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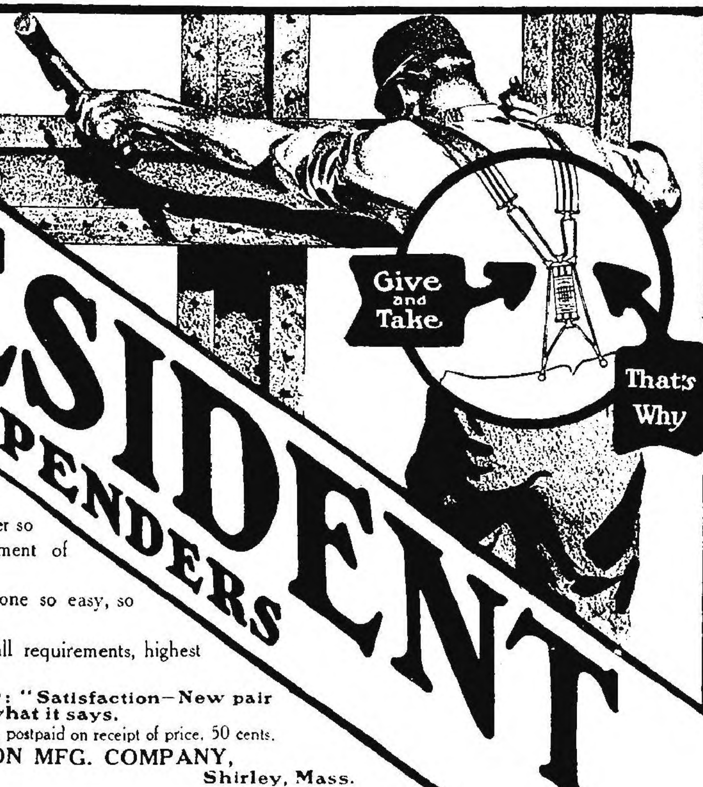

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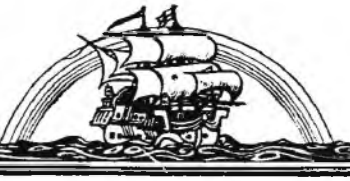

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is the name of the Complete Novel that will appear in the September Argosy, and having for its pivotal point a certain magazine editor who unwittingly provides himself with a boomerang. "Locked Out" and "Locked In" are two sharply contrasted short stories to be found in the long list of them in this September number.

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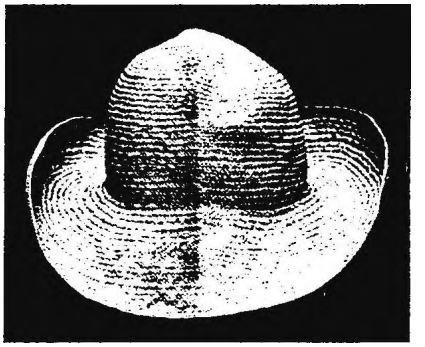

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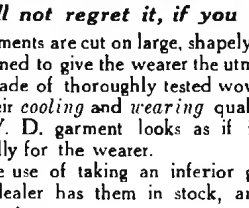

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LVIII AUGUST, 1908. No. 1

RICHES THRUST UPON HIM.

By GARRET SMITH.

The remarkable fashion in which a man procured a job that carried him into the Canadian woods and launched him upon a series of experiences as out of the ordinary as they were thrilling.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

LUCK'S TWIST.

MY luck had turned at last. It hadn't merely turned; it had whirled. The manner of it took my breath away.

When I, a green college graduate, had sent my card into the forbidding presence of James Brewster Deming, president of the Great Northern Development Company, with a modest request for work, unaccompanied by any introduction, I had not the slightest hope of success. It was simply the last throw of one who had searched two weeks in vain.

Ten minutes later I left The Presence in a daze. I was duly chosen as an important member of his staff.

You have all dreamed of falling from a dizzy height and about to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below. Then you have seemed to land and find the rocks soft as down. That's the way I felt. At this point you usually wake up.

I stood, after my dismissal, waiting for the elevator, wondering how soon I'd wake up.

There in my hand was, or seemed to be, a sealed letter addressed to Amos Tompkins, Hotel Iroquois, Buffalo, N. Y., my new chief. I was to deliver the letter to him personally. Explanations would follow.

That was all I knew. How had Deming come to have that letter ready? He had never heard of me before, as far as I knew. What's more, he had asked no questions. Was the humble name of Paul Belden an open sesame? It didn't have that habit.

I had counted up the pitiful remainder of my roll of bills that morning and found I had left just enough to buy a ticket back to my father's farm in northern New Hampshire, after paying my hotel bill. I decided then that I'd take a noon train for that bucolic spot and once more pitch hay for a living. New York didn't appreciate me.

As I had left my hotel and turned up Broadway for the Grand Central Station, my eye caught these letters on an office-window:

GREAT NORTHERN
DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.

I recalled vaguely a conversation at my fraternity club where I had dined the night before with Tom Mason, a young broker, my only friend in the city.

A man at the table next to us said to Tom: "I see the Great Northern Development Company is going to make one more try. Taken a lumber concession in northern Canada."

"That fellow Deming is near the end of his tether, I guess," was Tom's reply.

That was all I could remember as the glittering sign recalled the incident. I stopped and did the Uncle Josh act for a moment. Then an idea arrived.

I confess I am a bit superstitious in my own way. The recurrence of this

name on a shining sign, handwriting on the wall as it were, just as I was about to surrender to the demon of the city, struck me as an omen.

"I'll just try old Deming," I thought. "Maybe he wants an office-boy. I'd take even that rather than go back and get the merry smile from the Rubes at home. Luck sometimes takes a twist just as you are about to leave a note for the coroner's jury to discuss. If Deming will give me a chance to swing an ax in the woods my early training will come handy, even if my mining engineer's degree doesn't make good. I'd rather chop wood among strangers than pitch hay at home. So here goes."

I found Deming's office on the third floor. With shoulders thrown back and resolved to put up a mighty bluff, I entered the anteroom.

My first set-back was a supercilious boy who sat reading a dime novel, and who barely looked up as I extended my card.

"Take that in to Mr. Deming, please, and say I want a job," I directed with forced assurance.

"Got an appointment wid him?" languidly asked the reader, not deigning to touch the card.

"He'll see me all right," I returned with some heat, bluffing strenuously.

"He won't see nobody now," snapped the youth, returning to the exhilarating activities of "Tiger Tom."

I threw my card on the table and, picking up a magazine, pretended to read. My White Mountain blood was up. I would tire out the enemy.

A moment later I had the pleasure of seeing a bout between my literary Cerberus and another intruder, one not calculated to increase the odds in favor of my seeing Deming.

The newcomer, apparently a dissipated young dandy, announced that he had an immediate appointment with the president.

"Boss told me I wasn't to disturb him now," growled Cerberus.

The other seemed not particularly excited about it. Looking at the youngster amusedly, he also placed his card on the table and paced back and forth for a few minutes. Finally he looked at his watch, picked up his card and said: "Tell Mr. Deming I'll drop in again this afternoon."

He went out, leaving me half inclined to follow him. I could still catch my train.

While I was debating, my forced courage rapidly oozing out, a young man opened the sanctum door from within and asked: "Anybody to see Mr. Deming?"

The boy gave him my card.

"Here's where I get the grand bounce," I told myself as the young man disappeared again.

The next moment he returned with a look of strange deference.

"Step right in, sir," he said.

I obeyed in surprise.

"Sit down!" barked a wiry little man, swinging half around from his desk and eying me sharply through iron-rimmed spectacles.

His short gray hair and stubbed mustache bristled like the coat of a bulldog. His black eyes seemed to bore through me for a moment. Then they shifted in a queer, wavering fashion, and a faint smile crossed his leather visage. I was being scrutinized by President James Brewster Deming.

"Near the end of his tether," Tom had said of him.

Perhaps that explained the shifting of those keen eyes.

I began stammering something about my willingness to do anything he had on hand from office-boy's work up. Then I was cut short.

"I understand—I understand. Never mind that," said the formidable one. "I want some one to assist the chief of our new expedition as right-hand man, and I am going to give you a try. I suppose you know nothing about the work, or about work of any kind, for that matter. But maybe you'll learn."

I was too awestruck to resent this slur on my industry. However, I thought that right here my pedigree was in order, and hauled out my well-worn letters. I was cut short by my dismissal.

"Well, I'll be tetotally hanged!" I gasped as I stood on the curb collecting myself. "Politely turned down by a dozen men with whom I supposed I had all sorts of pull, men made acquainted with my whole history, and then

hired offhand by one who knows nothing about me and doesn't want to learn!"

Perhaps Deming had on hand some kind of secret dirty work for which almost any one would do. A glance at me had possibly satisfied him that I was a likely sort of a chap, and at the same time one in need, and not too particular as to what was required of him.

Apparently he thought I was on my own resources and without good connections.

On the other hand, it was possible that some friend had recommended me to Deming, and that I, by a strange coincidence, had happened in before my sponsor could let me know what I had to expect.

My former explanation did not seem probable. If Deming had been looking for an applicant—any applicant—why had it apparently been so difficult to reach him? Also, why had my particular card produced so marvelous an effect on his secretary? Still, it might be.

I dismissed the idea of personal or moral danger with the thought that I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Adventure I welcomed.

As for the second possibility, my only recommendations would come from Lehigh University, where I had been graduated two weeks before, or from Mason.

I called up Tom and told him what had happened.

"Phew!" he exclaimed. "That's a funny stunt. Well, if you want to try him, all right. But look out you don't get stung."

"You didn't recommend me to him, then?" I asked.

"I? Not on your life! I never saw the man or had anything to do with him. Wouldn't recommend any honest man to him if I did. He's known in the Street as a trickster—always trying new deals, working a sharp game, then pulling out after robbing his backers; always within the law, of course, then cooking up another scheme. His ways are so well known now that I can't imagine who is putting up the dough this trip."

That wasn't encouraging.

Then I got the president's office at Lehigh on the long-distance phone. No one there had ever heard of Mr. Deming.

I fell to working on the problem, and had reached Buffalo before it occurred to me that Deming might be an old childhood friend of my father. That would account for the effect of my card. My peculiar reception I might lay purely to Deming's eccentricity.

I reviewed the happenings of my own twenty-one years, and my family history as far as I knew it, and could recall no one of Deming's description.

Ours was a simple line of farmers reaching back in Massachusetts and New Hampshire history nearly to the days of the Mayflower. Its annals and connections were pretty well known to me.

I myself had led a simple farmer's life through my boyhood, preparing for college at the village high school, and had never traveled fifty miles till I went to Lehigh. There was certainly no clue to any rich or influential connections.

To settle it I got my father on the long-distance phone at Buffalo, much to that simple old gentleman's trepidation, and asked him about Deming. He had never heard of such a person and was sure I had run into a confidence man.

This present happening was entirely out of keeping with my usual line of luck. From babyhood I had been ill-starred. Falls that meant only bruises for my playmates meant broken bones for me. My college course was deferred three years by a succession of poor crops. In college I had just missed several honors by a hair, and was graduated a year late on account of illness in my junior course.

So at last, when the evil spell seemed to be broken, perhaps it was only a trick of my unlucky genius to prepare me for still greater mishaps. I had reason to think so before I reached the sequel of my strange meeting with James Brewster Deming and his associates of the Great Northern Development Company.

CHAPTER II.

ACCIDENTAL EAVESDROPPING.

"WELL, that's agreed, then."

I almost knocked over the little table in my surprise. The words sounded right at my elbow, but there was not a person in sight nearer than the two men

across the room, out of earshot for all ordinary tones.

I was in the little rathskeller where I had been taking my meals since reaching Buffalo. I had found a note saying that Tompkins had been delayed for a few days, and I was living as cheaply as possible to eke out my nearly exhausted funds.

I looked around to see if there was an unnoticed alcove in my corner of the room. There was not.

"You know you can't be too careful," again came the voice. "That's why Deming never gives out anything in New York. Even an office-boy might overhear and queer the game."

In the familiar words "Deming" and "New York" my surprise was redoubled. I now took note of the couple across the room.

They were leaning over their table with every apparent effort at secrecy. Yet as I watched their lips I was convinced that the words I heard were spoken by them.

Then an explanation struck me. The ceiling of the room was an oblong vault. The two men and I sat in opposite corners at the focuses of a perfect whispering-gallery.

Ordinarily, having made this discovery, I would have been impelled by honor to move myself from the zone of eavesdropping. But I had heard enough to be convinced that I was vitally interested and I kept my seat.

The speaker was a smooth-faced, fleshy, comfortable-looking man with scant sandy hair, and a white skin that betokened an indoor life. His companion was the exact opposite, tall, spare, and dark, with drooping black mustache and a weather-beaten face.

The men had in common the shrewd, keen expression of those who live by their wits.

"It sure does look like a cinch." It was the dark stranger who was talking now. "Old man puts up the dough for our expenses, and gets nothing out of it but some valuable experience. If we strike it we win everything. If we don't, we've nothing to lose. But how about the youngster?"

"Oh, the young cub—" the other started to reply.

Just then the waiter stepped in and cut off the sound-waves. I lost the rest of the speech. By the time I had finished my order the men had started to leave their table. This parting remark by the fleshy stranger stayed with me, however:

"Remember, your part is to stand for any dirty work that comes to light. Deming and I must be left out. If that boy knows too much, it's up to you to see that he makes no report on it. See?"

Then they left me to my speculations.

That these men had been talking about our expedition seemed certain. It was not likely there were two Demings in New York both interested in operations around Buffalo at the present time.

Was this a conspiracy to defraud my employer? They talked of beating the "old man." But they also referred to Deming as though he were in the apparent conspiracy.

Then who was the "old man"? Also, who was "the youngster"? It was as much of a mystery as ever.

I no longer doubted, however, that I had been inveigled into some evil operation. Nevertheless, I had no intention of withdrawing. Had I not been inadvertently thrust into the rôle of a detective? My eyes were opened to mischief afoot, and it was clearly my duty to ferret it out and bring the miscreants to justice.

I became quite mock-heroic on the way back to my hotel.

One question puzzled me. Had I better tell Tompkins when he arrived what I had heard, or would it be best to work it out alone? My doubts along this line were soon to be settled in an astonishing fashion.

I stepped up to the desk at the Iroquois and asked if Amos Tompkins had arrived yet.

"Yes," said the clerk, "he's around here. I'll page him for you."

A few moments later a hand touched my shoulder and a familiar voice said: "I am Amos Tompkins."

I turned and received another jolt.

The speaker was the fair, fat man of the rathskeller.

"The deuce you are Amos Tompkins!" escaped me before I had recovered from my surprise.

"You are skeptical," he said with an ill-concealed sneer, though outwardly his manner was almost deferential. "Well, I'm ready with proofs, all right. But why do you doubt me, young man?"

Of course I couldn't tell him. Without reply I took the chair to which he motioned in an out-of-the-way corner of the lobby.

I was doing some rapid thinking.

If this was Tompkins, I would not antagonize him by doubting his word, but would do all I could to win his confidence. If this was an impostor, I could show him up more effectually in the end by appearing at first to swallow his pretensions whole.

One thing I decided at once, however. If he were an impostor, it would be the fellow's game to get hold of the letter given me by Deming and learn its contents, and thus further his schemes. That I would prevent.

As the man began to pull letters from his pocket to establish his identity I hastened to assure him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Tompkins," I said with a laugh. "Don't take me too seriously. I haven't the slightest doubt of your identity. I merely had formed a different mental image of you, and your real self took me by surprise. I assure you, however, that the genuine thing is much better than my preconceived notion."

I had half-consciously adopted an indifferent and good-natured manner, and, as I learned afterward, it was the best thing I could have done.

My companion let it go at that and came back at me with:

"Now as to your own identity. I believe you were to have a letter for me."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Tompkins," I said, giving the first excuse that came to my mind, "but by mistake I put that letter in a package with some other papers I left in New York. I've sent for it and will have it in a few days."

If I had scored against my questioner he didn't show it. He asked me a few skilful questions that seemed to satisfy him, and at the same time tended to convince me that he really was Amos Tompkins.

"The letter doesn't matter much," he said. "I'll ask Deming in my report to-night to send me a duplicate. He has described you so well that I knew you at sight, anyhow. By the way, did he tell you what your name would be while you are with us?"

My surprise must have been very apparent, but I replied in the negative, as though I had expected as a matter of course to be renamed on entering the employ of Mr. Deming.

"You will be John Vincent until further notice," said Tompkins.

"Who is John Vincent?" I ventured.

"Why, you are all the John Vincent there is," was the reply. "Don't you like the name? Perhaps you think best to be known by your own name," he added with a sarcastic intonation I did not appreciate.

Then, as if conveying further warning, he went on: "We won't mention your real name even among ourselves. Even the walls—and so forth, you know."

Now how could the unheralded and unsung name of Paul Belden, whispered in a Buffalo hotel or shouted in the north woods of Canada, in any way affect the destinies of the Great Northern Development Company? Another puzzle to my collection.

One thing was evident. I was supposed to know much that I didn't know. I would take pains to conceal that ignorance. On the other hand, I flattered myself that I was beginning to get an inkling of things I was not supposed to understand.

Three days passed, in which all my doubt of the identity of Tompkins vanished. Several strangers presented themselves to him in that time and were hired. He received daily letters from the offices of the Great Northern Development Company, and sent reports to James Brewster Deming every night.

Tompkins, Deming's personal representative, was evidently in a conspiracy. Against whom? How many of us were supposed to be wise? Was I, Deming's vice-representative, so to speak, a member of the conspiring group or a victim?

On the third day I was convinced that Deming had hired Tompkins and believed in him, whatever his purpose, and that I could do no good by longer holding back the letter I had feared to give

him when I thought he might be an impostor.

I turned it over as though I had just got it from New York, where I had said I left it by mistake. Then, for the first time, we talked definite business.

"Here's a map of our operations," said Tompkins. "You may keep that copy for your own guidance."

I studied the parchment before me carefully. It was very simple.

In a broad curve across a square was marked the course of the Little Moose River. About the center of this curve and also about the center of the company's reservations, as represented by the dotted square, was a cross marked "island." This, Tompkins said, would be our headquarters.

The space above the square was labeled "Monahan's farm." That there should be a farm in that region excited my surprise and curiosity. I didn't realize then how much that farm was to mean to my future career.

In the midst of this "farm," where the bow of the river disappeared from the map at the north, was another cross labeled "Granite Rapids." An arrow showed that the river flowed in a northerly direction.

But another feature of the drawing now caught and held my attention and checked my half-formed question about Monahan's farm. There was a straight dotted line running through the island and disappearing back of the rapids. Beside it was written "gold vein." Here was a new light.

Checking my surprise, I studied the man for a moment, and then asked: "What are the details of my duties?"

"You will superintend, ostensibly, our supposed work of lumbering. I'll give you an assistant who is a thorough woodsman. He will help you out, and at the same time give you due deference. We will thus keep these men busy without arousing their suspicion of our real mission till we find what we are after, then set them to mining when we are sure of our ground and that our claim is all right. At the same time, we can use the lumber you work up later on. I will be supposedly employed surveying for a lumber road and mill site, really looking for this."

He placed his finger on the straight dotted line.

We were interrupted at this point by another prospective employee, and I went away to digest my new clues.

The next day we left Buffalo. There were eight men in our party, mostly alleged surveyors; really, I believe, miners and mining engineers. The lumbermen had been hired in the woods by an advance-agent, and would meet us at the end of the line.

The first person I noticed on entering the train was the dark stranger I had seen with Tompkins in the rathskeller. The next moment Tompkins and I passed him in the aisle, face to face, but there was no sign of recognition.

We sat down in the rear of the car, and Tompkins began reading a paper. I watched the stranger.

Presently the latter looked around in apparent aimlessness, and his eye fell on us. Then he arose with an exclamation and, staring hard at Tompkins, came in our direction.

"Isn't this Amos Tompkins?" he said, holding out a hand to my companion.

Tompkins looked up as though he had seen the other for the first time, then jumped up and exclaimed: "Well, I'll be hanged! If it isn't Bill Townsend! Haven't seen you since we left college."

It was pretty acting, and evidently for my benefit. The two masqueraders took the seat behind me and fell to discussing old times in loud tones. The one essential I gathered was that Townsend was bent on a fishing expedition with two guides to a point about eight miles north of our proposed camp on the Little Moose River.

After a while Tompkins said he'd got to look after some baggage, and, introducing me to his "old college chum," he left us together.

I found Townsend an interesting talker. He entertained me with accounts of his former trips to the region, together with a vivid description of the country.

"Ever been north before?" he asked finally.

"No. This is my first trip beyond the Canadian line."

"I understand your party's going into the lumbering business there," he went on. "There is good timber in that claim. Should be big money in it at present

prices. By the way, ever hear the stories of gold in that region?"

The man was eying me sharply.

I returned the look with bland interest and mild surprise mixed in proper proportions.

"No," I replied. "Is there gold there, or is it only a fable?"

"Only a fable," said my companion, seeming to lose interest. "Few have heard the rumors. No one has ever found gold. If the report should get abroad, there'd be a rush there, and it would spoil my fishing."

He steered the conversation into other channels.

At the little village of Montrelle, where the railroad ended and our trip through the woods began, I was looking after the baggage, when I inadvertently came behind Tompkins and Townsend in conversation.

"Look out for that boy," Townsend was saying. "He's no such fool as Deming thinks him. There was method in the old man's madness."

Could they be talking of me, I wondered? If Deming had thought me a fool, why had he hired me?

"Well, there are ways to remedy that," replied Tompkins. "Go as far as you like. The woods are deep and lonesome."

That might mean several things. I shuddered with a feeling of unknown peril.

CHAPTER III.

A SPILL AND A SHOT.

THE beauties of the Canadian wilderness were fast reviving my depressed spirits. As I saw the tiny houses of Montrelle growing hazy over the dancing waters of Little Moose Lake I forgot for the time that I was surrounded by conspirators I had reason to believe regarded me with malevolent suspicion, though their reason for such feeling was to me a mystery.

I even forgot my growing dislike for Townsend, my canoe-mate, who was going with us as far as our camp and had invited me to paddle with him.

Rounding Eagle Point, three miles from Montrelle, we left civilization and struck out into the open fifteen-mile stretch for the mouth of the Little Moose River. There were twenty canoes of us, including two big hunting canoes, "war canoes" the woodsmen called them, loaded with supplies.

We had picked up two dozen lumbermen, two guides, and a cook in Montrelle, and were stocked with provisions for a month.

As we passed the point our fleet began to string out. The wind was in our faces and freshening. Here and there I saw whitecaps begin to sparkle in the sun. Paddling was becoming hard work.

I had handled a canoe as a boy, and had noticed that Townsend seemed surprised at the way I made myself at home in one. But I was soft from long lack of practise. My cramped knees ached from the continued kneeling posture, and blisters were rising in my smarting palms.

Despite the fact that we had no baggage aboard, our canoe fell farther and farther behind the others. Our losing battle with the growing waves grew momentarily more difficult.

The shore was three miles away. The nearest of the other canoes, that in which were Tompkins and a guide, was half a mile distant at least.

I looked back at my companion. He was eying me curiously. What struck me as more strange, however, was the way he was handling his paddle.

For a woodsman he was certainly awkward. We should have ridden the waves with comparative ease. Instead, we were wabbling about in a serpentine course and shipping water with every stroke of our blades.

Suddenly Townsend seemed to slip. He toppled over with a yell, waving his paddle frantically. The next moment we were both wallowing in Little Moose Lake.

Being a good swimmer and lightly clad, I came to the surface immediately and looked about. Townsend was already clinging to the stem of the overturned canoe. Tompkins and the guide were rapidly paddling our way. A half-dozen strokes brought me to the canoe bottom.

Interpreting the remarkable expression on Townsend's face as I saw fit, I said: "You are alarmed, Mr. Townsend."

There was considerable bitterness in

my remark, which I made no attempt to conceal.

"I thought you couldn't swim, old man," he replied. "I was just coming after you. Glad to see you are all right. Awfully sorry for that ducking. Don't see what made me so clumsy. Got a bit of a sick headache to-day that seems to queer my stroke."

I said nothing, but couldn't help thinking that Townsend's words failed to tally with his looks. Was that ducking an accident?

To right, bail, and board a capsized canoe in a sea running whitecaps is no easy task. However, we accomplished the first part of it at last, Townsend and I treading water at the stern and Tompkins and the guide in the other canoe at the stem.

We were aboard again and sponged dry in half an hour. Fortunate it was that we had had only ourselves in our craft, so nothing of value was lost by the spilling.

By this time it was noon, and we landed at the next point for luncheon.

That afternoon I watched my canoe-mate narrowly. I had established my reputation as a swimmer, however, and had little to fear of another attempt to drown me, if, as I was by no means prepared to swear, there had been a deliberate attempt in that direction.

Why should there be such an attempt? I wondered. The more I thought about it the more unlikely it seemed. Moreover, Townsend made himself so agreeable after the accident that I, with the easy optimism of healthy youth, began to be ashamed of my suspicions.

Although the things that I had heard and seen left no doubt in my mind that Townsend was some kind of a scoundrel, I found myself losing my dislike for him.

Accordingly, I agreed readily when, as we were rolling into our blankets that night, he suggested that I go on down the river with him and visit his stamping-ground after our own camp was pitched, if Tompkins didn't need me for a day or two, after we reached our island. He said he needed a little help to get all his baggage moved.

We had bivouacked near the mouth of the river and had only a ten-mile run the next morning to the island where we were to camp. We landed at noon, and by four o'clock our camp was pitched. The following morning I was to go on with Townsend.

Then occurred an incident that renewed my apprehensions and made me regret that I had warmed up to my new acquaintance quite so much.

The men were scattered about the freshly cleared little rock island on which our camp was pitched. I decided to divert myself by practising at shooting the rapids which swirled around the island, as there was no one about with whom I cared to visit. Tompkins was busy with his report and Townsend was over in the woods, hunting.

After a little diversion on the river, I landed on the opposite shore and took a stroll in the cool woods.

I started back as the evening shadows began to fall. Just as I stepped on the open table of rock where my canoe lay I heard a shot. There was the zing of a bullet. A little branch six inches from my head was splintered.

Some one in the woods had fired at me. It was a new experience and I was seized with a panic.

My first impulse was to dodge back among the trees. Then it came over me that my assailant was hidden in there and I leaped for the canoe.

I paddled desperately for the island. Then, as I made it, I stopped and laughed at myself for my fear. Undoubtedly it was an accident.

The men were hunting over there. Same old thing you read about. Movement among bushes! "Deer!" cries intelligent hunter. Bing! Body sent home to victim's friends with apologies by hunter.

However, I was not quite satisfied, and was resolved more than ever to be on my guard.

I gleaned nothing from the remarks of the hunters at supper. They told of shooting some small game, which they exhibited, but no one admitted shooting at a deer.

The next morning we were astir early, and Townsend and I prepared to start for his camp. I regretted my agreement to go with him, but couldn't back out without betraying the suspicions of whose justice I had no proof.

Townsend said he needed me to help with his extra canoe and baggage, and Tompkins seemed anxious to have me go, that I might get familiar with the country.

Again I puzzled my head to form some theory as to why the men might wish to get rid of me. I found none.

The river below was more turbulent than I had seen yet. Twice in two miles we had to carry around rapids, and twice more we shot them where it took all our skill to avoid a wreck.

The river itself was most bewildering. Though I took careful note of landmarks, I had some inward misgivings about returning without getting lost. At the end of an hour we reached the boundaries of old Monahan's farm, and my companion regaled me at length with the account of the strange life of the old recluse and the delusion that always clung to him that his rocky land was rich with gold.

Then we rounded a sharp bend and came on the mighty roar of Granite Rapids, through which no one had ever passed alive. It was a long, steep carry we had to make here over a rocky promontory.

I found myself greatly interested during the hour it took us to make the carry examining the peculiar rock formation I found there. I thought then it was only gratifying my professional curiosity, but a few days later I was to learn that my investigation was a most valuable one.

At length we got our canoes back in the river and in a few minutes were once more in smooth water. When I was able to give my attention to the surrounding country again we were beyond the northern boundaries of Monahan's farm, and in a region north of that portrayed on our map.

The river was still curving to the left in a long bow as it had on the other side of the rapids, and was just as full of blind passages to trap the tenderfoot.

It was not, however, till we reached a point five miles farther down and swung in sight of another island, that I was suddenly struck by a strange coincidence.

"There's my stamping-ground!" cried Tompkins.

What occurred to me first was the remarkable resemblance between this island and the one where our party was camping. It was the same distance below the rapids that our island was above them. The river on both sides of the rapids was following the same general curve. The character of the river above and below was the same.

In fact, by taking a map of the region where Tompkins and his party was encamped and reversing the directions on it you would have a very good map of the country where Townsend and I now were.

It was this last thought that emphasized the coincidence and, in view of something I had seen that very morning, shed a new light on the subject.

It was while we were getting our canoes ready for the start that I had had occasion to go into Tompkins's tent to ask him a question. He was out at the moment, and as I turned to go I noticed several papers lying loose on his improvised table, where he and Townsend had evidently been discussing them.

One was a map of the concession, as I thought, at first glance, like the one Tompkins had given me. A closer look, however, showed me that there was something peculiar about it.

Every detail of the map on the table was the same as the map I had in my pocket, but as it lay, the arrow showing the direction of the river pointed toward what seemed the bottom of the map and the river curved to the right instead of the left. It was the real map reversed.

I looked at it closer, however, and found I had it bottom side up. But turned around, though the map then gave the right direction to the river, it showed Granite Rapids and Monahan's farm to the south instead of the north. The map was marked "Copy of original as received from Jacques Montaine."

I had dropped it then with the thought that it was probably a would-be copy that had been marked wrongly. But now it was clear to me that it was an exact map of the region north of ours.

The striking fact, however, was that though you were to place the two maps together as the regions lay, the gold veins as indicated in the two would not

run together, nor even parallel, but would cross near the Granite Rapids, a conformation not likely to be found.

As I thought of it now, the whole thing was clear. Only one of those charted gold veins was the one Tompkins expected to find, and that was the one I saw in the tent marked "Copy of original." The other map was meant to deceive somebody.

Who? Why? Townsend was evidently the man who was to find the real gold vein, and the game was to keep the men busy elsewhere till he did. And the scene of his operation was not a part of the concessions of the Great Northern Development Company, apparently.

Was the Great Northern, then, paying the expenses of these precious scoundrels while they searched gold for themselves?

That fitted into what I had heard in the rathskeller in Buffalo. My part in the plot was as much a mystery as ever, but what I saw convinced me that the purpose of getting me off down the river with Townsend and the guides was not a good one. I was not long in learning the truth of that conclusion.

CHAPTER IV.

I LOSE MY WAY AND FIND A NEW MYSTERY.

TOWNSEND had expected me to stay overnight at his island, but I resolved not to be caught in any such trap, for trap I was now convinced it was.

We reached the place a little after noon. About three o'clock we had his two tents pitched, and I calculated that I could just about make Tompkins's camp by dark if I started back at once.

Townsend was at first exceedingly insistent that I should remain with him, but I pleaded that I felt an attack of indigestion coming on, and that I had with my baggage some medicine that I wanted to take without delay.

He managed, however, to hinder me for an hour, showing me the beauties of the country where he said he came to fish and hunt every year. It was a little after four when I finally started up the river in a light canoe that I could easily manage alone at the carries.

Closely as I had noted the landmarks as we came down the river, I found it a bewildering maze on attempting to return alone.

Following the depressions in the granite rock in all the centuries since the ice age, it had not yet worn for itself a regular path. I followed it for half a mile or more through a narrow slit between rock walls that barely allowed the passage of the swift current. Then I came to a sharp turn, where the stream expanded into a little lake, like a human hand with finger-like coves radiating in every direction.

From which one ran the main stream where we had emerged that forenoon I couldn't for the life of me tell. We had cut off a long curve and a rapids by a carry that led into one of those finger coves over a wilderness of submerged stumps. At the mouth of this cove I had noted two fire-killed trees as guides for the return, but now, viewing them from the other direction, it seemed that there were fire-killed trees at the mouth of every cove.

I paddled about helplessly for an hour, trying half a dozen coves, only to find them nothing but blind passages ending in blank rock walls. In the meantime it was getting near sunset, and I should have been well past the last carry before the Granite Rapids. If I made that by dark, I would be all right.

Finally, as the red ball of the sun rested on the edge of a granite crest, I found what I thought was the carry. I got the canoe on my back and started across.

I soon began to suspect, however, that I was again on the wrong track. The path almost immediately ceased to look familiar, and in a little time I was convinced that I had already gone far enough to reach the end of the river, but there was nothing ahead but woods.

I started back in the twilight, and in a dozen rods came to a fork in the path that I had not before noticed. Which led to the river I could not tell. Of course, my evil genius was on the job and pointed out the wrong turn, which I promptly took.

In an hour I stopped, exhausted, and dropped the canoe to the ground. Night had settled down in impenetrable blackness over the woods. There was nothing to do but to spend it right there.

Now, a bivouac of that sort may seem like good fun when you read about it by the fireside. But if it does, you have never learned from experience how cold it gets in the Canadian woods at midnight even in July.

Moreover, you have never enjoyed the doubtful pleasure, as you lay shivering from the cold, of being obliged to add several extra shivers at hearing the dismal howling of wolves around you. All those pleasures I enjoyed that night.

A dozen times I heard dread somethings moving in the underbrush near me, and I crouched, ready to fire my futile little revolver at the something and then run.

It was an endless night apparently, but morning dawned at last to find me cramped and terror-stricken. I prowled about for a while in the early gray light, and suddenly made a joyous discovery.

Only a few rods away was the right carry. I knew it because I recognized a log thrown as a bridge across a swale we had passed the day before.

I was standing on a boulder in the open a few feet above the swamp-hole over which the log lay. As I turned to go back for my canoe, I suddenly stood frozen to the spot in surprise.

There, scarcely a rod away, leaning against the boulder, with a cocked rifle in his hands, was Townsend.

For a moment I was petrified. Then I noticed that the man was in a doze and had not yet seen me. I crept back quietly to the protection of a tree and watched him.

For once, my lucky star had interceded, for there was no doubt as to Townsend's purpose in that vigil. Sleep had for a moment blinded and deafened the man who, I knew now, would not hesitate to kill me when he could do it without being found out.

I knew that he had no intention of going for game that night; besides, this was not the method pursued in hunting wild animals. I was the only game sought. For the moment I had escaped him again.

He had evidently taken a short cut to head me off when I left his island the afternoon before. Getting lost had saved my life.

I stood behind the tree-trunk watching the man, not daring to move. I held in my hand my cocked revolver, resolved to use it if Townsend should come in my direction.

I didn't purpose to waste twenty-one years of perfectly good growth and education if I could help it.

In a few moments the man roused up with a start, looking hastily around him, glanced at his watch, and resumed his vigil. Five, ten, fifteen minutes, half an hour, and finally an hour dragged away.

I was cramped and tired, as well as badly scared. Finally Townsend took a last look around, let down the hammer of his gun, and slowly walked away, muttering to himself. As he passed me I heard him say:

"Curse him! He seems to slip away from me every time. Don't see how he got over to the river without going by here. Hope he's still lost and will rot before he finds his way."

Duly grateful for these kind wishes, I watched my would-be murderer out of sight, then stole quietly back to where I had left the canoe. Waiting long enough to be sure I was perfectly safe, I went back to the path and was soon on the river again.

I was completely fagged out. The hard work of the day before, a sleepless night of exposure, and the intense fear and excitement I had gone through, now had their full effect. I listlessly paddled back up-stream, and through my tired brain there ran over and over again the dark, unsolved problem of which I was a living element.

Of this much I was now sure. The real gold vein was being sought on land that did not belong to the company for which we were all supposed to be working. Townsend, Tompkins, and whoever else was in the conspiracy were evidently working for themselves at the expense of the company.

For some mysterious reason I, a rank outsider, had been placed among them, and was evidently looked upon by them as a spy who would thwart their schemes. My life was therefore sought.

There was one comfort, however. These two men were evidently the only ones of the conspirators on the ground at present. They had no intention of kill-

ing me openly. I felt, therefore, that if I could avoid being left alone with either of them I would be comparatively safe for the time being.

But, I asked myself over and over again, why was the unknown and powerless Paul Belden in this position, and why was he supposed by these scoundrels to have such dangerous power?

My new knowledge made me view Tompkins in a clearer light. When I got back to the island that day it was evident to me from his manner that he was surprised and disappointed to see me alive. It required some self-restraint not to tell him so, but I knew that a revelation now would be disastrous.

I only hoped that my unlucky star would be false to its traditions long enough to let me either get a stranglehold on these rascals or get back safely to civilization and out of their reach.

Then there came more light in a letter the next day that arrived with the first mail brought through to us since we struck camp.

"Here's a letter for you, Vincent," I heard Tompkins call, after he had shuffled over the contents of the bag dropped in his tent by the half-breed riverman.

My heart gave a glad bound, partly at joy because I thought it was from home, and I was getting wofully homesick, and partly at relief to know that it was not part of Tompkins's game to intercept my mail.

But, to my disappointment at first, and afterward to my immense surprise, the letter was not from home. It was addressed to Mr. John Vincent, in a fine feminine hand that I had never to my knowledge seen before, and was postmarked New York.

But the great surprise was in the contents, which explained many things, and at the same time gave me new and more baffling mysteries to solve.

This was what the letter said:

MY DEAR BROTHER:

Papa has explained how careful we must be not to let it get out at present where you are, as that would, of course, embarrass him in his business and perhaps spoil his plans. I understand all that and will write carefully so that if anybody should by accident see this letter it won't give you away. But why couldn't you have bidden your sister good-by?

You weren't angry with me, were you, dear? I tried to coax papa not to send you away, but you know how stubborn he is. Besides, perhaps it's wisest. I'm hoping you will fool them by showing that you have the ability to work after all.

But why can't you write to me? I thought, of course, you would write from Buffalo, but papa told me to-day that your party was already in the woods. I can't understand it. I hope you are not sick.

Do be careful. That is such a new life for you. Don't you wish you could spend an evening at the club now? You wouldn't even look cross if I should ask you to take me to the theater now, would you? You dear, naughty brother!

Mary Copeland came out last Friday night, and spent Sunday with us. Now don't you wish you were here? I think she missed you. Well, there's lots more to write, but I just won't write it till you take time to send your worrying little sister a letter. Good-by and be a good boy. Don't let those horrid woodsmen spoil your manners.

Papa says you won't write because you are obstinate. Then he was angry because I was impudent and said I wondered where you got that trait. Good-by again. Your loving sister,

FLORENCE.

P. S. This is the "secretest" part of the letter. Papa told me the other day when he was scolding about you how small your salary was and that you weren't allowed anything but that to live on. I think it's just horrid. You poor dear! Of course you can't live on that snippy little sum even in the woods.

If papa wants you to stay up there and amount to something he ought to let you have enough so you wouldn't starve. I told him so, too, and he said I was a silly baby. I don't care though, I'm going to help you myself even if you won't write. Here's a little bit out of my allowance. Don't you ever let father know. It isn't much and I won't miss it a bit. Besides, I can coax papa for more and you can't. By-by.

SIS.

Folded in the letter was a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill.

The letter left me in a maze of varied feeling. Besides the haze of new mys-

tery into which it plunged my brain, I was conscious that the dainty girlish writing and the sweet womanly feeling it conveyed, even though not meant for me, had set my pulse to beating a little faster.

I found myself forgetting the mystery for the moment and trying to conjure up in my fancy an image of the writer of that strange letter.

I quickly brushed sentiment aside, however, and once more began fitting the blocks of the old puzzle together.

The letter told me plainly that in some strange fashion I was unwittingly masquerading as some one else. There was nothing, however, to give the slightest clue as to who that some one else was.

I gathered that I was supposed to be the son of a rich man who was interested in the Great Northern Development Company. I had been sent under an assumed name into the woods to watch the workings of that company.

Tompkins and Townsend evidently were in on the secret, and for reasons of their own sought to thwart my father by quietly killing me. On the other hand, I had evidently been considered a good-for-nothing pampered youth up to date, and had been sent into the woods largely for discipline.

But who was I impersonating? Where was that unknown person himself all this time? How in the name of Heaven had such a weird mistake been made?

These questions raced unhampered through my sleepless brain that night.

CHAPTER V.

A CHASE AND A CONFIDENCE.

SEVERAL days went by without incident. We began to feel very much at home on the snug little island, and got pretty familiar with the general topography of our claim.

Tompkins laid out a definite plan of action, and we went to work.

I found the men easy to get along with. They soon realized that I had seen much of outdoor life, and could swing an ax in spite of my tenderfoot appearance.

Trenton, my head woodsman, was a good-natured giant. The men liked him, and at the same time held him in wholesome respect. He was loyal to me, and very soon I came to feel that, whatever might be the secret designs of my chief, I had the rest of the camp with me.

Tompkins selected a site on the mainland for a mill and dam, then set his surveyors to running lines for a road to lead up to the lake along the river valley. I was put to work with my gang cutting timber along this proposed road and building site.

"It won't be a sawmill or a lumber-road, if I find what I'm after," said Tompkins to me, with a knowing look; "but ore needs a road as well as lumber."

I was convinced that the road would be continued on down to the second island if Tompkins found what he really was looking after and he could get rid of those who were paying him to search on this island for what he knew did not exist there. And I was one of those he would have to get out of the way.

In the meantime, I would hold my peace, keep my eyes open, and get the road ready.

Of Tompkins himself I saw little after the first two or three days. He would start off in his canoe at dawn and not return till late at night, saying he had been searching the rocks for the vein farther down the river. Then he would announce that he must run up to Montrelle, and he would be gone three or four days at a time.

I became convinced that in these interims he was with Townsend, searching for the real gold vein. Whether he and his fellow conspirators had an option on the other land down the river, or had merely jumped it secretly, I could only guess, but in a few days came an occurrence which settled that question.

It happened on a sultry day, when all hands had knocked off work at noon and gone for a swim. Tompkins and I were a little apart from the rest, splashing around in a quiet eddy near the shore, when we suddenly heard strange voices near us.

Looking up, we saw half a dozen canoes manned by Indians and wild-looking woodsmen paddling swiftly down-stream. We were in the water to our necks, and unobserved.

When we first saw the strangers the

two men in the canoe nearest us were scanning our island closely. From their appearance, I judged them to be the leaders of the party.

"The island we're headed for looks just like this," remarked one to the other. "As much alike as two pickerel, and ours is the same distance t'other side o' the Granite Rapids as this is this side. All this side has been raked over, though, and it's a cinch that the other island is the right one. Hope that ain't as thickly settled as this. Might mean a fight. It ain't likely, though."

I heard a profane exclamation, and turned to see Tompkins white with fury, shaking a dripping fist at the canoes.

"Curse him!" he muttered. "I thought that fellow was in Arizona. The only other man on the continent who knows the game here, and he has come back to queer it."

"Some one you know?" I asked.

My chief seemed then to realize that he had been talking aloud, and calmed his wrath immediately.

"No—yes—" he wavered uncertainly. "Know him too well, in fact," he finally burst out. "We searched this country once together. Curse him! Curse him!"

Then he grew more excited and started for the bank. I followed.

"Here you!" He turned fiercely on me as he scrambled to his feet. "You know too much already, but I can't trust anybody else at present. Jump into your clothes. Take the light canoe. Paddle like blazes. Pass those fellows, but don't let 'em get wise to you following 'em. Get to Townsend, and tell him Montague is coming.. He'll understand. I'll follow with the crowd just as soon as I can. Don't peach to anybody else anything you've heard, and don't ask any fool questions, as you value a whole skin. Pass them before they make Granite Rapids."

He glared at me like a fat hyena, every hint of the old deference gone, and gave me a shove toward my clothing that sent me sprawling over them.

There was nothing to do but obey, so in less than fifteen minutes I had dressed, got the canoe ready, and started in pursuit of these new pieces in my puzzle-picture.

The task so peremptorily assigned was by no means an easy one. The strangers, though unaware of pursuit, were paddling swiftly, and already had over a mile the start of me.

Around bend after bend I toiled, only to see the canoes ahead passing behind the next bend. The blazing sun scorched my shoulders till the spray of the river felt like molten lead where it struck me.

Now I glided swiftly across a dark, quiet pool; now was hurtled down a tumultuous rapid I had never dared shoot before. I ran stumbling across the carries, the inverted canoe balanced on my head chafing blisters on my scalp.

I knew that if I failed to catch Montague it would not be safe for me to return to Tompkins's camp. It would be a long, lonesome walk back to Montrelle. Once let the strangers get established on the island, and it would be impossible for our party to oust them.

But my efforts were all in vain. I swung into the last stretch before Granite Rapids to find it empty. The objects of my pursuit were already around the far bend and doubtless beginning the carry.

I could not pass them on the narrow winding path. To appear among them while they were making the crossing would mean awkward and perhaps disastrous talk.

The familiar intercourse of the north woods does not permit even chance acquaintances to be secretive as to their destinations. Besides, now that they had made the carry, I could not reach the island in time to do any good, even if I framed a plausible excuse for passing them.

I was paddling slowly and disconsolately toward the bend when I heard a feeble cry on the right bank. At first I saw nothing. The queer, weird, wavering voice seemed to emanate from the dead rocks.

Then I noticed something stirring on the bank, and, on looking closer, could make out, leaning crumpled up over a low boulder under one of the scrub-oaks, the figure of a wizened little old man.

Again came the hail, an inarticulate cry, like that of a wounded animal in the last throes of death.

It was old man Monahan, and he evidently needed help.

I recognized the hermit owner of the

farm that had so aroused my curiosity when I saw it charted on our map, from the vivid description Townsend had given me.

His pathetic history had moved me deeply. His eccentricities had been the theme of unending amusement to unthinking woodsmen and hunters for a generation. He had come to the woods thirty years ago, a sturdy Irish immigrant, with his young wife and their three children. The first rumors of gold in this region had lured him, and he staked this claim and began his thirty years of search.

He didn't find gold. In ten years his wife and, one after the other, his children died, leaving him alone, a disappointed, heart-broken, prematurely old man. Trouble had affected his reason, and for twenty years after that he had been entertaining visitors to the woods with wild stories of gold on his farm, and of how some day he would sell it for a big fortune and go back home to Ireland, where he said "Kathleen and the childer are waiting."

He got enough for his wants by tilling the barren farm and making two trips a year to Montrelle for a little trading. He was perfectly harmless, and when not talking of his farm or his lost family seemed rational and even shrewd.

This pathetic story went through my mind again as I saw the old figure before me and realized that at last the recluse had come to a point when some dire need had compelled him to call on his fellows for assistance.

Should I heed that cry or continue in my course? I looked doubtfully in the direction of the bend?

It was hopeless now to try to catch Montague and his men. It would take them an hour to make the carry, in which time I would not dare show myself to them. Then by the time I had crossed the carry they would be nearly to the island.

Here was a human being who needed my immediate aid. I knew, too, he was a real human being, one who would not watch for a chance to stab me in the back.

I headed my canoe for the bank. Townsend might shift for himself.

I found the old man in a half stupor and apparently dying. Giving him a little whisky from the flask I always carried for an emergency, I had the satisfaction of seeing him revive sufficiently to be half carried, half led along the winding wood-path to his little rough log hut back half a dozen rods from the river.

I placed the old man on his cot and bathed his face in cold water, now and then administering a little more whisky. In a few minutes he revived considerably, and opened his eyes to stare at me with a look of dumb gratitude.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"Betther, now, thank ye, boy," he quavered. "It's a bit of a sunsthroke, an' it near done me. Yer a fine boy to help an old mon, and ye'll be rewarded. Listen to me.

"It's only a short time Michael Monahan has to live, and he's nather kith nor kin to lave his farm here to. And it's a rich property, too. Harkee, boy, an' belave a dyin' mon. As I hope the saints'll give me rist in hiven, there's goold here. They wouldn't belave me, an' I couldn't find it; an' him as knew where the yellow goold was wint away, and the secret with him."

The old man stopped, exhausted. I gave him a little more whisky, and after a moment he went on.

His speech was broken, and much of it incoherent. For half an hour he talked, but only this much I could gather from the rambling utterances of the shattered mind.

He told me of a Jacques Montaine, from Montreal, who had come to his cabin ten years ago, heard his story of gold, and believed. Jacques was an old prospector, and knew ore. He searched for the treasure with Monahan.

Then one day he had come exultantly and had shown the old man where the gold lay, and had drawn a map of the vein. All Monahan could remember was that there was a river in the map, and an island and a dotted line marked "gold."

That afternoon they had been very happy, and had drunk much whisky in celebration. Then toward night came three hunters and sought shelter in Monahan's cabin. They, too, had drunk of the whisky. Montaine, in drunken

boastfulness, had shown them the map, and told them of the gold.

The strangers left his cabin the next morning, and Monahan never saw them again. In the afternoon of the same day, Montaine went fishing in his canoe alone. He never returned, and was never heard of again. He had the map of the gold vein with him when he disappeared.

Monahan's head had felt queer for a long time, ever since Kathleen, his wife, died, and after Montaine went it grew worse. He could not remember where the gold was, and was never able to find it.

All this I was able to piece together from what the old man said. In the three men of whom he spoke I easily recognized Tompkins, Townsend, and Montague. I could guess why Jacques Montaine never returned from that fishing-trip.

But now the old man returned to his original suggestion of rewarding me for coming to his aid. His story had been told to convince me of the value of his farm. Now he proposed that I buy the land, paying him only enough to insure him a decent burial. Otherwise, he said it would go to the crown, "that needed no more goold than it had already sthole from green Ireland."

When I seemed to hesitate at accepting his offer, he grew frantic, and to quiet him I agreed. There might be something in the old man's belief in the gold vein. The Great Northern Development Company and its parasites certainly believed in it.

The one-hundred-dollar bill sent to me by my unknown "sister" would place me in possession of what might be a fortune. So I agreed to hurry back to Montrelle, get a doctor and a notary public, and return immediately. The old man had revived considerably, and seemed in no immediate danger.

As I arose to go, Monahan asked:

"An' do ye belong to the parthy that jist wint by?"

"No," I said, "I was chasing them, but they beat me to the carry, so I gave it up. I wanted very much to get to the lower island before they did."

The old man rose on one elbow, excitedly.

"Ye kin catch thim yet," he said. "I know a thing or two, that's a secret to all but Mike Monahan these thirty years."

I thought the old fellow was wandering again, and strove to quiet him.

"How long have they been by?" he demanded.

"Three-quarters of an hour," I said, consulting my watch.

"It's easy," he cried, again on one elbow and gesticulating wildly with the other hand. "Paddle to the carry, sink yer canoe in the shallow wather at the right of the path by the flat rock, an' go down with it. Crawl under the flat rock, an' ye'll find yerself in the bowels of the earth. Through them ye kin go, in tin minutes, under the mountain, and come out beyant the rapids in smooth wather."

Not wishing to arouse the old man again, I pretended to believe his rambling directions, and said I would follow them immediately.

"Crazy as a loon," I thought as I went back to my canoe, intending to hide in the woods till Tompkins and his rescue party should pass, then hustle for Montrelle.

But curiosity to see just what had given the old man his idea about the "bowels of the earth" got the better of me, and I paddled around the bend toward the carry.

CHAPTER VI.

A GREAT DISCOVERY AND A BATTLE.

THE making of the carry required some skill. I had been over it twice, however—the first time with Townsend, and now I had little trouble.

Running down with the current about a dozen rods till it seemed that my canoe must be caught in the jagged whirl, now plainly visible, I suddenly bore to the left, and with a few short, sharp strokes brought the canoe alongside the flat rock that shelved out from the shore.

At the left of this a steep path led up the rocks. On either side was a high, overhanging wall of trap.

The peculiarity of the formation here had attracted my practised eye the first

time I saw it. I have called it a formation. It was rather a malformation. I have seen nothing like it before or since.

It was the remnant of a huge dike, caused by the splitting of the earth's crust in the early ages and the flowing of molten matter through the crevasses. Then the limestone, which once overlay the surrounding country, eroded away, leaving the hard trap-rock towering in a small mountain, perhaps three hundred feet high. It was over a mile across.

But the peculiar thing about it was that, in some unaccountable fashion, the molten rock, in overflowing, had mixed up in its mass huge chunks and streaks of the softer limestone. I could see this softer rock outcropping in several places on the surface of the trap, and it suggested to me, now, the possibility that there might be some foundation to old Monahan's idea about going through "the bowels of the earth."

It was the presence of this soluble limestone that had enabled the river to cut that deep gorge, and a streak of it under the dike mountain might make possible a subterranean passage.

This thought occurred to me as I reached the flat rock, and lent a new spirit to my curiosity. I squatted in the canoe bottom, and holding to the edge of the rock, I put my face close to the water and peered into its depths.

Sure enough, the rock, instead of descending straight to the bottom of the river, went down only about two feet and then suddenly retreated like a huge shelf. The bottom, at this point, seemed to be only about three feet below the shelf.

I decided to try old Monahan's directions. Stepping overboard by the rock, I found myself in water to my shoulders. I reached under the shelf of rock, first with my arm, then with my paddle, but found no back to the cavern that seemed to be there.

Then I carefully sunk the canoe, and, turning it end-on toward the shore, shoved it under the rock shelf. It went the whole length without touching anything.

Next, I drew a long breath and ducked under the rock myself. Moving along about half the length of the canoe, I felt the rock roof suddenly rise above water, and I stood upright. I opened my eyes and saw, far ahead of me, a dim light.

In a moment my sight became accustomed to the dimness. I was standing in a pool, a rod across, that escaped in a narrow stream on the side opposite me. The pool and stream lay in the bottom of a long, narrow fissure that was closed at the top, excepting at narrow chinks, here and there, which admitted a streak of daylight.

Old Monahan had told the truth, so far. In all probability the rest was true. The fissure probably extended across the dike, and the stream had worn a passage through the limestone for the whole distance.

Hauling my canoe to the surface of the pool, I got in and paddled boldly down the stream. It was shallow and swift, but devoid of rocks, as far as I could see in the half light. Anyhow, I took a chance.

In ten minutes, as I should judge, I glided into a broad pool with a low roof of rock, in the far side of which was a whirl where my stream disappeared.

I paused, puzzled. Was I imprisoned? I looked behind me, and decided that it would be easy enough to wade back in the shallow, swift stream and drag the canoe. But there must be a way to get out at this end.

I paddled over to the whirling eddy, and, steadying the canoe with one hand against the roof, sounded the depth with my paddle. I struck bottom at four feet. Then I reached forward and found the current passed under the rock about two feet below the surface.

The outlet was probably like the inlet where I had entered.

So again I sank the canoe and shoved it under the shelving rock. I followed myself, and three feet from where the shelf began I stood upright in the open air.

I was at the shore of the river, in a shallow cove some fifty rods below the lower end of the carry.

I wasted no time in wonderment. Hauling out the canoe and putting it afloat, I got aboard, and, after mark-

ing the spot with my eye, I paddled swiftly into the river. As I struck midstream I looked back, and saw the party I had been pursuing just starting away from the carry.

There was no time to lose. I bent every muscle to the paddle, and in a few minutes saw that I was not only holding my own, but slowly gaining on Montague's party.

They did not seem to regard my presence in the river ahead as significant, for, although they were paddling swiftly as before, there was no sign of extra effort, and I had received no hail.

Just as I was congratulating myself, however, that I was to be allowed to fulfil my mission undisturbed, there came a hallo from behind me. Pausing for a second and looking over my shoulder, I saw the occupants of the strange canoes waving their arms toward me.

Again came the hallo. I could just make out that the men in the foremost canoe were Montague and his companion.

Instead of obeying the evident command to halt, however, I redoubled my efforts at the paddle. In a moment I looked back again, and saw that the pursuing canoes had struck a surprising speed, which made my own strenuous efforts appear futile. I could see the distance between us growing rapidly less.

Then I swung around the last bend and perceived the island ahead of me, a scant half-mile away. At the same time I heard a shot. A bullet sang over my head.

Could I make the island before I was hit or overtaken? The bend would shelter me for only a few minutes. I dared not look back again. Not a stroke of the paddle could be spared.

In almost no time, it seemed, I again heard a shot. Then there came a fusillade. There was the zing of a bullet over my head. Then another at my left ear. A small storm of them sang a death-song none too far to the right.

They splashed into the water all about me. Another volley. This time the shots were nearer. One splintered the gunwale at the bow of my canoe. I was in an agony of terror.

On I dashed, half a dozen times nearly overturning by my spasmodic thrusts of the paddle. Again and again came the shots and wild yells of my pursuers, who were drawing steadily nearer, and, consequently, shooting closer to the mark.

One bullet pierced my hat-brim. Another scratched my shoulder.

I was nearing the island now. There was no one in sight. Would my race be in vain, even if I reached the island in safety? I couldn't hold it alone.

Just as I made up my mind to throw up my paddle and surrender, a man whom I recognized as one of Townsend's guides came from one of the tents on the island, rubbing his eyes as though just awakened.

He took in the situation at a glance. Diving back into the tent, he returned with a rifle, and, throwing himself behind a boulder, began blazing past me at my pursuers.

The firing behind me ceased. The men on the island, with the keen eyes of woodsmen, had recognized me just in time. With a big feeling of relief, I paddled on.

A moment later, Townsend and his other guide appeared on the shore, where I now saw a canoe lying.

"It's Montague!" I yelled, and then, overcome by fatigue and fright, I toppled over in the canoe bottom, and things went black.

Next thing I seemed to be coming out of a dream. My first thought was that it had all been a nightmare.

I realized that I was lying on a cot in a tent. But again there came that sound of firing, now right at my tent door, now off in the distance. Then I realized my position.

I had been taken in a faint from my canoe by Townsend's men and placed in one of their tents. They were now in a pitched battle with Montague and his followers. Despite my dizziness, I staggered from the cot, grabbed a rifle that stood in the corner, and looked out.

Townsend and one guide were on their stomachs behind a log at the upper side of the island. The other guide was in a similar position at the other end of the little strip of rock.

They were firing continuously. The enemy was evidently holding a winning

hand at that game. Part of their canoes were spread out above the island, and the occupants, lying low, were sweeping us with their fire.

The rest of the party had disembarked, and while some had commanding positions on the shore behind trees, others had taken their canoes through the shelter of the woods, and again embarked below us, thus cutting us off on all sides.

Under cover of a sharp fire, the canoes were closing in on the island. Evidently they feared we might have reenforcements soon and wanted to capture our fortress first.

I took all this in at a glance; then, amid a rain of bullets, threw myself beside the guide at the lower end of the island. There was blood flowing from an ugly gash in his scalp.

"I'm pretty near all in," he whispered. "Townsend got one in the shoulder, too. Those cutthroats had just as soon murder us as not."

It was pretty evident that they would soon have a chance. While my companion was talking, a canoe put out from the shore at either side, and those above and below began to close in. With a wild shout the enemy stormed the island.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM DESPAIR TO DELIGHT.

I FIRED pointblank at the nearest canoe, which was working up-stream only a few yards away. The man at the paddle gave a yell and fell limp.

I had never shot a man before. As I saw the woodsman topple over it gave me an indescribable feeling of sickness. Another picked up the stricken one's paddle and the canoe came on.

I was so unnerved that my next shots were wild. A cry at the right told me that my companion had struck home.

Nevertheless, the horde of half-wild men came on unchecked. They would be on the island in a moment, making an end of us. A strong desire seized me to stand up and be shot rather than lie there and be clubbed to death.

At that dark moment of despair I heard a cheer up the river that sent my blood pulsing anew with hope. Nor was the cheering far off.

In our preoccupation none of us had seen Tompkins and his men swing around the bend above. They were now almost upon us. Then came a volley of shots, and the canoes at the side and upper end of the island were raked by the fire of our rescuers.

At that moment those below rushed us. My companion and I jumped to our feet, and were joined by Townsend and his men in a hand-to-hand battle of clubbing rifles with the landing party.

There were seven of them still unwounded, but so desperately did we four meet them that three of their number were soon laid low, and the other four — badly battered — sought their canoes again.

Meanwhile, two landing-parties of Tompkins's men were engaging the foe ambushed in the woods on either side of the river, and Tompkins himself, with four canoes, fought those remaining on the water.

For half an hour the battle raged. Now Montague's forces would get the upper hand and attempt another landing on the island. Each time we met them firmly at the shore, and Tompkins, rallying his canoemen, would attack and repulse the enemy.

Then night fell. Making a last sally, Tompkins and his canoes swept past the shattered enemy and landed on the island. Those on shore joined us, and Montague's men took to the woods.

We at once began throwing up temporary breastworks. There were several boulders useful for the purpose, and some logs that Townsend had brought over to build a cabin.

Now and then a bullet from the woods flew over our heads, but it was too dark for careful aim. Those of us on guard always replied with interest in the direction of the shots to discourage any meditated attacks.

Tompkins had brought two of his men ashore, dead, and three others badly wounded. Three were missing in the woods. On the island were one dead foe and four badly hurt. How many more we had sent on the long journey we could not tell.

At length our little fortress was completed. A cold bite was passed around, and then those of us not on watch

stretched out for such sleep as we could get.

The scratch on my shoulder, received that afternoon when I was first fired on, pained me a little. I still suffered a bit, too, from giddiness; but I was so completely exhausted that hardly had I rolled into my blanket when I was lost in sleep.

It seemed as though I had tossed in a wild dream for hours, when I came to sufficiently to realize that bedlam reigned around. Everywhere seemed to be yells and rifle-shots.

Men were stumbling, cursing, from their blankets all around me. Montague had made a sudden night attack. Fortunately, the sentinel had given the alarm in time for us to get our guns; but as it was, when we faced the shore we could see the dim forms of the foe clambering over our breastworks.

It was a short, sharp fight, mostly hand-to-hand. The difficulty of telling friend from foe made it all the more hazardous. In a few minutes, though, our eyes became accustomed to the starlight; and drawing together in the center of the island, we gave such a good account of our repeaters that after a few volleys the invaders broke with scattering yells and fled.

Dawn was now beginning to break. In the growing light we found seven men dead or dying, mostly those of the enemy. Hardly a man of us but what had some hurt, however.

At one end of the island, hands gripping each other's throat, lay Montague and Tompkins, the former dead with a bullet-hole in his temple, the latter still breathing but unconscious, with a bad gunshot wound in the chest.

We must get a doctor immediately. There was none nearer than Montrelle, and it would take two days of swift paddling to get him from there.

I told Townsend I would start for a doctor at once. I had my own reasons for going myself. I must get a doctor and a notary to Monahan's farm as soon as possible. Luckily, my plan fell in with Townsend's ideas.

I started just as the sun arose. The enemy had disappeared completely. It was hoped that the loss of their chief had broken up the expedition; nevertheless, arrangements were made for the most careful guarding of the camp.

A little later in the forenoon a detachment would start for the other island to prevent the remainder of Montague's men from wreaking vengeance there.

I braced myself for the trip with a strong cup of coffee and a good breakfast, and felt fairly fit, in spite of the wearing excitement of the day before, followed by little enough sleep. My plan was to paddle steadily all day, and with my light canoe and the subterranean short cut at Granite Rapids, I hoped to reach Montrelle late that night.

The morning was cool and cloudy, with a light breeze at my back, and the day bade fair to be less oppressive than the preceding one. My stiffness wore off in the first half mile. Everything was in favor of a good run.

I scanned the banks anxiously as I paddled along, fearing that at any moment I might be shot by one of Montague's lurking gang. All went well, however, till just before reaching the bend below Granite Rapids.

Then a shot rang out from the woods on the right bank. I heard the bullet near me. Another shot, and there was a splash in the water ominously near my bows.

I bent low and paddled swiftly for the bend. In a moment I rounded it, and unless there were foes ahead I was safe.

Just as I passed the bend, however, there was another report from behind, and a canoe pushing out from the shore started in pursuit.

Never before was I so thankful for anything as for my knowledge of the subterranean passage. It was only a dozen rods away. Could I reach it in time?

In a moment I was at the flat rock over the mouth of the underground stream. I nearly capsized the canoe in my breathless excitement.

Barely did I get the canoe under the rock and duck down myself when, turning cautiously with only my head down to my eyes out of water, I saw the pursuing canoe round the bend. I felt confident that they would not observe me at that distance, and was held by curiosity to see what they would do.

There were two men in the canoe. They paddled perhaps three rods past the bend, then stopped and looked bewildered. They scanned the perpendicular cliffs beside them as though they thought I might have scaled them like a fly on a window-pane.

They looked ahead to the carry where I would have still been in plain sight had it been possible to get that far before they rounded the bend. I nearly laughed aloud at their bewilderment. Finally, as they paddled close to the shore, evidently thinking there might be some unobserved foothold on the cliff, I ducked under the rock, not wishing to take any chances.

This time I had determined to look the cavern over more carefully. Accordingly, before I started that morning I had cut two dry pine knots for torches.

Fastening these and my matches in the canoe bottom, I had turned the craft over, making a kind of diving-bell of it, and had shoved it into the cavern under water without wetting the contents.

Now I lighted one of the torches, and paddled across the pool to the mouth of the shallow stream. With the painter in my hand, I started to wade ahead and drag the canoe up the current, which was too swift for paddling.

Hardly a dozen steps from the mouth of the stream a glitter in the water met my eye. I picked up a shiny yellow pebble. A little farther along was another.

Breathlessly I examined the walls with my torch. On both sides was the peculiar quartz rock I knew so well from the specimens in Lehigh museum. I stumbled on excitedly for twenty yards. Still that quartz, with here and there a glitter on the surface.

Standing in water to my knees, I filled out my chest and gave a loud whoop of delight that in the confinement of the cavern nearly burst my ear-drums.

I, Paul Belden, had found the lost gold vein, and on the land I had agreed to buy.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLICATIONS IMPENDING.

Gold! Gold! Gold everywhere, and mine!

I stood there and gloated for many precious minutes.

Then came a disconcerting thought. It was not yet mine, and perhaps old Monahan would die before I could get a witness to the transfer. I started for the end of the cavern in a panic.

Then came another thought.

My tender New England conscience rebelled for a moment against buying for one hundred dollars what I knew was perhaps worth millions. It was only for a moment, though. I cannot to this day blame myself for the part I played.

The old man had no heirs. He had offered me the place at that price of his own free will. The money I would pay him was all he would ever need or desire on this earth. Moreover, when he offered me the land at that low figure, he believed as firmly in its real value as I did now, standing as I did in the midst of the lost gold vein.

Then there was the comforting thought that my original purpose in buying the land was the unselfish one of comforting a dying man and assuring him a Christian burial. Had the old man's mind been unclouded, he would undoubtedly have long ago discovered the vein in the underground passage.

Perhaps, though, he had not been in the cavern since that far-off day when his partner and the map disappeared. His directions that led me to find the passage might have been due to one of those flashes of recurrent memory common to a clouded brain.

Anyhow, I was convinced that I was right in taking the farm. Moreover, I could see no reason for confusing a dying man now by telling him that I had found the vein he had lost so many years ago.

Having settled this delicate point, I hurried out of the cavern and was soon at Monahan's cabin.

I found him resting comfortably, and though noticeably weaker, he did not seem to be in immediate danger of death. I prepared some tea and toast for him as well as I could.

He ate a little, but seemed to have no appetite. I arranged some more food at his bedside, a little canned fruit, and cold toast, in case he felt a desire to eat while I was gone.

He remembered that I had promised to

buy his farm, seemed to be able to think of nothing else, but apparently he had forgotten all about the hidden passage.

I was about to enter my canoe again when there came down the river the half-breed letter-carrier and messenger who made trips from Montrelle twice a week. He had stopped at our camp and, learning that the main party was at Townsend's island, had brought our mail on down with him.

As he paddled ashore in response to my hail, pulling some letters from his bag, I had an idea.

I would clinch the bargain with Monahan at once, now that I had a witness. I could draw up a written agreement of transfer, we could all sign it and I would then give the old man half of his money. That would accomplish the double purpose of setting his mind at rest, thus preventing his selling to some one else, and at the same time give me what I felt might be a legal hold in case Monahan died before I could get back with a notary.

It took only about twenty minutes to carry out this plan, and I could see that the sick man was visibly relieved at getting his hands on the money.

As I turned back to the canoe again I recalled the letters the carrier had given me. I had been too much occupied to think of them before.

There were two of them. One was from home. The other address, I saw at a glance, was in the delicate writing of my unknown "sister."

I sat down on a log at the river bank and eagerly tore open the envelope, not, I am ashamed to say, of my mother's epistle, but of that written by the little unknown girl about whom I felt so much curiosity and, young sentimentalist that I was, a little touch of something else.

Imagine my surprise when I read this letter:

MY DEAR BROTHER:

You will be astonished to know that you are threatened with a visit from your little sister right out there in the wild woods, but I can't stand this suspense any longer. I am sure something dreadful has happened or you would write.

You know how mama and I worry. She will not write, because she says we must trust papa to do the right thing, and besides, I guess she thinks he is right when he says you are just obstinate. Papa gets crosser every day when your name is mentioned. But I believe in you yet, dear (I almost mentioned your name, but I mustn't).

Now I'm writing soon enough so you'll still have a chance to let me know if you are all right and if there is any reason why I could not get to you for a day or two. I'm going to make the folks think I'm visiting Sallie. I'll tell them when I get back. If I don't hear from you by next Thursday, I'll start for Montrelle.

I got a Grand Trunk time-table and planned it all out. I will arrive in Montrelle Saturday afternoon on a train due there at six o'clock. If you are well, you'll meet me there. I'm sure. If you are not there, or some message from you, I'll get a guide and hunt you up the next day.

Now I do hope nothing has happened and that you are just obstinate, as papa thinks, because I can cure you of that when I see you. Good-by now.

Your loving sister, FLO.

This was Friday. My "sister's" letter had evidently been delayed. She was due in Montrelle the next day.

Was it only a threat or would she make good? At last I might be on the threshold of solving the mystery. Better than that, I was to see the Florence who was so devoted to her brother and wrote such nice letters that she could not behave very badly to a total stranger, even if he had read those nice letters and spent her good money buying farms from crazy Irishmen.

Then suddenly a terrible thought came over me. It was a solution of the mystery of the "sister" so simple and obvious that I was dumfounded that I had not thought of it before.

One of the young engineers of the party must be the real brother of Florence!

It was probably Daniels. A carroty-headed snob whom I didn't like, anyway. No one else seemed to fit the part.

Tompkins, in distributing false names—the reason for that I didn't attempt to explain—had given me the one meant for another man. I had consequently received his mail and his money and was about to pass myself off for a brother to his sister.

I, of course, should have thought of

that before, when the first letter came, in fact, and hunted up the man for whom it and my false name were intended. That move, too, would have cleared up the rest of the mystery as to my employment, no doubt, and saved Townsend all those futile attempts to take my life.

Of course both the girl and her brother would be furious when they found out what I'd done. Such idiocy wasn't easily explained. Then my New England conscience got busy again and told me that I would be in duty bound to turn over Monahan's farm to the girl. Besides, I saw an end to all those glittering chances of romance.

Mechanically, I read my mother's letter, all the while trying to figure out what could be said to the other fellow's sister by way of explanation.

My letter finished, I looked at my watch and saw that I had lost an hour's time. I could not afford to dally longer.

With a heavy and troubled heart, I picked up my paddle and fell to working feverishly to make up for lost time.

I would not know the girl by sight if I should meet her at the train. She would not know me. How was I to tell who she was? Having done so, how was I to make her understand who I was?

What would she think of my story? Would she summon the Montrelle constable when I accosted her, or merely stick a hat-pin in my eye?

These were some of the perplexities that thronged my brain as hour after hour the dreaded end of my journey drew nearer.

CHAPTER IX.

REBUFF AND SHIPWRECK.

THE dreaded evening train on which I expected the fair mystery to arrive was just pulling into the station at Montrelle. Nervously I inspected the coach-windows as the train came to a halt.

I had reached the village at midnight the night before, and that morning had found the town's only doctor, who, as good luck would have it, was also a notary. With a guide and attendant, he had been despatched post-haste to the aid of Tompkins, with instructions to attend to Monahan on the way.

The rest of the day was spent getting myself store-clothes and a much-needed barbering and in making myself as presentable as possible.

For the last hour I had been pacing that station-platform, drawing mental pictures of the girl I hoped, yet dreaded, to meet. She certainly was a beauty, my dream-maiden. I was just putting the finishing mental touches on her costume when the train's whistle warned me of the approach of the reality.

The train stopped. A family of summer cottagers alighted from one car, two unattractive women came from another, a commercial traveler from a third. The smoker debouched two woodsmen, three Indians, and a squaw, all unpleasantly intoxicated.

The train departed.

There was no sign of the dream-maiden.

I stood watching the vanishing tail-lights with one of those mixed feelings of relief and disappointment, such as I understand a fellow has when, after screwing his courage up to the point of proposing to the only girl, he calls and finds her kid brother has the measles and the house is quarantined.

At last I turned to leave the station. The incoming passengers had taken their baggage and departed, all but one, the younger of the two unattractive women. She stood at the back of the platform near a large suit-case. She appeared to be waiting for some one.

She had her veil turned back now, and didn't look quite as old and unattractive as before. Could it be she? No. Everything about this woman was the exact opposite of my dream-maiden.

She, the real girl, was short and slight, instead of "tall and queenly." Her plain brown hair didn't match up "golden tresses" by a long shot. Her tiny nose, far from being Grecian, had a slight upward tilt that suggested rather the Hibernian, and even in the gathering gloom I could distinguish divers and sundry spots known commonly as freckles.

Her face was pale and travel-worn, giving her a look of age that might be deceptive.

Even as I hesitatingly took this inventory, she suddenly turned my way, then came over to where I stood.

"Pardon me — but — but — you—you don't know John Vincent, do you?" she asked. "Did he send you to meet any one for him?"

I got a decided jolt. The voice was the "low, silvery" one I had given the dream-maiden, and the eyes! Well, the eyes were orthodox, too, as far as I had been able to imagine them.

Only, the real ones were so much more so—I accepted the actuality at once in preference.

I stood foolishly speechless, staring into those wonderful blue depths. My gaze was met by a puzzled smile. I at once subtracted ten years from my first estimate of the lady's age.

Then I came to and began to talk. That is, I opened my mouth, hastily inserted both feet therein and kicked them about, saying everything in a breath that I had planned not to say, and leaving unsaid all my fine diplomatic words of approach to a disagreeable subject.

In one jumbled sentence I told her that I was John Vincent, that I knew John Vincent very well, that I didn't know who John Vincent was, but that I had read her letters to him, and that it was all right; that I was sure of only one thing, anyhow, and that was that I was not John Vincent, and that I didn't know who the deuce I was, anyhow.

The lady gave a startled little squeal, picked up her suit-case, and fled to the waiting-room.

I stood in the gloaming, pondering helplessly and breathing deep, fervent north woods oaths.

At length, with a new inspiration, I plucked up courage, and, taking from my pocket, as a means of identifying myself, the two letters I had received that day, I went into the station. The lady was interviewing a perplexed agent.

"Pardon me," I said, stepping up to them. "There has been a little mistake. I can explain, I think. I was embarrassed over the blunder, and alarmed this lady, I fear. I was sent by her brother to meet her, and didn't have a very good description, and when she spoke to me I thought she was some one else."

That seemed a good way of approach. I could explain the slight departure from the truth after I obtained an audience.

"If you will let me see you alone a moment," I ventured, turning to her, "I can explain it all. I have here some letters to identify myself."

Doubtfully she acquiesced, but when I indicated the benches at the far end of the room she started for the door, saying:

"It's pleasanter out here. We mustn't be overheard or watched," she explained when I joined her on the platform. Then, seeing several persons outside awaiting the down train, she added: "We can't stand here, either. We mustn't be noticed. We've already aroused the curiosity of that station-agent. Oh, dear! To be seen wandering around the streets would be worse yet. What can we do? I don't know you, and we must be sure of not being overheard when you explain—if you can explain," she finished doubtfully.

"I beg your pardon," she went on quickly, "but this thing is all so strange, and I'm only a girl and—and all alone."

I wasn't thinking any more about the dream-maiden now. I was feeling very sorry for a slender, travel-weary girl, with a delightful little nose ever so slightly tilted, and—and—yes—sun-kissed, whose brown hair seemed just exactly the color it ought to be. Also, I was removing five more years from her age.

"Just a moment, please!" I exclaimed with sudden determination.

I got her suit-case from the waiting-room, and, joining her again, said in a most matter-of-fact tone: "Right this way, please."

She followed me wonderingly down the short path to the pier where my canoe lay. I had her suit-case in the canoe, and had turned to help her in, when she stopped short.

"But I'm not going in that canoe with you till I know who you are," she said, drawing back.

"We are being watched," I replied, looking toward the station-platform. "Get in the canoe, please, and they will simply think we belong in one of the camps about this end of the lake. We can paddle about just out of earshot, where I can explain all in perfect safety. If it's not perfectly satisfactory, or I seem about to kidnap you, there are plenty of canoeists around on the lake to whom you can call for help."

I thought I was entitled to a little sarcasm, but she did not deign to notice it. Hesitating only a moment longer, she reluctantly placed an almost ridiculously small hand in mine for an instant and stepped into the canoe.

Intoxicated as I was by the touch of her hand, I was able to observe that my passenger seemed accustomed to a canoe, and that the water itself did not contribute in the least to her fear.

Silently I paddled out from the pier.

"Well?" said the girl, looking at me expectantly when we were a dozen rods away.

Laying the paddle across the gunwales, I drew a deep breath and began.

I had decided to trust her implicitly. Whatever the reasons for concealing my real name, I felt there could be no harm in telling her the exact truth.

So, beginning with my graduation from Lehigh, I gave her the whole bewildering story, not omitting the attacks on my life or the discovery and purchase of the real gold vein, which I assured her belonged to her and her brother by rights and would be duly turned over to them.

I ended with my lately formed theory that her brother was in camp with us, but that our assumed names had become confused.

If I had expected her to be won at once by my tale, I would have been greatly disappointed. I was confronted as I proceeded by a face that grew steadily more icy.

"I think you had better take me back to the village at once," she said with decision when I had finished.

"But," I interposed, "am I to understand that you do not believe me? Won't you stay at the hotel in Montrelle for a day or two while I go back to our camp for your brother? I'll start to-night."

"What is this man like who you think is my brother?" she asked.

"He is short, slight, and light-complexioned, with blue eyes and reddish hair," I replied.

The face before me grew more icy, but the blue eyes were blazing with indignation.

"My brother is six feet tall, and dark-complexioned," she said.

My theory exploded. Strange to say, I was glad. I was more relieved still at the thought that not a man in camp answered her description of her brother.

Townsend, who was tall and dark, to be sure, was debarred from consideration by his age and other circumstances.

"Besides," my companion went on scornfully, "at the time you say Mr. Deming employed you so strangely, we have it from Mr. Deming himself that my brother called and was duly hired. It is true my father furnished the money for this expedition, as you've found out in some way, though, thanks to our caution and this false-name arrangement, I trust you don't know who my father is.

"My brother had never shown any signs of settling down and attending to business, as papa wanted him to do, and papa thought if he had to rough it for a while it would be good for him. At the same time he wanted some one here to watch his interests. If it became known in Wall Street that my father was backing Mr. Deming, his associates would at once suspect there was something more than lumber here, and others would come here to prospect, too.

"Besides, Mr. Deming doesn't stand very well, and some people might lose confidence in father. I am afraid you are a spy for some one who is trying to find out about this business—some one who has learned a little of the truth. You intercepted my brother's mail, and thought by this rather clumsy story to learn more from me."

She broke off suddenly, and the expression of cold suspicion changed to one of alarm and pleading.

"Oh!" she cried. "I hadn't thought of it before, but you people know why my brother has not written home. Where is he? What have you done with him? Oh, tell me, please!"

The little form leaned forward for a moment in pleading, then shrank back in the canoe and shook with sobs.

I would have given several gold-mines to be able to produce that brother from one of my pockets just then. But I couldn't, so I just knelt there, looking foolish.

At this crisis the restless spirit of Little Moose Lake intervened in a most unpleasant manner. It is one of those bits of water so common in hill countries where

a squall of great fury is likely to arrive at any time without notice, and sometimes apparently from all directions at once.

In our preoccupation, we had not noticed the storm-clouds that had crept up over the village with the evening shadows. Neither had we observed how far down the lake we had drifted.

Our first warning came when I felt a puff of wind at my back and heard a distant rumble of thunder. I looked around, to see the lights of the village, now probably over a mile away, disappearing in the blackness of the storm.

In a few seconds it struck us, accompanied by sheets of driving rain and darkness like a blanket, broken by blinding flashes of lightning. The water flattened under the first blow of the wind, then with a roar began to boil like the gorge at Niagara. Our canoe, bobbing like a cork, was being blown rapidly down the lake.

I could just make out my companion opposite me clinging to the gunwales, pluckily quiet.

"She's a thoroughbred," I told myself.

I could do nothing but keep the canoe headed into the waves. Any attempt to make progress was useless, even if I could have seen where we were going.

With each plunge the tiny craft shipped more water. The wind seemed to grow steadily stronger. The rain fell in torrents.

It might have been for fifteen minutes I struggled with the storm. It seemed as many hours. Finally, my strained arms began to lose the battle. Each wave forced our bow farther around.

At length we rose on a crest, swung broadside to it and toppled over. I heard a little gurgling cry from my companion as she struck the water; then no sound but the turmoil of the black waters in which I struggled.

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE RESCUE.

NEVER shall I forget my emotions as I battled hopelessly with death in the darkness. My clothing, light as it was, proved too heavy a handicap against those mad waves, and I felt my breath and strength fast going.

But let me do myself the justice to say that my own peril troubled me less than the thought of my companion's fate. Had she sunk forever after that one little cry? Or was she able to swim, and was she even now struggling near me?

I cried out with my little remaining strength. The roar of mocking waves was my only answer. Then, as I fought frantically to keep on the surface a little longer, my hand suddenly struck something. I heard a faint, gasping cry, and another hand caught mine for a moment.

The girl was still alive!

Then the hand left mine, and I heard her say, "Don't—touch—me! I—can swim—save yourself!"

Feeling blindly about, I caught her arm. She struggled feebly to free herself.

"Don't—try—to—" The brave protest ended in a choking cough.

The thought of her need gave me a new and desperate strength. Treading water, I turned her on her back, and as I did so her struggles ceased altogether.

Grasping the collar of her jacket with one hand and swimming on my back, I toiled on in unreasoning desperation, not knowing whether land was near or far, before or behind me.

The fight lasted only a short time. Then overtaxed muscles gave out completely, and we sank together.

Sank! A fervent "Praise God!" burst from my lips. My feet had touched bottom. A guiding Providence had directed my last efforts to shoal water.

Then my spirits fell again at the thought that it might be merely a lone sand-bar far from land.

Cautiously feeling my way, I found to my joy that the bottom sloped upward. I was soon in water only breast high, where I dared to stop and rest for a moment.

My burden hung limply in my arms. I thought at that moment that if this struggle to save her life should prove to have been in vain. I would throw myself back again into the lake that had robbed me of her.

At length I staggered through the surf and fell exhausted on the sand.

For only an instant I gave myself up

to overmastering fatigue. Then rising, I felt my companion's wrist and found to my joy that there was still a faint flutter of pulse.

I knew the rules for first aid to the drowning and applied them, handicapped as I was by the darkness, my only aid an occasional flash of lightning.

At length I heard her sigh, and in one of those instants of illumination saw her eyes flutter open. Seeing me bending over her, she tried in vain to rise, then sank back and whispered: "Where am I?"

I told her briefly, and she was silent again for a few moments.

Then I heard her trying once more to move. In the next lightning-flash I saw her on one elbow, eying me intently.

"You saved my life," she said simply.

"I—I think the Lord saved us both," I replied.

In a few minutes another flash showed her sitting up.

"I think I can walk now, if you will help me," she said. "We can't stay here. I am sorry to cause you so much trouble."

Anything I might have said would have sounded foolish just then. I said nothing.

Steadying her faltering steps, I led her back from the beach. A few rods from the shore, we saw by lightning-light a sloping, thickly wooded bluff. The wind was still blowing fiercely and had turned cold. The rain had settled to a steady pour.

We had evidently struck a deserted shore under most unfavorable circumstances.

All this time not a word of complaint from the girl.

In a moment we had scrambled up the slope to the shelter of the woods. There, after a while, another distant flash of lightning showed a few feet away a low log shanty, such as lumbermen use.

Feeling our way to it, I pounded on the door. No answer. I tried the latch. The door yielded to my touch and I entered. Another flash revealed, through a broken window, a bare room, furnished only with a low, rough board bin at one end, filled with dry leaves, a typical woodsman's bedstead.

I kicked the leaves over, inspecting them in the intermittent light to make sure there were no snakes or other unpleasant animals lurking in them, then returned to my shivering companion.

"Go in there, please," I said, "while I hunt around a little and see where we are. You'd better sleep a bit if you can. I won't be out of call if anything happens."

She hesitated a moment.

"It seems a shame," she said, "to leave you out in the rain, but—I'm so worn out and ill from that ducking that I could not be of any use if I stayed out and helped you watch. Good night."

She entered the cabin. I listened a moment.

"You must close the door," I said, "and keep the wind out. Call me if anything frightens you."

"I'm not afraid," was her response.

"Dear little woman," I thought. "Brave as a trooper and innocent as a baby."

A cautious exploration convinced me of the truth of my fears. There was no habitation that we could reach that night.

Taking from my holster, where it still hung, my water-soaked and probably useless revolver, and squatting on the edge of the bluff a couple of rods away from the shack, with the weapon across my knee, I began my long, wet vigil.

Hour after hour dragged away in the incessant rain. I was bitterly cold. My wounded shoulder pained me a good deal. The distant lightning finally ceased and the wind began to die.

Gradually the rain slackened to a drizzle. Despite my anxiety and discomfort, I dozed for minutes at a time. Finally, just as I imagined I saw the first slight melting of the darkness that heralds dawn, I must have fallen fast asleep.

I was awakened suddenly by a light hand on my shoulder.

The girl was standing over me. Her clothing had nearly dried, and there had been a pathetic attempt to smooth it out and to arrange the tangled hair.

Her face was haggard, and the blue eyes were tear-stained. But in their depths was a look of tender remorse.

"You stayed out here all night in that cold rain and kept watch for me," said the owner of the eyes.

"And slept ignominiously at my post," I replied, trying to be merry under difficulties.

At the same time my heart leaped with hope. Was she going to forgive me? Would she perhaps be ready to believe my story now?

"There's nothing too much for me to do for you," I added. "I got you into all this trouble."

She looked at me inscrutably for a moment, then turned away. If I had been forgiven, I was not yet to learn it.

I now proceeded to get our bearings. It was nearly broad daylight. The rain had ceased and the clouds were breaking.

One look showed me we were on Little Moose Island, a wooded rock perhaps half a mile square, three miles from Montrelle, and a mile and a half from the nearest mainland. I had seen it before in my two trips through the lake, but had noticed on it no evidence of habitation.

I was now ravenous with hunger, and feared from the look of quiet suffering on the face of my patient little companion that my discomfort was slight compared with hers. Many hours might elapse before breakfast. It might, in fact, be more than a matter of hours.

I looked over the three miles of water and saw nothing between us and the dim roofs of Montrelle that even suggested coffee and rolls.

"Let's explore around the shore first," I said. "There may be a settler here somewhere."

We had gone half-way around the apparently deserted islet, when, turning a point, I startled my companion by a loud whoop of joy. There was a short pier. To it were moored a rowboat and two canoes.

As we looked, a good-natured appearing, middle-aged man came from the bluff in a homelike way and dipped up a pail of water.

To my relief, he responded in hearty English to my hail.

"Good morning," he shouted in surprise. "Bit early for a young lady and gentleman to be takin' a mornin' walk, bean't it?"

Then a glance at our disheveled appearance and a warning gesture from me checked his broadening grin.

"'Tis plain ye were wrecked in the storm last night," he vouchsafed. "Come from one of the camps? I'll take ye right up to mother, and she'll give the young lady some dry clothes, and you, too, sir, if ye don't mind wearin' an old man's Sunday suit while yours is ironed. I fancy ye ain't 'ad no breakfast yet, either. Well, yer just in time."

We followed up the path, and found a little farm on the bluff. A comfortable log-house stood in the center of the clearing. Through the open door we could see "mother" getting breakfast. She was all homely sympathy at once, and flew about making us comfortable.

"Right in here in my bedroom, my dear," she said to my companion. "Ye'll find some things o' mine that ain't very stylish, but ye can put 'em on while I clean and iron yours. Then we'll have breakfast. Pa, look after the young gentleman."

The girl rose to obey, took a step forward, and fell in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME LIGHT AND MORE MYSTERY.

My next few hours were filled with physical torture as well as anxiety. Every part of my body ached as I drove my canoe steadily forward hour after hour.

When the girl had fainted in the islander's cabin, apparently a complete collapse after the tension of our recent peril had been removed, I at once decided to go for the doctor whom I had sent to the aid of Tompkins. Scarcely waiting for a hasty breakfast, I took my host's lightest canoe and started, forgetting my hunger and the discomfort of my soggy clothing.

The bullet-scratch on my shoulder, relic of the fight down the river, had become infected, and my whole arm was now swollen and inflamed. That night of vigil had also given me a severe cold. I was weak from lack of sleep.

Nevertheless, I made such good time that I passed Granite Rapids at sunset, by way of my gold-mine, and by nine o'clock pulled up the canoe at the lower island, where the wounded Tompkins lay in Townsend's tent. The men were still

keeping watch behind the breastworks, guarding against a possible return of Montague's gang.

As I stepped from the canoe I noticed an awed hush around me, and guessed the cause. I met Townsend at the tent door.

"He's pretty near done for," he whispered. "He's been calling for you all day. Don't take too much stock in the delirium of a dying man," he added darkly.

Nodding to the doctor, who stepped out as I entered, I knelt beside the cot, embarrassed as only a boy can be who has been seldom in the presence of death.

One look into the eyes of the suffering man, despite the dim candle-light, convinced me that whatever pain he felt, his mind was still clear.

Townsend, naturally, did not want me to believe what he feared his fellow conspirator might tell under the spur of death. But for the presence of the doctor and the other members of the party, he doubtless would have prevented this interview. As it was, I felt safe, even from eavesdropping.

Presently the dying man spoke.

"Mr. De Lancey," he whispered, "I've a lot I'm going to tell you."

"De Lancey!" I ejaculated.

The man's mind must, after all, be wandering, I thought. Then it occurred to me that De Lancey might be the name of the man I was inadvertently impersonating.

"Just a moment, Mr. Tompkins," I interposed. "I'll help you some and save your talking. I want to ask you a few questions and tell you a few things I already know. I know a great deal you don't dream I do. I'll surprise you, too, by some of the things I don't know.

"As you understand it, my father, Mr. De Lancey, financed the Great Northern Development Company on condition that his connection be kept secret till this venture was put on a paying basis. Mr. Deming had won him to the scheme by showing him a surveyed map of the region with evidence to show that gold had been found there in a line as indicated and that, though the vein had been temporarily lost, could be easily found again.

"Now, my father thought it a good gamble. Besides, it made an opening for me, his only son, who was inclined to be the good-for-nothing sort. So he stipulated that I be sent to look after his interests and receive a show of authority and responsibility. To preserve secrecy the real purpose of the expedition was concealed even from most of the members of this party. I was given a false name.

"That much I am supposed to know. What I say is true, is it not?"

"Yes! Yes!" gasped the sick man impatiently. "Of course. Don't waste time with what we both know."

So far my knowledge, pieced together from many little things, was correct.

"Now, for what you don't suspect I know," I went on. "In the first place, the certified map you people showed Mr. De Lancey was not the real one, but a slight alteration, so like the real and yet fitting so well another piece of land entirely, that it fooled the careless prospector that Mr. De Lancey no doubt sent here to investigate. It won Mr. De Lancey's support in tying the company to a strip of land outside the one where you believed the gold to be, but so near it that you could search for the vein in the region of the real map, using the land Mr. De Lancey paid for as headquarters and a blind to outsiders.

"Your secret partner, Townsend, was kept searching for the vein on the real ground, with such oversight as you could give without discovery. So Mr. De Lancey was to pay all the expenses of yourself, James Brewster Deming, and Townsend, till you found the gold on outside land. Then you three were personally to buy that land and let the Great Northern Development Company go into bankruptcy and Mr. De Lancey whistle for his money."

The eyes of the dying man were wide in amazement.

"That's true! That's true!" he whispered. "But how did you know? Townsend always said you were no fool."

"Let me tell you more," I went on. "The map, the real one, you, Montague, and Townsend stole from Jacques Montaine and Monahan, who first found the gold. Monahan afterward lost his memory and Montaine went away, you know where, and never returned.

"Monahan's farm, where you thought the vein came to the surface, you couldn't

buy, but you thought you could find the gold north or south of there. First you searched south of the rapids, but found nothing. Then Montague went away after a quarrel with you and Townsend and you thought it was left to you two.

"Meanwhile, though, your money gave out, and you separated to find the wherewithal to pursue your prospecting. You ran onto Deming, who agreed to raise the money from De Lancey, so you sent for Townsend and began work. When you found I was likely to know too much, you plotted to kill me as you did Jacques Montaine, the man who first drew your map."

Tompkins had ceased to appear astonished. He lay passively listening, apparently resigned to my knowing the whole truth. As I paused, he looked at me indifferently and said: "You might as well know. I'm done for anyhow. I've not such a lot of love for Townsend. He can look out for himself. I was going to tell you a little, anyhow, to put you on your guard. You're not a bad sort and—and—things look different when a man's dying."

"Now, listen," I continued, "and I will tell you now what you don't know and what will probably surprise you greatly. I am not Mr. De Lancey's son."

"What?"

Amazement for the moment overcame weakness. The dying man almost shouted as he struggled to rise on one elbow. Then he collapsed again and I feared he was going to faint.

I got him a little whisky from a bottle by the cot, and in a moment he revived and asked:

"What do you mean? Is this a joke on a dying man?"

I then told him the whole story of my strange employment and how I had kept the facts from him till I had learned his secret. The man heard me to the end in helpless astonishment.

"Now," I said in closing, "there are a few things I want to know which you can tell me. Who is Mr. De Lancey, my supposed father?"

"Vincent De Lancey, of New York and Larchmont, the Wall Street broker and promoter."

I recognized the name of a man of whom I had read much in the financial news. He was one of the Fifth Avenue set.

"What is the name of the son whom I have been impersonating?" I asked next.

"Vincent, Jr."

"Has the old man any other children?"

"A younger daughter, Florence, about twenty years old, I should say."

"Did you and Deming ever suspect that I was not young De Lancey?"

"No. And I don't see yet how your story can be true."

"Had Deming ever seen young De Lancey before he supposedly hired him?"

"No."

"Where can young De Lancey be? Have you any idea?"

"Not the slightest. I know from Deming's letters that the boy's family think he is with us."

"Haven't you any possible explanation as to how this strange mistake could have been made? How did it come about, when Deming was expecting young De Lancey at a certain hour, that when I walked in in broad daylight at that hour and presented my own card, he should take me for De Lancey? That part of the mystery is as deep as ever. It makes me believe that, in spite of all my apparent information and what you tell me, there is some big, dark secret back of it all. I beg of you, don't let anything lie on your conscience at this hour."

I searched the eyes of the man before me for some trace of that secret. They told me nothing.

"It's as mysterious to me as it is to you," he answered. "God knows that for once I have told the truth."

His last words trailed into a whisper. He gasped and clutched at the blanket. I called the doctor and hurriedly applied the whisky to his lips again.

The physician stepped to the cot almost instantly, but was too late. The plots and schemes of Amos Tompkins had come to an end forever.

My first thought was of Townsend. I resolved to have it out with him then and there, depending on Dr. Lefevre and our engineers, of whom I now was the acting head, to back me up. I determined, if necessary, to make Townsend a prisoner and take him back to Montrelle.

"Is Mr. Townsend here?" I asked a hushed group around the camp-fire.

"He went over to the other tent about fifteen minutes ago," replied one of the group respectfully.

I looked in the tent. He was not there. Nor did a hasty trip around the little rock reveal him. Inquiries from the few woodsmen still awake brought out nothing.

Then I looked at the canoes drawn up on the flat rock at the lower end of the island. One of them was gone. Moreover, striking a match, I could see the mark still fresh where the canoe had been lying.

Townsend had fled.

CHAPTER XII.

WEALTH AND JAIL.

I COULD not afford to lose a moment.

My first feeling on learning of the escape of Townsend was one of relief. Second thought filled me with apprehension. I could not hope, after all, that a man of his desperate character would let so big a game escape him without taking the very last chance.

His sudden departure might mean one of two or three things. He might simply have hurried away to warn Deming of Tompkins's fate and of his possible death-bed disclosures. He might be lying in wait in the woods to shoot me down when I started away and thus insure the keeping of those disclosures secret.

What filled me with a vague fever of dread and impatience, however, was the fear that Townsend had, in some way, suspected my dealings with Monahan and had started out for the old man's claim with the intention of preventing the consummation of my purchase.

The doctor might have let slip in Townsend's hearing that I had sent him to Monahan and that I had engaged him, the doctor, as notary as well as physician. Townsend also might have been eavesdropping after all outside the tent while I was talking with Tompkins, and hearing me tell about the theft of the map come to the conclusion that I was in league with Monahan.

Hence, I resolved to get the doctor and his two men at once and start for Monahan's cabin, complete the transfer of the property, make the old man comfortable, and then, after an hour or two of much-needed sleep, push on to the relief of Florence De Lancey, my unfortunate companion of the day before, who might even now be seriously ill on the island where I had left her.

The run back to Monahan's was an anxious one. It was bright moonlight, and our canoes would have made an excellent target for the rifles of a lurking foe. Added to that was the fear that the fugitive might already be at our destination, and possibly, by adding one more murder to his list, would render our efforts vain.

I had little faith that my merely written contract with the old man would establish my title to his land against a contestant.

We made the trip without incident, however, reaching the farm at one in the morning. We had to make the carry this time. I had no intention of revealing my rich cross-cut to any one as yet.

Creeping cautiously up to the cabin, we found all quiet, save for the heavy breathing of a sleeping man. We rapped for several minutes, standing beside the door with drawn revolvers to guard against treachery.

Finally I heard old Monahan's feeble "Who's there?"

With a reassuring word, we pushed open the door and entered. Striking a light, we saw that the old man was still about as we had left him, though perhaps a little feebler.

After a brief examination, the doctor turned to me and whispered: "His mind seems to be clearer even than it was the other day; in fact, as often happens in such cases of monomania, he appears entirely sane, now that life is ebbing out. He's just dying by inches from old age and exposure. We'll leave a man here to look out for him and he may live for a week or more yet. Better fix your business up now while he's surely all right."

I explained to Mr. Monahan that I was ready to give him the rest of his money now and take the deed to his farm. The doctor had brought a blank form with him and we proceeded to fill it out

without a hitch. It was signed and duly certified.

I placed the precious document in my blouse with the thought that I now had a means of atonement to Miss De Lancey for the trouble I had caused her, and at the same time of proving to her my sincerity. So deep had become my feeling for her and so thoroughly had I grown accustomed to the idea of giving up the wealth within my grasp that I could hardly restrain my eagerness to get the deed recorded and then transferred to her.

All this time, in the excitement of swiftly moving events, I had forgotten my own physical condition.

Not till we lay down for an hour's nap, with instructions to the watch to call us for a start at dawn, and I had tossed about in a vain attempt to sleep, did I realize that I myself was in need of a doctor's care. My whole side was now swollen and throbbing with pain from the infection in the shoulder.

I lay and suffered in silence, not wishing to disturb the doctor, whose regular breathing showed me that he was getting a little much-needed repose.

Minute by minute, each minute an hour, passed, till at length the watch, coming to rouse us with the first streak of dawn, found me still wide awake. I could no longer stifle my groans, so severe was the pain.

"Doc," I said, "can you examine my shoulder? It's pretty bad, I'm afraid; that little gun-scratch I told you about, you know. I can't stand it any longer."

The doctor, roused by the healer's instinct, sat up, at once wide awake.

In a moment he had bared my side and felt me over with skilled fingers. The grave look that came into his face alarmed me.

"Only needs opening and a little poultice, I suppose?" I asked as he finished his examination.

I wanted reassurance.

Without reply, he turned to his surgical case.

In a moment he had his instruments out and had sent one of the men for fresh water. I dared not ask him my question again.

"I do not want to frighten you unduly, my boy," he said at length, "but I want to warn you so you will back up my efforts. This is a very serious case of blood-poisoning, and we will have a hard fight to save your arm."

While the doctor worked over me, I lay half stupefied at the suddenness of this new peril.

Never again may I be called upon to suffer what I did during the next hour. My arm had to be lanced open from shoulder to wrist, carefully cleansed and then soaked in carbolic acid.

At length I was bandaged up again and ready to be moved. About nine o'clock they carried me gently to the river and placed me on an improvised bed of blankets in the center of one of the canoes.

In spite of my dead weight, we made good time. My two companions made a stretcher of the canoe at the carries, placing bow and stern on their respective shoulders and toting me over to the water again as though my weight was nothing.

I experienced a little temporary relief after the lancing of my arm, and the trip was not as painful as I expected.

All the while I was dreaming of the pleasure of seeing the girl again, but was at the same time tortured by the double fear that she might be seriously ill and that anyhow, after thinking it over, she would decide against me and refuse to see me again.

So it was with eagerness and dread combined that I watched the waters of Little Moose Lake glide by our canoe all the afternoon.

It was nearly dark when at length the hazy bulk of Little Moose Island lay ahead of us. A few minutes later we turned from our course to run around to the left of the island where the little farmhouse lay.

As we did so, two canoes shot out from the right side of the island in the dim distance ahead and made in our direction. We could soon see that there were three men in each canoe. They were paddling rapidly.

As we watched them a man in the foremost canoe waved to us and a faint hail came over the water. The doctor answered and he and the guide rested on their paddles a moment. Then we started on again. Once more came the hail.

"They seem to want to speak to us,"

said the doctor. "We'd better wait and see what they want. They'll be here in a minute."

"Do you believe it's all right, doctor?" I asked anxiously, thinking of Montague's lurking men, also of the possibility of Townsend getting some of his pals together and starting after us.

"Well, if they plan mischief," he replied, "they have us under their guns. I guess we better stay and see what they want. We'll have our own shooters ready in case they get unpleasant. It's three to six, though."

In a few minutes the doctor, who had been watching the oncomers intently, dropped his gun with a little laugh.

"It's Sheriff Pitkin and a bunch of raw deputies," he said. "Our consciences are clear, so we can wait at our ease and see what he wants. He's after some one down the river. There's been a tough gang around here for the last six months. Probably this man Montague enlisted them for his work. They may have troubled the village again, or perhaps Pitkin has got wind of your little battle and has started on a tardy relief expedition."

So we waited, and in a few minutes the sheriff and his party were alongside our canoe.

"Why, hallo, doc!" cried the man I took at once for the sheriff. "Didn't recognize you till I almost ran you down. Thought you were trying to dodge me when you turned off. Who ye got there?"

The sheriff eyed me with a keenness before which I shrank in vague dread.

"This is a young man from the Great Northern camp down the river. He got a pretty bad hurt in that fight with the woods gang the other day. Suppose you heard about it. Little late to be getting after the gang, ain't it? Oh, let me introduce you. Mr. Pitkin, Mr. Vincent."

"Mr. Who?" asked the sheriff sharply, peering into my face with a still keener glance.

"Mr. John Vincent," replied the doctor, surprised at the sheriff's manner.

"Sorry, doc," said Pitkin, "but I've got a warrant in my pocket for the arrest of a young man answerin' this chap's description to a T, an' I guess it's him.

"Young man," he added, turning to me, "you are my prisoner."

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE TOILS OF THE LAW.

FALSE representation! Conspiracy! Theft! Abduction! Connivance in murder! Attempt at murder!

Astounded, outraged beyond measure, I heard these preposterous charges against me formally brought before the justice's court in my bedroom in Montrelle.

It was the next day after my mysterious arrest. I lay raging with fever, but still rational, in the doctor's house, where I had been taken the night before, too ill to be left in the village jail.

Worse than the consternation I felt at these charges, was my grief and disappointment at learning what seemed certain to me to be the origin of the accusations.

When the sheriff had stopped us the evening before and told me I was under arrest, my first thought had been Townsend. This, I decided, was undoubtedly his work. Then there flashed over me a horrible suspicion.

Could it be possible? No! Yet, why not? Miss De Lancey certainly had apparent reasons for causing my arrest. She might have recovered quickly from her illness that followed our wreck and exposure, and after my departure, with time to think it over, had decided that I was indeed an impostor capable of doing her and her family great harm.

Could I blame her if she had gone to the village and lodged a complaint? Yet I couldn't believe that she was that kind of girl. I had imperiled her life, unintentionally, it is true, but I had saved it also at the risk of my own.

Was I not entitled to the benefit of a doubt? Ought I not to expect it from one who seemed gentleness itself?

Yet from the start, things had looked black to me. The moment the sheriff had announced that he had a warrant for me and while his charges were still a mystery, I could see that my friend, the doctor, had begun to think and that there was a conflict in his mind between suspicion and compassion.

For several moments he had eyed me, doubt written in his face. At length he turned to the sheriff and asked, "What's he charged with, Pitkin?"

"Most everything, I should say," replied the sheriff with an ill-timed chuckle. "Anyhow, it ain't my business to say. I got the warrant all right, and I'll have to ask ye to come right on to the village with me. He'll hear what he's charged with when he goes up against the court in the morning. Anyhow, doc, where do you come in? Is Mr. Vincent, or whoever he is, really hurt? And what were you cutting off to go around the other way for?"

The sheriff eyed the doctor dubiously.

"See here," the latter replied with some heat, "I don't know what you've got against this young man. I don't know whether it's a just charge or not. But I do know he's in a serious condition. I'm his doctor and will stand by him. He has a sick friend over here on the island I must attend to at once. I'll change canoes here with you and go on to the village in a couple of hours. Put this boy in my house at once when you get there. I'll go on his bail all right. He couldn't escape if he wanted to, anyhow, in that condition."

Silently I had reached out and shook the doctor's hand, looking my gratitude.

So it had come about that I had slept that night in the doctor's bed with a deputy on guard outside the window. I say slept. As a matter of fact, I had only dozed off occasionally, to be brought back to consciousness again by pain and worry.

Relying on the doctor's friendship. I had told him my whole story while he was dressing my wound for the night. He had assured me of his belief in me, but admitted that so far the mystery seemed baffling.

The doctor was the nearest to a lawyer in the little town, being a notary and representative of a lawyer named Barton, whose main office was in Brentwood. a larger place thirty miles down the road. The doctor agreed to look out for my case at the preliminary hearing in the morning and get Barton on the scene as soon as possible.

He also promised to obtain a nurse who was staying at one of the summer cottages, to care for me, as he was a bachelor with no women in the household except his cook and general housekeeper.

Of Miss De Lancey, whom he had just visited, the doctor would say little.

"Oh, she's coming on all right," he had replied carelessly in answer to my question. "A bad case of nerves from fright and exposure. She'll be in good shape in a day or two. I left her on the island for the present. She's with good people. Seems to be a nice little girl, but afraid of me for some reason."

So he left me to worry and doze alternately till at length tardy dawn appeared. I was distinctly relieved when, about nine o'clock, the justice and sheriff appeared and called an informal court in my bedroom.

The doctor had insisted that I could not be moved, and had his way about it. Thank Heaven, I was soon to learn why I had been so mysteriously arrested.

It was a crude court. There was little of legal form and phraseology. For that I was thankful. In the plain language of the backwoods, I heard delivered a series of charges and specifications that first filled me with indignant amazement, then with black despair.

I realized that I had become entangled in a web of fatal mysteries from which, to my sick brain, there seemed no escape.

In a daze I heard the sheriff go through some complex affidavits, then in words I understood all too clearly he read the following summary:

"I do therefore, your honor, find this prisoner sought for extradition to the United States of America, State of New York, City of New York, on the charge of falsely representing himself as Vincent De Lancey, Jr., to James Brewster Deming, of the Great Northern Development Company, thereby obtaining employment with said company that he might learn its secrets, defeat its purposes, and defraud it of valuable property.

"It is further charged that this defendant did conspire with other parties unknown and make way with the true Vincent De Lancey, Jr., in a manner to us unknown; that he did further by correspondence deceive Miss Florence De Lancey, sister of the aforesaid Vincent De Lancey, Jr.; that he did first by this

deception obtain money from said Florence De Lancey, then lure her from her home in New York to Montrelle, where he did attempt to spirit her away, also, submitting her to great personal peril and hardship.

"I do furthermore, in behalf of the Dominion government, charge this defendant with the aforesaid crime of abducting Florence De Lancey, which took place within the borders of this county. I do moreover charge him with here learning the secrets of the Great Northern Development Company and using undue influence and coercion to obtain a title to land belonging to Michael Monahan that he might further exploit said company; that he did further conspire with a murderous band of outlaws under one Leon Montague, who did attack the employees of the Great Northern Development Company, killing many of them, including Amos Tompkins, commander of the expedition; that he had previously made several attempts himself against the life of Tompkins and against the life of one Townsend, a friend of Tompkins."

This remarkable series of charges was supported by the affidavits of James Brewster Deming, Vincent De Lancey, Sr., Townsend, and—Florence De Lancey. Now I was sure of her part, and I could think of nothing else.

At the doctor's request it had been arranged to postpone the hearing till I was better, and till he could secure professional counsel. It was announced by the sheriff that at the continuation of the hearing he would have present as witnesses the station-agent, several persons who were on the station-platform that day when Miss De Lancey embarked on our almost fatal voyage, engineers from our camp, persons from the company's New York office, and, if possible, Deming, De Lancey, Sr., and Miss De Lancey.

It certainly looked dark for me. I had indeed hired out to the Great Northern Development Company, and had been passed off as another person. I had no means of proving that I had been an innocent party to this move. In fact, my story of what had actually happened seemed ridiculous on the face of it. I had learned the secrets of the company and had bought Monahan's land. There was no way that I knew of whereby I could prove my uprightness of motive in this.

Young De Lancey had disappeared. Absurd as was the charge, how could I demonstrate that I had not spirited him away? I had obtained money from Miss De Lancey without in the least intending to do so, and she had come to the woods to see me under a false impression and had suffered much on account of my innocent self; but, try as I might, my fevered brain could see no way of proving that innocence against which every bit of circumstantial evidence pointed.

In a delirious dream I saw the figures of the sheriff and the justice pass my bed as they left the room after court was adjourned. I realized that the doctor was dressing my wound, feeling my pulse, and preparing medicine. His voice was coming to me from far away, but what he said I did not know and did not care.

One thought was racking my fever-mad brain over and over. "She betrayed me! She betrayed me!" over and over again it rang.

Then something in my head seemed to snap and kind oblivion blotted out everything.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CARD TRICK AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

ONCE more came the soothing touch of a tiny hand on my throbbing brow.

Ever and again through seeming ages of mad delirium I would for a moment become conscious of that soft touch on my temples, and I would grow calmer and fall asleep.

Once I became dimly conscious of a white form moving about the room; but as I strained my eyes to see, madness again seized me and filled my brain with its horrid shapes.

Slowly I had fought myself back from that oblivion that had for a time driven all problems from my brain. Like a drowning man mired in a weedy bottom, I had struggled slowly toward consciousness through all the fiendish shapes that haunt the depths of madness.

At length came those fleeting breaths of the free air of reason when I felt the

touch of that little hand. Each time it remained a little longer and brought me a trifle nearer the reality of things.

Then once more I would be fighting over again the battle of the island, or feel myself being dragged down to the depths of Little Moose Lake.

When I first felt that caress on my forehead I thought it was the hand of my mother, and I called to her and wept because I got no answer. Then another wave of delirium swept me through that wild night on the island with the girl.

Again I felt the touch of the hand and suddenly thought that the girl was at my bedside. I seemed to remember for a moment and cried out: "You betrayed me! You betrayed me!"

But at length when the touch came I only felt myself being soothed to sleep with a consciousness of growing sanity and vague wonder as to who my nurse might be.

Now the hand was brushing back my hair, and I felt it at last as separate from my dreams. For a long time I lay and recalled slowly the things that had happened before the fever had gripped my reason.

Then I opened my eyes and looked into hers! The wonderful eyes of blue!

My heart nearly stopped beating for a moment. Was this another fantom? I closed my eyes. I opened them again.

The vision was still there.

I tried to raise my hand to hers to see if it were indeed flesh and blood, but I was too weak even to lift my fingers.

At that moment her voice was added to the testimony, the voice I could never mistake.

"You mustn't try to move," she said. "I'll call the doctor."

Wonderingly I saw her step to the door and heard her call. With a few low words she left me with the doctor.

"Well, old man," said he cheerily, "back with us again at last? Do you know you've been playing crazy for three weeks? Well, you're all O. K. now. Pretty weak, though. Keep quiet a little, and we'll have you back on your pegs in no time. You're going to keep that arm, too, so don't worry."

He gave me some medicine, and as he straightened out the bedclothes and shifted my position I whispered: "Was — that — who — was — she — was — she —"

"Yes, yes, that was Miss De Lancey," he replied. "You owe your life to her nursing. She insisted on taking care of you herself. Now it's all right. Go to sleep, and we'll tell you more to-morrow."

And even as he spoke I fell asleep and slept like a baby.

The morning sun that wakened me showed me her again by my bedside.

"Do you know me now?" was her greeting.

"No, you mustn't talk yet," she hastened to add, as I tried to respond. "And I mustn't tire you by chattering, either."

I was too weak to do anything but obey. It was sheer pleasure to take my medicine from her and watch her smooth my pillows and straighten up the room.

But to my keen disappointment, the tiny hand I had felt in the brief breaks in my delirium no longer soothed my brow. I had a kind and gentle, but a very reserved, almost shy, little nurse.

So when I asked myself why this girl who had denounced me to the authorities should take care of me through my illness, the answer was that there was no other nurse, and she was too tender-hearted to let anybody or anything die uncared for, even though she believed I deserved to die.

Besides, perhaps she wished to hasten my recovery that I might the sooner be tried and convicted.

But as the days passed her constant kindness made this answer less and less satisfactory. I was finally able to talk, but we seemed both to shun the subject of which we both were thinking.

She would read to me for hours, then we would chat, now about the woods and their people, now of the city and the events of the outside world. From this we passed to more personal topics.

I told her little by little of my boyhood, and she related incidents of her school-days just past and of her home and friends. She read my letters from home to me and wrote replies at my dictation.

So the old distrust was thrust into the background, and I had almost for-

gotten it when an announcement of hers brought it all back.

It was the first day I was able to be fully dressed. I sat by the window when, without warning, she came in to say good-by.

"Papa is going to take me home," she said, "since you no longer need a nurse."

"But — but," I stammered, "I thought you were—were going to testify at my trial. Didn't—didn't you—you—" I halted, overcome by embarrassment.

"Why, Mr. Belden," she replied with a deep flush, "do you still believe all those miserable things of me you talked about while you were raving? Didn't the doctor tell you? That silly man! He said you'd—you'd like it better if I told you."

She was blushing furiously now.

"Forgive me," I said. "I did not have the courage to ask you or anybody else about things. I wish you would tell me now. But first let me say that I do not doubt you for an instant, and that my greatest desire in the world is to have you believe in me, even if appearances are against me."

And at that moment I meant every word I said.

"Mr. Belden," and the blue eyes filled with tears and turned away, "I do believe in you, and it is I who need to be forgiven.

"Listen," she went on hastily. "I'll tell you what happened while you were ill. First, that awful affidavit of mine. The day before the doctor came first to see me on the island, Mr. Brant, at whose place you left me, came over here to the village, and while here gossiped around well-meaningly about our shipwreck. As a result, there came back with him a man who said he was a friend of yours, who, I afterward learned, was that man Townsend.

"Mr. Townsend told me you were in trouble, and that my affidavit of just what had happened to us would get you out of it. He said my brother was in camp, and would come to me just as soon as he saw my affidavit.

"So he wrote out my story of our accident and how I came to be here, and in my sick condition I didn't realize that he had written it so that it made your actions seem very strange. Townsend left the paper with me, saying the doctor was a notary. So, that night, when the doctor came, I made affidavit to that distorted story, and half an hour later Townsend came back and got it.

"Well, they had a clear case against you for a week. The engineers of your party were honest and friendly enough, but Townsend laid his plot so cleverly that all they told about your actions fitted right into his story. Some of the villagers and woodsmen, it turned out, were bribed to color their stories. One woodsman told of seeing you shoot at Tompkins in the woods. Afterward, he confessed he lied when other parts of the story were proved false.

"What turned things first in your favor was the capture of one of Montague's gang, whose story showed you had nothing to do with them, but, on the contrary, had done your best to give warning against them, and had been shot in doing so. Then, your deed to Monahan's place proved all right.

"The testimony of the doctor and his men knocked out the charge of undue influence. I proved, after a lot of trouble, that you hadn't tried to abduct me, and hadn't stolen my money, though I confess at first I had some doubts myself. Then the doctor and I both told the story you told us. We agreed exactly.

"Next, the two maps you told about were found, and everything agreed with your story of them. About this time Townsend saw things were going against him, and disappeared. You see, his plot was based on things he had overheard Tompkins and you saying when Tompkins was dying, and the things that I, foolish little goose, babbled to him about your story when I was ill, and didn't realize fully what I was doing.

"Well, when Mr. Townsend went away, that settled the charges brought against you here, but there was still the demand for extradition.

"At this point, papa arrived. It seems he had become suspicious of Mr. Deming about the time this trouble began, and after a little investigation

in New York, learned things that led to the arrest of Mr. Deming. When papa got here, he found your story corresponded with his discoveries. So he agreed to withdraw his charges against you for the time being, and have you extradited and held simply as a witness.

"Oh, I forgot to say that the letters from your father and mother went a good way to convince us you were all right. I guess they didn't let you know that papa visited them in Vermont to find out things for himself. He came back and said your people were thoroughbreds. You see, papa came from an old New England farm himself, and knows real worth and good old stock when he sees it.

"But I must warn you, papa isn't quite convinced yet. I'm sure, somehow, it will come out all right. You see, Mr. Belden, there's one thing we can't account for, that's your story of how you were hired.

"Mr. Deming still insists he hired my brother, and shows his card to prove it. Your card can't be found. Mr. Deming's clerks agree with him in this. Father still fears you were in league with Mr. Deming, Tompkins, and the rest to defraud him.

"He says, by telling the story you did, you might be making a desperate attempt to save yourself. He also suspects you may know something about my poor brother's fate.

"I've argued a lot with him, but can't prove anything. He says, though, that you own the best part of the gold in this region. They found your cave of ore as you describe. Papa says it's worth millions. He says, too, that if you'll prove your innocence he'll offer you half of the stock of the reorganized Great Northern Development Company, provided you'll pool your claim with his capital, experience, and machinery. He says you can have any office in the company you want.

"I'm sure you will convince him in some way that you are all right. I don't—I don't—know why I—I—believe in you so, but—I—I do," she finished falteringly.

Before she knew what had happened, I had leaned forward and captured one little hand.

"Little girl," I said, "I know why you believe in me."

Just then there was a sharp rap at the door. The hand was withdrawn at once; but I saw a look in her eyes that made me believe I had not made a false move.

She opened the door. A portly, gray-haired man, with a strong but not unkindly face, was disclosed.

"Oh, it's you, papa—" the girl began; then, with a little cry of "Oh, Vincent!" she darted past her father into the arms of a tall, dark youth in the background, who somehow looked familiar to me.

I knew at once that the youth was the long-lost brother, though for the life of me I could not recall when I had seen him before.

The senior De Lancey looked fondly at his children for a moment, then turned to me.

"This is Mr. Belden, I believe," he said with a cordiality that surprised me. "My son has just turned up from hiding, and explained this puzzling business. I want to apologize to you, sir, for misjudging you so.

"Vincent, tell your story," he added, turning to his son.

The young man released his sister and came forward.

"I've done you a rotten deal, old chap," he lisped, "and I'm sorry. You see, father was dead set on my coming up to this bally swamp, and I was dead set against it. I didn't see any way out of it, though, don't you know, so I went up to see Deming on the day and hour appointed by father and him. Don't you remember my coming into the anteroom when you were waiting, and how the fresh kid turned me down?

"Well, you remember I threw my card on the table when the kid wouldn't take it. Yours lay there, too. I got tired of waiting and went out, picking up what I supposed was my card.

"When I came back in the afternoon I found I had another man's card that turned out to be yours. I found out before I made any break. A little tipping and pumping of the kid satisfied me that you had used my card, and had been hired.

"The thing struck me as a good joke. I decided to lie low and see how long it would take for you people to untangle yourselves. When I heard, through a trusty friend, what a deuce of a mess I had got you in, I hot-footed it up here.

"Now, the governor has a business proposition to make to you, and if you accept it, I want to make amends by offering myself for any dirty job you've got. I've turned over a new leaf, and want to make good."

Thus prompted, the elder man repeated the offer of which his daughter had already told me during our conversation, of making me half owner and a director of the Great Northern Development Company.

"I'll accept," I said, when he had finished; "but, instead of taking my choice of the offices of the company, I want to ask humbly for a very high official position in your household, namely, that of son-in-law."

"Well! Well!" gasped the old gentleman. "This *is* a surprise." Then he added, after a searching look at his blushing daughter: "I guess Flossy is the one to choose the man for that job."

There was, at that moment, a look in the wonderful depths of two blue eyes that left no doubt as to who would get the job.

THE END.

MR. SMITH DINES OUT.

By ROBERT RUSSELL.

The exciting incidents that capped an acceptance to spend a social evening at a suburban villa.

SMITH looked hopelessly about the platform of the small station. He had just stepped from the train after a half-hour's journey from the city where he had been spending a few days on business, when the full force of his predicament struck him.

The day previous he had met, on a busy street of the city whence he had just now come, the girl who had been very near to becoming Mrs. Smith some five years before.

During those years he had not seen or heard from her, but her cordiality of yesterday made it evident that the cause of the old lovers' quarrel was forgotten. He had been honestly glad to see her again, and their hurried, eager conversation had culminated in an insistent invitation to him to attend a little dinner which she and her recently acquired husband were giving at their suburban home some twenty miles out of town.

Well, here he was! She had told him that her house was but a ten minutes' walk from the station, northward, but—he had no idea what her married name was.

Yesterday their manner of addressing each other had been "George" and "Louise," and her assurance that any one whom he would meet on the street of the little town could direct him to the proper house, had furnished no information as to the name of the casually mentioned husband.

It was nearly seven o'clock already, and as Smith approached a man who leaned contentedly against the side of the station, dinner with Louise seemed a prospect worth realizing.

"Can you tell me which direction is north?" said Smith.

"Yes," replied the man without changing his position.

"Well," continued George, after a moment resulting in no enlightening developments, "please show me."

"There be some dispute 'tween Lish Johnson, Lang Smithers, an' me on the point, but I—"

"Oh, I don't care to be particularly exact," interrupted Smith, somewhat irritated. "Tell me the general northward direction."

"Standin' here," answered the even-

tempered possessor of the required information, retaining his evidently satisfactory position, "you draw a straight line through the westerly window of the First National Bank an'—"

"But I don't know where the bank is." again interrupted Smith, with increasing impatience. "Will you—"

"Corner of Elm an' Main Streets."

"See here," interjected George, thoroughly aroused by the other's stupidity, "will you point in the direction I ask?"

With a respectful glance at Smith's six feet of strength, the man silently extended a decidedly unmanicured finger toward a wide street running at right angles to the station.

"Thank you," said the young man, starting rapidly in the direction indicated. His informant shifted his position slightly in order to keep the tall figure in sight as long as possible, meanwhile shaking his undeveloped head in wondering doubt.

After walking the ten minutes which, according to Louise's instructions, should bring him to the neighborhood of her home, Smith accosted a respectable looking wayfarer, and in some embarrassment inquired whether or not he happened to know which of the near-by houses was the home of a beautiful young married woman who had formerly been a Miss Louise Conlon.

The man's amazed plea of ignorance forced George to seek other sources of knowledge.

A very bright-looking maid who opened the third door at which he inquired assured him, after he had stated fully his situation, that he must be looking for Mrs. Brown, who lived but a short distance away. To Mrs. Brown's he accordingly repaired, and the evident preparations for company that the attractive little house presented made Smith confident that his idiotic ignorance would produce but slight inconvenience.

The first words of a young woman, who stepped toward him as he was about to repeat his inquiry to the servant, made such inquiry unnecessary, and saved him the humiliation of confessing his lack of knowledge of his friend's name.

"This must be Mr. Smith," said the woman. "My cousin, Mrs. Brown, told me that she expected you," she continued, after George had assented to being the unfortunate possessor of that name, "and she laid upon me the special duty of making you at home among all these strangers," waving her hand toward the reception-room, which buzzed with a distant hum of conversation.

"Take off your coat and let me introduce you," she went on. "Mrs. Brown has one of her terrible sick headaches, but hopes to come down-stairs later. She absolutely refuses to have this meeting of our bridge whist club spoiled by her absence, and said she knew you would excuse her."

Considerably disappointed, but hoping to have at least a few moments' conversation with Louise later in the evening, Smith was presented to Mr. Brown and the other numerous members of the club, after which formality he at once sat down to a sincerely anticipated dinner.

Subsequent developments proved it to be extremely unfortunate for the young man that he possessed such strong convictions on the subject of politics, for his opinions were absolutely at variance with those held by an enthusiastic, bald-headed little old gentleman sitting near George at the table.

A thorough discussion of the President's attitude in regard to a renomination made the two men enemies for life. They proved to be on opposite sides of every subject broached as inevitably as they were physically separated by a woman of some two hundred pounds weight occupying the chair between them.

It was, therefore, one of Fate's playful pranks which decreed that Smith and the old gentleman should be opponents at the same table in the card game that followed.

"My score will be a good one," said George's persistent antagonist, as he laid a very handsome watch on the table, evidently preparing to keep the time of each rubber, "if Mr. Smith knows no more about whist than he does about politics."

The young man's good-humored reception of this and other like sallies which were made during the long evening did not seem to please his opponent, and the latter's excitable temper was not calmed by the fact that Smith and his partner were consistent winners with the cards, although no money was at stake.

A sense of duty and a desire not to offend Louise were all that induced George to continue the game; and there was also the hope that she would appear for a moment before he left. As the hours dragged on, however, this possibility became very slight.

The last rubber was finally finished; and the old gentleman, having added up his most unsatisfactory score, was in an extremely disagreeable frame of mind, when he turned to George and made one of his pleasant remarks.

"You must feel rather awkward, Mr. Smith," he said, "among all these people who have never seen or heard of you before?"

"Not nearly as awkward," replied George sweetly, "as I have seen people look when trying to play a game which they do not understand."

A glance at the old gentleman's watch lying on the sheet of paper which recorded the evening's score showed Smith that he had but ten minutes in which to catch the last train back to the city. Hastily rising, he sought out the young woman who had greeted him as the hostess for the evening, made his abbreviated excuses, seized his coat and hat, darted through the door, and ran down the street toward the station.

The possibility of being forced to pass the night in a neighborhood which produced such characters as the old gentleman of the watch lent added endurance to his somewhat untrained body.

The train was standing at the station when he arrived, completely exhausted, and was just moving on when Smith seized the guard-rail, swung onto the step, and then—a sudden tug at his coat-tails, a strong arm about his body, and he was again standing on the station platform, gazing into the now animated eyes of his first acquaintance of the evening—the man who had pointed northward.

Smith's amazement gave way immediately to overwhelming wrath, and his impulse to knock the man down could with difficulty be restrained.

"Do you know what you've done, you—you—" he finally blurted out, glaring at the man.

"Certain," replied the other. "I've made up fer showin' a man the way to the First National Bank by keepin' him from gettin' away from it."

"What do you mean, idiot? You've made me miss the last train to the city. I'll look well arriving there to-morrow morning dressed in evening clothes."

The objectionable person laughed.

"You'll be lucky ter git there at all," he said, "as fur as I kin judge. Mr. Browning, president of the bank, who's been playin' cards at Mrs. Brown's, telephoned down here an' asked the station-agent to see thet you, describin' ye, be kep' from goin' off on this train—he—"

But his interesting statement was rudely interrupted by a noise which banished all other matters from the minds of both.

The sound of a Roman mob was nothing as compared to the babble proceeding out of the darkness to the north of the station. The patter of feet on the gravel, the crunch of carriage-wheels on the road, and the shrill tones of women's voices, mingled with an occasional determined male ejaculation, reached Smith's ears long before the various causes of the disturbance appeared.

One by one, out of the gloom, came the members of the whist-club, until they formed a complete circle about him of male and female personifications of indignation. And last, puffing and blowing from his unwonted exertion, appeared the bald-headed old gentleman of irascible temper and strong political convictions.

A way was immediately made for him through the crowd, now augmented by other interested inhabitants of the village who had been awakened by the strange commotion, and he stood menacingly before the bewildered young man.

"My watch, sir," he blustered.

"What?" replied Smith, scarcely able to restrain his mirth.

"My watch!"

"*I* haven't got it."

"Again I say, give me my watch."

"Oh, rot!" laughed George. "It was lying on the score-sheet the last time I saw it. Do you think I stole it?"

"You see," triumphantly exclaimed the old gentleman, glancing about him at the intent audience, "he saw where the watch was, seized it and his opportunity, and thought we could not overtake him."

"This has gone far enough," said George in disgust. "Search me if you want to, but Mrs. Brown will tell you all about me. Go back. I'm going to get a horse to take me to the city."

"You are going to do nothing of the kind," shouted he of the bald head.

Then, to the man who had been the cause of Smith's missing the train: "Come on, Thomas. We will take him to my friend Ellerdon, justice of the peace. Keep a careful eye on him to see that he does not throw the watch away."

The party began to move in the direction whence it had just come, but Smith demurred.

"See here," he said to the old gentleman, "this is ridiculous. I am an old friend of Mrs. Brown's, and have no more to do with—"

"Stop," interrupted his hearer, "do not incriminate yourself further. I feel in duty bound to refuse to listen to you," and he relinquished his place at George's side, fearing that human weakness for information would conquer his evident duty not to hear additional damning facts.

It seemed to Smith a duty to be forced to trouble Louise when she was ill; but as the throng entered the gate of Justice Ellerdon's premises, he had determined to send for her to vouch for his honesty. She would gladly do far more than that, he knew.

It was a justice of the peace clad in a dress-suit who opened the door, and who, in amazement at the sight presented to him, prepared to hold his court in the parlor. One look at his intelligent face convinced George that it would not be necessary to send for Louise, and he determined to do so only as a last resort.

"You want somebody committed to jail, do you?" said Ellerdon to the old gentleman. "Won't to-morrow do?"

"No, sir. This very night, if you are a friend of mine."

"Very well," replied the justice wearily, glancing curiously at the whist-party and the wide-mouthed natives, all of whom had squeezed into the dainty little room; "proceed."

"I will be as brief as possible," began Smith's adversary, the little old man, "and I have innumerable witnesses to bear me out. This man," pointing an accusing finger at Smith, "wormed his way to-night among honest people who had gathered at Mrs. Brown's to play whist, by claiming to be an old friend of hers. None of us knew him, and Mrs. Brown did not see him, being ill upstairs.

"As we were about to break up for the evening, he," and the little man made his denunciation as impressive as possible, "suddenly stated that he must hurry to catch his train, and rushed from our presence with scarcely a word of apology. Almost immediately I discovered that my watch, which I had laid on the table during the evening in accordance with my invariable custom, was missing. At once I remembered this stranger's disagreeable personality and argumentative disposition, and my suspicions were immediately directed toward him with an inspired acumen which often possesses me.

"Loath to believe that an old friend of Mrs. Brown's was capable of such a crime, I hurriedly asked Mr. Brown to present the matter to his wife; but his intercession was unnecessary, as she herself descended from above at that very moment. A hasty description of this man brought forth the remarkable statement that her old friend Mr. Smith did not correspond at all to my picture of this impostor. The case was made certain beyond a doubt by the delivery just at that minute of a delayed telegram from the genuine Smith to Mrs. Brown, expressing his regret at having been unable to be present. I telephoned to the station—apprehended the thief, and—"

He thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets, stopped suddenly, and stood silent. Every eye was upon him, and every face expressed perplexity at his continued silence.

The fall of a pin could be heard in the intense stillness, as the old gentleman stood in the center of the room, an indescribable expression on his countenance.

Gradually he withdrew his right hand from his pocket and, as the wrist emerged inch by inch, the wonder in his eyes grew. At last the hand appeared clasped about something.

Then came the left, and by its aid there was disclosed the contents of the

other. First appeared a sheet of paper, covered with the figures of a bridge whist score, and, within it—a handsome gold watch.

As the old gentleman held the article before him, gazing absently at it, there was a movement in the crowd surrounding the door of the room, and a wondering exclamation came from Smith:

"Louise!" he cried, starting forward as a radiant young woman in a black evening gown entered upon the strange scene.

"What in the world does all this mean, John?" murmured the girl, coming to Smith's side, but addressing Ellerdon.

"Aren't you Mrs. Brown?" asked Smith in amazement.

"Of course not. I'm Mrs. Ellerdon. Didn't you know? And is that why you did not get here for our dinner-party?"

"Then," mused George audibly, "I *was* an impostor—but," with a motion toward the old gentleman, "he's found his watch."

Silently the spectators of the comedy filed out of the house, and Louise, George, and Ellerdon were left together.

"Will you give me a formal introduction to your friend?" said the justice, "who, I trust, will spend the night with us."

"Will not my husband," said Louise, turning to Ellerdon, "or my old friend," addressing George, "please explain what this thing means?"

"A mere trifle," laughed George. "It needed a large party to show me where you lived. That's all."

SECRET ENEMIES.

By F. K. SCRIBNER,

Author of "A Conflict with Cæsar," "The Eagle of Empire," "The Ravens of the Rhine," etc.

The man with a difficult trust to execute in a strange country and threatened by foes whom he has no means of knowing.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOST WHO WAS MISSING.

LIGHTS should have been shining from the windows of the Hôtel de Marrast. On either side, along the broad Faubourg St. Germain, the dwellings showed signs of life and activity within; but, from the gabled roof to the marble entrance, the residence of the Marquis de Marrast presented only a somber, gray stone wall.

To the young man stopping abruptly before the house, after his brisk walk along the boulevard, its appearance brought a feeling of misgiving.

It was still early in the evening, and, as the marquis expected him, he would scarcely darken his windows for the reception of a guest. It flashed into his mind that De Marrast might have departed for his country château, to the north of Paris, but he put aside the idea quickly.

A French nobleman does not issue an urgent invitation and permit the recipient to present himself at the door of a deserted residence.

He took out his watch and consulted it by the flickering light of a street-lamp near by; it was scarcely nine o'clock.

Had he not lingered over his supper in the little restaurant near the Pont au Change, he might have reached the house in the Faubourg St. Germain before twilight had given place to darkness. But because he had reached Paris only late that afternoon, and the last stage of the journey over the dusty road had been tiresome, he hesitated to present himself at the Hôtel de Marrast in the first hour of his arrival.

A few rods from where the diligence came to its final halt, after the long journey from Calais, the sign of the little hostelry near the Pont au Change caught his eye. The possibilities thereon set forth decided him. Water, soap, a change of linen, and a comfortable repast on the shaded balcony overlooking

the river—afterward he would proceed to the fashionable Faubourg St. Germain without misgiving.

He did not conceal from himself that his acceptance of the marquis's invitation was accelerated by the desire to meet Mlle. de Marrast. Had it been only De Marrast, his long-time friend—but the marquis's sister, that was another matter. He was somewhat of a believer in first impressions.

He returned the watch to its fob, with a movement of impatience, feeling that some annoying mistake had placed him in an embarrassing position. He noticed that those who passed glanced at him curiously, and from him up at the darkened windows.

He crossed the marble steps and swung the great bronze knocker.

The echo resounded from the hall within, but though he waited a full minute the door did not open. Again he knocked, more sharply.

A faint, grating noise, near at hand, broke the silence. A little wicket, disclosing an opening scarcely five inches square, and near the level of his eyes, swung back.

Standing without, the visitor could see no one, for the space behind the opening was dark, but he felt that somebody on the inside was studying him leisurely. The thought angered him.

Raising his head, he spoke sharply:

"So it seems some one has at last heard my knocking. How long since has it been the fashion in Paris to keep an expected guest standing before a bolted door?"

There was a moment's silence; then a voice replied from the gloom:

"Already too many guests have been here to-day, *monsieur.*"

"But the marquis? Surely De Marrast is here?" he demanded sharply.

"The Marquis de Marrast receives no one to-night," the voice replied.

Realizing that the person behind the wicket was, in all probability, a servant, the caller checked the hot retort which hovered on his lips, and said coldly:

"Go inform your master that Sir Harold Campbell is standing outside his door. Do you take me for a thief or a cutthroat?"

"Neither, *monsieur;* only, as I have said, the marquis does not receive to-night."

There was a doggedness in the reply that showed the fellow was not to be turned from his purpose. Again Campbell checked the hot retort upon his tongue, for he realized angry words must result only in the wicket being closed in his face.

For an instant he was on the point of retracing his steps to the inn, but the situation appeared to him so extraordinary that he resolved to find a solution before beating a retreat.

"Wait, my friend," said he dryly; "it is possible the marquis is denying himself visitors to-night, but there is a simple method of turning that possibility into a certainty. Hand this to your master. I will wait for a reply."

Taking a note-book from his pocket, he held a page to the light and wrote a few lines hurriedly:

> Your devil of a porter is keeping me here before the gate. Have I then crossed the Channel to adorn your door-step? CAMPBELL.

Tearing out the leaf, he turned and thrust it through the grating into the invisible hand within.

The wicket closed softly, and he heard the bolt shoot into place. Despite the unpleasantness of the situation, he could not repress a smile, picturing the servant's explanation and the marquis's anger.

Suddenly he felt that some one was standing behind him. He turned sharply, to face the tall figure of a man.

In the flickering light this stranger appeared a somber object, for, though the night was warm, he wore a cloak, the collar of which concealed the greater portion of his face.

A harsh voice issued from behind this covering:

"Pardon, but I have observed that *monsieur* has been standing for some minutes before a bolted door. It is possible that *monsieur* is a stranger; also that he has lost his reckoning."

"On the contrary," replied Campbell; "while it is true I am not over-familiar with Paris, my destination is the Hôtel de Marrast, before which I stand."

The stranger laughed harshly.

"Which *monsieur* finds in darkness, and with doors bolted. Doubtless *monsieur* is wondering—"

"Possibly. But may I ask from what arises your interest in the matter?" Campbell spoke sharply. To be accosted by one who evidently desired to conceal his face did not please him, and the other's manner bordered upon insolence.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"Only that *monsieur* may be saved unnecessary waiting, for, as you see, the Hôtel de Marrast is closed," said he.

"To all appearances. And having interested yourself in my behalf, you may possibly be able to enlighten me. Do you know whether the marquis has left Paris?"

For a moment the other did not reply. Then:

"Might I inquire why *monsieur* is here?" he inquired.

Campbell shrugged his shoulders.

"I see you do not care to answer me. Why I am here is my own affair. And, by what right do you question me? If you are a member of the police, show your authority, otherwise you had best take yourself off," said he coldly.

"I have only advised *monsieur* to give up a useless errand. You will discover the Marquis de Marrast cannot be seen to-night. Perhaps to-morrow, but now the house is closed," persisted the stranger.

He raised his hand. Campbell braced himself to meet an attack, but the other's movement was only for the purpose of adjusting the collar of his cloak.

"It is plain *monsieur* does not care to take my advice," he concluded harshly.

"Which I have not asked," added Campbell.

There was a moment's silence.

"It is possible *monsieur* is familiar with the old adage, 'A word to the wise.' It would be doubly the part of wisdom if *monsieur,* who is a stranger to Paris, left the Faubourg St. Germain, much more the vicinity of the Hôtel de Marrast. It is only a fool who would thrust his head needlessly into danger; and, I take it, *monsieur* is not a fool."

"Do you threaten me?" demanded Campbell sharply.

"I only warn you that it is the part of wisdom to leave the Hôtel de Marrast," replied the stranger bruskly.

Then, before Campbell could reply, he turned abruptly, and hurried away into the gloom of the boulevard.

Campbell watched him disappear. He was inclined to think he had had an encounter with a madman.

There came the sound of bolts being drawn, the gate creaked on its hinges, and a gust of cool air from within swept across his face.

Turning, he confronted the open door of the Hôtel de Marrast, and the somber figure silhouetted in the aperture. The man held a silver candelabrum, in which three tapers were burning.

"*Monsieur* will be pleased to enter," said he solemnly, and backed against the half-open gate.

Campbell recognized the voice of the person who had addressed him through the wicket, and glanced at him sharply; a sarcastic reply hovered on his tongue.

But the man's face was as stolid as a plaster mask. As well waste sarcasm on a wooden image.

He stepped across the threshold into a wide hall, faintly illumined by the flickering candles. His companion closed the door softly, shot the great bolts into place and, turning, said impassively:

"*Monsieur* will be pleased to come this way."

Campbell followed in silence; through the long hall, up a score of broad marble steps, on to the carpeted landing above. There it was better lighted, and, looking before him, he saw a long corridor, flanked on either hand by carved, massive doors.

From one of these, as he followed his guide along the hall, a man issued, clad in somber livery, closely resembling him who bore the candelabrum. This one, evidently another servant, stood perfectly motionless as Campbell passed.

Once he glanced sharply into the face of the visitor, then lowered his eyes, and appeared to be studying the pattern in the carpet.

The atmosphere of gloom, and the silence which filled the place, impressed Campbell unpleasantly. He touched his guide upon the arm.

The man stopped, and turned his mask-like face slowly.

"*Monsieur?*" said he.

"What is the meaning of this, and where are you taking me?" demanded Campbell shortly.

The man hesitated. For a moment the flame of the candles wavered, as if the hand which held the candelabrum trembled. He answered, in a dull voice:

"I am obeying orders, *monsieur.*"

"So I am led to understand; but what is the trouble here? You have told me the marquis is not receiving visitors to-night. Why are the windows darkened and the house silent? Surely there has been no misfortune to an inmate of the Hôtel de Marrast? If such be the case, you should have told me so in the first place. Where is the marquis?" said Campbell impatiently.

"It is a misfortune, even such as death brings into a house, *monsieur,*" the man replied impassively.

Campbell uttered a sharp exclamation.

"And I was clamoring at the gate; losing my temper at such a time. A word of this and I would have departed and returned to-morrow. Yet it has been sudden. The marquis made no mention of sickness when he wrote—five days ago."

"It was sudden, *monsieur,*" replied the man gravely.

Campbell turned toward the stairs.

"To-morrow I will return. You will explain to the Marquis de Marrast. I will sleep to-night in the tavern near the Pont au Change, if he should desire to send for me," said he.

"*Monsieur* does not understand. It is possible that—" the man began.

Campbell began to descend the stairs. He had taken scarcely three steps when the other put out his hand sharply.

"*Monsieur* must not go!" said he.

But Campbell ignored the words. He was cursing the fellow's stupidity.

Again the man spoke—almost sharply.

"*Monsieur* must not go. It was ordered that he follow me, and—we are almost there."

Campbell stopped. It occurred to him that, after all, Victor de Marrast might really desire his presence that night.

"Is it the marquis who has ordered—that I follow you?" he demanded.

"The marquis would desire it," the man replied.

Campbell retraced his steps to the upper landing. The man led him along the corridor, and knocked upon a door softly. Then he turned the knob, and opened it.

Campbell, expecting to greet De Marrast, stepped across the threshold; then halted abruptly. The room was dimly lighted by half a dozen candles, which showed red through silken shades, and—it was empty.

The servant, standing just without the threshold, made a little gesture.

"*Monsieur* will be seated, and—*monsieur* will observe there is wine upon the table," said he solemnly, and closed the door softly.

To Campbell it seemed that a key turned in the lock, and, uncertain, he remained for several moments standing motionless. The atmosphere of the place seemed overheated and oppressive. For a minute he hesitated, then crossed the room and parted the heavy draperies before one of the windows, to find it tightly closed by heavy wooden shutters.

Perplexed, the young man returned to the table, and, dropping into a chair, leaned back to speculate idly on the strange situation in which he found himself.

He began to wish he had followed his first impulse and returned to the inn until morning.

For how long he waited, gazing idly about the apartment, he could only conjecture. An uncanny feeling began to creep over him.

He arose, and began to pace restlessly back and forth. Finally he approached the door and turned the knob. He had not been mistaken; his guide had twisted the key on the outside.

A feeling of impatient resentment took possession of him. Where was the marquis? And why had they seen fit to lock him in a room in the Hôtel de Marrast?

He remembered the encounter with the unknown man on the steps before the door, and the words the stranger had uttered: "Only a fool will thrust his head needlessly into danger. It would be wise if *monsieur* would leave the vicinity of the Hôtel de Marrast."

For an instant the impulse seized him to try to force the door. Then, with a movement of impatience, he dropped his hand from the knob.

Why should he fear—in the house of his friend, the Marquis de Marrast?

As he turned to retrace his steps across the room, a curtain, which had concealed a door at one side of the apartment, was pushed aside, and the figure of a man appeared in the opening.

Campbell supposed it was the marquis, but, as the light fell upon the other's face, he saw it was not De Marrast—only a little old man, who leaned heavily upon a cane.

For several moments not a sound disturbed the quiet of the room; then the old Frenchman advanced until he reached the table, upon which he rested one hand heavily.

"It is M. Campbell?" asked he, in broken English.

"I am M. Campbell," replied the other shortly.

"And I—" the old man began; then, after an instant's hesitation: "It is possible *monsieur* speaks French?"

"Yes," replied Campbell; "passably."

His companion nodded.

"Then we may converse more readily. You are the English friend of my—of Victor de Marrast?" said he.

"I am a Scotchman, but it is as you have surmised. I am the friend of the Marquis de Marrast," Campbell replied.

"Whom the marquis expected—yesterday?"

"Possibly, but not having arrived yesterday, I am here to-night."

"*Monsieur* will be seated," replied the Frenchman quietly; "and, with *monsieur's* pardon, I will do likewise. *Monsieur* may have observed that—I am somewhat lame."

Wondering, Campbell hastened to pull up a chair, for the old man was already tottering upon his feeble legs. He dropped into it with a nod of thanks.

"I ask *monsieur's* pardon, but—I will be eighty-nine years old before the month is over, and—there has been unusual excitement; *monsieur* will understand," he explained in a quivering voice.

"Perfectly," answered Campbell soberly.

He was wondering what was about to develop—why this piece of antiquity had been chosen to receive him, in place of the Marquis de Marrast.

The old man stretched forth a shaking hand and poured out two glasses of wine.

"After *monsieur!*" said he gallantly.

There was a moment's silence; then, as the old man returned his emptied glass to the table:

"You are, *monsieur,* the M. Harold Campbell who is Victor's friend?" he said.

"As I have said; and you, *monsieur?*" Campbell replied.

"I am the Comte de Plauex," answered the old man proudly.

"Ah!" Campbell exclaimed. "It is an honor to meet the Comte de Plauex, *monsieur.*"

"Thank you, *monsieur.* I see you are indeed a stranger to Paris, for it is evident that you have never heard of me—not even from Victor de Marrast."

The old Frenchman smiled half sadly.

Campbell remained silent because he did not know what to reply.

The comte leaned a little forward, fixing his bleared eyes upon the face of the visitor.

"*Monsieur,*" said he in an even voice, you are wondering—why I, and not Victor de Marrast, is here to greet you."

"Yes," answered Campbell shortly; "you will pardon me if—"

The old man made a little gesture.

"You have heard of the Bastile, *monsieur?*" he demanded suddenly.

"Certainly, and who has not?" answered Campbell.

"And what the Bastile means to a Frenchman, *monsieur?*"

"I can guess something of that, *monsieur le comte,*" Campbell replied.

Surely the man before him was quite in his dotage.

The comte smiled dryly.

"Well, *monsieur,*" said he suddenly, "I am that same Comte de Plauex who was confined in the Bastile for thirty years."

"For thirty years?"

"Yes; and *monsieur* is wondering why I am speaking of such a thing—why, having come to visit the Marquis de Marrast, *monsieur* should be talking with an old man who has passed three hundred and sixty months buried in a dungeon. Well, *monsieur,* I am not the greatest curiosity: there is De Tavernier,

who was imprisoned forty years ago, and —I left him in the Bastile. De Tavernier is quite an idiot, and his eyes have become so accustomed to the darkness of a cell that he gazes at the light as through a cloud of vapor. You will observe what it means to be sent to the Bastile; doubtless *monsieur* has not considered the subject carefully."

"Not in the light in which you have put it, truly; but you will pardon me if I inquire why you are bringing this to my attention. I have not come to Paris to study into the condition of the Bastile, *monsieur*," Campbell replied.

The old man straightened himself in his chair, grasping the arms firmly with his withered hands.

"And you are wondering why, instead of meeting Victor de Marrast, you are closeted with an old man who you fear has taken leave of his senses. Is it not so, M. Campbell?"

"It was certainly the marquis whom I expected to meet—having been admitted to this house; but that you have taken leave of your senses—you do me an injustice, *monsieur*," answered Campbell.

"It was I who received your note and commanded the servant to admit you."

"And not De Marrast? I was surely led to suppose—"

A fearful misgiving oppressed Campbell. The serving-man had spoken of death in the house. Before he could put the question which hovered on his lips the old Frenchman interrupted:

"Because it was not possible for the Marquis de Marrast to receive himself what was intended for him. It was yesterday, *monsieur*, that Victor went to the Pont au Change to meet the diligence from Calais. But to-day—it was impossible."

"And why?" Campbell put the question half hesitatingly.

"Because," answered the old man in a hollow voice, "this afternoon De Marrast was taken, a prisoner, to the Bastile."

CHAPTER II.

FACING UNKNOWN FOES.

For a moment Campbell experienced a feeling of relief.

Then suddenly there rushed into his mind that other statement he had heard from the lips of the Comte de Plauex—of three hundred and sixty months buried in a dungeon.

The voice of the comte broke the silence.

"Yes, *monsieur*, had I told you that the marquis, your friend, lay dead in this house, my sorrow would be less. For he is dead, though he may eat and drink and breathe. Why should I not know of what I speak—I, who have passed thirty years in that living tomb?"

"But De Marrast? Surely there is some mistake, *monsieur*—a mistake which will be rectified—to-morrow—within a few hours?" Campbell cried.

The old Frenchman shook his head.

"Ah, *monsieur!* I see you do not understand; the Bastile does not give up its prey so easily. And—Louis is young," he answered.

"You mean," Campbell burst out, "that so long as the king lives Victor will remain in the Bastile?"

"It was only when Louis the Fifteenth died and long after a new king came to Versailles that I obtained my liberty. When they took me to the Bastile I was not an old man, *monsieur*," the comte replied.

"And your king? Why has he sent Victor to the Bastile? Surely he has committed no crime against France?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"As if that matters, *monsieur*. It is even possible Louis had no direct hand in this thing; but that the marquis has a powerful enemy at court is plain enough —an enemy powerful enough to send him to the Bastile."

"Who spoke ill of him to the king?"

"Even that was not necessary. It is simple, very simple, to send an enemy to a living tomb. It is the *lettre de cachet*."

"Ah!" said Campbell hoarsely, "I have heard—of your *lettres de cachet;* it is the curse of France, *monsieur*."

That fateful document, signed in blank by the king, permitting whoever possessed the paper to fill the blank with the name of such a one as the holder desired should be committed to the Bastile. The prisoner went to his doom ignorant of his enemy's identity.

The old man's lips quivered, then a quick gust of passion swept across his face.

"*Monsieur,*" said he in a stern voice, "it is the wonder of the world that such things can come to pass, and the end is not far off. I, in truth, shall not live to see the day, but you, who are young, will witness the vindication of France from the yoke which has hung about her neck for generations past. Already the murmur of the multitude echoes through the streets of Paris. The day is fast approaching when the dungeons of the Bastile will give up their prisoners."

But Campbell was not thinking of the wrongs of the prisoners confined in the famous castle near the Seine. His mind was wholly occupied with Victor de Marrast and the sudden misfortune which had befallen him.

"Is it then possible, *monsieur,*" he demanded, "that the marquis has been taken to the Bastile through the order of an unknown enemy? Has no opportunity been given him to refute the charge against him?"

"We may have our suspicions, *monsieur,*" was the reply, "but of certainty we have nothing. Even this afternoon the marquis was preparing to go to the Pont au Change, as he did yesterday. There appeared suddenly at the door a coach, guarded by the king's soldiers; one entered this house, demanding word with the marquis. When De Marrast went down to him, he received the order to accompany the soldiers to the Bastile. The officer showed the order, signed by the king; the marquis was powerless."

"And he had received no warning?"

"Until they knocked at the door, he suspected nothing. Had he done so, he might have escaped from Paris."

For several moments Campbell remained silent; the old man arose from his seat.

"*Monsieur,*" he said in a low voice, "at such a time as this one does not know in whom to put confidence. Because of that I ordered that you be brought to this room and permitted to remain alone for a short period. During that interval I took the opportunity to study your face carefully. You have the right to demand an explanation. It is because I desired to satisfy myself that you could be trusted. Victor de Marrast is in the Bastile; to render him assistance we are powerless, but—there is something more."

"And what is that, *monsieur?*" asked Campbell sharply. "If we cannot help the marquis, what, then, remains for us to do?"

The Comte de Plauex took a step forward.

"It is evident that you have forgotten one thing, M. Campbell. When Victor de Marrast was dragged off to the Bastile he left behind him one who depended upon him for safety—his sister, Mlle. de Marrast," said he in a low voice.

"Mlle. de Marrast!" repeated Campbell, as though talking to himself. "But surely they will not send *her* to the Bastile—she, who is scarcely more than a child?"

"Scarcely a child, *monsieur,* for she is twenty years old. Do you know what the marquis had planned? That to-morrow you were to accompany him to his country château, which lies some leagues beyond the outskirts of Paris. It was because of that that *mademoiselle* left the city the day before yesterday — to have everything in readiness. You expected to meet her, is it not so?"

Campbell remembered that he had looked forward to that meeting.

"Then *mademoiselle* is not in Paris? She does not know what has occurred?" he asked.

"No; she is at the Château Bleaumont, guarded only by a handful of servants. Even now it may be too late, *monsieur.*"

"Too late?"

"To save her from the threatening danger."

Campbell's face showed his perplexity.

"And what danger can threaten *mademoiselle?*" he asked. "I can understand the marquis may have made enemies, but surely not so with a young girl scarcely a year out of a convent school."

"Yet it is evident the Marquis de Marrast believes his sister to be in danger. When a man is suddenly confronted with imprisonment in the Bastile, with the coach waiting to take him, one would not expect him to think of other things. But between the moment when the offi-

cer commanded him to follow and the time he took farewell of me—a brief quarter of an hour—Victor de Marrast thought only of his sister and—of you, *monsieur.*"

"Of me?" Campbell exclaimed.

The old man nodded slowly, and replied:

"Because the marquis feared what fate might overtake *mademoiselle,* and realized that he was powerless, his thoughts in that supreme moment turned to the only man who might take his place. As you see, I am useless and my days are numbered. It is true, the marquis has good friends in Paris, or had until a few hours ago; but a Frenchman must be indeed brave who will seek to block the plans of one who carries in his pocket *lettres de cachet.* In the few minutes given him, De Marrast was at a loss to which of his countrymen to turn. Once behind the walls of the Bastile and he could do nothing. Driven almost mad with anxiety, pacing this room perhaps for the last time, he cried out to me: 'She must be warned; she must be saved—and to-night! But who will save her?'

"And while I hesitated, my head bursting with the effort to suggest a name, he caught me by the arm. 'M. Campbell!' he exclaimed. 'Already he must be near Paris. Swear to me that you will see him. When he understands he will not refuse.'

"I swore, *monsieur,* and, rushing to the table, he seized a sheet of paper and began to write rapidly—so fiercely that he broke a quill. But even then there was scarcely time; he had not filled the page when the officer, who had stationed himself at the door, entered. The marquis understood not another minute would be given him; he folded the paper quickly, sealed it, and put it in my hand. 'Deliver this to him,' said he in a steady voice.

"Then, as the officer made a gesture of protest, reaching out his hand for the letter, De Marrast thrust into the hand a roll of gold.

"'Permit a lost man a last farewell to a dear friend,' said he.

"And because the officer was not in league with his enemy, but only bent upon carrying out his orders, he pocketed the gold and permitted me to keep the letter. It is here, *monsieur.*"

He put the paper in Campbell's hand. The Scotchman, scarcely noticing that the seal was broken, opened it hastily.

The writing showed every evidence of desperate haste, but the man for whom it was intended had no difficulty in recognizing it as that of Victor de Marrast. Bending toward the light, he read:

> Fate has decreed that within the hour I pass from among the living, but for myself I ask nothing, and to attempt anything in my behalf would be useless. Of you, my dear friend, I beg, however, the greatest favor which one man may demand of another — to save from treachery and debasement my sister.
>
> When too late, I understand the danger which hangs over us; I have received the blow and half the plot has been accomplished. How easy, think you, can what remains be done if there is not a strong hand and a resourceful brain to oppose the plotter. It is dangerous work, my friend, more dangerous than you can realize, for the power against which you must oppose yourself is tremendous; but because I know you do not fear danger, and the sturdy race from which you sprang knows no turning back, I beg of you, in the name of our past friendship, do not refuse.
>
> There have been other things in my mind—when you should meet Annette—but now my only thought is that she be saved from a fate more terrible than even the one I must undergo. And you, and you alone, may save her. She is at Bleaumont, and unsuspecting. Of the comte, my old friend, who will deliver to you this letter, you can inquire the way. Do not lose an hour. Thank God you are a stranger in France and none will guess on what errand you depart northward from Paris; did that man suspect, you might not reach the château alive. Too late I now realize his treachery, the plan he has mapped out for the destruction of those who stand in the way of his ambition.
>
> That he has gained the great goodwill of the king is our misfortune; and it was I who first took him to Versailles. To know his identity will arm you at the outset. Poor fool that I have been not to recognize the truth. It is to—

The writing ended abruptly, with a great blot of ink where the writer had driven the quill into the paper.

Campbell straightened himself, the sheet trembling in his hand. The old Frenchman was regarding him eagerly.

"*Monsieur,*" cried he, "*monsieur,* what has he written?"

"And *you* do not know?" demanded Campbell.

"I do not know, *monsieur;* he sealed the paper."

"But the seal was broken when you put it in my hand."

"Ah!" cried the comte, and an expression of alarm crossed his face.

Campbell studied that face, withered, and the color of chalk.

"De Marrast trusted you?" he asked abruptly.

The other threw up his hands. "And with reason, *monsieur.* But for him I should still be in the Bastile. My life is short, but what remains I have given to him. Even to-day I would have taken his place."

"Then, *monsieur,*" said Campbell quietly, "there are two in France who will not fail him. Even now you may render great assistance. Fill in the name which it is necessary for me to know."

He handed the old man the letter.

For a moment the latter held it toward the light; then, with a sad shake of his head, he passed it back.

"Read it to me, *monsieur;* age has somewhat dimmed my sight."

And this man was to be his only ally in the difficult task he was about to assume—a man so lame and blind that he could not with safety venture to leave the Hôtel de Marrast! Yet the mind of the old Frenchman showed no sign of decay; with his wide knowledge of affairs in France, why should not his suggestions prove of untold value?

Campbell took the letter and read its contents in a clear voice. As he finished he heard a startled exclamation on the part of his companion. The old man had become terribly agitated; his hand, stretched out suddenly, knocked one of the wine-glasses from the table.

"In the name of God, *monsieur,* and he wrote nothing more! You are sure?" he cried.

"Nothing more. See, there is only a blot upon the page—after the words 'It is to—'" Campbell replied.

"But the name—the name of the man he knows to be his enemy?"

"As you see, it is not here; yet a stroke of the pen would have given it to us. Why, why did De Marrast fail at the critical moment?"

There was the ring of impatience in Campbell's voice.

The comte turned and bent over the table; when he again faced his companion he held in his hand two ink-stained quills. The point of each was broken.

"Ah!" said he in a hollow voice. "The first quill he broke quickly, and this other after the words 'It is to—' In desperate haste he drove the point into the paper and shattered it, and—there were no others on the table. The officer had entered; there was no time to procure another. Perhaps at the moment he did not realize what he had neglected. Do you understand, *monsieur?*"

Campbell understood too well, but hope remained that the mistake might be rectified. He put the question eagerly:

"But you must know, it is not possible that you do not know, what the marquis intended to tell us?"

The old Frenchman shook his head.

"I do not know, *monsieur.* You observe De Marrast states he alone knew."

"But you, who have always lived in France—surely you knew much of his affairs; knew who had reason to be his enemy?"

"*Monsieur,*" replied the old man, "you have forgotten that for thirty years I was buried in the Bastile. Though, during the past nine months, I have been an occupant of the Hôtel de Marrast, I knew little of the marquis's outside affairs. He even tells us that he suspected nothing until a few hours ago."

"But you can remember—a chance word—something?"

"Nothing, *monsieur.* I can give the names of a dozen, any one of whom might be De Marrast's enemy, but I can do no more. God help me. I can do nothing."

The tears were rolling down his withered cheeks.

Campbell crumpled the letter in his hand. An expression of impatience crossed his face, then the lines about his mouth grew tense.

"Then it seems, *monsieur,* that we must work in the dark. Well, we will do so;

it has been done before. And we have one advantage: it will not be known that I am acting in behalf of the marquis. To-night I will go to the Château Bleaumont, unsuspected."

But instead of replying, the old Frenchman threw out his hands and dropped limply into a chair. Campbell sprang forward, thinking he had fainted, but the comte controlled his agitation with a supreme effort.

"*Monsieur!*" he cried in a terrible voice; "we are lost, *monsieur!*"

Then, before Campbell could reply:

"The seal! The seal of the letter was broken. I remember, alas! I remember. When De Marrast was taken down-stairs I followed, even to the door. It was many moments before I returned and concealed the letter."

"Concealed the letter, *monsieur le comte?*"

"In my agitation, scarcely knowing what I did, I first left it lying on the table. The seal was broken—some one read that letter, *monsieur.*"

CHAPTER III.

TAKING A BIG CHANCE AT A GATE.

In a flash one of the mysteries of that strange night was made clear to Campbell—the meeting with the unknown man outside the door of the Hôtel de Marrast, the seemingly unnecessary warning, the veiled threat which lay behind the stranger's words.

In plain English he had been warned to mind his own business; not to interfere in the affairs of the Marquis de Marrast. Who the man might be he had no means of knowing, but it was only too plain that he was possessed of the knowledge that Victor de Marrast had appealed to the young Scotchman for aid in his extremity. The stranger must be cognizant of the contents of the letter the Comte de Plauex had carelessly left upon the table in the library.

Some men might have hesitated before going further, for the danger was now doubly great. But Harold Campbell was of another caliber. To recede now was to hesitate in the face of a threat; to show the white feather because danger lurked near.

But though a reckless spirit rose up within him, he was not blind to the dictates of caution. He possessed a valuable combination of attributes. Brave to recklessness, he was yet master of a coolness which had stood him well in many a crisis.

When he again addressed his companion it was in a voice of calmness:

"And who could have opened this letter, which you left for but a few minutes in a private room in the Hôtel de Marrast? Surely not one of those who came to take the marquis to the Bastile?"

"That was not possible," replied the comte; "only the officer actually entered the house."

"Was any one else present—any one who was not an occupant of this building?"

The Frenchman shook his head.

"You are sure of that? Summon all your faculties, comte, for it is necessary that I know as much as possible."

"I do not think any one entered the house; no, I could swear to it. Yet the seal of the letter was broken."

"Then," replied Campbell, "one of two things is certain: either the seal broke of itself—and that I cannot believe—or else one of the servants is a traitor to the Marquis de Marrast. Which one?"

But the strain had begun to tell upon his companion. The old man was now trembling so violently that he could no longer think, or speak connectedly.

"*Monsieur,*" said Campbell, after a pause, "but one question more and you may retire to the rest of which you stand so much in need. Tell me how I may reach, as quickly as possible, this Château Bleaumont; already we have wasted too much time."

He poured out a glass of wine and held it to the lips of the half-fainting man. The comte drank and received strength, but when he spoke it was in a voice so low that Campbell was obliged to bend forward to catch the words.

"Near the village of Foulon, eighteen leagues from Paris by the straight road, and to start upon that road you must pass through the Place de la Bastile, *monsieur,*" he murmured.

"Very well," replied Campbell; "then I shall need a horse. I should

reach the château some little time after daybreak. It so happens that I am unarmed."

The comte motioned toward one of the drawers of the table.

Campbell opened it and discovered therein two pistols which, upon examination, proved to be primed and loaded. These he thrust into his pockets.

He looked at his watch. The hands marked a quarter to ten o'clock. He began, half aloud, to figure just what he might hope to accomplish within the next few hours.

To return to the tavern near the Pont au Change and procure a horse must consume three-quarters of an hour; by a quarter to eleven, then, he would be upon the road. From Paris to the Château Bleaumont was in the neighborhood of fifty-four miles; by hard riding he should reach the vicinity of the château not many hours after daybreak. He must leave the Hôtel de Marrast at once.

He did not for a moment try to deceive himself that he would be permitted to depart unobserved.

Of one thing he was convinced: whoever the marquis's enemy might be, he possessed an agent in one of the servants employed in the house. This agent had read the letter and communicated to his master what he had learned.

Whether the man who had spoken to him before the door was the principal or another agent, Campbell could not guess; nor did he try to do so. It was sufficient that the contents of De Marrast's letter were known to the enemy; that he could not hope to act secretly.

Under ordinary circumstances he might have departed from the Hôtel de Marrast by a back door, but under the present conditions this course would be futile. He would leave as he had come, trusting to good fortune to make an exit from Paris unmolested.

Turning to the comte, he said shortly: "*Monsieur*, I bid you farewell; if it be possible, inform the marquis that I bind myself to carry out his wishes."

In another moment he had passed from the room and retraced his steps through the long corridor. At the foot of the stairs he came upon the somber-visaged servant who had acted as his guide.

Campbell looked at the man sharply, but the inscrutable face told him nothing. The fellow unbolted the door and threw it open. Campbell passed out into the night, and the heavy fastenings clanged behind him.

He drew a deep breath; it was evident no one had received an order to obstruct his leaving the house that night.

He walked rapidly along the boulevard with the feeling of one who suspects that he is being followed; yet, watchful as he was, he could detect nothing.

At length he reached the tavern near the Pont au Change. Here he met his first difficulty. When he inquired about a horse, the landlord shook his head.

"In the morning *monsieur* can be accommodated with a dozen, if needs be, but at this hour of the night—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But surely a horse may be obtained in Paris, if one is willing to pay well for it," Campbell suggested.

The landlord rubbed his chin reflectively.

"It might be possible, and—how much would *monsieur* be willing to pay?"

"For a good horse; shall we say one hundred and fifty francs?"

"For that sum a horse might be obtained in certain quarters, if *monsieur* desires to put himself to some trouble. I would advise *monsieur* to wait until morning, for it is not possible one would care to ride about Paris for pleasure at such an hour of the night. And"—he assumed an expression of much concern—"as *monsieur* is evidently a stranger, I might suggest it is not the safest thing in the world to ride about Paris at such an hour. *Monsieur* will pardon me?"

"Two hundred francs?" Campbell replied shortly.

The landlord hesitated.

"Yes! it is possible I might direct *monsieur* to a place where he could strike a bargain on such terms; I might even arrange it myself—in the morning."

For a moment Campbell hesitated also. A suspicion had flashed into his head.

"Two hundred and fifty francs," said he calmly.

"Two hundred and fifty francs for a horse, *monsieur?*" The Frenchman was plainly agitated.

"And twenty-five for yourself, seeing

you may be put to some trouble," added Campbell.

The man's agitation became painful to witness; he shifted from one leg to the other, opened his mouth to speak, but the words seemed to cling to his tongue.

Campbell took out his wallet.

"Shall we say two hundred and seventy-five francs in all? I will put that amount into your hands; in return you will procure me a good horse within a quarter of an hour."

He began to count out the gold pieces.

The landlord appeared to be on the point of strangling. If he received two hundred and seventy-five francs he would be able to make a profit of no less than seventy-five out of the transaction. Seventy-five francs obtained for five minutes' trouble!

Campbell extended his palm on which lay the gold pieces. The Frenchman swallowed with difficulty.

"*Monsieur!*" he stammered.

"Well?" said Campbell sharply. "If I cannot obtain a horse here, I will go elsewhere."

"*Mort du diable!*" groaned the landlord. "Does not *monsieur* comprehend there is an ordinance against providing a stranger with a horse at this hour of the night? But—if *monsieur* would consent to—well—"

Campbell understood perfectly that there was no such ordinance, and also that some one had forbade the landlord to furnish him with a horse that night.

But how was it possible for any one to know that he would probably demand a horse at this inn? The answer was not difficult. Some one in the Hôtel de Marrast had listened to his conversation with the Comte de Plauex, and had left the house before him for the purpose of instructing the landlord of the tavern near the Pont au Change.

That this person had impressed the tavern-keeper was evident, for what French innkeeper would hesitate to accept two hundred and seventy-five francs offered for so simple a matter as providing a horse at eleven o'clock on a summer night?

But Campbell saw that the other's greed had got the better of his fears. The landlord was about to suggest a method whereby he might obtain the money and at the same time appear to obey the instructions it was evident he had received.

The gold pieces jingled in the extended palm, almost under the other's nose.

"If *monsieur* would consent to—ah—shall we say—depart secretly? You see, I do not care to have the police visit me in the morning—I, who am a poor man," the tavern-keeper concluded in a low voice.

"I understand. You do not wish me to mount at the door of your inn. Well, it is all the same to me—so long as you procure me a horse quickly," answered Campbell.

The landlord glanced cautiously about, snatched the money, and dropped it into his pocket. Making a little gesture which signified resignation, he came close to Campbell and placed his mouth in proximity to his ear.

"*Monsieur* will derive pleasure from strolling out upon the Pont au Change, from whence an excellent view can be obtained of the river. If *monsieur* should lean over the railing near the center of the bridge, it might happen that a horseman would halt and dismount near him. It would then only be necessary for *monsieur* and the horseman to exchange places—as quickly as possible; the police would be none the wiser."

"I understand perfectly; also why caution is necessary," answered Campbell shortly.

The Frenchman smiled at his own cleverness. He was thinking how easily he had gained seventy-five francs besides the commission he would demand from the man of whom he purchased the horse.

He was thinking also of how he might earn something more by furnishing certain information to a fellow who at that moment was seated in a room up-stairs. He was a crafty person, was the keeper of the little tavern near the Pont au Change—one who understood perfectly how to serve two masters.

"*Monsieur* is doubtless armed?" he ventured.

"That is my own affair; go, attend to the matter of which we have spoken," replied Campbell sharply.

Ten minutes later, leaning upon the parapet of the bridge, below which flowed the silent Seine, he heard the sound of hoof-beats behind, on the planking of the

structure. A horseman, mounted on a gray steed, appeared out of the gloom. He pulled up the horse, dropped from the saddle, and approached the parapet.

Campbell turned, took a few quick steps, and vaulted upon the animal's back.

As he gathered up the reins he experienced a thrill of satisfaction; in the first move of the game he was not the loser.

He leaned toward the silent figure which had taken his place beside the parapet.

"My friend," he asked in a careless tone, "can you tell me the most direct way to the Place de la Bastile?"

"To the Bastile, *monsieur?*" the man replied, looking sharply up into the face above him.

"That is what I desire to know," replied Campbell shortly.

"Across the bridge; the first turn to the right. And you desire to go to the Bastile, *monsieur?*"

Campbell touched the horse's flanks gently with his heel.

"I have heard that to see the Bastile by night is something," said he lightly, and rode out across the planking of the Pont au Change.

The man left behind gazed after him for a moment. Then he turned and ran at full speed across the bridge in the direction of the inn.

To a horseman familiar with the streets of Paris the distance from the Pont au Change to the gate of the city through which Campbell desired to pass could be covered in a reasonably short period, but the Scotchman soon found himself in a maze of doubt.

Three times he was obliged to stop and inquire the way, and once to retrace his steps through a narrow and almost deserted street. At the black walls of the famous prison, as he passed into their shadow, he cast only a hurried glance. He realized he had wasted much precious time and that every moment might now be of incalculable value.

He finally reached the gate and pulled in his horse. A sleepy custodian was examining by lantern-light a paper which had been presented by a man who drove an unwieldy ox-cart.

This cart stood in the middle of the street between Campbell and the gate.

He had resolved, knowing it might be difficult to ride out of Paris unmolested, to bribe the guard liberally. Still, the success of such a method was uncertain, and he stood on the alert to accomplish his purpose in another manner if opportunity presented itself.

Now, as he pulled up his horse behind the cart, a sudden idea flashed through his head.

The guard, disgruntled at being aroused from his nap at such an hour, examined the paper with much growling.

"So you are one of those miserable fagot-gatherers who provide fuel for the authorities? Can you not remain quiet until daybreak?" he demanded.

"But it is a long way I must go; do you imagine fagots may be found anywhere?" retorted the driver of the cart sullenly.

The guard shrugged his shoulders, thrust the permit into his pocket, and laid hold of the gate; it swung slowly open, leaving the way clear for the passage of the cart, which began to move forward at a snail's pace.

"Hurry!" growled the irate soldier. "Do you fancy I have nothing to do except wait upon your convenience? I cannot even expect a paltry sou from such as you for my trouble. Now, with those two horsemen who passed out not half an hour since it was quite different. They were in the devil of a hurry, but did not neglect to toss me a *louis d'or* when I opened the gate. *Mort du diable!* and half my time is passed in waiting on such as you."

Campbell, close behind and concealed by the high-backed cart, heard this statement plainly. Now, many persons might pass through that particular gate, but intuitively he felt he had reason to be interested in the two horsemen who had ridden out of Paris in such a devil of a hurry.

The idea to which the presence of the cart in front of him had given birth became a determination. His impatience to be clear of Paris urged him to any recklessness.

The cart moved forward slowly. The oxen were already through the gate, and the vehicle passed into the shadow of the pillars.

The guard, having set his lantern on

the ground, stood just outside the entrance; the cart quite blocked the narrow passage, and what was behind it was invisible. Campbell gathered up his reins.

The rear of the ox-cart swung clear of the opening; one, two, a half-dozen feet opened between it and the flanking pillars. Campbell spoke sharply to the horse.

The guard, in the act of stooping to take up the lantern, heard the pound of hoofs. The dark outline of a horse and rider appeared on the farther side of the cart, flashed past, and, swerving into the main road, galloped off at breakneck speed.

For a mounted man to dash through a six-foot space in semidarkness and flanked by a stone column and a heavy cart, is no easy venture: the least miscalculation must bring disaster.

But Campbell, in a single mad bound, had accomplished the feat unscathed.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAPPED.

THE angry command to halt and the flicker of the lantern, as the irate guard ran into the road, only urged Campbell to send his horse forward at a faster gallop. And presently the shouts grew fainter, until they ceased altogether.

He judged it must be some time after midnight and he had consumed an hour since leaving the Hôtel de Marrast. There were many miles of riding before him, through an unfamiliar country and amid unknown dangers; yet, as he felt the strong pulses of the horse under him and the breath of the cool night air upon his face, he experienced a strange exhilaration.

He rode for the love of riding, mile after mile, over the hard, smooth road.

But after a time the animal began to show signs of weariness, and Campbell realized also that too great haste might result in his losing his way. He had kept due north, guiding his course by the stars, and now a word to the tired beast reduced the pace to a gentle canter. At the end of another mile he reached a fork in the highway.

He took out his watch and bent down to study the dial; the hands marked two o'clock. He had ridden for almost two hours.

For several minutes he sat motionless in the saddle, endeavoring to figure which of the two roads he should take.

Both led seemingly northward, but one, he knew, must carry him out of the proper course. He began to realize that there might be other than human agencies working against him.

Through the gloom he could make out the dim outlines of several houses standing some way back from the highway. But these places of abode were perfectly dark; the peasants of France do not burn lights at two o'clock in the morning.

Yet, to sit motionless, guessing which way he should go, profited him nothing. Only one course seemed to offer itself: he must arouse the inmates of one of the houses and inquire the way.

Dismounting, he threw the bridle into the hollow of his arm and led the horse forward until, reaching a path, he turned into it, and presently came to the door of one of the silent buildings. At that moment a dog began to bark loudly.

Campbell raised his hand to knock, when a window above his head was suddenly opened.

"Who is there?" called a gruff voice. "And what do you want?"

Campbell replied, stating his perplexity. The voice answered angrily:

"And do you take this for an inn, that you arouse people from their beds in the middle of the night? Well, if you are going to Foulon, take the road to the left; at the end of two leagues you will pass a tavern: there you may inquire the way farther."

The window slammed, and the dog set up a fresh series of yelps. Campbell led the horse back over the path onto the highway. There he mounted and took the fork to the left; but he had wasted another quarter of an hour.

He had covered nearer three than two leagues before he came in sight of anything which looked like a public inn. It was now after three o'clock, and already the early birds were stirring, also peasants who must travel some distance to begin their work at daybreak, together with a few carts whose drivers nodded in their seats.

Of one of these Campbell asked the way, and how far it was to Foulon. The man shook his head, saying he had only to follow the road to reach that place, but how far it might be he did not know. Yet it must be some leagues to the north.

A quarter of a mile farther on the horseman came in sight of the inn. A light shone from a lower window, and smoke was beginning to arise from the chimney.

Now, Campbell had no great desire to stop at a public place—at least, not until he had come to Foulon, near which lay the Château Bleaumont.

In the first place, he did not want to waste time; and in the second, he had not forgotten that the guard at the gate of Paris had said two horsemen had ridden out a half-hour before him. He had not the slightest desire to meet these unknown riders.

But to stop now seemed imperative. He was not at all certain just how to proceed, and his horse was showing unmistakable signs of weariness. Food and drink for the animal were the surest means of making it fit for a last dash across the country to his destination.

So, on arriving before the inn which stood a score of feet back from the road, he turned in toward the wide porch and dismounted.

A sleepy hostler answered his summons and appeared surly enough until a silver piece dispelled his sullenness.

Yes, *monsieur* was on the right road to Foulon, though if he had kept on a mile farther the fork to the left would have brought him quite two leagues from his destination. As for the distance—well, it was something like thirty miles, perhaps a little more, possibly less. Also, the horse could be attended to, and *monsieur* also obtain refreshment, if he would wait, perhaps half an hour. Had *monsieur* come from Paris?

"From Paris, and I am in haste," Campbell replied.

The man shrugged his shoulders; he need not have been told that—the horse showed it.

Campbell entered the inn. A pair of candles were burning in a dingy room filled with small tables, the tops of which were stained with wine.

It was evident the hostler aroused some one, for at the end of ten minutes a youth, yawning desperately, appeared and asked what *monsieur* might require.

"Coffee, and whatever else you can prepare quickly," answered Campbell.

The youth disappeared. Campbell went over to a corner, seated himself on a wooden settee, and, leaning back, closed his eyes. Rider as well as steed was beginning to feel the effects of the mad dash northward.

He sat up with a start. The room was in semidarkness, for the candles had burned out, and the first faint light of dawn was struggling through the dingy windows.

He knew that he had been asleep, and hastily pulled out his watch. It was past four o'clock. He had slept for the good part of an hour.

Angry at himself and at those who had permitted him to waste so much time when he had declared he was in haste, he got upon his feet.

The main door, opening on to the veranda, was ajar; through the aperture the gray light of dawn was streaming. Campbell took a dozen steps forward, then halted suddenly. A voice outside was asking:

"And you say that *monsieur,* who has ridden from Paris, is asleep inside?"

A second voice, that of the hostler, replied:

"As sound as you please, though an hour ago he appeared to be in great haste. It has often happened before."

"And he asked the way to Foulon?"

"Have I not told you so?"

"Then I am in luck if, as you say, he is still here," replied the first voice.

Campbell darted back into the room; through the doorway he could see nothing of the man who had evidently ridden up on horseback, but through one of the windows it might be possible. So, some one had either followed from Paris or it was one of the horsemen who had ridden through the gate half an hour ahead of him. In either case, he desired to see the fellow's face.

But for the moment he was doomed to disappointment; the rider had already dismounted and stepped onto the veranda. He could see the horse, covered with sweat and breathing heavily; but the saddle was empty.

Campbell glanced hurriedly about him, hoping to find an opening through which he might escape from the room. But except for the door leading into the hall, and the little windows, no means of exit was visible.

It was not probable the newcomer would offer violence in the tap-room of a public inn, but he might manage to detain him, and already he had lost too much time. He cursed himself for a fool; had he not fallen asleep, he would by now have been well on his way.

Steps in the hall warned him that escape was now impossible. He dropped one hand into his pocket, and his fingers closed on the butt of the pistol. In any event, he would be ready.

(To be continued.)

The Mutiny on the Mercury.

By BERTRAM LEBHAR.

A newspaper story of certain exciting experiences in a clash between the proprietor and the managing editor.

MARSDEN, managing editor of the *Mercury,* frowned dejectedly.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to hold down my job much longer," he said. "De Peyster, the new boss, is beginning to get on my nerves. It's only a question of time before I shall find myself telling him what I think of him in plain, unvarnished language; and after I have thus frankly expressed my opinion, I guess there won't be any room for me in the *Mercury* office."

Mrs. Marsden leaned across the little round dinner-table and sympathetically patted her husband's clenched fist.

"Perhaps you'll get along with him better when you become more used to him," she said gently. "He may be a really pleasant fellow when you get to know him well. It isn't wise to form impressions too hastily, you know, Tom, dear. He's only had the paper for a month."

"Yes, and in that month he's come pretty near ruining it," declared her husband bitterly. "I used to be proud of the old sheet. There wasn't a more fearless or more aggressive newspaper in the country than the *Mercury* used to be—under its former owner. The paper's motto was 'Without fear and without favor,' and we always lived up to it.

"But since the *Mercury* changed hands, we've become as weak as boarding-house tea. De Peyster, with his many prejudices and his social aspirations, has emasculated the paper. We're only allowed to print half the news. The other half has to be kept out for fear of hurting the feelings of some of De Peyster's high society friends.

"He's always calling me up on the phone, and telling me to kill such-and-such a story, or to give a yarn three times as much space as it's worth, because he wants to oblige somebody or other."

"Well, after all, Tom, dear, he owns the paper, and is entitled to do as he pleases with it," Mrs. Marsden remonstrated. "You cannot reasonably expect him to run the *Mercury* in accordance with your wishes, you know. As the proprietor, he has a perfect right to change the paper's policy if he so desires."

"Policy be hanged!" cried the husband irritably. "The poor old sheet hasn't got even a vestige of a policy any more. De Peyster seems to regard it as a mere plaything. He hasn't the remotest idea of how a newspaper should be run. Yesterday we went to press without printing a line about the Seymour Brown suicide. All the other papers had columns about it. It was the leading story of the day, in fact. Do you know why we didn't print it?

Simply because Seymour Brown was a friend of De Peyster. Isn't that enough to make a fellow weary?"

"Well, why should you care, so long as he pays you your salary every week?" argued Mrs. Marsden. "After all, dear, that's the main thing for you to consider. You're making good money, and you've got one of the highest positions in the newspaper business. We're just about as happy as we could be. Let him run his old paper any way he wishes. There's no reason why it should worry you."

"Oh, yes, there is," replied Marsden savagely. "There are other things in this world besides money, Lucy. There's self-respect, for one thing, and I'm beginning to lose mine.

"The fellows on the other papers are laughing at us. They declare that the *Mercury* has become the biggest joke that ever happened—and they're right.

"I used to be proud of being managing editor of the *Mercury*. It was a position second to none in the business; but now I have to hang my head in shame to think that I'm in charge of such a weak, puerile, idiotic apology for a newspaper."

His wife sighed. She knew that Marsden possessed a fiery temper and was extremely stubborn, and, under the circumstances, she feared the worst.

"Try not to do anything rash, Tom, dear," she implored, as she brought him his hat and helped him on with his overcoat. "Try to get along with De Peyster as well as you can. Remember you have me and the kiddies to think of, as well as yourself. If you lose your job on the *Mercury*, you may have great difficulty in getting another, and we haven't a cent saved."

Marsden winced at this last sentense. Only a few weeks previously he had withdrawn his savings of years from the bank and invested them in Wall Street on "a sure-thing" tip, which had turned out to be a delusion and a snare, as sure-thing tips generally do.

Under the circumstances, he felt that his wife's gentle reminder was a well-deserved reproach, although she did not mean it as such, and he answered her quite meekly.

"Yes, my dear. You're right. It's up to me to be careful, for I really can't afford to lose my job just now. I'll do my best to get along with De Peyster and his foibles, and to keep my temper within bounds. But it's going to be a mighty hard job," he added with a sigh.

II.

WHEN Marsden reached the *Mercury* building and, passing through the city room, pushed open the frosted glass door marked "Managing Editor," the telephone-bell on his desk began to tinkle.

He sat down and lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Mr. De Peyster is on the wire, sir," the boy at the switchboard announced.

"All right; put him right on," Marsden commanded, and he frowned as, a second later, the high-pitched voice of the owner of the *Mercury* came to him through the instrument.

"Hallo, Marsden! Is that you? I thought I'd call you up to remind you that Mrs. Stacey Baxter-Buchanan holds her regular monthly reception at her residence to-night. Don't fail to send a good man to 'cover' it, and see that we have a good story about the affair in the paper to-morrow morning."

"All right, sir. I'll be sure to attend to it," assented Marsden. "I'll give it a whole column, if you wish.

"It really won't be worth ten lines," he muttered to himself. "Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan isn't one of the top-liners in society, and her receptions are always dull and without any news value. However, Lucy is right. I can't afford to lose my job just now, so I must make every effort to please the old fool."

"A column!" came the voice of De Peyster over the wire with an inflection of surprise. "That won't do at all, Marsden. Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan is a particular friend of mine. I want you to devote at least three columns to her reception."

"Three columns!" shouted the managing editor, losing his self-control. "Why, I beg your pardon, Mr. De Peyster, but that's absolutely absurd.

There isn't another paper in town that will give it more than a paragraph. Besides, we're going to be particularly crowded to-morrow morning. The great Horton murder trial begins to-day, and we'll have to devote at least a couple of pages to that."

"Well, I can't help it," retorted De Peyster with a shade of asperity in his voice. "I've already promised Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan that we'll give her at least three columns; so it's got to be done. You must manage it some way—even if you have to cut down the report of the Horton trial."

"What!" the indignant managing editor fairly screamed into the transmitter. "Cut down the story of the greatest murder trial of the century in order to make room for an account of a dinky reception that isn't worth a tinker's dam? Why, really, Mr. De Peyster, that is the most—"

By a violent effort he stopped short, suddenly realizing that if he finished the sentence he would find himself minus a job.

The voice of his indignant employer came to him sharply over the wire.

"Really, Marsden, I don't care to enter into any argument with you concerning the matter. I am the owner of the *Mercury,* and intend to do as I please with its columns. You will kindly carry out my orders without any impertinent comments."

Marsden's face was crimson, and it was a good thing for him that the man on the other end of the wire could not see the ferocious scowl upon his features. He was silent for some seconds, struggling to regain his lost self-control.

When he next spoke he had managed, by a desperate effort, to acquire mastery over himself.

"Very well, sir," he said grimly. "Your orders shall be carried out. Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan shall have her three columns' worth of space in the morning. I beg your pardon for having presumed to discuss the matter with you."

"That's all right," replied his employer in a much pleasanter tone. "If we are to get along together, Marsden, you must learn not to oppose me in the least particular. My instructions must be obeyed implicitly. I cannot brook any insubordination. By the way," he continued, "there's another matter I want to talk to you about. Who wrote the story in yesterday morning's paper about the Patterson wedding?"

"Young Carruthers wrote it. Pretty good story, wasn't it?"

"No. I don't think so. I was very much displeased with it."

"But everybody said our story was the best in town," cried the surprised managing editor. "I was so pleased with Carruthers's good work that I gave him a bonus of ten dollars."

"Well, you can give him a week's notice, in addition," snapped De Peyster. "I don't require his services on the *Mercury* any longer."

"A week's notice!" gasped Marsden. "What on earth for? Young Carruthers is one of the most promising reporters on the staff. He hasn't fallen down on a single story since he went on the paper, and he is a really brilliant writer."

"That may be, but his style is too sarcastic to suit me. There was a covert sneer in every line of his description of that wedding."

"Of course there was," cried the managing editor. "That is why I was so pleased with it. Nobody could have anything but a sneer for the man who divorced his faithful wife of twenty years in order to marry a dashing soubrette. By handling the story in the clever way he did, young Carruthers touched a responsive chord in the heart of the public. We have received many letters from delighted readers applauding the stand we took."

"I don't care anything about that," snapped De Peyster. "Whatever his faults, Mr. Patterson is a man of high social standing, and should have been treated respectfully in the columns of the *Mercury.* He has communicated his displeasure to me, and I have promised him to make an example of the man who wrote the offensive article. Therefore, you will please give Carruthers a week's notice immediately."

"But really that would be most unjust," protested Marsden. "Carruthers is not to blame. He simply carried out

instructions. I told him not to spare the contracting parties in writing the story of that marriage."

"Then *you*, also, deserve to be discharged," declared the owner of the *Mercury* grimly. "Let this be a lesson to you, Marsden. This time I will be content with the discharge of the man who wrote the story; but if anything of the sort occurs again, you also will suffer."

Marsden was about to make an angry reply, but a click at the other end of the wire told him that his conversation with his employer was at an end.

Thrusting the telephone-receiver back on its hook, he sprang up from his chair and fiercely paced up and down the room, his fists clenched and his eyes flashing fire.

"Confound him!" he cried savagely. "Darn his mean, narrow little soul! If only I dared to tell him what I think of him! If only I could afford to tell him to go to Hades! But, for the sake of Lucy and the kids, I can't do it. I've got to be false to my manhood and bend my knee to him, like an arrant coward. If only I hadn't lost that money in Wall Street! I wouldn't stay on this job another hour, if I had enough cash to tide me over for a few months."

When he had calmed down somewhat, he went outside to the day city editor.

"Send young Carruthers in to me as soon as he comes in," he ordered.

Fifteen minutes later a tall, good-looking young man knocked on the glass door marked "Managing Editor."

"Do you wish to see me, sir?" he asked, as he entered the private office in response to Marsden's "Come in."

"Yes, I do, Carruthers," said Marsden gently, gazing fixedly at the blue blotting-pad on his desk in order to avoid his visitor's frank gaze. "Sit down. I want to have a talk with you.

"My boy," he went on, somewhat huskily, "I have a very unpleasant duty to perform. I regret to say that, after next Saturday, your services will no longer be required on the *Mercury*."

The young man turned pale.

"I—I don't understand," he stammered. "I thought that you were well satisfied with me. Only yesterday you gave me a bonus for good work, and now you propose to fire me. What have I done?"

"I'm sorry," muttered Marsden contritely. "I don't want you to think that this is any reflection upon you, Carruthers. I assure you that it is not. If I can help you to get a job on another paper, I shall be glad to do it. I am very well satisfied with your work."

"Then, won't you please tell me why you are firing me?" cried the surprised youth.

The managing editor uttered a sound which seemed suspiciously like a groan.

"Yes, I'll tell you," he cried fiercely. "I'm firing you because—because I'm the biggest coward that ever wore shoe-leather."

And there was such a wretched look on his face that the reporter impulsively held out his hand.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "Please don't feel badly about it, Mr. Marsden. I'll get along, all right. I shall never forget your kindness to me, while I've been on the *Mercury*. And, believe me, I sha'n't leave here with any hard feelings toward *you*."

III.

As Fred Carruthers left the managing editor's sanctum, he pondered deeply.

"Mighty queer go," he soliloquized. "Wonder why on earth I'm fired. The boss seems to feel mighty cut-up about it. It's a cinch he hasn't got anything against me. Wonder what he could have meant by making that remark about being the biggest coward that ever wore shoe-leather. Marsden never struck me as being a coward. I never met a whiter man than he is.

"Maybe the city editor can throw some light on the mystery. I guess I'll tackle him on the subject."

He walked over to a roll-top desk in a corner of the city room behind which sat a coatless man intently perusing some newspaper clippings.

"Mr. Harding, I regret to inform you that I'm fired. Can you tell me why?" began Carruthers.

The man at the desk looked up from his work and eyed the reporter with undisguised surprise.

"Fired!" he exclaimed. "Who fired you? Not Mr. Marsden?"

Carruthers nodded.

"You don't tell me!" said the city editor. "Why, I imagined he was so pleased with your work that you were about due for a raise of salary. I supposed that was what he wanted to see you about just now. What have you been doing?"

Carruthers shrugged his shoulders.

"You can search me. I thought that perhaps you could tell me. The managing editor didn't vouchsafe me any explanation; but he seemed quite upset about the matter. He said it was no reflection on my work, and that he was sorry to have to give me the bounce."

"Then he must be doing it at the command of the new boss. It's too darned bad. I'm sorry to see you go, Carruthers; for I don't mind telling you that I consider you one of the ablest men on my staff. When does your discharge go into effect?"

"Not until next Saturday."

"Well, maybe the order will be rescinded by then. I sincerely hope so. By the way, I want you to cover the theater line to-night. Saunders, our regular dramatic man, is sick. You've never covered the line before, have you? Well, you'll find it pretty easy. All you've got to do is to drop into each theater, keep your eyes open for news, and inquire of the press-agents if they've got anything to give out."

That evening Carruthers started out to cover this assignment. He visited several theaters, and interviewed the press-agents as instructed. He also kept a sharp lookout for interesting happenings which had not come within the ken of the official publicity promoters.

Outside the entrance of the Barrett Theater the reporter met an old friend in the person of Policeman Tibbs, a uniformed member of the traffic squad, detailed there to regulate theater carriages.

"Hallo, young feller!" exclaimed the patrolman heartily. "Glad to see you."

"The compliment is reciprocated, old chap," retorted Carruthers genially (for it is from such humble sources as Patrolman Tibbs that much news springs). "What's doing? Know anything worth printing?"

"Well, you ought to have been around here an hour ago. You'd have seen some fun, and I shouldn't be surprised if you could have written a piece for the paper about it."

"What was it? Tell me about it," exclaimed the reporter with interest.

"Well, it was like this. A carriage drives up to the theater, here, and a gent and a lady gets out. They was swell folks, too, I should judge from the style of them. They are just going into the theater when the lady puts her hand to her throat and cries 'My Heavens, my diamond necklace—it is gone!'

"The gent becomes very excited when he hears this. 'My word,' says he. 'How very careless of you, Minerva. Where do you think you lost it?'

"The lady replies that she's sure she had it on when she left her house and got into the brougham, so they goes back to the carriage and searches every inch of it; but the necklace ain't to be found there.

"So, then, the lady is positive that she must have just dropped it as she was getting out of the carriage and walking into the theater, and they begins to search in the gutter and on the sidewalk here.

"Just then I steps up and salutes, asking if I can be of any assistance.

"'Officer,' cries the gent, 'my wife has just dropped a diamond necklace worth twenty thousand dollars. It must be somewhere here in the snow. Don't let anybody pass along here until we've found it.'

"Then I helps them to search, and a crowd gathers, and several men volunteers to join in the hunt for the gems. We turn up every inch of snow, but the necklace ain't to be found.

"The gent grows more and more excited every minute, and begins to abuse me, and threaten to have me broke if I don't find the necklace for him. Can you beat that for nerve? Some of these rich people reckon they own the earth, I guess.

"As for the lady, she begins to cry, and says she's the most unfortunate woman on earth, and she's sure the matter will get into the newspapers. It's a funny thing, but she really seemed more concerned about it's getting into the newspapers than she was about the loss of the necklace.

"The gent tells me haughtily that the press must not be informed about the incident, and he gives the same instructions to the management of the theater.

"I reckon the theater people will obey orders and keep mum about it, but that fresh gent can't gag me. That's why I'm telling you all about it."

"It's very kind of you, old chap," declared Carruthers gratefully. "And was the necklace finally found?"

"No, it wasn't. After we'd searched for about an hour, they gives it up in despair. The lady was so upset that they didn't go into the theater, but got into their carriage and drove off home, after the gent had again warned me that I would surely get broke if the matter got into the newspapers."

"And I suppose you didn't learn who they were, eh?" inquired the reporter eagerly.

"Yes, I did. The gent gave me a card and told me to be sure to notify him at once if the necklace was found, and he'd reward me handsomely. I've got the card here."

He took off his cap, extracted a piece of pasteboard from the interior, and handed it to Carruthers.

"Mr. Horatio Spriggs — Madison Avenue," the reporter read. "Gee whiz, Tibbs, this is a mighty good story, and I'm ever so much obliged to you for telling me about it. Don't say a word to the fellows on the other papers, will you, old chap?"

"I won't," the policeman assured him. "I'll be mighty glad, though, if you'll print a piece in your paper about it, just to teach that fresh gent that he don't own the whole earth."

"You just leave that to me," retorted Carruthers with an expressive wink. "I'll give him plenty of publicity, never fear."

And he started off for the home address of Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Spriggs; so elated over his good luck that he actually forgot that he was to be fired from the *Mercury* on the following Saturday.

IV.

In response to Carruthers's ring, the door of the Spriggs residence was opened by the haughtiest butler in New York.

This proud person eyed the visitor suspiciously, and when he heard that the latter was a newspaper reporter he made no effort to conceal his disdain.

"Why don't you come around in the morning?" he exclaimed severely. "Don't you think you're a very impertinent young feller to be bothering us at this hour of the night?"

"Why, it's only ten o'clock," protested Carruthers good-humoredly. "And it's really a matter of great importance. You just tell Mr. Spriggs that I desire to see him about that diamond necklace, and I'm sure he'll give me an interview."

And Carruthers was right. As soon as the butler communicated this message to his master, the latter hastily left the library and, with a frown on his face, descended to the entrance-hall, where the reporter stood waiting, hat in hand.

Carruthers saw at a glance that Patrolman Tibbs had not erred in describing Mr. Horatio Spriggs as "a fresh gent who imagined he owned the whole earth."

He was a very pompous young man, and his demeanor was even more haughty than that of his supercilious butler.

"What is it you want?" he snapped as he came within range of Carruthers. "If you have come here with the idea of publishing anything in the *Mercury* about the loss of that necklace, I want to tell you, right now, that I don't intend to have a line printed about it."

"Just a nice, pleasant little story, Mr. Spriggs," said Carruthers gently. "Nothing offensive, you know. Just a plain statement of facts. Such a story as we intend to print may help you to recover the lost gems."

"Not a line! Not a line!" cried

Mr. Spriggs with an imperious wave of his hand. "I won't permit you even to mention the matter in your paper."

"Oh, but we *must* print it," protested the reporter. "It will be impossible for us to keep the story out. Won't you please be reasonable and give me a detailed description of that necklace, and tell me whether it was a present to Mrs. Spriggs from yourself?"

"Why, you impertinent beggar!" cried Spriggs, almost choking with rage. "If you don't leave this house this instant, I'll have you thrown out. I tell you that you sha'n't print a word about that necklace."

"But why should you object so strenuously to the publication of the story?" argued Carruthers coolly. "Surely it is no disgrace for a lady to lose a diamond necklace. If we print the story, it will do you more good than a paid advertisement.

"The person who finds the diamonds will probably read about your loss in the *Mercury,* and will return the necklace to you. Won't you please be nice about it, and give me the information I require to make my story complete in every particular?

"Also, I would appreciate it if you would give me Mrs. Spriggs's latest photograph. We—"

"James!" the infuriated Mr. Spriggs fairly howled. "Throw this impudent bounder into the street. Don't waste any words on him. Throw him out, bodily."

"James had better not try anything of the sort," shouted Carruthers, squaring his shoulders. "I will leave this house right away, but I will go out without any assistance.

"And I want to tell you, you cheap, insignificant little parvenu, that if you will purchase a copy of to-morrow morning's *Mercury,* you will find a story therein that may make you regret that—"

He didn't finish the sentence. James, the butler, despite his haughty appearance and his languid air, was a very muscular man, and Carruthers was of slight build.

The butler grabbed the reporter around the waist and lifted him bodily from the floor. The next moment the struggling Carruthers found himself being hurled through the open doorway into the street.

The front door of the Spriggs residence closed with a bang, and Carruthers found himself lying prostrate on the snow-covered sidewalk, almost foaming at the mouth with rage.

"The dirty cur!" he growled as he picked himself up. "That's a nice way to treat a fellow. This is the first time in my life I've ever been thrown bodily out of a house, and, by jiminy, he and his confounded butler shall pay dearly for it."

His first impulse, after he had got to his feet, was to go back to the house and challenge Mr. Horatio Spriggs or his butler or both of them to come out on the sidewalk and engage in a mortal combat forthwith.

But he was sensible enough to realize that this invitation doubtless would not be accepted, and, if he raised a disturbance, in all probability he would be arrested and locked up in the nearest police station.

For the same reason he refrained from obeying a savage impulse to hurl a rock through the front window of the Spriggs residence.

"I'll wait and get revenge later," he muttered. "Just what form it will take, I don't know at present; but I'll surely get even some day. And, by way of a starter, if the boss will give me a free rein, I'll write a story about that lost necklace which will make Mr. Horatio Spriggs writhe with fury and humiliation."

His hat had fallen from his head and rolled into the gutter, and he now stooped to pick it up. As he did so, he espied something glittering in the snow, and, with an exclamation of amazement, seized it with eager hands.

"Great guns!" he gasped. "It's the necklace. Mrs. Spriggs must have dropped it just as she was stepping into her carriage. No wonder they couldn't find it outside the theater.

"Since Mr. Spriggs is such a fresh gentleman, he sha'n't have his wife's necklace returned to him until to-morrow.

"By that time I'll manage to think

out some ingenious means of getting it back to him which will enable me to print another story about its recovery.

"I'll say nothing in my first story about the necklace being found. Since the purse-proud little snip objects so strongly to having his name in the papers, he shall have two consecutive days of publicity instead of one."

And carefully putting the necklace into his pocket, he brushed the snow and mud from his clothes and started quite jauntily for the *Mercury* office.

V.

As he passed a drug-store on his way to the Subway station, Carruthers suddenly bethought him that it would be a wise plan to stop for a minute to telephone to the night city editor of the *Mercury* that he was on his way down-town with the story of the necklace.

"That cad Spriggs will probably get the office on the wire right away and ask them not to publish the story," he reflected. "And if the boss doesn't know what the story is about, he may make a rash promise and have to abide by it. I'd better get his ear first and explain matters."

So he entered the drug-store and used the public telephone, informing the night city editor that he was coming right down-town with "a peach of a yarn," of which he gave a brief synopsis over the wire.

He carefully refrained, however, from making any mention of the fact that the necklace had already been found. That secret he would keep locked within his breast until the following day, for reasons already stated.

It proved a wise piece of forethought on Carruthers's part to telephone to the office about the story, instead of going right down-town.

For just as he had finished talking with the night city editor, the boy on the switchboard informed the latter that a "gentleman named Mr. Horatio Spriggs" was on the wire and wanted to converse immediately with the editor of the *Mercury*.

A few seconds later the night city editor walked into the office of Marsden, the managing editor.

"Say," he said, "there's a man named Spriggs on the phone, and he's a very high and mighty sort of a chap. Carruthers is on his way down-town with a good yarn about Mrs. Spriggs losing a diamond necklace outside the Barrett Theater, and this chap Spriggs flatly forbids us to print a line of it. Don't you think you had better talk with him?"

"Sure, I'll talk with him," said Marsden. "Just tell the boy to switch him on to my phone. I'm just about getting sick and tired of these fine gentlemen who want to keep things out of the paper. It's bad enough to have a boss who's got that habit without having outsiders trying to give us instructions how to run the *Mercury*."

The telephone-bell on his desk gave a faint tinkle, and Marsden lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Well," he snapped, "this is the managing editor. What is it you wish, sir?"

"I am Mr. Horatio Spriggs," said a haughty voice. "Do you understand me, sir—Mr. Horatio Spriggs."

"Well, what can I do for you?" inquired Marsden.

"I don't want you to print anything about my wife's losing her necklace."

"Why not? It's the truth, isn't it?" retorted the managing editor testily.

"Never mind that. I won't have anything put in the *Mercury* about it. Neither Mrs. Spriggs nor myself desires any publicity about the matter."

"But why not?" demanded Marsden, considerably nettled by the other's domineering tone. "What reason can you give me why the story should be suppressed?"

"The only reason I care to give you is that I do not wish it to appear in the paper," was the haughty reply.

"Well, if you can't give me any better reason than that, I guess it will appear, all right," cried Marsden hotly.

"No, it won't. I forbid you," cried Spriggs imperiously.

"Forbid?" snorted the managing editor with a scornful laugh. "That's a pretty strong word, my friend. You seem to have a most exaggerated idea of your own importance, Mr. Horatio Spriggs; but let me assure you that

your grand manner doesn't overawe me one bit. You'll find that neither your wishes nor your commands have any weight with the *Mercury.*"

"You are a very insolent fellow," was the arrogant reply, "and you shall be punished for presuming to talk to me in this impertinent fashion. It is quite evident that you do not really know who I am. I happen to be the son-in-law of Mr. Henry De Peyster, the present owner of the *Mercury.* Such being the case, I rather think my commands have some weight; and I forbid you to print a line of that story."

If Mr. Spriggs expected that this announcement would completely crush the managing editor, he was disappointed.

True, the latter, up to this point in the conversation, had been entirely ignorant of the relationship between his employer and the man on the other end of the wire, and if he had known it at the start, he might have been more conciliatory in his attitude toward the latter.

But now his fiery temper, strained to the bursting point by his vexatious experiences with De Peyster and by the domineering manner of Spriggs, gained full mastery of him, and rendered him indifferent to all consequences.

"I don't care whether or not you're the boss's son-in-law," he roared into the telephone. "I wouldn't care whether you were the boss himself. Tomorrow morning's *Mercury* is going to contain the story of that lost necklace. I'm going to print it, and you can do what you darn please about it."

"You sha'n't do it," cried Spriggs angrily. "I shall communicate with my father-in-law at once, and have you instantly dismissed. I'll teach you—"

Marsden contemptuously cut the conversation short by putting the receiver on the hook. Then he went out in the city room, his face flushed with anger and his mouth set in a grim line of resolution.

"Did Carruthers come in yet?" he inquired of the night city editor.

"No, not yet, Mr. Marsden."

"Well, when he comes in, tell him to write as much as he can on that necklace story. I'll allow him all the space he can fill. When the story is finished, send it into me before it goes up-stairs.

"I'll show that fellow Spriggs that I'm no miserable slave," he muttered as he returned to his private office, closing the door after him with a bang. "I'm mad clean through now, and I don't care what happens. That story is going to be printed. They've got my goat at last, and I'll show them what kind of a man I am."

An hour later, De Peyster called him up on the telephone. Mr. Horatio Spriggs had carried out his threat and got into communication with his father-in-law.

"Hello, Marsden," said the owner of the *Mercury.* "My son-in-law informs me that you have refused to kill a story at his request."

"Yes, sir, I did refuse," replied Marsden quietly. "I knew of no sound reason why the story should not be printed. It is quite harmless, and in no way reflects upon Mr. Spriggs. Under the circumstances, I could not grant his request to suppress it."

"Well, you must do so. The mere fact that my son-in-law doesn't want it printed should be good enough reason for you. Kill that story at once. Under no circumstances is a line of it to appear in the *Mercury.*"

"But, Mr. De Peyster—" began Marsden protestingly.

"No argument, please, Mr. Marsden," the owner of the *Mercury* broke in chillingly. "I have already informed you once to-day that I will not tolerate any discussion of my orders. Kill that story immediately."

Marsden angrily hung up the receiver and strode up and down the carpeted floor of his private office, his fists clenched and his head thrust forward belligerently.

He was no longer Marsden, managing editor of the *Mercury,* approaching middle age, and with the responsibility of a wife and children to control his actions and stultify his spirit. He was the old Marsden of his college days, famous throughout the land for his prowess on the football gridiron, and possessed of a stubborn and invincible spirit which would yield to no man.

A copy-boy knocked on his door, and, being bidden to enter, laid some typewritten sheets upon his desk.

It was Carruthers's story of the lost necklace, cleverly written, ridiculing Horatio Spriggs in nearly every line and ending with a graphic description of how the *Mercury* reporter had been rudely thrown out of the house by the Spriggs butler.

Marsden carefully read through the copy from beginning to end. Carruthers had written enough to make two full columns.

Then the managing editor took his blue pencil and wrote on the copy: "Must be used on front page—double-leaded, and with scarehead."

"I'll show 'em," he muttered grimly.

VI.

HALF an hour later a hansom drove up to the *Mercury* building, and a fat, pompous little man alighted therefrom.

He strode into the editorial rooms with a manner so grand and majestic that the boy at the door, generally the most imperturbable of youngsters, was completely overawed, and actually allowed him to pass without first demanding his name and business.

Perhaps it was a good thing for the boy that he did not attempt to bar the way of the visitor, for the latter was Mr. Henry De Peyster, proprietor of the *Mercury,* and in no mood to be trifled with.

He had left his club and come down to the office for the special purpose of making sure that the story of the Spriggs necklace did not get into the paper.

Of course, it did not strike him as likely that Marsden would dare to disobey the emphatic order on the subject which he had given over the telephone; but still there had been something about Marsden's tone which De Peyster did not like, and which had suggested to him that it would be a good plan to pay an immediate visit to the *Mercury* office.

With his chin elevated at an imperious angle, and looking neither to right nor left, the haughty little man strode through the city room and, pushing open the door marked "Managing Editor," entered the private office, unannounced.

Marsden was sitting at his desk, and was perceptibly somewhat startled by his employer's sudden entry.

This visit was a great surprise; for never before, since he had come into possession of the *Mercury,* had De Peyster come down to the office at night-time.

Marsden guessed the reason for the present call, and, although he greeted his employer with a polite nod, there was a defiant expression in his eyes.

"How is everything going to-night, Marsden?" began De Peyster pleasantly enough.

"Oh, pretty good, sir," replied the managing editor carelessly.

"I presume you sent a good man to cover Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan's reception and are printing three columns about it, as per my instructions, eh?" inquired De Peyster, glancing sharply at the managing editor.

"Yes, sir," replied the latter; "I assigned Hillis to cover the story. He's one of our best descriptive writers. We've got just three columns. I can let you see a proof of it in a few minutes, if you wish."

"Very good," said De Peyster, clearing his throat. "And that necklace story, Marsden—I suppose you promptly suppressed it as soon as I ordered you to do so, eh?"

Marsden squared his shoulders aggressively, and looked his employer straight in the eyes.

"No, sir," he answered quietly, his face paling. "To be quite frank with you, I did not suppress that story. It is going to be printed in to-morrow morning's *Mercury.* The copy has already been sent up-stairs to the composing-room, and, doubtless, by this time is all in type."

De Peyster's face turned first white and then crimson. His little, beady eyes flashed furiously.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have dared to disobey me?" he shouted in his high-pitched voice.

"Yes, sir; I regret to say that, in this instance, I have done so," replied Marsden quietly. "I assure you that I

mean no disrespect to you, Mr. De Peyster. It is a matter of principle with me, entirely. Your son-in-law, Mr. Horatio Spriggs, has thrown down the gauntlet by daring me to publish that story. My self-respect would not permit me to decline such a challenge. I might as well inform you, too, that not only will that story be published in to-morrow morning's *Mercury,* but that it will appear on the front page, double-leaded and with a scare-head."

"You insolent fellow!" squeaked De Peyster furiously. "You must be either drunk or crazy. Do you realize that you are talking to the proprietor of this newspaper? You shall be duly punished for this astounding piece of impertinence. Go up-stairs at once, sir, and stop any further work on that story."

But Marsden did not stir.

"I'm sorry; but I can't do that, sir," he said quietly. "That yarn must go through. I have made a vow to that effect, and I intend to stick to it, no matter what the consequences may be."

"Good Heavens!" gasped De Peyster, so excited that he began to stutter. "You can't be in your right senses. I have never heard of such an amazing case of insubordination. Do you mean to tell me that you imagine that you, a mere employee, can have something printed in this newspaper, when I, the owner of the paper, say that it shall not be printed?"

"I believe I can," replied Marsden grimly. "I am the managing editor here, and my word is law. I doubt if there is a man on the night staff, or in the mechanical departments, who has ever set eyes on you before.

"Under the circumstances, you will find it a hard job to countermand any of my orders, even though you *are* the owner of the paper."

"We shall see!" cried De Peyster. "If you persist in your refusal to go up to the composing-room and tell them to stop work on that story, I will go up there myself and give the necessary orders."

Marsden made no reply, and the furious proprietor of the *Mercury* strode out of the room and climbed two short flights of stairs to the composing-room, where many men sat at clattering linotype machines, busily turning "cold copy" into leaden lines of type.

The foreman, seeing De Peyster standing there, came over to him and inquired bruskly what he wanted.

"I am Mr. De Peyster, proprietor of the *Mercury.* I want you to stop work immediately on the story of Mrs. Spriggs's necklace, which I believe one of your men is now setting up."

The foreman looked at the speaker suspiciously.

"That copy was marked 'Must' by Mr. Marsden," he said. "You'll have to get his O. K. if you want it killed."

"But I tell you I am the proprietor of the *Mercury.* I pay your salary, and can discharge you if I wish to do so," cried De Peyster indignantly.

"Can't help that, sir," replied the foreman, quite unruffled by this implied threat. "I don't know you, in the first place, and even if I did, it wouldn't make any difference. Mr. Marsden is the only boss we recognize up here. If he orders us to cut out that stuff, well and good—otherwise it goes through as per his instructions. I advise you to go and see him, and get him to give you a signed order."

"Now, see here, my man," cried De Peyster furiously. "I will not tolerate any more of this. You will stop work on that copy immediately and destroy the type you have already set up on it, or I shall discharge you."

"Oh, no, you won't," retorted the foreman coolly. "My union will have something to say about that. You ain't got any grievance against me. I'm only doing my duty. As I said before, I don't know you. I've never seen you before. How am I to know that you are what you say you are? Go and get Mr. Marsden to give the necessary order, and it will be all right. He's the only big boss we know up here."

"Then, you refuse to destroy that story?"

"Without Mr. Marsden's orders, I must. Besides," he added, glancing across the room, "we're all through with it now, anyway. That fellow over there at the third machine has just finished the last 'take' on it. As soon as I've had a proof struck off, it will go

down to the stereotyping-room. Better go down there and argue the matter with them, if you don't care to take my advice and go to Marsden."

De Peyster again threatened the foreman with instant dismissal, and denounced him for his "impertinence and insubordination." But the latter only grinned at the tirade of the fierce little man.

Printers are the most independent of all the workers on a daily newspaper. Their union is one of the strongest in the country, and they have abiding confidence in its power to stanchly protect them.

After standing there scowling and fuming for a while, De Peyster, at length, actually took the foreman's advice and descended to the stereotyping-room, where he again encountered defeat.

The burly foreman of the stereotypers had never before set eyes on the pompous little man. He looked dubious when the latter told him that he was the owner of the *Mercury*, and laughed uproariously when De Peyster commanded him not to stereotype the two columns of type on the necklace story which had just come down from the composing-room.

"I'd like to see myself leaving anything out, without orders from the boss," he scoffed.

"But I tell you *I* am the boss," screamed De Peyster.

"Not for me. Marsden is the only boss I recognize. Go and see him, and get his O. K., if you want any changes made here," declared the foreman stoutly.

"I'll—I'll discharge you if you don't obey me," cried De Peyster. "I've got the power to discharge every man in this building. You'll be sorry for this insolence, my man, before I get through."

"Pooh! I ain't insolent," replied the head stereotyper calmly. "I can't take orders from a man I don't know. You'll have to answer to my union if you try to fire me. Go and see Marsden and get his O. K., and I'll do anything you say."

De Peyster almost groaned. It was agony for a man of his proud spirit to have to realize that, without the approval of Marsden, his hired employee, his commands were without weight with these men, who knew him not.

Much provoked, he returned to the office of the managing editor, presenting a somewhat crushed and humbled appearance.

"I hope that you have repented of your insubordinate conduct by this time, and are willing to make some amends by suppressing that story immediately," he said to Marsden almost appealingly.

"No. I'm sorry, but it can't be done," replied the managing editor firmly. "By the way, Mr. De Peyster, I regret to say that I've some more bad news for you. Nicoll, the make-up man, has just informed me that we're several columns overset this morning. Under the circumstances, I had to leave something out — so I've thrown out that three-column account of Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan's reception."

"You insolent hound!" screamed De Peyster, fairly crazed by this fresh insult. "You shall suffer for this, I promise you."

"Oh, I guess you can't do anything more to me than fire me, and I presume you've already made up your mind to do that, anyway," replied Marsden calmly. "Under the circumstances, I thought I might as well celebrate my last night on the *Mercury* by getting out a real live newspaper, such as we used to turn out under its former ownership.

"Something had to be cut out this morning, and as that three-column reception story was the least important piece of news, I naturally selected that for the ax. It really wasn't worth printing, you know."

"But I insist upon it's going in the paper," shouted the owner of the *Mercury*.

"You can keep on insisting. It won't do you any good. You stand about as much chance of getting that story in the paper as you do of keeping that other one out."

"But I have promised Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan that we would print three columns about her reception," protested De Peyster almost tearfully.

"I can't help that. You should not

have made such an extravagant promise. The story wasn't worth five lines. We're going to turn out a real newspaper this morning, boss. Probably it will be the last time that the poor old *Mercury* ever will appear as such."

In his despair, De Peyster suddenly had an inspiration. He would appeal to the night city editor. Although the latter was Marsden's subordinate, he had some authority over the men upstairs, and might be able to influence them to obey his (De Peyster's) orders.

He rushed wrathfully out of the managing editor's office and through the city room to the desk of the night city editor.

"I am Mr. De Peyster, the proprietor of this newspaper," he began breathlessly. "I want you to go upstairs immediately and have that lost necklace story left out of the paper, and that story of Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan's reception kept in. Do this and I will make you my managing editor at twice the salary Marsden was receiving."

Before the night city editor could reply, Marsden suddenly appeared in the open doorway of his private office and caught his eye.

The managing editor tapped his forehead significantly, and the night city editor thought he understood the situation.

De Peyster was so excited that he certainly gave every appearance of being insane.

"Run away, little man, and don't bother me. I'm very busy," said the night city editor, and thereby lost his chance of promotion.

Soon afterward the big presses of the *Mercury* began to thump, thump, thump. The first edition was being printed as fast as the most modern of machinery could turn it out.

When De Peyster glanced through a copy later, tears of mortification and rage stood in his tiny eyes.

The story of the lost necklace was on the front page—two columns of it, prominently displayed and capped with a sensational head-line.

Not a word about Mrs. Baxter-Buchanan's reception was to be found anywhere.

Marsden had triumphed. His mutiny had been a complete success.

VII.

When Marsden went down to his office the following afternoon, he carried his written resignation in his pocket.

It was better to resign than to be kicked out, and although De Peyster had been so overcome with rage that he had actually left the building without formally discharging him, Marsden did not entertain the slightest doubt that he was to get his walking papers.

He entered the *Mercury* editorial rooms in a decidedly despondent frame of mind. He had won his point, it was true, but now that he had time to count the cost, the prospect of being out of a job, with a wife and children to look out for, made him feel somewhat remorseful.

As he walked toward the door of his private office, young Carruthers stepped up to him.

"If you please, sir, I would like to have a little talk with you about that necklace story," began the young man.

"All right. Come inside," said Marsden indifferently.

"After writing that story," went on the reporter, when they were seated in Marsden's office, "I began to think how strange it was that that fellow Spriggs and his wife should have objected so strongly to the yarn being printed. The facts did not seem to reflect on them in any way, and there did not seem to be any sound reason for such strenuous opposition to publicity on their part.

"I came to the conclusion that there was some mystery about the matter, and this morning I set out to solve it. I am glad to say that I have more than succeeded."

He leaned over to the managing editor and whispered something in his ear.

"Great guns!" cried Marsden. "Are you sure of that, Carruthers?"

"Positive. You see, I've got the necklace here. I found it last night, outside the Spriggs residence."

He took the string of gems from his

pocket and handed them over to his chief. The latter examined them with great interest.

"I am very glad that you told me about this, Carruthers," said Marsden. "Very glad, indeed."

"I thought that perhaps the information might be of some use to you, sir," replied the reporter. "I learned this morning that that fellow Spriggs is the son-in-law of the owner of this paper, and, if you'll excuse me for mentioning it, I thought that, such being the case, you might get into trouble for having printed that story."

"I understand; and I assure you I appreciate your thoughtfulness, old chap," said Marsden heartily.

An hour later, Mr. De Peyster entered the *Mercury* building and strode fiercely into the office of the managing editor.

His face was still pale from the excitement of the preceding night, and his little eyes flashed angrily.

"Hello! You here?" he snapped, catching sight of Marsden at his desk. "I shouldn't think you would have the impudence and presumption to set foot in this building after your disgraceful conduct of last night."

"I came down here to straighten out my affairs before leaving," replied Marsden quietly. "Besides, I have not yet been formally fired. In your excitement you forgot to discharge me last night. Before you can do so, however, I now hand you my written resignation."

"I refuse to accept it!" cried De Peyster hotly. "You are going to be dishonorably discharged from my employ, sir, and I shall use all my influence to prevent you from getting a job on another paper."

"I hope that I shall be able to succeed despite your kindly efforts," retorted Marsden. "By the way, are you still firm in your determination to fire young Carruthers?"

"I can't see how that is any of your business, sir," snapped De Peyster furiously.

"Well, perhaps it isn't. But if I were you I wouldn't fire that young man. If you do, he might get a job on one of the sensational papers in this town and print another story about that necklace."

"What do you mean?" asked the surprised De Peyster.

"I mean that that necklace has been found, and that young Carruthers has made the interesting discovery that it is made of paste. I shouldn't think that a man of your social standing would care to have the world informed of the fact that your daughter, Mrs. Horatio Spriggs, is in the habit of wearing imitation diamonds."

"Good Heavens!" gasped De Peyster, greatly agitated. "Can this be true?"

"Yes. There is no doubt about it. Here is the necklace. You can see for yourself. That is why your son-in-law was so averse to publicity. He was afraid that if anything was printed about that supposedly valuable necklace, the real truth might eventually crop out.

"Carruthers is a very clever reporter. He has been working hard this morning, and, by using his own peculiar methods, has managed to learn that the real diamond necklace, of which this is a clever copy, was pawned by your daughter a month ago to settle some of her rascally husband's card debts."

"Good Heavens!" gasped De Peyster, turning white to the lips, as he examined the necklace Marsden had placed in his hands. "This terrible scandal must not be made public, Marsden. It would ruin me socially. Young Carruthers must be induced to keep quiet about it. You can tell him that, instead of discharging him, I have decided to retain his services at an increased salary."

"Very good, sir. I am glad to hear it. By the way, since you are indebted to me for this information, would you be kind enough to allow me to resign, instead of firing me. I should appreciate the favor."

"Resign!" cried the frenzied owner of the *Mercury* hastily. "I should say not. I won't hear of it. You must stay on the paper, and I will increase your salary, also. Under the circumstances, I am willing to forget the late unpleasantness."

TAKING BIG CHANCES.

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

Author of "A Lump of Bullion," "The Tail of the Lumberbeast," "The Great Bank Robbery," etc.

The series of fearsome happenings that set wide-awake a certain little sleepy village on the Atlantic coast.

CHAPTER I.

THE STAGE TO BROGGAN.

"WELL," said Benly, my physician, "if you really must work, instead of taking a complete vacation and rest, I don't know but what you've made a wonderful discovery in Broggan. I didn't suppose such a place existed in these days of modern progress and development. I could not have chosen a better place for you. By all means, pack up your goods and chattels and go."

And I did.

I am not going to be explicit in the location of Broggan. I have a reason for my reticence on this point. I am still living there, in the same house mentioned in this history of a brief portion of my life, and there are reasons why I prefer quiet and privacy.

I know that if I gave the exact location I should be overrun in summer with sight-seeing tourists.

In order to maintain that privacy, I shall not mention the location further than to state that it was on a certain rugged coast facing the Atlantic, and not a thousand miles from New York.

Nor is it necessary for the purposes of this story for me to state how I had discovered it. It was there. And I was going there. And there you are.

I was deep in my work on what I expected to be a great hit, a novel of life on a rugged coast; and I wished to live in peace and quiet, where I could hear the roar of the sea and look out upon its riotous frolics.

Benly had told me that I needed rest, and I was determined to work. So Broggan seemed to offer a combination of work and rest.

I left the train at the nearest railway village, and waited for the stage to Broggan. It would be a nine-mile ride in a dilapidated vehicle that had certainly seen better days, and must long ago have earned a needed rest.

The wheezy affair rumbled up to the station. There were no other passengers for Broggan, and the driver looked extremely downhearted.

"Cheer up, Joel Bankred," I said. "Perhaps during the summer we will offer some compensation for this meager showing now."

The ruddy-faced young driver looked at me a moment blankly.

"Oh, you!" he broke out, with a grin. "I wondered how a stranger knew my name. It's all right, sir. Get in. Any baggage?"

"Not yet. But I shall have a lot of stuff come down, Joel. I am going to rent a house for the summer in Broggan."

"You are! Going to stay in Broggan all summer? Well, I'm glad, Mr. Dell. Real glad. But why a man who could live any place he likes should want to live in a dead-and-alive hole in the ground like Broggan, beats me. But, anyway, get in. I'll have you there soon enough."

"Don't hurry, Joel. Plenty of time. I am a young man yet, and can afford to spend all day getting there."

I took a seat up near him, so that I might relieve the tedium of the journey by talk.

"Anything new in Broggan?" I asked when we got fairly started.

"You're joking. There ain't been anything new in Broggan in a thousand years."

"You were born there. Don't you call babies new things?"

"Not in Broggan. Couldn't be if they tried. I've heard of what you

people who write and study call the influence of heredity. Well, the children born in Broggan inherit age. They're born old. No, there ain't anything new in Broggan."

"Not a trolley-car?"

"What for? The only place the people ever go is here, and if there was a trolley, I would be out of a job."

"Who owns this stage line, Joel?"

"I do."

"Quite a paying property, is it not?"

"Paying—what? I do this for fun, and so as not to let the horses starve."

"How did you come to take up this business?"

"Inherited it, same as everything else is done in Broggan."

"Your father's, then?"

"Yes, and my grandfather's, and I guess my great-grandfather's. If I had any ancestors when Columbus discovered America, they were running this same stage line, with the same stages, and the same horses. No, nothing ever changes in Broggan."

"We'll put some life in the old place, Joel. When I get settled and acquainted we'll have boating-parties, fishing-trips, and dances on the lawn. There are houses with lawns in Broggan. I've seen them."

"Same old lawns, same old grass," he said.

"Any nice girls in Broggan?"

"Only one."

"Well, that's something."

"She's mine."

"No chance for me, then. I fancied I might find a sweetheart down there."

"You can—all you want. But they're about as old as Broggan. You can have 'em if you want 'em. You have no begging to do."

He was an interesting fellow, this Joel Bankred, and I repeat the conversation to give an idea of the village I had chosen in which to spend a quiet summer. Promising enough, wasn't it, with nothing new, and the only nice girl in the place belonging to Joel?

"What house are you going to board at?" he asked. "Did you say you were going to board?"

"No. I said I was going to rent a house."

"Gosh!" Then he began to whistle.

"Why do you whistle thus like a mocking-bird, Joel?" I asked. "Is there anything strange in the fact that I am going to rent a house?"

"No, only there ain't one to rent."

"Not a vacant house in Broggan? There must be dozens of them."

"Well, I mean not what you'd like. Of course, there's the old— But nobody would live in that."

"Well, why did you stop? The old what?"

"The old haunted house."

"Joel! You almost make me want to hug you. It is the very thing I do want. I dote on haunted houses. I love ghosts. I'd rather see a ghost any day than a creditor. Go on, Joel. Tell me the story of the haunted house."

"There ain't no story. It's just haunted. That's all."

"Come, now. This reticence ill becomes thee, Joel. Whoever heard of a haunted house without a story? How *could* a house be haunted without one? Joel, you are withholding something."

"No, there ain't no story. Nobody was ever killed there, as I know of. Nobody ever eloped and was slain by an outraged father. I've read those stories you mean. I never heard any about that house."

"Then how comes it haunted?"

"I don't know. People say so. That's all."

"But why do they say so? There must be some foundation for such a statement."

"Well, all I've ever heard is that a light was seen there once, maybe twice. But nobody lived there."

"Oh, some tramp, perhaps. Children playing there. I suppose the doors are off the hinges and the windows broken. Anybody could get in."

"No," he answered, "it's the best house in Broggan."

"Then, why isn't it rented?"

"Nobody ever wanted it. I never heard of anybody wanting to rent a house in Broggan till to-day. There won't be any trouble about getting it if you want *that*."

"Who owns it?"

"A man in New York."

"Then I've got to go back to New York to see him?"

"No; Jake Jicks, the postmaster, has the key."

And then we rolled into Broggan and stopped at the post-office. Joel took the mail-pouch and canvas sack, and we went into the office together.

The post-office at Broggan was one corner in a general store.

"Here, Jicks," said Joel, "Here's your mail. And here's Mr. Dell, of New York. He wants to rent a house in Broggan."

Mr. Jicks seemed to have suffered a sudden stroke. He stood and stared at me.

CHAPTER II.

BROGGAN ITSELF.

LIKE Broggan itself, the postmaster was very old. Like Broggan, he seemed not to have had anything new in years.

His beard was long and unkempt. His coat was rusty with venerable age. His trousers were patched and worn. His shoes could have been improved on.

Yet he sold all these articles of clothing, and there was a barber-shop in Broggan.

"Er—um—Mr. Dell, did you say?"

"Joseph Dell," I answered. "I want to rent a quiet house in Broggan. In a quiet neighborhood, you know."

"Every neighborhood is quiet," he said. "Of course, there's the graveyard. But it ain't much quieter'n the rest."

It seemed so. I could see from the door perhaps a dozen people who had little to do. Two women, one inside a yard and the other hanging over the fence, were engaged in a conversation that appeared to be interesting to themselves, at least.

A boy strolled along the street barefooted, with a fishing-rod cut from a willow-tree stuck far up over his shoulder. Two men were evidently swapping horses.

I had come to a retired, quiet spot, and here was rest — sweet, complete, health-giving rest.

"And," continued the postmaster, "I don't know of a decent house to rent."

"That is what Joel said. But he told me of one — he called it the haunted house."

"Oh, you wouldn't want *that!*"

"Why not? If it is the best house in Broggan, as Joel said, and is well situated, the accommodations are good, the air wholesome, I don't see why I don't want it—providing the rent is not too high."

"The price—is anything you want to pay. It ain't been occupied for years. But it's haunted."

"So Joel said. But he couldn't give me any engaging stories to make it seem probable."

"No, neither can anybody. I suppose old Squire Jackson could. He's the oldest here."

"Well, I'll take a look at the house; and, if I like it, I'll see Squire Jackson and get his story. I'm real fond of ghosts and such people."

He shook his head, but went rummaging around in an old desk for the key. He finally found it.

"I ain't got nothing to do," said Joel. "If you'd like, I'll walk with you and show you the place."

"It is just what I would like. Come along."

As we strolled through the quaint old streets I asked Joel more questions.

"On what do these people live?" I inquired. "They have decent cottages, nice gardens, and are comfortably clothed. Yet there is apparently no occupation here save Jicks's store, the blacksmith's, and the barber."

Just then we came in view of the sea —a grand sight from where we stood.

"On what they saved from that," said Joel, sweeping his hand seaward. "Broggan used to be a fishing village. That was in the old days when fish were fish and the men who caught them got paid for them. Fishing is gone now, and people like the frozen stuff that's months old rather than pay for the old fleets that brought 'em good ones. But these people saved money, and it don't take much to live in Broggan."

"I suppose there's a doctor?"

"Yes. He's as old as Broggan—almost. But if he didn't have some money, he'd starve. Nobody ever gets sick in Broggan."

We passed from the houses and were on a narrow road leading along shore. I was so interested in what Joel was saying that I did not notice when the road turned.

Perhaps it didn't. Anyway, I was surprised to see that we had the sea on each side of us, and then I saw the house.

It wasn't a massive affair, nor was it small. It was, of course, much too large for my necessities, but I need not furnish it all. It was a substantial house, built, I judged, of stone taken from the spot.

There was no fence or wall around it; and, though I supposed there were children in Broggan, I did not see a broken window.

The doors and woodwork around the windows had once been red, and still retained some of the original color. And the setting was perfect.

I thought at once of Jones, who was to illustrate my book, and a delightful plan unfolded itself to me. Jones was an artist, and married. This, as in the case of most artists and writers, is a terrible combination. But Mrs. Jones lacked entirely the artistic temperament, and could bake bread to beat the band.

And the plan that unfolded itself to me was to have Jones and his wife come and live in the stone house. It was roomy enough for us to have all the bedrooms we needed, and Jones could have his studio on one side of the house where he couldn't hear my typewriter, and I could have my library on the other where I couldn't smell his nasty paint.

For Jones was more than an illustrator. He earned enough money illustrating to support him as an artist in oils.

I had this delightful picture in my mind: Jones scraping away at a black-and-white for my book, and me banging out nicely rounded and inspiring sentences, and Mrs. Jones preparing an excellent meal for us all. And I foresaw Jones and myself in an auxiliary yacht out at sea, catching fish to eat while fresh, and thereby reducing expenses.

"I'll open the door," said Joel.

"Not yet," I interposed. "Let's take a look around. I don't care much about the inside. But the sea, the sea! Can it be beaten anywhere, I wonder?"

"It makes a deuce of a row sometimes," replied Joel. "I don't see why people make such a holler about it. I've lived here all my life, and I don't care much about it."

"That's because you are accustomed to it. If you ate turkey every day, you'd wonder why a man who always had roast beef hollered about turkey."

"I like the mountains."

I did not attempt to explain the reason. I was entranced with the view that was spread out before me.

We were on a rocky promontory, rugged and bewildering in shape, with portions of the edge so difficult that I doubted if anybody had ever gone there. And straight ahead lay the vast Atlantic, then moderately placid, giving off varying colors under the westering sun.

And on the right swept a rugged, indented coast, and to the left a curve that formed a harbor for small sailing vessels as safe as any on that rock-bound shore.

I stood several minutes, probably to the disgust of Joel, and then turned reluctantly. For the material part of the business must be done, and it was growing late.

Joel thrust the key into the lock of the front door. I saw him try to turn it, and his face gave a twist as if it refused.

"Rusty," he said.

But there was a creak as the old lock gave, and he threw open the door.

Of course, after being locked and closed and uninhabited so many years, the air was foul. Our footsteps sounded hard and loud on the bare wooden floor.

We stepped into a wide hall, from which old-fashioned stairs ascended to the upper floor.

"The hall is as big as a house," said Joel. "I wasn't never inside before. I don't know anybody in Broggan that was, unless it's Jake Jicks, the postmaster. And the rooms—look here."

He threw open a door. It led to a great square chamber, with two windows in front and one on the side. We stepped from that to the next and—stood frozen with surprise and horror.

For, lying prone on the floor, with his face turned up toward the ceiling, was a man—dead.

CHAPTER III.

EXCITEMENT IN BROGGAN.

JOEL BANKRED looked at me, and I stared in stupefaction at Joel. His face was deathly white, and his teeth seemed

to be chattering, although in my own agitation I heard no sound.

"What does this mean?" I managed to ask.

There may have been a hint of suspicion in my voice or expression. It had momentarily flashed over me that the only way of reaching Broggan was by means of Joel's stage. And this man certainly was not of Broggan.

"Before God, Mr. Dell," cried the frightened young stage-driver, "I don't know. Is he really dead?"

"We'll see."

I stepped to the prostrate form. It required but a touch to prove that life had been extinct for some time.

The man was apparently about fifty years of age. He was well, even elaborately and expensively, dressed. His clothing was new and of fashionable cut. His linen was fresh, and corresponded in costliness with his outer clothing.

He wore a diamond ring and gold watch and chain.

"He is dead, and has been dead for a day or two, perhaps three," I said. "Who is he? Not a resident of Broggan?"

"No," answered Joel shiveringly. "Not a resident of Broggan."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"No, sir, I have never seen him."

"Didn't he come to Broggan in your stage?"

"No. I would remember such a man. Didn't I remember you?"

"Yes—you remembered me."

"Why do you speak like that?" he cried. "Do you think I killed him?"

"No, I don't think—I am not going to accuse anybody when I know nothing. It is a case for the coroner. Who is the coroner?"

"Coroner?"

"Yes, yes. The coroner. Don't you know what a coroner is?"

"Yes, I know what a coroner is. But—I never knew any coroner around Broggan. I suppose there is one somewhere. I don't know."

"Well, we've got to find him. We've got to report this matter at once. I suppose the best thing to do is to report it to the constable, and let him do the rest. Don't touch anything."

"Yes—the constable," Joel repeated.

He seemed dazed. The shock had deprived him temporarily of his wits.

"Who is the constable?" I asked.

"I don't know. There ain't any constable in Broggan."

Here was a situation. A murder mystery in a town where there was no one familiar with the law to take up the investigation.

"There must be a constable somewhere. Anyway, we can do nothing. But we will take a look around the house. The wonder is how this man got here. He was killed here—that is certain."

"And the lock was rusty — you saw the lock was rusty," said Joel eagerly.

"I saw the lock was rusty. Now, see here, get your wits about you. I am not accusing you. I don't care particularly who killed this man. But, having discovered the body, we will be more or less involved in the investigation. Come. Let us examine the house."

We went through the house from top to bottom. We examined all other doors, all the windows. Not a door was unlocked. Not a window was broken.

"These locks on the windows," I said, "could be easily opened on the outside to permit a person to enter. But, having made his exit again, he could not put on the catch. Yet none seem to have been disturbed. It is a mystery that will take some solving, I fancy. It is certain that robbery was not the motive."

We locked up the house and hurried back to the post-office. It had occurred to me that as Jake Jicks, the postmaster, had charge of the house, he should be the first to be informed.

We found Mr. Jicks selling a piece of calico to a woman. We waited till he had made the sale.

"Mr. Jicks," I said, "I like that house very well. But there is at present a tenant there who must be removed."

"A tenant? What do you mean?"

"We found a dead man in one of the rooms."

"A dead man! A dead man in that house? Impossible!"

"It is not impossible, since we have seen it. We both have pretty good eyesight. He is a well-dressed man, and was not killed for robbery. He still wears a valuable ring and watch. Joel says he does not belong in Broggan."

"What'll I do? What'll I do about this thing?" asked the old postmaster, quaking in his sudden terror.

Broggan had been somnolent so many years that the mere mention of a dead man upset people.

"I knew there was something the matter with that house," went on Jicks. "Everybody said so."

"It is no time to talk about that now," I told him. "If the old house was never haunted before, it surely will be now. The constable and the coroner must be notified. As the caretaker or agent of the house, it is your duty to do this."

"Yes—yes—I'll do it," said Jicks, shaking his head solemnly. "A murder—in that house! I knew it would come. Everybody said so."

"It is extremely evident there is something wrong with the house," I remarked. "And having stumbled upon the mystery, I am inclined to go on with it. Act lively now and get the constable here. I don't care when the coroner comes. That's his business."

Mr. Jicks had been moving at the slow gait characteristic of Broggan for many years. One could almost hear his joints creak as he tried to hurry. He was soon on his way, and spread the news as he drove.

All Broggan gathered at the store and post-office. There were old and withered faces that looked wise, and old heads that shook with gratification.

There were a few young faces that were white with apprehension.

"It had to come," said the older ones. "That house had a story. Yes, it had to come. We knew it. Nobody ever wanted that house."

"What is it, really, Joel?" asked a rather pretty girl, coming to where the stage-driver stood, white-faced and silent.

"It's a dead man in the big stone house, Lizzie. Mr. Dell, here, and I found him. He's lying on the floor, dead. Mr. Dell says he's been dead a long time. And—oh, Lizzie! I—I—"

"What, Joel?"

"I never saw him. I didn't kill him. He never rode in my stage."

"Who says you killed him?" asked the girl loudly and with fight showing in every turn of her intelligent face. "Who dares say that, Joel? You kill a man? Joel Bankred, who dared say that?"

"Nobody has said it — yet, Lizzie. But don't you see, nobody ever comes to Broggan except by my stage."

"Joel," I struck in, "you are working yourself into a frenzy prematurely. Your stage is not the only way to reach Broggan if a man wished to come some other way. He could hire a horse, or he could come by way of the sea."

"Not by the sea, not by the sea. Nobody could climb those cliffs."

"Still, there is no more reason to accuse you of murdering the man because you drive the stage than there is of accusing Jicks because he has the key."

Bankred stared at me.

"But the lock was rusty."

"Yes, but one turn of a key does not remove the rust from a lock."

"The postmaster!" whispered some one in the group. "He says the postmaster did it."

"Friends," I said aloud, so all could hear, "I made no such assertion. I merely quieted Joel by saying that others might be suspected as well as he. I am not an officer of the law. They will take care of the matter. My advice to you all is to keep cool, disperse to your homes, and let those who represent the law take care of things."

"But we must know," said an old fisherman whose grizzled face showed great age. "We must know."

"You'll know," I answered. "A man like that can easily be identified. He must have many friends. And this may settle your fears concerning the house being haunted. It is supper-time and I am hungry. Who is going to have me for a guest to-night?"

"Come home with me," said Joel. "Mother has a spare room."

And as Joel and I left, the crowd slowly melted away.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INVESTIGATION IN BROGGAN.

We had an early and an excellent breakfast.

"The coroner's here an' the constable," said Joel's mother, who had been up some time. "Postmaster Jicks sent

over to tell. They ain't going up to the stone house till you get there."

This corresponded with the general slowness. In any other place the coroner and constable would scarcely wait in patience while the two men they wanted took their own time in rising and eating breakfast. We were not long, however, and were soon at the general store.

The constable was an old man, tall and grizzled, evidently a farmer. The coroner was a young man, and without doubt a physician.

"We will go at once," said the coroner, after we had been introduced.

On the way to the stone house the coroner walked with me and asked questions. I explained what I could, exactly the same as I have told it here, and there is no necessity for repeating the conversation.

Arriving at the house, Jicks, with trembling fingers, opened the door. The lock creaked again. Joel glanced at me significantly as if to say I had been right.

The dead man lay just as we had left him. The coroner at once began his investigation.

He took out the watch, opened the front case, and looked for an inscription. There was none. He opened the back case, and found nothing there.

He almost took the watch apart, but could find nothing to indicate the identity of the wearer.

"You will of course keep the watch," I said to the constable. Then to the coroner: "You'd better take down the number of the watch. Many dealers have a method of keeping a record of purchasers of fine watches, and this is a good one."

"Your idea, Mr. Dell, is an excellent one," the coroner replied. "We will work together on this, the constable and I, without any friction. It is the first mystery of the kind either of us ever had."

He took the ring off the finger, which was a difficult matter. There was nothing inside it, however, to help identify the man.

Then he began to go through the pockets.

"Seems as if that was my business," interposed the constable. "You've taken my business away from me. I thought a coroner just decided how a man was killed."

The coroner flushed.

"Oh, well, go ahead and make your examination."

For two who were going to unravel the mystery together without friction they were making a wonderfully good beginning.

The old constable went through the pockets in what seemed to be a careful way. He found nothing.

"The man was killed by a stab with a very fine blade," said the coroner, turning the body over and exposing a small wound from which but little blood seemed to have flowed. "You see, there are no blood-prints. He was killed in this very spot. He was enticed here, evidently, for the purpose. Now, we have two things to determine. How was he brought here, and what was the motive of the murderer?"

"There you go again," grumbled the constable. "Ain't it enough to be coroner without being constable and detective, too? You've decided he was stabbed and that it was murder. Ain't that enough for you?"

"It will have to be," said the coroner with a grin, "if you wish no help in the matter."

"The first thing," proceeded the constable, "is, who knows this man? Somebody must know him. A man wouldn't come to Broggan without somebody knowing it. Jicks had the key. Jicks, I'll hold you for examination before the justice of the peace. Bankred, did this man come to Broggan in your stage?"

Joel almost fainted.

"I've said a dozen times he didn't."

"I'll hold you, too, for examination before the justice of the peace."

And then he swung round to me.

"You said your name was Dell, didn't you? Maybe it is and maybe it ain't. It's a mighty strange thing you should take a notion to rent this house just after a man was killed in it. I'll hold you for examination before the justice of the peace."

"I did not come to Broggan to rent this house in particular," I said, getting wrathy at the old fool for his methods. "I came to rent *a* house."

"Well, this *is a* house, isn't it?" he asked testily.

"But—"

"I'll hold you. Now, everybody in Broggan must march past this body and swear whether they know him or not. Get 'em. You, Smithers, you didn't have nothing to do with it. Go get everybody in Broggan."

Smithers didn't have far to go. Nearly everybody in Broggan was outside the house.

It was a scene that would have been ludicrous if it were not tragic. Under the commands of the constable the population of Broggan filed slowly and solemnly past the body like friends taking the last look at the dear departed. But nobody in Broggan had ever seen the man before.

It was a mystery that would baffle the keenest detective. Yet this aged constable, who had never arrested anybody more important than a chicken-thief caught in the act, insisted on ferreting it out alone.

It was ridiculous. There was absolutely no reason why I should take any great interest in the death of a man I had never heard of. But—remember, I was a writer, and writers have a peculiar habit of going as deeply into all kinds of mysteries as possible.

Then, again, the man had been killed in a house I wanted to rent. I still wanted the house. In fact, I wanted it more than ever. There was something fascinating about the whole thing that was irresistible.

Having satisfied himself that nobody in Broggan knew the dead man, the constable made a careful tour of the premises. He discovered nothing more than I had.

"Everything is all right," he reported. "If there was a broken window, or an open door, it would be different. He was brought in that front door, and Jicks had the key."

"But I gave the key to nobody," wailed poor Jicks, who seemed about as capable of committing a murder as a week-old kitten.

"Who said you did?" roared the constable. "Who said you gave the key to anybody? I said you *had* the key."

That settled the matter so far as Jicks was concerned, and I knew there was no use arguing with the stubborn old constable. He had completed his work to his own satisfaction in the house, and placed Jicks, Joel Bankred, and myself under arrest.

Jicks locked the door.

"Gimme that key," said the constable, and it was handed over.

All Broggan watched us as the constable marched us to the office of the justice of the peace.

"How is it," I asked, "if there is no constable in Broggan, that it has a justice of the peace?"

"Oh," said Joel, "all he does is to marry people that don't like ministers."

"How many has he married in ten years?"

"One couple."

"And how is it," I asked again, eager to know more about these peculiar folk, "that when all Broggan came to view the body, the justice of the peace was absent?"

"He's sick abed."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing but old age. He's ninety-three."

I saw our finish. With a constable like this one, and a justice of the peace bedridden with old age, there was more of the comic element than the tragic in the whole affair.

Yet, a man, and evidently a wealthy man, had been murdered. Not for robbery, that seemed certain. And in an old stone house that had been uninhabited for ages. And with no possible explanation of how he could have got inside the house.

Clearly, these men were not the ones to conduct such an investigation.

We were lined up before the bed in which lay a man who seemed to be all skin and bones. The office furniture, such as it was, had been moved there.

There seemed some wisdom left in the faded old eyes as the justice looked us over. The constable told what he could, which was no more than the rest could tell. We all had to tell the same story.

Then the old man shut his eyes, and I thought he had gone to sleep, thus adding another farcical element to the affair. But they opened again, and were brighter than before.

"This," he said, in a wheezy old voice, "is not a mystery of Broggan. It is for some one skilled in the wickedness of the world to handle. Mr. Dell cannot be connected with the crime. The case requires a skilled detective. Mr. Dell is most likely to know one. Mr. Dell, will you obtain the services of a good detective?"

"I will, sir."

"Everybody is discharged from custody."

The wisdom of ninety-three had spoken. And driving with Joel to the station, I sent this telegram:

DAVE WARSON:
New York—Murder in Broggan in house I rented. Mystery deep. Constable incompetent. Get authority and come. DELL.

CHAPTER V.

A DETECTIVE IN BROGGAN.

I KNEW Dave Warson well enough to time his arrival. I met him at the station with Joel Bankred.

"What is it, Joe?" he asked as he clasped my hand.

"Tumble into this golden chariot, and I'll rehearse the gory tale as we go along. It will try your mettle, old man. It will give you a chance to make a name in the world of detectives such as you never will have again."

And as we rode along I told him the story as I have told it here, Joel adding a word now and then with the freedom of a friend, if he thought I had omitted something important.

"On the face of it," said Warson, "it looks like an unfathomable mystery. But I guess we'll get to the bottom of it. A man like that will be missed, and a little publicity will bring his friends."

Joel, to show his good will, and knowing that Broggan was more interested in the mystery than it was in the daily mail, did not stop at the post-office, but went on to the big house. I had the key.

Since the wisdom of ninety-three years had spoken from a bed, my importance had risen in Broggan to such dizzy heights that I had the key of the big house, and was looked upon generally as the custodian of the mystery.

In truth, the stone house was now called the haunted house. It needed no weird tales of olden times to give it that lofty eminence. It was haunted by a modern virtue all its own; and while it held the gruesome proof of a terrible crime, not a soul that belonged in Broggan would go near it.

Arriving at the old house, all three of us entered. Warson stood a moment looking at the body.

"You told me he had a ring and a gold watch. Where are they?" he said.

"Here."

I took them from my pocket and handed them to him. He gave me a curious, whimsical look.

"What sort of officers of the law do they have here?" he asked. "It is usual for such officials to keep things found on a dead man."

"The constable did have them. But since the justice told me to get a detective, I've been the whole thing."

Warson nodded and grinned. He stooped down and made a minute examination of the wound.

"Did anybody advance an idea as to what instrument did this?" he asked.

"No; only the coroner said it was something with a fine blade."

"A blind man could see that. Did you notice how little blood had been shed, yet the wound was quite sufficient to kill?"

"Yes, unless something else was done. A blow, perhaps."

"No," he said, after another examination. "This was done with a peculiar weapon made of wood. I saw one once. It contains, and is covered with, a styptic poison. The poison makes death certain, and also draws the wound to prevent bloodshed."

"What is the object, since the murderers go and leave the body anyway?"

Warson looked up at me.

"In this case there might be two theories. One is that the murderers had no other weapon, for this might be an innocent-looking thing, and lead to no suspicion if one was found on an arrested man, or—"

"Or what?" I asked as he paused.

"The murderers intended to return

and take away the body, and leave no bloody trace behind."

I started at this.

"Why didn't they take it away at once?"

"My dear Dell," he said, "murderers are the most easily frightened people on earth. In a house like this, famed for its mysteries, known as being haunted, the slightest sound would drive a dozen of them away in terror. Or—the job might have been done by one man. Feeling himself too weak—perhaps because he was hurt in the scuffle himself—to carry off the body, he left it, intending to bring some one else to help him."

"That, then, leads up to the theory that some one besides Jake Jicks has a key."

"I don't say that. Don't let's jump at conclusions."

His tone told me that conversation was, for the moment, at an end. He began a careful examination of the man's clothing.

Pocket after pocket he turned inside out. When he reached one in the vest, a small, a very small, piece of paper fell to the floor.

"I thought you said the constable explored the pockets," he remarked.

"He did, but he didn't turn them inside out. Anyway, what good is a snip of paper like that?"

"The smallest item, the most insignificant thing, may give a clue," he answered.

He slowly unfolded the paper. I saw him gaze at it a moment.

"What did I tell you?" he said as he handed the paper to me.

In amazement and wonder I read this:

"Scipio—600.000—Cash."

That was all. It was written in a man's hand, and to my inexperienced eye meant nothing.

"Well, what about this?" I asked.

Warson rose to his feet.

"It upsets all our previous theories," he said. "This is either some cabalistic cipher, or it is a memorandum such as a busy man might make. In either case, it spells money. I am convinced now, that the motive for this murder was robbery."

"But the ring? The watch? A robber would not leave them."

"Why not? If I have struck the right theory, and this little note means money, it means six hundred thousand dollars in cash. A man who has made six hundred thousand dollars in one haul cares little for baubles. And again, what use could they make of ring or watch without being in danger of detection? If they had succeeded in getting away with that fortune, they would not carry away two things that could be identified.

"Mere thieves, who steal watches and jewelry, will take that risk because they must do that or go into some other business. But if the murderer of this man wanted money, he got all he wanted. If he wanted revenge, he got that."

"Well, what do you think the whole business amounts to?"

"Wait," he told me. "I remarked, before, that we would not jump at conclusions. I want to make a thorough examination of the house."

"You won't find anything."

"So you said about the—that," he said, pointing to the dead man.

I accompanied him slowly through the house, Joel following with eyes agape at the skill and penetration of Warson.

I suppose Joel had read many detective stories. Most boys in the country glory in them, but they seldom see a real detective at his work.

And there must have been some grand sensations of gratification in Joel's mind over the fact that Warson had not asked him a question as to whether the unknown had ridden in his stage.

Warson examined every window with the minutest care.

"You say you went over the house," he said to me. "Are you sure there is no possibility that one of these catches might have been open, and you, in your agitation, replaced it and thought it had been closed before?"

"I am certain," I answered.

He nodded, as if my word was good, and we finished our explorations.

"So far as I can see now," he said, the key must have been used. You say Jicks, the postmaster, had the key?"

"He had the key—yes. But when you see him you won't suspect him of murder."

"How many times must I tell you not to jump at conclusions? Who said I suspected him? But he had the key. Where did he keep the key?"

"In a little box under the shelf at the post-office window," replied Joel.

"Oh," said Warson, giving him a quick look. "You knew where the key was kept, eh?"

"B-but I didn't take it," stammered Joel.

"There *you* go with a jump. Who said you did take the key? But you knew where it was kept. And you are not the only man in Broggan."

CHAPTER VI.

SETTLING IN BROGGAN.

"GOSH!" said Joel, relieved by Warson's manner and words, and glancing through the window at his stage. "Jicks'll think something happened."

"Hurry up, then," I told him.

"Look here, Bankred," called Warson. "Keep your lips sealed about that key. I'll do my own investigating."

"I ain't likely to say anything," replied Joel. "I'm scared enough now."

When the young stage-driver was off, Warson smiled.

"Strange how easily some people are frightened," he remarked.

"You don't suspect *him?*"

"No."

"Jicks?"

"No."

"Then, why do you dwell upon the key?"

"Because somebody else might have got possession of it."

"But the people of Broggan are not murderers?"

"Look here, Dell, you and I are in Broggan, are we not?"

"Since we are here, we are here."

"The gateways to Broggan do not close with us, do they? Anybody is at liberty to come to Broggan any old time, and in any old way he chooses. Ever hear of, or read a story about, a mysterious horseman? A fantom ship? Even an air-ship, in these days?"

"Well, you win on that. Now, what have you dug up about the paper?"

"I've been thinking about that while we were going the rounds. I have reached the conclusion that the word Scipio is the name of either a mine of gold, silver, or rubies, or copper—a mine, anyway, or a ship. This man has more the look of a sailor than a miner to me."

"A sailor? What, with those smart clothes?"

"There are captains who get rich in various ways. Anyway, whether this Scipio is a mine or a ship, she was sold, or was to be sold, for the neat sum of six hundred thousand dollars."

"Well?"

"And this man came here either to buy or sell. If he came to buy, the murderers have got his money, and have taken his life instead of giving him the deeds. If he came to sell, they have taken his deeds and life, and kept the money."

I began to feel a little like Joel, astonished at the young detective's clear reasoning. It all seemed plain enough to me now.

"There is still a mystery," went on Warson. "Why should they choose this empty house in which to carry on their transaction? What would have lured this man here to his death?"

"He might have come to buy the place."

"Hardly. That would entail making something public. And the next thing to do is to get this man identified."

"How will you set about that?"

"Publish a description of him in every large city."

"Why large cities?"

"He is a man accustomed to large cities. His clothing shows it."

"Where will you make your headquarters while in this business?"

"Right here—in this house. There is no danger of this man's enemies coming back now. They probably know by this time that the body has been discovered. You intended to furnish the house. Go ahead. And we won't engage any servant. We may need privacy that a servant would make impossible. We can make arrangements with some

one in Broggan to furnish our meals. How does that strike you?"

"Right," I answered. "I will close with Jicks at once. And I will send for my duds."

"I will walk down to Jicks's with you. It will give me a chance to see where he kept the key."

We found Jicks idle, and I told him I would take the house. He looked at me in astonishment.

"There will be two of us," I explained. "This is Mr. Warson, a detective. He will live with me for a while, and we will take our meals with Joel's mother."

All idea of asking Jones and his wife to come there had fled. I knew a ten-mule team wouldn't drag her into the place after what had happened.

"Mr. Jicks," said Warson, "where did you keep the key of that house?"

Jicks stared.

"You don't think—I—"

"I haven't said anything about you," said Warson testily. "I merely wish to see where the key was kept."

"Round in here."

Warson examined the little box under the post-office window.

"Now, Mr. Jicks," he said, "have you noticed, at any time in the past few days, anything disturbed around your place? Any evidence that an entrance had been forced by intruders?"

"Why, no; I can't say's I have."

"Nothing out of the way? No locks scratched or tampered with?"

"Nothing, I'm certain."

Warson nodded.

"You go on about your business and get your stuff down," he said to me. "I'll look around a little."

Feeling that I had the privilege, but asking permission of Mrs. Bankred first, I harnessed up one of Joel's extra horses and drove to the station. I telegraphed for what furniture I had intended to bring, and added the contents of another bedroom for Warson.

When I returned I found Warson smoking on the porch of the old house.

"Learn anything?" I asked.

"No, I didn't expect to learn anything. But there is one thing clear enough in my mind. Nobody in Broggan committed this murder."

During the next few days we had plenty to do. The constable visited the detective. Warson sent advertisements to papers. The coroner came again and held an inquest, which amounted to about as much as they all do. He then had an undertaker come and take away the body.

Then my furniture arrived, and Joel brought it over in a wagon. We furnished such rooms as we needed and made ourselves comfortable.

No answers came to any of Warson's advertisements, and the body was buried.

Then Warson got down to work in earnest.

We bought a horse and buggy, so that we might be entirely independent of Joel's stage, and go to the station any time we pleased. There was a shed back of the house which we turned into a stable, as the one belonging to the place had gone down in wind and weather.

We made the shed as comfortable as possible for the horse. It was my duty to feed it. Of course, while the exciting chase after the murderers was going on, I had no intention of trying to settle down to work.

"I am going to New York to-day," said Warson. "I am going to begin this investigation on the theory that the Scipio was a ship. And it is reasonable to suppose that a ship worth six hundred thousand dollars could be sold in New York to better advantage than anywhere else."

"It seems easy," I answered. "Once find the owners of the Scipio, and all is plain sailing."

"Yes—the thing is to find the man who came here with the one who was killed. There are great possibilities in view. Oh, by the way, I thought of having a telephone put in."

"Go ahead. It will be expensive."

"I know it."

And so Warson went to New York.

CHAPTER VII.

CLUES AND SECRETS.

HAVING nothing else to do, although much to occupy my mind while Warson was away, I relieved the tedium of my

lonely existence by falling into the habit of many inhabitants of Broggan, as well as of all other small villages, by strolling to the post-office to meet the stage when it returned from the railroad with the mail.

I not only received my own mail, when there was any, but also enjoyed chats with Jake Jicks and some of the older inhabitants. I asked questions of them all concerning the old stone house, but if they knew anything about the stories which gave it the reputation of being haunted, they were singularly reticent on the matter.

Thus it happened that I was standing on the post-office porch, one day, when Joel's wheezy, old ramshackle vehicle rolled along with Warson as a passenger.

"Hello, Dave," I said gladly. "Glad to see you back. It was lonesome while you were away."

He grinned as he sprang lightly from the vehicle.

Naturally, it would have been my impulse first to ask if he had learned anything about the mystery. But there were others about who gathered near, eager to look at and listen to this man who, from the reports spread by Joel concerning his marvelous powers of deduction, had risen in their estimation to the altitude of a great detective.

I knew that he, or any other detective, for that matter, if he had anything to tell me, would prefer to tell it when we were alone.

Like all the others, I watched Jake Jicks unlock the mail-pouch, dump out the small bundle of letters, the few registered packages, and one or two important-looking official envelopes. For, no matter how small and unimportant a country post-office may be, the official communications from Washington must go there just the same.

With that slow, methodical measure so characteristic of Broggan, Jake Jicks opened the bundle.

It did not require a great deal of post-office skill to assort the Broggan mail. There was little need for a large case of named or numbered pigeonholes. He simply picked up the loose letters and handed most of them out to the waiting crowd. The rest went into the boxes of farmers, who called for their mail when they felt like it.

"Here, Sally Morrow, here's that letter from Boston you've been looking for so long. Good news, I hope. Here, Jim, a letter from that girl of yours in Vaders."

"Jim," a young fellow who worked somewhere or other on somebody's garden, blushed as he took the letter, and everybody fired a volley of questions and advice at him

"Here's a letter for you, Mr. Dell. Joseph Dell, Broggan."

I took the letter. It bore the inscription of Baymer Brothers, shipping merchants, New York."

I opened the letter, and took out a brief note and a check.

The note ran simply, as follows:

DEAR MR. DELL:

Enclosed find check for $250.00 as usual. Yours very truly,

BAYMER BROS.

"Well, Warson," I said as I handed him the check to look at, "we can afford a few luxuries now. This will come in handy."

He read the note and looked at the check. I fancied a peculiar look came over his face. It was mostly curiosity, and combined with that, a puzzled expression I thought he tried quickly to conceal.

"I didn't know that you were engaged in the shipping business," said Warson as he handed my precious slip of paper back to me.

"My connection with the shipping business is extremely limited," I replied, folding everything and tucking the missive in my pocket. "It amounts simply to this: Baymer Brothers is either a corporation or a stock company or a firm with shares. I am not sure which, and never took the trouble to inquire. But my grandfather on my mother's side was at one time part of the concern, and when he died he left me this quarterly income from the firm. I get it regularly. I have no official standing there, and do not conduct any business. I simply receive and spend the money."

"That's what money's for," he said, but I fancied again there was a quick,

shooting look in his eyes, as if he were surprised, though I could not imagine why he should be.

"You are independent, then, of your earnings as a writer?" he said.

"So far as a thousand a year would make me."

"Well, it keeps and clothes you."

"But now the question is," I said, "how am I going to cash this thing. I wonder if there is a bank at Vaders. If there is, nobody would know me there."

"How much is your check, Mr. Dell?" asked Jicks, who had overheard the conversation. "I do my banking at Vaders. If you wish to trust me, and will indorse the check, I will bring you the money this afternoon."

"I guess I can trust you with two hundred and fifty," I replied. "And I am glad to have the chance. Saves me a lot of trouble."

I put my name on the back of the check and gave it to him.

"I'll give you a receipt for it," said Jicks.

"Oh, never mind that."

He smiled and nodded, as if gratified at this display of confidence.

Warson and I started back to the big house.

"You seemed surprised, Dave," I remarked, "that I should suddenly blossom before your very eyes as a multimillionaire."

"I don't know that I was. What makes you think that?"

"Well, I judged so from your expression."

He laughed.

"If there was any expression at all," he said, "it was probably one of envy. It must be a fine thing to be sure of an income, giving you time to devote your mind to your work without bothering about bread and butter."

"It is comforting. But you haven't told me what you've discovered. What was Scipio? I don't mean, *who* was Scipio? I've read of the gentleman. But was the particular Scipio in which we are interested a ship?"

"I am on the trail. I think she was. Of course, I am not sure that the Scipio I'm after was the one meant in the memorandum. But there is in existence a ship by that name. She was owned by a man named William Wratton."

"Of New York?"

"That's the trouble. I couldn't find him."

"Then, for the present, we must look upon the dead man as William Wratton."

"There you go again. Always jumping at conclusions. Didn't I tell you that the dead man might be either the seller or the purchaser? I shall leave again shortly, and hope to gain more knowledge. But I am going to Boston this time, and not to New York."

He seemed to be more reticent than usual. Instead of a certain rollicking manner and witty way of speaking, he had subsided into the cold, matter-of-fact, professional detective.

I supposed this was his general mood when hot on the scent, and did not press him. It is possible that a detective may have clues and secrets in his keeping which he does not care to disclose even to his dearest friend.

And I did not, by any means, occupy that position with Warson. I knew him as a young detective, fearless, honest, and hard working. He had, up to this time, failed greatly to distinguish himself, although I believed it was in him, if he had the opportunity. I had given it to him.

We were on the threshold of the old house when he turned to me.

"Joe," he said, "what was your reason—what was the specific reason—for sending for me in this case?"

"Because I thought you were the man to solve the mystery, and to give you a chance to make a big name for yourself."

"Our friendship played a part, then?"

"Of course."

I opened the door, and we went in.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER TRAGEDY IN BROGGAN.

SOMEHOW, I was restless that night. Warson's manner, while it was in nowise disquieting, had set me to won-

dering. His manner had apparently changed when he saw my check from Baymer Brothers.

What that innocent little piece of paper had to do with him, or the case he was working on, I could not imagine. I conjectured all sorts of absurd and impossible things.

I knew nothing about the business of Baymer Brothers. I knew, of course, that they owned ships that went to all parts of the world. But where, what cargoes they carried, and the manner of conducting the business, were things I neither knew nor cared about. Yet it was possible that in some way or other Baymer Brothers were concerned in the Scipio case.

About midnight I fancied I heard stealthy footsteps. I lay perfectly quiet, trying to determine in what direction they were going. I knew that there was nobody in the house except Warson. And why he should be prowling around at that hour, when he was at perfect liberty to do whatever he wished in the daytime, was a puzzle.

I fancied he might be ill, and was careful not to waken me. But Warson didn't seem to be the kind of fellow who ever got ill.

The footsteps seemed to creep near to the cellar door, and then I saw the gleam of a detective's lantern, which is much the same as a robber's, with a dark shutter over the lens, or bull's-eye, and I heard the bolt of the cellar door slowly drawn back. He was going into the cellar.

We had absolutely nothing in the cellar, not even coal. For the season was warm, we needed no fire for heating purposes, and did no cooking.

Then the recollection that the house had the reputation of being haunted flashed over me. I had forgotten that, knowing Warson was in the house.

When the light had disappeared I crept from my bed and went to Warson's room. The bed was empty. Warson had gone down into the cellar.

For what purpose? Why should he be prying around in secret? I had engaged him on the case and given him his information on which to start. We had been all over the house a dozen times.

I went to the head of the cellar stairs. I could see the light of the bull's-eye lantern moving about slowly. He was down there at least an hour.

When I saw the light coming quickly toward the stairs, as if his search was finished, I hurried back to bed. I did not wish him to know I had been watching.

It was clear that he was up to something he did not wish me to know anything about.

And if this was the case, if there were to be secrets kept from me, I resolved to watch Mr. Dave Warson. His action surprised me. I would not be surprised any more.

The next morning he had returned to his old manner. Whether this was forced, or whether whatever had been on his mind had vanished, I did not know.

Of course it never occurred to me that he could by any stretch of imagination connect me with the murder. This was so preposterous an idea that I never dreamed of it.

"Joe," he said, "you won't mind if I go about a little alone, will you?" he said as we walked over to Joel's for breakfast. "There is something funny in this town of Broggan, and I don't even want to tell you what I think. When I get a tangible story, I'll tell you all of it."

"Why should I care?" I asked. "You are the detective in the case. Go ahead. You are certainly independent of me. I am not paying you."

He did go about alone. Where, or for what, he did not tell me, and I did not inquire. But when I went to the post-office, Jake Jicks, with whom I had trusted my check, and from whom I had received my money all right, seemed suddenly to have developed a slight coolness which he was not diplomat enough to conceal.

Yet his manner was friendly enough. He acted more like a man afraid.

It was the same way with Joel.

This lasted three days.

"I'm off to Boston," said Warson one morning. "And as I don't know where the trail will lead me, nor when I'll strike Vaders, we'd better leave the horse at Vaders, so that I can come

back at any time. I may not hit the stage."

"All right. I don't need him," I replied.

The horse was put in a stable at Vaders, and Warson departed.

That day I was at the post-office when the stage returned. I had resolved to ask Joel a few questions. But as soon as he had thrown down the pouch and sack, he beckoned to me.

"I want to speak to you alone," he said.

We walked a little way.

"Mr. Dell," he said, "I like you, and you always act as if you liked me. I want to ask you something on the quiet."

"Fire away," I answered, knowing that I was going to get my information without asking for it.

"Is this man Warson a particular friend of yours?" he inquired.

"Why — no. I might call him a friend, I suppose. As a writer, I have interested myself in a few mysterious cases where he was concerned, and we became acquainted. And I thought he was the man for this job. Why do you ask that?"

"Have you noticed any change in him—anything different in his ways of late?"

"Since he returned from New York? Yes."

"Well, he's been nailing me with questions about you. He wanted to know exactly how many times I had brought you to Broggan. And he wanted to know if you had ever seen that old house before. And he wanted to know if the other time you came alone.

"Now, he wouldn't ask all them questions for nothing, would he? He's a detective. When he asks questions he wants to know something. I've read a good deal, even if I am only a country stage-driver, and I've read some good detective stories. This fellow has got something in his crop about you."

"I don't know why he should have," I answered. "Yet now I recall certain incidents, it would certainly seem so. He surely cannot suspect me of murdering that man."

"Well—I hate to say it—but that seems to me to be exactly what he does think."

I started. Had the check from Baymer Brothers produced such a suspicion in Warson's mind? The idea was disquieting. Yet, of course, I knew I was innocent.

We strolled back to the post-office, and Joel went off to the stables.

"Mr. Dell," said Jicks in a low voice when we were alone, "I wanted to speak to you after that detective went away. He's been asking a whole lot of questions about you. He asked how many times I had seen you. I told him once before you came to stay. He asked if I had ever shown you where I kept the key of the big house. Of course I told him no. He asked what sort of mail you usually received. What do you suppose he's nosing after you for? Surely you didn't kill that man?"

"No," I told him. "Surely I didn't kill that man. But I'll have a go at Warson if he tries to make it appear that I did."

I returned to the big house with feelings that were far removed from pleasant. I could not fathom Warson's motives. I resolved that when he returned I would go to New York and have a talk with Baymer Brothers. I might learn something there.

On the third night after Warson left, I was disturbed about two o'clock in the morning by Warson coming in. He had had a duplicate key made, so that either of us could enter at pleasure. I heard him stumble in the hall. I saw the flicker as he lit a lamp.

"Hello, Dave," I called from my bedroom. "Home again? Any news?"

"Yes," he said slowly, and, in a mumbling sort of way, "A lot. Bu' no' now. I'm sleep-y. T'-morrow'll tell you."

He was certainly sleepy, and so was I. I turned over and dropped off again.

In the morning I woke feeling refreshed. If Warson had news to tell me, it would relieve my anxiety about his manner toward myself.

I usually heard him dressing the same time as myself. He was quiet, and I, of course, knowing that he had

come home late, thought he would sleep till noon. But in passing his door I looked in.

There was something peculiar about his face. He lay on his back. His eyes were staring.

"Warson!" I cried, leaping toward him.

He did not answer.

A wound in his neck, similar to that in the man found in the house, told the story. He was dead.

(To be continued.)

WHY I MISSED THE MIDNIGHT.

By EDMUND E. FIELD.

A fortunate day for this commercial traveler, followed by a night of dismay.

"GEE whiz! This is a lonesome road. I am almost sorry I did not take Wilson up when he offered to accompany me part way—or, at least, to the main street corner. That light in the distance is supposed to be where I turn; no mistaking the light, for it is the only one in sight, and I'll bet it is at least a half mile, if not three-quarters, away. Well, I'm not going to take any chances unprepared."

Shifting my gun from my hip to my right-hand-side coat-pocket and still retaining my hold upon it, I felt ready for any emergency. I walked on, stumbled several times, giving a sigh of relief as I neared the light.

I was just crossing the alley at the rear of the main street buildings, when I was startled by two shots in quick succession. Glancing in the direction of the sound, I hurried on my way, scarcely recovering from the shock when a powerful looking fellow placed his hand on my shoulder and commanded: "Wait a minute." I halted, and he went on: "I heard two shots in this direction a minute ago. Did you hear them?"

"Yes," I replied, "down the alley; but it's none of my business. I've got to make the midnight train."

"Is that so? Better let us go back and see if anything is wrong."

Again I protested.

"It's none of my affair. I must make that midnight train."

Taking a firm hold of my arm, the stranger coolly remarked: "You'll go back all right, so cut out your train talk."

He then led me back into the alley, took out a pocket-lantern, and focused the light from side to side until it fell full upon the prostrate form of a man. Turning him over and looking him full in the face, he gasped out in a dramatic way: "It's Bunk Brown, and he has been shot dead."

As the light shone on the grim features of the dead man I completely lost my nerve. I realized my awful position when the stranger threw the rays of the lantern full upon me and exclaimed: "What's that you have in your hand?"

Reaching over, he grabbed it.

"A gun, eh?"

Sure enough, in my unnerved condition I had unconsciously removed my hand from my side coat-pocket, still holding my pistol.

"Two shots fired," the other went on. "A man found dead. You with a gun in your hand. No one else in sight. You are under arrest. I am an officer of the law. You must answer to the charge of murder."

What was I to do, practically a stranger in a strange land?

A traveling salesman, working new trade, I had that afternoon finished selling a bill of goods. It was the first I had sold in a week. I was feeling pretty good. It was in Oklahoma, in a town that had grown rapidly.

Such towns are not known for their architectural beauty. The store buildings are usually one, seldom two, stories high, strung along one, two, or three blocks of the main street, according to the size of the town's business. The merchants, as a rule, are a fine class of fellows, who drift in from the different sections of the country to establish

themselves in a new town. Mixed in with them are rovers, cow-punchers, ranchers, gamblers, and a rough element generally.

It is not unusual to hear of some one being shot for some trifling offense, but the quarrel is usually confined to the gambling element.

It was in such a town that I had just sold my bill of goods, and I had promised the merchant I would call upon him in the evening for a social chat. After supper, I lighted a good cigar and strolled down to his store, a few doors below the hotel at which I was stopping.

After an hour's conversation touching on various subjects, he prepared to close up for the night. Having locked the door, he walked down the street, turning in the direction of his home.

"When are you going to leave?" he inquired.

"On the midnight," I answered. "I will get to Oklahoma City about 5 A.M., sleep for a few hours, and be ready to do business there at the usual time in the morning, thus saving half a day. That 9 A.M. train would not put me there until too late."

Then I added: "I have plenty of time. I'll walk part way home with you."

We continued our talk until he stopped in front of a neat little cottage and remarked: "Well, this is my home. You have plenty of time; come in. I'll be glad to have you meet my wife."

Delighted to have the opportunity of getting better acquainted, I accepted his invitation.

I found his wife a very entertaining and accomplished lady. A musician of extraordinary ability, she played a number of selections, while I sang several popular songs. I did not realize how quickly the time had passed until I heard the clock strike eleven.

I rose to take my leave, thanking them for the evening's pleasure. I started down the steps when the merchant, putting on his hat, joined me.

I surmised his intention and asked: "Do you intend to return to your store for some special purpose at this late hour?"

"No," he answered. "Just to see you safe to your hotel."

"No," I protested. "I thank you for your kind interest. I'll follow the road to the main street. The hotel is only a short distance beyond. I left instructions with the clerk to send my trunks to the depot for the midnight train; I'll have plenty of time to check up. I would not have you leave your wife alone at this late hour."

"Better let me go along with you," he suggested. "At least, to the main street. It is a pretty lonely road for a stranger; it's a good half mile, too."

"I won't listen to it," I protested. "I fear no danger."

"Very well," he replied. "Keep to this road, turn neither to the right nor the left until you reach the light yonder. That is on the main street corner. We will be glad to have you visit us again on your next trip. Good night—good luck."

It was at the light in the distance at the end of this lonely road that I had the awful experience I have already related.

The officer still retaining his grip upon my arm, I realized that I was the victim of circumstantial evidence. Recovering my senses somewhat, I explained that I was a traveling salesman, had sold a bill of goods to Mr. Thomas Wilson, had spent the evening with him and his wife at their home, and was now on my way to the hotel to get my grip before starting for the midnight train.

"It may be all right, stranger," he calmly answered, "but the situation looks bad for you. We'll go to the hotel, anyhow."

At the hotel he examined my gun, frowned deeply, and remarked in an undertone: "I see you have used two shots —at least, you have two empty shells."

In my excitement I could not think where I had fired them, but knew it must have been in practise somewhere, for I never had occasion to use my pistol otherwise.

While we stood there I noticed a number of people crowding in, among them some pretty rough-looking characters, too.

"So you've got him, eh?" The officer by my side drew his gun, and aiming it at the speaker, a rough-looking character, commanded: "Throw up your hands!" and his hands went up.

"Get his gun! What's your game?"

"Nothen," answered the man. "I only wanted to save you wasting time with him by making him pay the penalty here and now."

"Is that so? Well, you'd better get facts first. This is a traveling salesman," the officer calmly replied, "and he may be able to give a good account of himself."

"Oh, I thought you had the gazabo who shot Bunk, and I wanted to pay my respects by pumping some lead into him."

The officer turned to the crowd, which by this time had become very large. "Boys," he said, "we'll sift this matter to the end, but go slow with this man."

While he thus spoke, the crowd made a passageway as a large, powerful looking and important fellow, with a kindly face but determined manner, came forward. He seemed to have their respect, admiration, and fear by the suddenness with which they ceased their clatter.

The officer in charge of me saluted him with, "Hallo, sheriff!"

The sheriff listened intently to the officer's story. He just nodded his head, waved his hand at the crowd, and told them to disperse. Then he directed that I should be sent to my room and an officer placed on guard at the door.

Turning to me, he remarked: "This is done for precaution, stranger."

When I reached my room I closed and bolted the door and sat on the edge of the bed to try to reason things out.

I concluded of all the experiences I ever had, this was certainly the limit. Here I was mixed up in a murder case; in fact, charged with the crime. I knew I was perfectly innocent and could clear myself if they gave me a chance.

But how did I know that I would get a square deal? I had read that out in some parts of this section of the country they usually killed a man under suspicion and investigated afterward. Here I was practically a prisoner in a room, with an officer on guard at the door.

Suddenly it occurred to me that the room was on the second floor rear. I recalled having looked out of the window upon a shed.

I consulted my watch; it was eleven-forty-five. I reasoned if I remained there until morning, Lord knew what the crowd would do with me. If I got out of that window, I might reach the depot, which was less than ten minutes' walk away.

I gathered together my scattered belongings, hastily packed my hand-bag, noiselessly raised the window, dropped out upon the shed, then upon the ground, and straightened myself, ready to start for the depot.

I heard a command, "Halt!"

In the darkness I discerned the form of a man. He stepped closely up to me and pointed a gun full in my face.

"Where do you think you are going?" he demanded.

"I am trying to make the midnight train," I faintly whispered, for I was completely exhausted.

In my eagerness to get away I had entirely forgotten the possibility of any one guarding the rear of the building.

"Well," the man with the gun replied, "you are certainly taking pretty desperate chances. Do you know that I would have been justified in shooting you the minute I saw you get out of that window? If you are not guilty, why are you trying the sneak act? Why, man, you never would have got five hundred feet away before you would have been recognized and shot. Do you realize that Bunk Brown's friends are on the lookout for a chance to kill you, for they believe you to be guilty? They are everywhere, except in the rear of this building. I was placed here by the sheriff to keep them off, for he suspected one or more of them might try to get at you this way. The sheriff is a man who believes in a square deal and fair play, and in giving every man a chance to prove himself innocent.

"You don't seem to want to take that chance. It's not for me to say what I think. My instructions from the sheriff are to protect you. If I take you around to the front, there'll be trouble; so the best way out of it is for you to get back into the room the way you got out. Move quickly."

Once more in my room, I walked the floor in an agony of suspense. What to do I did not know. Finally I threw myself on the bed, but I could not sleep.

Some time in the early morning I

must have dozed off, for I was suddenly awakened by loud knocking on the door. I opened my eyes, for a minute not realizing where I was; then all at once it came to me.

With a heavy heart I questioned: "Who is there?"

"The clerk," came the reply. "Do you want to make that morning train?"

Opening my door, I inquired: "Do I what?"

He repeated his question. I glanced up and down the hall.

"Where is the officer?" I whispered.

He smiled and answered: "The sheriff called him away about two-thirty this morning, having more important business for him. You are cleared of suspicion."

I was dazed. I could not seem to grasp the meaning of his statement. Stepping into my room and taking me by the hand, he continued:

"I congrafulate you, my boy. You surely had a rough experience and a close call. The whole thing turned upon the information furnished by Mr. Wilson, the merchant to whom you sold goods. The sheriff sent to him for corroboration of your statement. Mr. Wilson responded in person, arriving at the hotel about 1.30 A.M. to testify to the truth of all you had said, and further added that when you were at his place he heard a disturbance in his hen-house in the rear. Coyotes having devoured his fowls for several nights, he was on the lookout for them. Having carelessly left his own gun in the store, he borrowed yours while you were listening to his wife at the piano."

"Yes, I remember his asking to look at my revolver," I said. "We had been talking about guns. But I did not hear the shots."

"That was because of the noise at the piano," replied the clerk. "He was surprised that you did not mention the circumstance of his borrowing your gun, although he neglected to call your attention to using it when he returned it to you. It was all done in less than five minutes. On his way to the hotel he heard two fellows talking as they passed him on the road on horseback. One said: 'I got his money, anyhow.' This information led to forming a posse, who overtook them along about 2.30 A.M. The facts and evidence were complete against them.

"The killing of Bunk had been deliberately planned," the clerk went on to explain. "It was the result of a card game back in one of the alley gambling-rooms. Bunk had won high stakes during the evening. The other fellows lost. Bunk remained some little time after the others had left. As he stepped out into the alley one of his opponents in the game drew his gun and deliberately fired two shots into his body.

"Just then you happened along and were arrested on suspicion. The guilty ones evidently went under cover, awaiting an opportune time to make their escape, which they were doing when accidentally seen and heard by Mr. Wilson, who reported the circumstances to the sheriff. I am sorry you missed that midnight train."

In my joy over being released, and without thinking, I sent this telegram to my wife:

> I am cleared of that murder charge.

Then I realized what I had done, so I had to wire again, to this effect:

> Don't worry. It's all a mistake. Will explain by letter.

OPPORTUNITY.

TIME wears all his locks before,
  Take thou hold upon his forehead;
When he flies he turns no more,
  And behind his scalp is naked.
Works adjourned have many stays;
Long demurs breed new delays.

Southwell.

WASHINGTON OR—WORSE?

By EDGAR FRANKLIN,

Author of "The Taking of the Liberator," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

Certain astounding happenings that broke the calm current of life in a banana republic.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

STEPHEN GIRTON and Ned Hemmett are respectively Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury in the little republic of Guanama, under United States protection. Hemmett passes into Puerto Carlo thirty cases which he supposes to contain personal property of a beautiful Spanish girl, Inez Vanniera, but which turn out to be rifles. Perdon, the Governor of the republic, mysteriously disappears, and Girton and Hemmett start for the uplands to ferret out what they suspect to be the beginnings of a native revolution.

On the train for Santa Maria they are set upon by a squad of Guanaman policemen, and overcome after strenuous resistance.

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE WOODS AND OUT AGAIN.

"THE brunette gentleman," said Hemmett gently, as some measure of breath returned and he twisted his head to survey the panting Girton, "was right; we *are* under arrest!"

"Well, we'll not stay there long!" burst from the Secretary of State, "and if that ruffian doesn't do his time in prison I—"

A boisterous laugh greeted him from the brown police captain. For a moment it seemed to hang in the air; then it found echo! Police and natives to the number of hundreds laughed triumphantly, excitedly, scornfully, until the very roof of the little station rang.

"And the populace seems to be right in with the fun," Hemmett muttered savagely. "Has this fiendish little pesthole of a country gone mad, or—"

"Arise, *señor*," the captain chuckled pleasantly. "Hi! *Con presteza!*"

"Say, I'll '*con pres*'—" the Secretary of the Treasury began wildly.

"Pssst!" Girton's wits were returning. "Keep your mouth shut, Ned! There's no use threatening, with an army like this around us—and the whole mob apparently unfriendly. We may not be able to understand it, but we'll gain nothing by giving them food for laughter."

Hemmett gulped, as he was jerked to his feet, and looked around.

The train, apparently, might leave now. It was drawing slowly out of the station. Half a minute, amid the peculiar little hush, and the dingy end of its rear car rumbled around the curve and out of sight.

A sigh, mainly of bewilderment, escaped both men. Each on his own account, as it were, was trying to find the answer, endeavoring to read the riddle of this sudden halt in their journey, of the incomprehensible workings of the native police, of the excited, exultant jabberings of the throng behind them.

Be Guanama as queer, as effervescent, as she may; be her people ever so hysterical and mendacious and secretive, the forceful arrest of her foremost statesmen in a time of ostensible peace and contentment passed all former attainments by many, many degrees.

Could it be, each reflected, that the—as yet unnamed and unclassified—movement had extended throughout the entire country without a hint coming to them until within the past fortnight? Could it be that those very millions of brown men and women who so shortly before had been all allegiance, all admiration for the great United States, had turned now and were—

"Face about!" remarked the native captain crisply.

A twist of the shoulder emphasized the command. Side by side, Girton and Hemmett turned suddenly from the tracks and were forced into a walk along the platform.

Unresisting, they came to the end—turned the corner and walked down the side—stepped into the stifling dust of the roadway and still walked on, police on every hand.

Silently still, the little party crossed to the straggling woods and came to a halt, the mob lingering interestedly about the station, watching and chattering.

Among the trees there was a rustling, a trampling of hoofs. A long, three-seated carriage came into view, drawn by a pair of stout horses and very evidently private property. It halted before them, and the negro driver grinned frankly at the prisoners.

"Enter! The forward seat, Señor Girton, behind the driver!"

A push, and Girton followed the officer who had scrambled in before him. He was thrust to a seat. The captain settled calmly and comfortably beside him, and turned to see that Hemmett was safely installed behind, between another pair of the constabulary.

Grim, savage, choking down emotions that would have singed even the hot air had they become words, the Secretary of the Treasury was crammed between the dusty uniforms. The captain winked—grunted his satisfaction—gave a word to the driver.

Without further comment, the vehicle started away for the road that skirted the town and led to the half worthless, wholly uncut, timber country behind.

It was, perhaps, the most remarkable drive the two Americans had ever experienced. Together they had journeyed on horseback, in carriages, latterly occasionally in motor-cars; together they had worked and fought and raced; but neither could well recall a ride which had not had a definite motive, before or behind them.

Just now—what?

They had been taken bodily by men who were among the lowest of their subordinates. They had been removed from a car in which they had every earthly reason and right to ride. They had been hustled into a carriage, and now—they were almost galloping for the woods; and more than that neither could say.

If necessity held them silent, taste seemed to lead the constabulary in the same direction. Not one of the four police essayed speech.

The driver whistled aimlessly as he urged the horses to quicker pace. The police lit their cigarettes unconcernedly, and their captain, with playful amusement, blew each particularly rank gust of gray vapor in Girton's direction, sending a leer after it that roused a tornado of rage in the Secretary's breast which nothing stilled but the very material pistol in the officer's hand.

Rio Espectro was altogether behind. They had parted company with such civilization as existed there and were racing through rocky woodland country, with no apparent destination ahead.

Some eight or nine miles, perhaps, had been traversed when the driver turned questioningly. The captain nodded. The vehicle slowed down and turned into an almost overgrown woodland road—overgrown, but showing faint signs of some recent travel in the crushed shrubbery at the sides.

Jolting, pounding, the carriage attained another half-mile through the stillness. And then, very abruptly, the road took a new twist, and they came into view of a huge, decayed house.

Perhaps it was the abandoned home of some wealthy Guanaman; possibly it was one of those curious mistakes which foreigners had in a few instances erected in the fancied calm of the country.

At all events, it was big and roomy—and very evidently occupied. Men were about, here and there and everywhere. Horses by the dozen were tethered to the trees—champing some, drowsing others.

On the broad veranda a group of hard, keen, native faces turned suddenly toward the carriage, and on the instant a cheer went up which shook the still air.

The vehicle stopped. With a leap the police were out, grinning triumphantly and beckoning to the captives.

Stiffly, without comment, the pair descended. More men crowded from within, and stared and talked excitedly and delightedly until the place buzzed like a huge hive of bees.

"Well, we're expected," Hemmett remarked dryly.

"Pleasant, at least," muttered Girton. "Ned, in all your existence, did you ever—"

"The *señors* will remain silent!" the captain informed them flatly. "Come this way."

Wholly safe among the crowd, he laid a hand on an arm of each and piloted them into the wide, dusky corridor. Straight ahead they went, and to the big door at the back, closed just now, and with an armed man standing guard at either side.

Their captor spoke a low word or two. The eyes of the guards brightened instantly as they stared at the newcomers. One reached forward and turned the knob, and the portal swung open before them.

It was a strange apartment that greeted them—big and high-ceilinged, perhaps formerly a drawing-room, just now entirely bare, save for a few rough chairs and a table.

Behind the latter sat a man, brown of skin, distinctly stout, a trifle foolish of expression, but thoroughly important and self-satisfied, nevertheless.

He looked up with pompous calm as steps approached, and laid down his pen. He sat back with a broad smile, and:

"Marado!" gasped Girton and Hemmett in one breath of unbounded amazement.

Guanama's ex-President, presumably hunting in far distant hills, and the firmest friend of the great United States in all the little tropical community, bowed with pompous gravity.

The captives regarded him almost weakly.

Marado! The pudgy little man who had wept tears of real joy at annexation! The mutable being who had, figuratively, allowed the United States to take him to its bosom for an eternity of peace and prosperous content! Marado, who—

But he was standing now.

"*Señors,* dear friends of the past, I welcome you!" he exclaimed.

"And you—you—it was you who—who were back of this damned outrageous business—" Girton mouthed in sudden fury as words returned.

"Yes, you wabbling little sneak!" Hemmett echoed.

Speech failed him. With a jerk he was free and bounding for the table. Girton's hand went out and clutched him for an instant, and in the instant steps rushed at them, some half-dozen muskets appeared magically, and Hemmett relaxed with a gasping grunt.

Marado, distinctly paler, sat down suddenly and breathed a sigh of relief.

"*Señors!*" he cried with a faint tremor. "This—this—is of the folly!"

He surveyed his armed guard, and his smile returned.

"There—there is much which you will find it hard to understand, *señors.* That I shall give myself the honor to explain. For the present I ask only that you shall retain that wonderful calm of the *Americano.*"

A second sigh of content escaped him.

"See!" he cried. "My men shall retire from the room. I shall put in you the same great trust as of old, despite all. I ask only your word that you shall hear me in quiet."

"Well, you've got it, I guess!" said Girton grimly. "We'll be calm."

Marado smiled approval. A lordly wave of his hand, and the handful of men retired. The door closed upon them; not very tightly, but closed nevertheless.

The rotund Marado beamed greasily and happily. Hemmett surveyed him with grim fierceness for many seconds, and when at last he spoke between gritting teeth his comment held the answer to many recent puzzles:

"So *you're* at the bottom of all this underground deviltry!"

The ex-President of Guanama smiled even more broadly.

"One does not term 'deviltry' those things which are a sacred duty, *señor,*" he observed placidly. "But—ah! Be seated. You shall know. You shall know why, for the great good of you, my two old friends, I have ordered your bringing here"

"For the good—" Girton ejaculated.

"Indeed, Señor Girton!" Marado warmed to incipient eloquence. "For your good so much that, in the long years to come, you will look back and cry aloud: 'It is indeed he, Marado, who is blessed! It is he who'—"

"Well, I think you can cut out all that fancy business and get down to cold facts," Hemmett observed sharply. "And the first thing for you to explain is how in the name of everything sane and conceivable you or any other native of this territorial madhouse so much as *dared to think* of laying a finger on either Mr. Girton or—"

The placid voice broke in upon him once more.

"*Señor,* it is to be calm. Many things seem strange; yet, when a little time has passed and thoughts return—"

"Drop it!" Hemmett's fist came down upon the table and Marado jumped. "What we want to know is, by what authority were we molested?"

The late President stiffened slightly.

"By my own, *señors.* By the authority of myself." His voice swelled suddenly. "By the authority of the leader, the ruler, of the new, the Free Guanama."

"The—the—" Girton repeated.

"The great, the free country which you and I and the good Señor Hemmett love so well. Ah, be seated. It is better. There is much to say—much that will bring to you the great rejoicing—much that will show you how right I am. See! Had I sent a messenger, you would not have come here."

"Well—"

"And yet, for your own good you are here," Marado pursued conclusively. "It is plain—"

"It's almighty plain that about the largest bunch of trouble ever brewed on God's footstool is waiting for somebody—and you have a striking resemblance to that somebody just now, Marado," Hemmett answered. "When you dare—"

"A moment, *señors.* I shall speak first. It is but little more than two hours back that we received knowledge of your presence on the train. Yet so greatly do I esteem you, so swiftly did I act, that you were brought to hear me. You listen in quiet?"

The pair glanced at each other hopelessly, half bewilderedly, and an ironical smile came to Girton's lips.

"We'll listen, Marado," he said briefly.

"*Bueno!*" The little man behind the table was wreathed in smiles. "To begin, then: The great *Americano* oppresses."

"What?"

"*Si, señor.* At first we believe in him. The Governor of the military, at first sent to rule over us, was perhaps a good man. He was at least just, and my people—"

"*My* people!" Hemmett commented under his breath.

"Yes, *señor,* my people. My people saw in him the great, the good Governor, who was there for the little time only and was doing his best. What they disliked they forgave. Then—*then* comes this Governor of permanency—this pig *Americano,* Perdon—this murderer of the souls and bodies of men and women—this—"

"Rot!" Girton snapped angrily. "Perdon has been here only six months, and—"

"And were he here six centuries, my people could hate him no more than now!" Marado boomed forth as excitement rose and reddened his round face. "What, in truth, has he done? First, of the taxes upon my suffering people—he say they shall be increase. Then, of the duties—what you say—the customs payments. He say we shall not have free trade, as you call it. He say that—bah! Shall I use the golden hours in speaking of this dog?"

He waved his fat hands wildly.

"You know! We know! No! My people go to him. Some time he tell them he do what he please. Some other time, that they know not what is best for them. Some other time still, that perhaps he or the *Estados Unidos* make the new laws when they please. Always—"

"Marado!" roared Hemmett.

The President, through a series of pantings and swallowings, gulped his noisy way to a standstill. The Secretary of the Treasury eyed him almost compassionately.

"Marado," he said, "if you could compel your beloved people to take about twenty stiff doses of bromid daily—if you, yourself, would indulge in a little

good, reliable dope about every fifteenth minute—things might seem a little clearer. What Perdon does—"

"Did do!"

"What Perdon did, then, isn't final. Perdon, nor any other one man makes our laws, my dear man. When things are finally settled down here on a working basis, when we have elected and organized our own legislative bodies—and that is only a matter of a little time now—"

"Time! Yes, time!" came in a scream from behind the table. "It is always time! It is that which my people will not endure. Always the excuses. Always the to-morrow. Always more oppression, in the name of protection. And always the greater tax—the less of the liberty."

He shot to his feet and glared at them.

"Pah! No! It shall not be, I tell you! My people are great—they are mighty—they are free—they will bear the yoke no longer. Aaaah!"

He dropped back into the chair, puffing.

"But now it is over," he announced more quietly. "Now all is at an end. We have suffered. We have cried aloud. We have besought, and now—"

"Now we're going to have our regular biennial revolution," Hemmett commented sourly.

"Revolution!" Marado turned upon him. "No, it is no revolution, *señor.*"

"Eh?"

"It is no revolution, *señor,*" Marado went on earnestly. "We simply state to the United States that we have decided again to become free. They agree, perhaps. Perhaps not."

"And if they don't?" Girton asked dryly.

"Then, *señor,*" said Guanama's ex-President placidly, "we simply ignore them. It is simple."

For a moment the sublime egotism brought an almost dazed smile to their faces. It was Girton who replied.

"It looks simple, Marado, but—but in the remote possibility of some misguided spirit putting up an objection—"

"Then we fight, *señor!*" Marado announced. "From the hills we fight. Fifteen thousand rifles already we have. Let the *Americano* soldiers come. One by one we kill them in the hills—ten thousand—ten hundred thousand, if need be."

He sank back and his hands clasped.

"And then at last," he cried rapturously, "at last, when the *Americano* shall understand that he faces a people indomitable—when we have killed such thousands as may be necessary—when at last the *Americano* retires forever—then we shall indeed have Free Guanama, peaceful and prosperous forever more!"

Hemmett had been studying him with a wondering keenness.

"Marado," he said slowly, "as between friends, as it were, I presume that Mr. Perdon was kidnaped through your orders?"

"It was indeed so."

"And do you realize that when our country is apprised of that fact you'll have more hell to pay here even than *aguardiente* ever cooked up in a Guanama brain?"

"For the time, it may be the foolish *Americano* shout in pain," Marado observed loftily. "In a little time he see that he has encountered a greater people—he will go away—and we are *free!*"

"Well, you've got it all reasoned out," Hemmett smiled acidly, "but—suppose it doesn't exactly work?"

"It will work as I say, as I decree, *señor,*" Marado replied with gentle certainty. "I have say that Perdon shall be taken. He is taken. I have say that you shall come here. You are here. So will go the rest."

He hitched closer to the table and looked them over earnestly.

"And so," he pursued, "I come to the real—the pleasant—business. I speak to you, not as to servants of the tyrant, but as to friends of myself and my suffering country. I have told you this is to be; I propose you, too, shall share in the joy."

"What?" Girton's eyes narrowed.

"*Señors,* forsake the country which grinds down the poor. Join with my people, the true sons of liberty. There will be a little trouble at first. There will be a little unpleasantness at first. Then, when all is calm again, with me you shall be the greatest in the world's greatest country—Free Guanama!"

"In other words," Hemmett began

hotly, "you mean to have us throw down Old Glory, the flag we were born under, the flag we've served and loved all our lives, and take up with a set—"

"Wait, Ned!" Girton broke in suddenly, and with a very significant glance.

"Wait? When that—"

"Yes, wait a moment!" The Secretary of State spoke volumes with his eye, and Hemmett fell silent suddenly. The former turned to Marado.

"And if we don't do it, Marado?" he asked quietly.

The little brown man started violently. For an instant he glanced from one to the other of them. Then his countenance hardened into an almost comical look of pale determination.

One rather shaky hand went forth and picked up the paper-weight on the table before him. An instant it was poised in the air. It came down then with a distinct slam.

And almost with the sound came two crashes, one from either side of the room—the reports of two rifles that seemed to have been thrust through the wall.

From Hemmett's head the slouch-hat flew bodily, torn through the top by a bullet. Through Girton's own head-gear a clean hole was cut.

And then, with a thin cloud of smoke on either side of the apartment, with a bullet-hole through either wall—silence!

It was Hemmett who broke the hush with:

"Grand-stand sharpshooting, eh? Well—"

"Well, it is what I expected from a man of Marado's proverbially quick action," Girton cried. "It is the answer of all answers I should have wished—that of a man thoroughly determined. Ned!"

"Eh—yes?"

"Marado's *right!*" thundered the American Secretary of State. "The United States is wrong!"

His eye once more caught Hemmett's dropping jaw and suddenly brought it back to place.

"This is a little country just now, but it can be made a big country, for it's made up of a big people who will stop at nothing. I'm willing to forsake the Stars and Stripes, Marado."

"You're—" came from Hemmett weakly.

"Yes, and so are you," Girton bellowed enthusiastically. "We've seen the last of the oppressor, old man. We'll take up now with a free people and fight with them, and die with them, if necessary. Three cheers for Free Guanama!"

His voice fairly shook the room. Hemmett, after a last second of hesitation, suddenly rose as well, and waved his hat and joined.

"And we'll thrash the old United States, too," he informed all the neighborhood. "We'll thrash 'em if it takes a century."

From behind the table Marado came suddenly. A moment he paused, then tears of very genuine joy suffused his eyes.

He hurried forward and embraced Girton. He turned and administered the same surprising attention to Hemmett, with even greater vigor and enthusiasm. And then, clasping a hand of each, he cried with solemn joy:

"*Señors*—ah, *señors!* The God of Freedom has indeed sent you great wisdom."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HEART OF THINGS.

LEAVING the main line of the railway, say fifty miles short of Santa Maria's terminal, and striking southward into the mountains, it is very little of a task to become hopelessly lost in the densest of tropical forests.

Trails are very few, very poor, very far between. Of human habitation there is practically no sign for mile after mile until, having taken an all-day jaunt through Guanama's hills, one reaches at last the rich plantation country and the first of the series of branch railways which bring the tea and coffee, the tobacco and fruits, to the coast.

At the wholly insignificant flag-station of Felipe, then, the fast freight of the late afternoon had deposited a party of eight men upon the very border of the woodland waste. From the baggage-cars their horses, ready saddled, had been led down the incline to the ground, and the party had disappeared abruptly in the up-country direction.

Now, jogging rapidly through the

dusk, the eight were progressing higher and higher into the hills, through a land where stillness is broken only by the chirp of an occasional bird or the call of a forest beast—or, at times, by the beat of iron-shod hoofs.

To the fore rode Marado, side by side with a long and lank Guanaman, authoritative of mien and spare of speech. A dozen yards behind; Hemmett and Girton followed, astride scrubby native mounts. Behind them still came four more riders, very plainly of Guanaman blood.

It was a quiet party, talking little and thinking much. From the vanguard now and then came a word or two from Marado, when eloquence raised his flexible tones. From the rear came no sound at all, save the steady breathing of hard-working horses.

The pair in the center, however, lighter of skin, less enthusiastic of bearing, talked steadily in a very well muffled undertone.

"And *that's* all of ten miles from the line," Girton remarked suddenly as they topped a ridge and, with a momentary glimpse of vast stretches of green woods, began another of the interminable descents.

"And just that much farther from civilization," Hemmett muttered.

"Well, it can't be helped. We're in for it now."

"But if the notion of renouncing the flag of the United States and all that sort of thing hadn't occurred to you—"

"We'd be dead now, as sure as God made little apples," Girton replied forcefully.

"We might—or we might not."

"We'd be as dead as bullets could make us, Ned. I tell you, when we were taken to that infernal villa there was no intention of letting us out alive unless we forswore everything we're faithful to."

"Perhaps, but—"

"My dear boy," said Girton, "there are more ways of serving one's country than being shot for her. We threw up the grand, whole-souled bluff of damning the Stars and Stripes up hill and down again. When Marado hugged us and wept, we swore to be faithful to him forever and a day. What's the result? We—"

"We're—"

"Instead of being nastily interred in the woods," Girton hurried on, "we're going right to the heart of things. We're going to learn precisely what *is* afoot! And when we've learned, by simply throwing ourselves heels over head into the spirit of this idiotic revolution we're going to break loose and cable home such a full bill of particulars—"

Hemmett's little laugh interrupted him.

"And we're well on the way to all those details now, aren't we?"

"Eh?"

The Secretary of the Treasury edged his mount nearer and smiled tartly.

"See here, Steve! We've been on the road since about noon. We rode with Marado from his—temporary headquarters, I suppose it was—to the railroad. We quizzed him all the way. Then we rode to Felipe with him. We quizzed him until questions fairly stuck to the walls of that beastly little day-coach. After that, we got aboard these noble steeds again and rode a full five miles side by side with him. And *what,* in the way of information, did we get out of it all?"

"Well, he—"

"He told absolutely nothing. He told us that when we had proved ourselves as faithful as he, personally, knew us to be, all should be revealed. He informed us that the rifles were ready—somewhere—and that the men were gathered. He brought out in seventeen different ways that as soon as the ammunition arrived the first great blow would be struck, and the United States put on the double-time retreat. And that's absolutely all we got."

"But the world hasn't come to an end yet, Ned," Girton smiled.

"So I perceive. And yet, with the best part of a day to question him in, and Marado one of the most thorough-paced fools we ever met—fool enough, even, to accept as Gospel the announcement that we had turned on the Stars and Stripes—we know only that we're going somewhere, supposedly, to do something. It is not extremely definite."

"We'll make it so, a little later on," the Secretary of State answered. "I have a very strong notion that we're bound for the headquarters of this little agitation, and—"

"Hush!"

Girton looked up suddenly. His voice died away. Marado had reined in, and with seraphic smile was awaiting their approach.

The rear-guard, with that curious uniformity which hinted strongly at prearrangement, halted. Marado's companion rode on slowly, and Marado himself waved a lordly arm.

"It is there, *señors!*" he announced.

"Eh?"

"Yonder, *señor!*"

"What? The hill?" Hemmett asked bluntly as he surveyed the tall, flat-topped peak through the dusk.

"Aye, *señor*—the hill. Bare and dreary it seems to you, perhaps, and uninviting. Yet there, about the base, up the sides, through the forests below, is the army of liberty!"

"The—the whole crowd?" Girton cried.

"Nine thousand good men are there, *señor*. A week, and almost as many more will have joined us."

"But"—Hemmett's eyes were straining toward the summit—"I say, Marado!"

"Yes, Señor Hemmett?"

"The—that—" His gaze grew even more concentrated, and Girton's own eyes followed.

And above the summit, dimly reflected upon the low-hanging clouds, each man caught a glow of dusky red.

"Isn't that—yes! It is!" Hemmett turned on Marado. "Man alive! That's old Demonio! That—"

"It is indeed the volcano of El Demonio! A fitting place for the birth of liberty, is it not, *señor?* Fire is born there, and great forces, and—"

"And at pretty nearly any minute the whole affair may erupt and smash your revolution quicker even than—"

The Secretary of the Treasury broke off shortly. His contemplated metaphor was not altogether in harmony with their recently expressed fidelity to Guanama.

Marado smiled placidly.

"El Demonio has been quiet for one hundred years, *señor*. It will never break into eruption again."

"In spite of the fact that there are a few millions of tons of white-hot, seething lava within fifty feet of the crater-level?" Girton questioned rather breathlessly.

"It will not break forth, *señor*." The calm of the smile grew. Marado nodded pleasantly. "And now, in the shadow of nature's great forces you shall meet the great forces of Guanama—the people over whom you shall both so shortly rule in the finest, the greatest sense."

He spurred his horse forward. For an instant the two men stared at each other. Then, at a restless movement of the four behind, they started on their way again, and Girton laughed shortly.

"If an added touch could increase the pleasure of this little excursion," he observed, "one is bound to gain it by camping on the side of a volcano."

"It's extinct," Hemmett murmured.

"Yes, and it's always the unloaded guns that go off."

He took another long look at the red glow above the crater. It was increasing gradually now, as darkness gathered.

"Who in the name of common sense would ever have thought of pitching a camp of that size on the edge of a volcano?" Hemmett cried softly.

The Secretary of State turned on him abruptly.

"Somebody with *brains*, Ned!" he said with remarkable earnestness. "Somebody capable of thinking a good deal more quickly and clearly than Marado, too. That's struck me more than once this day."

"Yes?"

"Yes, and very decidedly. There's more in this affair than appears on the surface, my boy. Marado, for example, would hardly have dared seize Perdon or ourselves on his own initiative. Had he done so, he would hardly have had the daring to take us off the train and into his villa in the woods. Then, again, that spectacular object-lesson we got in sharpshooting doesn't look altogether like Marado—it's too refined and conclusive."

He shook his head thoughtfully.

"In other words," Hemmett grinned tartly, "there is quite a bit of information that we'll have to gather in this devilish camp ahead."

"Yes, and we'll have to gather it and get loose, whether we sleep or eat or anything else," Girton sighed.

The trail broadened shortly.

From an extremely narrow, really difficult, mountain path they swept now into a newly made road of some breadth; and, following Marado's example, they spurred their little horses to a gallop and, incidentally, depended upon their instinct to keep to the way in the blackness.

A mile was covered thus—and then two. And after that, very abruptly, they were challenged from the shrubbery at the roadside.

A momentary colloquy in Marado's neighborhood, and the forward pair started on once more. In the bushes a single flare of rifle-fire shot upward; a crash broke the calm of the woods—and all was still again.

They passed the place without molestation, and Hemmett breathed a sigh of relief.

"One shot—all right, I presume," he muttered. "Two shots—trouble."

Another half mile was covered. A second halt was brought about. This time, it appeared, two shots were proper, for when they had been fired Marado called back cheerily through the early night:

"Forward, *señors!* All is well!"

The sound of galloping hoofs ahead sent their steeds into lively action. Some five minutes of swift going and they rounded a turn, and Hemmett muttered in astonishment:

"Well, we're coming on the outfit, all right enough."

Ahead a camp-fire blazed brightly, some twenty or thirty men about it. Farther, there was another and another and another, twinkling red spots that seemed to dot the forest as the stars dotted the heavens.

To the right they appeared, then to the left, ahead, and, very shortly, behind.

It was a time for the eyes rather than the lips, and the two Americans took in the details of the big scene in silence.

Here, there, and everywhere the mightiness of the secluded camp was thrust upon them. Here was a group of rough tents, here shelters made of boughs, here again, a long row of white army tents. Now would appear a rude log shack, now a great fire, with pots above it and the aroma of native cooking all around.

"How the dickens are they feeding 'em?" Hemmett gasped. "We haven't heard anything of food-stuffs being bought up at wholesale."

"That's another indication of the mysterious brain. I've been thinking about it, too, in the past five minutes or so. A Guanaman doesn't eat much, Ned, and I'll guarantee that pretty nearly every man of them brought all he could buy and carry himself."

"And—"

He stopped as Marado appeared beside them in the blackness.

"It is here that you shall stay, *señors*," he announced, indicating a tent in the shadows, vaguely illumined by a fire some twenty yards distant.

"Eh?"

"For the present it is your home. Tomorrow, perhaps, we shall make further arrangements for your comfort, *señors*. Just now I shall have the best of our food sent to you. *Adios!*"

He was gone in the darkness, and the five with him. From the blackness a grinning native trotted up and set about making a fire in front of the tent.

Slowly the two men dismounted. And as they stood side by side on the soft ground Hemmett laughed suddenly.

"Well, we've been taken in good faith, Steve. We're not even under guard."

"No—unless you consider nine thousand men a guard," Girton muttered. "However—"

He raised the flap of their new abode. It was utterly plain and very much like others they had occupied in former days. A pair of camp-cots, half a dozen tin utensils—and nothing more.

Supper came shortly—a more or less nourishing meal of one course, served in tinware which one hardly cared to examine for traces of former grease. They ate in silence.

Their attendant disappeared for the time. Side by side they stretched by the fire as the night cool descended; side by side, for a while, they smoked silently. Then:

"Perdon's our first goal, Ned," came from Girton.

"Do you suppose he's here in this mob—dainty little Perdon?"

"I see no likelier place to suppose, Ned. And if he is here we must get to him and learn what we can."

"And then?"

"Learn whatever is possible about the whole affair here and get clear altogether."

"Which will be delightfully simple, of course."

"Simple or not, we'll have to accomplish it," sighed Girton. "We've been in tighter boxes and crawled out with a whole skin."

"Perhaps, but if we knew what our standing in this fresh-air insane asylum happened to be—"

"Well, we'll find out—that's all. Eh? There's— I say! Pedro! Sancho! Arturo! Whatever your name is, come here!"

Their native attendant, passing at a distance, halted and shuffled toward them. For a few seconds Girton regarded him keenly in the dim light. Then:

"Well, *camarada,*" he inquired genially, "how are all things here?"

"Well, *señor.*"

"Our rifles—I don't see them."

"They are still stored in the wagons, up the side of El Demonio, *señor,*" came with a rather astonishing lack of reticence.

"Ah!" Girton nodded easily. "And the ammunition—what's your name?"

"José, *señor.*" The man seemed to quicken as he replied: "One says that the 'munition shall come to-morrow—at last."

"Good!" Hemmett concluded with an approving chuckle. "And then—eh, José?" he laughed.

"Then, *señor,* freedom once more!"

"You're right, *camarada* — freedom once more!" Girton seemed to fall into a brief space of reflection. His head came up then, and he asked: "This American we served under—this Perdon—is here?"

"*Si, señor.* He also is upon the side of El Demonio, high up in the little *caverna* where the bushes grow thin."

"Is he, though? Know the place?"

"Well, *señor.*"

"Aha! Well—" Girton rose slowly and yawned; then, in the most matter-of-fact fashion: "Take us up there, then, José. We'll have a talk with him."

"So, *señor?*" The native stared. "Is it—then—permitted?"

"Guess it is," Girton laughed. "Find out if you want to."

The native vanished with almost uncanny speed. A minute or two they waited. Then he reappeared with:

"It is well, *señors.* Yet it is a long walk in the night."

A chuckle of excited satisfaction rose in Hemmett's throat; he stifled it quickly.

"We'll try it, anyway," he said. "It's cool now, at least."

The native bowed and turned away. Stiff of limb, rather filled with secret amazement, they walked after him.

So there was no objection to an interview with Perdon! That in itself was somewhat remarkable. Remarkable, too, was the speed with which permission had been gained.

Into either man's mind came a very strong suspicion that their little tent was, after all, not so very far from some one in high authority, and that their apparent utter freedom and isolation existed upon the surface only.

Through the brush, they struck into a path and forced their weary feet after the lighter ones of José.

Sentries appeared here and there along the route—dusky, almost invisible figures which popped out and leveled rifles in no pleasant fashion. A thickly muttered word from their guide seemed to right matters instantly. The figures vanished and they were allowed to pass.

Fifteen minutes, and the ground was rising sharply. Half an hour, and they were making really rapid progress through thinning woods and thinning lines of tents and dying camp-fires. Three-quarters of a hour, and they were panting up the baring sides of El Demonio, dark and very unalluring in its possibilities.

Little parties were here and there, one or two of each on guard, the rest sound asleep upon the ground. Save for them, the trio was alone. Alone and unarmed —and privileged to speculate upon what might be done with the two substantial pistols at José's belt, could that gentleman be persuaded to part with them.

And then, as wild plans began to formulate in each brain, the guide stopped suddenly.

"It is there, *señor,* that we have the rifles."

He pointed along the side of the volcano. In the rising moon, the two Ameri-

cans were permitted to view a line of perhaps a dozen heavy wagons, standing alone and without horses, a single guard near each one. José laughed aloud.

"To-morrow, perhaps, *señors!*" he cried exultantly. "To-morrow, perhaps, we shall have them! This way, *señors!*"

A last look, and they turned a rocky corner of the path. A dozen yards up the incline a fire burned, and more sitting figures were revealed. There was a queer little red spot, too, among the big boulders.

So *this* was Perdon's new abiding-place! They hurried forward. The red spot grew and took on definite outline, until it stood revealed as the torch-lit entrance of a cave.

The men about were on their feet now, and in conference with José. A signal from the latter, and the visitors advanced hurriedly and, reassured by a nod, stepped into the smoky depths of the cavern.

There, huddled on the damp stone, haggard and dirty, white-faced and wild-eyed, sat the appointee of the President of the United States, the ultimate of all government force in the Territory of Guanama—the Honorable Lucius Perdon!

CHAPTER VIII.

VEILED FORCES AND A MISTAKE.

For a moment there was dead stillness in the stifling little cave. Hemmett and Girton, fairly horrified at the change twenty-four hours had wrought in the dapper dignity of Perdon, held their breath.

And then, blinking through the haze of smoke, the small man on the floor seemed electrified. With a bound, he was on his feet and running toward them; with a leap, he clutched at each and cried wildly:

"Girton! And you, Hemmett! Thank God! Thank—" he broke off sharply. "You found me! You've brought troops to teach these damned scoundrels the lesson of their—"

"Hush!" Regardless of official dignity, Girton's hand clapped over the Governor's mouth. Firmly he held it there as he almost whispered:

"Quiet, Perdon! We haven't brought any troops. We haven't brought ourselves, even. We've been captured, although after a little different fashion. But now—quiet. We got here, and that's good luck enough for the present."

The little man relaxed suddenly, weak-kneed, it almost seemed, in the keenness of his disappointment. Released, he tottered a pace or two.

"Then why—how—"

"Hush! Sit down!" Girton abruptly squatted on the floor, and his utter weariness found vent in a groan. "We'll give you our own side of the tale first, Perdon. After that we can compare notes."

Long accustomed to brevity of action and speech, thoroughly aware of possible listeners without, the Secretary of State began his tale.

Minute after minute the lowest of hums issued from the mouth of the cave, while Perdon sat with his back against the stone and listened silently to the recital.

All his haggard gloom returned as it proceeded. The little man, eminent, exalted in his own sphere, was crumbling under actual physical hard usage.

His thin lips pursed, his small, square chin dropped to the bosom of his sadly soiled white shirt as he took in fact after fact. Here and there he nodded his comprehension of one detail or another; now and then he sighed.

And then Girton's earnest talk ceased and he, too, sat back.

"That's all the salient features of our tale," he said in conclusion.

Perdon rubbed his smoke-sore eyes and cleared his choked throat.

"Mine is equally simple—perhaps a little more so, Girton," he began. "They walked in on me last night as I was preparing for bed—and actually headed by my own man, sir!"

"Ah!"

"There must have been a dozen, at the least, I think. How they got there unperceived I don't pretend to explain. Probably every confounded servant in the house is corrupted. Well, they fell upon me, and it was a simple enough matter to overcome me, I presume. They gagged me and carried me off. There were no lights in the corridor when we emerged. We went down the rear stairway and through the grounds—and not a damned

one of our native Secret Service men appeared to interfere."

He coughed uncomfortably.

"After that it was merely a carriage ride to Bodera, in the suburbs, where they bundled me into a baggage-car and carried me to Felipe. From there to here I rode horseback. We arrived something after daylight."

He broke off with another groan. Hemmett leaned forward.

"And that is your whole story, Mr. Perdon?" he asked. "It is all you know about the present situation?"

The Governor of Guanama turned upon him a smile that was nothing less than ghastly in its dryness.

"All, Mr. Hemmett," he said, "save that I am an *Americano* pig, that these beastly niggers may kick me when they please and—that I am to be shot tomorrow!"

"*What?*"

The pair started forward. Perdon looked them over with eyes that were too tired for great emotion even in the face of death.

"I learned that last cheerful fact from the apparent chief of these three without who are guarding this hole. He seemed exuberant over it."

"But it sha'n't—" Girton began loudly.

"Hush!"

The Governor's eyes turned toward the entrance for a minute. When they fell upon the Secretary of State once more the latter was fairly puzzled by the quiet resignation in them. Perdon, be he physically what he might, was a man of mighty character and there was no trace of fear in his gaze.

"Excitement will neither help nor hinder at this juncture, Mr. Girton," he said placidly. "I fear there is no way of staving off consequences just now. I took my post in full knowledge of possible dangers. Now that I have encountered one of the most serious possible nature, there is very little use in regrets."

"But—"

"But there are a number of things I wish to discuss while the chance remains," the Governor went on evenly. "This movement, be it revolution or what it may, has taken shape with amazing suddenness and quiet. That there will be a certain amount of trouble is as sure as the fact that our own country will eventually smooth out that trouble."

He paused to wipe his eyes again and Hemmett reflected, with some amazement, that the little man was speaking with the same quiet precision that had characterized his every utterance since his accession to Guanama's governorship.

"It is perfectly possible that, with proper playing of the part you have assumed," Perdon went on, "you will eventually escape and be in a position to invoke our forces to vengeance for whatever wrong may be done. To myself I do not refer, but rather to such property losses and losses of life as may occur.

"For one thing, there is a quantity of keen thought lurking somewhere behind all this agitation and planning. Find the source of that, and you will have found the man or men who best deserve punishment."

"And you have some suspicions on that score?" Hemmett muttered.

"Some very definite ones, sir. Guanama is a country of great possibilities. More than one great European power has had her quiet eye upon this territory, even since she became part of our country. One power in particular—"

He paused and smiled slightly and significantly. The two men nodded comprehension.

"We will call it *the* power, then, which has been most interested in Guanama, would gain much by trouble here—more particularly if that trouble became sufficiently violent to warrant her intervention. Very well. When I was brought through their dumfounding camp this morning we halted near the center. We turned northward then, and penetrated the forest I should say a quarter of a mile. There, sir, we came upon a sight which confirmed me as absolutely in this European belief as if I had seen a written agreement. It—"

He stopped suddenly, for a scraping had come from the mouth of the cave. The three looked sharply in that direction.

Toward them was coming some seven feet of muscular Guanaman manhood, topped by a smile of surpassing insolence, decorated with a pair of pistols of modern type and convincing caliber.

"Come, *señors!*" he laughed. "Out! Enough is enough!"

"Well, if we might be permitted—" Hemmett began through gritting teeth.

"Pah! Out with you!" The command was emphasized by a brisk kick, which brought the pallor of helpless fury to Hemmett's cheeks. "I am, as you say, in charge here! Go!"

"We'll have to—" Girton muttered.

A handshake constituted their sole good-by to Perdon. The little man rose calmly, as if in his own drawing-room, and watched them depart.

The moon was well up now. Without, they encountered their José, nervous and apprehensive of mien.

"It is said that I should not have brought you, *señors,*" he whispered. "It is said by Alanza, in charge here, that I should have kept you in the tent below. Come, *señors,* come! For I fear—"

He turned down the slope. Girton and Hemmett followed silently.

It was Marado himself who awakened them in the morning—awakened them from a slumber so deep that cannonading could hardly have broken it.

The little man was broad of smile as ever as he watched them stir.

"Aha! The good sleep, *señors!*" he cried. "It is wine—no?"

Girton regarded him dully for a moment or two. Memories of the night before were flocking back now and overwhelming him. He glanced at Hemmett, and suddenly his thoughts broke into words:

"Marado!" he cried. "I—"

"Ah, but the good Señor Girton is again excited!" chirped the liberator of his people. "Pooh! It is to forget all! In the morning one remembers sadly—at noon he lives. Yes? Come, what is it, this country to which you are no longer faithful? What is it to regret, *señor?* Nothing, I assure you. So let us then see the future and not the past. Let us eat together—the first of our breakfasts together in some time. We shall have fruit of the—"

"Wait!" The Secretary of State broke in on the flood of chatter. "I'm not in any mood to talk about food, Marado. It is this thing of Perdon."

"Eh?"

"Is it true that that man is to be executed?"

The little brown man's eyes opened.

"You have heard, then?"

"Yes. Is it true?"

"Ah, but—*señor!*" Marado protested almost in pain. "I had hoped to spare you that."

"Thanks. *Is it true?*"

Calmly, rather ruefully, Marado surveyed him for an instant. A shrug prefaced his words.

"It is indeed true, *señors,*" he said with the utmost unconcern. True and—necessary!"

"Necessary!" gasped Hemmett.

"Indeed, of the most necessary! Come! Let us forget an—"

"We won't forget just yet, Marado," the Secretary of the Treasury said flatly. "We joined forces with you—er—as a people wishing to become free. We did not join a band of cold-blooded murderers."

"Ah, the *señor* speaks truth!" smiled the brown man. "Far, far is this from murder. The necessities of war, *señor,* if war must be—it is that and nothing more."

"And you can see quite clearly just how Perdon's death will forward"—Hemmett swallowed hard—"our cause?"

Marado perched upon the edge of the cot, and his eyes widened with an innocent wonder that was almost childlike.

"But of a certainty, *señor!*" he cried. "For the one thing, it is proper that the oppressor of my people should die, is it not?"

There was no answer. Marado smiled appreciatively at his own thoughts.

"And for the other, it will be the grand *coup*—yes?"

"What will?"

"Ah! you had not learned that part? I tell you—for you, too, will enjoy and appreciate. We do not shoot this Perdon, you understand, until our ammunition arrives; until we are ready to send one sweeping fire from these hills upon all who approach. That, perhaps, will be to-day. Then—poof! He is gone—and what you think?"

Girton shook his head. Marado chuckled anew.

"The head of the pig shall be stuck over the gates of our White House at

Puerto Carlo, *señors,* in the view of all people!"

"The—*what?*"

"His head, *señors,* taken most cleanly by a sharp machete. It shall be our first, our last, our only message to the damnable American nation. After that, if they dare, they may fight."

He considered his cigarette with a complacency little less than amazing.

"Myself," he concluded, "I do not think they fight. Big they may be; yet they will understand what manner of people they have now encountered—and leave forever, thankful that we have killed but one of them."

There was a pause, literally, for breath as the remarkable speech came to a close.

"But, Marado," Hemmett cried, "can't you understand that such a thing would be the wildest idiocy? Can't you understand how it would rouse the United States and bring war-ships and troops and—"

The fat little brown hand waved the cigarette playfully at him.

"So it is that you think, *señor!*" cried Marado, with his rich chuckle. "We, who know our own people, our own strength, know better! Ah—you shall see! But now—to breakfast! Come!"

A hasty toilet, and they proceeded to this meal, distinctly harrowed, distinctly thunderstruck by the air of utter conviction which seemed to permeate the camp. Men were singing, here and there; men were whistling and joking, not with the air of an army about to dare extinction, but with the assurance of victory already won.

"Ned, there's some force here—somebody—something—which has filled these poor fools as full of conceit and cocksureness as mortal skin can hold!" Girton whispered, as they came into sight of Marado's own tent and the rude lumber table before it.

"And they've got you as well as poor Perdon!" Hemmett answered. "Good God, Steve! If you'd only taken my advice and reported the whole thing as it stood and—"

Marado turned at the low talk—and it ceased.

Breakfast went cheerily, for one at least. Marado bubbled over, laughing and chatting and chaffing.

Now and then a serious-eyed man would appear from the woods, hold brief converse with him, salute and retire. And at the last visitation the little brown man laughed gleefully.

"A scout has just returned from the north," he informed them. "This afternoon—this evening, perhaps—you shall have a surprise. You shall see how quickly, how splendidly, a suffering people can fly to action."

"Which means that the ammunition is on the way?" Girton queried.

"Which means, perhaps, that the stars will twinkle to-night," Marado replied slyly. "Wait. You shall see what you shall see."

The meal came to an end. At Marado's request they returned to their own tent, presumably to wait.

It was quiet there, inordinately quiet. At a distance José worked about, seemingly at nothing in particular.

They watched him for a time as he warbled discordantly in his native tongue. Then, suddenly:

"Well, Perdon must be taken out of that cave this afternoon, Ned."

"Eh?" The Secretary of the Treasury opened his eyes. "I—I have been thinking of it. It's impossible."

"It's not impossible. Nothing's impossible, my boy. It *can't* be impossible, for it must be done."

"With the whole country swarming, with an armed guard at the cave, and with you and me armed to the teeth with a pair of penknives?"

"The country isn't swarming on the other side of El Demonio, Ned," Girton said earnestly. "If we could get him out—around the hill—into the woods beyond—"

"Wild!"

"It may be wild. If anything could be wilder than the manner in which we three, absolute heads of this government, have been treated in the past few hours, I miss my guess," Girton rejoined. "And wild or not, it's Perdon's one chance for life and it'll have to be tried."

The Secretary of the Treasury pursed his lips gravely.

"That cave's nothing but a rock-pile," Girton went on. "It may be that there is some way of getting into it from the rear. It may be—"

"That if there's a rear door, it's thoroughly guarded," Hemmett interposed.

Girton's eyes narrowed.

"And that means that you're willing to see Perdon killed without trying even a long shot to save him, Ned?"

"It—" Hemmett hesitated. "It does not."

It was a little past three when José vanished, their few lunch dishes washed, and returned to the tent. Through the trees hardly a sign of life was to be seen or heard in the heat of the afternoon: Marado's army was taking its siesta.

A moment's listening, and the two were on their feet—and Hemmett sighed a little.

"It's neither more nor less than madness, Steve," he said softly. "We'll be held up, at the very mildest, by the first sentinel, and very likely—"

"Well, we won't consider likelihoods," the Secretary of State smiled. "Stranger things have happened than this rescuing of Perdon, and—oh, if we gain nothing, we can lose nothing!"

"I'm not so eternally sure of that."

In silence they struck into the woods with an utter openness of bearing well calculated to disarm possible suspicion. Ostensibly, at least, they were in no sense prisoners; behaving on that basis, perhaps, they might pass to the cave.

The trail, well noted the night before, was hot and still. They jogged along lazily enough. They reached the patch of massive trees where the sentinel of the night had first challenged them, and Hemmett took to whistling with almost uncanny unconcern.

And they passed the spot without interference. It was a yard behind them now—now a dozen yards—now as many rods; and the only sound was the soft singing of forest insects. Girton breathed a long sigh.

"Well, the man's been taken off duty, or—or else we're *persona grata* here now," he observed in an undertone.

Hemmett glanced about covertly.

"I'd give something like one hundred dollars in cold, hard-earned cash to know which it is," he muttered.

Onward went their trudging feet. They had struck the sloping ground now, and were putting more strength into their walk and attaining greater speed. The forest grew thinner, forward vision became less difficult—and still there appeared no obstacle in the way.

All things considered, it was rather astonishing.

Perhaps it had been assumed by Marado that escape for them would be impossible. Perhaps their renunciation of allegiance to the Stars and Stripes had been taken in veriest good faith—and certainly they had worked that day to lend truth to the amazing ruse they had undertaken.

And yet—it was somehow unlike former manifestations of the suspicious Guanaman character.

On the other hand, this utter freedom was more than cheering. If, in fact, they were given unquestioned run of the camp and its vicinity, matters might be simplified.

They were out of the woods now, and with Demonio's crater well in view. Far, far to the right stood the canvas-covered wagons that held the rifles, and Hemmett snarled aloud as he sighted them. To the left, higher up, was the rocky space which concealed poor Perdon.

"Ned!" Girton stopped suddenly.

"Eh?"

"The workings of Providence are beyond us. There's some sort of fire up there, and—yes, there's an outlet for it behind the rocks. See!"

"And if the outlet's big enough—"

The Secretary of the Treasury broke off and followed his companion as that person swerved to the right suddenly and bent himself to climbing.

Ten minutes, and they were almost in the shadow of the rocks. Fifteen, and they were fairly behind them, perspiring, panting, and unperceived.

"The Lord must be with us to-day," Hemmett gasped as he mopped his forehead. "There's our smoke!"

"Yes, and the hole's big enough to let down three men at once," Girton whispered excitedly. "Wait here. Start up a song if any one's coming. I'll—"

He was off. For a while Hemmett watched his ascent of the rocks almost incredulously, casting an eye here and there betimes. Close to the top of them was Girton now; now he was bending low; now he had suddenly disappeared altogether.

And still there was no sound of challenge, no sign of detection.

It was an anxious wait for Hemmett. Minute after minute he smoked, the cigar shaking very frankly in his hand. Minute after minute he looked east and west, north and south.

And then, so suddenly that the Secretary of the Treasury started violently, a head appeared among the rocks—Girton's! It paused for an instant. His body followed, and the Secretary of State was lying flat upon the rocks.

He was reaching downward, too—tugging and tugging at something. Another pause, and the gray shock of Perdon's hair appeared. A further long, strong pull—and the Governor of Guanama, haggard and tattered, was standing upon the ledge, free!

Thirty seconds, and Hemmett was beside them. Girton greeted him with an exultant little smile, and:

"It worked! It actually worked! There are two men down at the front, Ned, and they're sound asleep as two logs!"

Hemmett drew one long, amazed breath. His eyes sparkled, then he cried softly:

"And if they'll give us ten minutes more leeway—time to get into the woods yonder, we'll make the branch road by this time to-morrow, and—"

"Yes! Come! Good for the jump, Perdon?" Girton leaped downward.

A bound, and Perdon was beside him. Another, and the three were on the ground, with a clear way ahead to skirt the side of El Demonio and break into the untenanted forests beyond.

It was no time for words. Silently, sparing breath as well as might be, they started on their race. Heads down, a hand of either of the larger men on the frail form of Perdon, they struck a brisk run.

Fifty yards, and they were well free from the big rock-pile, with its passages and its guards. A hundred, and they were within the patch of tall shrubs that extended along the side of the volcano.

It was great! It was unspeakably, wonderfully great! It was, of all things, the last piece of good fortune that could have been expected!

Ten minutes now, and they would be under cover. Ten hours more, perhaps, and they would be on the edge of the plantation country.

And ahead of that would be the branch road, with its numerous little puffing trains; and beyond that still, Puerto Carlo and the war-ships and the United States troops scattered along the coast and in the cities and—"

"Halt!"

The word came so suddenly, so quietly, so incisively, withal in a tone of such utter finality, that the trio fairly slid to a standstill.

From the thick brush ahead the tall Alanza, late guardian of Perdon's unsavory cave, had emerged. There was a contemptuous smile upon his thin lips; there was a long-barreled revolver in either hand.

From the bushes, too—as Hemmett meditated one wild, sudden onslaught upon the man, which might or might not end in Girton's and Perdon's escape at least—half a dozen more brown faces peered suddenly, half a dozen rifle-barrels poked forth in their direction.

With the suddenness of an esthetic action, the trio relaxed. A moment before, racing exultantly to freedom, they had raced now into the most efficacious of traps; and they were facing—what?

In a measure, Alanza gave them a hint.

"You will face about, *señors!* We shall return to camp and learn"—he laughed aloud suddenly—"we shall learn the fate of traitors to Marado's army!"

(To be continued.)

WAVES.

All day the waves assailed the rock,
I heard no church-bell chime;
The sea-beat scorns the minster clock
And breaks the glass of time.

Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Bloodgood's Cheap Thoroughbred.

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN.

Why a family in a flat wanted a dog, and what became of the one the head of the family picked out.

MR. BERTRAM BLOODGOOD had laid down his paper across the corner of the table when his wife brought in the ham and eggs. The S.P.C.A. ad in the Lost and Found column fell directly under his nose as he began to slow up the feeding process at about the middle of the second egg.

UNWANTED DOGS AND CATS.

Owners of lost dogs and cats, and responsible persons wishing to procure pets, should apply at the shelter.

He had finished the six lines before he took any real account of what he read.

"Say, Betty," he exclaimed to the plump little woman who sat on the other side of the table wiping a trace of yellow from the corner of her lips, "that would be a chance to get a good dog! I heard, the other day, that some fine specimens find their way across the city in the dog-wagon."

They had been discussing the dog question only the night before.

The Bloodgoods were without children, which fact they regretted. The family up-stairs were blessed with a row of six in assorted sizes—which fact the Bloodgoods also regretted. They had decided that a good, noisy, obstreperous dog would be about their only hope of getting even for certain noises which, coming from outside their own apartment, jarred upon their sensitive nerves.

A big racket in your own rooms, especially if it is big enough to be heard outside, goes a long way toward soothing just that peculiar nervous trouble with which the Bloodgoods were now so sorely afflicted.

"Where is it?" asked Mrs. B. "I'll go and see about it."

"S.P.C.A. shelter, foot of East One Hundred and Second Street. But I think I had better go myself. I can stop there this afternoon—it's Saturday, you know," said Mr. B.

"But you do not think I am going to have you bring in a dog I have never seen, do you?" inquired Mrs. B. with some asperity.

"Well, now, what good would there be in your seeing it?" argued the male partner in the concern. "Can you tell me what is the difference between a water-spaniel and a bull-terrier?"

"Certainly I can. A water-spaniel has—has— Besides, it's not half as important about the particular breed as some other qualities."

Mr. B. now played his trump card.

"But, my dear, this shelter is away over on the East Side. I don't think you would care to go there."

That finished the argument. Mrs. B. expressed a heavily freighted opinion of the society for locating in such a district, but she resigned her purpose. About 3 P.M., therefore, Mr. Bertram Bloodgood stood before the secretary's window at the shelter, satisfying that individual that he was a responsible person.

This technical duty attended to, he explained exactly what sort of an animal he desired. A keeper in uniform led him to a rear room, explaining that there was a fine little bull-terrier in the pen, due to die to-morrow.

"I'd take him meself, if I hadn't got a houseful of 'em already," he confided to the eager listener.

The pen was a good-sized room with a heavily wired door and thick-screened windows. On the approach of the keeper, some twenty-five dogs came yelping forward.

There were two big dogs, five medium-sized dogs, a pair of fairly reputable-looking beagle hounds, and a lot of uncertain fox-terriers. They all crowded about the keeper's legs, barking, leaping up his trousers in spite of his protests.

"Dom thim," muttered the keeper; "they always breaks me heart wid their friendliness, an' me knowin' they'll all be dead in a couple of days."

Oh, yes; I forgot to mention the bull-terrier. He came forward more slowly, as became a dog of aristocratic past. He did not leap all over the keeper's knees like the rest, but stood off, wagging his tail gently.

His eyes had a proper amount of indifference in them. He was evidently blasé, and proud of the fact.

And I forgot to mention another—a yellow dog. As for his exact scientific pedigree, he could have claimed more or less distant relationship with almost any kind of dog you might name.

He was a whole dog-show in one piece. You could, if you had known his family-tree, have called him anything from a rat-terrier to a St. Bernard, and proven his lineage.

He was different from the others in another respect. Instead of rushing the keeper, this remarkable scion of mixed nobility began immediate advances toward Mr. Bloodgood.

He seemed to know him; or else he had the confidence-man's ability to make anybody think he is a long-lost friend.

He barked with unceasing enthusiasm. His long, unkempt tail wagged his whole body. He hugged Mr. B.'s well-creased trousers with an embrace such as a Frenchman uses on the man who has just bloodlessly satisfied his honor.

The funny part of it was that Bloodgood seemed to recognize that dog.

Where had he seen a yellow dog lately? No, it must be the expression in the face that reminded him of the mongrel he used to have in his boyhood days on the farm.

By the way, amiable reader, did you have a mongrel cur in the days when you were a boy on the old farm? Did you chase up and down the green fields with that ill-bred whelp? Did you maul him and throw him around the barn?

Did you make him go in swimming with you in the old mud-hole? Did you take an occasional bite from your own plate and slyly toss it into his open mouth when he sat beside the table, with his bright eyes never leaving your face, his head first on one side, then on the other, his whole manner saying "You ain't going to forgit me?" and your whole heart replying "Well, I guess not"?

Then you know why Bloodgood forgot his interest in the aristocratic bull-terrier; why he looked a trifle sheepishly at the keeper, and said he knew it was a poor dog, but he wanted a family pet more than something, etc., etc. You can understand how he kept on his way—doggedly—in spite of the fact that he took to back streets for fear of being seen, and in spite of severe misgivings about what Mrs. B. would say when he brought his prize home.

At last he sighed in relief as he reached the corner of Ninety-Sixth and Central Park West. Only one block remained now, and, so far, he had met nobody he knew.

The dog had required no dragging. Indeed, he had made the trip rather easier for his new owner. At the middle of the block he gave a quick tug at the new chain, which pull, being unexpected at the other end, gave him his desired liberty.

The yellow cur used this priceless boon of freedom strangely.

There was a group of rather unkempt boys squatting over a game of marbles in front of the "all modern improvements" apartment wherein Bloodgood abode. The yellow dog rushed this group.

Two of the smaller youngsters were bowled over as he leaped upon the most untidy kid of the lot.

Bloodgood had flattered himself that the dog had liked him from the start. But the way that ill-bred cur began making love to the untidy kid caused the man who had just rescued him to turn green with envy.

And the way the kid came back at the cur showed Mr. B. that he had forgotten all about how to really treat a dog.

"Here's Rover," shouted the youngster. "I wonder how he got away from the dog-catcher?"

Mr. B. tried to assume an attitude of severe dignity.

"That's *my* dog," he said sharply. "What are you trying to do to him?"

"Your dog!" exclaimed the boy. "Hey, fellers, listen to the guy tellin' me this here's his dog."

"But I just got him from the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and paid a year's tax on him," protested the new owner.

"De s'ciety swiped him offen me. I guess dey can't sell wot don't belong to 'em," argued the boy, triumphantly holding the cur with a jiu-jitsu grip around the new collar.

"But, my boy," still insisted the man, "the law says I am the owner. I can get a policeman if you want me to."

The boy saw the point—realized that he was up against the tyranny that mere individuals may not resist. He gave a searching, keen glance into Bloodgood's face. Then he bestowed a soft, loving look upon his pet. Thirdly, he turned a pair of pleading, moist eyes back to the present owner of the object of dispute.

"Say, mister," he half sniffled, "you wouldn't take away a kid's mut, would you?"

Bloodgood had taken the mongrel because of certain remembrances of a dog that used to live on a farm. Now he suddenly recollected a boy that lived on the same farm and owned the dog.

"Oh, I guess he isn't worth much," he faltered. "If you think you want him more than I do, you'd better keep him. I don't know as I care much about a dog, anyhow."

It was funny, but Bloodgood had to swallow hard two or three times in trying to look benignant.

The kid forgot to express any thanks save with his eyes. He dextrously slipped the collar from the yellow dog's neck.

"Here, mister, 's yer collar," he called after Mr. Bloodgood's retreating figure in the doorway.

"Better keep it," sang out the late owner of a really good dog. "It shows the tax is paid. Where do you live, anyhow?"

"Third floor front," promptly replied the youngster, pointing to the apartment directly over the window where Mrs. Bloodgood's plump face looked down at them.

"Where's the dog?" asked that lady, as she met her husband up-stairs at the door of the private hall.

"Oh, they didn't have any I cared for—only one, and I knew you wouldn't want that," replied the honest man.

"You're all right, after all, Bertram," said Mrs. B. ambiguously but affectionately.

MY BRIGANTINE.

My brigantine!
Just in thy mold and beauteous in thy form,
Gentle in roll and buoyant on the surge,
Light as the sea-fowl rocking in the storm,
In breeze and gale thy onward course we urge,
My water-queen!

Lady of mine!
More light and swift than thou none thread the sea,
With surer keel or steadier on its path;
We brave each waste of ocean-mystery
And laugh to hear the howling tempest's wrath,
For we are thine!

My brigantine!
Trust to the mystic power that points thy way,
Trust to the eye that pierces from afar,
Trust the red meteors that around thee play,
And, fearless, trust the sea-green lady's star,
Thou bark divine!

James Fenimore Cooper.

CHASING RAINBOWS.*

By DOUGLAS PIERCE,

Author of "His Good Right Hand," "The Shaft of Light," etc.

The pursuit of fortune in town by a fellow from the country, with an account of the jolts he received in the process.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

A YOUNG farmer named John King learns that his invalid father has been tricked into buying from Colonel Lindon a piece of worthless land. The farm being heavily mortgaged by this transaction, John starts for Philadelphia to try his fc tune. Here, on the day after his arrival, he is arrested for passing counterfeit money which has been palmed off on him by three card-sharps, and is taken to jail.

CHAPTER VI.

WOOING THE FICKLE GODDESS.

THE bumptious conceit with which King had boasted of his skill at picking the queen dwindled perceptibly during the long hours he tossed sleeplessly on the hard prison board which served him in lieu of a cot.

What a come-on he had been!

The game of the grafters, which it had so perplexed the bartender to fathom, was now as plain as the nose upon one's face. They had simply lured him on with the idea that he was winning from them, until they had effected an exchange of six hundred dollars of their worthless counterfeits for his one hundred dollars' worth of good United States notes.

No wonder they had skedaddled so hastily when they met him on the pool-room stairs, for they supposed, no doubt, that he had already detected the imposition, and mistook his cry of greeting for a war-whoop of vengeance.

Well, their precipitate flight showed that they were afraid of him, at any rate. And grimly King vowed to himself that he would give them cause for fear. As soon as he got out of this place, he would camp on their trail until he had either made them give up that hundred, or else had taken it out of their hides.

As soon as he got out! A cold thrill of apprehension coursed down his backbone.

Suppose he did not get out? Suppose the judge and jury should display the same distrust of his narrative which had been exhibited by the police and the detectives? He had nothing to back up his story except his unsupported word, whereas the evidence on the other side was conclusive.

He broke into a cold sweat of abject terror. Good Heavens, unless they did believe him, he was booked for a term of twenty years in state prison!

And, indeed, the possibilities his imagination conjured up did so work upon his fears that he presented anything but the appearance of an innocent man when he was haled before the magistrate for his preliminary hearing in the morning. Pale, hollow-eyed, despairing, he came to the bar and stammered out a tremulous, contradictory tale which would not have carried conviction to a philanthropic old lady.

The judge listened impatiently for a few moments, and then began rustling over his papers.

"Is that all you have to say?" he snapped.

Another minute and the prisoner would have been bound over to await the action of the grand jury, and, in default of bail, to spend a weary intervening period behind the bars; but, at that fortunate instant, who should enter the court-room but the friendly traveling man who had

attempted to rescue John when he saw him in the clutches of the sharpers on the train?

He was the representative of a law-book house, and well known to all the officials.

A glance at the bench and the miserable culprit arraigned before it, a quick question or so to one of the attendants in the room, and the man came hustling forward with the request that he might be sworn.

His testimony very rapidly changed the complexion of affairs. The judge relaxed his stern frown, and, with a much more lenient manner, took up a reconsideration of the case.

The hotel proprietor, clothier, haberdasher, and jeweler, who had been whispering among themselves, came to the conclusion that the young man had been guiltless of any criminal intent, and announced their willingness to drop the prosecution provided he made good their several claims against him.

In short, from being on the edge of finding himself railroaded into state prison, John saw a release from custody dawning before him; and, when his roll of spurious notes had been destroyed and his various creditors had been settled with, the judge, after delivering him a short lecture, did order the case duly dismissed.

King made his way up to the smiling traveling man and gratefully wrung his hand.

"How can I ever thank you?" he exclaimed.

"By being a little less cocky the next time any one offers you good advice," rejoined the other, with a whimsical glance. "After the way you crowed over me yesterday, I ought to have let you suffer; but I couldn't quite bring myself to do that, and I guess you've had lesson enough to teach you that you can't beat a sure-thing gambler at his own game."

"You bet I have!" replied John with emphasis.

Yet the very first thing he did after leaving the court-house was to hunt up his friend, the bartender, and lay plans for another visit to the pool-room that afternoon.

His capital by this time had shrunk to a single hundred dollars, and to his mind a bet upon the horses offered the only solution for replenishing it; for even the bitter experience through which he had passed did not disabuse him of the belief that he could wring the pot of gold he was after from the grasp of the fickle goddess of chance.

The bartender was manifestly disappointed when he learned that their financial operations would have to be more circumscribed than he had anticipated, and still more put out when John, who had been talking to some other people in the interim, announced that he would no longer pay so exorbitant a commission; but, after a reasonable amount of protest, he came gracefully down off his perch and agreed to the other's terms.

"I can make a surer thing out of it, anyway," he reasoned craftily to himself, "by fixing it with the house to tout him onto dead ones, and then get my bit from his losings. That little old hundred of his won't get more than three whirls if I have the handling of it; I can tell him that."

Accordingly, when the electric-lights again twinkled out over Philadelphia, and its various pool-rooms emptied out their hordes of haggard-eyed dupes, the boy from Blairsburg found himself stumbling along the streets penniless, friendless, and with no place to go.

How it had happened he could not exactly tell. All he knew was that the three "winners" had gone down one after another to inglorious defeat, and that, with his money vanished, the bartender's interest in him had suddenly cooled to the freezing-point.

"Tough luck, for fair," that guide, philosopher, and friend had commented lightly, while John sat dazed and appalled after the final catastrophe. "I'd have pretty near bet my head that that last one would pull us out; but it just goes to show you how uncertain this horse game is. You can have 'em ringed out with all the information in the world, and according to the dope it'll look as though nothing had a chance with 'em; yet days like this will come when not a single play can you put over the plate.

"I'm worse off than you, though," he went on hurriedly in order to forestall any attempt at a touch. "I went to that

last one with every cent I had, and I don't know what the old woman will have to say to me when I get home and tell her about it.

"However, there's no use putting off the evil day. Guess I'll be toddling along and get it over with. Bye-bye, old man. Next time you feel like playing 'em, come around. I have the good ones handed to me every day, you know, and it's only once in a coon's age that they fall down on me like they did this afternoon."

Then he departed; but John still lingered on in the crowded, ill-ventilated room, partly because he had no place else to go, partly because, dejected and heart-sick though he was, the feverish excitement of the place, the winning and losing, the posting of odds, and breathless expectancy while a race was being called, still exercised its baleful attraction over him.

It seemed so easy to make money in this way. All you had to do was to pick out a winner, put up your money, and, lo! the sum you risked was returned to you twice, three times, perhaps twentyfold, increased.

Surely there must be some way of beating the game.

Then he noticed that a young man sitting near him was winning on seemingly every race, and after a while he mustered up courage to accost this fortunate youth and ask him how he did it.

"Oh, I am playing 'Parsee's' selections in the *Morning Index*," explained the other with jubilant good-nature; "and he happens to be in rare good form to-day. See, he's not called a single loser, so far."

He tossed a clipped-out newspaper slip across the table as he spoke, and John, glancing down a list headed "Parsee's Picks," saw that what had been told him was the truth. Every winner of the afternoon had been here named in advance.

Yet this was a day when the bartender had declared the horses were running out of all calculation. Abruptly John's opinion of his late mentor sank to zero, while his admiration for the talented "Parsee" soared correspondingly skyward.

A prophet, more than any one else, must be able to deliver the goods.

"What a jackass, what a long-eared dolt, I have been!" groaned King. "It stands to reason that a big newspaper would know more than that dub of a bartender; yet here I have been throwing away my good money on his guesses, and agreeing to give him a percentage of the winnings to boot, when all the time I could have got legitimate information for nothing. And the worst of it is that, now I know what to do, I haven't got any money to do it with. Oh, I must make a raise somehow!"

The same thought was in his mind as he wandered aimlessly along the streets, after the closing of the pool-room, uncertain what to do or where to go. Over and over again in his brain rang the insistent idea that if only he could get hold of enough money to play this new method, all would still be well.

And then, as he turned into a squalid little thoroughfare in one of the poorer quarters, the sight of a three-ball sign brought him a sudden inspiration.

Across the grimy window-pane of the place was the announcement: "Cash loaned upon watches, jewelry, household articles, and clothing of all sorts. Highest prices paid for old gold and silver."

King stopped as if fascinated. A city-bred man compelled to raise the wind would have thought of this expedient first thing; but John was from the country, remember, and the pawnbroker's alluring offer came upon him almost like a revelation.

Eagerly he reread the sign. Cash loaned upon jewelry and clothing!

Why, what need was there for him to be cast down? Did he not have the goods he had bought so recklessly the day before, and the purchase of which had so nearly sent him to the penitentiary?

New as they were, and of sterling quality, he should have no difficulty in securing upon them all the money he needed to pursue his operations.

Gleefully, therefore, he hurried to the hotel, where he had retained his room for yet another day, and, making up a big bundle of his possessions, sped back to the pawn-shop. But he discovered that

the amount one's "uncle" is willing to advance upon any article is wofully disproportionate to its original cost, and when his little transaction was concluded he found himself far less rich than he had expected to be.

Nevertheless, it was enough to buy him supper and breakfast and to provide for a fair-sized bet or two upon the horses; so, conquering his disappointment with the thought of the omniscient "Parsee," he retired to rest, to let his mind revel once more in glowing dreams of easily acquired wealth.

But, alas! there is a law of averages which governs newspaper "tipsters" no less than other folks, and "Parsee," who had been so accurate in his divinations the day before, to-day handed out nothing but a choice assortment of "lemons." By evening King was once more broke and disconsolate, and once more wise to a system of play which, if he only had the money back, would, he felt, be absolutely certain to win.

So it went on. Each night he left the pool-room, overthrown and discomfited; yet each morning he rose up full of hope in some new scheme, and ready to take another whirl at the unbeatable game.

Don't ask how he did it. A pool-room fiend may be without means to pay for board and lodging, yet somehow he can always raise enough for a bet or two at his afternoon's diversion.

And John, although his meals became very irregular, and his sleeping-place, instead of a room at the Stratvue-Bellford, was frequently a bench in the park, managed to turn up each day with a piking dollar or two to feed into the insatiable maw of the little window.

At last, one evening as he was sauntering down Market Street, holding "*post-mortem* inquests" upon his luckless plays of the day, and revolving schemes in his head whereby to gain a stake for the morrow, he came to a sudden halt with a quick gasp of astonishment.

There, just ahead of him in the crowd, he saw the two sharpers who had fleeced him on the train!

His first impulse was to spring after them, and by main force compel them to give back the money out of which they had wolfed him; but he was sufficiently used to city ways by this time to realize that such an action would probably only result in getting himself behind the bars, so he resisted the temptation.

Neither would it do any good to have them arrested; for not only would it be very difficult to prove his charge, seeing that the "green goods" had been passed upon him in a gambling game, itself an illicit transaction, but even should he succeed in having them convicted, this would not get his money back.

Yet there must be some way of forcing them to disgorge, he reasoned to himself—some way, either by intimidation or strategy, of recovering that hundred dollars which meant so much to him.

At any rate, it would do no harm to trail them for a bit, and find out what they were doing and where were their usual hang-outs, in order that he might have no difficulty in locating them when he should have hit upon some feasible plan wherewith to go after them.

Accordingly, he sprang forward to the task, and, worming his way in and out through the slow-moving groups of pedestrians, followed hard upon the couple's trail.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHASE AND A MEETING.

KING'S pursuit, however, did not last long, for the two crooks had not proceeded more than a block or two down the street before they turned in at the brilliantly lighted entrance to a theater.

John was in a quandary. To follow them inside was perhaps to risk recognition sooner than he was ready for it; yet there seemed nothing else to do, since the building, being on a corner, had two separate exits, and while he was watching one they might slip out of the other and be lost to him.

Accordingly, he decided to take a chance, and, pulling his hat down over his eyes, he brushed into the lobby after them. They stood at the box-office window, and, edging hurriedly yet cautiously over in that direction, King had the satisfaction of hearing them engage a box for a party of six at that evening's performance. That both of them were to be of the party was evident, too, from the

fact that they were gotten up "regardless," in full evening-dress.

"A box," muttered King, as, having heard all he wanted, he quickly turned his back and pretended to be absorbed in a large frame of photographs—"a box, and togged out like a couple of dukes! They must have money all right; but the question is, how to get it away from them? I wonder what little game they have on to-night, and whether or not it would help my plans to keep a watch on them?"

He fingered reflectively a lonely quarter in his pocket, which he had been holding onto for bed money; but, ultimately concluding that another night on the park benches would do him no particular harm, marched up to the box-office and planked it down for a seat in the top gallery.

"I'm here to see those scoundrels more than the show," he said to himself as he toiled up the successive flights of stairs, "so this is really all the better, for I can look right down and pipe off everything that takes place in their box, while there isn't one chance in a million that they'll ever spot me."

Still, it was quite a time before he had the opportunity to "pipe off" anything in the box, since it was early yet, and the party of six seemed in no hurry to put in their appearance.

In the interim, John amused himself by glancing about at his neighbors as the house slowly filled up, and during this process he caught sight of a familiar figure not three rows away from him. It was the traveling man who had so opportunely come to his rescue in the police court.

At the same moment the other saw him, and, coming across the aisle, shook hands warmly.

"This seat beside you doesn't seem to be taken," he said, sinking down into it, "so I guess I'll appropriate it, at least until somebody comes along who has a better claim."

"But what are you doing 'way up here in 'nigger heaven'?" questioned John, a little surprised to find the other so much at home there. "I should think you would be down front in an orchestra chair."

The other laughed unaffectedly.

"Economy, my dear boy. I find that I can see almost as well up here, and at the same time be reasonably comfortable, so I save my money instead of blowing it. It's choice with me, you see; but," giving him a shrewd look, "judging from your way of putting your question, you are in a different box. What's the matter? Haven't been running up against any more flim-flam artists, have you?"

"Oh, no. It's simply that things haven't been breaking very well with me lately. You—you couldn't let me have about twenty dollars until to-morrow evening, could you?" John blurted out eagerly. "I'll pay you back by that time without fail, because—"

He was about to say, because he had a sure thing on the next day's racing-card; but, reflecting that such a statement might not inspire the confidence he desired, he broke off abruptly, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"Because why?" persisted the traveling man.

"Well, because—I'll have the money."

"Just so. By the way, King, what are you doing now?"

The young man flushed under the searching gaze bent upon him.

"Nothing regular," he admitted confusedly; "but you needn't be afraid of me on that account. I'll have the money for you promptly by six o'clock, or even earlier, if you need it."

"In other words, you'll have the money for me just as soon as the race is over which you expect to win," making a clever guess. Then, as he saw that his shot struck home: "Oh, King, King, wasn't one lesson at that sort of thing enough for you?"

"That sort of thing?" And anger blazed in John's eyes. "You don't mean to class playing the horses with a low-down skin-game like that monte deal, do you? Why, some of the biggest men in this country bet on the races."

"Very true; but they merely do it for the excitement, and hardly with the expectation of winning—certainly not as a method of making their livelihood. Nor do they go to a pool-room to do it.

"No," he went on earnestly, "I am no Puritan, and if a man wants to go to the race-track occasionally and risk a modest wager, I have no objection, provided he

can afford to lose it; but when a young fellow like you gets an idea into his head that he can beat that game, and puts in the time that he should be spending at honest labor in hanging around those insidious dens, I can tell him that he is pretty far gone on the road to perdition. The only way to save himself is to break off, and break off short.

"Beat the game?" he snorted. "It's a mathematical impossibility. Why, even at the track and with the regular bookmakers, the percentage is so much against you that, with all the luck in the world, they are bound to get you in the long run; while, with these pool-room sharks, shaving odds as they do and running up their percentage to ruinous figures, one has absolutely no chance at all.

"I warned you once," he went on, "and you were sorry you didn't take my advice. Now, I am going to try you again, and see if you'll be any wiser this time. Where are you stopping?"

Somewhat shamefacedly John had to confess that he had no lodging-place other than the "wide, wide world."

"Ah, so bad as that, eh? Then, since you are properly up against it, you ought to be fit soil for my missionary labors. It helps out, too, what I was going to propose.

"Suppose you come up to my rooms and bunk in with me until you can get on your feet. I won't lend you any money so long as you have the pool-room bug in your head; but I'll see that you have a decent place to sleep, three square meals a day, and a clean shirt to your back, provided you'll make an honest effort to get into some sort of a regular job."

The quick tears sprang to King's eyes, and he reached out impulsively to clasp the other's hand. As a matter of fact, he was hungry, homesick, and wretched, sickened by the fetid atmosphere of the pool-room, for all that he kept on going there; and this first touch of kindness he had met since he had been drifting about the big, strange city stirred him to the heart.

"Why—why—" he stammered brokenly.

"Why am I doing it?" rejoined the traveling man. "Because I went through the same sort of a mill myself when I was about your age, and I know what it would have meant to me if somebody had stretched out a helping hand. I believe you can be saved, and I am going to take a try at it.

"At least, if after I have related to you some of the things I went through, and have proven to you the utter impossibility of beating the horses, you do go back to the pool-room game, I shall feel that my hands are clean and that your ruin is upon your own head.

"And now," he broke off, "let's cut out the preaching and sit back to enjoy the play. The curtain is about to go up."

John had been so absorbed in their colloquy that for the moment he had completely forgotten the object which had brought him to the theater; but, recalled now to his environment, he cast a quick glance toward the lower floor, then gave his companion an excited nudge.

The party of six were just coming down the aisle.

"Look, look," whispered King, "there come the two crooks who passed the counterfeit money on me. They are up to some new game to-night, and I came here to watch them and try to find out what it is."

"Where are they?" questioned the traveling man, glancing uncertainly about. "I don't see them."

"There, in the first stage-box on the left-hand side—that party of six which has just come in."

But the traveling man, who by this time had leveled his glasses on the group, interrupted him with a quick exclamation of impatience.

"What are you talking about?" he scoffed. "Those people are from Rittenhouse Square. That is young Arthur Chase and his sister Kate, and the two young ladies with them are friends of theirs."

"Yes, but the two chaps in the back of the box," persisted John—"the ones who have just turned around from hanging up their hats? Who are they?"

The traveling man took a quick look through his glasses, then gave a sharp start, and looked again, longer and more carefully.

"By Jove!" he said at last, turning to King with an expression of absolute bewilderment on his face. "You are right.

But what on earth is Arthur Chase doing in the company of cattle like that?"

CHAPTER VIII.

ENLISTED FOR THE WAR.

"You seem all struck of a heap," remarked John. "Who is Arthur Chase?"

"Arthur Chase," replied the other, "is my boss. That is, he is the son of old Richard K. Chase, who founded the concern for which I work, and, although he has never taken any active part in the business, he is, since his father's death, the largest stockholder in the company.

"Why, you must surely know who the Chases are," he continued. "There's not a family in Philadelphia which has a higher standing. And that's what gets me," again shaking his head. "I simply can't comprehend how those two swindlers could have hit it off with them.

"True, I have heard it said that young Arthur was rather wild, and a fellow who is going the pace will hook up with some strange associates at times; but even that doesn't explain how he could let his sister appear in public with them.

"Look!" he broke off disgustedly. "That Scott, as you call him, has drawn his chair up beside hers at the front of the box, and is hobnobbing with her as if they were two old cronies. Did you ever see such colossal nerve?"

His attention thus drawn to the young woman who seemed the bright, particular star of the party, King turned his gaze in that direction—and held it there. In fact, it seemed as though he would never get through staring at that beautiful animated face under the rippling coils of bronze-gold hair.

When the girl entered the box, he had noticed her but indifferently as one of the sextet, for at that time his attention had been absorbed in watching the movements of the crooks.

Each of us has stored away somewhere in memory our youthful conception of the ideal woman; but few of us have ever met that creation of our fancy in real life. To King it was granted now, however, that this thing should come to pass.

Line for line, feature for feature, hair, eyes, coloring, he saw before him the princess of his dreams.

He saw her, too, smiling and chatting apparently on terms of friendly intimacy with a man he knew was not worthy to unloose her shoe-laces, and the sight hurt him like a blow in the face.

"The cur!" he muttered. "The swindling, dishonest hound! I'd like to grind my heel into that smirking monkey mouth of his!

"Now, do you believe I was right," he added, turning sharply to the traveling man, "when I told you there was some new game afoot with that precious pair?"

The other nodded gravely. He, too, had not failed to note the cordiality of Miss Chase's manner toward the smooth rascal beside her.

"I certainly do," he assented; "and if it is what I think, we've got to put a spoke in it. I owe that much to old Richard K. Chase, for he was a mighty good friend to me in his day."

"Well, I don't owe anything to Richard K. Chase," said John; "but if there's any way of giving those rascals what they deserve, you can count me in, hook, line, and sinker!"

It was but little of the performance on the stage that either of those two in the top gallery saw that night, so thoroughly were they taken up in watching the party in the box and in discussing what it was possible for them to do. And long before the final curtain both had vacated their seats and were down-stairs, one on guard at each of the entrances.

John spied the party coming out first, and, hastening around to the other side of the building, hurriedly summoned the traveling man. Then the two stood at one side, watching in the shadow, while the merry group passed down the steps and out to their waiting conveyance.

The moment all of them were inside their coach, however, the pair darted down the street and scrambled into a hansom which they had stationed there in readiness.

"After that carriage!" panted the traveling man, a little winded by his run. "And don't lose sight of it under any consideration!"

"Never fear," grinned the cabby, scenting a liberal fare. "If they lose me, it'll have to be somewhere else than in little old Phillymadelphy."

And he was as good as his word. It was a long chase that the coach led them —out through quiet residential streets to the fashionable district where the stately Chase mansion was located, and where the ladies of the party dismounted, and then, with the three young men aboard, back down-town until it finally halted in front of one of the big hotels—but the hansom was never more than a block behind, and it held the other vehicle in view all the way.

Arriving at the hotel, however, and seeing the coach dismissed and the trio pass inside, the traveling man suggested to John that he might as well go home.

"Here, take the key and go over to my rooms and wait for me," he said. "You can do no good here, for they would recognize you in a minute, whereas I can stroll nonchalantly close up to them and eavesdrop all I want to without arousing any suspicion."

"But won't this young Chase know you?"

"No; as I told you, he has nothing to do with the business. He would probably remember my name if he heard it, for I have been with the house a long time; but as to his knowing me by sight, I think I can reckon on being perfectly safe."

It was so arranged, therefore, and King went up to the traveling man's pleasant apartments to put in a long two hours waiting for the other. Nor was any solicitude he might have felt relieved much when his friend did at last put in an appearance, for the traveling man's face was set and stern.

"Yes, you were right, King," he said, sinking frowningly into a chair and drumming his fingers perplexedly on the table; "there is a big scheme on the tapis —a good deal bigger scheme than I had anticipated—and how to prevent it is more than I have so far been able to figure out.

"I went into the hotel after them," he continued, "and, as I had expected, found them assembled around a table in the café, together with an elderly man whom I have since learned is Colonel Howard Lindon, of Blairsburg."

"Colonel Lindon!" ejaculated King. "That does settle it!"

"What! Do you know him?"

"Like a book. And a more unscrupulous old rascal never drew the breath of life."

"Very true, I guess, from what I gathered to-night, for he seems to be the head and front of the conspiracy upon which your friends, the 'green-goods' men, are engaged."

"You learned, then, what is doing?"

"Yes, in a way, although not so fully as I would have liked. I could not get close up to the party, you see, owing to the way the tables were arranged; so I had to take a seat at a little distance and bribe one of the waiters to do my listening for me.

"From what he could pick up, I make out that this Colonel Lindon has a rubber plantation down in Central America somewhere, and is organizing a company to take it over and work it. Scott and Newman he uses apparently as his agents to get in touch with young men of more money than brains, and steer them up to him, so that he can interest them in the scheme."

"It's a fraud, for sure," declared King vehemently, "else old Lindon wouldn't be in it. He couldn't go straight if he wanted to."

"Yes, I, too, sized it up as a bunco, not from anything I knew about Lindon, but simply from the way they were setting about it, and because Scott and Newman are associated in the affair."

"And have they nailed young Chase?"

"I am afraid they have. He grew very flushed and excited while they were talking to him, and the waiter told me that he had agreed to take fifty thousand dollars' worth of the stock on their promise to make him a director in the company, paying twenty per cent of the amount now and the balance on delivery of the stock. Nor have I any doubt that this is true, for I myself saw him draw the check and hand it over to the colonel."

"You saw him draw a check? The idiot!" exclaimed King contemptuously.

A quizzical smile flickered over the traveling man's lips.

"Oh, I don't know," he commented dryly; "perhaps no more of an idiot than if he had let them inveigle him into a three-card monte game. Fake stock and phony money are pretty much on a par, it strikes me.

"However, I am not caring very much about that part of the transaction," he went on, waxing serious again. "Young Chase has got to learn from experience, like all the rest of us, and although fifty thousand is a pretty good bunch of money, he can afford to lose it a good deal better than you or I could.

"It is something else the waiter reported which has set me worrying." He paused, and again that troubled frown drew his forehead into creases.

"What is that?"

"Why, when Arthur stepped out for a few minutes to-night to answer the telephone, the colonel leaned forward to this young Scott and, in a jovial tone, asked him how sped his wooing.

"'Finer than silk,' the rascal replied. 'You can take my word for it, colonel, that in less than three months I'll be the husband of the prettiest and swellest girl in Philadelphia, and then we shall all have money to burn!'

"And with that, they ordered up a fresh bottle of champagne, and began drinking toasts to him in the highest sort of merriment.

"Now, what do you make of that, King?"

"Make of it?" cried John, starting to his feet, his eyes flashing. "Why, I say it must be stopped in some way. Has Miss Chase no relative who can be called upon to prevent such a sacrifice?"

"None, except Arthur, and I can see from the way he has taken up with these fellows that it would be idle to appeal to him. He would simply refuse to hear any charges made against them."

"Nevertheless, he must be told," urged John. "Why, he can't help being convinced by the proofs we can offer of their character. They are notorious crooks."

But the other only shook his head.

"You don't know that Chase obstinacy," he said. "Once let a man get into their confidence, and you couldn't shake him out with a ton of dynamite. Old Richard K. was always that way, and they say this boy is just like him."

"Yet you must make the attempt," insisted King. "You are an old and valued employee of his house, and he would surely listen to you."

"Oh, yes, he would listen to me," assented the traveling man. "And then do you know what he would do? He'd tell me that he didn't care to have any one in his employ come to him with slanderous tales about his friends, and that, deeply as he regretted to sever our long connection, I might consider myself free to look for another job. It would do no good, I tell you. I should simply scorch my own fingers, and not get any chestnuts out of the fire, either."

"Then, why not go to the girl direct?" suggested John. "After all, she is the one most concerned, and she could hardly fail to take note of such a serious accusation, especially when her whole life's happiness is at stake."

"Worse and worse," demurred the traveling man with emphasis. "Tell a woman that the man she loves is a villain? My dear boy, she would simply go to Scott and ask him if it was the truth; and then, when he had assured her that it was not, she would complain to Arthur that I had been circulating malicious lies about their friend, with the result that I should be in worse case than ever."

"All the same," declared John warmly, "somebody has got to warn her. I, for one, don't believe that she is such a silly dupe as you picture her. She looks to me like a sensible, clear-minded girl, who, if the matter were properly presented to her, would investigate it to the bottom, and that is really all that we want. I say again, she must be told."

"Well, I don't know who is going to do it. She may be all that you say; but it's a ticklish business at the best, and I hardly think I care to take the risk."

"All right, then," said John, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang, "I'll do it myself. I've nothing to lose; but, by Jove, even if I had, I wouldn't hesitate a moment, where it was a question of saving a girl from such a fate as looms ahead of Miss Chase!"

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE CASTLE OF THE PRINCESS.

It was very easy to announce his intention, and John was very bold as he talked the matter over with the traveling man that night, and laid his plans for securing an audience with Miss Chase.

But the next morning, when the time arrived for action, he began to feel his courage oozing out at toes and finger-tips.

There are far more grateful tasks than that of informing a young woman that the man to whom she has become attached is a thief and a swindler; and King could not help wondering what sort of a reception he would get.

Would she listen to his story, and take any stock in it, or would she, as soon as he had opened up, politely show him the door?

Indeed, it was quite on the cards that she would decline to see him at all; but that was a risk he had to take, in any event, and he believed he could frame up a message sufficiently piquing to her curiosity at least to bring her down to meet him.

Still, he had to confess that his appearance was hardly such as to inspire great confidence. Sleeping on a park bench has a tendency to rumple one's clothes, and during the past week or so John had not, perhaps, been over-scrupulous in regard to his personal grooming.

This difficulty was overcome by the traveling man, however, who, since they were both of about a size, generously offered to loan him habiliments suitable for his undertaking, and also stood treat to a shave and hair-cut at a neighboring barber-shop.

Indeed, the country lad looked very fit and fine when the hour came for him to set out; yet he himself was far from satisfied. At the last moment he turned back to ransack his friend's stock of neckwear for a more becoming tie, and after he had really started and covered a block he returned once more because he observed a tiny speck of mud upon one of his highly polished shoes.

Nor did his pluck come back when he was actually on the way. He still had to fight with that strange sense of shrinking timidity, and on arriving at Miss Chase's home it was all he could do to flog himself up the steps and ring the door-bell.

It recalled to him a similar attack of shyness he had once suffered from as a child when he had been sent over on an errand by his mother to the house of some strangers lately moved into their neighborhood; and this memory was so strong upon him that when the solemn-faced butler surprised him by suddenly opening the door he blurted out before he thought:

"If you please, sir, I would like to borrow a hoe!"

"What?" demanded the solemn-faced one, his graven-image stolidity shaken for once.

But, John, scarlet to the roots of his hair, and ready to sink into the ground, caught himself together.

"No, no," he corrected hastily. "What I meant to say was that I wished to see Miss Chase."

The butler, however, did not relax his attitude of suspicion.

"I am sorry, sir," he returned loftily, "but Miss Chase is engaged this morning, and wishes to be excused."

"Nevertheless," John rejoined, "I think she will see me, as it is a matter of the greatest importance. At any rate, you go and find out."

"Very well, sir," answered the man, somewhat impressed by the positive manner the caller had assumed. "What name shall I give?"

"King—John King. But that will mean nothing to her. You tell her that I wish to see her in reference to a danger of the most serious character which is threatening her brother."

After considering several plans, John had decided that this was about the surest method of gaining the girl's ear, and the result showed that he had not been mistaken.

He did not have to wait three minutes in the imposing, old-fashioned drawing-room, to which he had been conducted, before she came running down the stairs, her eyes wide, and her hand pressed to her heart in sisterly fear.

"You come to me from Arthur?" she cried, not stopping to greet him. "Something has happened?"

"No," John spoke up quickly in order to allay her evident alarm. "No harm has befallen your brother—yet. You have evidently misunderstood my message. I sent word that I wanted to see you on account of a danger that threatens him, not one which has already come to pass."

"But if that is so," she questioned, still standing, and eying the stranger a shade doubtfully, "why do you not go to Arthur himself? Why do you come to me?"

"Because the blow which is being aimed at him comes from the hand of one whom he considers a friend. You know your brother's almost quixotic loyalty to the men he trusts, Miss Chase, and can see for yourself how useless it would be to appeal to him."

"That is true," she admitted; "and yet it seems a somewhat strange way to—Who is this friend of his you accuse?" she demanded sharply.

(To be continued.)

A Speculation in God's Country.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

The letter on the grass that tempted a farmer, and what came of his fall.

"LAND sakes, Abbie, it jest seems to me this is 'bout the hottest day we've had this summer!"

Mrs. Markham dropped her knitting into her lap and, pushing her glasses up on her forehead, leaned back wearily in the little rocking-chair.

The young woman addressed did not deign a reply, but gave a lazy jerk to the string she held and, swaying back and forth in the hammock, continued reading the novel which held all her attention.

It certainly was hot, stiflingly so; even the shaded lawn upon which they had sought a semblance of a breeze in the shelter of the towering sugar maples seemed to be shriveled and parched, and the old farmhouse behind them looked particularly uninviting as the sun's rays beat down upon it.

Mrs. Markham glanced in the direction of the road.

"Abbie!" she exclaimed commandingly. "Set up in thet hammock! Here comes some one up the road!"

With sudden obedience, her daughter quickly rose to a sitting position, reluctantly laid aside her book, and as she caught sight of the young man, dust-covered and walking as if greatly fatigued, she remarked curiously: "I wonder who he is?"

The man was now almost in front of the house, his head bent as he studiously read a letter he was holding. Looking up quickly, he turned into the narrow shrub-lined path that led to the Markham home.

As he neared the couple seated on the lawn he again glanced at the letter he still held.

"I beg your pardon," he began falteringly, removing his hat, "but could I beg a—"

He broke off stammeringly and the hand that held the sheet of paper allowed it to flutter unnoticed to the ground as he pressed his fingers to his forehead.

He swayed perceptibly, then muttered feebly: "A drink of—water! Water!"

Shrieking the last word, a look of pain convulsed his face, then he staggered forward and fell in a heap on the grass.

For a moment Mrs. Markham and her daughter did not move, so completely taken by surprise were they at the collapse of the stranger. Then suddenly the farmer's wife jumped to her feet, allowing her knitting to roll to the ground in a tangled mass.

She ran toward the house, calling wildly: "Cal—Cal—Calvin!"

Markham had heard the first call, and recognizing in it a strange note of alarm, was already framed in the doorway when his wife stumbled up the steps of the porch. His eyes rested on her for a second, then looked on past to where his daughter stood, rooted to the spot, where lay the apparently lifeless body of a man.

The farmer took in the situation at a glance, and unmindful of the fact that he was in his stocking feet—he had removed his heavy boots to rest them during his midday siesta—he bounded down the steps with one leap, and running

along the pebbled pathway, bent over the prostrate stranger.

"Abbie!" he cried, glancing up at his daughter. "Quick—some water. Sunstroke, I guess."

He seemed at a loss just how to proceed.

"Martha, do ye know what to do fer it?" he questioned, turning helplessly to his wife.

Mrs. Markham had by this time regained her natural composure.

"Yes. Carry him to the spare room and put him on the bed," she commanded quietly, and as her husband took the young man, limp and helpless, in his arms she bent over the stricken one and murmured sympathetically: "Poor fellow! I wonder where he comes from?"

A groan escaped the stranger's lips; his eyes rolled in his head and he moaned thickly, almost inaudibly: "The—Roberts place—Roberts place."

Markham was staggering under the heavy load he carried, but caught distinctly the words, and turning to his wife, who was following closely, said softly: "Wonder if he's a friend of the strange people that live up in the old Roberts farm—the Wilburs?"

"Mebbe he is," was her reply. "But we'll first see if we kin bring the poor unfortunate round. If we can't, we'll send word up to 'em. Mebbe it's only a slight stroke an' he'll soon be himself again."

The farmer pushed on through the narrow hall and into the small, darkened apartment just off the dining-room that served as a spare bedroom. Depositing the unconscious man tenderly upon the bed, he turned quickly to find his daughter at his elbow, holding a pail of freshly drawn well-water.

"Calvin, git me some cracked ice," his wife directed.

The motherly old lady knelt by the side of the bed and tenderly bathed the man's head with the fresh, cool water, and when her husband returned she continued her ministrations with a piece of cracked ice in each hand.

Suddenly the patient's eyes opened and an almost natural look showed itself in them as he gazed inquiringly from the face of one to the other in the dim light that filtered into the room between the slats of the closed blinds. But it was only for a moment. With a deeply drawn sigh the eyes closed again.

Mrs. Markham continued rubbing his temples for some time, then, looking at her husband, whispered: "Calvin, don't ye be a standin' there like a bump on a log. They ain't nothin' you kin do. Leave Abbie an' me alone."

The old man made no objection to this order and, walking out of the room, went to the kitchen, put on his slippers, then tiptoed back through the hall and out upon the front lawn, where he flung himself into the little rocker his wife had occupied only a short time before.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed at last as he mopped his perspiring forehead, "if we don't hev rain afore long the crops will jest sizzle up an' die. I noticed the corn—"

He stopped abruptly as a gentle breeze rustled a sheet of paper that lay a few feet away upon the grass.

"What's that?" he muttered, then slowly rising, he walked toward it, adding. "Looks like a letter, and spoilin' the 'pearance of the front lawn."

He reached down and picked it up carelessly, then returned to the rocking-chair.

Instinctively he allowed his eyes to scan the paper he held. Instantly he straightened up, and his weather-stained face became a study as he reached in his pocket for his spectacle-case.

When he had placed his glasses upon his nose, the lines around his mouth hardened while he carefully studied each word in the letter. Then the hand that held it dropped idly to his side and a far-away look came into his eyes as, lost in thought, he gazed across the valley before him.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed aloud at last, and again reread the letter.

It was written on the stationery of the Central National Bank of New York, and ran as follows:

REED REAL ESTATE COMPANY,
NEW YORK CITY.

MY DEAR REED:

Regarding that property in the Berkshires, known as the Roberts farm, which we have talked 'bout, I have decided to buy it for a summer home, as,

from your description and pictures, it must be God's country. Will you send a representative up there and get it for me as cheaply as you can? I will pay as much as fifteen thousand dollars for it, but no more.

Let me hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

GEORGE B. WATSON, President.

For some moments the old man continued his deep thinking, then he carelessly tossed the letter toward the spot where he had picked it up and arose with a look of determination clearly graven on his features. There was a halting nervousness in his walk as he strode toward the house.

"It's an ill wind wot blows no one some good," he muttered grimly.

He walked through the hall quietly and past the closed door of the room the stricken man was occupying, to the kitchen, where he hastily threw off his slippers and quickly pulled on his long leather boots.

Leaving the house by the back door, he hurried out the drive to the dusty highway, and continued in the direction of the Roberts farm.

A short, hot walk, and as he approached his neighbor's place he exclaimed: "Gorry! I never realized wot a ideal home this would be, with thet lake almost behind the house. Guess I seen it so of'en it never 'curred to me. 'God's country,' thet bank man calls it. Wal, mebbe 'tis, though I never thought of it thet way afore."

Walking straight to the front door, he knocked loudly upon it. For some moments there was no reply, and Markham muttered to himself: "Gosh! but these people are funny ones. In the hull year they've lived here I ain't seen 'em only twice."

Again he rapped determinedly.

The old farmer did not hear the silent approach of some one within, or see an eye pressed to a tiny slit in the opaque curtain that covered the glass in the front door. Had he, the sudden flinging open of the door would not have caused him to jump back in astonishment,

"Oh, how de do!" he exclaimed in surprised tones. "How are ye, Mr. Wilbur?"

The carelessly dressed, disheveled-looking person who opened the door appeared not to notice the farmer's greeting, but questioned suspiciously: "You are Mr. Markham, from the farm below, aren't you?"

"Yes, I be," the farmer replied quickly, "an' I come up to see if ye wanted to sell yer place?"

"Well, my brother and I have been thinking of selling and going back to the city. It's terribly lonely up here, you know, for two bachelors."

The speaker barred the entrance with his person, but as he paused he stepped out upon the porch, closing the door behind him.

"It's so hot in the house, let us talk out here."

As they sat down on the steps—there were no chairs out there—Markham began: "Wal, how much do ye want fer yer farm?"

"Oh, I don't know," the other replied thoughtfully. "To tell you the truth, we are so tired of it up here we will sell for almost anything to get rid of it."

The old farmer rubbed his hands in nervous glee at this announcement.

"Wal, *how* much?" he queried anxiously.

"Oh, if you were to offer us five thousand—"

"I'll give you four thousand five hundred!" broke in Markham with genuine Yankee shrewdness.

"No," the other replied positively. "Five thousand, I said, and it's little enough."

"We'll split the difference," Markham objected. "Make it four thousand seven hundred an' fifty."

The other mused deeply, then broke out: "Done, if settled up this afternoon. But it's a cash sale."

"Cert'inly," the farmer agreed proudly. "I'll go right down an' git my democrat wagon an' be up fer ye in fifteen minutes. We'll drive over to Lenox an' fix up the deed an' it'll be settled."

Before he had finished speaking Markham was half-way down the walk, and without another word he hastened back to his own home. Entering his yard, his eyes caught the letter which had instigated this sudden purchase, and picking it up, he thrust it into his pocket.

His wife met him as he hurried through the house and a guilty flush rose to the lean, brown face as she remarked softly: "That poor young man seems easier. I've packed his head in ice an' he is sleepin' now. But he'll hev to stay overnight with us."

Markham inwardly exclaimed "Good!" Then aloud: "Wal, I'm goin' to Lenox this afternoon. Got to see 'bout somethin' over there," and hurried out of the house.

It was but the work of a moment to hitch up, and, driving rapidly, he soon disappeared up the road, leaving a cloud of dust in his wake.

The Wilbur brothers were awaiting him, and without a word they climbed into the rear seat of the wagon and the trio started for Lenox. Markham endeavored to draw the two men into conversation, but quickly realizing their wish to avoid it, refrained, and the ride proved a silent one.

At last they drew up before the bank and the farmer hurried inside, only a few moments before the closing hour.

He hardly returned the teller's greeting, but filled out his check for the amount desired and thrust it through the little window. The man took it and a quizzical look spread over his face, but he refrained from questioning, having already noted Markham's peculiar, nervous actions.

The required amount was pushed out to him, and he left the bank without a word of farewell.

For one of his age, he jumped very nimbly into the wagon again, and drove rapidly around the corner to the office of the county clerk, where the deeds were signed, the transfer made, and the money passed to its new owners.

"When do you wish us to get out?" the elder Wilbur queried when the farmer turned his horse's head homeward. "If agreeable to you, Mr. Markham, we'd like very much to stay a few days longer, to give us an opportunity to gather together our belongings."

"Sure, thet's all right," the old man replied, with just a tinge of magnanimity in his voice. "I won't want the place fer a few days, at least."

The rest of the drive was unbroken by speech, the farmer's mind busy with calculations of the profits of his afternoon's work. The intensity of the sun's rays had decreased greatly, and a cool breeze fanned the old man's forehead when he drew into his own yard, after depositing the Wilbur brothers at their home.

Mrs. Markham had seen her husband approaching, and greeted him from the back steps as he drove by.

"Calvin, where hev ye been all the afternoon?" she inquired.

"Had to go to Lenox to see 'bout some business," he replied evasively, pulling up his horse. "How's the sick 'un?"

"Went away shortly after ye left," she replied. "He come to an' insisted on goin', much agin my advice. He said the best place fer him wuz home, so I hed Hiram hitch up an' take the poor man to the depot, 'cause he wasn't in no condition to go, anyway, let alone to walk."

Markham heaved a deep sigh of relief. He was burdened with a conscience, even if at times he thrust it far into the background, and dreaded meeting face to face the man of whose helplessness he had so coolly taken advantage.

"Mebbe home is the best place fer him," he remarked, then, slapping the old horse on the back with the reins, proceeded to the stable.

During the evening meal the farmer was strangely quiet, so absorbed was he in his real-estate venture. He ate sparingly, and at length pushed back his chair with the declaration: "I'm goin' down to New York to-morrow—goin' to take a little holiday, bein' as the ground is too dry to do any cultivatin'."

No objection was raised to this announcement, although his wife felt deep down in her heart that she, too, deserved a brief respite and change from the daily care and work of the farm.

Markham seated himself in his easy chair and, lighting his pipe, smoked in silence for some time, then quietly arose and went to his room, where he retired for the night. But the heavy sleep he always enjoyed did not come to his tired eyes. His mind was overtaxed with the excitement of the morrow's trip.

The first streak of gray was showing itself upon the horizon when the old man arose and, laying out his black suit—the one used only on state occasions—

hurried into his working-clothes, and after greasing his boots carefully, rushed through the morning chores, then returned to the house and finished dressing just as his wife called him to breakfast.

But he had no appetite, and after struggling bravely to eat, he arose, bade his wife and daughter a hasty good-by and strode toward the waiting buckboard.

The ride was soon ended, and after a short wait the train pulled in and Markham was being rapidly carried to New York.

The four-hour ride seemed unending to him, but at length the train reached the Grand Central Station, and the farmer walked confidently toward a policeman. Drawing out the treasured letter, he inquired with assumed dignity: "Kin ye direct me to the Central National Bank?"

With an amused twinkle in his eyes, the officer gave the necessary information and Markham hurried off, half dazed by the noise and bustle around him.

Fortunately, the bank was only a few blocks away, and with a nervousness that caused big beads of perspiration to stand out upon his forehead, Markham soon found himself standing before the imposing structure. He paused for a moment, then strode determinedly into the building, but hesitated and stared around in a confused way as he stepped into the brightly lighted interior.

A portly, gray-uniformed special officer advanced toward him.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" he inquired.

"Wal, I dunno," the farmer replied, a display of deference plainly evident in his tone. "Ye kin, if ye kin direct me to Mr—" He paused, having forgotten, in his nervousness, the name of the bank official.

Hastily fumbling in his pocket for the treasured letter, he drew it out, and added: "Mr.—President Watson."

The officer seemed undecided just what steps to take. "Was Mr. Watson expecting you?"

"Not exactly," Mr. Markham's face was wreathed in smiles. "Not exactly," he added, "but it's about the Roberts place."

"The Roberts place?" the officer repeated blankly.

"Yes, he'll understand. Jest tell him that an' he'll see me."

"Wait here a moment. I'll be right back."

The officer walked to the rear of the bank, and quickly returned accompanied by a pale, spectacled clerk, who nervously inquired: "What was it you wished to see Mr. Watson about?"

"Thet Roberts place," Markham answered impatiently, thrusting before the man's face the letter he held.

He read it through earnestly, then looked up with a puzzled expression.

"I don't understand what it means," he began. "This—"

"It means jest what it says, young man," the farmer broke in hastily. "It means thet I own the Roberts place, which Mr. Watson wants to buy, and I want him to know I'll sell it to him real reasonable."

"But, my dear sir, please let me speak," pleaded the other. "Mr. Watson wants no summer home—he already has one—and furthermore, this letter was never signed by him. That signature is forged!"

The old farmer gazed around blankly, unable to grasp the full meaning of the statement he had just heard.

"But—but—"

"Come now, my good friend, I don't know yer game, but I must ask ye to quietly leave the bank. There's nothin' doin' here fer ye." The officer glanced at the young man. and, receiving a nod of approval, added as he seized the countryman's arm: "I'll take ye to the door."

It was no gentle pressure that gripped him, and with a snarl of defeat Mr. Markham shook off the officer and exclaimed angrily: "Take yer hands off! I'm goin' to see Mr. Watson, I say!"

But the burly officer retained his composure as he again gripped Markham's arm.

"No, ye won't; and if ye don't want to be arrested ye'll git out quietly. Be sinsible, now, and go back to your home. If some one sint ye that letter he did it fer a joke."

"A joke!" the farmer shouted wrathfully. "Is it a joke fer me to go an' buy thet farm—"

"Stop where ye are!" the guardian of the peace interrupted. "Ye're attractin' the attintion of ivery one here. Out ye go peaceable, or to jail wid ye!"

The commanding tone of the man caused Markham to check his anger instantly. He had already started the farmer toward the door, a proceeding to which the old man now offered no objection, and he passed out of the building without another word.

With head sunk low, Markham shuffled along the street, a picture of despair, pushed and buffeted from side to side by the rushing, bustling throng.

He continued on, his mind in a tangled whirl. He felt that the whole universe was leagued against him to prevent his seeing the bank president. He had already walked a few blocks when, glancing up with a start, he recognized a familiar street and saw the Grand Central Station just ahead.

An idea formed itself out of the chaos in his brain. He would lay his case before the officer who had directed him to the bank. With this decision paramount, he hastened his footsteps, and had no difficulty in finding the policeman he wanted.

With a tremor in his voice, he began: "I beg yer pardon, but hev ye a moment to spare? I want to ask yer advice."

The guardian of the law recognized his questioner, and with a kindly smile replied: "Why, yes, of course. What is it?"

Markham displayed the letter for the policeman's perusal, then briefly told of his reception at the bank.

"Where did you get this letter?" the officer queried. "And who is the Reed Real Estate Company?"

"Durned if I know," the farmer replied blankly.

"There is a directory in the information bureau; let us see if we can find their address."

Leading the way, the policeman was soon deep in the search for the office of the firm to whom the letter was directed. But the investigation proved futile. No such concern was listed in the book.

Glancing up abruptly, the officer remarked: "There is no such name in New York City. Where did you get this letter?"

Markham was for the moment completely taken aback by the question.

"I—I—found it in my yard," he stammered.

"And on the strength of this you went right up and bought the property?"

"Yes, thet's it," the old man admitted reluctantly.

The officer felt sure he had solved the mystery, yet was loath to add to the farmer's troubles.

"If you take my advice," he began slowly, "you will return home and wait for these people to come to you. If they want it they'll soon be after you, and your not running after them will show no desire on your part to sell. Then you will be able to hold out for a better price. Don't you think I am right?"

"Guess ye are," Markham assented with a pleased snicker. "Ye surely are!" he added positively. "Thet's jest what I'll do. As ye say, they'll be comin' to me, an' then I kin set my price. I'm awful 'bliged to ye."

"Oh, that's all right," was the good-natured reply. "I'm glad to have been able to help you. Good day, sir."

It fortunately happened there was a train about to leave for Markham's home town, and he hurried down the long platform toward it. A pleased chuckle escaped him after he had seated himself comfortably and the train had got under way.

"Thought I was bein' used mean, but, after all, I guess 'twas for the best. Now they'll come to me, an' I'll make 'em pay well for all this trouble."

The trip seemed remarkably short, the farmer's mind being occupied with the thoughts of the extra sum he would add to the selling price of the Roberts place as revenge and balm to his injured dignity. Even the long walk from the railroad station to his home seemed to take less time than usual, and his face was wreathed in smiles when he stood before his surprised wife.

"Wot—ye back so soon, Calvin?" she exclaimed.

"Yep!"

"Guess ye didn't stay long in the city," she ventured.

"Long 'nough," was all the information he would vouchsafe.

Realizing that her husband was not in

a communicative mood, Mrs. Markham refrained from questioning further and the old man retired to his room, from which he presently emerged in his working-clothes and left the house to attend to the chores.

No further reference was made that night to his trip, and soon after supper the farmer went to bed.

The next morning he was up at the usual early hour, and busied himself with his regular duties until the call for breakfast. For some moments the meal progressed silently, until Mr. Markham remarked: "Calvin, I think me an' Abbie will go to town this mornin'. I want to do some shoppin'. Kin we hev a horse?"

"Of course," he replied absently. "Of course ye kin."

Nothing further was said on the subject, and shortly after the dishes were washed Mrs. Markham ordered Hiram to hitch the horse to the buggy, and a few moments later she and Abbie drove out of the yard.

Markham was in no mood for work. He felt that any moment would bring the bank president's representative to buy the Roberts place, and he hoped he would come to-day, and thereby end the suspense under which he labored. Lighting his pipe, he walked through the house to the front lawn, where he seated himself, after looking expectantly down the road.

For some time he smoked on in silence, lost in the reflection of what he expected to make out of his real-estate venture. Yet the thought constantly came into his mind: "Suppose Mr. Watson should decide that he didn't want to buy, after all—what could I do with the durned thing?"

But he nervously dispelled this idea every time.

"He wants it bad, and'll be after it soon enough, ye kin bet," he muttered to himself.

The sound of wheels caused Markham to look up hastily, and he saw a carriage that contained three strangers. His heart gave a jump. Could they be the men he wanted to see?

He quickly decided he would not display any overanxiety, and directed his attention elsewhere. On they came, the horse throwing up clouds of dust at every step.

Markham puffed nervously at his pipe, and realized they were right in front of him, when he heard the driver halt his horse.

The old farmer's disquietude could not be held down longer, and he turned to see one of the men leap nimbly from the vehicle and walk rapidly toward him.

"Can you direct me to the Roberts place?" he queried, without the formality of a greeting.

The farmer sprang to his feet, and with a sickly attempt at composure replied: "Wal, guess I kin. If ye want to buy it ye kin jest make yer arrangements with me. I own it, ye know."

His questioner gave him one searching glance, then looked in the direction of the carriage and as if in response one of the other men sprang down and hastened toward them.

"You say you own it!" the first man exclaimed. "When did you buy it?"

A smile of approval at his own shrewdness formed itself around Markham's mouth as he replied: "Day afore yesterday."

The strangers again glanced knowingly at each other, then one of them said: "We're not buying farms to-day, sir."

"No?" the farmer cried in disappointment.

"No," the other repeated. "But we are going to ask your help in a little matter. Do you know whether the men who lived there have left?"

"They hedn't up to day afore yisterday." Markham's face had taken on a puzzled look of inquiry. "An' when I bought it then, they asked me if they could stay a few days longer."

"I see, and you bought it from them. Now listen to me and I'll tell you how you can be of service to the United States government and to yourself."

Opening his coat and displaying a badge, the man went on: "We are Secret Service agents, and the men who have been living on the place you purchased are noted counterfeiters."

"You—don't say!" the farmer gasped.

"We have been on their trail for a month," the other continued. "They know it, and probably learning we had located them, sold the place to you, as

they knew they might have to skip any moment."

"No, they didn't," Markham put in heatedly. "I bought it because another man wanted it fer a summer home. I don't mind tellin' yer, for even if ye are from the bank president, I've got the place and ye'll hev to buy from me if ye want it. Ye see, I found Mr. Watson's letter here on my lawn."

Saying this, he pulled the missive from his pocket and angrily held it toward the detective.

As one of them took it, the other leaned over his shoulder and scanned the contents.

After studying the letter carefully one of the men questioned: "Have you communicated with this gentleman?"

The farmer was not certain just how to answer this.

"Look here," he said, "if yer from him, wot's the use of askin' durn fool questions, an' if ye ain't I dunno wot business it is of yourn, anyway."

"It is for your own good, my dear sir. We have proved to you who we are."

"Wal there, if it does ye any good to know it, I went down to New York yisterday, but Mr. Watson wouldn't see me."

Markham's tone gathered disgust as he proceeded, then suddenly changed to anger when he added: "Sent out some one to tell me he didn't want no summer place, bein' as he already had one. Then this man had the presumption to tell me Mr. Watson never wrote nor signed thet letter."

"My dear friend," one of Markham's listeners said sympathetically, "it is almost as I thought."

"Wot do ye mean?" the farmer snapped.

"I mean that the letter was thrown into your yard as a bait. The counterfeiters wanted to sell very badly, and hoped you would bite, which you did. Do you see it now?"

But the farmer only stared vacantly at them, unable to believe he had been the victim of a plot. Then it occurred to him that the young man who was stricken seemed to recover very suddenly. He was on the point of telling this part of the story, which he had carefully avoided, when the officer continued:

"If they are still there, they will not admit us, and we will have to force an entrance, a proceeding not to our taste if we can avoid it, as we do not wish to damage your property. How far is this place?"

"Jest 'round thet bend in the road," Markham answered, as if in a daze.

"Good! Then they have not seen us. Now, we wish your help. You go up and get talking with them—that is, if they are there. They will see you, while they would not a stranger. We will follow presently."

The farmer rubbed his hands nervously, and his face took on a hard, vindictive look.

"I'll do it," he agreed, "because they won't let me in the house. They'll come out on the porch, same as they did afore." Then his voice changed suddenly, and he added weakly: "But are ye sure I'll be safe an' not git hurt?"

"You need have no fear whatever," was the reassuring reply. "If it's just beyond the bend, we can be upon them before they realize it."

"I'll do it." There was no trace of hesitancy in Markham's tone now; instead, there was only anger, hate, and revenge.

"That's fine," the officers chorused. "Go now—we'll leave our wagon here and follow you in a few moments."

With a firm, decisive step the farmer departed, leaving the two men standing on the lawn and the third in the act of tying his horse to the hitching-post.

Markham did not falter, but strode on, angrily raising little clouds of dust with every footfall. When he rounded the bend, his newly acquired property came into sight, betraying no sign of life or habitation.

The farmer's face was grim and set as he entered the overgrown yard and, ascending the porch steps, rapped loudly on the door. A brief wait, and he hammered again.

"Durn them, I wonder if they've gone without turnin' over the key to me," he muttered under his breath.

But before he could continue, the door-knob moved with the grating sound that betrayed little use, and the elder Wilbur stepped out, carefully pulling the door shut after him.

"How do you do, Mr. Markham?" he

said. "You see we are still here, but expect to go in a few moments. In fact, the wagon we ordered to take us and our few belongings to the station should have been here by this time. The little furniture within we are going to leave; you can have it if you want it; if not, it will make a good bonfire."

"Oh, thet's all right," the farmer replied, glancing uneasily down the road.

Then a thought struck him, and walking to the end of the porch, he added: "Thet's a fine meadow yonder, ain't it?"

They were both looking the opposite direction from which the officers would come. "An' thet clump of pines over there on the mount'in ought to be worth somethin' in a few years."

He was talking on feverishly, bent determinedly upon keeping Wilbur's attention to this side of the house. "How's thet fence—"

The sound of hurried footsteps struck the ears of both men simultaneously, and they turned.

"Not a word, Sparks!" commanded one of the officers. "Up with your hands!"

Mechanically, the man obeyed.

"Well, Sparks, or Wilbur, as they know you up here," the captor continued, still covering his prisoner with his revolver, while one of the others hastily ran his hands over him in search of weapons, "you've given us a good long chase, but we've got you at last. Where's Harris?"

But there was only a calm, steely look in the fellow's eyes that gave not even a hint that he had heard the question.

"We'll find him, anyway," the officer remarked curtly. "Tom, watch this one; keep him covered; he's tricky."

"Who wuz thet feller wot dropped the letter on my lawn?" Markham demanded hotly, after the two men had disappeared in the house.

A sneer spread over the prisoner's face.

"Pretty good actor, wasn't he?" he replied tantalizingly.

The farmer's face was a study, as he realized how easily he had fallen into a carefully laid plot, and one into which his unscrupulous desire for gain had drawn him.

A moment later the other counterfeiter appeared upon the scene, followed closely by the officers with drawn revolvers.

"Took him unawares as he was packing up the last of their money-producing outfit," one of them explained, as he shackled the brothers together.

"Now, I'll tell you how we'll manage it," the man who seemed the leader of the three began. "You will both take these two to the nearest jail, and I'll stay behind to bring their paraphernalia. Perhaps our good friend here"—he smiled and nodded toward Markham—"will hire us a horse and wagon, because there is a bunch of it."

"I'll *lend* ye one—and gladly," the farmer volunteered quickly.

"Very well, that's fine." Then, turning to his brother officers, he went on: "Boys, this is one of the most important captures we've ever made, and will mean a great deal to us. I'll run down and get our wagon; wait here till I come back. You, too, Mr.—" he added, addressing Markham.

A brief wait and the carriage pulled up, the prisoners were helped in, and the vehicle started slowly down the road, one officer driving and the other guarding with drawn revolver.

As they passed out of sight around the bend, the remaining secret-service agent turned and looked admiringly at the house, then past it to the stream that wound its way through the meadow, and still farther to the tree-clad mountains beyond.

"This is a beautiful location—and a grand country!" he exclaimed earnestly.

"Yes—'God's country,' them fellers called it in their letter," Markham sneered.

"And well named, too," broke in the officer. "What did you pay for the place, if I am not too inquisitive?"

"Four thousand seven hundred an' fifty," the old man replied, absolute disgust showing in his voice and every line of his face. "I'd be durn glad to sell it fer four thousand now."

"Would you, really?" A far-away look of thoughtfulness was displaced by a positive one. "I know a man who will buy it at that price. Wait till I ship off this stuff inside—then we'll talk it over."

THE FROZEN FORTUNE.*

By FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

The thousands that must be had and the millions that were found, only to keep melting away before the finder's frantic eyes.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

RICHARD SHIELDS and "Pill" Gordon, owners of a small newspaper in Goldendale, California, suddenly find themselves confronted by the necessity of raising six thousand dollars in order to meet a check whose indorsement has been forged by Gordon. Dick, who is engaged to Gordon's sister, Jessie, starts out on a prospecting tour, on the desperate chance of making a strike before the three months' time is up.

In the town of Vermilion he is mistaken for a man named Dolan, who is levying blackmail on a Spaniard named Ranon, nominal owner of the Blackfoot Mine, and has become engaged to Ranon's daughter, Ines. Dick starts off for the Klondike, but the ship Bolivia, on which he sails, is wrecked on an iceberg, where he is left, the sole survivor.

Finding with the sand frozen into the iceberg gold-dust and nuggets, he pans out several thousand dollars' worth before he is rescued, much against his will, and taken off without the metal. In Sacramento he meets Ines Ranon, who succeeds in getting from Dolan a promise to finance an expedition to find the iceberg. Dick becomes involved with Ines, though he really loves Jessie. In the railway station at San Francisco he comes face to face with Pill, and Jessie with him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PENALTY.

SANITY came back to me at the sight of these two dear faces, and the *señorita* slipped out of my mind like a bad dream. I gripped Pill's hand, and then inconsiderately threw my arms round Jessie and kissed her twice.

"Hello, old fellow, I didn't know you two were on such terms!" cried Pill.

"Then it's a good time to congratulate me. Your sister has promised—"

"Dick!" exclaimed Jessie, in a painful state of crimson.

"To make me your brother-in-law—after the tide turns in our affairs, you know."

"Is that so? Then congratulations, for sure. But, say, the tide *has* turned, from your wire. What did you mean? You haven't struck it rich so soon?"

"Wait till we get to the hotel," I replied.

Pill was looking worn; the strain of the last month had told heavily, and he was too impatient to hear my news to talk of anything else.

There were no new developments in Goldendale, he informed me, with a warning glance at his sister. Jessie walked between us, demurely shy, and she seldom spoke till we reached the hotel.

There, in my room, I told the story of the iceberg once more, and of the alliance I had made for its recovery. Naturally, I did not speak of my temporary insanity with the Spanish girl, and I tried to dismiss her as briefly as possible; but I was uncomfortable during the recital. I felt Jessie's eye on me, and I dreaded her intuition.

"It's the queerest tale I ever heard," said Pill when I had finished. "But, of course, I know you're not lying—"

"Many thanks."

"And I don't see how you could have been mistaken. This is gold, all right," fingering the specimens I had produced. "Do you think your Irishman will grubstake us?"

"Miss Ranon thinks she can persuade him. We'll hear from him to-morrow."

"Well, if he won't, we'll raise the cash some other way. There'd be all

the more for us to divide. We must begin to look round for a ship at once—a small steamer if we can manage it, or else an island schooner if we can't. Not a minute to be lost. You say the ice is melting fast."

"Was she pretty?" spoke up Jessie.

"Who? Miss Ranon? Yes, very pretty," I admitted, for I knew that the women would be almost certain to meet in the next few days.

Jessie said no more, but sat very quietly, while I tried to talk to Pill, answer his thousand questions, help on estimates of time, money, results. Finally, I suppose he noticed my distracted manner and inferred that I wanted to talk to his sister.

He made a good-natured pretense of looking at his watch.

"Got to run out. I'll be back in twenty minutes," and he disappeared.

Left alone with Jessie, I was in a state of horrible agitation. I could not speak on any indifferent topic, for I knew that she suspected something wrong.

There was a dark shadow in the air, and I felt that my only course in honor was to clear it up with perfect frankness, whatever the result. But I did rely on her generosity.

"Jessie," I said, rather shakily, "I've done a foolish thing, and I have to tell you. I've been—not exactly untrue to you—no, never that, but—"

She stood up quickly, very pale.

"I knew it," she said. "I could feel it. As soon as you spoke of that woman I knew that there was something between you."

"There isn't anything between us at all, Jessie. She is a very beautiful woman. I lost my head for a minute; she made a fool of me, but it didn't last long. It's over, utterly over now, and I never expect to see her again, except in the course of this gold business."

"Did you tell her that?"

I had no answer for this.

"When did this happen?" Jessie interrogated coldly.

"Yesterday," I confessed, beginning to repent of my overtruthfulness.

She turned away without looking at me.

"Don't make a great matter of this, Jessie," I expostulated. "It isn't one, really. Can't you understand? I was a fool for a minute; that's all there was to it. I felt that I ought to tell you—God knows whether I did right—and it's all over, and I've never ceased to love you better than any one else in the world. Can't you pardon me?"

"Oh, yes, I pardon you," said Jessie coldly.

I did not know what to say. I was confronted with the old impassable difficulty of making a woman understand that a man may be temporarily infatuated with one woman without wavering in his far greater love for another.

It is a difficulty which most men have to encounter at one time or another.

"You did right to tell me. I thank you," went on Jessie, in an even tone. "All this makes me understand you better. When we were at Goldendale you thought you cared for me; then you met this woman and loved her; when you see me again, you come back. Is there any truth in you at all? Perhaps you told that woman about me, as you have told me about her. Did you?"

I hesitated. It was a fact that I had mentioned Jessie's name to the *señorita*.

"You coward!" she flashed at me, turning, and then she paused painfully and looked me in the face.

"Jessie!" I cried uncontrollably. "Don't you know very well that you're the only woman I love or ever could love?"

She shook her head.

"I loved you; I truly did. I would have waited for you; I would have been faithful to you; I would have shared your good and bad luck, and been glad, because I loved you. You know very little what that means. It's gone now. There's something dead here," laying her hand with a passionate gesture on her breast. "Oh, Dick, why couldn't you have been different? How could you hurt me so? No, don't touch me. Let me go. I hope that I'll never see you again as long as I live."

She burst out of the room. I did not care to follow.

My reflections for the next five minutes were bitter enough. She had made me feel like the lowest of created things, and yet I knew that I had been nothing worse than foolish.

If I had been silly, she was unjust. The combined result was that I had lost her, and now, in the manner of men, I began to realize truly what I had lost—a treasure richer than the sea could hold. Then Pill came in.

"What's the matter with Jess?" he inquired. "I saw her just now in her room. Have you two quarreled?"

"Something like it," I muttered.

"Well, make it up again. Let's go down to the water-front now and see what we can find. That iceberg—"

"To Hades with the iceberg!" I exploded.

"It wouldn't last long there," Pill remarked, looking at me curiously. "Oh, say, brace up! Bless you, an engagement isn't any good until it's been broken and mended a few times. Jess'll come round all right. Give her time. We've more important things on hand, anyway. Get your hat."

As we went through the office the clerk gave me a telegram. It was from Sacramento, and read:

> Will be at Plaza Hotel to-morrow noon. Come. I. R.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TELEGRAM.

PILL and I searched all that afternoon along the harbor-front, and in the shipping offices and the agencies of the real-estate brokers of the sea, but we could find nothing of the sort of craft we needed.

There were schooners, of course, but the only steamer available was an ungainly freighter, for which a prohibitive price was asked.

We gave it up for the day and went back to our hotel, where I hoped to see Jessie again. I had thought of a hundred things to say, and I was determined to make another effort to justify myself.

But Pill went up to her room, was there a quarter of an hour, and came back, looking troubled.

"She insists on going back to Goldendale to-night. What's the matter with her? Can't you tell me just what your disagreement was about?"

So I told him, and he listened gravely.

"You were a great fool to break out like that," he remarked, "and a bigger one to tell of it. I'd have expected more sense from you, Dick. The thing was all over and couldn't be helped, and you should have kept quiet about it. Of course, Jess takes it hard, and no wonder. I'd be mighty sorry if anything happened to break off this affair. I'll go up and try to reason with her some more—try to get her to stay over till to-morrow, anyway."

But Jessie left San Francisco that night, and I was not allowed to go to the station with them. Her good-by was almost inaudible through her thick veil, and her hand felt cold in its glove.

I did not sleep well that night. I was bitterly angry with myself for more than one reason, and I was filled with a cold rage against the *señorita*.

The thought of Jessie brought no anger, but only a sense of hopeless loss, and this lasted me all through a white night and a busy morning.

For Pill and I resumed our search for a vessel as soon as business had begun in shipping circles. We were beginning to think that we would have to hire a schooner or try some other port, when a streak of luck came our way at last.

We heard of the Chrysalis, that she might perhaps be hired, and we tracked her down to her agent's office.

The Chrysalis was an ocean-going steamer, built and fitted as a yacht by a now bankrupt and forgotten millionaire, and she was capable of making fifteen knots an hour and of crossing the Pacific, if necessary. She had been laid up since winter, but we were assured that she was in perfect trim and needed only to coal.

She would cost us four hundred dollars a month, and we would have to insure her and supply everything. But I did not anticipate that the voyage would last more than two months at most.

We did not have the money to close the deal, and we did not know yet whether Dolan was going to advance the funds. By the time we had looked the yacht over it was noon, and I started for the Plaza Hotel to learn what the Irishman intended to do.

The *señorita* hurried bewitchingly to meet me when I entered her sitting-

room, but I was effectually hardened against her fascinations now. She detected the change in my manner and stopped half-way.

"Well, what does Dolan say, Miss Ranon?" I began curtly.

She looked at me curiously, silently.

"I made a fool of myself yesterday," I added. "I was insane, I think. I beg you to pardon me; it won't happen again."

"You've seen Jessie!" she exclaimed.

"Please don't bring in her name," I interposed.

The woman's face suddenly seemed to change and harden under its superficially smiling mask.

"It doesn't seem to have occurred to you that I'm not particularly proud either of what happened yesterday. I expected an apology from you, of course. I was doubtful whether to pardon you, but you put the matter so gracefully that I really can hardly help it.

"I've been sick with the shame of the whole thing," she went on, after a pause. "You didn't know me, you see, if you thought that I was going to weep and plead. Listen, Mr. Shields. If you can meet me on a business footing while we are partners, well and good. If not, we had better call it off, and you can find your capital elsewhere."

She had turned the tables on me so promptly that I was dumfounded. But I caught the impression that she had the capital.

"Business it is." I said. "I infer that you've got the money."

"Dolan has written to his correspondent here to furnish what we need, up to four thousand dollars. I'll introduce you to him and he will pay the bills. Dolan himself can't come over for a day or two. Have you got a ship in view?"

"Just what we want," said I, delighted to get back to a footing of pure business. "Steam-yacht, six hundred tons, costing four hundred dollars a month. We have to coal her, and buy supplies, mining tools, and so forth, and hire a captain and a crew. I fancy there won't be much left of Dolan's four thousand."

"Perhaps he'd stand for a little more. Come out with me and I'll make you solid with his agent here."

From that moment the *señorita* was all business—keen, alert, frank, and masculine. We called for Pill, and I presented him to Miss Ranon.

He had trouble in concealing his unbounded admiration, and whispered to me at the first opportunity:

"Ain't she a stunner? Don't blame you. Do the same myself."

I was afraid that he would fall into the snare next; but there was little time for sentiment that day, or on the following days. We engaged the Chrysalis, sending the bills to Dolan's correspondent, according to instructions, and ordered her to be coaled as quickly as possible.

We engaged a skipper, a middle-aged New Englander named Hart, who was out of a berth and glad to take a temporary job to fill in time. His hard, dry face struck me as honest, and we had reason afterward to be glad that my instinct was correct.

He was able to help us to a couple of engineers and a crew of eight men, and we had them aboard the yacht the same day to superintend coaling. Meanwhile, Pill and I scoured the city, ordering supplies, tools, weapons, and having a great safe installed in the yacht. It is no small task to get ready for even a short cruise, and three thousand dollars went like melting snow.

Dolan came down twice for a few hours, looked over the yacht, was introduced as our partner to the captain, and went back to Sacramento again.

Meanwhile, I had found time for the indispensable duty of reading up at the State library on the habits of icebergs and the directions of the Pacific Ocean currents. When I finished my calculations I had them verified by the meteorological office, and the resulting information was that the iceberg should then have reached a point about four hundred miles off the coast, and in a northwest direction from Seattle.

We should reach it from San Francisco in four or five days, and, luckily for us, it was big enough to be seen from afar.

It appeared impossible to get off in less than three days more. But that afternoon while we were aboard the yacht a telegram arrived for me, sent on

from the hotel. It was from Goldendale, and read:

Miss Gordon badly hurt. Tell her brother, and both come at once.
SPRAGUE, M.D.

CHAPTER XX.

OUTWITTED.

I GLANCED at my watch, and rushed to find Pill.

"There's no Dr. Sprague at Goldendale, so far as I know," he said. "Seems to me a new doctor has just come there, though," he added.

"There'll be a train for there in half an hour," I broke in. "We'd better try to catch it."

I was in a terrible state of perturbation, for my first idea was that Jessie had made some attempt on her life. Evidently, Pill thought of the same thing.

"We oughtn't to have let her go back alone," he said, and we started for the hotel, where we clutched a few things and raced for the station.

We caught the train as it was pulling out.

That was a nightmare journey. The train was a slow one; we might as well have waited for the express four hours later, but neither of us was in a condition to stand waiting. It was hard enough to bear those hours of travel, first through the deepening twilight and then pitch darkness, full of horrible possibilities as the train banged and rattled over the mountain roadway.

Neither of us spoke much. We sat in the smoking-car and consumed a great many cigars, consulting our watches every quarter of an hour.

The train was late; I remembered that that train was usually late, and it was almost midnight when we reached Goldendale.

There were few people at the station, and we spoke to none of them, but jumped into a hack and were driven as fast as possible to Pill's house.

The place was totally dark.

We stopped, hesitating, at the gate. I had expected to find the house awake.

"They must have taken her away," muttered Pill; but there was no hospital in the town, and his words sounded ominous.

Pill knocked, at first timorously, then more loudly.

After a long interval I heard faint steps coming down the stairs, and the glow of a light shone through the keyhole. The lock clicked back; my flesh fairly crawled with dread—and the door was opened by Jessie, in her dressing-gown, holding a lamp.

"Oh, Pill!" she cried, almost dropping the lamp. "Is anything wrong?"

"Are you all right, Jess? Have you been hurt, or sick?" demanded her brother.

"No. What did you—"

"What does this wire mean, then?" and Pill pulled the crumpled yellow paper out of his pocket.

Jessie glanced at it, still standing in the doorway.

"Why, there isn't any doctor named Sprague in town. You surely don't think that I sent it?"

"Let's go inside," said Pill. "No, certainly not, Jess. The question is, who did?"

"Maybe there's another Miss Gordon here," I suggested, and we grasped at that improbable chance of error.

"Well, there's nothing to do now but wait till morning. You'd better go back to bed, Jess," said Pill to his sister. "We'll find out later who sent the message."

Jessie slipped away, and we heard her busied for some time about the up-stairs regions, preparing rooms for us. But we did not go to bed for a couple of hours; the reaction from our nervous excitement was still too strong, and I felt, somehow, the presence of treachery overhanging us. Yet I could not see just how we could be injured by our journey. The Chrysalis was not nearly ready to sail, and we could be spared for a few hours as well as not.

Next morning we went straight to the telegraph-office, where we learned that no such message as the one I had received had been filed at Goldendale.

This put a new face on the matter. Pill and I looked at each other in consternation. There was a local train for San Francisco at nine o'clock, and a fast one at noon.

"All the same," said Pill, "I can't see how we can miss anything of any account. I really ought to stay here for a couple of hours, for I left things in any old sort of shape when I rushed off to meet you, and there are one or two matters that I absolutely must look after."

"We'll get there almost as soon, anyway, if we wait for the express at noon," I agreed; and while we were talking the nine o'clock train came through, and we foolishly let it go.

We spent the morning at the *Bonanza* office, which was in charge of our head compositor as temporary editor. I must confess that the copy of the paper he had got out since Pill's departure was in no way worse than usual.

Pill emerged from a study of the books with the bad temper that the operation always gave him, and we went home for an early lunch. We reached the station at a quarter to twelve, and learned that the noon train had been canceled for a week past. The next one for San Francisco did not leave till seven o'clock.

Then I did, indeed, have a terrible foreboding of catastrophe.

"I felt as if we were doing wrong to let that first train go," said Pill in dismay. "Now, we can't get back to town till the latter part of the night, and God knows what's happening."

"I don't see that anything very bad can happen," I replied to cheer him, though I felt little cheer myself.

The train was a slow one, and would take at least eight hours to make the journey.

It turned out to be late as well. It left Goldendale an hour and a half behind time, and it was after six o'clock when we reached San Francisco next morning. It was foggy, dark, and raining a little.

A street-car from the station took us straight to the docks. We walked a hundred yards and turned through the familiar gate.

The slip where the yacht had been berthed was empty. Men were at work cleaning up the wharf.

"Where's the Chrysalis?" Pill demanded breathlessly from one of these laborers.

"Sailed last night," replied the man, without looking up.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST STAKE.

"WHAT?" Pill roared in a terrible voice of rage, despair, and incredulity.

"Sailed last night. Don't you know what that means? Gone to sea," repeated the fellow sulkily.

I glanced about, half dazed. My eye fell upon a man I knew, whom we had employed on various jobs about the yacht.

"What's all this, Wilson?" I cried. "The yacht hasn't sailed without us, has she?"

"She's sailed, sure enough, sir," replied the man. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Everything's wrong, by Heavens!" yelled Pill. "Why, she didn't have her coal in her. How did she get off?"

"Coaled yesterday, sir. They sure hustled. Never saw a ship take her coal so quick, barring a war-ship, of course. Sailed about two o'clock this morning, they tell me."

"By thunder, that girl of yours has done us!" raged Pill. "She and that Irishman have got clean away without us!"

"Did you see her sail? Was there a lady on board?" I asked.

The man had not seen her go out. We hunted up a cab, drove madly to the Plaza Hotel, and learned that Miss Ranon had departed the evening before, leaving no address.

From the hotel we flew back to the wharf. No one there knew anything. None of the men then at work had seen her sailing. There was only the certain fact that she must be at that moment a hundred miles or so out to sea, headed for the floating fortune.

But Pill's face lighted up suddenly.

"Why, they can't do very much, after all. They don't know where to find the berg."

"Yes, they do. I told Miss Ranon, if she remembers it," I groaned.

"You stupendous ass!" Pill managed to get out, and choked.

We paid off our cab and walked hope-

lessly back toward the Templeton Hotel, where we still had our rooms.

The game was lost, then, irrevocably. We had not money enough to hire any craft that would have the ghost of a chance of overtaking the Chrysalis, and there was no time to look for capital and outfit another expedition.

And it had been all my fault. I seemed to have piled one act of folly on another, so that I had ruined our golden prospect, lost the love of Jessie, and had probably made wreck of Pill's life, for the false note in the Goldendale bank could hardly be redeemed now.

"Pill," I said, "say something. Curse me—kick me. I'm the rottenest partner that any man was ever cursed with."

Pill looked at me, and his haggard face softened.

"Never mind, old boy. You did your best to get me out of my fix, and you almost pulled it off. We'll pull through, somehow. I'll try to beg off from Hollis—get him to give me time to square it. Perhaps he'll let me make a fresh start somewhere. If not, I'll send Jess away and keep her out of it."

My heart sickened at the dreary prospect. I searched wildly about for some means of retrieving our position, and found none.

At that moment there was no risk that I would not have taken — no chance, however desperate, that I would not have welcomed. But there was not even a chance.

At the hotel the clerk gave me a letter which had arrived the day before. I did not recognize the stiff handwriting; but it turned out to be a note from Hart, our New England skipper, which read:

> Your partner, Mr. Dolan, came aboard this morning with your letter. Sorry you can't sail with us, but we will go to sea to-night, according to your instructions. Your partner is a driver, for sure. He's put thirty extra men on to get the stuff into her. Hope everything is all right.

The last sentence seemed to indicate a possible doubt. I handed the letter to Pill.

"Forged a letter from you!" he exclaimed. "Easy to do, for Hart had never seen your writing, I suppose."

"And a forged telegram. Forgery seems to be Dolan's specialty. The whole thing is clear enough now. We've been allowed the privilege of getting Dolan's ship ready for him, and now he sails away for the plunder."

Pill's face turned a dark red.

"Dick," he said with deadly deliberation, "we'll just watch for these friends of ours when they come back. We'll lay for them, and if they land anywhere on this Pacific coast I'll have that fellow's life."

My own blood leaped with responsive passion at the idea of a hand-to-hand struggle, pistols and knives, on the deck of the yacht, at the thought of holding Dolan at the end of my revolver. Little mercy would I show him.

But this effervescence of impotent rage passed, and we fell gradually into dull depression. Nothing was left but the sickening reality of helplessness and defeat.

We sat down in the hotel smoking-room and smoked, looked out of the windows, and hardly spoke. I picked up one newspaper after another from the tables and looked at them mechanically.

They were full of the sensation of the Chicago wheat corner. At that time I scarcely knew what I read, but the staring head-lines photographed themselves on my memory. I can see them now:

> July Wheat Still Soaring. Market closed yesterday at $1.78. Bear Failures Reported.

The now historical attempt of the daring Minneapolis miller to corner the wheat market was the only subject that day, but I glanced down the newspaper columns without caring to understand them.

But as I looked over paper after paper my eye at last caught something that vaguely interested me. I read it, at first with half my attention, then a light—the wildest flicker of imagination—rose upon me, and I reread it with my whole mind.

Then I handed the paper to Pill.

(To be continued.)

BEATING THE MAIL.

By LITTELL McCLUNG.

A statement on impulse that brought dilemma in its wake.

"MERCIFUL Dan Cupid!" I ejaculated, as I looked out of my apartments into an unclouded summer sky. "Thirty years old to-day, and still living a wretched bachelor—just think of it! But I'll be miserable no longer. By Venus, Juno, and all the amorous goddesses, I *will* extract a little comfortable happiness out of this mundane existence by asking some fair daughter of Eve to wear orange-blossoms for me!"

But who should the fair lady be? Who *could* she be? This question corrugated my brow as I turned to brush my hair.

Then my glance fell on the photograph of one of the several handsome girls that adorned my walls. There it rested a moment, caught by the charm of the figure enclosed in an old-gold frame.

Who should she be? Why, who else could she be, who else in the world but the girl in the golden frame—Mildred Van Dresser?

Stately and beautiful, with sparkling blue eyes, and masses of light-brown hair, Mildred was a catch for any man. Mildred was companionable and considerate. Besides, Mildred was lovable, and, oh, yes—Mildred's whiskered papa owned a seat on the Stock Exchange and was the prime mover in a copper company with a smelting plant in Utah and offices in Broad Street.

What a fortunate man I was to know such a girl as Mildred, and how fortunate, too, that she seemed to enjoy my society!

I had known Mildred for some time, and our acquaintance had ripened into warm friendship. At times, I confess, I had conversationally played another rôle than that of a platonic friend, and Mildred hadn't appeared to mind a bit.

But, queer as it may seem, the fly in the ointment was that Mildred had more money than the average, while I was as poor as a financier after an October panic. I feared that Mildred might think I had an eye for her father's easily earned dollars, and for that reason I had been more cautious with Mildred than I might have been otherwise. Above all things, I wanted her to think that I liked her for herself alone.

But now I would be cautious no longer. I would go to see Mildred at once, and after the usual preliminaries I would make love to her in genuine fashion, and end by proposing that she undertake to live happily with me despite her wealth.

Accordingly, that very evening found me going up to the brownstone front that Mildred called hers. As I approached, it occurred to me that before laying siege to the heart of such a creature it might be prudent to see if she really and truly cared anything for me.

On that point, too, I was unduly proud—I couldn't bear the idea of proposing to a girl who didn't love me.

At this point in my reflections I pushed the electric button, and the butler swung open the heavy portal. Yes, Miss Mildred was in, and would be told I had come.

"Well, right here's where I'll test Mildred for signs of devotion," I resolved, as I sank into an easy-chair in a dim corner of the drawing-room.

But how could I test her?

Mildred's step sounded softly on the stairway. I had but a moment to answer the question propounded to myself. Then, of a sudden, the answer came.

How is any girl's affection to be tested? There is only *one* way—bring another girl into the case!

This I would do, come what might.

Mildred was positively radiant in a gown of soft lavender that emphasized the curving lines of her figure and enhanced the blond beauty of her face. Evidently she had been expecting somebody to call, and, as no other suitor showed up in the course of the evening, that somebody must have been I.

Two or three times I was on the verge of beginning a fervent declaration of love, but I had the force to stick by my desire to find out first if Mildred was in love with me. I tried to find an opportunity to make the test, but not until I said good night in the vestibule could I manage it.

Then, in calm and serious tones, I said:

"Mildred, I might as well tell you—I—I'm—almost as good as engaged to a dear little girl!"

"Engaged!" echoed Mildred in astonishment, and in the dim light it seemed to me that an expression of regret darkened her fair face. "Engaged? Why, I never should have dreamed it! Please tell me who she is?"

"Oh, I don't mind telling you," I replied; "that is, if you really want to know."

"I do want to know, very, very much," said Mildred quietly.

"Well, the unfortunate girl is—" But right here I paused perforce. My plan of campaign had not included the name of the girl. Who the mischief was she?

For a fraction of a second I was helpless. Then, like a flash, *one* name came to me—only *one,* but that was enough. In desperation I used it.

"Suppose I should tell you it was *Frances!*"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mildred, "the pretty little girl you introduced one night at the theater—the girl you never say much about?"

"Yes," I answered. "That is Frances."

"Then let me be among the first to congratulate you, dear fellow," said Mildred. "She will surely make you very happy, and I know she will be happy with you."

Mildred's hand clasped mine, and there was a touch of tender sincerity in her tone.

All in a daze, I left. Once on the pavement, I was able to collect my scattered senses. As they came together, I found myself as limp as a dust-rag after a spring cleaning—limp from sheer disgust at myself for what I had done.

I could hardly believe that I had been so idiotic as to tell the girl I had hoped to win that I was betrothed to another. And, worst of all, I had mentioned Frances as the "other girl."

What would Mildred think of me when she found out that I had been so deceitful about such an important thing? Poor little Frances, what would *she* think of me if she found out?

Frances worked in a down-town broker's office for fifteen dollars a week, lived in a flat, and "boarded out." But Frances had meant a great deal to me.

Her simple faith in me, her trust in what I said, and her appreciation of the little things I was able to do for her had given Frances a warm spot in my heart. Frances was pretty, sweet, and entertaining. And she was womanly withal—her contact with the hard business world had not detracted one jot from her delicious femininity.

The wonder was that I hadn't fallen desperately in love with Frances long ago. But she had always been so friendly, so companionable, that I hated to spoil it all by intruding another element.

Paradoxical as it may sound, I actually thought too much of Frances to make love to her. Heavens, how some of our little ideals, mutually agreed upon, would be shattered had she possessed telepathic powers at that moment!

Finally I concluded to worry no more. In the morning I would call up Mildred and tell her in an offhand way not to take too seriously what I had said about being engaged.

The next morning I did call up Mildred, only to be informed that she had gone out for a drive in the park. Later in the day I rang up again, but Mildred had just gone out shopping.

That afternoon late I made it a point to go around to see Mildred. I found her sitting on a side porch talking to the family cat. She greeted me with a motherly sort of smile.

"Hello! How are you?" she exclaimed. "I've just written *her* a little note."

"Written *her* a note?" I asked in surprise. "Written whom a note?"

Mildred's lips curled in scorn.

"Come, now, no bluffing at this stage of the game, young man!" she commanded. "To whom else should I write a note under the circumstances but to Miss Frances—the girl you are going to

marry? I hoped she would always be happy, and said I was sure she always would. I also said one or two nice things about you."

At this I was just about to exclaim, "Why on earth did you do it?" but I caught myself in time, and asked, as calmly as I could, "When did you write this nice note to Frances?"

"Oh, an hour or two ago," answered Mildred. "I posted it as I came up from down-town."

"That was awfully kind of you, Mildred, and I certainly appreciate it," I declared. "And I know Frances will like it, too, for I have often spoken of you to her."

"Have you, really?" asked Mildred. "Now, come up on the veranda, and we will have a nice, long chat about it all."

"I'm sorry," I told her, "but I just can't talk with you now. I started down-town on a business errand, and thought I'd run in and say hello on the way. But I'll come again—to-morrow—good-by!"

"Good-by!" exclaimed Mildred, as I started off. "I'll look for you—late in the afternoon—don't fail."

"Gee—what a mess!" I muttered as I reached the street.

Could anything be worse? Here I had failed to square myself with Mildred, and if Frances ever got that note I'd be sure to lose her, too. But Frances *should not* get the note.

On second thought, though, I realized the absurdity of such a determination. Trying to intercept Uncle Sam's mail is a foolhardy business generally fraught with serious consequences.

No, I would have to save myself with Frances some other way.

Hard and rapidly I thought, but no solution came. For want of anything else to do, I called up Frances's domicile, and was informed that she had gone out visiting, and would not return until seven o'clock. Leaving word that I would be up to see her at 7.01, I hung up the receiver with a vicious bang.

But maybe by that time the note would be in Frances's hands! The mail service is sometimes surprisingly quick. If kind fate only prevented it from arriving by the late delivery, then it would not reach Frances until next morning.

Meanwhile, I might, out of sheer desperation, do something.

Now, more than ever, I began to feel how much Frances meant to me—how highly I valued her esteem, her opinions of me, her lo—but *that* was another question.

Shortly after seven I arrived at Frances's flat. Attired in a snow-white waist and a glossy black skirt, her black hair daintily coiffured by her own hands, her large, dark eyes asparkle, Frances was temptingly pretty.

"My, but I'm glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "I haven't seen you for—let me see—at least three days, and I was getting pretty lonesome. There, now, you see how much I miss you, so it's your solemn duty to come oftener."

At these words from Frances's lips I breathed a sigh of joyous relief. Mildred's note had not arrived, and would not come until next morning. I still had time to do something—if there was anything that could be done.

Yes, there *was* something I could do—it occurred to me in a second—and I would do it, too!

At first opportunity I gently gathered both Frances's hands into my own, and demanded of her in fervent tones if she thought she could ever love me half as much as I loved her.

Whereat Frances didn't get flustered or otherwise act self-conscious, as girls are supposed to do under such circumstances. She just nestled closer and said earnestly and low:

"I'm sure, very sure, that I will always love you, and nobody else in the world!"

And, sweetest of all, her eyes confirmed the words her lips uttered.

As I clasped her tight in my arms I whispered:

"Then, dear little girl, you will actually be engaged to me, and some day you will be a whole lot more?"

"Yes, yes, I am, and I will!" answered Frances.

It was nearly midnight when I kissed Frances good night. I didn't care a rap then what Mildred Van Dresser might think or care about me—for didn't I have Frances? Frances was worth all the rich papas in Broad and Wall Streets combined.

Somehow or other, in my happiness, I

forgot all about Mildred's note—the fatal note that had been the means of bringing me to a realization of what was genuine happiness and what was not.

Next morning I called up Frances.

"How does it feel to be engaged?" I asked.

"Delightful!" came the reply over the wire. "And don't you know I'm getting good wishes already. . . . Yes, really. . . . It was fine, simply *fine,* of you to tell Mildred Van Dresser—I used to be quite jealous of her. . . . You must have called her up at midnight, for I got a splendid note from her first thing this morning!"

LAND OF LOST HOPE.*

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Certain weird experiences of a doctor who responded to a call in the night which made him a prisoner of honor.

CHAPTER XVIII *(continued).*

THE POOL OF SHARKS.

CALLISA stepped toward the edge of the pool. But Berkley sprang forward and drew her back.

"Never!" he cried. "It is horrible—horrible! If you go, Callisa, I go with you!"

He put his arm around her and led her around the ledge, farther from the opening. Neither of them spoke.

On and on they walked, until they came to a place where the caves in the wall seemed deeper and were more frequent. But in none of them could Berkley see light; not one extended through that wall.

Suddenly Callisa stopped abruptly. Berkley looked at her, to find on her face an expression of surprise mingled with horror. He glanced in the direction she indicated.

At the mouth of one of the caverns farther on stood a ghostly figure. It was that of a white woman, middle-aged. Her clothes were in tatters. She stood beside the rocks, gazing at Berkley and the girl.

Berkley uttered an exclamation.

"My cousin!" Callisa whispered. "She was executed many suns ago. Forgive me for remembering the past, master. It is so like the present when one comes back from the dead!"

"Your cousin!" Berkley exclaimed.

He looked toward the ghostly woman again. He rubbed his eyes. Another woman was standing beside her—another —several of them—two or three men! Then it flashed through his mind—here was the solution of the former kodar's letter.

As they watched, one of the women gave a cry, and they all ran forward toward Berkley. Near him they fell upon their knees upon the ground. He heard many exclamations.

"It is a new kodar!"

"Our old kodar—our friend—has passed away."

"It is Callisa! He has brought her here. She has been condemned!"

The natives among them mumbled in their language. The white women and white men got upon their feet and watched Berkley.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed, bewildered.

But they took his words as a threat.

"Do not slay us, master!" they cried. "The other kodar let us live. Do not feed us to the monsters!"

"Have no fear," he replied. "You shall live!"

At that they wept and sang, and made so much noise that Berkley motioned for them to keep silent, fearing that the guards outside would hear and wonder.

"Tell me, one of you," he asked, "what the former kodar has done?"

One stepped forward and explained that the other kodar had been tenderhearted. He had not slain them, but had allowed them to live in the caves. It was a poor living, but better than a horrible death.

The caves were clean. The kodar had

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brought them food. He had told those at court that it was necessary to toss food to the sharks when there were no executions. No one but the kodar and condemned people dare enter the pool, so they had been safe.

"But it has now been many suns since he last came," the narrator continued. "We did not know why. Our food dwindled away, and finally was gone. We lived on scraps. One night one of the men slipped out while the guards were not watching and got some meat; but he did not go again, for fear some one might see him, and thus bring punishment upon our friend, the kodar. The new master will give us food, will he not? We can live on such a very little! It is better than that!"

The woman who had been telling the story pointed to the pool where the sharks played..

"Have no fear!" Berkley repeated. "It is my desire that you live. I bring you another companion. Treat her gently, for I love her well!"

He turned to Callisa.

"Oh, master!" she sobbed, and he clasped her in his arms.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOOMED TO MARRY.

THE guards waiting at the entrance beheld the kodar come forth, his head bent forward. He did not speak to any of them, and they respected his silence.

Superstition held them in its grasp. They dreaded and feared the vicinity of the Pool of Sharks.

The little procession took up its way across the cleared space and through the forest. Presently the main avenue was reached, and they turned toward the palace.

When Berkley was once again in the library his face dropped the expression of sorrow it had worn, and became a countenance in which joy predominated.

Callisa was safe for the time being, but imprisoned with those other creatures. They should not want for food—he would see to that. But they faced a life of misery in that awful spot unless he did something to free them.

He went from the library to the laboratory to mix some drugs. There Begley found him.

"There is trouble, master," he said.

"What do you mean, Begley?"

"Natives have whispered rumors of a strange man who goes among the people on the other side of the island. He is a white man, master. He talks against the king and the laws. At first the natives drove him away and would not listen, but in some strange manner he has influenced them, and they have gathered around him, willing to do his bidding. The natives scarcely understand, but I, who have been to the outside world and know of such things, understand perfectly."

"Well, Begley?"

"He is trying to get the natives to overthrow the laws and attack the king. And—pardon me, master—he is speaking against you."

"He is, eh? What does he say?"

"He is saying how cruel you are. He says you carry out the commands of the king to kill. He has told them you will not be a good, kind kodar, as was the last, but will be harsh and cruel. He has told them that you will not let the young men marry, and that you will soon take the wives from their husbands and the children from their mothers."

"He's a wonderful liar! I suppose this man is—"

"It is Giles, master!"

Berkley smiled.

"Just as I thought," he said. To himself he added: "And just as I wanted it."

"What is to be done?" Begley asked.

"What do you think, Begley—is the matter serious enough for consideration?"

"I fear it is, master. If he works upon the superstition of the natives, they will do what he directs."

"Leave the matter to me; I'll do something immediately," said Berkley.

Begley left the room. But he was back again immediately.

"There is a messenger from the king waiting," he reported. "His majesty desires your immediate presence at a conference."

"Tell the messenger I'll come at once."

Begley departed again and Berkley began to prepare for the trip across the square. He had hoped that Giles would

incite the natives to revolt, for in civil war, if all worked out well, lay his own salvation, and at a cost not great, considering that not many lives would be lost and the laws given by a tyrannical maniac would be overthrown.

Berkley found the procession waiting at the veranda, took his place in it, and crossed the square. This time the king left the throne-room when the kodar arrived, and motioned for Berkley to accompany him. The conference was to be private.

Berkley followed the king to a small apartment opening from the main hall.

"Kodar," said the king, when they had been seated, "have you heard the rumors from the other side of the island?"

"I have, your majesty."

"It is this maniac, Giles. He is seeking to arouse the people. They do not know what strife means, kodar. But it is in their hearts, as it is born in the heart of every living being. The smoldering fire needs but the spark, and our laws will be broken, our kingdom overthrown, the nation will be without a guiding hand, chaos will reign, famine and pestilence will slay the people. You, who came to us from the outside world, know what these things mean better than I."

"I know," answered Berkley.

"There is a great quantity of gold stored in the palace. It is worth nothing in this land, but in the outside world, I have been told, it accomplishes wonders. This man Giles would seize it, I feel sure, and to do so would steep his hands in blood."

"Perhaps that is not the reason for his treason," said Berkley.

"Speak, kodar."

"It has come to my ears, your majesty, that this man Giles loves your daughter, the Princess Bretina. Knowing that you have ordered that she shall marry me, he has, in his despair, attempted to stir up the natives. By this means he hopes, I believe, to attract your attention and cause the wedding to be postponed."

"Scoundrel!" cried the king.

"I beg your pardon?" said Berkley.

"Not you, kodar, but this sailor who dares go against our authority."

"But, suppose the Princess Bretina returns his love?"

"She dare not. Even though she did, it would make no difference. Is every one going against our laws?"

The king's brow was wrinkled as he paced back and forth across the room.

"Kodar," he went on, stopping in front of Berkley, "this rebellion must be put down, and without resorting to force. I have a plan."

"I shall be glad if your majesty will explain."

"The people of this land have the greatest respect for the marriage bond. If Giles is attempting revolution because of his love for the Princess Bretina, as you suggest, his plans can be nipped in the bud and peace restored by one act."

"You will let him marry her?" Berkley cried.

"No!" thundered the king. "But she shall marry you—she shall marry you—*to-morrow!*"

"Your majesty!"

"To-morrow!" cried the king. "The wedding ceremony of the kodar is impressive. The superstitious natives will come to see it, and it will awe them. There shall be a feast for every one. Then, when you and Bretina are husband and wife, Giles will be powerless to cause trouble. Bretina will be married—that will settle everything with the people.

"Giles's power will be broken. We will then have only the man to contend with, and not his followers. We can have him captured, and you shall have the pleasure of conducting him to the Pool of Sharks."

"I am not ready to take a wife," protested the kodar.

The king halted before him.

"Kodar," he said, "I command that you wed the Princess Bretina at high sun to-morrow. I shall order everything—you may discontinue your duties until after the ceremony. The servants will prepare my palace and yours."

"At least, your majesty, give me more than a day!"

"Kodar, I repeat, I command you to marry the Princess Bretina at high sun to-morrow. You understand?"

"I understand, your majesty," said Berkley.

Within a short time he left the palace and crossed the square to his own.

He knew it was useless to refuse. They

would compel him to go through the ceremony. And he could not join hands with Giles, for in doing that he would spoil everything.

Giles had been arousing the natives against the kodar—if the kodar joined their ranks they would have no cause for which to fight. Berkley's only hope for success lay in the possibility of Giles and his followers making a move before the hour set for the ceremony, and this seemed unlikely.

He might have gone to the Pool of Sharks, but that would mean imprisonment, with no hope of ultimate escape. There was but one thing to do—think out a plan whereby the ceremony might be postponed.

One thing gave him a little hope—Bretina would be informed immediately of the impending ceremony; she would communicate with Giles, probably, and Giles, if he could induce the natives to do so, would try to prevent the marriage.

Berkley sat in the library for an hour, trying to think of a plan. Through the window he watched the king's palace.

There seemed to be a great deal of excitement there. Guards, their shoulders bound with purple sashes, which meant that they were messengers, left the palace and departed into the forest, following the avenue. They were informing the natives of the ceremony of the next day and inviting them to the feast.

Officials of the court hurried from the palace to all quarters of the island. Men were building a large pavilion in the center of the square, working swiftly, laughing and singing as they worked.

The afternoon passed quickly. Berkley had thought of no plan; he hoped Giles would strike in time.

The darkness came finally, but the men in the square worked by the light from scores of torches.

CHAPTER XX.

THE KISS OF DEATH AGAIN.

In one instance Berkley had reasoned correctly. Giles was not long in learning that the king had ordered the marriage of Berkley and Bretina to take place the following day.

When he heard of it, the sailor was in the midst of a small crowd of his followers. The king's messenger who informed them of the affair was badly beaten before he could make his escape.

Then Giles implored the natives to avenge their wrongs and prevent the marriage. He told them that such an act would make the king recognize their power, that his majesty would thereafter be afraid to enforce the law against them.

As soon as he was alone Giles wrote a note to Bretina, and called a native boy, who had done such things for him before, to smuggle it to her. This boy, realizing that something exciting was occurring, wanted to remain where he was, so he bribed another boy to undertake the task.

The boy he bribed was the one who had carried the notes between Giles and Berkley. He got his directions mixed; and that is how the kodar, sitting in the library after dark, received a note intended for the Princess Bretina, which read:

> I have heard, my princess, of what the king has done. Have no fear, for I shall rescue you. Meet me to-night at the usual hour under the big palm on the avenue, and there I will explain my plans.

Berkley replaced the note in its wrapper, gave it to the boy, and told him it was to go to the Princess Bretina, at the king's palace. He told the boy to say to the guards, and to the waiting-woman of the princess, that the letter was from him, but not to tell the princess herself.

After the boy had gone, Berkley sprang from his chair and paced the room, thinking.

A plan had flashed into his head—a plan that would at once prevent the marriage and anger Giles and his followers the more. He determined to carry it into execution.

He notified the king by messenger that he would pay an imperative call immediately, that something of great importance had happened. The messenger soon returned with word for the kodar to cross the square.

Berkley allowed his face to assume a look of deep anger and mortification. When he left the escort and entered the king's room his majesty could see at a glance that something was deeply troubling the kodar.

"You have news, kodar?" he began.

"News! News!" Berkley acted like a man beside himself with rage. "Excellent news, your majesty! What manner of woman is this which you would have me wed?"

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the king.

"What manner of woman is she? Would you have your kodar take as wife a breaker of the laws, a woman who forgets the dignity of her position, who communicates in terms of intimacy with the common rabble?"

"Explain! Explain!" exclaimed the king. "You are talking of the Princess Bretina?"

"I am," replied Berkley. "I am talking of the woman you would have me marry. It has already been announced that we are to be married at high sun to-morrow, has it not? The Princess Bretina should respect the man she is to wed, should she not? Even if she did not respect the man, she should respect the kodar, should she not?"

"Explain!" cried the king again.

"She does not respect me!" exclaimed Berkley. "She disregards your commands, your majesty! Even at the moment when her wedding hour is arranged she communicates with the common rabble.

"Your majesty, the Princess Bretina, who is not worthy to be your daughter, will to-night steal from her apartments, and go alone along the main avenue to a certain tree. There she will meet a certain man, and they will speak of love.

"He will clasp her in his arms. They will kiss. She will allow it, be glad of it! Such is the woman you would have me wed. Such is the insult you would put upon your kodar, the second man of your kingdom!"

Berkley did it well. He touched the king's heart. He twinged the right chord. His majesty arose with wrath in his eyes.

"Now, by Heaven," he screamed, "if what you tell me is true, she shall die like a common cur! I cannot believe it, kodar! She is my daughter—she has always shown a disposition to obey every law!"

"She has been fooling you," retorted Berkley.

The king's anger rose by leaps.

"Who is the man?" he thundered.

"Giles! The man who is plotting against you—the enemy of the land. That's nice, isn't it? The king's daughter and promised wife of the kodar leagues herself with her father's enemy!"

"Now, by Heaven—" the king began again.

He stopped suddenly, and a look of cunning came into his eyes.

"She shall be watched and guarded," he said. "She shall not leave the palace! Guards shall make the trip instead of her, and seize this man Giles!"

"Allow me to suggest, your majesty," replied Berkley, "that we use another plan."

"What is your plan, kodar?"

"What I have told you is hearsay. Rather, it is information that has come to me in an indirect manner. To do as you say, your majesty, would be to assume that the Princess Bretina is guilty. You would not do me the injustice, your majesty, of causing me to marry the girl with this cloud upon her fair name."

"What do you propose?" the king demanded.

"Let us do nothing to inform the princess that we know of her intrigue. Let us go secretly to this meeting-place, keep in hiding, and await developments. If the princess comes to meet this sailor, we will know she is guilty, and we will be able to capture him. You will have a real reason for having him executed, and his followers, realizing that he is unworthy, will give you their allegiance.

"If, on the other hand, the fair Bretina does not come, then will I admit I have wronged her with my suspicion, and I'll gladly take her as my wife, knowing that she keeps the dignity due her rank and respects her father and her promised husband."

"The plan is good," answered the king. "Where is the meeting-place?"

"At the giant tree beside the main avenue, three-quarters of a mile distant."

"And the time?"

"I do not know that. It is to be some time to-night."

"How can all this be accomplished?"

"We must act, your majesty, in such a manner that no suspicion will be

aroused. Take a guard you trust and steal from the palace to the end of the avenue soon after I have gone. I'll meet you there with Begley, my servant, and one guard. We must not have more, for we want the matter kept secret."

"You are right," said the king, "and it shall be done."

"I'll go at once, then, your majesty!"

"Do so. Meet me within a few minutes at the end of the avenue."

Berkley returned to his palace, called Begley and a strong guard, and the three left the building by a rear entrance, and skirted the edge of the forest until they reached the mouth of the avenue. The king was already there, with an officer of the guard. He signed to Berkley to lead the way.

They walked swiftly, but with as little noise as possible. As they approached the tree Begley was sent ahead, to be sure Giles had not already arrived.

He found no trace of the sailor, and soon the entire party was concealed in the underbrush, within a few feet of the tree and not far from the edge of the avenue.

"Whoever may come to the tree," the kodar commanded, "let there be not the slightest noise by any of you. Keep your eyes and ears open, but your mouths closed. Do not move until his majesty or myself gives the word, then seize any one who is near the tree."

"Why those orders?" the king asked.

Berkley whispered the answer:

"We want to be sure, your majesty. We want to hear what she says, see what she does. Maybe she will tell the sailor that she has determined to be my bride."

"The orders are good," announced the king.

The thought that Berkley wanted Bretina to retrieve herself pleased him. But Berkley had another idea in issuing the orders. He wished affairs to reach a certain climax, without which his plans would not be successful.

An hour passed; then they heard some one walking down the avenue.

It was a man, and he came from the interior. He stopped beneath the tree, looked around him carefully, then leaned against the trunk, waiting.

"It is Giles," Berkley whispered to the king.

They waited a few more minutes. Then they heard some one coming from the opposite direction, from the square.

Before she reached the tree, they saw it was a woman. Giles stepped from the shadows to meet her. She ran to him quickly.

"You are late," he said.

"I couldn't get away sooner. It was difficult to leave the palace. So many people are about."

"Preparing for the wedding, I suppose?" said Giles scornfully.

"Yes," she answered.

"And you'll marry the kodar?"

"The king has commanded it."

"You love him!" Giles cried accusingly.

"You know I do not. My love is yours."

"Yet you will marry him!"

"The king commands it."

"Come with me to the other side of the island. My people will welcome you. They will fight for you—fight the kodar, the king—"

"I cannot," she said.

"Why not? The king has commanded you to marry a man you do not love."

"I cannot raise my hand against him. He is my father."

"But you love me?"

"Yes."

"You see," said Berkley to the king.

His majesty was beside himself with anger. He would have emerged from cover and confronted the pair, but Berkley put a hand upon his arm.

"Wait, your majesty; perhaps we may hear more," he said.

Giles was holding Bretina by the hand.

"Go back," he was saying, "and prepare for the ceremony as though you were willing. Leave it to me. You will never be the wife of the kodar."

"I do not understand," she replied.

"I shall rescue you in time."

"You'll not harm the king?"

"No; your father shall not be harmed. But I may harm the kodar."

"I pray you will be in time," she said.

"I'll be in time. Go, now, before you are missed. I was going to tell you our plans, but it will not be necessary. Trust me; I'll be there in time."

"I trust you," she answered.

For a moment they looked at each other

without speaking. Then Giles drew her toward him. A second later their lips met.

Those in concealment could see the action plainly. The king sprang to his feet.

"Seize them!" he cried.

The guards sprang out, followed by the king and Berkley. Bretina was seized by Begley; the guards fell upon Giles, who struggled and fought like a madman.

The king, bent in sorrow, leaned weakly against the tree. As soon as the two prisoners were secure, one of the guards lit a torch. Its light revealed Berkley, the kodar, standing in the middle of the avenue, one hand uplifted, like the figure of a judge passing sentence.

As they looked at him, he stepped toward them and lowered his arm. His words were not spoken in a loud tone, but they penetrated to the very souls of those before him.

"*It was the kiss of death!*" he cried.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FIRST BATTLE.

THERE was dead silence for a moment, then Bretina sobbed suddenly, Giles let an oath pass his lips, the king gave a gasp of sorrow and despair.

"It is the kiss of death!" repeated Berkley. "Will your majesty pass sentence?"

The king did not speak for a time. The sorrow of losing two daughters in as many days was great.

But he realized what Berkley wanted him to realize—that he did not dare withhold sentence; he was forced to uphold the law, or else declare the law to be worthless. And to do the latter would be to wreck his country.

"She shall die," said the king slowly.

Bretina cried out again. Giles struggled to escape the guards who held him.

"She shall die before seven suns have risen; it is the duty of the kodar to name the hour."

Berkley named it instantly.

"To-morrow at high sun!" he exclaimed.

Bretina was weeping now; Giles struggling more than before.

"To the palace!" the king ordered.

They began their short journey, Begley leading the way with Bretina, next the guards with Giles, then Berkley and the king.

Half the distance they covered without mishap. Then Giles suddenly burst his bonds, and, with a powerful blow, stretched one of the guards on the ground. Before the others could recover from their surprise, he had wrenched himself free and was fleeing down the avenue. Soon he disappeared in the underbrush. One of the guards began to follow, but Berkley called him back.

"You cannot find him now," he said.

"Fools!" cried the king. "You have let him escape! Take men at daylight and seek him; and unless you bring him in a prisoner you shall all suffer."

Then they went on, and finally reached the square.

Giles fled to the other side of the island and aroused the natives. He addressed them in their own language—told them that the kodar was going to execute another of the king's daughters, the one the kodar was expected to marry. He dwelt upon the kodar's cruelty.

"He will slay all of us!" he cried. "He plots against the king! His majesty's eyes are red with weeping, but what can he do? The kodar is a wise man who plots well; he dares the king to refuse to obey the law. He is to lead the Princess Bretina to the Pool of Sharks at high sun to-morrow."

There was much murmuring among the natives. Giles was doing his work well.

"Who will give battle to the cruel kodar?" he cried. "Who will follow me to rescue the Princess Bretina, to slay the kodar, to help the king in his difficulty?"

"All of us! We will follow the new master!" they cried.

Throughout the night Giles kept them in a state of fanaticism. They sang and danced around huge fires. He stirred the native savagery in their blood. They tore great clubs from the trees, sharpened stones. There were no weapons save these torn from nature.

When morning broke, more natives had joined his band. While the majority danced and howled and found weapons, Giles held a council with several of the

leading men among them. They arranged a plan of attack.

Two hours before high sun they were stealing in single file through the forest toward the trail that ran from the main avenue to the Pool of Sharks.

Berkley, who had slept well, arose satisfied with everything. Bretina thought she faced an unknown death; the king thought so; Giles, who prepared his natives for a battle and a rescue, thought so.

None but Berkley knew that Bretina faced no real danger, that he was merely getting her to the Pool of Sharks to leave her there safe, but out of the way, so he would not have to marry her. He had depended upon that kiss of death. And everything had turned out right.

He expected Giles would do something after Bretina had been taken to the pool. Angered by her supposed death, he would cause a revolution in reality, and in the chaos Berkley might get a chance to escape from the island with Callisa and reach the outside world again.

There was one thing, however, that he feared. Should Giles be successful in keeping himself and Bretina from reaching the Pool of Sharks, all would be lost. Therefore Berkley went to the king, explained the danger to the government, as he put it, and requested that the guards, for the first time in their lives, be armed with cutlases which were stored on board the Manatee.

Captain Stomble was ordered ashore, and the commands of the kodar and the king were communicated to him. His sailors brought the weapons, and taught the guards how to use them.

The sailors, also, were ordered to form a part of the procession to the Pool of Sharks, to be on hand in case of trouble. There were few of them who did not hate Giles, who was by no means a kind mate, and they promised to serve well.

At noon the keeper of the ceremonies brought the guards and the condemned girl to the veranda of the kodar's palace. Bretina was weeping. She did not have the courage of her sister. It was necessary for two guardsmen to support her.

This time the kodar did not march ahead, but the lead was taken by the sailors. People lined the avenue as before, and though they sang, it was easy to see there had been a change.

The rumors of what Giles had done had spread. The new kodar was looked upon as a butcher. Berkley knew these people were chafing under the yoke they wore. They needed but a touch to become bloodthirsty demons eager for revenge.

The trail was reached, and the procession turned into it. Half of the distance to the pool was traversed without a hostile move being made.

Then suddenly the air was filled with shrill cries of anger and rage. From the forest on either side, just before the clearing was reached, sprang naked natives, bearing clubs, sharp stones, any weapon upon which they could lay their hands. With Giles at their head, they swarmed down upon the procession.

Captain Stomble called an order to his sailors. They fell back upon the main party, while the guards behind closed up, and the officials and the doomed girl found themselves the center of a whirling, fighting, cursing mass of human beings.

Giles and his natives fought like demons. The cutlases flashed and soon began to show red. Here and there a native fell with his head split open; here and there a sailor or guardsman went down, brained by a club or a stone.

And above the din of conflict rang shrieks and curses and groans. Bretina had covered her face with her hands.

Berkley, seeing that the battle was slowly but surely going against Giles and his natives, gave the command to move forward into the clearing and toward the entrance to the Pool of Sharks.

When the open space was gained, the guards and sailors had a better chance to fight with greater effect. The natives were giving way. Giles was unable to rally them. They would not face the cutlases of the guards in the open.

The entrance to the pool was reached. The guards and sailors, except a few who remained behind to protect the keeper of the ceremonies, began to pursue the natives, intent upon driving them back from the trail. Berkley told Captain Stomble not to go far, that he would soon come from the pool, and would wish to return to the palace immediately.

Then he grasped Bretina by the arm, and they passed into the entrance.

The girl was so weak from fear that she could scarcely stand. Berkley supported her, and guided her through the passage to the interior. When she saw the peculiar formation of the pool, and the black water beneath, she began to scream.

Her cries brought out those who inhabited the caves. They ran toward the kodar, Callisa the first among them. She saw Berkley holding Bretina in his arms.

"So!" she cried, stopping before him.

"Callisa," he said, "your sister has been condemned. I have brought her here to you. Tell her that she is safe. See! She is crazed with fear."

But jealousy flashed in Callisa's eyes.

"Why was she condemned?" she asked.

"The kiss of death condemned her!"

"You?" Callisa screamed.

"No," he replied softly. "It was Giles, the sailor, the man she loves."

"Why do you not execute her?" the girl demanded.

"Do you want to see your sister die, Callisa?"

"It is the law, is it not?"

"I saved you, did I not?"

"But you loved me—you said."

"I would have saved you even though I had not loved you!"

She looked at him for a moment, then stepped forward.

"I believe you," she said. "Forgive me, my master; I love you much!"

"You are freely forgiven," he answered.

Callisa put her arms around Bretina.

"You are safe, my sister," she said. "The good kodar will not let you die! See! Here is our cousin, and all the others! Not one of them has been executed. Don't you understand? The old kodar was kind, too!"

Bretina ceased her sobbing, and looked around. When her eyes saw the black water, she shuddered and drew away from the edge. But Callisa continued to speak to her, and the other women came forward, and in time Bretina's fear was gone.

Then Berkley told them he would have to leave them. Callisa walked some distance with him. Presently they could hear the shouts outside, and the shrieks of wounded men.

"What does it mean, my master?" Callisa asked.

"It means that soon we shall be free to go away from this place, to my country, where we may be happy," he replied.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BURN THE PALACE!"

WHEN Berkley emerged from the Pool of Sharks, the sailors and guards were awaiting him, and nearly all traces of the recent conflict had been removed. The injured men had been carried away; the few dead had been taken aside into the forest, to be left under guard until they could be given proper burial.

The procession began the return journey.

Guards told Berkley that Giles and his men had scattered and gone to the other side of the island. But as the procession reached the main avenue it was met by a native guard, whose clothes were covered with blood and dirt, and who was so weak from running that he could scarcely stand. He prostrated himself before the kodar.

"Master, the king is in danger!" he cried.

"What do you say?" cried Berkley, pressing forward.

"The king—in danger! The mad sailor and his natives are surrounding the palace. Their cries are fearful to hear. It is feared they will attack the king."

"You are sure of this?"

"I was sent, master, to bid you hasten."

"Forward!" cried Berkley.

He took a cutlas from one of the guards, and himself led them on. Captain Stomble marched beside him.

As they neared the square they could hear the cries of the besiegers. They traveled faster. Shrieks and curses and groans came to their ears, for Giles, working upon the natives' desire for revenge for their comrades slain, had made demons of them.

When Berkley and his men turned into the square they saw the followers of Giles grouped about their leader in the center of it. Giles was speaking to them, and they were cheering them on. It was

evident that they were preparing to attack.

"Scatter them!" Berkley commanded.

Sailors and guards rushed forward, giving their weird cries. The natives turned and saw them. Before Berkley could realize it the battle was on again, the fearful din awakening a thousand echoes from the forest.

Berkley hesitated a moment, then sprang into the fight, wielding his cutlas with terrible effect. Gradually the natives gave way before the sailors and guards. Giles was calling something to them in the native language. It was apparently an order to retreat, for gradually they worked their way to the mouth of the avenue, and began to disappear into the forest.

Soon the majority were gone. The guards held a dozen prisoners, but these were released by order of the kodar. There was no time to care for prisoners, no men to spare to guard them.

As soon as the forest had swallowed the native horde, Berkley ordered the guards and sailors to the royal palace, to see how it fared with the king.

But the king was not there. Frightened at the descent of Giles and his natives, his majesty had feared for his life, and had taken refuge in the kodar's palace, thinking the men would not search for him there.

And there Berkley found him, a wrinkled old man, bowed with sorrow, shaking with fear. He was huddled at the foot of a divan.

"Is the danger over?" he faltered, when Berkley entered.

"I fear not, your majesty. We must make preparations for a defense."

"I deemed it would be safer here."

"Here, or in your own palace, it is the same," replied Berkley. "We must defend one; we cannot hope to defend two. The natives are aroused now; some of their comrades have been slain, and they are crying for vengeance. We have not men enough to defend your palace and mine also. So, if your majesty desires, we shall remain here, and fight until the last man is dead."

"It is in your hands, kodar," was the feeble response.

Berkley pitied the old man before him. But it was no time for pity, and Berkley felt that, when the trouble was over, the king would be thankful when he learned that his daughters had not been executed, but were still alive—so thankful that his joy at finding them unharmed would compensate him for the loss of his throne.

Captain Stomble received his orders, and began placing the sailors and guards. From the forest on every side came the cries of the natives. Without doubt they were preparing for an attack on the palace.

In an hour it would be sunset. Berkley hoped there would be an attack and that it would be repulsed before that time. Then, perhaps, it would take Giles some time to rally his men, and there would be no trouble during the night.

Captain Stomble reported to Berkley soon that he had placed his men as well as possible, and that nothing more could be done.

"Guard the two doors at either end of the main hall," Berkley instructed. "I shall place his majesty in one of my rooms, opposite the laboratory. Remember where he is. The keeper of the ceremonies and several guards will be with him. In case the fight goes against you, let the men from either side of the place retreat down the hall to the king's room, and there make their stand."

"Very good, sir," said Captain Stomble.

A guard came from the front veranda at that moment.

"Here is a message, sir, just delivered by a native," he said to Stomble.

The captain took the message and opened it. It was not addressed to any one, but its meaning was clear. It had been written by Giles:

> If the men in the palace will surrender to us the kodar, we will go away, and cause no more trouble. An answer is awaited.

"Take that message to the king!" Berkley commanded.

Captain Stomble did so. But in a few minutes he returned and issued directions to the guard who had brought the message.

"The king says for you to tell the native messenger to inform Giles that the

kodar will not be given up! Say to him also that sentence of death has been passed against him and all his followers.

"The king said that?" Berkley asked, when the guard had gone.

"Our king's fighting-blood is aroused," was the captain's reply. "He is not the sorrowful, weak man he was an hour ago. His body is straight, his mouth firm, his eyes flashing."

"Good!" muttered Berkley to himself.

He paced back and forth through the hall, waiting. Within a few minutes the yells and screams from the forest increased in volume, and he knew that Giles had received the message and had translated it to the natives.

Captain Stomble hurried toward the front veranda. The natives were issuing from the woods, running toward the palace. Berkley hastened to the rear veranda, and found a similar condition there.

The two forces clashed as they had clashed before. Stones were hurled with great force, clubs descended, cutlases flashed red in the light of the sinking sun. It was a gigantic hand-to-hand conflict without modern weapons.

Berkley watched it with interest. He noticed one thing—that the natives were fighting more recklessly than before, and with greater courage, a courage born of fanaticism.

But the battle was too one-sided to last long. Only a few of the enemy had cutlases, which had been seized in the fight near the pool, and with stones and clubs they could not face the guards and the sailors armed with the better weapons.

Gradually the black men were forced back toward the forest. The guards did not follow them far—only far enough to get them at a safe distance from the palace. Then they returned to their stations.

The cries and shrieks continued. Though beaten, the natives were not conquered. Giles could be seen walking among them, urging them to greater endeavor. They were bold enough to advance in the open space between the palace and the edge of the forest to pick up their dead and wounded.

Berkley wondered why they had not attacked the royal palace. There the gold was stored and there the women were in hiding, and there were only a score of guards about it. He mentioned this to Captain Stomble.

"Pardon me, kodar," was the reply, "but it is *you* the natives are trying to get. You see, Giles has made them believe you are cruel, heartless, that you will work hardships upon them. So it is your residence they attack. When he gets them maddened to a certain point and they will do anything he says, then they will forget their original grievance and attack the royal palace, too. But now it is the life of the kodar that they seek."

"I understand," answered Berkley. "Why, then, wouldn't the king be safer in his own palace?"

"Perhaps he would. I understood from a native that Giles has issued orders that no one is to harm the king. But his majesty desires to remain here, and that settles it. You cannot convince him that the natives are not in revolt against him also."

Darkness was beginning to fall now. At the edge of the forest the besiegers had built great fires. Before these they danced in their nakedness, always uttering shrill cries. It resembled the dance of cannibals before a feast.

Suddenly there was a change in the cries. Berkley sprang to a window and looked out. Giles was speaking to the natives again. They were cheering him and glancing at the palace.

"He is telling them they cannot hope to conquer the guards without weapons," Captain Stomble translated, after listening a few moments.

"Then they are going to give it up?" Berkley asked.

"Listen!" said Captain Stomble.

The natives were now crying one sentence over and over again. They were seizing brands from the fires and waving them in the air. Giles was shouting at the top of his voice.

"What are they crying?" Berkley demanded.

Captain Stomble had already left the window and was hurrying to the hall. But he did not need to answer Berkley's question. For in his excitement Giles was

shouting in English, and Berkley's blood chilled when he heard the words:

"Burn the palace! Burn! Burn!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SWIFT HAPPENINGS.

CAPTAIN STOMBLE had hurried to place his men and give them new instructions. Once a firebrand was thrown against the palace, it would burn swiftly, and there would be no hope of saving the building. The king's palace and the other buildings in the square would burn also.

Stomble ordered his men to surround the palace completely, and at such a distance that in order to set fire to the place the natives would have to break through the line. Stomble commanded one side; Berkley the other.

Angered by their previous failures, and urged on by Giles, the natives attacked at once. Time and again they rushed, and were beaten back by the sailors and guards. They fought more desperately now, and were gathering courage.

Not one of them, though, was able to break through the line and reach the palace, and for the time being the greater damage was averted.

Giles withdrew his men again in a short time, and they disappeared in the forest. Their cries died away in the distance; not a sound of them could be heard.

"Some trick," said Berkley to Stomble. "Urge your men to be on their guard, and not to leave their posts, no matter what happens, unless they receive orders from one of us to do so."

Captain Stomble delivered the orders, and they waited. An hour passed. Then the natives emerged from the forest again, and threw more fuel on the dying fires, until the flames leaped as high as the palace and cast a lurid light over the entire square.

It was a trick, as Berkley had guessed, for while those about the fires danced and howled, a hundred naked men crept from the opposite side of the square and upon the guards. They were less than fifty yards away when they were discovered.

The guards raised their cry. The natives sprang to their feet and rushed forward.

It was another hand-to-hand conflict. Now and then a native broke through the line, to be brought down by a slash from a cutlas. But the trick did not work, for the guards on the other side held their posts, as they had been instructed to do, and did not leave that side of the palace unwatched.

Giles hurled his natives on every weak part of the line. He seemed to be everywhere, staying out of the close fighting himself, but revealing generalship that was really wonderful.

Slowly the guards began to give way. They were greatly outnumbered, and the strain was telling. The sailors stood their ground better, but it was evident to Berkley that they could not hold out much longer.

He passed around the word again that if retreat was necessary it was to be accomplished in such a manner that the king would be safe.

Nearer and nearer the palace the natives drove the king's defenders. The change in the battle caused an alteration in their plans, for Giles was heard ordering them not to burn the palace, but to capture it, with its defenders.

Finally the sailors and guards were at the palace doors. And there they made their stand.

The fighting was fierce. The natives seemed not to know fear. Some of them had cutlases now, taken from dead guards and sailors. With these they fought like madmen.

Berkley was beginning to despair. He feared that things had got beyond him. For the first time, he faced real danger.

Then there was a sudden chorus of screams from the natives, and with astonishment Berkley beheld those attacking the palace entrance fall back and flee. He pushed through the guards and to the veranda.

On every side the natives were fleeing, except those who had prostrated themselves upon the ground. And by the light from the fires he saw a woman's form walking straight across the square to the palace door.

It was Callisa!

Callisa, who had met death in the Pool of Sharks, it was supposed, was walking

across the square, and every native who saw her in her white robes fled with superstition close at his heels.

Nor was the flight confined to the men under Giles's command. The native guards rushed to the interior of the palace, the sailors stood like men frozen in terror. Captain Stomble, who was at the other entrance, did not see.

Berkley ran forward to meet Callisa.

"Why did you come?" he asked. "There is danger."

"That is why I came, master! I heard the guards at the pool entrance talking of the fight, of the attack on the palace, and I feared you might meet harm. And so when they went away I escaped and came to you."

"No one must see you," he said. "Slip quickly to the side entrance. I'll let you in and hide you."

He went back to the veranda. Callisa, walking to the side entrance, passed quickly into the shadow, and was lost to view so speedily that it was like an apparition vanishing.

Half of the weary sailors who saw her could not have sworn ten minutes later whether they had seen her or not.

Berkley opened the door and let her in and took her to the library.

"Every one is forbidden to enter here," he said. "You'll be safe as long as we can defend the palace."

He left her there, and went back through the corridor to the veranda. A few natives stood at the edge of the forest, looking at the palace. The fires were deserted and were dying out. Superstition had worked to the advantage of the defenders.

But out in the forest was Giles. Superstition did not hold him in its power as it did the natives. He had the superstition of the sea, not that of the land. He saw in Callisa no specter, but a flesh-and-blood woman, and he began thinking.

He knew the kodar loved Callisa; there was not the slightest doubt of that. And he arrived at something very near the truth—that in some manner Berkley had saved Callisa from death after he had taken her into the pool.

He gathered his natives as soon as possible, and told them what he knew. It was of no avail. They declared whoever entered the pool died there, except the kodar; that Callisa had died; that her specter had returned to haunt them for making war and breaking the land's laws.

Giles argued, entreated, threatened, cursed at them. Gradually he worked courage into some of them, but the majority refused to approach the palace again.

Finally he found he had a score of men braver than the rest, who agreed to follow him.

He ordered that the fires should be allowed to go out. The night would be dark. He planned to slip into the palace with his handful of men and kill the kodar.

"Let no one touch the king!" he commanded. "The man who does so will die!"

Two hours slipped by. Giles and his natives were out of sight in the forest. The tired sailors and guards thought the night's fighting was over. They were weary and heavy with sleep. In time their watchfulness relaxed.

When Giles and his score of natives slipped from the edge of the forest and started to crawl toward the palace it was so dark that one could not see another man twenty feet away. They worked their way slowly, Giles in the lead, making as little noise as possible.

They evaded the main entrances, for there is danger even in sleeping guards. A footstep would be enough to have the sailors at their throats. They reached a long window that almost came to the ground, and, after much trying, Giles managed to get it open. He slipped into a darkened room, and the natives followed.

Giles led them to the corridor. No one was in sight. Only one torch illuminated the great hall. They entered it, slipping from shadow to shadow.

They came to the door of another room, beneath which light flowed. They heard the voices of men—the kodar's, the king's, Captain Stomble's.

Giles whispered instructions to his men, and ordered one of them to extinguish the light in the hall. Then they ranged themselves against the walls, where the light from the room would not reveal them when the door was opened. It was an assassination Giles had planned.

When all was ready, he sprang to the door, knocked upon it, then leaped back into the darkness again. There were steps inside, then the door was thrown open, and Captain Stomble stood in the opening.

"Why, there is no one here!" they heard him exclaim. "And the lights in the hall are out!"

Berkley made an exclamation also, and started for the door. Giles and his men were ready. Once the kodar stepped into the dark hall, he would die!

But Stomble, walking toward the porch, stumbled into a native.

"Who's that?" he cried.

The native did not reply. Captain Stomble whirled around.

"Be careful, kodar! Give us lights! There is treachery here!" he cried.

Berkley stepped back into the room for a torch. A guard came running through the corridor just then, bearing one. He had heard his captain's cry.

The light revealed Giles and his natives. With a snarl Giles sprang toward the captain. The natives awoke to action.

"Help! Help!" Captain Stomble was crying to his sleeping guards.

They came running from both ends of the corridor. Giles saw that his men were being cut off.

"Into the room!" he commanded, and sprang toward the door.

The natives followed. Giles met Berkley face to face, and their cutlases crossed.

As they fought, the natives closed the door behind them, and opened the window as a means of escape. Then they watched their leader as he battled.

Berkley and Giles were evenly matched. The fight was a pretty one. But there was a difference in their fighting, for Giles wanted to kill the man before him, while Berkley did not.

In a corner the old king watched, his eyes filled with fear. One of Giles's followers was watching the king, too, and in his eyes was the flame of revenge.

He had lost a daughter the year before—she had been executed by order of the king. The native forgot the orders of Giles when he saw the king before him. He slipped across the floor toward the monarch.

The king crouched in his corner. He saw the native's approach, and screamed with fear. Giles, who saw, screamed also, ordering the native back.

But the black man was thinking of his daughter, and Giles's order meant nothing to him.

The sailor edged around so that he could approach the corner where the king was crouching. He had to watch Berkley, too. And though the kodar would have saved the king, he dared not, not knowing what Giles would do if his guard was relaxed for a moment.

Giles stepped backward, letting Berkley push him. But, though he executed the plan as quickly as possible, he was too late. The native reached the king's side.

"Slayer of girls!" he hissed.

The king screamed again—but the scream was cut short. The heavy cutlas of the native descended, and the monarch sank to the floor.

Giles sprang away from Berkley. The kodar did not follow. He had some idea of what Giles intended.

The mate tore the cutlas from the native's hands.

"Dog!" he screamed.

Then Giles's cutlas swept through the air, and the native's head rolled upon the floor. The other followers of the sailor stood dumfounded for a moment, then rushed for the window, sweeping their leader with them. And throughout the palace rang the cry:

"The king is dead! The king is dead!"

Those upon the outside took it up.

"The king is dead!"

Some one was pounding at the door. Before Berkley could open it, it was torn from the hinges. Captain Stomble and his men stumbled into the room.

They saw the signs of combat, the blood upon the floor, the decapitated native, the dead body of the old king.

"The king is dead!"

The guards and sailors in the hall, the natives at the edge of the forest, were taking up the cry. Captain Stomble looked at Berkley, and their eyes met.

"It is all over now!" Stomble whispered. "There is no prince! The country has been swept by war! It is all over!"

Berkley stepped closer to him.

"Yes, it is all over," he answered. "This is no place for us now, captain.

Get your ship ready. Put on her all the gold you can carry from the king's palace. Stand off and be ready. I'll come to you as soon as I can. Let no one except the white people go aboard."

"It is the best," said Stomble.

He turned around and gave an exclamation. Berkley looked toward the door. Callisa stood in it. Outside the palace and in the halls the cry continued:

"The king is dead!"

"My father!" she whispered.

Berkley took her in his arms.

"Be brave, dear," he said. "His murderer has already paid the penalty for his crime."

But the girl ran forward and knelt beside the body, and her tears flowed.

"My father! My father!" she sobbed.

"What does it mean?" Stomble asked.

"It means I have not committed murder," said Berkley. "When I entered the Pool of Sharks I found there—alive—all the persons the former kodar was supposed to have executed. He spared them all; he sent them food; they lived in caves like animals. And so I did not slay Callisa nor her sister."

Stomble looked at him a moment, then stepped forward quickly and clasped him by the hand.

"Thank God!" he said.

Outside the palace the cries were louder.

"The king is dead!"

And there were cheers mingled with the cries. A guard ran through the hall to Captain Stomble.

"The natives are preparing to attack, sir," he reported.

Berkley turned to the captain quickly.

"Beat them off until you can get to the boat," he said. "If you can't load the gold without risk, let it go. I'll go to the pool and rescue the white people there, and bring them to the landing as quickly as possible. I'll take Callisa with me. You'll wait with the Manatee?"

"I swear to you that I'll wait!" answered the captain.

Berkley lifted Callisa and led her to the doorway.

"Give me a couple of men, captain," he said. "I don't want a large party. We must steal our way through."

A few minutes later the four crept from the palace and started for the edge of the forest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CRISIS AT THE BARRICADE.

BERKLEY, Callisa, and the two sailors who had been delegated to accompany them made their way around the edge of the palace, keeping well in the shadows. Somewhere at the edge of the forest were the natives—natives who would not fear to attack the palace, now that the king was dead.

Giles, Berkley supposed, was busily engaged overcoming their superstition in regard to Callisa.

Berkley led the way, leading the girl. They managed to reach the edge of the forest near the main avenue without being observed. But the natives were lighting the fires again, and Berkley knew there was need of haste.

They kept near the edge of the avenue as they walked. Many times it was necessary to crouch beneath the underbrush while some party of natives hurried by, going toward the square. Yet their progress was satisfactory.

Half-way from the square to the trail which led to the pool a band of natives discovered them. The appearance of Callisa seemed to fill them with dread, but they did not fear Berkley nor the two sailors.

Yet they made no offer to attack, but followed the four, shouting and jeering, while one of their number ran on to the square, evidently to tell Giles.

Berkley, half carrying Callisa, urged the sailors to greater speed. They almost ran over the uneven ground. Finally the trail was reached, and they turned into it.

They could hear shouts and screams from the direction of the palace, and it was evident that an attack was in progress. Berkley wondered whether Captain Stomble would be successful in holding the natives back. The sailors would remain loyal, he knew, but the native guards might desert and go over to the enemy at any moment.

Then they heard sounds of pursuit behind them. Once, during a lull in the battle, they heard Giles's voice.

He knew of the escape, then, and was following. Well, thought Berkley, two men could hold the entrance to the pool against an army.

They hurried on. Far behind them on the straight trail torches gleamed and dark figures could be seen running toward them. In the direction of the square was a great light; Berkley knew, when he saw it, that some of the buildings were burning, perhaps the palace.

They were within a short distance of the clearing now. The men with the torches were gaining upon them rapidly. And just as the clearing was reached they were so near that the light from the torches revealed the fugitives to their pursuers.

With a chorus of fiendish yells they came on, Giles's great body in the lead.

Berkley reached the clearing with Callisa, and called to the two sailors to follow. Taking the girl in his arms, Berkley dashed across the open space, the sailors at his heels. Giles, who misunderstood his move, was trying to catch him before he could reach the pool.

The sailors turned to give battle. One went down before the terrific onslaught of the mate, but the other, fighting like a demon, his cutlas as ready and as quick as that of Giles, gave way slowly, and thus holding Giles back enabled Berkley and Callisa to reach the entrance to the pool.

Then the sailor allowed Giles to push him backward, and, guarding himself well, he, too, reached the entrance to the pool unharmed.

As the natives reached the spot, Berkley drew the sailor after him, guided him through the passage, and came upon the ledge, where he had already taken Callisa. The inmates of the caves were crowding close to the entrance, demanding to know what was going on.

There was no time for explanation then. Berkley called Bretina, and bade the others go back to their caves. Then, some distance from the entrance, Berkley and the sailor built a barricade of stone across the ledge, and behind this, with the two women, they waited.

Outside, Giles was cursing the natives for being so slow. The kodar had been almost in their hands, he cried. They had had a chance to avenge the murder of the Princess Bretina, but had not done so. Were they men, or dogs? Would they follow him now into the Pool of Sharks and take the murderer's life?

Emphatically they would not! No amount of persuasion could get a native inside that dreaded entrance. Horror was upon the inside, they declared. It was a place of death. Many had gone in and none ever come out, except the kodar.

"How about the Princess Callisa?" Giles demanded. "She came out!"

"It was not the princess," one of the men said.

"It was no ghost!" sneered Giles. "See! Here is a bit of her robe, torn off as she was running to the pool! Look at it! Feel of it! Isn't it real? Ghosts do not wear robes like that!"

"But—" began the native spokesman.

"I tell you the kodar saved the woman because he loves her! But he has slain the others! He has slain Bretina, the woman I loved! He has slain some of your daughters!"

The natives began to yell and curse again. Giles was touching them on a tender spot.

"There is no danger in there!" Giles went on. "The kodar is but a man. There is one other with him. Are you children, to fear two men and one woman? Let us get him. Let us kill the kodar!"

He went on in that strain, until some of the natives grew bold. Half a dozen signified their willingness to follow Giles into the pool, to avenge their murdered relatives or die in the attempt. Giles cursed the others for cowards, and led on.

They entered the narrow passageway and passed through to the ledge, ready to fight if attacked. The natives recoiled when they saw the dark pool, but Giles cursed them and pressed on.

"He is here!" he cried. "He cannot escape us!"

And screaming, cursing, they came to the barricade.

Berkley raised his head above it when he heard them stop, and they saw his face in the torchlight.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

A chorus of screams answered him. Some of the natives started to climb the barricade.

"Kodar!" cried Giles. "You shall die as the Princess Bretina died! You shall be thrown into the water!"

"The Princess Bretina is not dead," Berkley replied.

"You lie!" screamed Giles. "You killed her—because the king ordered it."

"I am telling the truth!"

"You are trying to fool me! You lie!"

Giles flashed his cutlas and started to scramble over the barricade. Berkley did not move. The mate drew nearer and nearer. Soon he was close enough to strike.

But Berkley still stood with his arms folded, waiting.

"Take up your cutlas!" Giles cried. "I don't want to murder you! Fight like a man—you murderer!"

Still Berkley did not move.

"Then, if you'll not, I'll kill you like a coward!" the mate screamed.

His blade flashed in the air. But before it could fall a woman arose beside Berkley and held out her arms to the man above. The cutlas dropped from Giles's hands.

"Bretina!" he cried. "Bretina!"

He was weeping as he scrambled inside the barricade and took her in his arms.

"You see, I did not lie," Berkley said.

Giles looked from Bretina to Berkley. A peculiar expression came into his face. He put one hand to his forehead.

"I—I don't feel well," he said.

Berkley smiled at him.

"I know," he answered. "You have been under excitement—acting queer."

"I've been insane!" exclaimed Giles.

"Not exactly," said Berkley.

He had forgotten the time and place; he was again the physician.

"You've been a little upset because of a great sorrow," Berkley added. "You'll be all right now. You were bitter against me, and I had to let it pass, because I knew you were not to blame, and because I knew that, if I let you go on, you'd make it possible for us to get away from here."

"I—I—" began Giles.

"You've disrupted this country and its peculiar laws," said Berkley. "But I have only one regret. The king—"

He stopped and looked at Callisa and Bretina.

"I killed the man that slew him," murmured Giles, after a long silence.

"I am glad of it," said Berkley.

The natives who had entered the pool with Giles had recovered from their astonishment and were demanding to know what it all meant.

"Tell them," said Berkley to Giles, "that all those people supposed to have been executed by the former kodar and by myself are still alive."

Giles told them, and there were happy cries and cheers, and one man ran toward the entrance to tell those outside.

Berkley called to the people in the caves, and they came out. A ghostly looking crew they were, all half starved, but all alive and well.

Berkley bade the white people remain behind, and the few natives he conducted to the entrance, Giles and his men going along. The prisoners passed out, and were received with shouts of joy.

Then Berkley and Giles started to return.

"Captain Stomble is getting the Manatee ready," Berkley said. "We'll join him as soon as possible, with Callisa and Bretina and these poor wretches who have been imprisoned here. Then we'll sail away to some civilized land."

Giles did not reply, but nodded assent.

"The natives will not trouble us, will they?" Berkley asked.

"Not after you have given their dead back to them," Giles replied.

"Perhaps we had better wait for the day."

"It would be best."

"There'll be a few things to do in the morning. The king's body—"

"The natives set fire to the kodar's house," said Giles. "The palace was the king's funeral pyre."

"It's hard for his daughters."

"The king was never a father," Giles answered. "He never gave them his love. He was almost like a stranger to them. He was a strange man."

"And a strange king," added Berkley.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON THE OPEN SEA.

When daylight came they left the Pool of Sharks—Berkley, Giles, the

daughters of the king, the white people who had been imprisoned, the lone sailor who had accompanied Berkley on his flight the night before.

Their progress was slow, for those who had been prisoners walked with great difficulty and were weak from hunger. But they reached the main avenue without mishap, and started toward the square.

There were reminders of the trouble on every side. Now and then they passed a body beside the road, now and then a wounded native was seen applying natural remedies to his wounds.

Berkley had questioned the white people about leaving the island. No one cared to do so, except the two daughters of the king.

They knew nothing of the great outside world, and they were afraid to face it. And so Berkley instructed them as well as he could, telling them to live happy lives thenceforth, to obey the laws of their religion, to forget those laws of the old king which had brought them sorrow.

He taught them that the best law of all is to be good, and to hope. He explained that hope was the entire future, a remedy for the present.

They reached the square. Before them were the smoldering ruins of the kodar's palace; the records and history of the Land of Lost Hope had been burned.

But the king's palace stood in all its splendor across the square, and before it was a crowd of natives watching Captain Stomble's men removing something to the ship.

The natives caught sight of the small party, and ran toward it. Berkley feared at first and prepared to defend himself, as did Giles and the sailor. But the natives did not come in anger. They were singing, and they threw flowers at Berkley's feet, and hailed him as their deliverer.

Here and there in the crowd where there was one who had escaped from the Pool of Sharks a reunion was held, and much rejoicing. Berkley made them a speech, which Giles translated.

He told them that he was going away; that they would have no king; that they were their own masters, and could make their own laws. He promised to return in a year, if possible, and see them. Then he led the way toward the water.

Captain Stomble met them at the landing. He reported that much gold had been taken aboard.

"There is enough for every man," he said.

"It is enough," Berkley replied. "We could take all freely, for to these people gold is of no value. But we'll leave the remainder here. As much as we have we may need. But let us not profit by the tragedy we have been through."

The sailors prepared the barge, and they left the shore. The people stood on the banks, on the little wharf at the water's edge, and threw flowers and sang. They reached the ship and got aboard.

The Manatee was ready for her journey.

"You will take the deck, Mr. Giles," said Captain Stomble.

"Captain! You don't mean—"

"I mean that whatever you have done is forgiven," was the answer. "Take the deck, if it pleases you."

And Giles, smiling happily, did so.

Berkley took the women to the salon. There on the couch where he and Callisa had so often sat and talked he placed her again, with Bretina by her side. Then he stepped back and looked at her.

"Now you may hope," he said. "Hope morning, noon, and night, and never cease hoping. Didn't I say that love would find a way?"

"Yes, master," she whispered.

"Do not call me master. Let us forget everything that was imposed by the laws of the Land of Lost Hope. I am not master to you, Callisa."

She arose and crossed over to him, and he took her in his arms.

"You still love me?" he questioned.

"Yes—m—"

"Not master, dear!"

Callisa bowed her head against his breast.

"I wasn't going to say m-master," she said. "I was going to say, 'Yes, m-my husband.'"

After a time Berkley raised her face and kissed her.

"The ship is under way," he said. "Let's go on deck."

They went, taking Bretina with them.

The ship had just cleared the entrance to the lagoon and was upon the open sea.

Astern lay the island; the people could still be seen on the shore. Callisa and Bretina looked at it, then turned their faces away. Berkley looked at it, too—looked at it long and earnestly. Then he turned his face away.

Suddenly he remembered something.

Begley! What had become of him? He had not seen Begley since the first of the trouble. He went to the captain.

"Begley is aboard," replied the captain, smiling. "When you were attacked while taking Bretina to the pool, Begley was trying to reach you. He had heard rumors of what the natives intended doing. The black men knew Begley's errand, and tried to stop him. They were afraid to injure him, because he wore the brand of the kodar. But when he fought to get away from them they had to fight in return—and he was wounded."

"Seriously?" cried Berkley.

"No. He managed to crawl back to the square. When he reached it the attack on the palace was in progress. One of my men found him and brought him to the ship. He's in his bunk, but he'll be in shape in a few days. He's got a few bad cuts."

"I must see him," said Berkley.

Captain Stomble took him to where Begley was lying. Berkley looked down into Begley's eyes. What he saw there was devotion.

"You were hurt trying to save me," he murmured.

Begley smiled in answer. Then he reached out a hand, and Berkley took it in his.

"Thank you, master," he said.

"Not master now. We'll leave all that behind."

"Always master to me," Begley answered. "I wear your brand. I must serve you always."

"And you shall!" cried Berkley. "You shall stay with me always. It can be managed somehow."

"Thank you, master," said Begley again. "I—I was the one who got you here, master. You remember? I was the man who went to your office in San Francisco."

"I remember. And because you did, I have had a rare experience, and have won the sweetest woman in the world. I'll never forget that, Begley."

"If you would please doctor me, I think I'd get better faster."

"You just wait a minute," said Berkley.

He went to the cabin for his medicine-case, and for an hour he worked over Begley, cleansing his wounds and bandaging them properly. Then he bade the man rest and sleep, and went upon deck again.

After a time, he asked the captain another question.

"Certainly!" replied the captain. "We've got to have one, and that's the best of the lot!"

And so Berkley went to the cabin again, and when he came out, there was something in his arms. He gave it to Giles, and Giles went to the stern and hauled down the yellow banner of the Land of Lost Hope and threw it over into the water.

Then, while all the others looked on, he hoisted the Stars and Stripes upward and broke it to the breeze.

"I guess we needn't be afraid of any old cruiser now!" shouted Berkley.

He took Callisa by the arm, and they walked to the rail.

"Over there," he said, pointing, "some days away, is Honolulu. And beyond is my country. I think we'll stop at Honolulu first. We can be married there."

"And then?" she questioned.

"Then we'll go on—to my country. There is enough gold on board to make every man on the Manatee comfortable for the remainder of his days. We'll take our share, and with it we'll buy a cozy home in some town where there are flowers and music.

"Life in my country isn't like it is in the one we have just left. Men and women work there to win their bread, and strive to put by a little besides. Sometimes there is discouragement and sorrow, and a great many times there is disappointment. But we can always hope, dear. Thank God, we can always hope. The darker the sorrow, the greater the disappointment, then the brighter the hope."

"I felt like that when you were leading me to the Pool of Sharks," she an-

swered. "I know what hope means—now!"

They heard Captain Stomble's voice, and looked up. He had relieved Giles, and the mate was coming toward them, Bretina walking beside him. But they were so happy they did not see the two by the rail.

"Yes," repeated Berkley, as he looked at them and remembered what sorrow and anguish Giles had passed through—"there is always hope."

THE END.

The Deeds of a Desperate Man.

By GARRETT SWIFT.

What happened when hunger held the reins and blind chance put a policeman out of the running.

I AM no apologist for Oakland. There may be those who think he was so at fault ethically that he deserved more than he got.

I am frank to confess that I, having felt some of the rough in life, cannot find it in my heart to condemn him. Let those who would do so first put themselves in his place and see what becomes of their ethics.

Oakland was the victim of a peculiar chain of circumstances that began in a small town near Buffalo, and ended, so far as we are now concerned, in New York.

He had been well brought up. As a matter of fact, for the son of a poor farmer, he had been too well brought up.

A doting mother had striven, contrived, and skimped in order to give him an education. He had studied hard, for he was no idler. He had no bad habits.

While he was in college, life held no charms for him except the charm of learning. He was the most industrious fellow in his class.

The result was that when his father died and the education must be put to some use, Oakland had only what had been between the covers of his books.

If he had come out of college a practical man this history of his peculiar case would never have been told. But he was not a practical man. And because he wasn't a practical man he found himself, at the time I first began to know anything about him, standing on a corner in New York without a cent in his pocket, a big hole in his stomach, and not a single friend.

The impractical side of the fellow's nature showed itself when he came to New York with an education to sell, thinking that hard-headed business men wanted to buy it. So they did. But he could not give them the proper application of it to make it marketable.

His little money was soon gone. And now, with a sort of half promise of work in a few days, he stood hungry, fainting, disheartened, in front of a small restaurant looking longingly at the tables inside.

He couldn't buy a cup of coffee. He had nothing to pawn, sell, or leave as security. There was no great amount of human love and charity in the face of the man who seemed to boss the place.

But a starving man is not fastidious as to faces.

After studying the situation and growing more and more desperate, Oakland braced himself, took a deep breath, and entered the restaurant.

"Mister," he began, "I am not a tramp, but I am starving. I need food. I will pay you in three days if you'll give me a meal."

"Wot's that? Say, think we run a charitable institution? Hey, Bill, looker the bloke wants a meal on three days' tick!"

"The sidewalk fer him," said Bill with a laugh.

Oakland gasped. He had met with very little charity. He knew there were organized charities, but he did not know how to reach them, and his sudden resolve to become a mendicant had come to him when the overpowering rush of

the odor of fresh coffee was wafted to him from the restaurant door.

He almost sobbed. He staggered to the street, and his heart was full of hate. In his country town the veriest tramps had been fed, and his mother's big kitchen held a chair and a meal for any who might ask in passing.

His suffering had within a few moments become acute. The sight of the food inside, the brutality of the owner, or head-waiter, whoever he might be, swept away the conscience that had been as clear as a child's up to the present moment.

He could have hurled a stone through the window and received nothing worse than prison food for a time. But Oakland's philosophy, as he stood there hungry on the sidewalk, did not include plans.

Somebody in the neighborhood had ordered a meal sent in, and a waiter brushed close to Oakland with the tray. The odor of hot chops finished him.

He would have committed murder, almost, just then, for a bite. He lost all reasoning sense. The spirit of fighting for subsistence came struggling up after ages of subsidence, and he reached out toward the tray.

"Hey, there!" yelled the boss, who had been watching him with no friendly eye.

But Oakland gripped the chop and tore into it like a hungry dog.

"Hang your inhospitable town!" he cried.

"Police! Police!"

The cry came first from the manager. It was taken up by the waiters, and then the crowd. A waiter rushed at Oakland and seized him by the arm. And at the same minute he saw a burly officer dart from the opposite corner.

A terror that was now stronger than his hunger had gripped Oakland's heart. He saw himself behind prison bars and the poor old mother, already suffering enough, bowing her head with grief.

He saw his chances of getting the only job that had been offered swept away by the recording of his name as a criminal.

All reason now fled. With what remained of his one-time strength he smote the waiter who held him and started to run.

The policeman was heavy, but he could also run. He wasn't starved.

"Stop or I'll shoot," he called out.

A swift thought that to be shot dead and forgotten would be better than going to prison for stealing a pork chop shot through Oakland's head and he ran faster.

He turned from Sixth Avenue into a side street. The policeman swung into that block after him.

And then the terror of Oakland became greater as he heard a shrill whistle behind. He knew it was a police call for assistance.

A doorway loomed invitingly open. Oakland did not stop to notice what kind of building it was in. He saw the open way and took it with a dash.

Once inside the door he shot up the first flight of stairs, with the big, fat policeman bounding after him. He swung round a turn, and still another, and then went like a hunted deer up another flight, with the big policeman seemingly nearer than before.

But the big policeman was panting now. And yet another flight did Oakland take.

The halls had been dark, but now he saw a door that opened into a room. It was light. Into it he shot and turned to run to the window as a last resort, when he heard a peculiar groan behind him and the fall of a heavy body.

He turned. The policeman had either stumbled or collapsed, and now lay prone on the floor of somebody's kitchen without a motion of his body. His head had come in contact with the kitchen range when he fell.

Oakland had felt thrills of terror within the last few minutes, but nothing compared to what he felt now as still greater possibilities surged through his disordered mind.

He was frozen with horror. He was alone in an empty flat with a policeman who had pursued him, and the policeman was dead.

A man who had enjoyed something like prosperity would have done some thinking. But all sane thoughts were swept away from Oakland now.

Whatever there was in his mind was the instinct of the hunted beast. To his strangely desperate brain, in his weak-

ened state, the prostrate policeman represented to him no more than one of a pack of hounds that would be on his track in almost no time.

He had no friends. There was no one in all the world who could help him. And he saw himself arrested for the murder of this policeman while in the act of resisting arrest.

Only to escape. That was the sole thought of which Oakland was capable.

There was no plan of action. No plot to steal. In fact, Oakland could not have told that he thought at all.

But with that blind instinct that leads a harried dog to bite anybody who stands in his way while he keeps up his frantic race for safety, Oakland tore off the policeman's coat and put it on over his own.

All this was done with the rapidity of lightning. The time it takes to tell it seems years compared to the second that it required the benumbed Oakland to get inside that coat. Even then he could hear voices in the hall.

The coat was too large for him, but he had his own on under it. He had no time to make an exchange of trousers.

Seizing the policeman's cap, which had fallen to a distance, Oakland stepped quickly into the hall and closed the door. It shut with a click.

Now there came a strange revulsion of the mind to Oakland. He was a criminal. No power on earth could save him now from the legal result of his predicament.

He knew he had not committed murder, but he had taken a chop, and having been pursued by a policeman, led that policeman to a vacant flat, with the result that the later was killed. He was thus in the eyes of the law and all men a murderer.

Yet he had been driven to this condition by the heartlessness of those who, by giving him a meal worth ten cents, might have saved him. They had scoffed him. They had ordered him from the place. They had flaunted their tempting coffee into his very nostrils. They had made him a criminal in the eyes of the law.

And that same wofish instinct that comes to every man when pushed to the limit grew stronger in Oakland, and from a frenzied fugitive he became a cool and calculating man bent only on saving his life.

He went down the stairs with his club swinging. Three or four people were there. They had just light enough to see that Oakland wore a policeman's cap, but not enough to notice that he had on a poor pair of ordinary trousers.

"Did you get him?" somebody asked.

"No," said Oakland, trying not to show his weakness in his voice. "He dashed through a window to a fire-escape and got to the ground. The man on post on the corner's got him."

There was a mad dash to see the prisoner in the hands of his captor and Oakland was alone.

Taking time to recover his breath, he went out into the street.

Assuming the stride he had noticed among patrolling police, he walked toward the corner. Men nodded to him. It was growing dusk and everybody was hurrying, and the trousers were not noticed.

Anyway, how did they know he was not wearing an old coat while off duty. This is not permitted by the department unless all the brass buttons are cut off, but who was going to take time to figure out such things? All anybody saw was a policeman strolling leisurely along.

But oh, that policeman was hungry! When he got to Sixth Avenue again he saw a fruit-stand on the corner. The grinning Greek was polishing apples. Heavens! How good those big, red-cheeked fellows looked to this fellow from a farm!

The Greek held out a big one.

"You eata ap'?" he said.

Would he?

"Thanks," said Oakland, and his teeth went into the apple.

And he continued on his way.

He had no place to sleep, and was too weary to walk the streets all night. But there were the parks. He must hide the coat somewhere. Policemen sometimes sleep on duty, but not on park benches.

But this did not bother Oakland then. He was enjoying his apple. There was no waiter to grab his arm. He could finish it at leisure.

He was in this state of bliss when somebody did grab his arm.

"You—a—you da polis on beat?"

"Not mine," said Oakland.

"But—a come! My—a husban'—getta kill! Bad man!"

The woman had him by the arm and people were beginning to stop to look. But Oakland stood there wondering what to do.

He knew perfectly well he could not take a prisoner into a station-house. He did not even know where the station was.

But that same sure instinct of self-preservation came to his aid. The crowd was getting too big.

"All right," he said.

Led by the woman, he proceeded toward a dingy flat-house and into the doorway. Up two flights of stairs and in a dingy room he found one man bleeding in a chair, another flat on the floor and two others sitting on him.

"Let him up," said Oakland. "I'll take care of him."

He grabbed the man by the neck, yanked him to his feet, and when the fellow struggled smote him over the head with his club.

"Send in an ambulance call," he said to one of the others.

His prisoner resisted and got another thump with the club that almost stunned him. Oakland dragged him down-stairs, and met another policeman coming up.

"Here, take this man in," said Oakland. "He's committed murder, I guess. I've got to go back. I've sent for the ambulance."

"Who are—" began the other officer, but Oakland was half-way up the stairs.

"Get me something to eat while we wait for the ambulance," he said to the woman.

She hurried to obey.

Oakland peeled off his coat—the policeman's coat—and rolled it up.

"Put that away," he said. "I won't want it any more."

"Why won't you?" demanded a stern voice behind him.

He turned. A tall officer stood looking at him. Oakland froze again with horror. It had been his intention to get rid of the coat and cap, and after a hasty meal walk out without waiting for the ambulance. So he might have done had it not been for the unfortunate chance that brought the other man with the prisoner and the sergeant on duty face to face.

The man with the prisoner had told his story and the sergeant had hurried to the scene.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded, looking at Oakland.

And now the self-saving instinct returned. Oakland froze up in voice as well as mind.

He stood looking straight at the sergeant.

"I say, who are you?" roared the latter. "Are you an officer of police?"

Still Oakland stared. The sergeant picked up the coat, unrolled it, and looked at the shield and the precinct number.

Next he glanced at the chevrons on the arm. Then he looked at Oakland.

"I don't know the officer who owns this coat," he said, "and I don't know you. But whoever he is, and I can learn, he has been on the force twenty years, and you are not much older than that yourself. You come with me."

It was all over, so it appeared to Oakland. The law had him. But that same horrible fear that had made him keen and wolfish in his desire to escape came back to him now.

He stared. His hungry look added to the uncanny expression of his eyes.

The two waited till the ambulance came. The sergeant then took the coat over his arm and grabbed Oakland.

All the way to the station-house the sergeant tried to get Oakland to talk. But Oakland had other ideas. Not a word could be dragged out of him.

"What's this?" asked the big man at the desk in the station-house.

"Something that must be explained," said the sergeant. "I met Thompson with a prisoner. Did he bring him in?"

"Yes, and returned to post."

"He said another officer gave him the prisoner. His report was that a murder had been committed. He was going back. I went to the place and found this fellow rolling up this coat and giving it to the woman, evidently the wife of the man who was hurt, and I heard him say he would not want it any more.

"Of course he is not an officer, but where did he get the coat and why should he want to impersonate an officer?

And if he was impersonating an officer why did he go to a miserable Italian stabbing affair? I can't make him talk, yet he talked to Thompson."

The man behind the desk studied the culprit before him several minutes.

"What's your name?" he asked finally.

Still Oakland made no answer. He simply stood and stared.

The captain took the coat and examined it.

"Why, this is McGinness's coat. He's on post now."

"I didn't see him. I was going to report his absence."

"You—you didn't see McGinness! And you did see this man in McGinness's coat making an arrest?"

"I didn't see him make the arrest, although he certainly made it. But he wasn't on McGinness's post."

"Well, by— Young man, what is your name?"

Still no answer but the stare.

"Do you know McGinness? What have you done with him?"

The same result from Oakland.

"This gets me," said the captain, scratching his head. "When is McGinness due? He's on post for one hour from now. We'll wait and see."

"Better send out and look him up."

"Good idea."

So two men in citizen's clothes were sent out to find McGinness.

They returned with the information that McGinness could not be found. He was not in any of the liquor stores on his beat. He was not at home with his family. He was not in any of the places he might most reasonably be expected to be found.

The captain sat back and looked at Oakland.

"We'll make him talk," he said. "We'll starve him to it. A few days without food may make him speak. Lock him up."

The irony of it! They were going to starve him, and he was tottering from starvation already.

But he was grit. If he died, he would die without their knowing his name. It should never be known in that home where he had been a gentle and loving boy that contact with New York had transformed him so quickly into a murderer.

Rather have his poor old mother go sorrowing to her grave because she did not know where he was than kill her with this hateful knowledge. They could not make him talk. If he did talk, the consequences would be as bad as starving.

The captain sat a while longer. This was a puzzle in police matters that was entirely new. He had solved all sorts of riddles, but never one like this.

And Oakland, paying no attention to the others, stood staring at the captain. The two were looking straight into each other's eyes, and the captain was no fool.

"I can't understand," he muttered at last, "how to make this out unless— But we've got to find McGinness first."

"Well, that ought not to take long," said a sergeant.

"We'll see. McGinness has got to be looked for at once. He may be murdered."

"My God, that's so!"

"And on post."

"Yes, on post."

"Turn out all the men and go into every house and store on McGinness's beat. Find out if anything happened. Ask the janitor of every house, and look into every vacant place. We'll get this somehow. What the— Hold him! Ah!"

A peculiar look had come over Oakland's face, and he had stiffened and gone over backward.

"He's under arrest, of course. Take him to the hospital, two of you, and watch him. Take the police wagon. It's outside."

Two hours later the captain sat at the desk, still deeply engaged in trying to solve this problem. It was the most perplexing enigma he had ever encountered. The telephone bell rang.

"This you, captain? Yes, this is Oth. Yes, the prisoner has begun to talk, but he is incoherent. The doctors say he is suffering from brain fever superinduced by starvation."

"Ha! I thought there was something of that sort about him. He's no criminal. What does he say about McGinness?"

"He raves about a policeman. He doesn't mention any name, but from what

he says it was a restaurant row. I suppose one of those cases where a fellow goes in and eats and then doesn't pay, and McGinness was called."

"Yes, yes, but where *is* McGinness? The man couldn't kill an officer in a restaurant, put on his coat and walk out without somebody knowing it."

"And he says something about running, and a house, and he keeps saying he didn't kill him."

"Then McGinness must be dead," said the captain.

"No," roared a voice at the captain's elbow, "McGinness ain't dead! But where's the divil that stole me coat? I'll make him a dead one or me name's not McGinness. Led me a chase into a vacant flat, and me all out of breath and the place dark. I was winded and fell. I hit me head agin the range in the kitchen and lay like a dead one. When I came to I was locked in and the grub thief had gone with me coat and cap."

"What was the charge against him?"

"Dummed if I know. I was called and he ran and I chased him."

"We'll find out. He's in the hospital, raving. I suppose he thought you were dead and feared the charge of murder. And if he was poor enough to steal food, he couldn't have friends to help him out. We'll attend to the stabbing business now. When this other one gets well enough to leave the hospital you'll find it a case for charity and not one for jail."

And they did. Oakland recovered. His story agreed with that told by McGinness.

"Well," said the captain, "you got us one of the worst murderers in the country. We've wanted him a long time. The commissioner and mayor and others all know about the matter, and you'll have no trouble getting a job now. I don't know but what, if you want to, you can wear the blue yourself."

BLISS WITH A STRING TO IT.

By F. RAYMOND BREWSTER.

The transports of joy into which the receipt of one telegram sent a lover, and the dull, sickening thud with which he came to earth when another arrived.

THEY were standing at the rail of the great steamer as it plowed its way westward, and the wash of the sea against the bow of the boat seemed to murmur a song into his ears. And to the music of the waters these words ran through his mind:

> Above us the heavens, below us the sea,
> I fancy the world only holds you and me,
> On a starlight night.

"This is the last night aboard," he said slowly—dreamily—as he gazed out across the starlit sea.

There was more than a trace of regret in his tone.

"Yes, this is the last night," she agreed. "I'm so glad."

And a sigh escaped her—a sigh of relief.

Scarcely a ripple showed itself on the calm surface of the water, not a cloud hid the beauty of the heavens. Any seasoned old mariner would have predicted a quiet night, but a discerning little god like Cupid would have hoisted warning signals instanter, for a storm was brewing on the sea of love.

Her manner was coldly distant and bored as she stood at the rail, her back toward the glimmering ocean. Scarcely a breath of air was stirring; but as the giant steamer pushed its way through the waters into the blackness of the night beyond, the slight breeze thus created gently blew a few loosened strands of hair across her face.

Deftly she drew them back into place and poked the ends carefully away. The movement seemed to arouse the young man beside her.

"That was unkind," he said in the same slow, dreamy tone.

"What?" she asked with a puzzled air.

"To say you are glad."

"Did I say that?"—innocently.

"Yes, a moment ago."

"I had almost forgotten."

"Then you didn't mean it?" His tone was almost eager.

"Mean what?" she teased.

He stirred from his place, turned half toward her, and his lips parted as though he would speak; but he hesitated, and then, after a moment, resumed his former position. Presently the girl spoke.

"I think I shall go inside," she said. "It is quite chilly out here."

"Yes, it is positively cold," he agreed.

Yet neither moved.

"You are very sensitive to cold," she rejoined caustically.

Her immobility was superb, when he suddenly faced her.

"Yes, I am sensitive," he admitted, "but it is not the air I feel so keenly. You know what it is. Ever since we met, Katherine, I ha—"

"Miss Roberts, if you please," she broke in, but he did not heed the interruption.

"I have loved you. Then you said I was a mere boy—that it was only a passing fancy—but two years have elapsed and I have not changed."

"No, Mr. Druce, you have not changed; that's just it. You have always been so boyish, so immature. You don't seem to grow up. You are like *Peter Pan.*"

"Constancy has proven my sincerity," he protested.

"I don't doubt your sincerity," she returned. "Even a schoolboy may be sincere in his affections, but schoolboy affairs are seldom lasting. Two years is more than the average, though."

"As a reward for my constancy, won't you grant me one privilege? Why this eternal Mr. Druce? Why should I always say Miss Roberts? Why should it not be Arnold and Katherine—for I have always thought of you as Katherine? Can't you, at least, grant me this?"

He spoke ardently, and she hesitated. He leaned forward, tense and eager, to catch her almost inaudible reply. And he never knew how near he was to victory.

"No, not now," she said slowly; "not until I can accept your attentions in the same spirit in which you offer them. I must go now; it is quite late."

"Good night—Katherine," he said mischievously, as she turned away.

No reply.

"Good night," he corrected himself.

Still no answer.

"Good night, Miss Roberts."

"Good night, Mr. Druce." And she was gone.

Hours afterward he was still disconsolately staring out into the gloom of the night.

He was living the last two years over again—one his senior year at college, the other his first year in business. He could not recall a day when Katherine Roberts was not in his thoughts, since his sister had introduced them.

In his last big football game, the knowledge that she was in the stands cheering for his team—cheering, perhaps, for him—spurred him to the mighty effort which brought victory to his colors.

In business she was his inspiration. Even in the face of her hostile attitude, he persevered. And her objection was that he was too boyish!

He was older than Katherine by a year, but yet he was too boyish! Well, he was, perhaps. One is not old at twenty-four. The youngest in the family, he had been dubbed "the kid," and the name had clung to him, even through college. What did it matter that he had attained the age of twenty-four and the height of six feet? He was still "the kid." Everybody guessed him to be twenty—in spite of his height, he didn't look a day older—and Katherine, too, looked upon him as—"the kid."

Well, he would outgrow it. But what if Katherine should marry meantime? He was, indeed, far down in the depths of despair.

Nor did he emerge from this all-enveloping mood for some days. His sister, Florence, made a correct diagnosis of his case soon after his arrival, but wisely refrained from interfering.

Then, like a flash, he changed! It all came about through a telegram. Like a stroke of lightning out of a clear sky, this startling communication came.

It was from Washington, whither,

Katherine Roberts had gone immediately upon her arrival from Europe. Incredulity, amazement, and—joy were in Druce's face when he read the message:

> Will arrive home to-day. If convenient, call this evening.
>
> KATHERINE.

Over and over again he read the yellow sheet. And from the depths of despair he ascended to the seventh heaven of bliss.

"Katherine! Katherine!" he repeated, gazing in wonderment at the signature.

Even as he held the joyful message before him, he remembered her answer to his plea for the right to address her by her first name. And that was just a fortnight ago.

"No, not now," she had said then; "not until I can accept your attentions in the same spirit in which you offer them."

"So," he told himself, "my perseverance is at last rewarded."

So overwhelmed was he that the four walls could not contain him, and he went out into the glorious sunshine of the early fall. And when he left the house his sister marveled—and rejoiced—at this sudden change.

As he walked on down the avenue, he suddenly realized that he was near the well-known family jeweler's; in fact, it was just opposite, on the other side of the street. A sudden thought entered his mind.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "I can order the ring now, and it will be ready in a few days."

That is how he came to be crossing the busy avenue just at this moment. That is why he heard close by a frightened, terrifying cry of alarm.

He turned quickly. There she stood in the middle of the street, a mere slip of a girl, under the upraised hoofs of two shiny black steeds. With a mighty effort the driver had jerked them back until the steel bits cut deep into their jaws, but in another instant the heavy, steel-shod hoofs would descend on the fear-stricken girl below them.

In the crush of rapidly moving vehicles, the coach drawn by the two frightened black horses had been rammed by a heavy wagon behind, forcing it forward with deadly directness onto the helpless little one ahead.

Druce did not hear the warning shouts of the drivers; he did not see the surging mass of people and vehicles around him. He only saw the little girl before him, rooted with fear under the descending hoofs. There was not a moment to lose.

With a quick, agile spring he reached her side. A cry went up from the throng on the sidewalks as he grasped her firmly in his strong arms and almost threw her to a place of safety.

He was not a moment too soon. With crushing force the wildly pawing, frightened animals came crashing down. He had saved the girl, but he was too late to save himself.

The weight of the plunging horses carried him with awful force to the pavement. Another cry from the spectators rang in his ears, and then—oblivion!

The clang of the gong and the sway of the ambulance as it rumbled over the pavements were in Druce's first conscious moments. In a half-dazed sort of way he saw the white-coated young doctor hanging by the strap in the rear.

He felt bruised and badly shaken, and from his ankle came excruciating pain. He was, in a measure, glad when the hospital was reached.

Consciousness had fully returned now, and he was able to protest vigorously and successfully against remaining in the institution. The doctors afforded him temporary relief, and after signing the usual paper releasing the hospital authorities from all responsibility he was declared free to go.

Telephoning from the hospital, he found that his sister Florence was alone at home. Briefly, simply, he told her of his mishap, and asked her to send the carriage to the hospital for him.

The clock indicated three when Florence arrived in the carriage, alarmed and anxious, but easily reassured.

During his exciting experiences of the afternoon, Druce had not forgotten Katherine, and now he wondered how he would be able to see her that evening.

Her message had said "if convenient," but he realized that there was too much at stake for him to neglect this opportunity.

He resolved to enlist the aid of his sister on this occasion, for Florence and Katherine were particularly good friends, and he felt that the former could help him in his present dilemma.

"Florence," he said, as they were riding back from the hospital, "will you call up Katherine for me when we get home?"

"Why do you wish me to do that?" she asked, always careful to avoid any interference.

"Well," Arnold confessed, "I received a message from her to-day, asking me to call to-night. Of course, I can't go in this condition. It is important that I should see her, and I want you to help me arrange it."

"I'll do anything reasonable, Arnold," she agreed, "but you know I don't wish to interfere and cause trouble."

"Just this once," he coaxed. "I've never asked you to say a word in my behalf. I can't go to-night, so I want you to telephone her."

"Why don't you do it?" she asked.

"That would spoil the plan," he replied.

"Oh, then it's a plan. What is your plan?" The question was pointed.

"My plan is that you shall call up Katherine and tell her that I have been hurt, and that you are alone with me. Ask her to come. Don't tell her how slightly I am injured—don't tell her that you are not a bit nervous—just ask her to come. Will you do that?"

There was a quality in his voice which made her feel that he knew best—made her feel that something had happened to change Katherine's views in Arnold's favor. Hence she readily agreed to her brother's plan.

When they reached home the telephone was immediately brought into use; first to summon Dr. Jones, then to call up Katherine. And this call proved full of surprises to Florence.

Why did Katherine express such genuine concern for Arnold? Why, after insisting on the particulars of the accident, did she exclaim so readily: "I'll come immediately"?

Beyond the fact that she had been successful in inducing Katherine to come, she told her brother not a word about the conversation over the telephone; but, knowing Katherine's deep-rooted feeling toward him, she wondered what had brought about this sudden and wholly agreeable change.

Arnold was in the library, anxiously awaiting the result of the plan, his injured ankle propped up comfortably before him.

"What luck?" he asked eagerly when she entered. "Will she come?"

"Yes," was the reply; "she was much alarmed and said she would start immediately."

And even though the pain from his ankle was intensely severe, Druce smiled.

It was some minutes later when Florence suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, Arnold, in the excitement I almost forgot to tell you that a message came from the telegraph-office just after you left the house. I'll get it."

"Another message?" he asked himself. "From whom, I wonder?"

Although his sister returned with the envelope almost immediately, he could hardly endure the suspense, for intuitively he scented danger.

With trembling fingers he drew out the yellow sheet. His face paled as he read the lines scrawled on the familiar telegraph-blank, and he involuntarily started from his chair, but sank back again with a groan.

"Florence," he gasped, "to the telephone! Get Katherine on the wire and tell her not to come!"

"You are too late," she cried, alarmed at his excited manner. "She was to start immediately. That was half an hour ago."

"Won't you try?" he pleaded. "Something may have detained her. There is a chance."

His sister left the room to comply with his hopeless request, and he gazed at the message before him, stunned. From the seventh heaven of bliss he had descended to the depths of despair once more.

All the joy of the first message was swept away by this second despatch. How conceited he had been to assume that the signature had meant so much!

How ready he was to grasp at a straw of hope!

The second despatch was from the operator of the telegraph station from which the first telegram had been sent, and it read:

> Message just delivered to you should have been signed Katherine Roberts.
> FRANK SMITH, Operator.

What a blow it was!

Florence brought the discouraging information that Katherine had already started. If he could only flee—if he could only avoid seeing her!

Even as the realization of his terrible mistake fully dawned upon Druce, Katherine was announced. It was too late to get away now; he must face the fruits of his folly. Katherine herself followed fast on the heels of her announcement.

"Oh, you poor boy!" she cried as she ran to him. "How on earth did it happen?"

Surprised and partly reassured by her manner toward him, he tried to explain his injuries, but he had not proceeded far into his modest account when she interrupted him, and, to his utter amazement, continued the narrative, bestowing unstinted praise on the vainly protesting but happy young man.

"I was in that coach, Arnold," she explained. "I saw your heroic act, but in the excitement I was too frightened to recognize you as the hero. When Florence partially explained the cause of your injuries, I surmised that such was the case. That is why I hastened here."

"But you give me too much credit for what I did," he protested.

He had not failed to note that she had called him "Arnold."

"It is little enough acknowledgment of your manly qualities after treating you as 'the kid' for two long years."

Florence had responded to the imperative summons of the telephone, and Arnold took advantage of the opportunity. He explained how he happened to be crossing the street when the little girl was in danger—told her the effect the two telegrams had had on him—and she did not stop him. Thus encouraged, he took heart.

"May I finish my errand—Katherine?" he questioned.

"Your ankle will not permit you," she reminded him.

"But you will?"

"Y-e-e-s."

And when Dr. Jones came late that afternoon he found a surprisingly chipper patient.

A BARBAROUS BATTLE.

By LEE BERTRAND.

A case of war to the keenest edge of the razor-blade on opposite sides of the street.

OLD Petrosini's business had grown so extensively that there came a time when he found it physically impossible to shave or cut the hair of all the men and boys who came to his barber-shop.

Would-be patrons would poke their heads in at the door and, seeing the crowds of men impatiently waiting for their turn in the chair, would go away and either try to shave themselves or go unshaved—for there was no other barber-shop in the village of Axeville.

This state of affairs made the old barber feel very sad; for he was avaricious, and hated to see the dimes and quarters almost literally walking out of his shop.

And yet, when he mentioned his troubles to his pretty daughter Anita, and she, being a very practical young lady, advised him to hire an assistant, the stingy old man shook his head.

"An assistant would add to my expenses," he said. "Labor is shamefully high nowadays. I suppose I couldn't get an experienced young man to work for me for less than six dollars per week. It's a lot of money, and there's no telling how much soap and bay-rum

he'd waste in addition. I can't see my way clear to do it."

"But don't you see that if you have an assistant, you'll be able to handle more than seven dollars' worth of additional business every week," protested Anita. "Don't be foolish, father, and lose a dollar by trying to save a dime."

This argument appealed strongly to the old man. He was not very good at figures; but with the aid of pencil and paper, he was able to calculate that ten more shaves a day at fifteen cents per shave would bring him an extra ten dollars and a half per week. He was now turning away at least ten customers daily because of his inability to attend to them personally.

He looked at his daughter admiringly, and pinched her rosy cheek.

"You are a bright girl—a very bright girl," he told her. "I wish you were a boy so that I could put you into the barber business. Yes, my dear, you are quite right. It will pay me to get an assistant. I will advertise for one this very day."

He did so, and in response to the advertisement came a young man with a prepossessing personality and a smile that was perpetual.

The young man had worked in a New York barber-shop, knew the business thoroughly, and was willing to start at five dollars a week, if there was any prospect of advancement.

Old Petrosini eagerly told him that he could consider himself hired on the spot. The young man peeled off his coat without further ado, donned one of his employer's white duck barber jackets, and started cheerfully on his new job.

The new barber, whose name was Chris Wahman, turned out to be a treasure. He was almost as quick as old Petrosini at shaving a customer, and equally as skilled as his master in the art of cutting hair.

And, in addition, he was very sparing with the soap and the bay-rum.

Patrons no longer went away growling because they could not wait their turn to get shaved. With the help of his assistant, old Petrosini was able to handle all the trade that came to him, and the old fellow rubbed his hands gleefully and congratulated himself upon his great good luck.

So highly did he esteem his new "hand" that when the latter inquired of him where he could find cheap board and lodging in the village, the old man, who was a widower, proposed that the young man come and live at his house, and offered to board and lodge him for three dollars a week.

Young Chris accepted the offer with alacrity; for he had already caught a glimpse of Petrosini's pretty daughter, and being something of a connoisseur when it came to feminine pulchritude, he was enchanted at the prospect of living under the same roof with such a dark-eyed, black-haired beauty.

In the course of time, the inevitable happened. Young Chris fell very much in love with Anita, and the latter succumbed to the young man's good looks and perpetual, good-natured smile.

Old Petrosini, however, remained stone blind to the romance that was budding in his household. If he had the slightest suspicion of young Chris's infatuation, he reassured himself with the reflection that his daughter was not the sort of girl to reciprocate it.

Anita was earning ten dollars a week as a stenographer in a pickle works in a near-by town. Petrosini had brought her up to appreciate the value of money, and he felt confident that she was too sensible a girl to be willing to give up the pickle-works' job for a young man who was earning only five dollars a week.

Therefore, he closed his eyes to the danger that was brewing, and his good feelings toward his assistant underwent no change.

One evening, after the last customer had left the barber-shop, the old man climbed into the chair and bade Chris give him a shave.

This was a high mark of his confidence in the latter, for Petrosini was in the habit of shaving himself, being very particular of his own face.

As he wielded the razor across his employer's chin, Chris deemed the occasion propitious for making a declaration which had been lingering on his lips for some days.

"Mr. Petrosini," he stammered, "I

love your daughter and your daughter loves me. With your permission, we want to get married."

This announcement so excited the old man that he moved his head and received a gash on the chin about an inch long.

Chris turned pale as he saw the blood trickling from the cut, and he turned even paler after his employer had spoken.

"Young man," said the latter sternly, "never mention this subject to me again, and particularly never mention it to me while you are shaving me. I'll have to wear a piece of court-plaster to hide that cut, and court-plaster is quite expensive. Besides, it's bad for the customers to see a barber with a cut chin. No, you cannot marry my daughter. The idea is preposterous."

"But we love each other," cried the young man, applying alum to the gash on his employer's chin.

"I can't help that," retorted Petrosini. "I'm sure Anita doesn't love you enough to be willing to marry you. She's earning ten dollars a week now, and you're only earning five. Besides, you're a German and she's a daughter of Italy. Some day she will marry; but her bridegroom will be one of my own race."

"But she wants to marry me. She told me so," protested the young man. "She is tired of her job in the pickle works, and is quite willing to give it up. Besides, I have prospects. A rich uncle of mine has promised to loan me enough money to open up a barber-shop of my own."

Old Petrosini waited until the razor was safely out of the way and then shook his head.

"I'll never consent to the marriage," he said firmly. "I like you well enough as an assistant, Chris; but as a son-in-law, you're not to be thought of. I hope to see my daughter make a grand marriage. She shall wed a man of wealth and position—perhaps he will even have a title—who knows? Anita is beautiful, accomplished, and will have a good sum of money when I die."

The young man's manner changed. The good-natured smile disappeared from his face, and was replaced by a frown.

"Very well," he said grimly. "If you won't give your consent willingly, I'll force you to give it, Mr. Petrosini; for Anita says that she won't marry without it. Either you will agree to our marriage, or you will take the consequences."

Petrosini glanced apprehensively at the razor in his assistant's hand. He realized that he was helpless if the latter contemplated a sudden assault upon him, and he turned pale beneath the lather.

It was with a great sigh of relief that he saw Chris restore the razor safely to its case and wash the soap from his chin.

"What do you mean by 'the consequences'? Do you dare to threaten me?" he then found courage to demand.

"I mean that, unless you will let me marry Anita, I will do my best to ruin you," replied the young man calmly. "I will take advantage of my rich uncle's offer and open up an opposition barber-shop across the street. In a short time I shall put you out of business. Now, are you going to give your consent?"

"Never!" gasped old Petrosini, springing from the chair. "Young man, you are talking foolishly. If you open an opposition shop across the street, you'll starve. I've been running this shop for years, and the whole village knows me. They won't desert me for a newcomer."

"We'll see," retorted the young man confidently.

"All right, we'll see. After this piece of impudence, young man, you can consider yourself discharged. It will be easy for me to get another assistant. Also, you will please find another place to board. After what has occurred, I don't want you in my house any more."

"Very good, sir," replied the other calmly; and that very night he packed his trunks and left the village.

Old Petrosini inserted another advertisement, and procured another assistant—a tall, rawboned youth, not nearly as skilful as Chris Wahman, but, of

course, greatly to be preferred to the latter, under the circumstances.

When Petrosini questioned his daughter as to her feelings toward his former assistant, the girl told him frankly that she was in love with the young barber, but she dutifully promised him that she would never marry without his consent, which she begged him to give.

But the old man was obdurate.

"You'll never get my permission, my girl," he told her. "You might as well make up your mind to that at the start. That young scoundrel is no good. He actually had the impudence to threaten to start an opposition barber-shop and to run me out of business."

"Well, I guess he'll do it, father," replied the girl confidently. "Chris is a man of his word, and he's the kind of fellow who's likely to succeed in whatever he undertakes."

"Bah! I'd like to see him try it!" snorted the old barber disdainfully.

And when, a few days afterward, he looked out of the window of his shop and saw carpenters at work on the vacant store across the street, he gave vent to another disdainful snort.

Even when the workmen's deft hands had converted the vacant store into a pretentious looking barber-shop, with a big striped pole protruding from the doorway, he only laughed contemptuously.

The next day, however, when he looked across the street at the opposition shop, he did not laugh nor snort.

Indeed, he turned purple with rage, and glared at the rival establishment.

The cause of his anger and chagrin was a big sign in the opposition window, which read:

WAHMAN'S TONSORIAL PARLORS.
First-Class Shave, 10 Cents.
Latest Style Hair-cuts, 15 Cents.

Now, old Petrosini had always charged fifteen cents for a shave and twenty-five cents for a hair-cut, and, having had a monopoly of the barber business of the village, had always been paid these prices without protest.

This outrageous cutting of rates made him very uneasy. He realized that the natives of Axeville were thrifty folks, and he foresaw that he would have to cut his own prices or gradually see all his business go to his audacious young rival.

He held out, however, until several of his oldest customers deserted him for the place across the street, and then, with many angry mutterings and sighs of regret, he wrote out a sign announcing that he, too, had reduced his prices to ten cents for a shave and fifteen for a hair-cut.

"I'll cut the prices until all my patrons have come back to me and that young scoundrel has been driven out of business, and then I'll go back to the original rates," he promised himself.

The next day, when he came down to his shop, he glanced across the street, and saw to his horror that the sign had been taken out of the enemy's window and a new one put in its place.

This sign read:

CHRIS WAHMAN,
Tonsorial Artist,
High-Class Shaves, 5 Cents.
Fashionable Hair-cut, 10 Cents.

As he read these terrible words, the old man literally tore his hair and almost wept.

His rage and despair increased as the day advanced, and he saw his own trade sadly falling off, while a steady stream of men and boys kept pouring into the rival establishment.

There was nothing for him to do, he realized, but to meet the burning competition which prevailed. Laboriously, and with many sighs and imprecations, he wrote out a new sign announcing that he, too, was prepared to shave all comers for five cents apiece, and cut hair at a dime per cut.

"There's one consolation," he reassured himself. "That scamp across the street must be at the end of his rope now. He can't reduce prices any further, unless he's willing to work for nothing; and I don't think he'll be able to hold out very long at the present rates. With the expenses he's got, he must be running his business at a loss now, and I guess that rich uncle of his who is backing him won't stand for that sort of thing very long."

But the next morning Petrosini discovered to his dismay that his enemy

was by no means at the end of his rope. A new sign made a prominent showing in the window of the latter's shop. The sign read:

Chris—TONSORIAL SPECIALIST,
Shaves, with Bay Rum, 5 Cents.
Artistic Hair-cut, with Hair Tonic, 10 Cents.

This announcement staggered him. At his shop, bay-rum and hair-tonic had always been classed as "extras," and charged for as such.

His rival's latest move so disconcerted him that, unable to control himself, he rushed across the street to the latter's shop and shook his fist in the smiling face of the "tonsorial specialist."

"You young fool!" he shouted frantically. "Do you want to ruin the barber business? Who ever heard of a shave with bay-rum for ten cents. It is madness. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Every man has his own way of doing business, Mr. Petrosini," was the calm response. "This happens to be *my* way. I'll go on running this shop at these prices until you give Anita your consent to marry me."

"I'll never give it!" shouted the other furiously. "I'd sooner see my daughter dead than married to you. I'll spend every cent I've got in the bank rather than give in. We'll see who can hold out the longest."

Avaricious as he was, he was even more stubborn. His aggressiveness was aroused, and when he got back to his shop he, too, placed a sign in his window announcing the free application of bay-rum or hair-tonic to every customer.

The next day his enemy dealt him a still more crushing blow. A sign in Chris Wahman's window proclaimed the glad tidings.

CHRIS, THE TONSORIAL CHAMPION,
FORMERLY BARBER TO NEW YORK'S
FOUR HUNDRED.
SHOE BLACK ON PREMISES.
A FREE SHINE TO EVERY CUSTOMER.

When the enraged Petrosini reached home that evening he said to his daughter: "I'm mighty glad, my girl, that I was sensible enough to refuse to allow you to marry that fellow. The young scamp has gone crazy. He'll end up in a mad-house, you see if he don't."

"Oh, I don't know," retorted Anita confidently. "Chris strikes me as being pretty level-headed. He knows what he's doing. He threatened to drive you out of business, you know, father, if you didn't give your consent to our marriage. You'd better give in before he carries out his threat."

"I won't give in!" shouted the old man, banging the table furiously with his clenched fist. "When I say a thing, I stick by it; you ought to know that by this time. As for driving me out of business—bah!—I defy him. I promise you I'll turn the tables on him before I get through. I've got a plan up my sleeve now which I guess will come pretty near finishing the fellow."

"What is it, father, dear?" inquired his daughter with suspicious eagerness.

"Never you mind," retorted the old man cautiously. "Your father may be old, my girl, but, thank goodness, he ain't foolish. If I was to tell you, you'd run right off and tell him. This is going to be a surprise for him."

Of course, the devoted girl did not fail to warn Chris that her father had "something up his sleeve," and that the old man confidently expected that the said mysterious something would crush his enemy completely.

Next morning the young man glanced across at the window of the shop over the way somewhat anxiously, but all he saw was a sign announcing that Petrosini had also engaged the services of a shoeblack, and was prepared to shine customer's shoes free of charge.

It was Chris's turn to utter a contemptuous "Bah!"

"If that's what he calls a surprise, he's got another guess coming," he muttered. "I quite expected he'd do that. I'll wager, though, it must hurt the stingy old fellow terribly to be losing so much money. He won't keep this fight up long. I guess I can afford to wait a few days before I try anything new."

The following day, however, he discovered that he had underestimated his opponent's aggressiveness. The threatened "surprise" made its appearance. It was such a staggerer that it made the young man gasp.

Old Petrosini had sent to New York

and engaged the services of a female manicurist. A sign in his window informed the public that said manicurist was on the premises, and was prepared to cut, trim, and polish patrons' finger-nails absolutely free of charge.

The male population of Axeville hailed this announcement with great delight. Axeville had never been careful of its finger-nails in the past; but now it took advantage of this golden opportunity, poured into Petrosini's barber-shop, and ignored the establishment across the street.

The old barber rubbed his hands gleefully as he saw his lost trade coming back to him with a rush.

From a financial standpoint it was suicidal, of course, to offer a manicure, a shoe-shine, and a shave, with bay-rum, for the insignificant price of five cents; but the old man's fighting blood was aroused to a point where expense was no longer a consideration with him. It was enough for him to see the look of consternation on the face of his enemy.

The latter was indeed completely overwhelmed; but he was not the sort of man to submit to defeat, especially when there was such a big issue at stake. He soon rose to the emergency.

Petrosini enjoyed his triumph for a brief two days. Then he almost fainted as, happening to glance out of the window, he espied the following sign in the window of his adversary:

CHRIS'S PALATIAL TONSORIAL EMPORIUM.
CUSTOMERS' SHOES SHINED AND NAILS MANICURED. FREE OF CHARGE.
ALSO CORNS AND BUNIONS TREATED GRATIS BY EXPERT CHIROPODIST, NOW ON PREMISES.

The sign held forth no vain, empty promises. The enterprising young barber had secured the services of a "lady manicurist" to meet the competition of his rival; and he had gone the latter one better by importing a genuine expert on pedal extremities — a long-haired, dignified-looking colored man, who had devoted his whole life to the study of bunions.

The roads of Axeville were in very poor condition, and, as a result, the population suffered greatly from corns. This unusual chance was not to be overlooked. Petrosini's customers rapidly deserted him, and poured in a steady stream into the shop across the street, where they were literally waited on hand and foot, to say nothing of a liberal application of bay-rum to the face or tonic to the hair—and all for the paltry sum of five cents.

Old Petrosini gnashed his teeth in rage and despair. One minute he contemplated savage assault upon the person of his enemy; the next, he yearningly entertained the proposition of hurling a substantial rock through the plate-glass window of his rival's establishment.

But he was a law-abiding citizen, and fear of the consequences deterred him from adopting either course. Instead, he closed up his shop and took a train for New York, with the intention of hiring a chiropodist, regardless of cost.

The next day he returned, bringing with him a pedal expert, twice as black, twice as dignified-looking, and with hair equally as long and wavy as the colored gentleman who did duty across the street.

Not only did the old barber display a sign in his shop-window announcing that he, too, was prepared to minister to the feet of Axeville, free of charge, but, in order to crush his stubborn rival completely, he announced a further rebate in the shape of a free shampoo with every shave or hair-cut.

This caused his fickle patrons to fluctuate back to him again. The population of Axeville appreciated the luxury of a shampoo, especially when a shave, an application of bay-rum, a shoe-shine, a manicure, and a pedicure were thrown in *gratis*.

It was the best nickel's worth ever offered. Axeville felt that this desirable state of affairs could not long continue, and that this deadly war of the barbers must sooner or later come to an end.

In the mean time, however, there was nothing like getting as much of a good thing as possible. The men of the village began to look more spruce and more spry than they had ever appeared in their lives.

When a man becomes fighting mad he will often spend his money as readily and as recklessly as a profligate. So pleased was old Petrosini at having got the best of his enemy by the free shampoo premium that he did not begrudge the money this step cost him, even though the operation of shampooing necessitated the use of much high-grade soap.

"I guess I've got that young fool beaten to a standstill now," he chuckled gleefully. "I shouldn't be surprised if he goes out of business in a few days."

But Chris Wahman did not go out of business. Instead, he not only followed his competitor's lead by adding free shampoos to his list of premiums, but he also secretly prepared to bring the campaign to an abrupt end by a decisive, shattering blow.

Three days later old Petrosini's eyes opened wide with amazement as they gazed upon the following sign in the window of his rival:

GREATEST TONSORIAL NOVELTY OF THE CENTURY.
COME AND BE SHAVED OR GET YOUR HAIR CUT BY OUR LADY BARBER.
YOU WILL FIND HER AS SKILFUL AS SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped the old man. "What the deuce is that madman up to now? That sign can't really mean what it says. Who ever heard of a lady barber? It must be a trick to get people inside his store. The knave ought to be arrested for false pretenses."

But, by craning his neck and glancing through the open doorway of the shop across the street, he saw to his dismay and amazement that the sign proclaimed only the truth.

A golden-haired, dimple-cheeked, buxom girl, attired in a stunning white-duck suit, was busily engaged in wielding the razor across the face of one of Axeville's leading citizens.

The latter, judging by the rapturous smile which illuminated his lathered features, seemed greatly to be enjoying the unique experience, while the other customers gazed enviously at him as they sat awaiting their turn.

"Gracious!" muttered old Petrosini, biting his lips with vexation. "What is this business coming to when the other sex begins to butt in? She won't last, I'll wager. Pretty soon she'll let the razor slip and cut somebody's throat, and then those foolish fellows will have nothing more to do with her, and will come back to my shop."

But his prediction proved unfounded. The lady barber, as the sign in Chris's window announced, was as skilful as she was beautiful, and she wielded the razor so deftly that her customers received not even a scratch.

As a matter of fact, so great were her charms that even if she had been less skilful and had inflicted deep gashes upon the features of the men she shaved, it is probable that the latter would have received their injuries with stoic fortitude, and cheerfully risked a repetition of the thing.

The combination of her personal attractiveness and her tonsorial expertness, therefore, proved a powerful magnet which drew customers to Chris's shop by the scores.

The lady barber's fame even penetrated to neighboring towns, and men rode over to Axeville in buggies and automobiles to receive a shave and a hair-cut at her fair hands.

Petrosini's establishment was well nigh deserted. As one of his late customers remarked, all the bay-rum, all the manicuring and pedicuring, all the shoe-shining and shampooing in the world could not equal the delight of reclining in a comfortable barber's chair and being shaved by a beautiful golden-haired creature whose eyes gazed enchantingly into one's upturned face, and who blew the stray hairs from one's neck with a breath so sweet that it made one think of a rose-garden.

And, besides, in addition to this captivating experience, one could have all the rest of the above-named advantages free of charge at Chris's barber-shop; for although the young man's latest attraction proved such a powerful drawing-card, he did not withdraw a single one of the many premiums offered to customers.

Therefore, what reason was there for going to old Petrosini's shop when so

much could be obtained for a nickel in the shop across the street.

The old man was in despair. He realized that he must procure a lady barber at any cost, or admit that he was beaten.

He made another trip to New York, and, visiting a barber's employment agency, was surprised to find that "lady barbers" were not quite as scarce a commodity as he had supposed.

The manager of the agency assured him that he had several competent females on his list.

Old Petrosini paid the required registration fee and eagerly besought the man to produce the tonsorial ladies.

But when he saw the latter, his hopes fell to zero. True enough, they were women, and, also, no doubt, they were skilled in the art of wielding razors and shears; but, alas! they were the homeliest specimens of femininity he had ever seen.

To attempt to employ any one of them as a competitor of the beautiful golden-haired lady barber of his rival would have been madness, and would have made him a laughing stock in the village.

"These won't do at all," he groaned. "Give me back my money and let me go."

"What's the matter?" bruskly demanded the manager of the employment agency. "You asked for lady barbers, and here are half a dozen from which you can take your pick. What more do you want, anyway?"

"I want a lady barber with a human countenance," cried the desperate old man. "I'd be afraid to take any of these into my shop for fear their faces would crack my plate-glass mirrors. Oh, I didn't know there were such homely women in the world!"

As the indignant females were inclined to resent this unflattering allusion to their physiognomies, the old man beat a hasty retreat to the street.

He visited several other barbers' employment agencies in the hope of finding what he sought, and at last, when he was about to give up the quest in despair, he ran across a young woman who looked as if she might answer his purpose.

Her hair was red and her face freckled; but, nevertheless, she was quite a good-looking girl, and she assured old Petrosini that she was a first-class barber.

The old man eagerly closed a deal with her, and took her back to Axeville with him.

The next morning a big sign in his window proclaimed the glad tidings that he, too, had a woman barber, and invited the men of Axeville to come and be shaved or have their hair cut by her fair hands.

Several of his old customers were won back to his shop by this invitation. They already had been shaven or shorn by the lady barber across the street, and they were eager to try the new female tonsorial expert as a pleasing novelty.

Petrosini's lady barber made a pretty picture as she stood behind the barber's chair attired in a neat white-duck suit, equally as "fetching" as the costume of her rival of the other shop.

As he stepped into the chair and got into position for a shave, the first customer looked at her with frank admiration in his eyes.

She was not quite as pretty as the lady across the street, but she was, nevertheless, very handsome, and it was a treat to be shaved by such a creature, he thought.

But she had no sooner began to wield the keen-edged blade than the unfortunate man quickly had cause to change his mind.

Her first stroke laid open a gash in his left cheek about two inches long. Her second produced a similar rent upon his chin.

He did not wait for the third. With the lather still upon his face and the towel hanging from his neck, he jumped from the chair and, panic-stricken, fled from the shop.

Undeterred by this victim's harrowing and harrowed experience, a second man, lured by the lady barber's pretty brown eyes, climbed into the vacated chair and announced that he desired a hair-cut.

Petrosini's lady barber proceeded to cut his locks. She also cut a generous slice off his right ear.

At this he, too, jumped hastily from the chair and rushed out of the shop without waiting for the completion of his hair-cut.

After that, nobody else was rash enough to venture into the chair. Petrosini's shop remained deserted for the rest of the day. His lady barber was a rank failure.

Then the old man realized that he was defeated, and with tears in his eyes he went across the street to his triumphant adversary.

"Young man," he cried, "I've had enough. This lady barber of yours has got me beaten. Call off this fight and I'll let you marry my daughter."

"Agreed," said the young man eagerly. "I'm much obliged, Mr. Petrosini."

"Thanks ever so much, father," cried Chris's lady barber, suddenly pulling off her blond wig and revealing the raven-black tresses beneath.

"Anita!" gasped the old man, almost fainting with surprise.

"Yes, father. It's I," replied the daughter meekly. "Chris taught me how to shave and cut hair, and I gave up the job in the pickle works to come here and help him win this fight."

"Well, I'll stick to my promise," declared the old man when he was able to speak again. "You shall give up this shop, son-in-law, and come across the street with me as my partner. We'll return to the original scale of prices and cut off all the confounded premiums. And after you're married to Anita, she shall come and work as a lady barber in our store."

"No, she won't," cried Chris firmly. "You and I will run the business by ourselves, Mr. Petrosini. Anita may be a first-class barber, but in future she's going to stay at home to cook pies and mend my socks."

HIS BORROWED PLUMAGE.

By WALTER DURANTY.

A case of exchange which may or may not have been fair, but was decidedly harrowing in the immediate outcome.

"THANKS awfully for the sweater, old man," said Rupert Dalmayer as he swung cheerfully out of the room. "You don't mind if I leave my coat and vest here till I get back? I'll come in for them this evening."

The door banged behind him, and Lawrence Manford was left alone to choose between the rival charms of green and blue neckties. As he decided on the former and fashioned it into a neat bow, Lawrence felt in spite of himself a twinge of envy at the thought of Dalmayer's position in comparison with his own.

Socially they were on the same plane, they were staying at the same seaside hotel, and they were on friendly terms, and yet Dalmayer was able to command a handsome suite, to drive an automobile, and indulge his lightest whim, while he —Manford—was housed in a single room near the roof, and obliged to count every dollar in order to provide even for his fortnight's holiday.

His poverty seemed especially distasteful this fine summer morning as he eyed his year-old clothes and thought of the dainty freshness of Irma Lovel, whom he had promised to take out for a row.

If only he had a new fancy waistcoat to set off his carefully pressed suit!

As the idea flashed through his mind, his glance fell almost unconsciously on Dalmayer's pretty lavender vest hanging from the door, and he realized with a vague sense of shame that it would fit him admirably, and that Dalmayer would be away fishing the whole day.

"I'll just try it on," he muttered; "I wish I could get *my* things from a first-class tailor. It might have been made for me; really, I almost think—after all, he's wearing my sweater." Thus Manford to himself a moment later.

A little voice whispered that that was different, that the sweater had been duly borrowed; but the mischief was done now, and Lawrence Manford was caught in the snare of vanity.

As he buttoned up the vest his fingers came in contact with Dalmayer's gold chain, which he had left fastened from pocket to pocket, for he wore his watch on a wrist-strap.

Massive, yet simple in design, it struck just the right note of luxury without ostentation, and again Lawrence felt envious of this other man, no better than himself, who had so much while he had so little.

The chain certainly gave the finishing touch to the elegance of the vest, and he longed to wear it, too; but without permission—and yet it was no worse than taking the waistcoat—Dalmayer would never object, even if he should find out; it was only for a few hours, and it did look well. Why not? And again Lawrence Manford had yielded to temptation.

As he settled Irma comfortably in the stern of the light skiff, he fancied that her eyes rested with interest on his borrowed plumage, and especially on the iridescent buttons which flashed green, violet, and orange in the glancing rays of the sun.

The charm of her companionship, sympathetic almost to the point of flirtation, soon banished the remnant of his scruples, and he gave himself up without reserve to the joys of youth and beauty and the summer sea.

They were drifting gently along past tree-crowned headlands rising like giants from the fringe of pearly sand, when a sudden splash roused him to action as one of the oars, which had been resting idly in the row-locks, slid off into the water.

It was almost beyond his reach, and Lawrence bent forward to grasp it. when, plop! Dalmayer's chain slipped from his vest and plunged, gleaming and shimmering as if rejoicing in its freedom, far down into the purple depths.

Still gripping the oar, Manford watched it, fascinated, until with a last twinkle it vanished from his sight; and then, with a gasp of horror, he sat up and looked at his companion, who, eyes half closed and face demurely shaded by a parasol, did not seem to have noticed his mishap.

"Isn't it delightful?" she murmured softly. "We might be in a fairy heaven, gliding mysteriously over the enchanted waters."

Lawrence stifled his anguish in the effort to reply appropriately, but in his heart he cursed the enchanted waters as he writhed under torments worthy of another place than heaven.

Why had he allowed himself to take the chain at all? Fool that he was to go rowing with it tucked loosely from pocket to pocket, and thrice fool to lean so carelessly out of the boat.

This was a nice ending to his holiday, for an ending it would be.

His little hoard of dollars would now have to make good the loss, instead of winning him ten days more of paradise. No more might he enjoy the cool plunge into the surf and the fresh sea breezes and the pleasant society of his friends: he must go back to the burning pavements of the city, and his boarding-house there, with its airless rooms and unappetizing food. Truly, his moment's weakness had borne a bitter harvest.

To do him justice, the idea of evading his burden never entered his head, though a frank apology and explanation to Dalmayer would have enabled him at least to postpone the repayment of the debt.

But Lawrence Manford had a strict code of honor, and, though poor, was by no means devoid of pride. He had given way to vanity and the harmless desire of a youth to shine in the eyes of a maiden, but he would not sneak out of the consequences of his action and go whining for forgiveness.

After what seemed years of torture, the morning to which he had looked forward so eagerly ended at last, and he was free to hurry to his room and count his scanty store. When he had paid his bill and the necessary tips there would be just fifty-seven dollars left. Yes, that ought to be enough: luckily, the chain had been a plain one, though it was heavy.

Well, the only thing for it was to go into the neighboring town and see if he

could purchase another to replace it before Dalmayer came back.

He could easily match a simple design like that: it was essential that its owner should not notice the change, or he would insist on refusing the sacrifice —and the thought of his cheery disregard for a mere gold chain stung Manford's self-conscious poverty like red pepper in an open wound.

Sure enough, the jeweler's shop contained a facsimile of the "missing links," as Manford mentally termed them with dreary humor.

"How much is this one?" he asked, holding it up.

"Sixty dollars," replied the assistant. "That's a heavy chain and a fine quality gold."

"I can't pay more than fifty," returned the young man despairingly.

"Afraid I can't let it go at that. Suppose we split the difference and say fifty-five; that's the best I can do for you."

He spoke quite decisively, and, after a feeble attempt to beat him down further, Manford counted out the money and returned soberly to the hotel, thankful that he had at least got his return-ticket to New York, where he had the pleasant prospect of an idle week, with just two dollars to play with.

He had decided to go by an early train the next morning. During this last evening he would make the best of it, so that his face was serenely cheerful as he listened to the eager account of an exaggerated catch which Dalmayer poured forth when he came in shortly before dinner to get his clothes and return the borrowed sweater, in which he had incidentally torn a gaping rent.

"I tell you," he cried excitedly, "he was the biggest fish I've ever hooked; he must have weighed a hundred pounds, and I got him right up to the side of the boat; and Jim was just going to jab the gaff through his gills, when my foot slipped and I fell forward, nearly spiking myself on the gaff and ripping your sweater like anything, and when I picked myself up the beggar had got away. I tell you, old man, he was a whopper and no mistake; but I'm awfully sorry about the sweater—it's a wonder I didn't tear myself, too," he concluded, as he carefully arranged the chain across his elegant vest and sauntered jauntily out of the room, leaving Manford to the mournful task of packing his clothes in preparation for departure.

In spite of his resolve to make the most of the short time left to him, Manford's heart sank as he sat at dinner, listening to the gay conversation and watching the happy faces all around him.

How different this was from the sordid prospect before him; it was always hard to go back to the city after his holiday, but to waste it like this when he had scarcely tasted the draft of pleasure, was almost more than he could bear.

He was roused from his gloomy meditations by the merry voice of Irma Lovel, who was sitting opposite with Dalmayer on her left.

"Please, Mr. Manford," she cried mischievously, "whose is it, really? I'm sure you were wearing it this morning, because I noticed those pretty buttons, and now Mr. Dalmayer has got it on; do tell me."

Manford winced as he realized her meaning, and began to blush furiously, whereat the fair Irma, who had been secretly piqued by the abrupt way in which he had left her that morning, pursued her advantage.

"I suppose you are a believer in the old proverb about the value of fine feathers," she said.

"But who was the pretty bird for whose benefit my poor garment was required?" put in Dalmayer cheerfully, who, having never known what it was to be poor himself, had no conception of the anguished delicacy of the unhappy Manford.

It was now Irma's turn to blush, but she returned to the charge undefeated.

"And how about the watch-chain?" as her eye caught the gleam of gold on Dalmayer's breast.

"Was that also assumed for—er—purposes of conquest?" supplied Dalmayer wickedly.

"There's another proverb," Irma continued, "about all not being gold that glitters; I noticed you didn't seem much upset, Mr. Manford, when your chain fell—"

"Right again, little Brighteyes," interrupted Dalmayer with a chuckle. "Trust a lady to spot sham jewelry. I've worn this old fraud since my real one was stolen a couple of years ago."

"But I saw it fall overboard," cried Irma in surprise.

"And I paid fifty-five dollars to replace it," gasped Manford in an apoplectic voice.

"Holy Moses!" shouted Dalmayer; "and I paid one dollar to buy it. You do pay your debts well, old man, and I did two dollars' worth of damage to your sweater, and never even had it mended."

Ten days later, when Lawrence Manford departed to New York, comforted by the news of a substantial rise in his position and salary, it may confidently be asserted that if he had not enjoyed his holiday it was not the fault of himself or of the glorious weather, or of his friend, Rupert Dalmayer, or, last but not least, of that sweet and winsome maiden, Irma Lovel.

Bad for the Boon Companions.

By ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS.

An early morning incident, in which a dream and a vanished hundred-dollar bill jostled each other wickedly.

WE had been boon companions for many a year, Maxfield, Jenkins, and I, so when they each moved to the country on the first of May they made my flat their headquarters whenever it pleased them to spend the night in town. Sometimes they felt too tired to take the trip, and sometimes it stormed.

That night it stormed. Not only rained, but blew gusts that took you off your feet if you were not careful.

Jenkins had phoned me early in the day that he would stay all night. He added that he would sleep on the couch in the front room, and would I kindly come in as quietly as possible so as not to disturb his slumbers?

I told him I would.

Then, as I pushed my way against the storm, I encountered Maxfield.

"Beastly night," he grumbled, holding his umbrella unsteadily as the wind came in a hurricane around the corner. "Hate to go all the way to Ollington in this weather."

"Stay with me, then," I said. "Jenkins is already there, but I can stow you away. You can sleep with me."

He smilingly accepted the offer. When we reached home we found Jenkins asleep on the couch, with the little rose light on the table turned on. It gave out a soft, dim glow.

We went through the room quietly so as not to disturb Jenkins, relieved ourselves of our umbrellas, and prepared for sleep.

Before he turned in, Maxfield went into the front room and raised the window a trifle.

"We need some air," he explained. "I don't want it blowing directly on me, but it doesn't matter about Jenkins."

The wind blew in with little gusts, fanning some papers. I put the window down an inch, so that the papers wouldn't rattle and waken us. The wind still blew in.

I went to the table and began to count a roll of bills I had taken from the bank that day. I folded them up and put them back in my coat-pocket when I had counted them. I must have been half asleep as I counted those bills, I thought afterward.

"I will have to get up early," exclaimed Maxfield before he dropped off to sleep, "but I will be careful not to waken you. I will go out on tiptoe."

However, in spite of his attempt at silence, perhaps because of it, he did wake me. I watched him dress, take his umbrella and leave the room. I heard him tiptoe softly across the bedchamber into the next room, stop a minute somewhere, open the door and go out.

The next morning Jenkins awoke with a strange story.

"Last night," he said, "I dreamed I saw first, the quiet room, the table, the dim rose-colored electric, and a yellow bill on the table. Every little while the wind blew in at the window and the yellow bill fluttered, Then you came in, dressed, with your hat on and an umbrella in your hand. You stopped at the table, stood there a minute, then went on out. I threw a pillow at you as you went out, but I can't find it anywhere."

"Because you didn't throw it," said I. "You were dreaming. I haven't been up since I went to bed."

"It may have been a dream," admitted Jenkins, "but was there a yellow bill on the table?"

"Not that I know of," I replied, "but wait," and pulling out my pocketbook I once more counted my money.

"Why, yes," I cried, "there must have been. I must have dropped it on the table when I was counting the stuff last night."

"Maybe it is there yet," Jenkins said. "Look."

I looked. No yellow bill. I stood aghast. It was no slight matter to me to lose a hundred dollars.

"Where do you suppose it is?" I stammered.

"Maybe you are a somnambulist without knowing it," suggested Jenkins. "They mostly are without knowing it until somebody catches on. Maybe you came through the room, picked it up and hid it."

"But I didn't come through," I averred. Then remembering: "Oh! It must have been Maxfield you saw. He stayed all night with me, too. That was who it was. He got up early and went out. He had his umbrella in his hand. You didn't see him in a dream. You saw him in reality."

"Then it was he," concluded Jenkins, "who stood by the table—"

"And got the money?" I finished.

Jenkins flushed and frowned. We had been fast friends and boon companions, the three of us.

"I won't say he got the money," he declared, "but the yellow bill was there in my dream. I saw the wind fanning it. Now it isn't there."

"I can't afford to lose a hundred dollars these hard times," I lamented.

"I am not accusing anybody," reiterated Jenkins, "but the bill was on the table, whether I saw it in a dream or in reality, because I saw the wind fanning it. Whoever the man was who came through with his umbrella must have got it, since it isn't there now."

When Jenkins was gone—and we parted frigidly—I looked in vain all over the place, then hurried to his office, where I found Maxfield.

"Did you see anything of a hundred-dollar bill on the table this morning as you went out?" I asked him.

"No," said he. "But how is Jenkins? This morning, when I left, he lay there staring at me with his eyes wide open, without saying a word. He looked as if he were in a trance. Is he all right this morning?"

"He's all right," I complained, "but I am not. I have lost a hundred dollars. Last night when I counted it I must have dropped it on the table. Jenkins says he saw it there in his sleep. He says the wind fanned it. He says other things about his dream. First it lay there, the wind fanning it. Then you came into the room, stood by the table a minute, and went out. He says you had an umbrella in your hand. This morning there was no yellow bill on the table."

Maxfield turned white.

"Do you mean to say," he stormed, "that Jenkins says I stole the hundred-dollar bill?"

"Jenkins didn't accuse you," I returned. "He simply told the story."

"And the story accuses me," affirmed Maxfield grimly. After a moment: "The bill might have blown out the window," he added.

"It might," said I, "if the table had been near the window. But it wasn't. It was in the middle of the room."

Maxfield thought a while.

"Did it occur to you," he said then, "that a man who would cook up such a cock-and-bull story about his friend might be guilty himself?"

"No," I answered, "it never occurred to me."

And it hadn't. But the fact of the matter was the suspicion lay between the two of them.

I turned the thing wearily over and over in my mind. The loss of the money made me sore. There sprang up a distinct coolness among the three of us. If we saw each other it was only to bow, and that in the most distant fashion.

I couldn't fathom the mystery. If Jenkins had been guilty why had he mentioned seeing the yellow bill and the fanning of it by the wind? It was not necessary, unless he manufactured the story in order to lay the blame on Maxfield.

As for Maxfield, he scorned me openly; whether through injured innocence or out of the bravado of guilt, it was impossible for me to say.

The fact remained that I had been deprived of the money—a big enough sum to leave a sore spot in my memory.

Six months ran along and the time for the semiannual cleaning of flats arrived. In the meantime the circumstance of the yellow bill had alienated our affection to such an extent that we three went out of the way to avoid one another.

It had been weeks since I had seen either Jenkins or Maxfield. I was beginning by now to recover from the loss of the bill to the extent that I regretted having practically accused my friends of robbing me of it.

Indeed, if we had moved in a lower class they could have had me arrested for libel, and justly. I had tacitly accused both. Only one could have been guilty.

Often I wished I had not missed the yellow bill, or that Katie, the little girl who waits on me, had come in in time to be accused of taking it, or that Jenkins had not dreamed his dream of how the wind fanned it, and so proved beyond a doubt that it had been there on the table.

By now they had both undoubtedly moved back into town. They were constantly about, and still I never saw them. All our pleasant old companionship was broken up by the loss of the yellow bill.

I stood by, looking on at Katie's cleaning. At that moment she was hard at work polishing a tall umbrella-stand of brass that was one of my treasures. I was so fond of it, in fact, that I kept it in the room by the table instead of leaving it in the little hall, where it rightfully belonged.

I had bought it while prowling around among the Russian brass shops of the East Side, where I had gone to look for a samovar. Always when I went to look for one thing in those wonderful brass shops I bought another.

"I have often had a mind," said Katie, "to see what was inside this thing."

With that she thrust her bare arm down deep, drew it out, and held up something yellow to my view.

"Look! Look!" she cried.

She spread it out.

"A hundred-dollar bill!" she ejaculated.

The yellow bill! The hundred-dollar bill the wind had blown that night into the umbrella-stand!

You know I never fully realized the beauty of a phone until that morning. Those friends of mine! Those good, true, injured friends that I had so grossly insulted with my suspicions!

"We have found the bill," I phoned, first to Maxfield and then to Jenkins. "Katie found it in the umbrella-stand, where the wind blew it. Forgive me. Come and dine with me and let me get on all fours and apologize. Not here. The flat is in the throes of a fall cleaning. Thank Heaven for it, or maybe Katie never would have found the bill. Meet me at the Knickerbocker at eight o'clock this evening, will you, and dine with me there?"

They did, and if I had been born on the other side, where the feelings are more freely expressed than here, I would have fallen on the necks of them, one at a time, and kissed them on the cheek.

"TIME TO ME."

TIME to me this truth hath taught,
'Tis a truth that's worth revealing:
More offend from want of thought
Than from want of feeling.

Anonymous.

THORNTON'S TELEGRAM.

By J. F. VALENTINE.

What came of a message at first despised, crumpled up into a ball and fired into the waste-basket, only to be carefully smoothed out and reread later.

JOHN THORNTON tilted back his chair, deliberately removed his half-smoked cigar from his mouth, and with a deeply puzzled expression on his face, muttered aloud: "What the old Harry is this, anyway?"

"'Absconder. At your mercy. You will understand,'" he continued, reading aloud the telegram he held before him.

For a full moment he stared at it, his deeply-knit brow proving conclusively the matter was one he could not quickly solve.

"Let me see," he added slowly, endeavoring to decipher the characters that marked the originating station, "this was sent from— Pshaw! What a fool I am!"

His tone suddenly changed to one of disgust.

"Some bright and brilliant person, with more time on his hands than he knows what to do with, is evidently trying to perpetrate a joke on me."

Before he finished speaking the telegram was crushed into a little ball and thrown vindictively in the waste-basket.

Turning to the paper-littered desk before him, Thornton took up a bundle of letters and pressed one of the buzzers to summon a stenographer. She quickly entered in answer to his call, and the letters were quickly answered, until he suddenly came to one that held his attention for a moment.

"Hm," he murmured beneath his breath, staring hard at the document. Then he pressed another button and leaned back wearily in his chair to await the answer.

The office-boy quickly appeared, and Thornton ordered, "Tell Mr. Burton I wish to see him."

"He ain't here to-day, sir," the boy replied.

"Not here? Why, how is that?" Thornton demanded, a slight trace of annoyance in his tone.

Then, recalling the fact that the office-boy was not supposed to be familiar with all the business of the clerks, he immediately added: "Send Mr. Williams here."

The boy left the room, and soon the head bookkeeper entered and stood respectfully by the side of his employer, awaiting his orders.

"Look here, Williams, I want a special statement made up without delay. These people"—he tapped impatiently with the back of the fingers of his right hand the letter he held in his left one—"these people claim we have not credited them with all their payments. Can you get it up for me?"

"I'll try, sir," the bookkeeper replied. "I'm not familiar with Burton's work, but—"

"What's the matter with him?" Thornton interrupted. "Has he sent in any word as to whether he is ill, and if so, how long he will be away?"

"No, sir; no word of any kind as yet," was the quick response. "But I am sure he is sick; he was yesterday, and went home early, asking me to balance his cash for him. I tried to, but—I couldn't seem to do it. I am not familiar with his work, and I hope he does come down later."

"That will do." Thornton's voice sounded so strangely different to Williams that he glanced quickly at him, then walked hurriedly out of the office.

As he passed through the doorway, the stenographer was surprised with a curt "No more just now" from her employer, and she, too, left the room.

Thornton sprang to his feet, and, bending over the partially filled waste-basket, pawed nervously over the papers that had been thrown there. A queer light shone in his eyes as he straight-

ened up again, the crumpled telegram in his hand.

As he smoothed out the many creases and reread the strange message, he muttered: "Can it be possible?"

The lines of strength and determination that had been so indelibly engraved around his mouth were plainer and deeper than ever as Thornton seated himself at his desk again and, drawing the telephone to him, impatiently requested: "Seven-four-one-two Grant, please."

"Is this Harris, Adams & Company?" he inquired, after a short wait. "This is John Thornton. I wish you would send one of your best accountants over as quickly as possible to make a brief audit of my cashier's books."

As he hung up the receiver, he swung around in his chair and fell into a deep study.

"I hate to think anything wrong of Burton—he may be really ill and the telegram only a joke; but, nevertheless, something tells me to investigate thoroughly. But I cannot help feeling it looks serious—his nervousness of yesterday, Williams's inability to balance the cash last night, Burton's absence to-day without any word from him, and then, last of all, this telegram! That is the climax. If he hadn't sent it—"

He stopped abruptly as the office-boy entered.

"A man outside to see you, sir," he announced, handing his employer a card.

"Send him in," Thornton ordered, glancing at the piece of pasteboard tendered him.

Rising to his feet, Thornton remarked to the stranger as he walked in: "I only wish a cursory examination made of my cashier's books. You will do it in here, and I will see that you are not disturbed. I must go out for a short while, so you will use my desk. I'll send the books in to you immediately."

Bowing abruptly, he left the room and, motioning to the books which lay unopened on the cashier's vacant desk, ordered the boy to take them to his private office. Then he put on his hat and went out.

"I've got to see MacDonald to-day about that contract, so I may as well do it now," he muttered as he hurried along.

But his mind was not on the business before him—the fact of Burton's being away, and the coincidental receiving of the peculiar telegram, weighed heavily on his mind, and it was a relief when, arriving at MacDonald's office, he learned that the gentleman was not in. Without a word, Thornton left and, retracing his steps, was soon greeting the accountant, who was deeply engaged in his task.

With a nervous little twitch in his voice, Thornton asked briefly: "Well, any discoveries?"

The accountant looked up with the cold, hard look of a man who has an unpleasant duty before him.

"Yes, sir; I am sorry to say these books are in a terrible muddle. Just how badly I cannot determine on such a brief examination."

"Then you think I have been robbed?" Thornton queried anxiously, leaning heavily upon the desk and peering into the other's face.

"Undoubtedly, sir!"

The answer was positive enough. In any event, it left no doubt in Thornton's mind.

"Then I shall have him arrested," was the determined declaration. "The telegram was true, after all," he added in an undertone.

Then, addressing the accountant, he continued: "But I do not know just the *modus operandi* in a case like this. Would you notify the police?"

"Yes, that is the first thing — then have your books straightened out as quickly as possible. As they are at present, you have no idea as to your financial condition."

"I can hardly believe it," Thornton declared. "Why, I'd have trusted Burton with anything I have. Although he has not been with me more than a couple of years, I had absolute confidence in him. But before notifying the police, I think I'll go to his home and try to see him."

A sinister smile spread over the accountant's face.

"You will hardly be apt to find him there, Mr. Thornton. Anybody whose books are in such tangled shape as these are"—he pointed at the large ones upon the desk before him — "would hardly

stay at his home, awaiting apprehension. He would be more apt to hasten to parts unknown."

"I suppose that is true," Thornton remarked absently. "What would you advise?"

"The most essential thing is to get your man," the other replied, without a trace of indecision. "Aside from his being a criminal, he would be able to help straighten out matters. His assistance would simplify things for me greatly."

"I see." Thornton's manner was preoccupied, and he seemed plunged in deep thought. "I will go to the nearest police-court and swear out a warrant."

"Yes, that would be my advice. I do not wish to appear an alarmist, but I fear conditions are worse than we imagine."

"Is that so? Well, I'll go now, and will be back presently. In the meantime, keep right on with your work."

Without another word, Thornton left the office and headed for the police-court. As he strode with quick, nervous steps in that direction, he kept repeating to himself: "I can hardly believe it. Burton seemed so honest, and I trusted him implicitly. It almost seems that nowadays one does not know whom they can trust."

He entered the crowded court-room and, pushing his way through the groups that filled the rear portion, walked up to the officer standing before the bar and, stating his wishes, was led to the clerk's desk at one side. Here the warrant was filled out, and then sworn to before the magistrate.

With a sigh of relief at the conclusion of what had proved to be a most disagreeable task, Thornton left the court-room, after requesting immediate service of the warrant.

As it was nearing his luncheon hour, Thornton stopped at his down-town club for it. He did not feel like eating—he was nervous regarding the financial condition of his business, and wondered to what extent Burton had delved into his funds.

He ordered carelessly, resenting the intrusions of the waiter, and then sat in a deep study until the food was set before him. He ate little, but played idly with it for a few moments, then signed the check and arose, walking through the room with his eyes directed straight ahead. Not until he reached the street did he throw off the spell that seemed to hold him securely in its grasp.

He strode rapidly toward the building in which his offices were located. Something seemed to tell him he should hurry back.

As he entered his private office, the accountant, who was still seated at his desk, was talking over the phone, and did not notice Thornton's presence.

"No, he is not here," the man was saying, "but will—"

"Who is it?" Thornton queried, advancing to the other's side.

He looked up in surprise.

"Oh, wait a moment," he called through the phone. "Here is Mr. Thornton now."

Rising suddenly from the chair, he remarked: "I did not know you had returned. Some one wants you, sir."

With that unseen, indescribable intuition that so often appears upon occasions coincident with overtaxed brains, Thornton seized the telephone.

"This is Mrs. Burton," a trembling voice at the other end of the wire announced. "Oh, Mr. Thornton, surely there is a mistake. Tell me there is."

"I hardly know what to say, Mrs. Burton. Why do you ask?"

"Because there is an officer here with a warrant for Mr. Burton's arrest, and he says you ordered it made out," the voice replied, ending with a plainly audible sob. "He is sick in bed—"

"Where—there in his home?" Thornton broke in excitedly.

"Yes, he is very ill and cannot be moved. What can I do?"

Thornton was at a loss for a reply. He was not familiar with police methods, and was rapidly revolving in his mind the unpleasant affair before him. The trembling, sobbing voice of the culprit's wife touched him, and he blurted out: "Tell the officer to wait there until I come, and I'll fix it with him. I'll start immediately."

Hanging up the receiver, he turned to the accountant and said in rather a mournful tone: "Keep right on with

your work. I'll be back later in the day."

The trip up-town to Burton's home seemed a never-ending journey to Thornton; but at last he found himself upon the street he wanted, and slowly walking along, found the correct house-number and entered.

In answer to his ring, the door opened automatically, and he passed into the hall of the large apartment-house. He stood for a moment, undecided as to what floor Burton lived on; then, hearing a door open on the floor above, ascended the stairs.

A sad-faced woman with eyes red from weeping was awaiting him, and, without a word from either, she motioned him into the parlor, a cozily furnished little room, in which the detective sat brazenly smoking a large black cigar.

In a voice choked with emotion, Mrs. Burton murmured, "This way," and led Thornton into a room in which her husband lay helpless upon a bed. Then turned and left employer and employee together.

There was no trace of anger in the actions of Thornton as he sat down upon the side of the bed. For a moment neither of the men spoke; then he inquired sadly: "Burton, why did you do it?"

Burton stared vacantly at his employer, then burst out: "I can't say. Mr. Thornton, I did it, and am ready to pay the penalty. I don't care for myself, but it will be hard for my wife. Poor little girl, she believes me innocent. What an awful blow it will be when she learns the truth!"

"Burton, I can't believe it yet," Thornton remarked sadly. "I trusted you implicitly—"

"Don't make it any harder than it already is," Burton begged, raising his hands appealingly. "I wanted money! money! money! I craved it, and, thinking I saw ahead the road so many imagine the short-cut to wealth, I took it. I began by speculating—with my own money, I mean. I won—just the thing I should not have done. I was encouraged by this and plunged deeper.

"Up to this time I was honest, using only my own money. Then the change came, and I lost. The tide had turned, and every time I played the market the losses were sure and certain."

His voice was now almost eager, and he raised himself upon his elbow as he continued earnestly: "Then came my downfall. I saw what I felt was an assured investment, and a chance to get back what I had lost. So I took what was not mine. I took your money—and lost!

"Since that time my life has been a hell upon earth. My days were torture—the nights filled with horrible visions. I felt I was going mad, and this morning I collapsed. But now this awful suspense is ended, I feel better and am ready to get upon my feet and take my punishment. I wouldn't care, only for—for—my wife."

Thornton had listened listlessly to the confession of the man before him, and for a moment did not speak, his eyes staring vacantly at the foot of the bed.

"Burton, there is just one thing I cannot understand," he began at length. "Just one thing that does not complete your confession."

The sick man braced himself, and a look of fear spread over his face. But before he could put a question, Thornton continued: "Why did you send the telegram? You—"

"Telegram! What telegram?" Burton queried in tones of complete surprise.

Thornton's face showed a fleeting expression of suspicion as he drew the message from his pocket and handed it to the other, who stared open-eyed at it, then announced positively: "I did not send this, sir!"

All his tender feeling for the man seemed to flee, as Thornton's lip curled in scorn and he began scathingly: "Burton, you have sunk low enough—do not add lying to your already blasted character. I was touched with your story, but now—" he paused a moment, then added almost appealingly: "Tell the truth."

"I certainly did not send that telegram!" was the declaration, decisive and final.

Thornton was instantly upon his feet, and, without another look at the prostrate man, hurried toward the room in which the officer was seated. Avoiding

the appealing look from Mrs. Burton, he addressed the policeman: "Do your duty."

A stifled cry burst from the woman's lips as her husband's accuser hurriedly left the apartment.

The memory of the wife's look of total despair caused Thornton to fidget nervously in the car during the ride down-town, and it was with positive relief that he found himself once again in his own building.

Entering his private office hurriedly, he was greeted by a man who had been gazing interestedly out of the window into the street below.

"Hello, John!" exclaimed the stranger, who proved to be Thornton's wife's brother. "I've been waiting here for nearly half an hour. You are a busy creature, I guess."

"Rather, Tom," Thornton replied absently. "I've had a very trying experience to-day. But what brings you back so soon?"

"Well, I won't keep you," the other announced. "I just dropped in to let you know I had returned. When I went away this morning, I expected to stay a week or two. But when I arrived at Torringford, I found one of Horace's children down with scarlet fever. Naturally, I came back on the next train, and will intrude myself upon your hospitality for another week. Did you get my telegram?"

"What telegram?" Thornton queried, a trace of annoyance in his voice, caused by his desire to get at the many papers upon his desk that demanded his attention, and from which the accountant had risen respectfully.

"Why, the one in which I informed you that I was an absconder," was the reply, followed by a short laugh.

"You sent that message!" Thornton exclaimed in astonishment. Drawing the copy from his pocket, he thrust it before his brother-in-law's face. "You sent this?" he repeated.

"Yes, of course I did. Who did you think— By Jove, they didn't send it as I wrote it, though. In this last sentence, 'You will understand,' I wrote just the letter 'U.' That's what I always call Eunice, you know. But why this excitement?"

"But what does it all mean?" Thornton demanded.

"Only this, John. Be calm and I will explain. Yesterday Eunice asked me to pay a bill for her while I was down-town looking over the sights of your wonderful city. The amount was seventy-four dollars, and she gave me a hundred-dollar bank-note. I forgot to give her the change, and went off this morning with it in my pocket, never thinking of it until I reached the Grand Central Station, when it occurred to me.

"I knew Eunice was going to be out all day to-day, and fearing a telegram to the house would excite the servants and they might try to find her, I sent it to you, thinking, of course, you would understand and explain to-night."

Noting the relieved expression upon Thornton's face, he added earnestly: "I hope no harm has been done by this little —may I call it, joke of mine?"

"No, Tom; no harm in one way," Thornton volunteered calmly. "That is, not for me. In fact, it is just to the contrary. It caused me to look into the accounts of my cashier, who is absent to-day. He has gone wrong, I soon found."

"The deuce you say!" the other ejaculated.

"Yes, but when I accused him of sending the wire he denied it, although he admitted his pilfering. I felt sorry for him until then, when I decided to let the law take its course. But now— Excuse me, Tom, but I must hurry uptown."

Seizing his hat, he rushed out of the office and hastened to Burton's home, to find he had got up from his bed and dressed shortly after Thornton had left in the morning, and accompanied the officer. The pitiful sorrow of Mrs. Burton touched him more than ever, and he hurried to the police-court, only to learn that his former employee had already been arraigned and was now in the city jail, no one having appeared to go on his bond.

Thornton hastened thither, and, after a short talk with the prisoner, returned to the court-room, where he went Burton's bail.

"You come back and help us straighten out the books," he began, when he

reached the jail again. "You say it cannot be more than five hundred dollars you have taken. Then, when your trial comes up, I will try to get you off as lightly as possible. I cannot promise to get you off free, but will do my best. Then, when it is settled, go to some other city and start life over again.

"I think you have learned a lesson you will never forget, Burton. But, remember, I am not doing this for you. It is for your wife—and to punish you would mean to cause the innocent to suffer with the guilty. Thank her for anything I do for you. I will expect you at the office to-morrow morning."

Burton's voice was too choked with emotion to answer, and with tears of gratitude coursing down his cheeks, he nodded, and the two men walked out of the jail together.

It was a little later than usual when Thornton arrived home that night to find his wife awaiting him.

"Why, John, you look awfully tired!" she exclaimed, after greeting him affectionately.

"I am, Eunice, dear," he murmured fondly. "That brother of yours played an unintentional joke on me to-day that caused me much worry."

"Yes, Tom told me of it," she interrupted. "I am so sorry. He is very thoughtless. He is really nothing more than a boy at times."

"Well," Thornton remarked absently, "it was a good thing for me, after all. But for another—well, perhaps it was a good thing for him, too. It certainly cut short a career of crime that might have ended no one knows where. Perhaps, after all, he may not have to suffer the penalty. Yes, I think Tom's little joke was a good thing for all concerned."

A CASE OF HEARTS AND HORSE.

By EDWARD PRESTON CAMPBELL.

The unexpected thing that happened when love was left out of the reckoning in a game of cards on the veranda.

THEY sat on the porch, facing each other—not saying a word. He was downcast, while she had a determined air about her.

"Well, if it is to end this way, I guess I cannot say anything more, Bess."

The young man got up with a lifeless air.

"Now, Robert, dear, you know I love you. I would marry you in a minute, only father thinks you have too much sporting blood in you for a son-in-law. He is all alone now; if I did anything to displease him it would kill him," stealing her hand in his.

"Oh, I guess I will survive all right; still, Bess, I hate the idea of losing you. I wish I could get around your father some way."

"So do I, but you know what chance you have of doing that."

"Yes, it seems hopeless. But I will have to get even with him for this rank injustice. Here he comes now. It is up to me to make him remember me."

"Don't be too hard on poor old dad. He likes you."

"I guess he does—a good way off."

"Good-by." With that the young lady darted into the house, her heart in a flutter. She had declined for the forty-seventh time to marry Robert Spires.

Robert stood at the top of the steps with outstretched hand.

"Well, Mr. Sniffen," he said, "this is a pleasure, indeed. Here I was growing lonely; no one around to talk to."

"Why, where are all the folks?" replied Mr. Sniffen as he shook hands.

For answer Robert simply shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I guess we can have a game of hearts, if Bess is not around. You know, she doesn't care to have me play cards for money. Now, when a man gets my age he needs some excitement. There are so many things that he cannot get pleasure out of as he did in his younger days."

"Right you are, Mr. Sniffen. I'm

sorry to say that I have to leave to-day for the city. I have some business that will demand my attention."

"That's too bad. I'm sure Bess and I will miss you."

"It's very nice, indeed, of you to say so."

"What shall the stakes be to-day, Robert?" rejoined the other, sitting down and picking up the cards.

"I suggest that we play a three-hundred-point game. The stakes—let me see. What do you say to putting up your pet horse against my two hundred dollars?" pulling out a large roll of money.

"You mean that I put up Bess, the pride of the stables?"

"Exactly, Mr. Sniffen. I love that horse. You have refused to sell her to me many a time. Now then, let's play for Bess."

Robert knew if he did win it would just about break the old man's heart.

But he was game. Without saying a word, he dealt the cards. Robert was fishing for his revenge.

Silently they played, then suddenly Robert reached over and pointed to the score.

"I guess that settles it," he said.

"I guess it does, my boy."

"Do you want to play any more?" asked Robert, highly elated, for he had won.

"No. I have had enough cards to last me to my dying day. Robert, promise me you will always look after Bess—see that she does not come to harm. You know how I love her. I'm going down to the stable. I won't be gone long. Wait here."

With his hat pulled down well over his eyes, he turned to enter the house.

"Mr. Sniffen, I'm—" Robert began, and held out his hand.

"Not a word, my boy. I know you love Bess as much as I do. She is yours. What makes me feel badly is that you two will be going to the city soon."

"Oh, daddy, here you are! You're the best dad any girl ever had!" exclaimed Bess, throwing her arms around his neck and giving him a big kiss. She had come suddenly upon them and heard what he said to Robert.

"There, there, my dear. I will leave you two alone for a while; I'll be back shortly."

With a big lump in his throat, Mr. Sniffen made for the stables.

"No hurry, Mr. Sniffen," young Spires called after him.

"Isn't he a dear, Robert? To think a few minutes ago I went into the house with a heavy heart; now, I hear father giving his consent to *our marriage*. It seems almost too good to be true," snuggling up close to him.

Robert was dumb with amazement for an instant. Then the truth of the matter flashed over him. What man could have resisted the temptation? It was too much for Robert.

"What do you say, dear, to walking across the road? There is the minister on the porch. Father might change his mind. It certainly will be a surprise to him. You know you said you would marry me in a minute."

"Do you think it would be right for us to do it?"

"Surest thing you know. Let us get the agony over as quickly as possible."

"Well, I like that."

"I will like it better after the deed is done. Come on."

Arm in arm they walked down the old familiar path. The minister did not hesitate a minute. He soon made them one. Smiling like two children, they returned to the house, to be met there by Mr. Sniffen, patting the neck of his favorite horse.

If Robert could have had his way just about then he would have been out West on his honeymoon.

"Oh, there you are, my boy. I do hope you and Bess will get along all right. I never had much trouble in raising her. She is as gentle as a kitten."

"Father, what makes you say such things? Of course Robert and I will get along all right. We are not going away, are we, Robert?" giving him a hearty kiss before the very much startled father.

"Not that anybody knows of," replied Robert, slipping his arm around the waist of his little bride.

"What does this mean?" the old man managed to get out.

"Well, you see, father, Robert and I have been in love for a year, and you would never give your consent till to-

day, and, as we feared that you might change your mind, we have just been married!"

"Married!" exclaimed Mr. Sniffen, scarcely believing his ears.

"Yes, sir," replied Robert in a matter-of-fact way, at the same time giving him a wink. "Bess heard you say that I could have her."

"I said what?"

"Now, dad, I heard you say that with your own lips: 'Not a word, my boy. I know you love Bess as much as I do. She is yours. What makes me feel badly is, you will be wanting to take her to the city with you.' So Robert and I are going to stay right here with you."

"That's right, Mr. Sniffen. Bess and I are not going away. You will have no fault to find with me. I have won the greatest prize any man could hope to win, so games of chance will no longer fascinate me."

Bess looked up into Robert's face with a happy smile.

The old man did not know what to say or do. He leaned against the horse for support, then suddenly he raised his hand:

"God bless you, my children," he said, adding. "I guess everything is fair in a game of hearts, but I will be hanged if you will get both," looking Robert straight in the eye.

Then, like a schoolboy, he led Bess, the horse, back to the stable, leaving Bess, the girl, with her Robert in bliss supreme.

THE VANISHING DIAMOND.

By MABEL GERTRUDE DUNNING.

The awful thing that happened to a woman with a borrowed ring.

MRS. CARLSON was unhappy. Compressed lips, frowning brow, and swaying foot would have told you that at first glance, and a second one would have shown you that she was indignant into the bargain.

She finally sat up in her chair, nervously rolled her handkerchief in a tight wad and wiped a few angry tears from her pretty eyes.

"I declare!" she exclaimed with childish impulsiveness, "it's bad enough to be married and dependent on the bounty of a husband, but to be dependent on a husband who thinks, sleeping and waking, of nothing but old books, costly books, rare books, and who spends every available penny for more books and still more books—oh, it's too dreadful to be endured!" and she jumped excitedly to her feet, her grievances, when spoken aloud, proving too great to be borne quietly.

Jessie Carlson had been married nearly three years. Pretty, clever in certain ways, but of no very deep mentality, she had accepted Robert Carlson's offer because his growing reputation as a writer of serious articles had opened vistas of social prestige and triumphs dear to her worldly little heart.

But her dreams of conquest never realized themselves, for Robert's standing as an author attained a certain height and remained there, with the consequence that Robert's wife never moved to the city to exercise her talent as a society leader, but remained one of the select ones in her own town.

To be sure, she had a pretty home, and everything needed for her comfort Robert supplied cheerfully. What more could she desire?

But Mrs. Carlson had one great grievance which clouded all her otherwise happy existence, and turned all her pleasures bitter with the remembrance of it. In all her three years of married life, she had never owned a diamond ring!

Just before her marriage, her engagement-ring had been stolen, and Robert had promised to replace it with another and larger stone immediately, but at that time the famous Newton library had been offered at auction, and knowing that it contained some valuable copies that Robert wanted, she had, in her rash desire to please him, insisted that he buy the

books then, and let the ring wait until after the wedding.

For three years she had repented her unselfishness, and reminded her husband of his unfulfilled promise, and each time, very remorseful, he had promised to buy the ring when he received his check for his next article.

But always the check was spent for books whose cheapness he could not resist, until now, he possessed the most famous and valuable library for miles around, while his wife, his faithful, patient wife, owned not one diamond ring.

And now, to fill her cup to overflowing, she had been elected president of the new whist club which was to hold its first meeting that afternoon. President of a whist club, and no diamond ring to flash before the eyes of the other players as she skilfully cut and dealt the cards!

What greater grievance could be thrust upon a woman?

Mrs. Carlson choked back an angry sob as her door was pulled noisily open and her sister billowed into the room, a bewildering combination of nodding roses and rustling silk.

"Oh, Jess, what do you think, I—" but noticing for the first time the other's tear-filled eyes, she stopped with open mouth and hands dropped limply at her sides.

"Why, Jess Carlson, you're crying!" she exclaimed. "What *is* the matter? Is your Angora cat dead, or has your husband bought another library?"

Sinking down on the sofa beside her weeping sister, she slipped her hands along Mrs. Carlson's shoulders.

"That's it exactly, Grace," was the strangled answer, "he's just bought the Richardson collection, and I asked him to get my ring that I might have it for this afternoon. This morning at breakfast, I lost my patience and told him what I thought of a man who had promised for three years to buy his wife a ring and kept putting it off to gratify his own selfish desire for books.

"Then he said the same old thing—he'd buy it with his next check—but that'll be too late!" she shrilled tragically. "I've got to play at the whist club this afternoon. It's the first meeting, and I'm president. Grace, imagine it! President! and not one miserable ring!" and to emphasize her words, she thrust her small, bare hands before her sister's commiserating gaze.

"It is beastly, Jess. I must say I think Robert is very selfish buying libraries for his own exclusive pleasure. He might vary the monotony occasionally with a diamond ring or a new gown for you. I don't suppose men realize how women feel about such things, but I do think it is a shame that he has never given you the ring he promised you," and Mrs. Martin spoke with energy.

"But, don't cry about it, Jess. Wait! I have an idea," and with a quick movement she pulled off her long glove, and, slipping a large, brilliant solitaire from her finger, thrust it into her sister's unwilling hand.

"There, you wear my ring. I'm going shopping and won't need it with my gloves on. It's impossible for you to go to that club without any; simply impossible. You've made such a fuss this time that possibly Robert will really get your own ring before the next meeting, and no one will know about mine."

"Oh, Grace, how good of you! I don't like to borrow, but just this once I'll wear it, with a thousand thanks to you. I don't think I'll tell Robert about it, though."

Mrs. Carlson surveyed the brilliant stone on her finger, flashing its hundred beautiful colors in the sunlight.

"I can go to the club now with some feeling of self-assurance," she sighed happily as she bade her sister good-by an hour later.

II.

"ROBERT, are you very busy?"

Mrs. Carlson opened the door of her husband's library with care, "No, not just now. What is it, Jess?"

The man bending over the writing-table raised eyes filled with inquiry.

Jess moved forward into a circle of sunlight and looked anxiously at her husband.

"Robert, I—" she hesitated, "I—yesterday we had some words about the ring I asked you to buy me."

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten," answered Carlson a trifle impatiently.

Was she going over that everlasting ring question again? By Jove, he'd buy

the thing and have done with it the very next check he received, he told himself.

"I wanted it especially to wear to the club yesterday, and because I didn't get it I went to my room and cried." Carlson's eyes dropped before his wife's gaze. "Grace came in and found me, and insisted that I wear hers, which I did."

The man moved restlessly in his chair. Why was she telling him this? To make him ashamed that her sister should feel obliged to offer her ring?

"It was dark when I came in last night, and in my hurry, I did not stop to turn on the light in my room, but removed my hat and gloves, and also the ring, which I left on my dresser. This morning, when I went to get it, I found it where I had laid it, but—oh, Robert, look! this is the condition in which I found it!" and stretching out her hand she laid the ring on the open book before him.

The thin, delicate prongs of the setting were bent upward, and the place where the glittering white jewel had reposed was now a gaping, empty space! The diamond was gone!

"For Heaven's sake, Jess, what have you done? Did you lose it?"

Carlson had risen and was examining the ring.

"Oh, Robert, I've looked everywhere for it. I thought I might have pulled it out when I removed my gloves, but I cannot find it in my room. I've been back to the club, but it isn't there. I must have caught it in something and pulled it out. What shall I do? How can I ever tell Grace!" and she began to weep.

Her husband watched her, an annoyed frown between his brows.

"You should never have borrowed it to begin with," he said severely, as though she were a child.

"Well, if you had given me the one you promised I wouldn't have had to borrow," answered Grace, a quick flash of just indignation in her eyes.

A red flush rose slowly over Carlson's face.

"We won't argue about that. Are you sure you've looked everywhere?" he questioned, turning the ring over in his hand.

"Everywhere. It could only have dropped in my room or at the club, because I had my gloves on. Oh, I do wish I had never borrowed the thing!"

"Well, never mind now. The harm's done," said Robert gloomily. "Let's go to your room and see if perhaps you haven't overlooked it."

They climbed the stairs together, but a long and diligent search was unrewarded. The stone was certainly lost.

"The ring cost five hundred dollars if it cost a cent," began Carlson, leaning against the door of the wardrobe. "That's what those books from Richardson's came to. I'll have to send them back and use the money to replace this stone before Grace sees the ring again."

"Oh, Robert!" Jess was weeping now.

"Don't cry about spilt milk, Jess," continued Carlson, a bit softened by her distress and contrition. "I'll take the ring to town this morning and have the stone put in. I'll leave it with Grace on my way back this evening."

"I'm sorry about it, Robert, and it's good of you to give up the books."

Poor Jess, humbled and relieved that the dreadful responsibility had been removed from her own frightened self, was nevertheless a bit astonished at Robert's calmness in accepting the loss of his five hundred dollars. She had been so terrified when she discovered her loss that bringing herself to tell her husband had been an agonized effort, for she had expected reproaches, and perhaps angry words.

"I'll send an expressman for the books. Will you see that they go back all right?"

Carlson's parting words, spoken with a resigned sigh, were the only reproach Jess felt.

III.

It was nearing dusk when Robert Carlson thrust his key into the latch of his front door. As he stepped into the dim, warm hall, a sudden rustle upstairs caught his ear, and looking up, he saw Jess hurrying down to meet him.

"Robert," she exclaimed excitedly, "I do hope you haven't bought that ring yet. I've been trying to get you on the phone all day."

"Why, yes, the ring is safe on Grace's finger, with the new stone in it, and Grace and Jim will be here for dinner in a short while. Why do you ask?"

"I've found the stone!" announced Jess dramatically.

"Found it! Where?" asked Carlson.

"Just before lunch I was removing the things from my dresser for Ellen to sweep, when I found the stone in the lace frill of my cushion. It was tucked down between the head of the lace frill and the cushion itself. I never should have found it only as I lifted the cushion into the sunlight the flash of the stone caught my eye. It's simply beyond me to understand how it could have got there. Here it is," and she extended her hand with the gleaming gem in her palm.

"Now you can have your books, after all," she added with generous gladness.

Carlson looked at her in silence for a moment.

"Haven't the books gone back?" he questioned.

"Yes; but we can send for them again," said Jess eagerly.

Her husband turned suddenly toward the library.

"You had better keep the stone and have it put in a ring for yourself. Let the books go. I guess you've waited long enough for your ring."

He silenced her protests and thanks with an upraised hand.

"Better go and look after the dinner. Grace and Jim'll be here shortly." And he entered his beloved library, closing the door between them.

Half an hour later Jess, with a radiant face, was chattering happily to her sister.

"Yes, I've got my ring at last—at least, I have the stone. Robert gave it to me to-day."

"By the way, where is Robert?" asked Grace, rising from her chair.

"In the library, reading. I thought I wouldn't disturb him until dinner was ready."

"Well, I'm going to rout him out. You can entertain Jim while I do it," laughed Grace as she left the room.

Her face was quite sober when she entered the library, where her brother-in-law was writing.

"Robert," she began quietly, "I want a word with you before Jess comes. I see she has her ring at last."

"Yes," nodded Carlson absently.

"Of course it was the one she lost?" she went on.

"Lost? How did you know she lost it?" Carlson looked up suddenly.

"Because I picked the stone out of its setting myself," replied Grace calmly.

"You! When, and for what?" cried Robert in amazement, rising to his feet.

"Because I felt sorry for Jess, and because it was time for some one to make you realize your selfishness. Listen, Robert. I was here last evening, and when Jess left me alone in her room with the ring—my ring—lying on the dresser, the idea suddenly came to me to pick the stone out of its setting and hide it, making Jess think she had lost it. I knew that you would replace the stone rather than have any one know she had borrowed it. I picked it out with a nail-file and hid the stone in the lace of her cushion, where I was sure she would never find it unless she took the cushion to pieces. After I received my own ring back I had intended to tell you what I had done and persuade you to give Jess the hidden gem, but I see she found the stone, and you gave her the other without my interference."

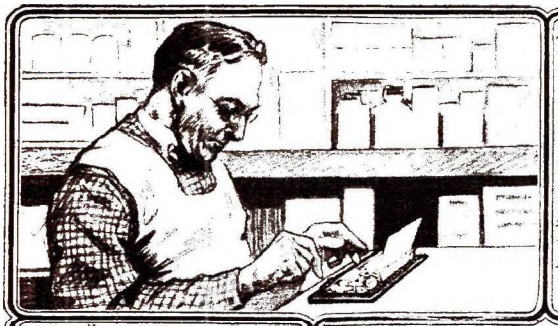
Grace waited for the man to speak, but he remained staring at the books on the table.

"Robert," she went on, "she's waited so long and been so generous and uncomplaining about the ring that yesterday, when I found her crying because you had disappointed her again, I made up my mind that if she couldn't have her ring by fair means she should have it by foul. I've no doubt it seems very silly to you, but it doesn't take much to make Jess happy, and that was the one thing to do it. Are you angry, Robert?"

Carlson straightened himself with energy.

"No, Grace, I'm not angry. On the contrary, I'm glad you did what you did. We won't say anything to Jess about this, but I'll try and remember the lesson you've read me."

And Jess has always been a little puzzled to know why her husband now varies his purchases of libraries with occasional pretty things for herself.



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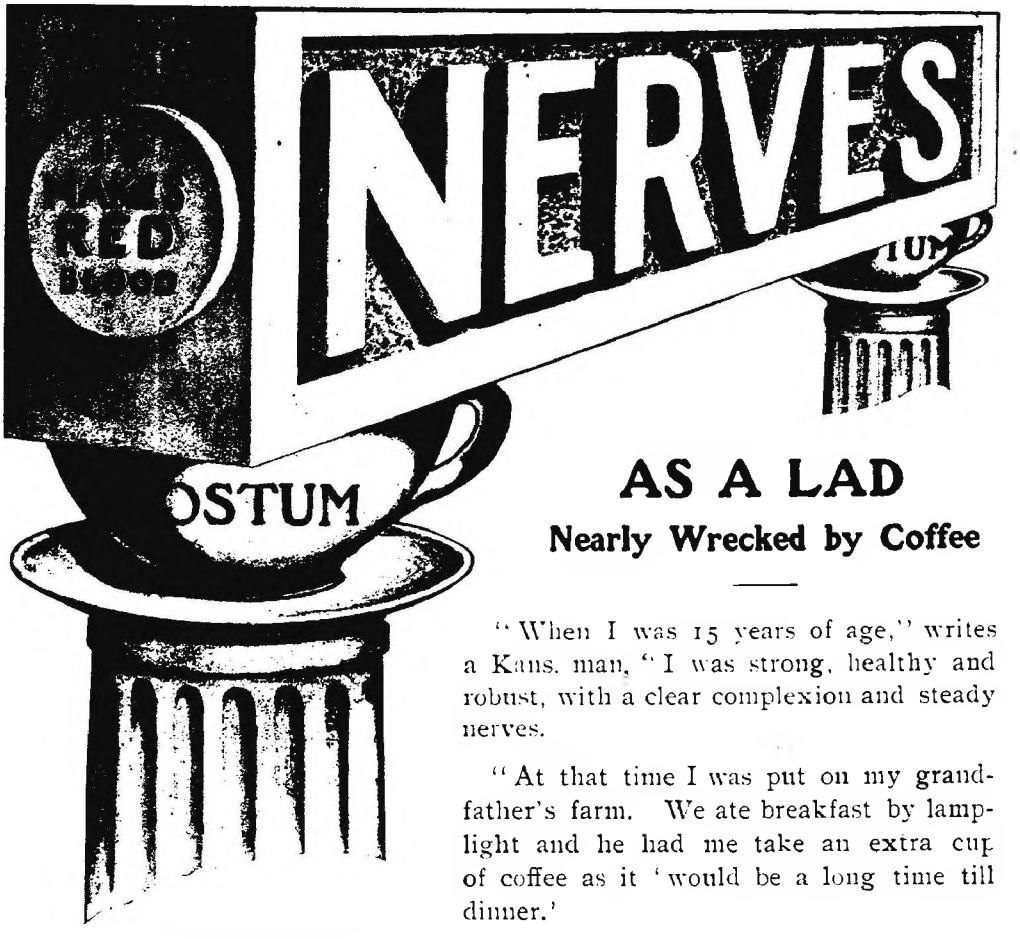

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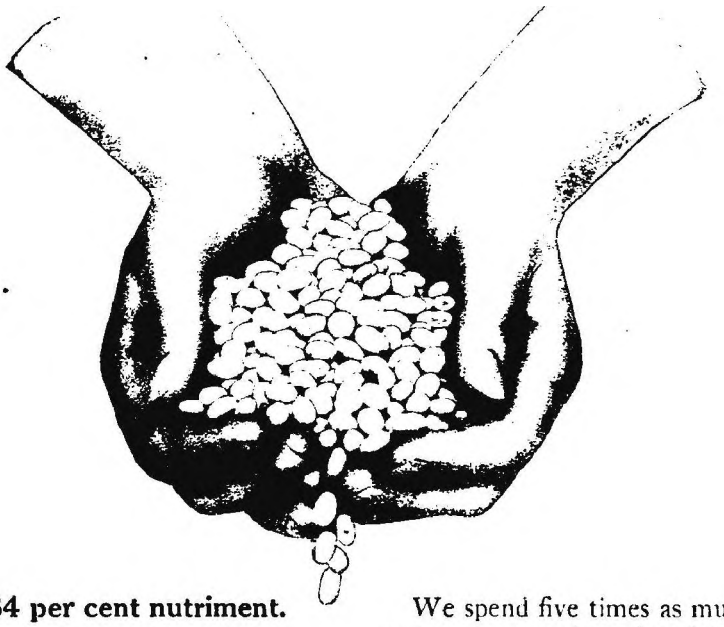

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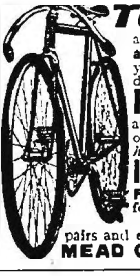

Ten Days' Free Trial

allowed on every bicycle we sell. We **Ship on Approval and trial** to anyone in U. S. and *prepay the freight.* If you are not satisfied with the bicycle after using it ten days ship it back and *don't pay a cent.*

FACTORY PRICES *Do not buy* a bicycle or a pair of tires from *anyone* at *any price* until you receive our latest **Art Catalogs** of high grade bicycles and sundries and learn our *unheard of prices* and *marvelous new special offers.*

IT ONLY COSTS a cent to write a postal and everything will be sent you **FREE** by return mail. You will get much valuable information. **Do Not Wait; write it Now!**

Tires, Coaster Brakes, single wheels, parts, repairs and equipment of all kinds at *half usual prices.*

MEAD CYCLE CO. Dept. L 31 CHICAGO

"A man's voice, anyhow"

NO way of amusing people is so sure of results as by means of an Edison Phonograph. Start one anywhere and everybody gathers around it. It is easy to entertain with an Edison. It will amuse any kind of a gathering.

The EDISON PHONOGRAPH

places music, formerly available only to the few, within reach of the many. No ear is too critical and no pocketbook too limited to enjoy the entertainment it affords.

There's Lots of Good Fun in the August Records

But the twenty-four new Records for August are not made up entirely of comic songs and the wit of clever comedians. There are good sentimental ballads, well-rendered band and orchestra selections, instrumental solos, and some sacred selections—the best of the new music and the best of the old. On July 25th they will be on sale at all Edison stores. Your dealer will be glad to play for you any Records that you want to hear.

Ask your dealer or write to us for the new catalogue of Edison Phonographs, THE PHONOGRAM, describing each Record in detail; the SUPPLEMENTAL CATALOGUE, listing the new August Records, and the COMPLETE CATALOGUE, listing all Edison Records now in existence. Records in all foreign languages.

NATIONAL PHONOGRAPH COMPANY, 35 Lakeside Ave., Orange, N. J.

Twenty Million Voices

A PERFECT understanding by the public of the management and full scope of the Bell Telephone System can have but one effect, and that a most desirable one —a marked betterment of the service.

Do you know what makes the telephone worth while to you—just about the most indispensable thing in modern life?

It isn't the circuit of wire that connects your instrument with the exchange.

It's the Twenty Million Voices at the other end of the wire on every Bell Telephone!

We have to keep them there, on hair trigger, ready for you to call them up, day or night—downtown, up in Maine, or out in Denver.

And to make the telephone system useful to those Twenty Million other people, we have to keep *you* alert and ready at this end of the wire.

Then we have to keep the line in order—8,000,000 miles of wire—and the central girls properly drilled and accommodating to the last degree, and the apparatus up to the highest pitch of efficiency.

Quite a job, all told.

Every telephone user is an important link in the system—just as important as the operator. With a little well meant suggestion on our part, we believe we can improve the service—perhaps save a second on each call.

There are about *six billion connections* a year over these lines.

Saving a second each would mean a tremendous time saving to you and a tremendous saving of operating expenses, which can be applied to the betterment of the service.

The object of this and several succeeding magazine advertisements is *not to get more subscribers.* It is to make each one of you a better link in the chain.

First, give "Central" the number clearly and be sure she hears it. Give her full and clear information in cases of doubt. She is there to do her utmost to accommodate you.

Next, don't grow fretful because you think she represents a monopoly. The postmaster does, too, for the same reason.

The usefulness of the telephone is its *universality, as one system.* Where there are two systems you must have two telephones—and confusion.

Remember, the value of the service lies in the number of people you can reach *without* confusion—the promptness with which you get your response.

So respond quickly when others call you, bearing in mind the extensive scope of the service.

The constant endeavor of the associated Bell companies, harmonized by one policy and acting under one management, is to give you the best and most economical management human ingenuity can devise. The end is efficient service and your attitude and that of every other subscriber may hasten or hinder its accomplishment.

Agitation against legitimate telephone business—the kind that has become almost as national in its scope as the mail service—must disappear with a realization of the necessity of universal service.

American Telephone & Telegraph Company

And Its Associated Bell Companies

LOCAL AND LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE

One Policy—One System Universal Service

UNITING OVER 4,000,000 TELEPHONES

$2.

The New "Junior" Thin-Model Ingersoll Watch

This newest Ingersoll meets the most exacting modern demand for extremely small, thin-model watches—yet it costs but a fractional part of the price of any other thin-model watch on the market. The beauty of its case lines and finish (nickel, gun metal or "gold") can only be fully appreciated by seeing this watch and handling it—by finding out how easily and unobtrusively it fits in the pocket. Its fine mechanism and adjustment produce unusual close-timing, and like all Ingersolls, it is a *guaranteed* time-keeper.

Ingersoll

Dollar Watch

The famous "Dollar Watch" is still the most popular, practical and inexpensive watch in the world. It has been imitated, but always unsuccessfully, and people have learned to look for the name "Ingersoll" on the dial, in order to avoid these imitations and get the only *real* watch sold for a dollar.

Other Men's Ingersolls at $1.50 and $1.75; "Midget" models for Ladies, Girls and Boys, $2 to $5.

If none of the 60,000 dealers who sell Ingersolls is near enough to supply you, we will send your watch direct, postpaid, upon receipt of price (if by registered mail, send 8c additional).

Ingersoll Gold-filled CHAINS—12 beautiful patterns—$1.00 postpaid

ROBT. H. INGERSOLL & BRO.
46 Frankel Building
New York

$1.

THE MUNSEY PRESS, NEW YORK.