the situation. A stable-boy might have been excused for telling her the truth: but there was no excuse for Master Denis Foucart.

Sounds from without now filled my ears, and I hastened to see what was going forward. In a few moments I found that Jehan was preparing for action. Horses were being rubbed down and accoutered in the courtyard. Archers were fitting new strings to their bows, and men-at-arms were sharpening their swords upon the cobblestones.

From ear to ear ran the buzz of excited rumor. There would be a sally; the *seneschal* would support us in an attack on Rainemont; we were to march to Jolin—these and a dozen other suggestions were passed about to explain the call to arms.

Some of the fighting men appealed to me for news, but I shook my head.

"Whatever is done," I said, "will be done in defense of your lady." That brought loyal shouts from them.

It seemed to be unknown that she had gone from the castle. The guards who had opened the gates for her had kept the secret.

I now went to the great hall. There stood Jehan before the chief vassals, his right hand raised to hold their attention. Neither he nor they seemed to notice me as I slipped through the entrance, and I felt no little humiliation when I remembered that, not more than twelve hours before, I had been the principal adviser in council.

"Nevertheless," I said to myself, "it is my work that has made it possible for them to plan their own fighting—my work, and my mistake." I reasoned, too, that the mistake might not turn out so badly.

"Men," cried Jehan. "our lady has gone from the castle." A murmur arose—a murmur of alarm. "Led by her hope of averting further bloodshed," continued Jehan, "she went before dawn, with a small escort, to seek the *seneschal*. Her departure was unknown to me until I received this letter." He held up the crumpled parchment. "Since Rainemont's guards surround the *seneschal's* camp, it is possible that our lady has fallen into Rainemont's hands."

"Curses on him!" shouted an old fighter, and the cry was taken up by others, until the assembly was all confusion in the expression of its angry fear for the lady's safety.

"Hold!" shouted Jehan. "There is no time for anger, unless we spend it on the bodies of the enemy."

"That is right! That is right!" came the answer from a score of throats. "Lead us forth! Rescue! Rescue!"

"We ride at once to save our lady," called Jehan. "The enemy are a greater force than ours, but we have justice with us, and our cause must win. Let every man prepare."

With a shout the council broke up, and all the fighters hurried for their arms. I followed Jehan. He went to a near closet, where a squire helped him into his mail.

"M. Jehan," I stammered, "I ride with you."

His face relaxed.

"Cease your regret, Master Foucart," he said. "You did what seemed necessary. I myself know how hard it would be to gainsay her."

"You do not understand," I replied. "An error in policy is as great a humiliation to me as a defeat in battle would be to you. I shall ride with you."

His impatience to get in the saddle kept him from arguing with me.

"Get armor, then," he said; and, with a final tug of his gauntlets, he was gone.

I had no mind for the encumbrance of armor. It would not serve me against a cannon or harquebus, and as for swords and lances, I preferred to keep out of their way. I did, however, take from the armory a light helmet and a breast-piece, as protection against bolts and arrows.

Then I went and saddled that same little shaggy pony upon which Simon Crouay had ridden to the castle. It was a fleet beast, I knew. While I was determined to go to battle with the rest, and prove that I did not lack courage, I preferred to be able to move over the field rapidly. Also, arrows usually fly high, and since the pony was little and I was short, my head would scarcely top the shoulders of the fighting-men, who were mounted on great chargers.

The courtyard was crowded with men and horses. The lancers were mounted, about thirty strong. A dozen harquebusiers also rode. The hundred or more archers were afoot, ready to crowd out behind the mounted men and spread on either flank.

Jehan took his place at the front, and spoke a final word:

"Since the lady is probably in Rainemont's camp," he shouted, "we must not shoot toward the camp, for fear of harming her. The lancers will ride directly toward the tents, but slowly, in order to draw the enemy out.

"The archers and harquebusiers will move as rapidly as possible in a semi-circle to the right. That will enable them to shoot at an angle to our line of advance.

"In the *mêlée*"—this to the lancers—"leave Rainemont to me. Protect yourselves from him; but, if possible, avoid harming him till I can reach him."

The portcullis rose, the drawbridge came clanging down, and forth we rode.

Once across the bridge the mounted men proceeded a little way, then drew up in a long line, while the foot-soldiers formed behind them. Before me the chargers pawed the ground. I twisted in my saddle from one side to the other until I found a little gap in the living bulwark through which I could look toward Rainemont's camp.

There were signs of excitement there. Men were rushing hither and thither, taking up arms and mounting horses. The faint sound of distant orders came to my ears, penetrating the noise about me. Rainemont was not napping.

Was the Lady Clothilde under guard in one of those distant tents?

And now our line began to advance, slowly, while the foot-soldiers ran nimbly to the right. I kept about thirty paces behind the chargers, now and then getting a glimpse of the ground beyond them. Bolts and arrows were flying. I could hear them whistling in the air, and one of them even glanced from my helmet.

The unwavering line before me now topped a little rise. When I in turn came upon this elevation I had so good a view of the field that I drew in my pony and decided to remain where I was. There was no longer any question of my courage, for I had been under fire. But, having proved myself, there was no further excuse for a king's agent to take needless risks; much better remain where I was, in a position which, though not entirely unexposed, was apart from the ground in which the hand-to-hand fighting was likely to take place.

Rainemont's camp was not more than three hundred paces beyond the point at which my pony stood. The castle was about the same distance behind me. I saw the lances ride out in line from among the tents. On their flanks were archers and harquebusiers. I trembled to see how small our own force was in comparison.

Off to the right, separated by a short gap from Rainemont's tents, was the camp of the *seneschal*, with sentinels posted. The forces there were preparing for battle, and I judged that the *seneschal*, though holding neutral, was mak-

ing ready for any emergency. I fancied that I could distinguish him, sitting on a huge black war-horse. The pain of his wound must have passed.

Our footmen were running fast in their flanking semicircle. Among them were the plunging horses of the harquebusiers. They were as yet making no offense against the enemy, but were withholding their fire until they should reach the desired position. Rainemont's men did not attempt to head them off. Indeed, they could not do so without plunging through the *seneschal's* camp.

In a battle fought between large armies the detaching of the archers from the main body would be weak strategy. But here. Rainemont, although his force was so much greater than ours, could not charge against our archers, at his right, without exposing himself to the danger of being taken in the rear by our riders. It remained, for him, therefore, either to retire among his tents—a futile proceeding—or throw himself against our mounted force—which was what Jehan desired.

How promptly my youth had adopted the strategy best suited to his situation! How decisively he had executed it! But it troubled me to note the length of Rainemont's line.

And now Rainemont's riders lowered their lances. An order was shouted and the line moved toward us, walking, then cantering, then breaking into a pounding gallop. Every rider's head was low, and every lance directed firmly toward us. It seemed that nothing would resist that charge.

But Jehan had only waited for the move. He shouted to his own men. Another instant and they, too, were in position, and thundering toward the enemy.

Our advance, however, was not against Rainemont's center. An attack there would have permitted both ends of our line to be enveloped. Instead, the youth directed our course against the right. The effect of this was that the enemy's left urged its horses forward more rapidly, to be ready to sweep around us at the first shock.

Meantime, just before Rainemont's men began to charge, our foot-soldiers got to their position, and, halting, opened fire. They ignored the enemy's archers and devoted themselves to the mounted

line, which they could sweep at an angle so wide that every shot that was not too high or too low must hit something.

The bolts and arrows flew like hail; the harquebuses roared at steady intervals. Horses began to stumble and fall in Rainemont's line. Our archers, under instructions, were aiming at the horses, and thus trying to hinder the charge. The shooting was effective, but it was partly offset by our own losses. The enemy's archers on the left shot at our archers, many of whom fell, while those on their right brought to earth several of our mounted men.

Not more than a hundred paces now separated the charging lines. Our men rode compactly. The enemy, however, while presenting a regular front on the right, was straggling forward unevenly on the left.

Suddenly Jehan shouted an order. Our line swerved toward the disorganized left of the enemy, and every rider urged his horse to greater speed. Before the opposing right could reform, our men were on them.

The crash was terrifying. Many riders went down, some to lie still on the ground, others to rise and continue the fight afoot with their swords, or in some instances to remount. Those who had kept their seats, but shattered their lances, drew swords, or took up battle-axes from their saddle-bows, and bent themselves to slaughter.

The scene of the shock was a plunging, whirling mass of men and horses, bright with metal that gleamed in the morning sun. Swords and axes rose and descended; the sound of clashing weapons was shrill in the air, and ever there was the rumble and thudding of hoofs. Horses, with lost riders, emerged from the crowd and galloped about, whinnying wildly.

Rainemont's right was wheeling into the *mêlée*. The added numbers would doubtless turn the issue. But while I waited, breathless, a dozen of our men, their lances still unshattered, rode out of the fighting mass. They had broken through the line. Quickly they wheeled and charged back, at the rear of Rainemont's approaching right.

One man only left the little group, and, turning his horse, rode straight for Rainemont's camp. It needed no second

glance to show me that this rider was Jehan. Nor was a second thought necessary to discover his purpose. He was spurring toward the Lady Clothilde, and the way was open before him. But, even as I looked, a man detached himself from the enemy's ranks and started in pursuit.

At this moment I felt my pony falling beneath me. A stray ball had struck him. As he slid down on his side, I slipped my feet from the stirrups and got nimbly out of the way.

While I stood, uncertain where to turn, a riderless charger galloped near. I approached him, calling and beckoning, and to my satisfaction, he stood quiet and let me mount. One of Rainemont's horses, he was.

Pulling the huge animal's head around, I looked to see how it fared with Jehan. He had stopped, and was wheeling his horse. His pursuer had also stopped; and I saw that it was Rainemont himself—cool, alert, doubtless taunting Jehan.

My horse, as I have mentioned, was a horse of war. He scented battle afar off; and part of his training was, when he had a rider on his back, to rush ever toward danger—a foolish training for either man or beast.

Without waiting to know my wishes, he suddenly dropped his head and galloped straight for the *mêlée*. I could not stop him, but I did the next best thing by pulling at one rein with both hands. This caused him to swerve to the right, and he carried me well around the edge of the fighting mass. My arms soon ached and the rein slipped between my fingers, but the fighting was now behind our backs, and this intelligent beast did not concern himself with what he could not see. Indeed, he permitted me to bring him down to a gentle canter.

My involuntary charge had brought me close to Jehan and Rainemont. They had taken stations, facing each other from a little distance, and, with lowered lances, were prepared to charge. Jehan saw me, and shouted something which I could not make out, because of the hollowness of his voice within his closed helmet.

For that matter, all through the battle, I had wondered how the shouting orders were understood. To me all the sounds were alike. But I have since been told that the soldier's ear is trained to distin-

guish inflections which the civilian would not recognize. They say that it is thus also on the sea, where cries that apparently mean nothing, tell the mariners accurately what to do in controlling the ships.

But even while I was puzzling, Jehan and Rainemont charged at each other. Heads low, shields before them, lances projecting rigidly, they came together with such force that I did not see how either could survive.

Both lances splintered. Both horses were thrown back on their haunches. But the riders kept their seats. Like flashes of lightning, their swords leaped from their scabbards, and the clangorous blows began to rain upon the interposed shields.

Clash! Clash! Clash! Their bodies swayed as they put their full force into their blows. With their knees they held their fretting horses to the stand.

Clash! Clash! Jehan swayed as Rainemont's weapon came down unparried upon his helmet. But, in return, my youth swept in a side stroke on Rainemont's shoulder. The sword of Tarroloys played like a living thing—a thing of fire. No, I did not fear for Jehan. If his horse kept footing, if his weapon did not break, he would win. But such a fight few fields have seen.

Clash! Jehan's horse stumbled and fell to his knees. Rainemont, like an unknighly coward, had struck the animal's headpiece. A pull on the reins, however, and he was again on all four feet. The fighters were so close at this instant that Jehan's shield pressed against Rainemont's sword-arm.

"Now is your time, lad—now, while your shield hampers him!" I almost shouted the words. "Drag him from his saddle! Hurl him to the ground!"

But no; Rainemont backs away, and the sword-play is renewed.

Suddenly the meaning of Jehan's shout came to me. "The Lady Clothilde!" While he fought Rainemont, I must find her.

I stole a glance over my shoulder at the *mêlée*. Be sure that I did not permit my horse to turn his head. If I had, he would have borne me back with a rush into the thick of it. But I looked, as I have said, and saw that the struggle was still going on. Our men were

but a handful now, and battling against great odds. But their courage had not diminished. Their swords and axes still kept busy a number greater than their own.

I turned back to the combat before me. Jehan was forcing the fight. Step by step, Rainemont's horse was backing.

No; it was a ruse. Suddenly the count returned to the offensive, and struck so suddenly that Jehan hardly parried the blow. Clash! Clash! Clash! Neither seemed to tire.

"The lady!" Jehan's muffled words seemed to ring in my ears. How could I know what guard had been placed over her in the camp? Ten armed men might bar the way to her. And yet, was she not there, a prisoner, because of my folly?

Before I knew it, my fears for myself vanished. Jehan and Rainemont were still on even terms. I gave them a last look, then spurred my charger to the camp.

In among the tents I rode, calling wildly. "Lady! Lady!" A man-at-arms tried to stop me, but I rode him down and left him writhing. Hither and thither I turned, still crying, "Lady! Lady!"

Was it a woman's voice that answered from among the tents at the right? I could not tell; but I swept around in that direction. There stood a tent with a single sentinel before it. He stepped forward, threatening me with his pike.

"From the count!" I shouted. He recognized the accouterments of the horse and lowered his weapon, and I rode over him. Was the act treacherous? Remember that I had neither lance nor sword.

Jumping from my horse, I pulled aside the tent-flap. There stood the lady. Her eyes were clear, and, though anxious, they showed me a spirit that retained its own control. Her hair was disordered, but she appeared to be unharmed.

"Quick!" I exclaimed, beckoning.

For answer, she raised her hands. They were bound together.

I cursed Rainemont aloud as I ran out and seized the unconscious sentinel's pike. With its sharp edge her bonds were quickly cut.

Men were running toward us as I led her from the tent. There was no time to lose. I helped her to the saddle, and clambered up behind her.

"Where?" she asked.

An arrow sped past my ear.

"To the *senechal*," I replied, sending the horse forward.

"And Jehan?" Her voice was eager.

"He is fighting nobly."

Another arrow grazed my shoulder. But we were close to the *senechal's* line. I galloped by the sentinel who stood to oppose our progress, and reined in a moment later before the *senechal* himself, where he sat his horse, with his men behind him. Over the horse's crupper I slid to the ground, and, running forward, held the animal by the bridle.

There was a murmur in the *senechal's* ranks. He himself sat calmly and waited. I spoke:

"This is your liege lady, Clothilde of Mescun and Cornay, who has escaped from imprisonment in the camp of the Count de Rainemont."

The words sound formal as I recall them, but I could think of nothing else.

The *senechal* looked long at the lady with his one eye. She met his look with that strong, true gaze of hers. Her bearing held a queen's authority.

His face, usually so inexpressive, betrayed, first doubt, then a slow admiration, and at last a dawning conviction. He breathed a deep breath, then said:

"Lady, I have doubted. Your brother was my lord, and his cause was my cause. But now I have looked into your eyes, and I know that you are true. I pledge you my fealty until death."

With that he drew his sword and extended the hilt toward her. Then, turning to his following, he shouted in his gruff, campaigner's voice:

"Men, this is your liege lady. Pledge your fealty."

Fifty swords were drawn and held forward, and fifty throats shouted the pledge. With one look, the Lady Clothilde had gained a support which all my arguments had failed to win for her! And yet—and yet—I believed that I had prepared for this moment.

The lady bowed soberly. Quietly she gestured toward the plain, where the sounds of the battle were still loud.

"Rescue our companions," she said.

Another moment, a loud command, and the forces of Cornay galloped away to battle.

The lady and I were alone, but for a small guard. I turned my eyes to the place where I had left Jehan and Rainemont in combat. They were still at each other with a vigor that seemed untiring.

A gasp told me that the lady also saw.

"Mary, help him!" she whispered. "Mary, help him!"

While we looked, Rainemont drew his sword back for a supreme effort. Bringing it over his head in a great sweep, at the same time he urged his horse forward.

Jehan met the blow with his shield. His own sword he held almost horizontally at his right.

Rainemont's weapon came down with such force that, although his shield caught it fairly, Jehan bent under the stroke. Our youth did not straighten up, but, holding his shield still above his head, he pressed his horse forward, passing Rainemont. At the same time he swung his own weapon at the full length of his arm.

His motion was rightly timed. Just as his enemy again struck down upon the shield, his own sword rushed full against the armor protecting the back of Rainemont's neck. So terrible was the blow that the weapon flew from his fingers as it found its mark.

Rainemont stiffened in his saddle. He seemed, for an instant, to rise in his stirrups. Then, like a stone, he fell to the ground.

Jehan's blow had broken his neck.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OUTCOME.

THE *senechal's* appearance on the field decided the battle. He came at a time when our forces were almost overpowered. In the *mêlée* men had been too busy to watch the fight between Jehan and Rainemont, but the news of Rainemont's death was quickly bruited, and his men, who had been holding out desperately, then yielded themselves.

I will not tell of the shreds of battle

among the foot-soldiers—the archers and cross-bow men and *harquebusiers*—numbers of whom were slain on both sides. The issue of the *mêlée* and the death of Rainemont decided the day for them.

I may also pass over the lady's story of her capture by Rainemont's sentinels, of his rude treatment of her, and his insulting demands.

Of the glad meeting of Jehan and his lady, after the fighting was over, you may imagine what you please.

Nor will I relate the story of our return to the castle. Too many lives had been lost to have that triumph a joyous triumph, and we went seriously over the plain.

But in the days that followed, the course of life at Mescun worked slowly into easier channels. The battle itself had, in a sense, served to drive away the clinging horror of the murder within the walls, and time, as I knew, would efface all but the memory of sadness.

Jehan and the Lady Clothilde grew ever more tender. Within the week Father Ambrose, released from Rainemont's camp, had said with good grace the words that made them one. I have never seen a happier young pair, for I have never seen a young pair who had been let so deeply into the meanings of life.

Their eyes may have been all for each other at that time, but their thoughts did not neglect their friends. Their rule over Mescun and Cornay began with the same gracious recognition of all goodness that has so long made each one of their vassals feel favored in the opportunity of allegiance to them.

I did not remain long at Mescun. Duty called me back to Paris and the king. But in the years that have since passed I have more than once revisited the castle. To me Jehan is still the same noble and fearless lad I first knew; the Lady Clothilde the same true girl, with all her wealth of girlish beauty. It even does not change my view of them when I remember that they now have sons old enough to bear arms.

Back to Paris, then, I went, and saw King Louis.

"Well," he said, "I learn that you have been fomenting warfare."

"No, sire, I have been stopping strife. Mescun and Cornay are at peace."

"Yes," he replied dryly—"at some cost."

"At least," I said boldly, "your ends have been gained. The tithes and levies will no longer be delayed, and there will be no war among the nobles of Touraine."

He took from his hat a little leaden image of a saint and gazed at it smilingly.

"Sometimes," he said, "a man offers advice to Heaven, and then, if Heaven chooses to follow the advice, the man puffs out his chest and says, 'See what I have made Heaven do.' Be not vain, Master Foucart."

I bowed. He meant simply that I should receive no great recompense for my service to him.

"But it is not to be Bretagne," I said. "You will not send me there?"

"No," he answered slowly. "You have snuggled under the wing of Providence—and you have escaped Bretagne."

No use to tell Louis anything. He had an agent to watch every agent, and a watcher to spy on the watcher. So I retired when he would let me.

That same evening, in a loneliness which my empty lodgings intensified, I sought out Master Villon. He sat in a low *cabaret*, kept by one Mother Merceau, whom he had persuaded to give him credit. A bottle was before him, and he was tilting it against his lips from time to time, in the intervals of scratching with a quill upon a dingy piece of parchment. His eye lifted suspiciously as I entered, but when he saw who it was he beckoned.

"Welcome, master," he called. "Seat yourself. Mother Merceau will bring you a bottle of the dregs she calls Burgundy."

The old hag went to her cellar.

"Help me out of this," whispered Master Villon as soon as she had disappeared.

"How so?" I queried.

"She is my jailer. Last week I came here, and she gave me credit. Now, she still gives me credit, but she will not let me leave the place till she is paid. It is a vile hole." He sniffed. "Also, there is a girl who wonders what has befallen me."

"There's the door," said I, pointing. "Let us go together while she is away."

He shook his head. "She is a queen of thieves. A dozen men would each stick a knife in my back at her bidding."

"Well," I said, "I will pay your score. From the looks of the place, it will not be large. But first you must solve a difficulty for me."

"What would that be?" His face fell.

"I have been troubled of late to know which is the greater—mind or sword."

"A nice problem. Here is Mother Merceau. Take a swallow and propound your thesis."

I pulled at my bottle and began.

"So that was the youth I brought you at Simonet's tavern," he interrupted.

"The same," I answered—"and a more splendid youth never was. Lucky for him that he escaped you."

"Proceed," said Master Villon.

I continued the story. At the close he said:

"And how far have events led you toward a conclusion?"

I presented my points elaborately. At the end of the first bottle I was all for the supremacy of mind. At the last drop of the second, my claim was all for the sword, and I was telling him how I had ridden unarmed into a *mêlée*, and how I had rescued the lady from a hostile camp.

"And now," I concluded. "it is your part to decide."

The look of sottishness vanished from his face. He leaned forward, his elbows on the table, and smiled like a saint.

"Master Foucart!" he exclaimed. "Master Foucart! Do you not see it? Mind and Sword are brothers, but the mother of both is Love. Back of every act, there is the heart."

"Put that in a song," I cried.

"Not now, not now. It is no subject for drunken extemporizing. But when the mood comes—perhaps—" He lapsed into silence. His lips formed silent words.

I tiptoed over to the watchful hag and handed her a piece of gold.

"Leave Master Villon undisturbed," I said, "until he speaks to you. Then tell him that I have paid his score, and let him go."

Silently I went out to the street. My heart was with those two at Mescun.

(The End.)

THE WRATH OF PTAH.

BY REX A. BOOTH.

A SHORT STORY.



It was noonday, and the sun glowed fiercely upon Memphis and its palaces and its temples. The hot air danced and shivered above the parched, cracked earth. On the sluggish bosom of the Nile, boats glided drowsily along, so silently, so slowly, that the water-cattle, luxuriating in the stream of coolness, scarce lifted a glance to them.

Like slender carven statues the ibis and the crane rested along the banks, save only when some dainty morsel floated within reach and roused them to momentary desire.

In the great temple of the mighty Ptah, maker of gods and men, the priest Niobedes, son of Nashatu, the king, stood before the high altar, and gazed upon the awful calm of the god Ptah, which was before his fathers were, and which had looked down through the centuries upon generations of worshipers, upon their loves and their sorrows, their sacrifices and their adoration, with a terrible pitiless majesty of stone.

Somber and swarthy was the face of Niobedes, and the mystery of the priesthood hung about him and invested him as did his sacred royal robes of purple and snow. He had lived to the middle age, when the passions are at their full flood, though they no longer race as the wild tide of youth.

The full, red lips and dark, deep eyes, wherein dreams flitted as shadows across the water, betrayed the passion that raged within him; and as, unmasked, he stood face to face with the god, they cried aloud of his desire, and of his unholy love for Dera, for the wife of his brother Rhadames, the prince.

In all Egypt there was no woman like

Dera, the daughter of Arthanes the Greek. Niobedes thought upon her, and he saw her before him, with her hair of rich gold, and her eyes that were like the blue lotus-flowers, and her skin that had the whiteness of fine alabaster. The tawny women of his own land grew hateful in his eyes, and he longed for Dera until the desire to possess her grew from a seed to a great tree, with roots that struck into his soul and drained it of all that was good.

And he stood there before the altar, in the gloom and silence of the temple, and sought in his mind for words to speak to the wife of his brother when she should come to him.

He had sent a writing to her, saying that if she would have the wish of her heart fulfilled, if she would bring into the world a new life, she must pass one hour in the Temple of Ptah while in the heat of noonday the world slept, so that the great lord of life might harken to her prayer when his ears were not deafened by the cries and entreaties of the many.

Dera had sent greetings to her brother Niobedes and had said that she would pray in the temple that same noon. Thither her slaves carried her at the appointed time. She did not feel the heat of noonday, for she thought with pleasure upon the message of Niobedes. If the great god Ptah were gracious to her and granted her wish, what joy it would bring to her and to her loved husband Rhadames! How sweet it would be when that little form she had so often pictured in imagination, should be nestling in her arms, and its mouth should smile upon her smile, and give caress for caress, each one worth life itself!

Even the slave women were blessed

with these nestling loves, yet the gods had denied her the sweet rapture of motherhood. Now she would be aided by the prayers of the holy priest, Niobedes, for whom Ptah had always an open ear. Hope shining in her, made her beauty radiant.

Down the great avenue, where colossal sphinxes in lofty grandeur kept guard on either side, they bore her, and up the wide, shallow steps, until the massive doors of the temple were open before her, and she passed alone into the gloom and chill within. Dazed with the sudden transition from blazing light and heat to comparative darkness, she stood motionless. A strong hand grasped hers and led her forward, and she heard the voice of Niobedes.

II.

"PTAH, maker of gods and men, will listen to thy prayer," he said. "For the sake of Niobedes his priest, he will listen. Many there are who pray to him, yet are their prayers in vain if they be not lifted unto footstool upon the heart of one whom he loves!"

"Oh, Niobedes, well do I know that Ptah loveth thee as his greatest and holiest son! Let me then bow before his altar and humble myself at his feet, and pray that my heart's desire be granted!"

The priest held the girl's slender hand firmly, and his dark eyes burned upon her loveliness.

"Ptah has spoken unto his servant, Niobedes, saying that Rhadames is hateful in his sight. Wherefore the gods have denied thee children!"

"Rhadames is a righteous man. He boweth before Ptah. He is great and valiant before all in the land of Egypt. He is thy brother," whispered Dera.

"I cried unto Ptah, and said, 'O Ptah! Rhadames is my brother. The same life is in us. The same breasts suckled us. We were together when the heart is as an unwritten book, and I have known him!' But Ptah answered me: 'The hearts of men are known only to the gods. Men look upon the green waters of the Nile, yet see not the terrors in its depths. But the hearts of men, and the deepest waters of the Nile, are pierced by the eyes of the gods. Say

unto Dera that Ptah frowneth upon Rhadames, and that she alone can atone unto me for his sin!'"

Through the outer temple Niobedes led the woman, and they passed along a low vaulted passage and came to the inner temple, where only the high priest may enter, and which is full of the sacred mysteries of the gods.

Hewn out of the rock was the inner temple, and hewn out of its wall was the mighty figure of the god Ptah enthroned before the door. No light was there except the sacred lamps, nor any opening save the low stone door which gave entrance to the priest. Never before had any but the high priest set foot on this sacred ground. Dera trembled and grew weak with fear as she bowed before Ptah.

"How shall I make atonement?" she whispered, and her voice shook and died away piteously into silence.

Then from the silver bowl upon the white altar there issued forth a veil of white vapor, and a pungent and bitter perfume—and the sound of distant thunder echoed through the chamber. And Niobedes murmured that the god Ptah spoke, and that the vapor was the breath of his nostrils.

Dera cowered to the ground, and her heart was faint within her. Scarcely dared she breathe, but her lips formed the words: "What saith Ptah, maker of gods and men?"

Niobedes looked upon her for a space, but he could not answer. Then he turned away and bowed down until his forehead touched the ground, and he cried out in a voice of deep sorrow and fear:

"Spare me, O Ptah! Lay any other command upon thy servant save that, lest my name be shadowed! Spare me, O Ptah!"

Louder and louder rolled the thunder, and a flash of lightning forked itself across the dusky image of the god, and the vapor rolled dense and black from the silver bowl.

Dera trembled and fell upon the ground.

"Speak not again unto thy servant in anger, O Ptah!" groaned the priest. "Thy command shall be obeyed. What is my brother to me, O maker of gods and men, when thou turnest thy face

from him! I see him no longer, for he stands in darkness, but thou art ever before! I will obey thee!"

III.

HE rose, and stooping, lifted Dera to her feet.

"Ptah hath spoken in anger," he said in hushed tones. "Never before hath he spoken thus to his servant Niobedes, and I dare not disobey him!"

"What saith he? I heard his voice, but my ears told me nothing, for fear made my heart almost die!" Dera clung to the priest's hands in her terror.

Slowly he drew her toward him, panting as he felt her in his arms, for his heart beat under the spur of his thought.

"Thus saith Ptah unto his servant: 'Tell Dera that upon Rhadames I look with anger, but upon Niobedes, my priest, I smile, and upon all whom he loveth. She whom he taketh to his arms shall be favored by Ptah, and her prayers will I answer!'"

The girl looked into his dark face and trembled, for his eyes had a look in them that affrighted her. She tried to draw herself away from him, but she could not.

"Thus saith Ptah: 'Let Dera, the wife of Rhadames, leave her husband.'"

Dera tore herself from his grasp and faced him. Her eyes were alight with rage.

"Rhadames is here. Ptah is far! My husband is more to me than the maker of gods and men!"

Niobedes looked with amazement upon the woman who defied the great Ptah even before his own altar. He marveled at her, but desired her the more.

"Ptah knoweth thy heart and hath pity upon thee," he said. "He will make thee wise, so that thou shalt obey him. Behold!"

He showed her upon the altar a silver bowl, full of water to the brim. He bade her look upon it.

Then, as she looked into the water, she saw, as a passing scene reflected in a mirror, a room, and she knew it for her own sleeping chamber. Upon the couch lay a woman. It was herself. She saw her own face, the eyes closed in slumber, and the breast heaving gently with the rise and fall of breath, as the ripples of the Nile.

From the shadows crept a man, who moved toward the sleeping woman with stealthy steps, and in his hand was a dagger. Then the dagger was uplifted and driven down, and the woman sprang half-way up and then fell back dead!

The murderer turned his face to the light, and Dera saw that it was the face of Rhadames, her husband.

The picture faded from the water, and white, like a statue of fair marble, stood Dera, gazing upon Niobedes with wide open eyes of horror and pain.

"Thou hast seen thy fate," said Niobedes. "But humble thyself before Ptah, and obey him, and he will save thee from Rhadames! Else wilt thou die at his hand!"

"He loves me!" was all that Dera answered, and her breath fluttered between her parted lips like the wings of a butterfly.

"Thou shalt obey Ptah. Thou shalt leave Rhadames," said the priest. "Oh, Dera! I will take thee! I will love thee! Death is not for such as thee!"

"Death is for me, as it is for all, save only the gods. If Rhadames would take my life, he is my lord and my love—it is his!"

The hot blood purpled under the priest's swarthy skin, and his strong shoulders bowed forward as though they would force his arms to clutch her and hold her prisoner forever.

"Look yet again!" he cried. "The future doth not affright thee. Look upon the present!"

Once more she peered into the crystal water, and therein saw a man who held a woman within his close embrace, and kissed her passionately. And she saw that the man was Rhadames, and her heart took courage, for she knew that all his love was her own.

Then the man put the woman away from him so that he might gaze into her eyes, and Dera saw that it was a stranger.

Love and sorrow alike ebbed from her breast, and it seemed to her that already she was far from the living, throbbing world. Niobedes spoke, and his words sounded as from a distance, and they told her the piteous tale of a woman of long ago.

"Ptah has shown thee the future and

the present," said Niobedes slowly. "He hath given thee thy choice between life and death! Thy love is in the arms of another woman. Wilt thou obey the command of Ptah?"

But Dera neither looked at him nor spoke. Her eyes were fixed upon the rigid, cruel face of the god, and her pale lips moaned slightly. Then she drew a dagger from her girdle, and with both hands drove it beneath her left breast, and fell upon the floor.

With a low, hoarse cry of grief and rage, Niobedes flung himself down beside her and plucked the dagger out. A great spurt of blood followed in its wake and ebbed in lesser throbs, until, with one sigh, she died and was lost to him.

Then the madness of fear seized upon him, lest any one should learn of this thing, for he knew that his office would not safeguard him from his brother.

IV.

A NOISE rumbled through the chamber, and he looked up in deadly fright. He thought that Ptah frowned upon him. It seemed to him that the mighty form of the god was bending forward, and threatening to fall upon him and crush him. He sprang away from the corpse of Dera, every pulse in his body quivering.

But the body must be hidden! He looked about him for a hiding-place. None could he find. There was a little space behind the god, where it had fallen forward. That must be Dera's tomb.

He dragged the corpse from before the altar and thrust it in the niche, forcing it into the narrow space. As he did so the towering figure of the god swayed for a moment, and then with a mighty crash fell forward upon the ground.

Awe-stricken and weak, Niobedes bowed his head and thanked Ptah that he had not punished him as he deserved, and crushed him to death in the fall.

"Even though I deserved the death,

O Ptah!" he cried—"for I have used the sacred rites of the priesthood for my own gross purpose. The mysteries that were taught unto me; that thy name might be exalted, have I used for mine own ends. Father of all, thou seest that I am punished, for she for whom I sinned has gone from me forever. O Ptah, I thank thee that thou hast not called me to judgment with my wickedness fresh upon me! O Ptah, I thank thee for thy great mercy unto thy servant, Niobedes!"

He rose from his knees. Since the god had fallen, there was no place to hide Dera, and he saw that he must leave her, and content himself with securing the door on the outside.

None ever came there save the high priest, and the evidence of his crime might lay undiscovered for long years, until he, too, should come to die, and his office should pass to another.

One look he gave to the dead woman's beautiful face, and then turned to the door. For the first time he knew that he could not open it. Fear had blinded him, and he had not seen.

Not ten men, nor fifty, with ropes and blocks, could have moved the god where it had fallen against the door of stone.

From the outside no help could come, nor was there possible entrance save by this one door.

And when the awful knowledge came to Niobedes, he cried aloud, he howled like a jackal, and he bit his flesh.

Then he grasped at the huge bulk of the god, and dragged at the cold stone until his hands were bleeding. He could not move it. And the great head frowned upon him. His heart seemed to turn to water, and his strength left him. . . .

The days passed in horror and silence, from dawn to blazing noon, and from noon to night, until Niobedes, the priest, lay dead with his dead love in the sealed temple of the great god Ptah.

DAYS.

Each day to do a little deed for love,

Each day to help some weary one along,

Each day to smile a little cheery smile—

Such days make life one sweet, unbroken song.

Wallace Arthur.

ACROSS A THOUSAND YEARS.

BY ELLIOT BALESTIER.

A SHORT STORY.



"N the bridge!"

"Forward."

"Something on the port bow, sir. Can't make it out."

"Keep your eye on it and report just as soon as you do!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

A slender, dark-haired girl had mounted the bridge, unobserved. She followed the terse dialogue with evident interest.

"Oh, captain, what do you suppose it is?" she asked eagerly. "Do you think we shall have an adventure at last?"

Captain Eric Neilsen, sailing-master of the twenty-five hundred ton steam-yacht *Thora*, four days out of New York for the Mediterranean, turned with a slight start at the sound of the voice at his elbow. His tanned face flushed slightly as he answered, laughing:

"I'm afraid not, Miss Nora. It's probably only a bit of drift. Steam and the wireless have relegated the romance of the sea to the pages of fiction."

"Oh, please don't say that," protested the girl pleadingly, as she leaned against the rail and looked up at the fair-haired, young giant, an expression of amusement and admiration in her gray eyes.

"To look at you," she added banteringly, "one might imagine that a viking had come to life. Perhaps you *are* the reincarnation of one of your several times removed great-grandfathers."

Captain Neilsen laughed. "I hope not," he replied. "From all I have learned of them, I gather that my ancestors were most incorrigible pirates. Still, perhaps if I were—"

He paused, a curious expression in his clear blue eyes, and the girl, with heightened color and drooping lashes, turned suddenly away, avoiding his level gaze.

"It might have its advantages," concluded Captain Neilsen.

Until he had met Nora Callahan there had been no romance in Eric Neilsen's life. From childhood the sea had claimed him, and to it he had given his allegiance.

His grandfather, even in his youth a famous scientist, had come to America from Christiania with his young wife many years before, and built up a substantial fortune, which his son, Eric's father, had more than doubled by marrying a wealthy wife, and then quadrupled by business acumen.

Both of them had been men of medium stature and sedentary habits, but Eric had thrown back to the hardy earlier ancestors, who in great banked galleys roved the seas, the scourge and plague of the coast towns of Europe, and the heroes of the sea-man and scald.

For science, except the science of navigation, Eric cared nothing. Business he hated; and to remain years on end in one place would have driven him mad. When, therefore, he had returned six months before, summoned by an urgent cable from a half-completed trip around the world, to find his father dying, a bankrupt, and his fortune irretrievably gone, he had turned to the sea for a livelihood, as naturally as he had turned to it for pleasure.

His one possession, the yacht *Thora*, he sold to pay the last of his father's debts. The purchaser, the Honorable James F. Callahan, one of the trade kings of America and a Senator from a middle Western State, offered him the billet of sailing-master, and Eric Neilsen accepted it with joy.

Thus it was that, on this glorious day in early spring, he was on the bridge of the *Thora* as paid master of the yacht that for two years he had sailed as owner,

and engaged, unconsciously on his part, in the pleasing but dangerous occupation of being flirted with by his employer's daughter.

"I'm afraid I would have to go back some hundreds of years," he continued, as the silence caused by his last somewhat enigmatical remark became embarrassing. "The past four or five generations of us have been very ordinary, matter-of-fact business and professional men."

"But, before that," insisted Nora. "You said yourself that they were pirates."

Neilsen smiled rather grimly. "Of course, most of it is legend," he said, "but they were not exactly pirates, in the modern sense. They were vikings, and according to the standard of those times, men of honor—at least, to their friends. About one of them, Jarl Raud—not the one King Olaf slew, but another Raud; the Red, or the Red Earl, he was called—there is a legend that he will return some day with a vast treasure."

Nora clapped her hands. "Oh, lovely," she cried. "Tell me all about it, quick."

Neilsen smiled at her enthusiasm. "There isn't much to it," he replied rather hesitatingly. He would not have admitted it, but there was something almost sacred to him in the legends of his family. "It seems that in the eleventh century he sailed away, commanding a ship in one of Thorfin Karlsefne's reckless expeditions to Wineland, which is supposed to be America.

"All returned after many months, except Jarl Raud, who never returned. It was given out that his ship was separated from the others in a storm the fourth day out. Later, it was whispered that Thorfin, jealous of Jarl's influence, had set upon him, killed all his men and the slaves at the oars, and set him adrift in his own galley. It was said further that, as his companions sailed away, leaving Jarl drifting helpless and alone, he had stood at the bow of his galley and swore by Thor and all the gods that some day he would return with a greater treasure than Thorfin ever saw.

"As he was a man who was known never to break his word, it came to be believed that he would return. But neither his wife nor son nor any one else ever

saw him again. And this was nearly a thousand years ago."

"Perhaps he meant he would come in another incarnation," said Nora seriously. "Perhaps *you* are he."

Neilsen laughed. "I doubt if the theory of reincarnation was known to him," he answered, "and, besides, if I have more treasure than Thorfin ever saw, he must have been pretty poor."

"Nevertheless," began Nora decidedly—but a hail from the lookout interrupted her.

II.

"On the bridge!"

"Forward!"

"It's a ship's boat, sir. Can't make out any one in it."

"Where away?"

"Two points off the port bow, sir."

"All right, keep your eye on it. We'll pick it up," he added, turning to Nora. "It's probably only a boat broken adrift from some steamer in the storm last week, but it's best to investigate.

He called an order to the man at the wheel.

In a few moments the boat was visible even to Nora's land-bred eyes, a tiny speck rising and falling sluggishly on the long swell.

"Almost water-logged," remarked Captain Neilsen, who was examining the boat through his binoculars. "A modern ship's boat apparently, with water-tight compartments fore and aft. Otherwise—" he paused. His face suddenly became grave, and the girl, who had been watching him, grasped his arm.

"What is it?" she asked excitedly. "Do you see anything?"

"You had better go below, Miss Nora," replied Neilsen quietly, but in a tone that was in effect a command. "Will you ask your father to come up a moment?"

Nora hesitated, as if about to protest, but the captain had taken up his glasses and was again studying the boat. After a moment she reluctantly obeyed.

Ten minutes later the yacht drew alongside the boat. She lay deep in the water, almost awash in fact, yet no one paid much attention to the boat. Lashed to a thwart, almost entirely submerged, was the body of a man. His head was

thrown back, exposing a face, pinched and shrunken, with blackened lips and swollen, protruding tongue.

The old, terrible story of starvation and exposure, and, worst of all, thirst, was plainly written there; but from a faint, gasping movement of his chest it was seen he was still alive. Captain Neilsen's orders were executed almost before they were given.

In a moment the man had been cut loose, passed aboard, and carried to a cabin, where Neilsen left him in the care of the first officer, a steward, and Senator Callahan's own physician, who, as it happened, had accompanied them as a guest.

Neilsen was in the main saloon with Senator Callahan and Nora when the doctor finally left his patient and joined them. His report was not encouraging.

"It will be a miracle if he lives," he said in reply to Nora's eager questions. "He is conscious now, but he is not a young man, and though inured to hardships as are most sailors, and especially Norwegians, he's had a terrible trial.

"He's from the oil-tank steamer Salisbury from New York for Japan. She caught fire, as nearly as I can get it, about ten days ago. The crew got away in the boats, but he was sick in his berth and was forgotten. At the last moment he managed to get the one remaining boat over, and for ten days, sick, badly burned and alone, without food and water, he has drifted on the high sea."

"There's little hope, then?" asked Neilsen gravely.

"None, I fear," replied the doctor. "The wonderful thing is that he is alive at all."

"In that case I had better see him as soon as possible. I must get a statement from him."

"Well," answered the doctor, hesitatingly, "I don't suppose it will make much difference. It's a question of hours, anyway."

He led the way to the cabin.

III.

THE castaway's appearance was much improved, though he was still a pitiable wreck of a once strong man, as he lay in the berth, too weak to even raise a hand. Indeed, only his eyes seemed alive, and

these glowing dully beneath his reddened, swollen lids.

But at the entrance of Captain Neilsen he sat suddenly erect, stared at him with terror-distended eyes, and shrieked incoherent words in his native tongue.

For a moment Neilsen was too surprised to move, then seeing that his presence had thrown the man into the last extremity of fear, he quickly retreated from the cabin.

Half an hour elapsed before the doctor finally succeeded in quieting his patient and joined the others in the saloon, an expression of perplexity on his face.

"Did you understand what he said to you, Captain Neilsen?" he asked. "You speak Norwegian, do you not?"

Neilsen reflected the doctor's puzzled expression. "I know what he said," he replied, "but he must have been raving. There was no sense in his words. He called me the Red King, swore he had taken nothing, and begged me to go away. That was all, but he seemed so terribly afraid of me I thought it best to go."

The doctor nodded. "Quite right," he agreed, "yet are you sure you have never seen him before? He is somewhat incoherent and his English is not the best, but I gather that he believes he has seen you before, under circumstances that inspired him with the most abject terror. No one ever tried to rob you at any time, or anything of that sort?"

"No," answered Neilsen decidedly. "Of course, living on the sea so much I have been through some rather trying experiences, but I have had very few personal encounters with my men. Certainly none that should inspire such fear as this poor fellow showed. Besides, I am sure that I have never seen him before. I should judge that his hardships have unbalanced him."

The doctor shook his head. "No," he said, "he seems perfectly rational, but disinclined to discuss the matter. I cannot make it out."

"Do you think he would talk to me?" asked Nora eagerly. "He might be willing to talk to a woman."

The doctor hesitated. Both Senator Callahan and Neilsen protested. Yet Nora was accustomed to have her own

way, and after a short argument the doctor conducted her to the cabin.

The old sailor's eyes brightened when he saw her. Her presence seemed to calm and soothe him, and after a few moments the doctor obeyed a sign from the girl and withdrew.

It was nearly an hour before Nora left the cabin, closing the door softly behind her.

"He is asleep," she said, and there was an expression of wonder, almost of awe, upon her face. "But he has told me the most curious thing. I can't tell you in his own words. As Dr. Spencer says, his English is poor, and he used a lot of Norwegian words I did not understand, but he is not raving, and I believe him."

"Can you tell?" asked Neilsen gently. "He did not speak in confidence?"

"Oh, no. He wished me to tell you, but he begged me to ask you not to come to him again, and I promised him you wouldn't. It seems," she continued, "that three years ago he was an A. B., whatever that is, on a steam whaler and walrus hunter, up in the Arctic Ocean. About sixty miles north-northwest from Seven Islands, these are his words, they landed on a small island, so covered with ice it was almost like an enormous berg. He wandered away from his companions, and skirting the shore to the northern side, came to a real iceberg—two or three hundred feet high—that had stranded there. A deep cavern had been hollowed in the berg by the action of the water, and in a spirit of adventure he entered it. He had only gone a few feet when he came upon something half-embedded in the ice. He dug it out with his ice ax and found it was a gold and jeweled cup. I suppose, from his description, it must have been one of the huge drinking goblets they used hundreds of years ago.

"Of course, he was elated over his discovery, and rushed on, hoping to find more. Suddenly he came to an open space, where a hole had been worn in the roof of the cavern. In the bright light that streamed from above he saw directly in front of him, staring at him with terrible eyes through a great thickness of clear ice, the head and upper part of a huge man.

"His hair and beard were red, and he

wore a 'shining shirt'—armor, I suppose. Anyway, he didn't stop to investigate it, but, dropping the cup, he turned and fled.

"Half-way back to his companions he fell into a crevasse in the ice. The next thing he remembers he was in his bunk with a broken leg. His shipmates had found him unconscious.

"He never told them of his adventure, but he assured me that except that the hair and beard were longer and redder and the face a pure white like snow, the Red King, as he called him, and you, Captain Neilsen, are exactly alike. That is why you frightened him so."

IV.

THERE was silence for a few moments when Nora had finished. Senator Callahan was the first to make any comment on the strange story.

"Sounds like a pipe dream," he announced decisively. "I believe the fellow fell down the crevasse first and dreamed all the rest of it."

To this the doctor would not agree. "No," he said, "the story is rather too circumstantial for that. Besides, there is nothing particularly improbable in it. They have found carcasses of the mammoth in a state of perfect preservation after tens of centuries."

"Of course it is true," added Nora indignantly. "If you had heard the poor old man telling it, you wouldn't have doubted it. Besides, I believe that it is Jarl."

"Oh, there's no reason why it shouldn't be true," interrupted Captain Neilsen hastily; "but that was three years ago. Probably the berg has broken up and drifted away long since."

"Nevertheless," replied Nora with decision, "I vote that we let the Mediterranean wait, and go to that island, wherever it is."

Both Dr. Spencer and Senator Callahan laughed, but Captain Neilsen, who had seen Nora gain her ends in more absurd propositions than this, remained quite grave.

"I am afraid it is not quite feasible, Miss Nora," he said firmly. "In the first place, our directions are rather vague. Seven Islands lie at the extreme north of the Spitzbergen group north of Norway

and far within the Arctic circle. Sixty miles west-northwest—and, by the way, he hasn't mentioned from which one of the group we take our bearings—would be somewhere between the eightieth and eighty-first parallels, and we are scarcely equipped for polar exploration."

"Besides, are we not to meet your mother and brother at Gibraltar?" asked the doctor.

"And Dick Van Alystan?" added Senator Callahan.

Nora stamped her foot petulantly.

"Oh, you are all against me," she cried. "What is the use of owning a yacht—and you know this is my yacht, dad—if you can't go where you wish? Now I am going to dispose of your objections in order.

"We can get more definite directions from the sailor when he is stronger. This is just the right season of the year to start north, and we can stop at, say, Bergen, in Norway, and outfit. That's for you, Captain Neilsen.

"Mother and Jim were almost afraid to trust themselves to an ocean liner, and they'd die of fright in this little boat. That settles them.

"As for Dick Van Alystan, he would refuse to go to heaven if he couldn't take his automobile.

"Now, here—wait!"

She rushed into the chart-room, and returned in a moment with a chart of the North Atlantic.

"Look," she continued; "we are just west of the Azores now. We can turn a little north and strike the English Channel—stop at Portsmouth and cable mother, and coal if necessary. Then go on through Dover Straits into the North Sea; stop at Bergen and outfit, and then on to Spitzbergen and the island of the Red King."

In spite of all arguments, and against the better judgment of Captain Neilsen, it was finally so decided.

Six weeks later the Thora sighted Parry Island, the most northern of the Seven Islands, and, turning her nose west-northwest, began the search for the island of the Red King.

As the doctor had predicted, the old sailor lived only a few days; but in that time Nora had managed to get from him

some definite information as to the location of the island and the berg.

The sea was dead calm, except for the long, oily swell, and there was little ice—only a few scattered bergs and some drift and brash ice. As they approached their destination, a thin, rolling white fog—ice-smoke, it is called—rose, through which the Thora slowly and cautiously groped her way.

Captain Neilsen was on the bridge, and there Nora joined him. For some minutes they stood side by side, peering ahead.

"Captain," she asked in a low voice, "do—do you think it is—he?"

Eric started. He had been lost in thought. Then he laughed a little.

"You mean Jarl Raud?" he asked, with affected lightness. "Why, it is over nine hundred years since he was lost. My dear Miss Nora, there are, and have been, hundreds of red-haired, red-bearded men in Norway."

"I know," she admitted reluctantly. "Still—but how, if it should be he, did he get there without men to row the heavy galley? He sailed from the Salten Fiord, did he not? That is hundreds of miles south."

"That's the least objection," replied Eric. "I doubt if those old fellows averaged more than fifty miles a day. That would bring him at four days out about two hundred miles off the coast, just at the place to catch the west wind drift, which would carry him north beyond Spitzbergen. There the Greenland current—"

The voice of the lookout interrupted: "Land dead ahead, sir!"

Within twenty minutes the Thora was riding at anchor, a scant half-mile off the barren ice-crusting island they had come so far to find.

"According to your sailor, Miss Nora," said Captain Neilsen, "we are just now opposite where the ice cave should be, but—"

"Let's go ashore at once!" exclaimed the girl excitedly. "Of course you cannot see it in this fog."

"I should suggest that we wait until the fog lifts," Dr. Spencer interjected somewhat timidly. "It's thicker than ever here, and I doubt if we could find our way in it."

"Find as much in the fog as out of it," growled Senator Callahan. "It's a fool errand, anyway."

As usual, Nora gained her way, and a landing party was made up. On the shore Neilsen divided the party into two, sending one around the islet in one direction, while he, with Senator Callahan, Nora, and two men took the other route.

Two hours later they met on the southern side of the tiny island. Neither party had discovered anything. Crevasses and caverns there were without number, but all were small, and no trace of man, alive or dead, was found.

Nora was frankly disappointed, and bore the gibes of her father with ill grace.

"I don't care!" she cried at last. "It's been fun anyway; and if you are so tired, rest here and send one of the men around for the launch."

"A good idea," agreed Captain Neilsen. "I will go. I should like to see the other side of the island for myself."

The island was only about three miles round, but the walking was anything but easy, and though he did not pause to make any particular search, it was a full hour before he arrived on the north side, where the launch had been left. Another half hour was spent running the little craft back.

The fog had thickened perceptibly, and objects were visible only a few feet away, when at last he reached his party and ran the launch alongside the pack-ice that fringed the shore.

"Well, you're a welcome sight!" cried the senator as he scrambled aboard, followed by the rest of the party. "A hot drink would just about hit me right. Hurry up and get back to the yacht. I'm—"

Captain Neilsen, who was standing by the wheel, glanced hastily over the party, a sudden expression of surprise and alarm on his face.

"Where is Miss Nora?" he interrupted sharply.

The senator paused, his mouth still open.

"Nora!" he said dazedly. "Nora! Why, she went with you, didn't she?"

"We haven't seen her since you left,"

said the doctor. "If she didn't go with you she must be lost in the fog."

V.

For a moment Captain Neilsen stood rigid, his face slowly paling. Then his orders came sharp and decisive.

"Mr. Clark," turning to the second officer, "you will take Mr. Callahan in the launch to the yacht full speed. Never mind the ice. Bring back to the north side what men you can carry, and send all the others in the boats. Tell Mr. McGregor to send me every man he can spare from the fires also, and keep the siren blowing at minute intervals. Bring guns and ammunition for signals. Live-ly, now!"

For two hours thirty men beat every nook and cranny of the islet, yet no trace of the missing girl was found.

Weary, disheartened, perplexed, Eric paused on the western shore of the island. Suddenly one of the men near him, confused by the fog, stepped upon a piece of the pack near the open water. There was a sharp crack, a jar and, before the man could rise from his knees, to which the shock had thrown him, he was four or five feet away on a cake of ice about twelve feet square that his weight had broken from the pack.

He was active, however, and a quick jump brought him back to the main pack. Captain Neilsen stood as if turned to stone, his face gleaming white and ghastly against his ruddy beard.

"That's the way she went," he said hoarsely, pointing to the fog where the cake of ice had disappeared.

For a moment he stood motionless, then, with sudden decision, he raised the repeating shotgun he carried and fired four shots in rapid succession. It was the recall signal agreed upon. In half an hour the searchers were again on the deck of the yacht.

Senator Callahan, wild with grief and anxiety, met them, but there was no word of cheer for him.

"She has been drifting for five hours now," said Captain Neilsen, in a voice that even his iron nerve could scarcely control; "but I cannot tell the rate of the drift. It would depend on the size of the cake she is on, and whether she stood up or lay or sat down.

"What wind there is blows north, which would retard her progress, if she stood up, but the Greenland current is strong here. She may have drifted a mile or five. We can only follow and watch, and pray that this cursed fog will lift," he added.

"You—you will do your best?" begged Senator Callahan brokenly. "She is—everything to me."

Neilsen seized him by the shoulder with a crushing grip, and looked him squarely in the eye. "I love her," he answered fiercely; and, without further words, turned away.

Slowly, cautiously, the Thora pushed her nose into the cold dead fog-bank that seemed to open before her and close behind her like a shroud, while every two minutes her powerful siren sent forth a hoarse, far-reaching bray. In the intervals Eric stood with a megaphone at his straining ear.

Only once did he speak. "Thank fortune there is no night here now," he said to the doctor, who had come to urge him to take some rest. "We are spared the darkness."

He would not leave the bridge.

Hour after hour passed, and still he stood at his post—silent, alert, watchful. Two bells in the first watch had just rung when there came a hail from the lookout.

"Something dead ahead, sir."

Almost simultaneously the bell in the engine-room clanged, and the yacht lost her slight headway.

Then, without warning, and silently as all nature moves in the frozen north, the fog was swept aside as by an unseen hand. And there, scarce a hundred yards away, lay a war-galley of a thousand years ago, still half-embedded in the huge remnant of berg that alone kept it afloat. It faced the modern steam-yacht, its curved dragon-head prow proudly poised, the ends of the broken sweeps still projecting through the double tier of oar-holes.

Yet it was not the galley itself that claimed the attention of crew and master alike.

On the deck, lashed to the stump of the single mast, was a man—a huge, red-haired, red-bearded man. In his right hand, still stiffened by the frost that had

held him for ages, was a mighty javelin. About his body gleamed a suit of golden armor, and on his left arm he bore a gold and silver inlaid shield—a shield the counterpart of which had hung in the hall of Eric Neilsen's home, and whose device he recognized.

So for a moment, there in the silent ice-bound waste of the Arctic Sea, the two stood face to face—Jarl Raud, the viking, and his descendant, Eric Neilsen, and they looked upon each other across the ages. A hundred yards separated their bodies—nine hundred years their lives. Yet, as father to son, so were they alike.

Then, as suddenly as if it had been swept away by some vagrant puff of wind, the fog drifted back, but not before Eric had seen another figure, one that moved and was alive, and a voice that he recognized, calling his name—his first name, "Eric!"

In a moment a boat was in the water. Willing hands at the oars soon carried it the short distance to the half-submerged berg and, with a shout of joy, Captain Neilsen leaped upon the ice beside the galley and, heedless of the men in the boat, caught the girl in his arms.

"Nora!" he cried; "Nora!"

Her clinging arms answered his unspoken question.

As he was carrying her to the boat, anxious now only to get her under the doctor's care, she looked up at him, trust and happiness in her tear-stained eyes.

"I was afraid at first when the cake of ice broke adrift with me, terribly afraid, but when it came against this one, and I saw *Him*. I knew I was safe."

Just as they boarded the yacht there came from the fog a sudden sound, a rushing, roaring sound, and then a mighty splash. A moment later a great wave dashed against the bow of the vessel, tossing it as in a storm; then the dead calm fell again.

"The berg has turned over," said Eric, in a hushed voice. "Jarl Raud has gone to his rest at last, and he kept his word."

"He came back, but—there is no treasure," answered Nora gently.

"Treasure!" cried Eric, catching her to his heart. "By the Hammer of Thor, he brought back a greater treasure than Thorfin Karlsefne ever dreamed of."

THE MOON OF EVIL OMEN.

BY MAUDE MORRISON HUEY.

A SHORT STORY.



"H, Stevie, I wish you'd go 'long and quit devilin' me! Can't you see I hain't no mind for such triflin'?" The girl stamped her foot into the yielding sand. There were tears welling up in her blue eyes. "I been a puttin' up with you till I can't no longer. 'Pears like you're bound to keep on till I has to tell ye."

The boy dropped the fish back into the basket. He had held it up for the girl to see, and had trailed the long, slimy tail across her brown wrist. His big, honest face quivered sensitively.

"I wasn't aimin' to devil ye, Clo'. You know I never trifles—leastways, not with you." His eyes wore the injured look of one who has been misunderstood.

"Well, I can't stan' it. My mind's took up. Go'way and leave me be, Stevie—do! I'll clean my own fish." She snatched the cleaning-knife from his hand rudely. "You're always offerin' to do my work. Can't I fetch and carry for myse'f a while yet, Stevie Duncan? Do I look he'pless?" The girl stretched her strong arms out before him. "Now go 'long—do! I just got to be alone." she cried desperately as she began to clean.

The boy stood helplessly on the sand, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. Then he turned and went away.

The girl did not watch his going; instead, she turned to the river and looked long and eagerly, with her eyes shaded from the setting sun. Down at the landing a boat was being launched for the first time. She could see the gleam of its freshly painted sides. The wind was from the west; it blew the gingham bonnet back from her head, and raveled

her blond braids into a golden cloud about her face. Still she stood motionless.

Out on the river a tow was tugging and puffing, trying to put its barges into port, but she paid no heed to its maneuvers. She did not know that the White Swan ferry-boat, coming across, was in danger from the tow's wheel. She had lost all interest in her surroundings. A flock of cranes swooped down to the fish-cleanings, unafraid.

It had been a hot day. The sun was sinking like a blood-red ball into the river, and where it touched the waves, they, too, became as blood, and went trailing a streak of color across the river. The sky paled to a sickly orange. The clump of sycamores cast themselves out in shadow, distorted and ugly. A ground-toad hopped up on the girl's bare brown foot, and cooled himself from the scorching sand. The swells from the tow came licking up along the shore.

The girl stirred then: she stooped and picked up a tiny sprig of love-mint, and hid it in her bosom. Then her eyes sought till they found a footprint, small and trim, and unlike the great, sprawling tracks of Stevie around the cleaning-blocks; and then another, and another. She traced them back till they were lost in the thick willows. Every day the waves came and washed the sands clean, but it had not mattered, for he came again; now he had been for the last time. On the morrow the Clotilde was going down the river. There would be no more tracks; there would be no more happy hours, wandering hand in hand along the river-banks; never again would he sit on the sands and watch her at the cleaning. He was going. Already he had said good-by—unless—

Wearily she stooped and picked up her basket of fish. It was but a stone's throw across the white sand to the cabin where she lived with her fisherman father—a bit of a gray cabin, stuck like a nest to the green hill behind it, its daub of a mud chimney bolstering it up on the hither side. She moved to it mechanically, set her basket of fish in the smoke-house, and crossed the rough kitchen floor to hang her bonnet on its accustomed peg. In the back-yard she split wood and whittled a pine-knot to kindle the supper fire. She swung the great pot down from its nail behind the stove and filled it with water. It was at this time she always put on the pot for her father's meal. He would be in shortly from tending the nets, and he was always hungry at night. She beat the corn-cakes systematically.

It had been years since they had laid her mother away upon the bleak hill-side, and since then she had been her father's sole housekeeper. Nor did the little cabin lack for housewifely care. She always saw that it was fresh and bright for his home-comings.

II.

ESPECIALLY on this night did it shine out like a beacon to the old man clambering heavily up the banks. He wiped the spray from his shaggy brows that he might see it better.

"Bless 'er! Bless 'er!" he said, thinking of the waiting girl inside. "Always a welcome for the old man, always a love-lamp shinin' out to guide him home." And in his face was the perfect confidence that it would never fail him. The smell of frying fish greeted his hungry nostrils as he opened the door.

The girl bent over her frying. Her long, golden braid was toward her father, and her strong shoulders, clothed in a cotton frock. He devoured the lines of her figure lovingly, his old face softening.

"Ho, little gal!" he called. She was always "little gal" to him. He did not seem to heed the changes of time.

He hung his dripping coat against the jamb, and rubbed his hands together contentedly. They were stiff old hands—stiff and clumsy from long hanging to oars. His back was bent with the lift-

ing of heavy nets. After a long day's work it was pleasant to come home to such a cabin as this. In all the world he doubted if there was a more cheery spot—always a light, and a waiting meal, and Clotilde. The cheerlessness of the best cabin without her had never come to him. He had never tried to think of a time without Clotilde. The possibility of some day losing her had never occurred to him. Her mother had always been faithful. She was like her.

She had picked a little posy-bouquet to put beside his plate to-night—pinks and honeysuckle. Perhaps it was the posies that made things look so extra bright. He went over and lifted it awkwardly to smell it, and his shaking hand spilled a great blob of water on the clean cloth. He wiped it away hurriedly, and then moved the mug to cover the spot. But Clotilde did not see him. She was turning the fish for a last fry, and her golden head was low.

He stood back proudly and looked at the table, set just as he liked to see it, the plain plates right side up—Clotilde did not turn them over in the unpleasant custom of stylish housewives. She knew how bungling his fingers were from handling wet ropes all day. She always made things comfortable for her old father. The big cup was there beside his plate. He was a hand for black coffee. It took a monstrous cup.

"It all looks mighty good to the old man," he said, rubbing his hands together. "There hain't a thing lackin', daughter, not a thing. I wouldn't change my lot for a kingdom."

The girl winced under his tender scrutiny, and stooped lower to drain the pot. The old man went out to wash.

There, against the cabin-wall, was the wash-bench, scrubbed spotlessly white, and the shining basin, half-full of water, waiting for him. He wondered sometimes how things stayed so tidy and nice. He always splashed the water. He was too much of a river-dog not to. It seemed rather crowded to wash in a basin after he had splashed in the river all day. He went in puffing and blowing, as usual, feeling blindly for the towel. He always came in with great gusto, shaking a shower of drops from his grizzled head.

"Now I know where that pesky towel is," he declared, making unsuccessful dabs along the white pine door. "It's there. No?—It's right there, then. It's meaner 'n an eel to get your hands on. Believe it crawls up a leetle higher, 'cause it knows the old man's got soap in 'is eyes." He scrubbed his ruddy, wind-roughened face vigorously.

When he was finished, and had combed out his wet mat of hair before the square of mirror on the wall, his meal was waiting. The fish and potatoes were a crispy brown, the coffee was steaming hot, the cakes were yellow and flaky. It was all a tired fisherman's heart could desire. Truly, he was blessed. He set to work heartily. He never neglected his duty when it came to eating. He was proud of his Clotilde as a cook. She certainly knew how to tickle the old man's palate.

He smacked his lips appreciatively. There were little patties of cheese that Clotilde had made in the morning. He was especially fond of clabber cheese. There was buttermilk in a pitcher, too. Sometimes he liked to "wind up" with corncakes and buttermilk. It made a good ending. The contents of his plate absorbed him utterly. When he had finished eating, she had already left the table and was washing up the pots.

"There's quite a heap o' them corncakes left, daughter," he remarked, eying the table with concern. "I thought I e't an uncommon lot. They was powerful good. Must be you stirred up a leetle more'n usual." The one haggled cake and the broken bit of fish on the girl's plate revealed nothing to the old man's slow consciousness. "Just set 'em by," he said. "They'll be good for breakfast. 'Twould be a shame to waste 'em. They was extra good." He brushed the crumbs off his vest-front with an air of full satisfaction.

He sat down outside the cabin door, where he could watch the sunset. He always sat outside the cabin on a warm night, to smoke his pipe, and think over the day's fishing. It had been a good haul, the best in many a day. He liked to study the sky for signs of a fair day.

Clotilde came out presently and sat on the step at his feet. She always came when the supper work was done.

The sun had gone from sight; the sky

was fading. Quivering patches of crimson still lay on the gray bosom of the river. She watched them grow into purple stains. One pale star showed away to the north where the sky was pearl. It flickered, went out, came again. She watched it a while, then the one lone lightning-bug flitting over the balm-flowers below. The peepers were everywhere in the sparse grass. A spicy scent of mint mingled with the aroma of the old man's pipe. Away yonder, where the ragged pines brushed the sky, a horned owl was sending down his shrill cries, and low and sweet in the after-silence came the whippoorwill's reply.

"It's goin' to rain," said the old man against the cabin wall.

The girl was silent. She sat holding her knee, and her eyes seemed trying to penetrate the gathering dusk.

The old man talked on: of his work—how he had put out two nets; how many jugs he had floated; how many blinds he had placed along the bar; how the raising of the river had increased his chances. Then he told how he had helped to float a new houseboat up at the landing. It was going down the river in the morning, he told her. The girl against his knee shivered.

"Cold?" he questioned, feeling her thin sleeve.

He went on lauding the new boat's virtues. 'Twas a fine thing to live on the river. One could see the world. The whole world was not like the little fishing hamlet yonder. If he were only younger—

She raised her head slowly. Her eyes were like opals in the twilight. Her bosom, under the confines of her plain-buttoned bodice, beat like that of a tortured bird. Away to the southeast the sky was taking on a strange light. She watched it as it changed from green to bronze; from bronze to gold. It was the moon—the moon was rising. Slowly, grandly, like a thing of life, it shouldered through the trees, then seemed to hang hesitant, looking down upon a troubled world. A white film gathered and clothed it like a halo.

"See!" the old man said. "it'll rain afore a twelve hour." He pointed out the signs with a stiff forefinger. "Boats best to stay ashore." he said. "If I had

a boat I'd mind how I set 'er loose with a moon like that. It bodes evil. I took note oncet o' such a moon. It foretold the worst storm that ever struck the river. It was that night the Bird's Eye went down. I warned 'em, but they couldn't see no signs o' rain. About midnight the wind riz. Boat all beat up on the rocks, and the crew lost. A moon like that bodes no good," the old man kept repeating.

They watched it as it advanced slowly, leaving a trail of mist in its track. A black pall seemed to shadow it, that was not a cloud. "Mark you, we'll remember this night," the old man said.

III.

HE had finished his pipe. He rose stiffly and knocked the ashes out against the cabin wall. He always went to bed early. He had to be out in the gray, wet dawn to tend the-nets.

The girl's eyes followed him despairingly. She could hear him putting his pipe away in its old crack, and then he was pulling off his boots at the jack in the corner. They fell with a soggy thud, one, and then the other. She saw how he was putting them to dry on the two pegs by the fireplace. Now he was wriggling out of his vest with a sleepy yawn. She turned and looked in upon him wistfully. He stood, fumbling sleepily over his buttons. She heard his bare feet plodding over the boards to the bedroom-door. Now his hand was on the latch.

"Good night, poppy," she called. Her voice was husky.

He turned.

"Hey?" He could see her outside, a little gray heap huddled upon the step. "Hey, daughter!" he questioned.

"Oh, nothin'. I only said good night," the girl repeated.

The old man ran his stiff fingers into his hair.

"Hain't ye goin' to bed?" he asked her.

"Not yet, it's early," she told him.

"Comin' in?"

"Bymeby."

He fumbled the latch lingeringly, took a few steps over the threshold.

"Ye hain't sick, be ye, little gal?" Something in her attitude struck him.

He eyed her curiously. "Cause if ye be, and there's anything I can do—"

"No, poppy, I'm all right." She sighed wearily.

The old man stood a moment.

"If it's the toothache—" he said; but the girl shook her head.

"If he only knew! If he only knew!" her conscience kept crying out. Somehow the great, awkward body, standing there, stiff with its age, looked such a helpless thing.

"A bad night," the old man mumbled, as he went to his rest. "The moon has an evil eye. It bodes no good."

The girl sat motionless, listening for the last sound, her cold hands clinched in the lap of her cotton frock. She thought how it would be better had the old man gone to his rest for the last time. She heard him fumbling for the peg where his clothes must hang, and then the grunt of satisfaction as the stiff limbs straightened themselves out. She longed to cry out to him, to tell him to come back, to sit there beside her; but her lips remained motionless. The old man slept, the sleep of honest toil, his knotty hands relaxed upon the coverlet, the rugged lines of his face softened by dreams. The sound of his deep breathing filled the room.

Then the girl rose, and went about softly, gathering up her things and making them into a bundle. Already the moon was two hours high. She thought how he would be waiting under the sycamores. At the thought of him she trembled and touched the sprig of love-mint in her bosom. She was quivering from head to foot as she went out into the night.

Her bare feet made no sound in the soft sand. She passed the cleaning-blocks where she had always taken care of her father's catch. There were the empty boxes, and the baskets, and the disused nets. They seemed to cry out a reproach to her. On she went down to the river that shone like a sheet of silver through the willows. There was her father's skiff just as he had drawn its nose upon the sand, the water wish-washing its sides musically. Once it had been her greatest joy to work the oars while her father handled the lines. He would miss her. A picture of him, old, bent, trying to handle the wet nets alone,

his stiff fingers tangled helplessly, came to torture her.

By and by the cold weather would come on. She saw him in a fog, pulling about blindly, his bit of red scarf fluttering out with the wind. Thinking of him, she stumbled on.

Now she was deep in the willows. She could see the sycamores. Their crooked silhouettes in the moonlight looked like ghosts of evil things. But a few steps farther, and she would be there. She sat down helplessly on an upturned snag. The dull monotony of the past was behind her. Just around the bend there, joy awaited her—love—life—happiness; still she sat desolate and bowed. The waves licked up stealthily until they touched her bare feet—a cold, clammy touch. She knew how they loved to suck in human life. Her father was old and stiff with long years at the nets.

A dark cloud, the size of a man's hand, drifted over the face of the moon. She saw it and shivered. A wailing sound began away across the river. She seemed to hear an old man calling for help.

Across the sky a bullbat swooped, hovering ominously over the gray cabin's roof. The wind was rising. It fanned the girl's white cheek whiter. Somewhere, away in the dark, a young coon whined piteously.

Some one spoke her name: "Clotilde!"

He was close. She could have reached out and touched him with her hand; yet she sat motionless, like a thing of stone.

Once more he spoke her name: "Clotilde!" The sound came low and true. It thrilled her. She had only to cry out; but she sat, helpless, despairing. She watched him going from her.

"Anyhow, it had an evil eye. It boded no good. I never knew it to fail before," the old man said, when he rose on a fair morning.

"We don't always see the worst storms, poppy," the girl said quietly. "The worst sometimes goes round."

"That's right! That's right!" mumbled the old man as he hobbled away to his nets. "See there!"—he pointed his finger to the river—"there goes the new boat. Good luck to 'er."

The girl stood, shading her eyes, till there was only a speck, like a white bird, dotting the horizon.

And then one day the old man came hurrying across the sand, big with news.

"Rec'lect the boat we watched set sail this fortnight—white boat with blue trimmin's?"

The girl's face flashed white out of the shadow.

"Did she get wrecked?"

"No, no, but it ain't sayin' as how she oughtn't to. There's a woman down at the landin' with two youngsters as 'lows she's his wife, and as how he left 'er terrible bad off. Cur'us things a happenin' on the river, hey, lass?" He searched her face with blundering old eyes of love, but there was nothing in it to cause him any uneasiness. He turned with his arms full of nets.

"Stevie's comin' up to-night," he said. "Better go in an' perk your hair up a bit, hadn't you? There hain't no better lad than Stevie," he added.

When he was about to "shove-off" he looked back and saw her, entering the cabin-door. A smile of satisfaction softened the old man's face as he bent his back to the oars.

BEACH-SONG.

FROM over the seas he came to me,
With his air of grace and his smiling eyes;
With his charm and wit and his many lies
And his lips that, deceiving, kissed me.

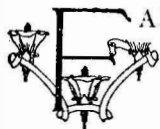
Strong and false as the sea was he:
A soul he had like the shifting sand;
But he held my heart in his careless hand
When over the seas he went from me.

I. Percival.

A MOUNTAIN MERCURY.

BY TEMPLE BAILEY.

A SHORT STORY.



FARE up the mountain America could see the rural carrier on his sure-footed little steed. At first he had seemed just a black speck against the sapphire sky behind him. Then, as he came nearer, he wigwagged a welcome with his red bandanna.

America had a little shawl about her shoulders, for, in spite of the sunshine, the February day was cold, and she used it for an answering signal. Then, smiling, she waited.

"You're mighty anxious," said the young man on horseback, as she ran down the road to meet him.

"It's St. Valentine's Day," she told him archly, "and I'm lookin' for one."

He handed her a little box.

"Well," he said shortly, "you've got it."

The girl's eyes were like stars as she untied the string.

"If I'd 'a' known," he went on slowly, as he watched her, "if I'd 'a' known that New York fellow was sendin' you somethin' nice, I'd have gone him one better."

"Oh!" she caught her breath quickly, "but you couldn't go him one better than this, Jeff."

She held up for him to see, a sparkling jeweled heart, swung on a slender chain.

"There's a card in the box," she went on, and read it with eager eyes.

Jefferson bent down from the saddle. "What does he say?" he demanded masterfully.

"I ain't goin' to tell you." She stood away from the horse. "It wasn't intended for any one but me."

"Well, you're goin' to read it to me." His head was up, and his bronzed young face was stern.

"I ain't goin' to read it to you. How'd you like to have me read your letters to some other fellow?"

He waived the question.

"I'm goin' to read what's on that card," he reiterated.

He dismounted and came toward her.

For a moment she seemed to meditate flight; then her blue eyes met his brown ones in defiance.

"You can't force me to give it to you."

"Yes, I can." Again his face was stern. "If you don't give it to me, I'll take it from you, 'Meriky.'"

Something in his air of quiet determination touched the primitive in the girl. It was thus that men made themselves master of her kind. It was thus they won the women of the mountains.

"Oh, well," she said sulkily—but back in her eyes smoldered admiration.

He took the card and read the verses aloud, and his lazy drawl seemed to add romance to the words:

This jewel, dear, is but the sign
Of my own heart: both, sweet, are thine.
I send them as a Valentine
To one I love.

"I guess he loves you, all right," he said slowly.

"Yes." Her tone was exultant.

"And he wants to marry you?"

"Yes."

Jeff tore the card into little bits.

"Don't!" she cried.

"Let the four winds take it," he said bitterly. "I knew there was trouble ahead when that man came up from New York to paint in the hills. You hadn't ever seen such a man, and he hadn't ever seen such a woman as you—you had the beauty of a wild bird, and he was used to seein' tame ones. That's why he fell

in love with you, and that's what would make you unhappy if you married him.

"You ain't fit to be caged in that little flat of his. I went there when I was in New York, and I felt like I was in a trap. He showed me the electric lights that had shades like flowers, and his pictures, and some old faded rugs, but I kept thinkin' how you'd die among all those tall buildings with all that noise—"

She shook her head, and the color came and went in her cheeks.

"But he'd give me pretty clothes," she said. "Don't you think I'd look nice in a pink silk dress and a pink hat with a feather?"

"You look nice in anything," he said fiercely, "to me. You look nice in that old gingham you've got on, with that worsted shawl around your shoulders. But he'd have to dress you up—and then you wouldn't be the girl he fell in love with in the hills—and he'd compare you to those city women, and after a while he'd be ashamed of you."

"Oh, how dare you, Jeff!" Her voice shook with indignation.

"He would," the man went on doggedly. "You don't talk like them, and you don't act like them—it's kinder to him to give him up—"

"But he said he'd learn me, and give me the things to look right in."

He came and stood over her.

"Is love nothin' but clothes?" he demanded. "Are you willin' to sell your chance of happiness for a pink silk dress?"

She drew away from him.

"I don't think it's very honorable for you to talk that way," she said. "seein' he's the man I'm goin' to marry."

His eyes blazed.

"Ain't I brought you his letters every week since he left?" he demanded. "Do you think I didn't want to fling 'em in the river?"

"Oh, well, you had to bring 'em." was her taunt. "You're the mail-carrier."

"No, I didn't have to bring 'em." His lithe young figure was drawn up to its full height. "I didn't have to bring 'em. I might have flung 'em in the river. I ain't afraid of the President, or no government officer, when it comes to gettin' the girl I want. But I wasn't goin'

to work that way. I wanted you to have his letters. To chose fair and square between us. And now's your chance, 'Meriky. This morning, here and now."

II.

HE reached out and took the jewel from her hand and laid it in his big palm, beside a little rosy heart-shaped pebble, worn smooth by the waters of the mountain stream.

"That's what I brought you for my valentine," he said slowly; "and at first I was ashamed to give it to you when I saw the present he had sent. But now I ain't ashamed. I'm offerin' you the best I've got. No man loves you like I do—not that artist. He's just taken with your face and figure. But I've cared since I was a kid, and I'm goin' to care till I die. I'm goin' to care after I'm dead and meet you in Heaven."

As he flung the words at her the girl caught her breath.

"Oh, Jeff," she whispered, "you mustn't say such things—"

"Which heart will you take"—his voice was tense—"his, that cost a lot of money, or mine, that didn't cost a cent? Which will you take, 'Meriky?"

She shrank from the decision.

"I told you just now I was goin' to marry him," she wavered.

Something in her tone gave him hope.

"Look here, girl," he wheedled; "look here. I want to show you somethin'. You get up here behind me on Baldy, and we'll go back a bit up the mountain."

She stared at him.

"What you goin' to do?" she queried doubtfully.

"I'm goin' to show you somethin'," he reiterated. "You come along, honey."

She shook her head.

"I'm not goin' anywhere with you, Jeff."

"Why not?"

She struggled for composure.

"I don't know," she whispered.

He dropped his hands on her shoulders.

"Look at me," he commanded, and as she raised her scarlet face he said slowly: "You're afraid you'll give in?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't know."

"You know how I love you, girl," he said simply.

Her eyes, lifted to his, seemed to see into the very depths of his tender soul.

"I'll go, Jeff," she said timidly, and he lifted her on the old horse.

The roads that wound up the hill and into the forest were muddy with the melting of the last snows. As they went along Jeff read to his lady-love the verse that was to have accompanied the rosy pebble heart:

If you love me as I love you,
 ● Our hearts will be forever true.

"It's pretty," she said softly.

"Not like his," Jefferson said. "I can't talk like the city chaps, but I can beat 'em all to death lovin' you, 'Meriky."

"Don't," she insisted. "What have you got to show me, Jeff?"

"You wait a minute," he said.

Deeper and deeper they went into the heart of the woods. About them was the silence of the winter. The bare trees looked ghostly in the pale sunshine.

And then all at once they came to a circle of the pines, vivid emerald among their dead surroundings.

As Jeff guided the horse into the midst of the circle America gasped.

"Oh, Jeff—"

"I built it last spring," the boy said proudly, as he led her up the steps of the tiny cabin; "and I put all the things in it. I never thought of your lovin' anybody else, and I just got ready for

you, and thought how you'd like it. And then he came, and at first I thought I ought to let him have you. He was rich, and could give you everything. But after I went to New York last fall I just wouldn't give you up to that kind of life."

He lifted her over the threshold, and for a moment held her in his arms.

"Why, honey," he whispered, "in the mornings we could stand here and see the sun rising through that cut I've made in the pines, and at night the wind would sing us to sleep."

He put her down, and stood away from her, breathing quickly.

"How do you like it?" he asked after a moment, unsteadily, and waved his hand toward the fireplace.

It was a great cavern of stone, fit to hold a backlog that would last a week.

"I could see you kneelin' in front of it," he said softly, "and the fire makin' your cheeks pink. I can't think of any other woman there, 'Meriky."

"Jeff!" There was a note of trouble in her fresh young voice.

He held out his arms to her.

"Come here," he said masterfully, and with face aflame she came to him and laid her burning cheek against his coat.

His voice shook as he looked at her.

"But there ain't any other woman goin' to be there, is there, honey?"

And the radiance in her eyes answered him.

WAITIN'.

WAYWARD lassie, can't you hear

Sweet the lark's wild note a fallin'?

'Tis the love-song o' the year.

'Tis the time o' mating, dear,

Will your heart na heed the callin'?

Sighin' lassie, rise and see

White, sae white the hills wi' heather;

Soft the glad wind in the lea,

Singin' songs o' you and me,

You and me a hand, together.

Lonely lassie, can you hear

Sweet the lark's sad note a fallin'—

Where the heather's brown and sere—

Where you're sleepin', whisper dear.

Can you hear my heart a callin'?

Gordon Johnstone.

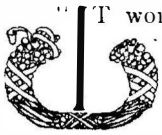
THE BELLS OF SANTA ROSA.

BY THOMAS R. YBARRA.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

PROPHECIES.



"I won't pay."

"It will."

The speakers were respectively Henry Rodney, Sr., and Henry Rodney, Jr. The former had all the confidence of age, which, being based on experience, is very strong; the latter all the confidence of youth, which, being based on nothing at all, is stronger still.

"You'll never make coffee planting in Venezuela a success, Harry." It was Rodney, Sr., who spoke. "Don't buy a plantation down there."

Rodney, Sr., leaned back in his chair. He was accustomed to seeing his advice followed.

"I've bought one," remarked Rodney, Jr.

His father glared.

"You're a fool!" he growled.

The younger man gave up gazing out of the office window at the shipping in Boston Harbor to face Rodney, Sr.

"Yesterday I became the owner of the Santa Rosa plantation," he announced. "It is situated in the Fila de Turgua, Venezuela's richest coffee-growing district."

"Who conned you?" interrupted Rodney, Sr.

"I bought it," continued the younger man, quite unruffled. "from its former owner, Señor Veléz, just now a resident of this country for political reasons. With modern machinery, such as I mean to install, and businesslike, up-to-date methods—"

"Such as you will supply, eh?" scoffed his father. "It's going to be a

regular little tropical bonanza, eh? Fine! Splendid! But how about revolutions?"

"No fear of them for years to come," declared Harry Rodney confidently. "In fact, the present government's exasperating stability is what forced old Señor Veléz to sell Santa Rosa to me. Now, as I said, with modern—"

But Rodney, Sr., waved his hand impatiently.

"Humph!" he snorted. "South America and business—nix! South America's good for love, that's all—languishing, dark-eyed *señoritas*, passionate glances, moonlight serenades, etc., etc.; but business—rats!"

Rodney, Jr., stiffened. He felt that his New England conscience had been insulted.

"Mine is purely a commercial venture," he answered coldly, "not a tropical flirtation."

"Humph! It won't pay."

"It will."

Which brought the two men back to their starting-point, each with his particular brand of confidence unimpaired.

But, whereas the confidence of age merely elicited explosive "Humphs!" from Rodney, Sr., whenever Venezuela and coffee were mentioned, the confidence of youth impelled Rodney, Jr., to take the very first steamer over the Caribbean to La Guayra, in Venezuela. There he boarded a diminutive little railway train, which zigzagged him in due course as far as Caracas, Venezuela's capital. There he alighted, proudly conscious of the fact that his first investment of his own money had made him full-fledged South American owner of a bona-fide coffee plantation in the rich Fila de Turgua.

Letters of introduction, presented during the next few days, opened to Rodney valuable and courteous sources of information—most especially General Alvarado, minister of war, who owned Caracatia, the next estate to Rodney's Santa Rosa.

"Rich?" ejaculated the general, when Rodney, his father's words still vividly in mind, began to fortify his own opinion of the new property. "Rich? Why, Santa Rosa is the neatest, snuggest little plantation in all the Fila de Turgua."

Then the young New Englander switched his questioning to the subject of revolutions.

"Nonsense," ejaculated the minister of war, "all the rumors about an impending outbreak are sheer, idiotic nonsense."

"How about Ledezma, the Turgua guerrilla?" asked Rodney, who had been hearing much legation and café gossip.

General Alvarado's face expressed supreme contempt.

"Why, I beat Rafael Ledezma so badly last year," he said, "and gave him such a taste of prison life that he will never be heard from again."

The general leaned forward; his gestures became positively pyrotechnical.

"Listen," he said, "do you want conclusive proof that I believe the whole Turgua region to be absolutely peaceful and safe? You shall have it. My daughter Elena is staying at my plantation of Caracatia, next to your Santa Rosa, and she is alone there, with the majordomo and his wife.

"Do you think that I would allow her to remain there if I believed a single one of these insane rumors about imminent uprisings in the neighborhood? Never—never, *señor*! Bah! Dismiss all this rot from your mind. Every foreigner is filled with it by chattering fools as soon as he sets foot in Venezuela. Ride out to your plantation, Señor Rodney, and in a week or two I shall welcome you in person at Caracatia and give you a taste of Venezuelan plantation hospitality. Revolution! Ledezma! Bah!"

And the general proceeded to tell Rodney how to get to his new property; and, in the exuberance of his friendliness, promised to telegraph to Rosario, the nearest railway station to Santa Rosa, in order that a good guide might meet Rod-

ney there and take him over the hills to his plantation.

Thus was the confidence of youth fortified by the confidence of bureaucracy. What chance had the confidence of mere age? Already Rodney, Sr.'s, "It won't pay!" sounded less loudly, less persistently in his son's ears.

And the latter's feeling of reassurance was changed to one of serene freedom from worry by his journey from Caracas toward Santa Rosa.

Its first stage took him through Caracas in an open victoria to the eastern railway station; through narrow, peaceful streets, lined with quiet old mansions, where jingling bells heralded the approach of leisurely little horse-cars and placid trains of pack-donkeys; by barrack doors, giving glimpses of somnolent guards, and pleasant-shaded plazas, where loafers slumbered on sun-baked benches. Everything—even the English station-master at the eastern station, enervated by ten years of the tropics—exuded peace, deep peace. Everything counseled Rodney to repeat General Alvarado's vehemence, "Revolution! Bah!"

Then came the slow railroad ride through the Caracas valley, green and sleepy, past Petare, huddled on a hillside, turning its back on its little railway station, as if in objection to the disturbing whistling and shunting going on there; through the gorge of the Guaire, silent between rocky walls, until at last the train stopped abruptly before the dozen tumble-down shanties of Rosario, temporarily rejoicing in great importance as the "eastern terminus" of the line.

There Rodney, stepping jauntily from the train, was duly met by a man who announced himself as the guide who was to take *el Señor Americano* to Santa Rosa.

Together the two started on horseback up a steep hillside trail through dense forest, where brilliant-hued birds flew overhead, and scared green lizards scurried madly to cover. At first Rodney, intent on sights and sounds new to him, kept his eyes on the scenery right and left, on the grim hilltops above and the green valley below, with Rosario growing smaller and smaller as they wound steadily upward; and all the while he whistled and hummed gaily. Then he began to turn his attention to the guide, riding

stolidly ahead, enveloped in his blue and red *cobija*, the cloak worn by all lower-class Venezuelans.

Across the man's swarthy face, from left temple clear to the right jaw-bone, ran a wicked machete cut.

"Who gave you that?" asked Rodney, in his carefully acquired Spanish.

"Rafael Ledezma," answered the guide. As he spoke he respectfully touched his hat. Rodney noticed that three of the fingers of his right hand were mere stumps.

"Last year," continued the guide, "Ledezma came to my ranch with his guerrillas and tried to press me into service. I resisted. He swung his machete. I lifted my hand. With one blow he did this"—the man showed the three finger-stumps—"with another, this," and he pointed to the ghastly scar across his face.

"Ledezma is no longer dangerous?" queried Rodney, a bit uneasily. The confidence of youth had felt a slight shake.

"General Alvarado scotched him," said the guide, "and thinks the snake is dead, but—Alvarado should beware. Look!"

They had come around a bend in the trail. The guide pointed to the charred ruins of what had been a great plantation house.

"There, ten years back," he said, "lived León Pacheco, nephew of President Dávila, of Venezuela. Being jealous of Ledezma's power hereabouts, Pacheco had him imprisoned in the fortress of Maracaibo, hundreds of miles away—imprisoned in irons in a deep dungeon. Yet Ledezma escaped, and, before the news of his escape could reach Pacheco, came to this place one night with his men.

"They dragged Pacheco out of bed, into the bright moonlight before the house.

"Don't you know me?" shouted the president's nephew to his captors.

"My name is León Pacheco."

"It was, you mean," corrected Ledezma, shooting Pacheco dead.

"Then they burned the house to the ground. Aye, *señor*, the hillside glowed red over Rosario on the night of Ledezma's revenge!"

Rodney gazed for a moment in silence at the ruins. Then he tossed his head impatiently.

"Bah!" he scoffed. "If Ledezma were not harmless now, General Alvarado would never leave his daughter Elena alone at Caracatia."

The mention of Miss Alvarado's name seemed to banish from the guide's mind all thought of the wicked Turgua guerrilla.

"At, *la niña* Elena!" he sighed reverently, "she is the most beautiful young lady in the world. Wait till you see her eyes—they are stars; and her hair—ah, what hair! She had it cropped short, to be sure, a few weeks ago, on account of an attack of scarlet fever, yet—will you believe it, *señor*?—she is prettier now than ever. Her hair curls, you see, and cut short as it is now—"

"What do people say of the quality of Santa Rosa coffee?" interrupted Rodney. The practical New Englander in him wanted to talk business. He felt small interest in the guide's raptures about the young mistress of Caracatia.

"*La niña* Elena does not like it—at least she says she doesn't. She used to ride over from Caracatia to Santa Rosa, get old Señor Veléz furious by insulting his coffee, and then get him good-humored again by singing and playing guitar to him. Oh, nobody can help liking her. You, *señor*, will—"

"Oh, forget your *niña* Elena," interposed Rodney, laughing. They had suddenly emerged from the woodland into a cleared space, from which Rodney could see, far below, a delightful narrow valley; in the foreground, set in the midst of dense coffee-groves, was a great, red-roofed house.

"Santa Rosa—your plantation," announced the guide. Then he pointed toward the northern end of the little valley, where, half hidden among trees, was another great house.

"And that," he continued, his voice growing softer and at the same time enthusiastic, "is Caracatia—where *la niña* Elena is."

"I play second fiddle about here with a vengeance," muttered Rodney to himself, as they began to descend the hillside toward his property.

For half an hour the two men slipped

and slid down the rock-strewn trail; for half an hour they cantered through coffee-groves, shady and fragrant. Then they emerged suddenly into a cleared space. Before them rose the house of the Santa Rosa plantation.

"Eh, Manuel! Vénacá, José Antonio!" called out Rodney's guide lustily. "Come out and take our horses, you lazy vagabonds."

Nobody came. With an impatient oath the guide disappeared in the direction of the servants' quarters.

Left alone, Rodney gazed with absorbed interest at the great house—his property. Low and rambling it stood before him, with its wide veranda, brick-paved and adobe-pillared, its red, weatherbeaten roof, its massive doors and iron-barred windows, through which the American caught glimpses of enormous, gloomy rooms, with bare, wormy rafters and uncarpeted brick floors; of vast courtyards stretching far to the rear into the very midst of the coffee-groves.

The coffee-groves! His own coffee-groves! Rodney thrilled with the glowing pride of ownership. There they were, decked in snowy blossom and velvet leaf, fragrant with the smell of millions of ripening berries, dark, mysterious and peaceful beneath the canopy of the tall shade-trees.

As Rodney gazed down the silent woodland vistas—as his eyes wandered back to the sleepy old house, all his feeling of disquietude vanished. He smiled. Here, indeed, was a very paradise of peace and rest. Here, indeed, with American push and machinery—Rodney's thoughts were never poetical for long—a fortune might be made, a skeptical father's "It won't pay!" hurled back in the speaker's teeth.

The confidence of youth, in short, had almost climbed again to the pinnacle which certain misgivings had compelled it temporarily to abandon, when the guide appeared abruptly from behind the house, white and wide-eyed.

"What's up?" asked Rodney, startled.

"*Señor*"—the guide could hardly speak for perturbation—"they are gone!"

"Who are gone?"

"Everybody—every peon on the place."

"Well—what the dickens does that mean?"

The guide's teeth clicked together.

"Ledezma!" he answered. He looked fearfully into the dark groves about him. "*Señor*—let us go back!" he urged.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Rodney, "I shall stay here—you, too." For a moment the guide stared at him blankly. "Heaven forbid, *señor*," he murmured, crossing himself hastily. Then he whirled his horse about.

"Come back, you coward!" cried Rodney. "Come back, I say!"

But already the man had spurred his reluctant horse into the narrow trail by which they had just arrived. For a moment he turned, touching his hat, and Rodney saw again the cruel red scar across his face and the stumps of his mutilated fingers. Then he disappeared.

Rodney was alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE BELLS.

FOR a few minutes the young American sat his horse before the Santa Rosa house, staring along the trail by which the guide had vanished.

The man's sudden defection, the look of terror on his face, had worked a change in the young planter's mind. Twilight, descending on the thick coffee-groves, seemed to fill them with spectral shadows. The long façade of the house became suddenly grim and hostile; its barred windows took on an uncomfortable, prison-like air.

Through the brancies of the trees and the dwarfed coffee-bushes a breeze rustled, and Rodney started in his saddle. Then, with a shamefaced laugh, he dismounted, tied his horse to one of the veranda pillars, climbed the stone steps, and fitting his key to the lock of the big middle door, let himself into the house.

Whistling a gay tune, he walked through the gloomy rooms, out into the courtyard, through the majordomo's offices and the long, back corridors; through the kitchen, with its immense brick stove and blackened walls; through the coffee *patios*, paved with rough flagstones.

Everything was deserted. He stopped whistling. Silence so oppressive, so uncanny, hung over Santa Rosa that Rodney, standing irresolute in the bare mansion, half considered returning to Rosario. Then across his mind shot a picture of his father, coldly triumphant in his Boston office, the harsh, "It won't pay!" on his scornful lips. Rodney stamped his foot; he would stick it out. Slowly he returned through the courtyard toward the veranda.

As he reached the big front room he again started violently. Somebody was on the veranda. Rodney stood for a moment stock-still, listening. Then, with an impatient toss of the head, he walked out the door.

There was a man by the front steps—a man dressed in the long black cassock of a priest.

"Welcome to Santa Rosa," he said as Rodney emerged from the house. "I am the priest of Santa Rosa village," he added, "and knew that you were expected here to-day. Welcome, *señor*."

"I am most grateful to you," said Rodney politely.

He was overjoyed at the sight of the old priest's kind face, at the chance to talk with a human being after his gloomy promenade through the deserted house of Santa Rosa. Having installed his visitor in the most comfortable of the veranda chairs, he vanished into the house and rummaged about in cupboards and pantries until he found some crackers and bottled beer with which he reappeared in triumph. Soon he and the priest were on excellent terms. Rodney lost no time in asking the old man what he made of the desertion of Santa Rosa by the plantation workmen.

"They're cowards, poor fellows," replied the priest. "Of course, Rafael Ledezma is a very wicked man, and in last year's revolution he killed and burned to his heart's content; but he is on his plantation at Turgua, far up in the hills. Even if he dares rise against the government again, after the beating he got from General Alvarado, it will doubtless take him several days more to collect a force large enough for venturing so near to Caracas as this. Yet, the whole countryside is alarmed. Already half of my villagers have run away—to hide in the hills

or take refuge in the bigger towns. I tried to keep them back, but I couldn't.

"Naturally, *señor*, there is some danger. For instance, Caracatia is no place for Señorita Elena Alvarado. Ledezma hates her father. I, myself, went to her this morning to urge her to leave to-day for Caracas, but she insisted that she would spend one more night on the plantation. Aye, *señor*. What a girl, what a girl!"

Rodney sighed resignedly. He had a dozen business questions on the tip of his tongue.

"She is the prettiest harum-scarum that ever lived," continued the old priest fondly. "Really, I can do nothing with her any more. The other day she came galloping into Santa Rosa village on horseback—in boy's clothes, mind you—dismounted in front of my house and ran into the dining-room.

"Padre Gregorio!" she shouted.

"I looked up and didn't know her, which delighted the little monkey so that she went into peals of laughter. I recognized the laugh, and, oh! Señor Rodney, I was almost dumb with horror.

"*¡Niña!*" I gasped. "Elena!—you?—riding about—in that!" And I pointed, speechless, to the boy's suit.

"Why not?" says she, opening her eyes wide. "It's very comfortable, *padre*—especially half of it."

"Words left me. Lifting eyes and hands to heaven I turned away. But she followed, plucking my sleeve.

"*Padre!*" she said, very sweetly, 'do I look pretty?'

"Go home, you naughty girl,' I commanded.

"Say I'm pretty. Say I'm pretty,' she begged. 'Say this suit is becoming to me.' And she tugged at my sleeve so hard that I had to turn around and look at her.

"*Mijita!* I said presently, 'Heaven knows that it is—but go straight home.'

"I spoke in vain—she was dancing with joy.

"You're a dear, sweet, gallant old *padre!*' she cried, 'and just for that I'm going to stay and have some of that delicious cake I see over there.' And stay she did.

"Mind you, I'm not going home yet,' she announced, her mouth chock-full of

cake, as she was getting into her saddle. 'Im going to ride all over the place and have a royal good time, and—I'll tell you all about it at confession, *padre!*'

"You go home!" I roared in desperation. But she shook her little head, brazenly blew me a kiss, much mixed with cake crumbs, and was off like mad. *Ay de mí!* What a girl she is! When she comes to me for confession I must impose a very severe penance on her."

"You certainly must," agreed Rodney. His New England conscience made him disapprove of tomboys—especially when they persisted in getting mixed up with every business conversation which he started.

"Why do the majordomo and his wife at Caracatia allow Miss Alvarado to wear boy's clothes?" he inquired.

"Why, bless you, she has probably convinced them by this time that all women in the world ought to wear them. Ah, Elera! She does what she pleases with all of us. You must meet her, *señor*. Surely, Americans admire girls of her spirit."

"Some Americans do," said Rodney, guardedly.

And then, to his immense relief, he managed to switch the conversation to coffee crops, and cost of labor, and transportation rates on machinery, and other similar questions dear to his practical heart, for all of which the benevolent old priest had intelligent and helpful answers. They passed a very pleasant hour together. When the old man rose to go, Rodney accompanied him as far as the edge of the cleared space in front of the house.

"I hope," laughed the American, "that you, too, will not run away to hide in the hills."

"No fear" said the priest. "My post is my church. There I shall stay, to ring the bells of Santa Rosa, to christen, confess, marry, and give extreme unction, no matter what may happen. *Adios*, Señor Rodney." He bowed courteously and began to trudge along the path to Santa Rosa village.

Rodney, climbing the veranda steps again, felt much reassured: the simple old priest's remarks had partially allayed the disquiet caused by the guide's abrupt departure. Throwing himself into a big

chair, he lighted a cigar and gazed calmly into the gathering dusk.

Soon, from beyond the coffee-groves, the bells of Santa Rosa began to ring—so sweetly, so peacefully, that they served effectually to restore Rodney's serene confidence. Forgetting those two disturbing elements, Ledezma, the guerrilla, and Elena, the harum-scarum, he proceeded to fill his mind completely with business—permanently, too, he flattered himself.

Strong is the confidence of youth.

CHAPTER III.

RODNEY RECEIVES A CALLER.

HE was awakened next morning by a shot.

Springing from his bed, he stood for a moment, irresolute and barefoot, on the cold brick flooring of his room, rubbing his eyes.

Then came another shot—a third—both from the direction of Caracatia, the Alvarado plantation. Rodney tumbled hastily into his clothes and dashed out on the veranda.

Dawn was just reddening the east, and the light was so weak as yet that he could not even discern the woods beyond the little cleared space in front of his house. Standing on the front steps, he peered into the distance. About ten minutes went by. Nothing happened. He turned to go back to bed. But a rustling sound made him wheel about and resume his post near the head of the front steps.

As he did so, a man burst from the circle of darkness, plunged across the cleared space, sped up the veranda steps, and fell literally into Rodney's arms. With a sudden twist, the American sent him spinning backward.

"What the dickens—" began Rodney, advancing truculently.

The other had careened against one of the veranda pillars and toppled to the floor. There he scrambled to a sitting posture. Rodney, coming close, saw that he was apparently unarmed and meant no mischief.

He was young—a boy, in fact—dressed in the rough clothes of a peon, or plantation laborer, loose white jacket and trousers beneath the blue and red *cobija*.

As Rodney gazed down at him curiously, he suddenly lifted his eyes.

"You needn't be so cross about it," he observed meekly.

"Who are you?" asked Rodney roughly. As there was no answer, he stirred up the huddled little figure with his foot.

"Hey, Bill—what do you want?" was his gruff question.

Again the boy lifted his eyes—big, brown ones.

"You mustn't call me Bill," he remarked. "In fact," he went on argumentatively, "you shouldn't call me by my first name, anyway."

"Well, I never!" gasped Rodney. "Stop this nonsense. Tell me your name."

"When you know my first name, you won't dare call me by it," remarked the boy, looking up sweetly.

"What is it?" snapped Rodney, again stirring the other up with his foot.

"Elena."

There was a silence. Rodney looked closely at the little figure huddled against the low veranda wall. He understood.

"Miss Alvarado," he said humbly, "I beg your pardon."

Miss Alvarado clasped her hands about her knees and looked solemnly into Rodney's eyes.

"You kicked me," she observed remissly.

"I am terribly sorry. I humbly apologize."

"You are a wicked, brutal American."

Rodney shifted about uneasily.

"So you know who I am," he said lamely.

"Oh, yes. You are the new owner of Santa Rosa—Don Harry Rodney."

She had scrambled to her feet, and the light, now strong, enabled Rodney to get a good look at her—nor did that look give the lie to what he had heard from the guide and the priest. Elena Alvarado's beauty was of the clean-cut, Spanish type—and it was but enhanced by her bizarre attire. Beneath her rough straw hat her great dark eyes gazed up at Rodney half boldly, half wistfully. Her boy's clothes, beneath her cloak, sat well on her lithe little body. Rodney became conscious that he was staring rudely at the bewitching apparition, when it said abruptly:

"I suppose you want to know the reason for this awfully shocking visit. Well—I might as well confess—when darkness came on up there"—she waved her hand toward Caracatia—"I got scared. I heard dreadful noises. They kept me awake. I got up and put on my clothes—these clothes—they were the handiest and—why shouldn't I wear 'em?" she burst out suddenly, conscious of silent New England disapproval in Rodney's eyes.

"Do—by all means do," he stammered in great confusion.

Elena, backed against the veranda wall, eyed him severely. Seeing that he was properly humbled, she resumed:

"Then I heard a shot. That was enough. I ran full speed down the road to Santa Rosa." She paused.

"Really—I'm much flattered," Rodney was floundering miserably.

Elena suddenly opened her eyes in scornful amazement.

"How dare you suppose that I meant to come to your house?" she sputtered.

"Look here, now, Miss Alvarado," began the exasperated Rodney. "you just said yourself that you started for Santa Rosa."

"Santa Rosa village," explained Elena majestically. "I intended to take refuge with my friend, Padre Gregorio."

"Oh."

"I am not in the habit of making informal calls at dawn in boy's clothes on young Americans whom I have never seen."

"Of course not."

"Do you understand now?"

"Yes, Miss Alvarado. I apologize."

There was a pause.

"Well, aren't you going to say that you're awfully glad I took the wrong turn and came here instead?" inquired Miss Alvarado, much hurt.

"Oh—er—why, of course—I—I'm delighted," stammered the bewildered young man.

Elena looked skeptical.

"Well, I'll believe you," she announced condescendingly. Then she proceeded to cuddle into one of the big veranda chairs, where she drew her knees close up to her chin and gazed critically over them at Rodney.

It was now broad daylight. The

American, glancing furtively at his bewitching little guest, grew more and more embarrassed. At any moment his workmen might return—or the priest—and recognize the nonchalant little occupant of the chair with consequences more or less compromising.

Rodney stood irresolute. To ask her to go home would not only be inhospitable, but—on account of her fright—positively heartless. It would be to drive her, helpless, into danger; to deny her protection.

And yet—there had been no more shots. He felt sure that those he had heard boded nothing alarming. Perhaps they had been fired into the air by drunken workmen returning from a spree. Why, thought Rodney, should he not escort Miss Alvarado back to Caracatia, put her under the chaperonage of the majordomo's wife there, and, with the help of the old priest, induce her to pack up and set off for Caracas later in the day? Yes, that would be best.

He was about to broach his plan to the young lady herself, when she, as if aware of his line of reasoning, suddenly piped up:

"I won't go home."

"Miss Alvarado—" began the New England conscience with great severity. But it stopped short. The big, brown eyes had grown wofully appealing. Tears were gathering in them.

"Señor Rodney, I'm afraid—horribly afraid," declared Elena with pathetic emphasis. "Oh, if you had heard those shots—so close! And those dreadful noises! You won't make me go back—yet—will you?"

She spoke and looked like a little scared child. Rodney could find nothing to say. Taking his silence for acquiescence, Elena sprang from the chair in great glee.

"You're not so brutal, after all," she remarked. "And, to show you my gratitude, I'm going to be useful. I'm going to make you your coffee. After that," she added hastily, recognizing dawning objection in Rodney's face, "I'll promise to go to Padre Gregorio. I really can't do it without breakfast." And as Rodney still seemed to have scruples, she suddenly stamped her foot. "Do you want me to make you your coffee, or don't

you?" she inquired in a pretty, if quite decided, rage.

"Yes—certainly—go ahead—of course I do," stammered the bewildered American.

"I should hope so," murmured Elena, disappearing in the direction of the kitchen. "No, I don't want any help," she called after Rodney, who was designing to follow her. So, for some minutes, he sat alone on the veranda, shocked, perplexed, and apprehensive, but thoroughly cowed for the moment by the spirit of his fiery little guest.

Then she reappeared, smiling sweetly, carrying a tray. Rodney sprang up to assist her, but she calmly kicked him, and he sat down again. She arranged the tray on a small table, poured out a cup of coffee, and offered it solemnly to Rodney.

"Drink, my lord," she begged, with a ludicrous curtsy.

Then, pouring herself a cupful, she lifted it to her lips. All the time she was watching Rodney narrowly. He took a mouthful of coffee. She caught him making an unmistakable grimace.

"What's the matter?" she shot at him suspiciously, cup at lips.

Rodney, embarrassed, remained silent.

"Say you like my coffee," she ordered. As he wouldn't, she added: "You're a thoroughly rude and disagreeable American. Why don't you say nice things about the coffee I've made for you? Now, why don't you?" she persisted, like a little mosquito.

"Because—it's bad!" blurted Rodney suddenly, losing all patience. "It isn't properly—steeped. It's muddy. It tastes like liquid leather. It—oh, it's very bad," he concluded, eying the beverage with unfriendly eyes.

Elena put down her cup in high dudgeon.

"That's just because it's Santa Rosa coffee," she declared.

The new owner of Santa Rosa fired up instantly.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "The stuff's abominably made."

"It isn't! Why, only yesterday, the majordomo's wife at Caracatia taught me how to make it, so of course I know how. And, anyway, if I don't, you shouldn't tell me so. It's your miserable Santa

Rosa coffee—that's the long and short of it. I always used to tell old Señor Veléz that it was no good at all. Santa Rosa coffee is bad—bad—bad!"

"What do you know about coffee, anyway?" inquired Rodney, with the cool air of a connoisseur.

"Well, I declare!" gasped Elena. "Is that the way to speak to a lady?"

And, leaning her face on her hands and her elbows on the table, she looked long and savagely at the coffee-pot. Rodney, sulking in silence, ostentatiously drained his cup of coffee—a trying and heroic ordeal which he deemed necessary to impress upon Miss Alvarado the fact that Santa Rosa coffee, even after gross ill-treatment at her hands, was still drinkable. Toward the end of the ordeal she was watching him furtively.

"Have a roll," she suggested, with a propitiating smile.

"No, thank you," stiffly.

"Oh, dear, he's cross," wailed Elena, addressing herself apparently to an invisible but sympathetic third party. "The great American planter is offended. He speaks in a horrible gruffish voice—brrrr! Unless he will take a roll from my hands I shall run off and die." In mute supplication she passed him the rolls once more. Rodney's good humor returned with a bound. He took a roll.

"He forgives! Ah, he forgives!" exclaimed Elena in rapture. And then they both laughed, and stuffed rolls and cream diligently for a while like the best of friends.

But soon Elena's sharp eyes noticed that Rodney was frowning and getting uneasy again.

"Shocked some more?" she inquired solicitously.

"Yes," he replied.

He had decided to take the situation in hand, at the risk of offending his whimsical *vis-à-vis*.

"Everything dreadfully improper?" she asked, with a chuckle, her mouth full of bread.

"Dreadfully."

"Oh, dear. What can we do about it?"

And she looked at Rodney, eyes twinkling.

Suddenly the bells of the Santa Rosa church rang out, calling the villagers to

early mass. Elena's eyes began to dance wickedly.

"There!" she cried, clapping her hands together.

"What?" asked the uncomprehending Rodney.

"The bells of Santa Rosa."

"Well?"

"Let's run down to the church, get married, come back, and finish breakfast as proper as you please."

As the look she expected came over Rodney's features she shrieked with laughter. New England conscience incarnate was in that look. He was shocked—oh, so shocked! But his disapproval was so genuine—so eloquent, so un-mixed, so boundless—that she stopped her laughter abruptly, as if very much piqued.

"Do you think I would really marry you?" she inquired hotly, her words tumbling out like a torrent. "Well, I wouldn't. Never, never, never! And, what's more, I'm going home."

She jumped up.

"Miss Alvarado—"

"Oh, go away."

"My dear Miss—"

"Oh, go away, I tell you." And she started to run along the path leading northward to Caracatia.

Rodney, half angry, half apologetic, wholly bewildered, followed, expostulating. But she kept resolutely on her way. Again and again he spoke. She would not look at him. Thus they hastened along the narrow path, between the fragrant, flowering coffee-bushes, until it brought them to the main road from Santa Rosa village to Turgua, on which lay the Caracatia plantation. With head held high and blue cloak gathered about her, she swung into the road, several paces in front of the American.

There, suddenly, she stopped short.

And, to the amazement of Rodney, emerging from the path close behind her, the little mistress of Caracatia came running back toward him, almost falling into his arms. "I'll be good now, I promise," she panted, terrified. Then she pointed in the direction of Caracatia.

"Look!" she said.

Rodney looked. As he did so, his face paled slightly, though his eyes remained steady.

A body of armed men had just wheeled around a bend on the road and was rapidly approaching.

CHAPTER IV.

LEDEZMA.

THERE was no time for Rodney and Elena to draw back out of sight into the path by which they had come. There was no time for them to think what to do.

Already a man on horseback, riding at the head of the column, had spied them. Spurring his horse, he was close to them almost before they could stir. And at his heels came the van of the approaching force, grinning menacingly, armed to the teeth.

The man on horseback—scarred, swarthy, and cold-visaged—gazed down at Rodney and Elena. The latter, cloak tight about her, hat down over her face, was making herself as unobtrusive as possible behind her companion.

"You'll both do," muttered the man on horseback.

As he spoke several soldiers seized Rodney. Others rudely laid hands on Elena. Shaking himself free, Rodney turned angrily to the man on horseback.

"What does this mean?" he cried.

The other scanned him coolly.

"A foreigner. I see," he remarked.

"Yes," said Rodney with much heat.

"I am Henry Rodney, owner of the Santa Rosa plantation. And I am an American citizen."

The man on horseback smiled.

"That makes a difference," he announced calmly. "You are free to go, Señor Rodney, accept the apologies of Rafael Ledezma."

He bowed slightly. At a sign from him the soldiers surrounding the young American fell back. Rodney remained staring stupidly at Ledezma—the wicked Ledezma, of whom he had heard so much. The guerrilla himself, seemingly forgetful of Rodney's existence, pointed perfunctorily at Elena.

"Give him a carbine," was his order. "He's only a boy. A rifle's too heavy."

At once an officer who had come up during Ledezma's colloquy with Rodney forced a carbine into Elena's hands. A

soldier buckled a cartridge-belt about her waist. By this time she was entirely encircled by rough men, reeking of strong drink. Tears were running down the girl's cheeks. She looked beseechingly at Rodney.

"I protest," began the latter, turning once more to the guerrilla leader.

Ledezma had started away. At the words he wheeled his horse about.

"Against what?" he asked.

"I protest against your taking that boy as a soldier."

Ledezma smiled coldly.

"Why?"

"Because—"

Suddenly Rodney stopped. To tell who Elena really was would be criminally imprudent. Not only was she surrounded by low, drunken men, but their leader was Ledezma—the terror of Turgua, the implacable enemy of her father, a man notorious throughout the countryside for unscrupulous cruelty, who would doubtless welcome any chance to revenge himself for the defeat and humiliation inflicted upon him by General Alvarado. Better anything, reflected Rodney, than to let Ledezma know whom he had in his power.

"Why?" repeated the guerrilla, still smiling coldly.

"Because—that boy is a peon on my plantation," declared Rodney arrogantly.

Ledezma burst into a roar of laughter; the men about him did likewise.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the guerrilla.

"I am exceedingly sorry to inconvenience you and the workings of your plantation, Señor Rodney, but the army of the revolution needs that boy's services more urgently than you do. Fall in!" he added gruffly to poor Elena, who was standing miserably by the roadside, with wide-open eyes, looking from Rodney to Ledezma, hope and terror flitting alternately across her wobegone little face.

A soldier started to pull her toward the middle of the road. In fury Rodney sprang forward.

"Don't you dare touch that boy!" he roared.

Ledezma's eyes flashed.

"Señor Rodney," he said calmly, but with dangerous smoothness, "take care. You are an American. I have refrained from pressing you into service. That

boy is as Venezuelan as I am. He goes with me."

"You scoundrel!" roared Rodney, livid. But Ledezma cut him short.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Silence, you cursed Yankee. Stand back there, or I'll shoot you. And you"—he turned menacingly to Elena—"fall in! Forward, march!"

He whirled his horse about, with a last savage glare at Rodney, helpless by the roadside. One of the soldiers, taking his cue from his chief, swore in the American's face and pushed him roughly to one side. Another, reeling drunk, dragged Elena toward his drunken comrades. The column began to move.

Rodney rushed to Elena's side.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered. "I'll save you. And—he a man!" In his excitement he did not stop to pick his words.

Her lips were quivering, but she straightened up gamely, smiling into his eyes.

"I will!" she said, a little of the old impudence in her voice. "Only—please save me soon," she added, looking in terror at the brutal gang about her.

"I will!" promised Rodney in turn. The next instant, a soldier sent him tumbling into the coffee-bushes by the side of the road. Elena, fearing similar rude treatment, hastily fell in at the rear of the column.

The last thing that Rodney saw, as the soldiers swung around a curve in the road leading toward Santa Rosa village, was a pathetic little boyish figure, plodding manfully along, carbine on shoulder.

Rodney hastened back along the path to his house. On the way a plan, which had sketched itself in his mind as he spoke to Elena, began to grow definite.

At Santa Rosa he found the majordomo of Caracatia, brought thither in the course of a frantic search for Elena. He told the American how he and his wife, at the first breath of danger, had fled to a small hut some distance from the main buildings of Caracatia, thinking that Elena was following; how, missing her, he had stolen back to find the house full of pillaging guerrillas, giving short shrift to the contents of General Al-

varado's wine-cellar; how, at imminent risk, he had continued his search to the very house itself. The man was beside himself with shock and apprehension, nor was his condition improved by Rodney's blunt description of Elena's plight.

"Merciful Heaven!" he groaned, falling into one of the veranda chairs. "She is lost!"

Then he sprang up.

"I'll kill that devil Ledezma!" he cried.

"No," urged Rodney, "leave it to me. I have a better plan."

At that moment the old priest emerged into the clearing from the Santa Rosa village pathway, hot and flurried.

"Ledezma!" he cried excitedly. "I met him and his guerrillas on the main road. Look what they did to me"—and he pointed to the sleeve of his cassock, almost torn away. "Let us go to Caracatia," he continued to the majordomo, "and get *la niña* Elena away safely."

"Too late," said Rodney and the majordomo together.

Padre Gregorio turned white. In a few words they told him what had happened.

"The villains!" he cried. "I shall follow—"

But Rodney, laying a hand on the old man's shoulder, forced him into a chair.

"What road did Ledezma take?" he asked.

"He went southward—toward Arenaza."

"Is there any way of getting to Arenaza without going over the route on which Ledezma is marching?"

"Certainly," answered the priest, "by way of the trail that brought you here yesterday as far as Las Tunas, and then straight southeastward. It is merely a small détour."

"Can a man on horseback, taking that route, get to Arenaza before Ledezma and his infantry reach it by the main road?"

"Easily," cried the priest and the majordomo together.

"Good!" exclaimed Rodney. And he outlined his plan. Again the two men offered him their aid, but he declined it.

"You," he told the majordomo, "must go back to Caracatia and protect your wife, who is all alone there. And you,"

turning to the priest, "have told me yourself that it is your duty to stay and ring the bells of Santa Rosa, come what may."

"Mind you, I don't want to toll for your funeral," said the old priest anxiously.

"No fear," laughed the confident Rodney. "You will ring a triumphal peal in honor of the safe return of Miss Alvarado and myself."

"And I'll protect your Santa Rosa for you, too," announced Padre Grégorio. "Look—it was to bring you this that I came here." From beneath his cassock he proudly took a diminutive American flag. "You probably scorned to bring one," he added to Rodney. "young men are so confident. I'll run this up over your veranda—it will scare away guerillas."

Rodney laughingly thanked him. Then all three began to make preparations. Padre Gregorio hastily put up some provisions. The majordomo saddled Rodney's horse.

And the American himself, rummaging through the house for whatever might be of use to him in his undertaking, smiled with special satisfaction when he found, in a dark inner room, two kegs of sugar-cane rum.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE MARCH.

CARBINE on shoulder, cloak held tightly about her, Elena trudged along the road toward Santa Rosa village, every thought concentrated on not betraying herself. Now and then, as she eyed the coarse company into which she had been thrown, and listened to their ribaldry, she could scarcely suppress a shudder and a tear; but each time she straightened up at once, throwing boldness into her look and jaunty swagger into her walk.

"Be a man!" Rodney's words acted on her as a prop and a spur. And she had seen the set look of resolution in the young man's eyes as he had said that he would save her. Setting her teeth hard, she trudged valiantly in the wake of the rough troop: at times, even, she smiled.

Nearing the village her resolve not to betray herself passed out of the passive

stage. Sedulously watching the coarse soldiers, her companions, she resolved to ape them, by sheer conforming to their ways and imitating of their manners to lull in them all potential doubts as to her sex. Brutal roughness was their striking trait; second nature in some, hardened henchmen of Ledezma, it had been aroused in all by drink and the unrestricted license permitted by the chief. So Elena resolved to be brutally rough, too.

As they swung along the road they met a peon. Terrified, he started to escape, but in hue and cry they went after him. One of the officers seized him by the collar, then, cringing, he was armed and annexed to the troop in the wink of an eye. And one of the hands that sent the poor fellow hurtling into the ranks was the hand of Elena Alvarado.

"Ha!—learning, eh?" remarked the grizzled half-breed who marched beside Elena. "You're a regular little devil, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Elena, looking unspeakably wicked.

And so pleased was she by the outcome of her act, and its obvious effect toward making the soldiers accept her without comment or scrutiny that, when they met Padre Gregorio, just outside the little village, and hailed him with rude quips, it was Elena who led. In fact, she pushed her new-born rowdiness so far as to seize the old priest by the sleeve of his cassock, tearing it half off.

"Boy!" cried the horrified man beside her, "haven't you respect even for the church?"

"Not a bit," answered Elena with a parting tweak of the *padre's* sleeve. And Ledezma himself, seeing what was going on, turned in his saddle and thundered: "You, there! Leave that priest alone!" Whereupon Elena, well scared, subsided into the ranks, and Ledezma scowled at her darkly.

He reined up, waiting for her to overtake him.

"Never harm a foreigner or a priest, boy," he admonished as she marched past him; "you get punished for the one, in this world, and for the other in the next. Remember that!"

"All right," murmured Elena, eying him meekly. Ledezma, spurring his

horse, rode on. The girl trudged along for a while, much abashed, but gradually it began to come over her that the rebuke from the chief had brought her much glory. Old soldiers gazed on her with approval, raw ones with envy. So her swagger came back and she grinned maliciously, as if harboring untold wickedness in her thoughts.

"Have a drink?" suggested the grizzled half-breed, offering her a dirty flask.

One sniff of its evil-smelling rum killed her swagger. Drink she could not; and yet to refuse, while engaged in careful fostering of a reputation for general devilry, would be, she knew, in the highest degree foolhardy.

"Don't you like it?" inquired the proprietor of the flask as she sniffed—and, at the words, inspiration came to her. Sighing a melancholy sigh, she returned the flask with the cork still undisturbed.

"Alas!" she wailed. "I cannot drink. I have made a vow."

"A vow?"—several soldiers were listening.

"Yes," she continued sweetly. "not until I kill a man may I taste any rum." And she shook her head resignedly.

Boisterous drunken laughter rang at her words. Ledezma, even, had to inquire its cause. When told, he smiled.

"I shall see that you drink soon," he told Elena, and she shuddered as the import of the speech came over her. Her bravado slumped; she prayed silently.

"Oh, if only Harry Rodney would save me!" she thought.

She was startled by the voice of the half-breed soldier beside her.

"Aye, *amiguito*, there is chance enough that you will drink before the week is out," he was saying. "In a few days we'll be fifteen hundred strong at Arenaza, for Juan Ledezma, the chief's brother, is coming over this very road tonight with two hundred men. And Santiago Herrera will leave Las Tunas, on the Rosario road, to join us, and Pepe Ramírez, too, and Tuerto Peña, and it will be 'On to Rosario!' for you, my boy, and—drinks!—if you aim straight."

Elena shuddered, but "Good! I'm glad of that," was what she said.

They marched in easy stages, stopping

at roadside inns and villages, or in the friendly shade of clumps of woods, to feast and revel. This was fortunate for Elena; otherwise the march through the hot noontide hours would soon have brought her endurance to an end. Reason enough she had, even as it was, to be thankful for the vigor and strength in her little body, for the open-air life she had led at Caracatia, and her many scamperings on horseback through the cool Turgua uplands. As hour after hour of heat and glare and dust went by, she bore up with amazing fortitude.

But as the afternoon waned, as the sun dropped lower and lower, her steps began to lag. She set her teeth and plodded on, silent and game, but her head drooped forward, her cheeks paled and deadly weariness stabbed at her heart. Again fortune was with her—her companions were wearied, too. Nobody drew suspicion from her drawn features and faltering steps.

Every trace of her swagger had vanished and she scarcely replied to the good-humored observations of the old fellow marching beside her, when, at last, a short way ahead, the little town of Arenaza appeared, red-roofed, smiling, and friendly. The tired troopers cheered; once more something of springiness showed in their gait. While still a bit outside the place, Ledezma gave the order to encamp.

It was now almost dark. The first guns had already been stacked, the first fires lighted, when a man on horseback suddenly came up from the direction of Arenaza. Apparently, in the darkness, he had failed to perceive the soldiers until close upon them. Then it was too late. A score of hands seized him, dragged him from the saddle, tumbled him on the ground. Already one had forced a rifle into his hands, when a mad shout of delight went up. Slung across the man's saddle the troopers had discovered two kegs of rum.

"That is my master's!" began the man. But nobody paid the least attention to his protests. The kegs were borne in triumph to the center of the camp; about them drinking-cups and gourds soon tinkled and rattled gaily. Elena, wondering how she could best keep out of the revel sure to follow,

siddled toward the outskirts of the drinking groups. There, for the first time, she looked full on the man just captured, and gave a sudden cry of joy. She recognized Rodney.

The half-breed, her companion of the march, eyed her, puzzled. She feared that she had been imprudent; his eyes, fixed on her, seemed, in her state of nervousness and exhaustion, to be filled with suspicion. So, facing him, she said nonchalantly:

"I know that man. He's a Santa Rosa peon. I'm glad he's caught, for I hate him."

And, advancing hardily to the American, who had not yet perceived her, she plucked his sleeve.

"From Santa Rosa, eh?" she said. "Well—Santa Rosa coffee is bad—bad—bad!"

At the sound of the impudent words he turned suddenly to look into a pair of beseeching brown eyes. And, as he looked, two big tears fell from them and rolled slowly down two pale and dirty cheeks.

CHAPTER VI.

FOUND—AND LOST.

THE sugar-cane rum brought by Rodney soon showed its effect.

About the flickering fires Ledezma's troopers began to sing and dance uproariously. In wild *joropos* they whirled fantastically in the red glare, swarthy and half naked, while now and again one of them fell to the ground in drunken stupor, unheeded by his comrades.

In the confusion Elena and Rodney found no trouble in edging a bit away from the central parts of the camp. The poor child was dead-tired. Her face was drawn and haggard; her eyelids drooped pathetically. On her boy's clothes, so spick-and-span that morning, the mud lay in splotches; the sandals on her little feet were caked with it.

Yet Rodney's arrival had kindled anew her courage and spirits. As she gazed at him, seated beside her on the ground, her brown eyes shone with pleasure and gratitude and kept shyly seeking his. But if he noticed it at all, he soon forgot it.

His practical mind was intent on his plan of escape.

"To-night all these men will be drunk," he whispered, after assuring himself that none of the soldiers could hear. "That will make them sleep heavily. As soon as they are all asleep we shall escape from the camp and return to Santa Rosa."

"Not over the main road."

"Why not?"

"Ledezma's brother is on it now with two hundred men."

"Well, by the road I took—through Las Tunas."

"No. Santiago Herrera has risen against the government, and will join Ledezma to-morrow morning by that road."

Rodney looked perplexed.

"I have a plan," announced Elena proudly. She glanced about her—the whole camp was still carousing.

"We can make a *détour* through those hills"—she pointed toward the northeast—"and go to El Cedral plantation. It is owned by General Vargas, who is a friend of my father and of the government. We ought to get there by to-morrow afternoon if we leave here to-night. General Vargas has probably already armed his workmen, so he can give us protection. Besides, the trail is little traveled, so we sha'n't be in much danger, and—I'm sure I can find the way. I've ridden from Arenaza to El Cedral with my father."

She looked eagerly in Rodney's face, seeking approval. At his "Fine! Splendid!" she flushed with pride, and there was a gentle light in her brown eyes, but Rodney did not see it; he was busy thinking of more important matters.

"You must sleep now, Miss Alvarado," he announced abruptly. "You'll need all the rest you can get. When it's safe to start I'll call you."

The young girl needed no urging. Cuddling into her *cobija* and murmuring a shy "good night" to Rodney, she was soon sleeping soundly.

Slowly the uproar died down in the camp. Heavy snoring took its place; the camp-fires cast their fitful light over rows of men sunk in drunken slumber. Above them the sky lowered, black and starless. Hour after hour went by. From time to

time Rodney looked impatiently at his watch, until at last the whole camp lay asleep. Three o'clock.

He touched Elena's arm. She arose without a murmur.

After putting his fingers to his lips he signed to her to follow, and began moving on all fours toward the great hill which loomed up, dark and mysterious, to the northeast of the silent camp.

Cautiously skirting the outer row of slumberers, the two worked their way toward a fire apart from the rest, across a path rising along the northeast hillside. Beside it lay a sentry, in heavy sleep, his bayoneted rifle tossed carelessly to one side. Moving silently, Rodney and Elena had succeeded in passing him, when suddenly, in the path straight ahead, a man appeared. By his side clanked a sword.

Grasping Elena suddenly by the shoulder, Rodney forced her down close to the ground. Then he seized the sentry's rifle and stood up in the middle of the path.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who goes there?"

"Revolution."

"Advance!"

The man started forward. Silently Rodney detached the bayonet from the sentry's rifle. The man was now but a few yards away.

"*Muchacho*, didn't you know me?" he asked lightly. "My name is Ledezma."

Bayonet raised, Rodney leaped forward.

"It was, you mean," he hissed, stabbing the man to the heart. As he fell heavily to the ground, his face came within the circle of light cast by the flickering camp-fire, and Rodney saw that it was indeed the face of Ledezma, the guerrilla chief. Stooping, the American appropriated the dead man's revolver and cartridge-belt. Then he looked apprehensively toward the sentry; the fellow still lay by the camp-fire, his drunken slumber undisturbed. Rodney shouldered his rifle.

"Come on," he whispered unceremoniously to Elena. She sprang to her feet and followed him along the path into the dark woods.

He set a heart-breaking pace. Every thought, every nerve in him were concentrated on speed, more speed; he forgot in

his tense eagerness the suffering of the girl, whom he could hear stumbling along courageously in his wake, panting painfully. But he would not slacken. If she chose to get herself into such a scrape, he told himself, she could not afford to be particular about the manner of her extrication. Up, up they climbed, through tropical forest, dense and tangled, with the black sky overhead and, beneath, in the valley, visible through each rift in the woodland, the ominously silent camp, lighted by its dying fires.

Rodney stopped suddenly. For the first time he was aware that Elena was weeping.

"What's the matter?" he asked, eying her.

"Le—Ledezma!" shuddered poor Elena. "The way you—you—killed him."

"Oh fiddlesticks!" Nervous strain was telling on Rodney's manners. "Now, you're not going to go to pieces about that, are you? What did you expect me to do? If he had aroused the sentinel, we'd have been in a nice fix."

"But—but—" sobbed Elena, still trembling with the horror of what she had seen.

"Oh, be a man!" urged Rodney. Why should she make a scene now? Impatiently he resumed the march. Behind him he heard her gulp down a sob. Nor did she cry any more.

It was long past dawn when they reached the top of the hill. Elena, exhausted, threw herself on the grass. From an overhanging rock Rodney eagerly scanned the valley and the steep trail by which they had left it.

"There's nobody chasing us yet," he announced jubilantly, turning to Elena. She smiled wanly, as she lay on the grass.

Rodney felt a twinge of conscience and bit his lip awkwardly.

"Miss Alvarado," he said. "I didn't mean to be rude to you on the road. I was terribly nervous and overwrought. Did I offend you?"

Elena turned her brown eyes on him; they were dull and tear-stained. All the girl's spirit seemed to be ebbing away.

"A bit—just a bit," she confessed softly.

"I'm awfully sorry. Won't you forgive me?"

He came and sat beside her on the grass. She smiled.

"Oh, you didn't mean to be rude," she admitted. "But you ought to remember that I am not in the habit of seeing a man killed every day before breakfast."

Rodney smiled.

"What—no?" he queried. And Elena laughed back at him with a bit of her old merriment.

"Venezuelan men," she announced presently, with the ghost of a twinkle in her eyes, "never have anything but pretty little speeches for girls."

"Oh, I know," said Rodney scornfully.

"Why do you speak like that?"

"Those pretty speeches mean nothing."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I just do." He spoke with Northern loftiness.

Elena's eyes suddenly blazed.

"Well, it's better to say pretty things you don't mean than rude ones you do."

Rodney started back.

"Good Heavens, Miss Alvarado," he cried, "what a little spitfire you are!"

"There you go!" sputtered Elena, whose rage had restored all her fiery spirit. "Spitfire! A nice thing to call a girl! You Americans don't know how to be polite, I honestly think. I wish a Venezuelan had rescued me!"

She looked furtively at Rodney. He was still calm.

"Julio Palacios, for instance," she continued, "or Pancho Ustáriz—yes, Pancho—I like him best of all. I wish he had rescued me."

"Well, he didn't," said Rodney bitterly. "I suppose his pretty speeches would have so charmed Ledezma that you would have been sent back to Caracatia in a coach-and-four. Bah! I apologize for rescuing you. All I can do is dress in the clothes of a dirty pcon and get captured and kill a man for your sake. That's all you can expect from an American. I wish that a Venezuelan had rescued you!"

Elena sat bolt upright in the grass. She looked at him, frightened and repentant.

"Mr. Rodney, I really didn't mean that—"

"Oh, let's drop the subject," snarled

Rodney. He sprang to his feet. "Let's start," he added coldly.

Thoroughly contrite, Elena sought his eyes, but he swung on ahead moodily, without turning back. Again and again she started to speak, but something held her back each time. So she plodded along behind him, disconsolate, with an occasional sad little sigh. For a full two hours they went on in silence.

"A short way ahead," ventured Elena at last, with mock animation, "you will come to a crossroads. The left-hand road is the one to take for El Cedral."

"Very well, Miss Alvarado."

His tone was icy. She said no more. Faster and faster he walked; poor little Elena, tired and unhappy, fell farther and farther back.

As he reached the crossroads she was already many yards in the rear. He was about to take the left-hand path, according to her directions; when, a short distance up the other path, he saw a peasant on a donkey. At once Rodney set out to overtake the rider, for slung across his saddle he had spied bread and meat and drink, none of which Elena and he had tasted since leaving Ledezma's camp.

Rodney turned a bend in the path and was about to call to the man, when the latter suddenly fired a pistol at him.

He missed. The next instant Rodney leaped forward, wrenched away the pistol and dragged the peasant from his saddle.

"Curse you!" hissed the infuriated American. "Why did you fire at me?"

"Why—weren't you chasing me?" inquired the frightened peasant.

"Idiot! I wanted food," explained Rodney. But not for quite a while could he persuade the fellow that he had not come after blood. Finally, at the clink of coin, the man willingly parted with some of his provisions. With them Rodney made haste back to the crossroads.

Elena was not there.

At first he was puzzled. Then he reflected that she had no reason for supposing that he had taken the right-hand path. Moreover, the sound of the shot fired by the man on the donkey had probably caused the girl to quicken her steps along the left-hand path, hoping the sooner to overtake her companion. So

he decided to continue his journey along that path himself.

Instead, however, he suddenly plunged into the bushes by the roadside, and threw himself flat on his face.

Along the path a troop of armed men was coming, in single file. Around their hats they wore the blue colors of the revolution. As they slouched past, rifles thrown lazily over their arms, Rodney, raising his face cautiously, looked intently at each one. When the last man had gone by, he sighed with relief.

Elena was not with them.

Then he hurried along the path again, more cautiously now, until, after a few hundred yards, he came to a small, thatched hut. He entered without ceremony.

Inside he found an old woman.

"Has a young boy just been here?" he asked abruptly.

"A very pretty young boy?"

"Yes."

"Surely, *señor*. He came into the hut a quarter of an hour ago, dead-tired, threw himself into a seat, and asked for water. Hardly had he drunk it before a lot of soldiers suddenly came into the clearing from up there"—she motioned toward a trail joining that from Arenaza on the east. "The boy jumped up, terrified.

"Go out the back door," I told him, 'and run along the Cedral road. They can't see you from the front of the house if you do.' He went, as fast as his tired little legs could carry him, but not before he had thanked me very sweetly, *señor*."

"And the guerrillas?—they went along the Arenaza trail?"

"Half of them—the others went toward El Cedral."

Rodney swore.

"But the boy had a five-minutes' start."

"Good—was he very tired?"

As she started to answer there came a sudden roar of rifle-fire. Both dashed to the door of the hut.

"From the El Cedral road!" gasped the woman.

"Oh, my God!"

Rodney fell into a chair. Shot after shot sounded. He clenched his fists, his face turned white.

The woman, from her place at the door, looked at him pityingly.

"*Señor*—" she began respectfully.

"Well?"

"That boy—is not a boy?"

Startled, he looked up. But in the old woman's eyes there was nothing but kindness. As Rodney stared at her in silence, she nodded comprehendingly. He bowed his head.

"Heaven bless her pretty little face," said the woman gently.

And while outside, amid savage huzzas, the shots crackled furiously on the El Cedral road, the old woman, kneeling before a crucifix, crossed herself and prayed silently for Elena Alvarado.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HILLOCK.

THE firing died down gradually; only occasional shots broke the stillness.

Then, outside the hut, came the pattering of many feet. Heedless of danger, Rodney rushed to the door. But the old woman dragged him back.

"Careful, *señor*," she admonished. "Don't let them see you." And when the American, pale and reckless, tried to push by her, she added: "If they harm you, how can you help the *señorita*?"

Rodney drew back over the threshold.

Man after man scurried through the cleared space in front of the hut, in wildest confusion. Some tossed away their rifles as they went.

Rodney, at the window of the hut, eagerly scanned each face. But Elena did not go by with the fugitives.

Where was she? The American made a hurried calculation of time, and his apprehension turned to an agony of suspense and foreboding. According to the old woman's story, Elena had fled from the hut with a bare five minutes' start of the revolutionists. Judging from the shots, the fight had taken place on the El Cedral road, less than half a mile away. Elena, then, must either have been overtaken by the revolutionists, captured by the advancing force which had just beaten them, or caught between the two forces at the moment of conflict. And, if captured by either, she had undoubtedly taken part in the fighting.

Rodney clenched his fists in silent despair. Still he watched the defeated revolutionists scurrying past. Again and again he started joyously at the sight of some boy, only to relapse into agonized disappointment when he failed to recognize her whom he sought.

On the heels of the last flying revolutionists came a short interval of quiet; then, swinging guns and hats madly above their heads, the victors raced into the clearing. A dozen of them crowded into the hut. One seized Rodney roughly. Another wrenched the young man's revolver from his grasp. Dumbly he submitted. The old woman, cringing before the exultant soldiers, hastily brought them what she had of food and drink.

Then a handsome old man, iron-gray and eagle-eyed, came in. "*Viva Vargas!*" yelled the soldiers, crowding about him.

Rodney, hearing the name, pushed forward with them, dragging along the men who sought to hold him back.

"General Vargas," he called to the newcomer, "I am a friend of General Alvarado. My name is Rodney. I own Santa Rosa."

Old General Vargas looked at him in courteous amazement—at his mud-stained peon costume and haggard features. Nevertheless, he signed to the soldiers to release their captive. They did so.

Rodney hastily explained that he had dressed as a peon for convenience; that he had started out on a little tour of inspection of the Fila de Turgua, and had, inadvertently, found himself on the outskirts of the fight which Vargas had just won.

The old fellow smiled.

"I deeply regret, Señor Rodney," he said, "that my country should have received you with blood and turmoil. I feel like apologizing to you in the name of Venezuela. But war is war. I, too, am a peaceful planter—but as soon as I heard, at my plantation of El Cedral, that that villain Ledezma was out against the government, I at once gathered my men and set out to punish him and his guerrillas. One band of them, I am glad to say, will give no further trouble. I am now looking for the rest. Señor Rodney, I advise you to return at

once to Caracas. The Fila de Turgua will probably be a turbulent place for some time to come. And, once more I wish to express to you my regrets that you have found us in such a state of turmoil."

The old general, bowing courteously, turned toward the door. But Rodney, stepping toward him respectfully, again addressed him.

"I had with me, general," he said, "a young boy—a peon from Santa Rosa. A short time ago we became separated. He went toward El Cedral. Did your force, by any chance, press him into service on the road?" Rodney went on to describe Elena's appearance as nearly as he could.

"Not that I remember," answered the general slowly. "We caught very few men on our way here before the fight. Perhaps the revolutionists overtook your boy."

"If they had, he would have turned in here while running away from you," remarked the old woman.

"He may be wounded, then," suggested Vargas. And, while Rodney and the old woman listened in agonized suspense, General Vargas went on:

"Or dead, perhaps. Now, the revolutionists carried off none of their wounded with them. We captured all—grown men, every one. Our wounded are all El Cedral workmen. As for the dead, we lost old Ramos, my body-servant; Pepe Alvarez, and Luisito, the coffee-picker. On the other side there were three killed also. They're all back there where the fight was. Two are lying in the bushes, and they're both big half-breeds. The third is off on a little hillock to the left of the trail and—yes, he's a young boy."

Rodney turned deadly white. Behind him the old woman mumbled a short prayer. Then the American pulled himself together.

"I guess I'll go and take a look at that boy," he remarked, trying to speak carelessly.

Dazed, he bowed in farewell to General Vargas; he only half heard the old man's renewed offers of apology and advice. Blindly he stumbled through the clearing, past rows of roistering, dirty soldiery, chattering with eloquent ges-

tication of their prowess in the fight. Some called to him to join them in the groups around the stacked rifles; others held up gourds filled with rum, signing to him to drink, but he hurried past, unheeding, mortal fear in his eyes, head bent, nails digging into the flesh of his palms.

Soon he was out of the clearing, speeding onward toward El Cedral. On, on he went, haunted by the vision of a pathetic little face, framed in short-cropped, curling black hair, with pleading brown eyes turned up to him in a mute appeal for forgiveness. Forgiveness for what? What had Elena done, he asked himself in fury, that he should have spoken to her as he had.

At the thought of his last words to her, cold and cruel, he clenched his fists tighter. He heard again the sad little sigh with which she had met those words; he heard again her footsteps, lagging but valiant, as she manfully endeavored to keep up with the grinding pace he had set. As he dashed blindly forward he swore at himself, calling himself fool and brute and cad, while the perspiration poured from him and the cold fear wrenched at his heart.

Suddenly he stopped short.

Before him, on the grass by the roadside, lay two bodies. One, a mulatto, face upturned, open-eyed and ghastly, had been shot through the head. The other, half-clad, was a thin, tall old peasant, blood oozing from a hole beneath his heart.

For a moment only Rodney gazed on them. Then, shuddering, slowly and fearfully, he turned his eyes to the right—toward a small hillock.

There, half-covered by a blue cloak, lay another body. Still standing where he was, Rodney fixed his eyes upon it. It was the body of a young boy.

Slowly he approached, and came close beside it. The boy was lying, face down, in a pool of blood, one arm hiding his features. With sudden convulsive decision Rodney bent forward, drew back the arm, and looked. Then he stood up quickly. Tears sprang to his eyes.

"Thank God!" he cried.

Relief and joy such as he had never felt flooded through him. "Oh, thank God!" he repeated, over and over again.

And, bending down once more, he drew the cloak reverently over the face of the dead stranger.

CHAPTER VIII.

PEACE AND WAR.

RODNEY sprang gaily through the matted underbrush between the hillock and the El Cedral trail, along which but a moment before he had advanced slowly toward the dead body, mortal apprehension at his heart. So overwhelming was the reaction that hope, which had lain dying within him, surged up with irresistible power, sweeping before it doubt and misgiving and anxiety, telling him over and over again with joyous certainty that Elena was safe.

Safe! He forgot that he did not know where she was, or whether harm had come to her; he forgot that the only thing he did know was that she had not perished in the fight between the force of Vargas and the revolutionists. All this he forgot; new-risen from a hopelessness utterly chill and despairing, he refused to pause or wonder or reason. She was alive—she was unharmed—she was found! Thus went his thoughts in mad leaps as he plunged through the underbrush, heedless of the nettles which tore his hands and the buzzing things which flew, startled, into his face. Elena—alive!

He regained the trail and, without hesitation, as if borne forward by instinct, he started northward away from the hut toward El Cedral. Onward he raced, head thrown back, heart beating joyously, until, rounding a sharp turn, he saw her.

She was sitting, all huddled up, by the side of the trail, carbine held between her knees, hat pulled over her face, the very picture of melancholy, gazing with disconsolate eyes straight before her—worn, cheerless, and pathetic in the dancing sunlight of the tropical day. As Rodney came swinging around the bend in the path she started back, looking toward him, terrified. The next instant she had cast away the carbine and was on her feet, eyes alight, hands outstretched to him.

"Harry!"

"Elena!"

He caught her in his arms, pressed her to his heart, kissed her lips. Her hands went about his neck, clasping him tight; the big brown eyes, brimming with happiness, looked up into his, and again he kissed her in a passion of thankfulness and joy. Suddenly disengaging herself, she drew back, but stretched out her hands to him.

"Harry!" she cried again with irresistible tenderness, and the American crushed her little hands in his and looked deep into her eyes.

"Elena, Elena," he said hoarsely, "I have found you! Thank God!"

They sat together in the grass by the roadside; while Elena, in her joyous torrential Spanish, told of her adventures since he had lost her on the trail between Arenaza and the old woman's hut. She told how she had come to the crossroads and heard the shot fired by the muleteer on the right-hand path; how she had fled, just as Rodney supposed, along the left-hand trail to the hut; how, seeing the revolutionary guerrillas in front of it, she had dashed onward toward El Cedral. By a stroke of good fortune she had spied the advancing government force while it was still toiling along quite a distance away; and plunging madly into the underbrush, unseen, had run with all her remaining strength deep into the woodland, until exhaustion had compelled her to sink to the ground.

"Then came the yelling and shooting," she went on, never stopping for breath; "but I just lay there. Soon the firing stopped. Though I was dreadfully tired, I began to get curious. So I crept to the top of a little knoll, from where I could see the trail. It was clear, except"—Elena shuddered—"except for some men lying very still beside it."

Rodney, his memory flying back to the hillock and the preceding minutes of agony, nodded and longed to kiss her again.

"Then I crept along through the underbrush," she continued, "and got to the trail again, a little beyond the bodies, nearer El Cedral. Then I didn't know what to do. I started to go back to the hut, and got afraid and ran toward El Cedral again; and, oh, Harry, how I wished you were there! And then"—the radiant little face suddenly clouded

and relapsed into the cheerless expression it had worn when Rodney appeared—"and then—oh, dear!"

"Well—and then?" asked Rodney impatiently.

"I—I killed a man, Harry."

"You—killed—a—man?"

"Yes. Just as I had decided to keep on my way toward El Cedral, he came prancing out of the woods—a great big rough fellow, too—and as soon as he spied me his hand went straight to his hip. I was frightened half to death, but I—I aimed that thing"—she pointed to the carbine on the ground at her feet—"and—and pulled the trigger. It went off—bang!—and the man threw up his hands and tumbled right over in a heap. Oh, Harry, I—I didn't know it was loaded!"

Rodney's solemn New England eyes twinkled as he listened to her tragic tale.

"Where—when—did this happen?"

"Right here—just before you came up."

"Well—where is he?"

A strong shudder ran through the girl's frame. She pointed to the opposite side of the trail, some distance away:

"There! He tumbled head first right into that deep gully. I—I wanted to go up and—look at him, but I simply couldn't. Oh, dear!" And she gazed disconsolately at the ground, nervously twisting her fingers into each other.

Rodney got up and strode forward across the trail. By the side of the gully he stooped to pick up a revolver. Then he leaned over and peered down. Sure enough, at the bottom of the gully lay a man, with eyes wide open. As the eyes met Rodney's they suddenly shut tight.

"Oho!" chuckled the American, scrambling down into the gully, which hid him completely from view of the road. With the revolver just picked up he covered the recumbent figure before him.

"Badly hurt?" he asked.

"At first there was no answer. Then:

"I don't know," hesitatingly.

Rodney leaned down and looked the other all over. There was no trace of blood—no visible bruise, even.

"Get up!" he commanded.

The man obeyed, brushing the dust and twigs from his clothes. At first he

gazed on Rodney with evidences of profound dread, but something in the expression on the American's face reassured him to such an extent that he smiled foolishly.

"Shamming, eh?" suggested Rodney.

"Why, certainly, *señor*," explained the other volubly. "I was walking peacefully along from El Cedral, when a young boy—a fiend, *señor*!—appeared, and—absolutely without warning or provocation—blazed away at me.

"‘*Caramba!*’ said I to myself, ‘this is no trifling matter. I’ll let the little devil think he has killed me.’ So I rolled into this gully and lay very still a while. Hearing no sound, I ventured to peek cautiously over the top. And behold—the bloodthirsty wretch was ambushed a little way up the trail—looking for more blood! I dropped into the gully again as fast as I could roll. How did you escape the little miscreant, *señor*? Or has he gone away? Or—”

He stopped, aggrieved. Rodney was shaking with laughter.

"Who are you?" the American inquired abruptly.

"The majordomo of El Cedral," replied the quondam corpse with dignity.

"Well, listen, Mr. Majordomo," said Rodney. "I am the owner of Santa Rosa plantation. I am going to protect you. But, in exchange for liberating you from the attentions of the little miscreant, I desire that you do exactly as I tell you."

"Give your orders," said the other eagerly.

"Simply lie down again in this gully until I whistle. Then come to me."

"It is well." With alacrity the majordomo slumped to the ground again. And Rodney, composing his face to something approaching seriousness, climbed out of the gully and walked back along the trail till he came to Elena.

She looked up hopefully, but at sight of his face hers fell.

"Oh, dear!" she repeated disconsolately, "if only it hadn't been loaded!"

"Let me congratulate you on your marksmanship," began Rodney with great solemnity. "Honestly, I didn't know that Venezuelan girls were such good shots. And he so far away, too. Why, let me see"—Rodney measured

with his eyes the distance to the gully—"a good fifty yards. Excellent, excellent."

"Oh, stop—please," pleaded Elena. "I—oh, I wish I had missed. I wish he had killed me instead." And she buried her face in her hands.

Rodney gave a low whistle.

The majordomo of El Cedral promptly scrambled out of the gully. Catching sight of Elena, he instantly tumbled in again. But soon, poking his head cautiously over the edge of his hiding-place once more, he got an imperious signal from the American, emerged entirely and advanced, although reluctantly and with obvious misgivings, along the trail.

"Elena—look!" said Rodney.

She raised her head and gazed full at the approaching majordomo.

"Why—why, that's the man I killed, Harry!" she gasped. And, springing to her feet, she rushed, carbineless, toward the majordomo. "Oh, thank you—thank you a thousand times," she cried.

The ex-dead man was painfully bewildered, but Elena's demeanor was so unmistakably friendly that his apprehension soon vanished. So he sat down beside her gingerly on the grass; while Rodney, with great merriment and mischievous glances at Elena, proceeded to tell what her feelings had been after the supposed shooting.

"The little miscreant is only a peon from Santa Rosa," he explained to the majordomo, "and, really, he isn't bloodthirsty at all." Then he turned to Elena.

"Did you really think you could hit anything with that carbine?" he teased. She pouted, and he laughed merrily in her face.

The majordomo was by this time thoroughly restored from his fright.

"I obeyed you over there in the gully," he told Rodney, "so now you must do exactly as I tell you. You must accept my hospitality at El Cedral. It is but a few miles away. General Vargas, my master, is unfortunately out chasing guerrillas, but in his absence I shall do my humble best for your entertainment. Both you and your peon are hungry and tired. Will you allow me to provide you with food and rest?"

Rodney bowed his acceptance.

"Then, with your permission," con-

tinued the majordomo, "I shall hasten on ahead and see that preparations are made at El Cedral for receiving you properly."

And he sped away on his friendly mission.

"Rest a while," Rodney told Elena, "and then we'll go along just a few short miles to a grand hot meal and all the sleep we can get. Isn't that fine, Elena?"

"Yes, Señor Rodney."

She spoke very coldly. Startled, he looked at her. She was seated on the grass, hands clasped about her knees, looking up solemnly into his eyes, just as on the night of her unconventional appearance at Santa Rosa.

"You are a brute!" she announced.

"Wh—why?" he gasped.

"That trick—that miserable trick you played on me."

Her eyes blazed.

"Oh, fiddlesticks! You know it was only a joke."

"And you knew how badly I felt about shooting that man; yet—yet you tormented me long after you found out he was alive, and—oh, it was mean!"

She was shaking with anger. Rodney dropped to the ground beside her, panic-stricken at the violence of her emotion.

"Miss Alvarado, really, now—" he began to expostulate. But she cut him short.

"First you are rude to me, and then you lose me because you are too cross to walk with me; and then you—you make fun of me and treat me like a little child, and get me miserably unhappy; and—then you call it a joke! Oh, I hate you!" she broke off passionately, throwing herself full length on the grass and sobbing in heart-broken fury.

"I—oh, I didn't mean to hurt you." pleaded poor Harry, very contrite.

"Well, you did! If you respected me—just a bit—if you cared for me just the littlest bit—you would never do such things!"

"But we Americans are always playing tricks—on the people we like best. Nobody minds them at all."

He bent over her, caught for a moment her tear-stained eyes, and realized how tired the poor child was—how shaken and racked by the day's ordeal. When

he next spoke it was with winning gentleness.

"Please forgive me, Miss Alvarado."

She sat up, brushing the tears from her eyes, still angry, but so wobegone—so unutterably pathetic—that Rodney went crimson with shame at the thought that he had teased her. He drew nearer. She edged away.

"Won't you forgive me?" he pleaded softly.

"No!" And, grasping her carbine angrily, she sprang to her feet.

"Let's start for El Cedral," she said.

He sought her eyes, but she kept them lowered. With a sigh, he struck into the trail, setting an easy pace this time, which she followed, head erect.

As Rodney plodded silently along, his thoughts were filled, first of all, with bitter regret for his tactlessness. Then, glancing furtively behind him, they turned to admiration for Elena's fiery spirit and amazing endurance. From this they switched to the inscrutable and volcanic workings of her mind; and he frankly acknowledged himself completely mystified, unable to fathom her.

Then, gradually, as he marched silently forward, all these feelings became merged into something else—a sudden, overwhelming desire to turn about, clasp the little spitfire to his heart, and kiss her. And turn about he did.

But at sight of her mutinous, downcast eyes and frigidly hostile mien, he sighed and resumed the march. Soon before them the house of El Cedral loomed up. Three o'clock in the afternoon it was, yet the appetizing odor of cookery came to them through open doors and windows. The majordomo stood on the veranda, beaming welcome. A failure he might be when confronted with the stern exigencies of war; in the domain of peace, however, he showed himself magnificent. With steaming *caldo de gallina*—how inadequate is "chicken soup" for that savory Venezuelan mess!—he began his determined assault on the exhaustion and hunger of his guests.

Next he backed up the attack with *sancocho*—chicken stew, if you will—garnished with potatoes and big yellow beans and cabbage and blood-sausage. And *hallacas* there were, too—untranslatable—and black beans, sweetened with

brown sugar, and rice and roast plantains and countless exotic fruits — fresh and preserved — and excellent red-and-white wine to wash it all down. By Rodney's special request, his little "peon" was allowed to sit at the same table with the majordomo and himself. The host, taking this as a sign of North American democratic spirit, merely redoubled his efforts to please. And he was not satisfied until both guests arose, gorged to satiety.

Then he led them to the veranda, where they lounged till dusk, drinking coffee such as Rodney had never conceived possible.

"And now what you want is rest," remarked the majordomo. He showed them to two rooms adjoining, opening off the veranda, where the shades had been pulled down and clean cots waited invitingly.

"You can sleep till doomsday," he announced. "There's scarcely any danger of guerrillas climbing way up to El Cedral."

Both visitors began thanking him profusely; but the majordomo motioned them, with hospitable impatience, to their respective rooms.

"And now I'll see that the servants keep quiet," he said, hurrying away.

Rodney and Elena were left alone. Rodney came close to the girl. Once more he sought her eyes imploringly.

"Good night, Elena."

She would not look at him.

"Good night—Señor Rodney."

And she haughtily entered her room and shut the door.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RECONCILIATION.

It was almost noon next day when Rodney awoke. Appearing on the veranda of El Cedral, he found Elena already up. Sleep had taken the worn look from her eyes and reddened her cheeks. In addition, the majordomo had provided her with a complete suit of white duck, of the very nattiest, together with a new *cobija*, to take the place of the torn and muddy clothes in which she had arrived. She was airily strutting about on the veranda when the American

emerged from his room, and looked very amenable and conciliatory.

Spying him, she seated herself demurely on a chair at the far end of the veranda and began to swing her legs back and forth, bewitchingly fresh and pretty in her new togs, and in evident anticipation of friendly advances.

But he did not make them. Since her frigid "good night" his mind had been going through some tortuous windings of its own. He had waked up very apologetic and peacefully inclined, picturing to himself a forlorn and pathetic Elena, to whom he would sue for forgiveness, by whom he would be graciously forgiven. The sight of the young lady's serene smile, her spick-and-span attire, and irritatingly chipper demeanor offended him vastly.

He stiffened—this, then, was the girl so deeply affronted!

Slowly it came over him that he, not she, was the wronged party. Discipline, he told himself, was what Miss Alvarado needed, and with Puritan determination he decided to administer it forthwith. So, with a cold "Good morning," he passed her where she sat, her hands in her trousers-pockets, entered the dining-room, and in a few minutes was engaged in animated conversation with the majordomo about coffee crops.

Elena, shrugging her shoulders, devoted herself with sublime unconcern to breakfast.

When the noontide heat was past, Rodney broached the subject of his departure. At first the hospitable majordomo refused to hear of it. But Rodney insisted. It was high time, he thought, to get Elena out of boy's clothes and danger into propriety and safety. The majordomo, once he realized that the American's mind was made up, was as helpful in suggesting a route as he had been in dispensing hospitality.

"Take the path that goes due west from here," he told Rodney. "It will bring you to the brow of the Turgua range, directly above your plantation. If you start now, you will have no difficulty, with this cool afternoon air, in reaching the edge of the range at nightfall. There you and your peon can camp, beginning the descent to Santa Rosa in the morning. From the edge of the range and all

the way along the descent there is a splendid view of the valley—your plantation, the houses in the village, Caracatia, everything.

"Now, I am going to lend you my telescope, Señor Rodney. It will enable you to sweep the whole valley as you climb down the hills toward Santa Rosa. If there are guerrillas moving about below, you can stay in the hills, where the paths, even in war-time, are almost sure to be practically untrudged. If the coast is clear, you can hurry down to Santa Rosa. From there, if you take my advice, you will lose no time in returning to Caracas."

Rodney thanked him, promising to follow directions, and, provided with telescope and provisions, he and Elena bade the majordomo farewell and set out westward.

Through the fragrant coffee-groves of El Cedral they went, while the rays of the afternoon sun gilded trees and grass with dying light, and birds of gaudy coloring flashed before their eyes; then past the plantation's boundaries, deeper and deeper into the real tropical forest, where the stillness was broken only by their footsteps crackling in the underbrush and by the melodious outpourings or shrill cawings overhead.

Neither of them spoke. Rodney's conscious sense of injury was but strengthened, as he marched, by Elena's gaiety. Cheerfully she trudged behind him, spearing at the green lizards with her carbine, humming all the while little Venezuelan ditties, gay and rhythmic, in a subdued but happy voice which seemed to him to reflect the greatest possible unconcern.

The sun dropped lower in the heavens; shadows began to fall along the grass beside the path; less and less frequent became the notes of the birds and the whirring of their bright wings in the branches.

Elena hummed less lustily; Rodney's sturdy pace slackened.

Suddenly he pricked up his ears. Instead of a Venezuelan dance-measure, Elena was humming—"Yankee Doodle!"

A very foreign and eccentric version it was, to be sure, but still "Yankee Doodle!" Rodney listened. He smiled—

but his shoulders, nevertheless, in the path before her, remained rigidly squared, unbending.

The ditty continued, soft but insistent. Was it an overture of peace? At a turn of the trail he looked furtively back, but she wouldn't meet his eyes. Instead, shifting her carbine from one shoulder to the other, she pretended to be entirely absorbed in the topmost branches of a tree.

So he faced forward again, very sternly. And for full half an hour he tramped along, unwittingly stiffening the pace, revolving in his mind old grievances, evolving new ones, unhappy but proud, self-accusing but relentless, jaws set for war, heart crying out for peace, until a pleading voice sounded behind him.

"Señor Rodney," softly.

No answer.

"Harry," very softly.

"Well—Miss Alvarado?"

"Please, Harry—will you carry my gun for me?"

And all at once, with a bound, every other feeling in him sank into nothing before that same overwhelming desire to hold her to his heart and smother her in kisses. Yet he contented himself with turning about and relieving her of the carbine. But, for all the action was impersonal, his eyes looked upon her with a softness which was not to be misinterpreted. And, when they resumed the march, she trotted along confidently by his side.

"Do you know, Harry," she remarked, after seemingly profound meditation, "I'm glad that I met you? You're good for me. When I get bad and lose my temper, you—you are horrider than I am. Now, all the Venezuelan young men I ever met fed me on nothing but sugar. All day long it was, '*Ay, mi vida!*' and '*Elena, star of my life!*' Bah! They spoiled me. Now, you don't do that sort of thing, Harry—you don't know how. Instead, you—"

"Elena," exclaimed Harry, "if I ever hurt your feelings again I'll kill myself. I wouldn't do it again for the world!"

"Take care," murmured Elena mischievously; "soon you'll be talking like a Venezuelan. Now—why wouldn't you hurt my feelings?"

"Because, Elena—" And then chill

Northern reserve rushed in, summarily gagging him. "Because—I simply couldn't," he concluded weakly.

Elena's laugh rang through the woods.

"Harry Rodney, your pretty speeches are not successes."

He bristled.

"I don't care," he growled uneasily. She was still laughing.

"Oh, they're not like those of—of Pancho Ustáriz, I know," he grumbled under his breath.

In an instant Elena had sidled close to him. Timidly she touched his arm.

"Harry!"

"What?"

"Scold me!"

Stopping short, he looked deep, deep into her eyes.

"Impossible!" he declared, with firm conviction.

Elena smiled gaily.

"I wonder," she remarked suspiciously, "why that sounded to me like a pretty speech?"

"Because it's the truth," said Rodney solemnly.

She dropped her eyes to the ground.

"Come, come!" she murmured.

"You are improving. If you keep on, you'll sound like a regular Venezuelan." Then, with sudden apprehension, she looked up at him.

"Harry—tease me!" she implored.

"Order me round—be rude to me! Say anything you like to me!"

Rodney hesitated. Then:

"Very well," he laughed. And, coming close beside her, he proceeded to stare at her so steadily, so concentratedly, with such obvious and undisguised admiration, that she again cast down her eyes, with a little blush.

"Don't you—don't you think it's time for us to move along?" she suggested demurely.

And, side by side, they resumed the march through the forest, while the afternoon light grew weaker and weaker and the evening darkness began to fall. Resolutely she kept up the pace; but to Rodney, his perceptions immeasurably sharper than heretofore, it soon became evident that the girl's strength was once more giving out. At every anxious look from him she valiantly straightened up and struggled onward, but her cheeks, red

that morning, were once more pale, and she breathed in quick gasps, with obvious pain.

He stopped.

"Elena!"

"Well, Harry."

"You are too tired to go the rest of the way."

"But—it's only a short distance to where we'll camp, isn't it?"

"Yes. I don't care. You sha'n't walk any more."

"But, Harry—"

"Let me carry you, Elena."

Rebellion flashed in her eyes, but he did not heed it.

"Elena—do what I say."

And picking her up determinedly in his arms, he set out afresh. Without a word of protest, she pillowed her head on his shoulder, looking up at him with a look so irresistibly shy and sweet that his heart started to beat tumultuously in a very intoxication of happiness. On he strode, Elena lying quietly in his arms. Once she raised her hand and brushed a leaf from his coat; again, with a mischievous twinkle, she flicked some dust from his cheek.

Each time he smiled his thanks, and each time, hastily raising his eyes from hers, he kept them resolutely and sternly fixed on the trail before him.

At sunset the path suddenly dropped away at their feet in precipitous windings. They were on the edge of the Turgua range. Striking off to one side, into the underbrush, Rodney came to a level, comparatively clear space, behind a great rock. Gently he laid Elena on the ground. Then he busied himself with the making of a fire, while she watched him wearily. He brewed some coffee, and held it to her lips, but she was too exhausted to drink more than a few mouthfuls; and when, having cut some of the beef provided by the majordomo of El Cedral, he turned to tempt her with it, he found her stretched on the blue-and-red cloak, head pillowed on her arm, asleep.

All that night, in the flicker of the fire, between the grim rock and the dark forest, Rodney watched beside the sleeping girl. Through the long, silent hours he sat, until dawn reddened the peaks of Turgua, with his rifle between his knees

and his eyes fixed on her face; and once only did he stir—to bend forward and kiss her as she slept.

CHAPTER X.

THE BELLS AGAIN.

IN the morning, after breakfast, they began the descent toward Santa Rosa.

A short few minutes convinced Rodney that it was to be the most arduous part of their journey.

The trail plunged abruptly downward, zigzagging in steep curves, strewn like the bed of a mountain torrent with rocks and stones, which, slipping and rolling along beneath the weight of their bodies, affording scarcely any foothold, rendered the descent doubly toilsome and exhausting. Rodney cut big staffs from fallen branches for Elena and himself, which they dug into the ground before them as they slid down the slope. In spite of this aid, however, after a couple hours of the grind, even with frequent halts for rest, Elena's strength was well-nigh spent again. For Rodney to carry her down the mountain slope was out of the question: it was difficult enough for him, unburdened, to pick a safe way among the treacherous, slipping stones.

At last, emerging from a dark clump of woods, they trod a small plateau, rocky and bare of trees, and Elena, gazing from its bleak edge, could not repress a cry of pleasure. There, directly below them, bright in the morning sun, every detail clear in the strong light, lay the Santa Rosa valley—the red-roofed village clustered around Padre Gregorio's church, the winding rivulets, the great rambling structures of Rodney's plantation, and of Caracatia, her home.

As they rested on the edge of the plateau, Rodney swept the valley with the strong telescope lent him by the majordomo of El Cedral. Along the windings of the steep path, which they had still to traverse, there was not so much as a single human being visible; but, about half a mile or so to the north of Santa Rosa village, just where the mountain trail joined the main road through the valley, a body of soldiers was encamped. There was no mistaking the gleam of the

stacked rifles and the flashing of the sunlight on buckles and side-arms.

Rodney said nothing to Elena about what he had seen; he did not wish to sour the pleasure with which she was gazing at Caracatia, her home. The sight of it, seemingly so near, renewed her strength. When, after a full hour's rest on the plateau, they started once more down the slope, her endurance amazed the American.

Slipping and sliding along, propping themselves as best they could on their staffs, they succeeded, with a long stop at midday, and others, shorter, at frequent intervals, in reaching a bald, jutting hillock, rising almost sheer from the valley directly over the encampment which Rodney had spied. It was four o'clock in the afternoon.

Whenever, during the descent, a good chance had presented itself, Rodney had pointed the telescope downward, sweeping trail and valley with careful eye for signs of guerrillas, but he had seen none beyond those encamped on the road below the mountain slope. On them, throughout the descent, he had kept constant watch. Now, as he leveled the telescope at them from the hillock, they showed the first signs of activity.

A drum began to beat; the soldiers, seizing rifles, fell hastily into line. Officers, swords in hand, walked up and down before them; one, the commander, evidently sprang on a horse held by an orderly.

Rodney chuckled with relief. Set squarely across the junction of trail and road, the troop had all day presented to him an awkward problem. He knew well that, if it remained encamped there, only two courses were open to him and Elena—either to slip past it at night, or else to remain hidden in the hills, counting on its eventual departure. Rodney knew that the troops were revolutionists; his careful watching had disclosed the blue of hatbands and flags, and he felt no doubt that the guerillas were bound through the valley to Arenaza, there to meet Ledezma's main force.

So the drumming and obvious preparations for the march, coming so opportunely, brought only relief to his mind. For the first time since spying them he told Elena about the soldiers, and let her

peep at them through the telescope. After some moments of seeming indecision, the order to march was given in the camp. Again Rodney glued his eye to the telescope, with Elena, expectant, at his elbow. Suddenly he dropped it from before his face, with a horrified exclamation.

Elena turned pale.

"What's the matter?" she cried.

It was too late to spare her.

"They're marching up this trail," said Rodney as calmly as he could.

No time remained to waste. Rodney looked despairingly at the steep slope down which they had just come; there it frowned, rock-strewn, cruel and sheer. He looked at Elena and shook his head. To send her up the ascent was to deliver her into the hands of the soldiery.

Already they were on the trail, but a few windings below. He could hear their short-breathed conversation, the jingle of arms and accouterments. He looked to the sides of the trail; it was flanked by dense underbrush, prickly shrubbery and rocks.

Yet, there lay the only hope. Beckoning Elena, he plunged down through the shrubbery.

He pushed it aside as best he could before her, but still, as Elena followed, the nettles tore her clothing and the branches whipped her flesh till her face and arms and hands bled from a dozen scratches.

After a few yards Rodney stopped; he feared that the snapping of twigs and rustling of leaves beneath their feet would betray them. Throwing himself flat on his face, and signing to her to do likewise, he lay, scarcely breathing, while the troop slowly climbed the steep path, only a stone's throw away. Not until voices sounded from far up the mountain slope did Rodney dare to move. Then the two of them slowly crawled back to the trail. When they reached it both were black with dirt and stained with blood.

Rodney was well-nigh desperate. At any risk he resolved to get Elena to decent shelter before night. Reflecting that all day, after careful scrutiny of the whole valley, he had seen but the one force of guerrillas, now well on its way up the mountain slope, he decided to push

boldly forward toward his plantation, which he knew was close at hand.

The trail was now far less steep; the stones and rocks, which had so cruelly tried Elena and himself through the day, were fewer. So Rodney again took the exhausted girl in his arms and strode bravely forward.

In a few minutes, emerging abruptly from the wooded slope, he struck level ground, and found himself at the junction of the trail with the main road where the encampment of the soldiers had been. He stopped and looked about him. Down the road, to the south, he could see Santa Rosa village, full half a mile away. Directly before him was a narrow path, branching from the main road and losing itself in coffee-groves. It could be none, decided Rodney, but the path used by the priest to go from his church to Santa Rosa plantation.

Without further hesitation, he grasped the tired girl more firmly in his arms, crossed the road and strode into the pathway. In a few minutes he came to a clearing and saw before him the big, rambling, red-tiled house of the Santa Rosa plantation.

Over the door floated a diminutive American flag. Rodney smiled thankfully, recognizing the old priest's hand.

He stumbled up the steps, crossed the veranda and entered the great front room. All was as he had left it. Again he silently thanked Padre Gregorio.

Then he laid Elena gently down on a sofa, rummaged in a cupboard, found a bottle of brandy and, pouring out a stiff drink, held it to her lips. She sat up, gulped it down, and fell back on the lounge, eyes half closed.

As Rodney sat beside her, anxiously gazing into her face, she smiled at him gratefully.

"Harry," she said, "I'm an awful nuisance."

He grasped the hand which lay limp beside her, but, as usual at such junctures, he found that his tongue stuck.

"Not a bit," was all he said, and even her exhaustion could not keep the mischievous twinkle from her eye.

He hastily scraped together some supper and brewed some hot coffee. When she had eaten, she revived wonderfully, and began to chatter gaily while she

munched, Rodney looking on with his heart in tumult, his eyes eloquent, his tongue mute.

Elena put down her coffee cup.

"Safe!" she exclaimed contentedly. "Oh, Harry"—and she impulsively stretched out her hand to him across the table—"thank you and—forgive me for all the trouble I've made you."

He had caught her hand in both his, when suddenly, through the still dusk of the late afternoon, came the piercing notes of a bugle. Again the sound came—close by, to the northward. He dropped her hand. Her head sank on the table, and for the first time in those days of danger she whimpered like a child.

Harry clenched his fists. He had thought that she could rest that night unmolested at Santa Rosa; that, next morning, he could get her to Rosario, whence the train would take her to Caracas and perfect safety. And now—the bugle told him that guerrillas were about again. It sounded a third time, nearer, and he dropped helpless and exhausted into a chair. What could he do to safeguard her? His brain, fagged by days of danger and scheming, refused to suggest any plan. All he could do was sit and clench his fists and gaze in despair at the sobbing girl across the table.

And then, suddenly, he raised his head—listened—sat up.

Out of the gathering darkness, sweet, peaceful and melodious, the bells of Santa Rosa rang out, sounding the Angelus. Harry sprang to his feet.

"Elena!"

"Yes, Harry."

"Listen."

"To what?"

"The bells of Santa Rosa."

"Well?"

"Let's go to the church and—get married."

She looked at him. And he went on, eloquent at last, in rapturous enthusiasm:

"Elena—please! When you are my wife not a soldier will harm you. You will be an American, then. Please!"

She cast down her eyes.

"Is—is that all?" she asked softly.

"Elena, I love you!"

She hid her face in her hands.

"Once," she remarked—and her eyes

twinkled behind her fingers, though Rodney didn't know it—"once I asked you—right here—to marry me, and—you wouldn't!"

His heart stood still. His arms dropped despairingly to his sides.

"Elena, my darling," he cried brokenly. "Won't you—won't you, please, be my wife? Elena—look up at me!"

Still she would not. He pulled her hands from before her face, in an agony of doubt.

And then, at last, the big brown eyes were raised to his, and he looked full into them and read them. And all his misgivings, all his fear, all his despair were swept away, as he caught her to his heart and passionately kissed her.

Padre Gregorio was standing by his church door, in the dusk, wondering what certain bugle-calls from up the valley might portend, when he felt something tug at the sleeve of his cassock.

"Padre Gregorio!" said a little voice.

He turned. There, boy's clothes and all, stood Elena Alvarado.

"*Mijita!*" exclaimed the delighted old man, catching both her hands and patting them with uncontrolled joy. "Oh, Heaven be praised—back again! And Señor Rodney, too!"

He had suddenly spied Harry, emerging from the dusk behind her. "Ah! my children—how I have prayed for you both! The good Lord be praised!"

As the old man beamed on them he caught in their expression something conscious and uncomfortable. Inquiringly he looked into Elena's eyes; they sought the ground. He looked at Harry; the young man became deeply interested in his shoes.

The priest smiled very happily.

"Padre Gregorio—" began Rodney, embarrassed. But Padre Gregorio put up his hand for silence.

"My children," he said with immense gravity, "will you kindly step into the church, and—excuse me, please, for a moment. I have a most important duty to perform."

They obeyed, walking down the dim aisle, and sitting side by side near the little altar.

And, as they sat there, the bells of Santa Rosa rang out once more; not

quietly and peacefully this time. but in the most tumultuously joyous of wedding chimes.

CHAPTER XI.

AH, ELENA!

ELENA and Rodney were at breakfast next morning, on the veranda of Santa Rosa, when Padre Gregorio rode up gaily on horseback.

"*Ola, niños!*" he called out, dismounting and climbing the front steps. "I've been to Caracatia. The majordomo and his wife are now on their way here. Shocked!"—the old man wagged his head in mock horror. "They are going to drag you right home. Elena, and, what is more, the majordomo means to assassinate your Harry on sight. For you are both wicked, wicked children. No, I won't sit down with you."

This last was in allusion to forcible attempts by both Harry and Elena to throw him bodily into a chair at the breakfast-table. Finally they succeeded, and while Harry was pouring him some coffee, Elena deliberately kissed the old man.

"*Niña!*" he exclaimed. "How dare you? For that I shall impose on you a severe penance—terribly severe—right now, too!"

And, taking her face in both his hands, he returned the kiss.

At that moment the majordomo of Caracatia and his wife arrived on horseback, and there was renewed excitement and give-and-take of exclamatory and gesticulatory Spanish, at the end of which the majordomo's wife beckoned solemnly to Elena.

"You come with me," she ordered.

And she pointed to certain bundles under her arm.

Elena followed her meekly into the interior of the house.

"I have good news," said the priest, turning to Rodney. "I suppose you have heard, of course, that Ledezma is dead."

The American nodded. He thought it best not to mention, even to the old priest, just how much he knew about the wicked guerrilla's death.

"Well," continued Padre Gregorio, "his troops at Arenaza got panic-

stricken, and when government soldiers began to advance from Rosario, the whole lot of revolutionists fell back into the Turgua Mountains. That means, practically, that the trail from here to Rosario is perfectly safe; it is improbable that any band of rebels would be foolhardy enough to lurk about on it, so far from the main body. So you and the Señorita Elena—I mean, the Señora de Rodney," he corrected himself, "may undertake your journey toward Caracas to-day without misgivings."

He was interrupted by the reappearance of Elena, in a pretty white dress.

"Not half so comfortable," she promptly remarked.

"And if you don't like it, Harry," she added, "I—I'll wear the carbine with it."

But Harry's face expressed no objections.

"And, now," he said, "are you ready to ride to Rosario?"

He addressed Elena.

"We are," answered the majordomo, the majordomo's wife, and the priest simultaneously. Rodney looked at them in astonishment.

"You—you aren't going with me?" he said.

But they serenely ignored his protestations that he and Elena, being Americans, needed no protection. As the young couple rode away from Santa Rosa, all three fell in behind.

"A regular guerrilla," remarked the old priest. And he half drew from his holster a big rusty pistol and looked unutterably ferocious.

Up the steep hillside they rode, laughing and chatting, over the coffee-covered uplands, past the scene of Ledezma's revenge, and down the steep slope, with Rosario spread smilingly before them. Nor did they find on the way a trace of soldiers, government or revolutionary.

But as they cantered into Rosario, beneath the hot noonday sun, a special train was just puffing into the station. From it poured hundreds of men, with gleaming rifles and bayonets—government troops. And from the rear car sprang a soldierly old man in full uniform. It was General Alvarado, Elena's father.

He and she spied each other at the same time. The next instant he was hugging her to his heart.

"Elenita, my darling," he cried, "I was on my way to find you. Only yesterday I heard of your capture. *Mijita*, come and tell me all about it."

He drew her aside. Rodney, the priest, the majordomo, and his wife, respectfully fell back.

For five minutes Elena talked animatedly with her father. Then the old general, hugging her again, advanced, hands outstretched, to Rodney.

"God bless you, my son," he said simply, straining Harry to his bosom in the manly Venezuelan fashion. The majordomo, his wife, and the priest, watched the scene, grinning with joy.

"Isn't she a wonder?" said the priest.

"Nobody like her," said the majordomo.

"It took her exactly five minutes," said the majordomo's wife.

"Ah, Elena!" said all three together.

The general, Elena, Rodney and the majordomo's wife hurried to take places in the train. The majordomo remained behind, to return toward Caracatia with the government troops.

"Better come along," said Rodney to the old priest. "Caracas is safer than Santa Rosa just now."

But the old man shook his head.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for suggesting such a thing," he said. "*Vaya!* What an idea. Who would ring the bells of Santa Rosa if I went? How would you have liked it if I had not been there last night? The idea!"

Whereupon, the whistle blew and, amid much waving of handkerchiefs, the train pulled out of the little station.

As it sped along through the rock-bound gorge of the Guaire, Elena leaned close to her husband.

"Harry," she said solemnly, "you must scold me often. Whenever I don't act like a nice American girl you must be horrid to me. Tell me—what do nice American girls do?"

"What they please—exactly what they please," declared Rodney.

"Then I'll do exactly what I please," said Elena. And she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. "There!" she cried.

And General Alvarado, on the seat opposite—haughty, old-fashioned General Alvarado—could find no more terrible way of objecting to her shocking behavior than to stroke his beard and murmur:

"Ah, Elena!" whereupon he got soundly kissed himself.

At the Caracas station they were met by the splendid carriage of the minister of war, which took them in state through the narrow streets to the Alvarado house, where the old general turned over a whole wing of the great mansion to the young couple.

Harry, installing himself immediately at the general's desk beside a pad of cablegram blanks, proceeded to open a severe-looking envelope.

"Brrrrr—business," growled Elena. "I'm going away, Harry—and I'm not coming back until you've finished!"

Harry opened the letter. It ran:

DEAR HARRY:

I see by the paper that the Venezuelan revolution is the worst ever, that they'll be fighting down there for a year or more, that the coffee district is overrun with guerrillas, and that the price of coffee has dropped to nothing. Remember what I said: "It won't pay." Cable me. Yours,

DAD.

And Harry, seizing the cablegram-pad, at once wrote:

RODNEY, BOSTON.

It has paid.

HARRY.

Ringing the bell, he entrusted the message to a servant. Then he sprang from his chair.

"Elena," he called out, "I've finished!"

PATHS.

THE paths men tread are endless o'er the world—

We falter as we follow through the maze;

But, oh, how sure our stumbling feet would feel

If we, once more, could walk the old home ways!

P. Walther.



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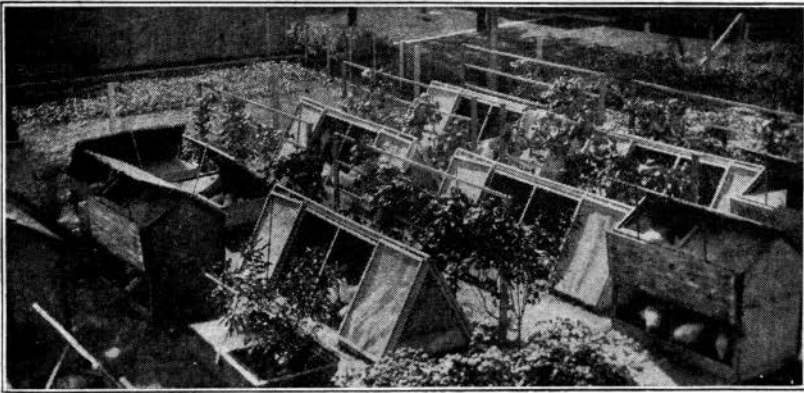
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TO the average poultryman that would seem impossible, and when we tell you that we have actually done a \$1500 poultry business with 60 hens on a corner in the city garden 40 feet wide by 40 feet long, we are simply stating facts. **It would not be possible to get such returns** by any one of the systems of poultry keeping recommended and practiced by the American people, still it is an easy matter when the new **PHILO SYSTEM** is adopted.

The Philo System Is Unlike All Other Ways of Keeping Poultry

and in many respects is just the reverse, accomplishing things in poultry work that have always been considered impossible, and getting unheard of results that are hard to believe without seeing; however, the facts remain the same and we can prove to you every word of the above statement.

The New System Covers All Branches of the Work Necessary for Success

from selecting the breeders to marketing the product. It tells how to get eggs that will hatch, how to hatch nearly every egg and how to raise nearly all the chicks hatched. It gives complete plans in detail how to make everything necessary to run the business and at less than half the cost required to handle the poultry business in any other manner. There is nothing complicated about the work, and any man or woman that can handle a saw and hammer can do the work.

Two Pound Broilers in Eight Weeks

are raised in space of less than a square foot to the broiler without any loss, and the broilers are of the very best quality, bringing here three cents per pound above the highest market price.

Our Six Months Old Pullets are Laying at the Rate of 24 Eggs Each Per Month

in a space of two square feet for each bird. No green cut bone of any description is fed, and the food used is inexpensive as compared with food others are using.

Our new book, the **Philo System of Progressive Poultry Keeping**, gives full particulars regarding these wonderful discoveries with simple, easy to understand directions that are right to the point, and 15 pages of illustrations showing all branches of the work from start to finish.

Don't Let the Chicks Die in the Shell

One of our secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick and believed to be the secret of the Ancient Egyptians and Chinese, which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.

Chicken Feed at 15 Cents a Bushel

Our book tells how to make the best green food with but little trouble and have a good supply any day in the year, winter or summer. It is just as impossible to get a large egg yield without green food as it is to keep a cow without hay or fodder.

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No lamp required. No danger of chilling, overheating or burning up the chickens as with brooders using lamps or any kind of fire. They also keep all the lice off the chickens automatically or kill any that may be on when placed in the brooder. Our book gives full plans and the right to make and use them. One can be easily made in an hour at a cost of 25 to 50 cents.

Send \$1.00 and a copy of the latest revised edition of the Philo System will be sent by return mail. The latest edition has many pages of additional reading matter, and by ordering direct you are sure to get the latest and most approved book.

E. R. PHILO, Publisher,
84 Third Street, ELMIRA, N. Y.

A FEW TESTIMONIALS

Valley Falls, N. Y., Sept. 5, 1907.

It was my privilege to spend a week in Elmira during August, during which time I saw the practical working of the Philo System of Keeping Poultry, and was surprised at the results accomplished in a small corner of a city yard. "Seeing is believing," they say, and if I had not seen, it would have been hard to believe that such results could have followed so small an outlay of space, time and money. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Oct. 22, 1908.

P. S.—A year's observation, and some experience of my own, confirm me in what I wrote Sept. 5, 1907. The System has been tried so long and by so many, that there can be no doubt as to its worth and adaptability. It is especially valuable to parties having but a small place for chickens; seven feet square is plenty for a flock of seven. (Rev.) W. W. Cox.

Ransomville, N. Y., Dec. 5, 1908.

Dear Sir:—Last spring we purchased your book entitled "Philo System" and used your heatless brooders last spring and summer. The same has been a great help to us in raising chicks in the health and mortality. The chicks being stronger and healthier than those raised on the brooders with supplied heat. We believe that this brooder is the best thing out yet for raising chicks successfully. We put 25,000 chicks through your heatless brooders this last season and expect to use it more completely this coming season. We have had some of the most noted poultrymen from all over the United States here, also a large amount of visitors who come daily to our plant, and without any exception, they pronounce our stock the finest and healthiest they had seen anywhere this year. Respectfully yours, W. R. CURTISS & Co.

Skaneateles, N. Y., May 5, 1908.

One article of the Philo System entitled "A Trick of the Trade," has been worth three times the amount the book cost. I saved on my last hatch fifty chicks which are doing nicely. W. B. REASE.

GET THIS \$1200.00 NEXT MONTH!

WHAT A BLESSING TO ALWAYS HAVE MONEY IN ABUNDANCE



You can, it's easy. **Hundreds Getting Rich the "New Way."** Said to be world's greatest and surest money maker. One man actually made **\$1281.00 IN ONE MONTH, \$51.50 IN 15 MINUTES, \$800.00 IN 8 DAYS.** Not a fairy tale, fake or humbug, but absolutely true—**sworn statement.** New, wonderful discovery. Causing great enthusiasm. Readers, listen, see, read how this invention has made, is **making thousands of dollars** for others:

Does \$1200 Monthly "My sales \$1281.00 one month, \$1118.00 another. **Best thing INTEREST YOU?** ever sold. Not one complaint from 2000 customers." **SWORN STATEMENT BY M. G. STONEMAN, MONT.**

"**SOLD \$2212.00 IN 2 WEEKS.** Not one dissatisfied user," writes Korstad & Mercer, Minn. "My sales **\$1680.00 IN 73 DAYS,**" writes C. D. Rasp, Wis. "Canvassed **60 PEOPLE GOT 55 ORDERS.** Sold \$320.00 in 16 days," writes W. H. Reese, Pa. "Enclosed order for **\$115.00 FIRST DAYS' WORK.** Best thing I ever worked," writes L. H. Langley, N. D. "Everybody thinks apparatus finest thing. **Sold 15 one afternoon,**" writes Miss Eva Edwards, Nev., after ordering 73. "I averaged **\$164.25 WEEKLY** for three months, undoubtedly best line on market," writes J. W. Beem, Kas. "**Finest seller I ever saw,** catches the eye. Don't want anything better. **SELL 8 OUT OF 10 HOUSES,**" writes Wm. Maroney, Okla. "**A man that can't sell your outfit couldn't sell bread in a famine,** send \$8 more," writes I. B. Cashman, Minn. "I make **\$100.00 DAILY,**" writes J. Sevegne, N. Y.

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This new invention, the Stolz Electrophone (U. S. Patent No. 763,576) renders unnecessary such clumsy, unsightly and frequently harmful devices as trumpets, horns, tubes, ear drums, fans, etc. It is a tiny electric telephone that fits on the ear and which, the instant it is applied, *negotiates* the sound waves in such manner as to cause an *astounding increase* in the *clearness* of all sounds. It overcomes the buzzing and roaring ear noises and, also, so constantly and electrically exercises the vital parts of the ear that, usually, the natural unaided hearing itself is gradually restored.

What Three Business Men Say.

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I got so deaf I could not hear with my speaking tube and was advised to try the Electrophone. After fifteen years of deafness, discomfort and worry, I now hear perfectly at church and at concerts. W. R. UTLEY, Sales Mgr., S. A. Maxwell & Co., Chicago.

I have now used your Electrophone over a year and know that it is a first-class, scientific hearing device. Without it people have to shout directly in my ear to make me hear. With it I can hear distinctly when spoken to in an ordinary tone. Best of all, it has stopped my head noises, which were a terrible aggravation. LEWIS W. MAY, Cashier, 100 Washington St., Chicago.

Write to, or call (call if you can) at our Chicago offices for particulars of our personal test offer and list of other prominent endorsers who will answer inquiries. Physicians cordially invited to investigate aurists' opinions.

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We Will Tell You These Secrets'

which have cost poultrymen years of labor and thousands of dollars. They will cost **YOU** only a trifle and a few minutes' time to write us. There is no man in the United States who has more friends among poultrymen than **MICHAEL K. BOYER**. A veteran chicken breeder himself, he knows the business from A to Z. and through his wide acquaintance and friendship he has learned many of their most jealously-treasured secrets. This scattered material he has collected in book form, and we are offering it to the poultry raisers

of America. **Every secret printed in this book has been obtained in an honorable way, either by permission of the owner or through Mr Boyer's own experience.**

Dr. Woods' Egg Dr. P. T. Woods authorizes the publication of his system for producing large quantities of sterile eggs for market. Every poultryman who raises eggs for market must know Dr. Woods' method to be up with the times, and every householder who supplies only his or her own table will appreciate an increased quantity of the highest quality eggs for table use.

The Secret of Mating No one is better known in the poultry world than I. K. Felch. Success has crowned his efforts as a breeder of blooded stock. Some years ago Mr. Felch compiled a breeding chart and published it. Later, realizing its value, he withdrew it. Now he gives this information to you in Mr. Boyer's book.

How to Have Fertile Eggs Mr. Boyer has contributed all the secrets which have made him the successful poultry breeder, poultry writer and editor that he is. His secret of securing fertile eggs by alternating males we believe is worth \$100 to any big producer of setting eggs. It is something new, and the diagrammatic illustration furnished by Mr. Boyer makes the matter so plain that the novice can easily understand it.

Feed at 15c a Bushel An enterprising poultryman has advertised this secret for \$5.00 and pledged those buying it not to disclose it. It has, however, long been known to Mr. Boyer, and the method has been fully explained in "Poultry Secrets."

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Of course we cannot go to the length of saying that all the information in the book is new to every one. It is said there is nothing new under the sun, and the Egyptians were hatching eggs by artificial heat centuries ago; but we do say that to the great majority of poultrymen these secrets are absolutely unknown.

We are Willing to Name Here Some of the Secrets

- 1 Secret of the Philo System.
- 2 Burdham's system of mating fowls.
- 3 Felch's method of breeding from an original pair, producing thousands of chicks and three distinct strains.
- 4 Mendel's Chart of Heredity.
- 5 Secret of strong fertility by alternating males.
- 6 Secret of knowing what to feed and how to feed it. The secret of having green food in winter.
- 7 Secret of appointing oats and barley for poultry feeding.
- 8 Secret recipes for chick feed; practically the same feed is now sold on the market at a high rate.
- 9 Secret of fattening poultry economically so as to make the most profit out of the crop.
- 10 Secret of telling the laying hens of the flock.
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- 13 The only safe way of preserving eggs.
- 14 A secret of dressing fowls so as to do the work quickly and thoroughly.
- 15 An exposure of the methods employed by some fanciers to kill the fertility of the eggs.
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- 17 Fattening turkeys for market.
- 18 Hunter's Secret of Success.
- 19 Dr. Prince T. Woods' Secret of Laying Food.

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