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# THE BLUE BOOK

## MAGAZINE FOR FEBRUARY, 1915

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CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager

RALPH K. STRASSMAN, Advertising Manager, 1172 Fifth Avenue Bldg., New York

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Advertisements

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By H. Rider Haggard

Author of "She," "Allan Quatermain," "King Solomon's Mines," etc.

rical skill. Of this magic  
one remark: If it  
means in-

towers, that had been restored and turned into a most luxurious modern dwelling-house. Let us call it Ragnall, the seat of a Baron of that name.

I had heard a good deal about Lord Ragnall, who, according to all accounts, seemed a kind of Admirable Crichton. He was said to be wonderfully handsome, a great scholar—he had taken a double first at college—a great athlete (he had been captain of the Oxford boat in the University race), a very promising speaker who had already made his mark in the House of Lords, a sportsman who had shot tigers and other large game in India, a poet who had published a successful volume of verse under a pseudonym, a good soldier until he left the service, and lastly, a man of enormous wealth, owning addition to his estates several in the North of England.

"Dear me!"

angelic lad  
he was engaged, whose name  
stood was the Honorable M—  
So I said that nothing would please me  
more than to see this castle.

Thither we drove, accordingly, through the fine frosty air, for the month was December. On reaching the castle Mr. Scroope was told that Lord Ragnall, whom he knew well, was out shooting somewhere in the park, but that of course he could show his friend over the place. So we went in, the three of us, for Miss Manners, to whom Scroope was going to be married very shortly, had driven us over in her pony carriage. The porter at the gateway towers took us to the main door of the castle.

ON THIS occasion Savage conducted us round the castle, or rather its more public rooms, showing us many treasures and I should think at least two hundred pictures by eminent and departed artists, which gave him an opportunity of exhibiting an intimate and peculiar knowledge of history. To tell the truth I began to wish that it were a little less full in detail, since on a December day those large apartments felt uncommonly cold. Scroope and Miss Manners seemed to keep warm, perhaps with the inward fires of mutual admiration, but as I had no one to admire, except Mr. Savage, a temperature of about thirty-five degrees produced its natural effect upon me.

At length we took a short cut from the Large to the Little Gallery, through a warmed and comfortable room, which I understood was Lord Ragnall's study. Halting for a moment by one of the fires I observed a picture on the wall over which a curtain was drawn, and asked Mr. Savage what it might be.

"That, sir," he replied with a kind of haughty reserve, "is the portrait of her future ladyship, which his lordship keeps for his private eye."

Miss Manners sniggered, and I said:

"Oh! thank you. What an ill-omened kind of thing to do!" Then observing through an open door the hall in which my hat had been taken from me, I lingered, and as the others vanished into the Little Gallery, I slipped into it, recovered my belongings, and passed out into the garden, proposing to walk there till I was warm again and Scroope re-appeared. While I marched up and down a terrace, on which I remember several very cold-looking peacocks were seated, like conscientious birds that knew it was their duty to be ornamental, however low the temperature, I heard some shots fired, apparently in a clump of ilex oaks which grew about five hundred yards away, and reflected to myself that they seemed to be those of a small rifle, not of a shot-gun.

My curiosity being excited as to what to me was an almost professional matter, I walked towards the grove, making a circuit through a shrubbery.

At length I found myself near to the edge of a glade, and perceived, standing behind the shelter of a magnificent ilex, two men. One of these was a young keeper, and the other, from his appearance, I felt sure must be Lord Ragnall himself. Certainly he was a splendid-looking man, very tall, very broad, very handsome, with a peaked beard, a kind and charming face and large dark eyes. He wore a cloak upon his shoulders, which was thrown back from over a velvet coat, and except for the light double-barreled rifle in his hand, he looked just like a picture by Vandyke which Mr. Savage had informed me was that of one of his ancestors of the time of Charles I.

Standing back behind an oak, I observed that he was trying to shoot wood pigeons as they descended to feed upon the acorns, for which the hard weather had made them greedy. From time to time these beautiful blue birds appeared and hovered a moment before they settled, whereon the sportsman fired and—they flew away. *Bang! Bang!* went the double-barreled rifle; off fled the pigeon.

"Damn!" said the sportsman in a pleasant, laughing voice. "That's the twelfth I have missed, Charles."

"You hit his tail, my Lord. I saw a feather come out. But, my Lord, as I told you, there aint no man living what can kill pigeons on the wing with a bullet, even when they seem to sit still in the air."

"I have heard of one, Charles. Mr. Scroope has a friend from Africa staying with him who, he swears, could knock over four out of six."

"Then, my Lord; Mr. Scroope has a friend what lies," replied Charles as he handed him the second rifle.

THIS was too much for me. I stepped forward, raising my hat politely, and said:

"Sir, forgive me for interrupting you, but you are not shooting at those wood pigeons in the right way. Although they seem to hover just before they settle, they are dropping much faster than you think. Your keeper was mistaken when he said that you knocked a feather out of the tail of that last bird

at which you fired two barrels. In both cases you shot at least a foot above it, and what fell was a leaf from the ilex tree."

There was a moment's silence, which was broken by Charles, who ejaculated in a thick voice, "Well, of all the cheek—!"

Lord Ragnall, however, for it was he, looked first angry and then amused.

"Sir," he said, "I thank you for your advice, which no doubt is excellent, for it is certainly true that I have missed every pigeon which I tried to shoot with these confounded little rifles. But if you could demonstrate in practice what you so kindly set out in precept, the value of your counsel would be enhanced."

Thus he spoke, mimicking, I have no doubt, (for he had a sense of humor) the manner of my address, which nervousness had rendered somewhat pompous.

"Give me the rifle," I answered, taking off my greatcoat.

He handed it to me with a bow.

"Mind what you are about," growled Charles. "That there thing is full cocked and 'air-triggered."

I withered, or rather tried to wither him with a glance, but this unbelieving keeper only stared back at me with insolence in his round and bird-like eyes. Never before had I felt quite so angry with a menial. Then a horrible doubt struck me—supposing I should miss! I knew very little of the manner of flight of English wood pigeons, which are not difficult to miss with a bullet, and nothing at all of these particular rifles. Then I heard Charles mutter:

"Now then, look out, Guy'nor. Here's your chance of teaching his Lordship how to do it, though he does happen to be the best shot in all the counties hereabout."

**W**HILE he spoke, two pigeons appeared, one a little behind the other, coming down very straight. As they reached the opening in the ilex grove they hovered, preparing to alight, for of us they could see nothing, one at a distance of about fifty and the other of, say, seventy yards away. I took the nearest, got on to it, allowing for

the drop and the angle, and touched the trigger of the rifle, which felt to my shoulder very sweetly. The bullet struck that pigeon on the crop, out of which, as it sank to the ground stone dead, fell a shower of acorns that it had been eating. Number two pigeon, realizing danger, began to mount upwards almost straight. I fired the second barrel, and by good luck shot its head off. Then I snatched the other rifle, which Charles had been loading automatically, from his outstretched hand, for at that moment I saw two more pigeons coming. At the first I risked a difficult shot and hit it far back, knocking out its tail, but bringing it, still fluttering, to the ground. The other, too, I covered, but when I touched the trigger there was a *click* and no more.

This was my opportunity of coming even with Charles, and I availed myself of it.

"Young man," I said, while he gaped at me open-mouthed, "you should learn to be careful with rifles, which are dangerous weapons. If you give one to a shooter that is not loaded, it shows that you are capable of anything."

Then I turned and, addressing Lord Ragnall, added:

"I must apologize for that third shot of mine, which was infamous, for I committed a similar fault to that against which I warned you, sir, and did not fire far enough ahead. However, it may serve to show your attendant the difference between the tail of a pigeon and an oak-leaf." I pointed to one of the poor bird's feathers which was still drifting to the ground.

"Well, if this 'ere snipe of a chap aint the devil in boots—" exclaimed Charles to himself.

But his master cut him short with a look, then lifted his hat to me and said:

"Sir, the practice much surpasses the precept, which is unusual. I congratulate you upon a skill that almost partakes of the marvelous, unless indeed, chance—" He stopped.

"It is natural that you should think that," I replied, "but if more pigeons should come and Mr. Charles will make sure that he loads the rifle, I hope to undeceive you."

**A**T THIS moment, however, a loud shout from Scroope, who was looking for me, reënforced by a shrill cry uttered by Miss Manners, banished every pigeon within half a mile, a fact of which I was not sorry.

"I think my friends are calling me, so I will bid you good-morning," I said awkwardly.

"One moment, sir," he exclaimed. "Might I first ask you your name? Mine is Ragnall, Lord Ragnall."

"And mine is Allan Quatermain," I said.

"Oh!" he answered, "that explains matters. Charles, this is the gentleman, Mr. Scroope's friend, that you said just now—exaggerated. I think you had better apologize."

But Charles was gone.

At this moment Scroope and the young lady appeared, having heard our voices. A general explanation ensued. And presently Lord Ragnall remarked:

"If you have a day to spare, Mr. Quatermain, we are going to shoot through the home coverts to-morrow, which haven't been touched till now, and I hope you will join us."

"It is most kind of you, but that is impossible," I answered with firmness. "I have no gun here."

"Oh! never mind that, Mr. Quatermain. I have a pair of breechloaders" (these were new things at that date), "that have been sent down to me to try. I am going to return them because they are much too short in the stock for me. I think they would just suit you, and you are quite welcome to the use of them."

Again I excused myself, guessing that the discomfited Charles would put all sorts of stories about concerning me and not wishing to look foolish before a party of grand strangers, no doubt chosen for their skill at this particular form of sport.

"Well, Allan," exclaimed Scroope, who always had a talent for saying the wrong thing, "you are quite right not to go into a competition with Lord Ragnall over high pheasants."

I flushed, for there was some truth in his blundering remark, whereon Lord Ragnall said with ready tact:

"I asked Mr. Quatermain to shoot, not to a shooting match, Scroope, and I hope he'll come."

This left me no option, and with a sinking heart I had to accept.

**S**ORRY I can't ask you too, Scroope," said his lordship when details had been arranged, "but we can only manage seven guns at this shoot. But will you and Miss Manners come to dine and sleep to-morrow evening. I should like to introduce your future wife to my future wife," he added, coloring a little.

Miss Manners, being devoured with curiosity as to the wonderful Miss Holmes of whom she had heard so much but never actually seen, accepted at once before her lover could get out a word, whereon Scroope volunteered to bring me over in the morning and load for me. Being possessed by a terror that I should be handed over to the care of the unsympathetic Charles, I replied that I should be very grateful, and so the thing was settled.

On our way home we passed through a country town of which I forgot the name, and the sight of a gunsmith's shop there reminded me that I had no cartridges. So I stopped to order some, as fortunately Lord Ragnall had mentioned that the guns he was going to lend me were twelve bores. The tradesman asked me how many cartridges I wanted and when I replied, "a hundred," stared at me and said:

"If, as I understood, sir, you are going to the big winter shoot at Ragnall to-morrow, you had better make it three hundred and fifty at least. I shall be there to watch, like lots of others, and I expect to see nearly two hundred fired by each gun at the last Lake stand."

"Very well," I answered, fearing to show more ignorance by further discussion. "I will call for the cartridges on my way to-morrow morning. Please load them with three drachms of powder."

"Yes, sir, and an ounce and an eighth of Number five shot, sir? That's what all the gentlemen use."

"No," I answered. "Number three; please be sure as to that. Good evening."

The gunsmith stared at me, and as I left the shop I heard him remark to his assistant:

"That African gent must think he's going out to shoot ostriches. I expect he aint no good, whatever they may say about him."

## CHAPTER II

### ALLAN MAKES A BET

**O**N THE following morning Scroope and I arrived at Castle Ragnall at or about a quarter to ten. As I climbed out of the vehicle on our arrival, a splendid-looking and portly person arrayed in a velvet coat and a scarlet waistcoat, approached with the air of an Emperor, followed by an individual in whom I recognized Charles carrying a gun under each arm.

"That's the head-keeper," whispered Scroope; "mind you, treat him respectfully."

Much alarmed, I took off my hat and waited.

"Do I speak to Mr. Allan Quatermain?" said his Majesty in a deep and rumbling voice, surveying me the while with a cold and disapproving eye.

I intimated that he did.

"Then, sir," he went on, pausing a little at the "sir" as though he suspected me of being no more than an African colleague of his own, "I have been ordered by his Lordship to bring you these guns."

I took one of the guns and looked at it. It was a costly and beautifully-made weapon of the period.

"There's nothing wrong with the gun, sir," rumbled Red Waistcoat. "If you hold it straight, it will do the rest. But keep the muzzle up, sir, keep it up, for I know what the bore is without studying the same with my eye. Also perhaps you wont take it amiss if I tell you that here at Ragnall we hates a low pheasant. I mentions it because the last gentleman who came from foreign parts—he was French, he was—shot nothing all day but one hen bird just on the top of the brush, two beaters, his Lordship's hat and a starling."

Scroope broke into a roar of idiotic laughter; Charles, from whom Fortune decreed that I was not to escape after all, turned his back and doubled up as though seized with sudden pain in the stomach, and I grew absolutely furious.

"Confound it, Mr. Keeper," I exclaimed, "what do you mean by lecturing me? Attend to your business and I'll attend to mine."

**A**T THIS moment, who should appear from behind the angle of some building—we were talking in the stable-yard near the gunroom door—but Lord Ragnall himself. I could see that he had overheard the conversation, for he looked angry.

"Jenkins," he said, addressing the keeper, "do what Mr. Quatermain has said and attend to your own business. Perhaps you are not aware that he has shot more lions, elephants and big game than you have cats. But however that may be, it is not your place to try to instruct him or any of my guests. Now go, and see to the beaters."

So Scroope and I were taken through a side entrance into the big hall and there introduced to the other members of the shooting party, most of whom were staying at the castle. They were famous shots; indeed I had read of the prowess of some of them in *The Field*, a paper that I always took in Africa, although often enough when I was on my distant expeditions, I did not see a copy of it for a year at a time.

To my astonishment I found that I knew one of these gentlemen. We had not, it is true, met for a dozen years, but I seldom forget a face, and I was sure that I could not be mistaken in this instance. That mean appearance, those small, shifty gray eyes, that red, pointed nose could belong to nobody except van Graaf, so famous in his day in South Africa in connection with certain gigantic and most successful frauds which the law seemed quite unable to touch, of which frauds I had been one of the many victims to the extent of two hundred and fifty pounds, a large sum for me.

The last time we met there had been a stormy scene between us which ended in my declaring in my wrath that if I ever came across him on the veldt I should shoot him at sight. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Mr. van Graaft vanished from South Africa, for I may add that he was a cur of the first water. I believe that he had only just entered the room, having driven over from wherever he lived, at some distance from Ragnall. At any rate, he knew nothing of my presence at this shoot. Had he known, I am quite sure that he would have been absent. He turned and, seeing me, ejaculated, "Allan Quatermain, by heaven!" beneath his breath, but in such a tone of astonishment that it attracted the attention of Lord Ragnall, who was standing near.

"Yes, Mr. van Graaft," I answered in a cheerful voice, "Allan Quatermain, no other, and I hope you are as glad to see me as I am to see you."

"I think there is some mistake," said Lord Ragnall, staring at us. "This is Sir Junius Fortescue, who used to be Mr. Fortescue."

"Indeed," I replied. "I don't know that I ever remember his being called by that particular name, but I do know that we are old—friends."

Lord Ragnall moved away as though he did not wish to continue the conversation, which no one else had overheard, and van Graaft sidled up to me.

"Mr. Quatermain," he said in a low voice, "circumstances have changed with me since last we met."

"So I gather," I replied, "but mine have remained much the same, and if it is convenient to you to repay me that two hundred and fifty pounds you owe me, with interest, I shall be much obliged. If not, I think I have a good story to tell about you."

"Oh! Mr. Quatermain," he answered with a sort of smile which made me feel inclined to kick him, "you know I dispute that debt."

"Do you?" I exclaimed. "Well, perhaps you will dispute the story also. But the question is, will you be believed when I give the proofs?"

"Ever heard of the Statute of Lim-

itations, Mr. Quatermain?" he asked with a sneer.

"Not where character is concerned," I replied stoutly. "Now what are you going to do?"

**H**E reflected a moment and then answered:

"Look here, Mr. Quatermain; you were always a bit of a sportsman, and I'll make you an offer. If I kill more birds than you do to-day, you shall promise to hold your tongue about my affairs in South Africa; and if you kill more than I do, you shall still hold your tongue but I will pay you that two hundred and fifty pounds and interest for six years."

I reflected for a moment, knowing that the man had something up his sleeve. Of course I could refuse and make a scandal. But that was not in my line and would not bring me nearer my two hundred and fifty pounds, which if I chanced to win, might find its way back into my pocket.

"All right, done!" I said.

"What is your bet, Sir Junius?" asked Lord Ragnall, who was approaching again.

"It is rather a long story," he answered, "but to put it shortly, years ago when I was traveling in Africa, Mr. Quatermain and I had a dispute as to a sum of five pounds which he thought I owed him, and to save argument about a trifle, we have agreed that I should shoot against him for it to-day."

"Indeed!" said Lord Ragnall rather seriously, for I could see that he did not believe van Graaft's statement as to the amount of the bet; perhaps he had heard more than we thought. "To be frank, Sir Junius, I don't much care for betting—for that's what it comes to—here. Also I think that Mr. Quatermain said yesterday that he had never shot pheasants in England, so the match seems scarcely fair. However, you gentlemen know your own business best. Only I must tell you both that if money is concerned I shall have to set some one to count your birds and report the number to me, whose decision will be final."

"Agreed," said van Graaft, or rather Sir Junius; but I answered nothing.

for to tell the truth already I felt ashamed of the whole affair. . . .

As it happened, Lord Ragnall and I walked together ahead of the others to the first covert, which was a half a mile or more away.

"You have met Sir Junius before," he said to me interrogatively.

"I have met Mr. van Graaff before," I answered, "about twelve years since, shortly after which he vanished from South Africa, where he was a well-known and successful speculator."

"To re-appear here. Ten years ago he bought a large property in this neighborhood. Three years ago he became a baronet."

"How did a man like van Graaff become a baronet?" I inquired.

"By purchase, I believe."

"By purchase! Are honors in England purchased?"

"You are delightfully innocent, Mr. Quatermain, as a hunter from Africa should be," said Lord Ragnall, laughing. "Meanwhile, I do hope that you will win back your—five pounds from Sir Junius. He is so vain that I would gladly give fifty pounds to see you do so."

"There is little chance of that," I said, "for as I told you I have never shot pheasants before. Still, I'll try as you wish it."

"That's right. And look here, Mr. Quatermain, shoot well forward of them. You see I am venturing to advise you now, as you advised me yesterday. Shot does not travel so fast as ball, and the pheasant is a bird that is generally going much quicker than you think. Now here we are; Charles will show you your stand. Good luck to you."

**T**EN minutes later the game began outside of a long covert, all the seven guns being posted within sight of each other. So occupied was I in watching the preliminaries, which were quite new to me, that I allowed first a hare and then a hen-pheasant to depart without firing at them, which hen-pheasant, by the way, curved round and was beautifully killed by van Graaff, who stood two guns off upon my right.

"Look here, Allan," said Scroope, "if you are going to beat your African friend, you had better wake up, for you won't do it by admiring the scenery, or that squirrel on a tree."

So I woke up. Just at that moment there was a cry of "Cock forward." I thought it meant a cock pheasant and was astonished when I saw a beautiful brown bird with a long beak flitting towards me through the tops of the oak trees.

"Am I to shoot at that?" I asked.

"Of course. It is a woodcock," answered Scroope.

By this time the brown bird was rocking past me within ten yards. I fired and killed it, for where it had been appeared a cloud of feathers. It was a quick and clever shot, or so I thought. But when Charles stepped out and picked from the ground nothing but a beak and a head, a titter of laughter went down the whole line of guns and loaders.

"I say, old chap," said Scroope, "if you will use number three shot, you had better let your birds get a little further off you."

"Here you come again," pursued Scroope presently, pointing to an advancing pheasant.

It was an extraordinarily high pheasant, flushed, I think, outside the covert by a stop, so high that as it traveled down the line, although three guns fired at it, including van Graaff, none of them seemed to touch it. Then I fired and, remembering Lord Ragnall's advice, far in front. Its flight changed. Still it traveled through the air, but with the momentum of a stone, to fall fifty yards to my right dead as a stone.

"That's better!" said Scroope, while Charles grinned all over his round face, muttering:

"Wiped his eye that time."

**W**HEN, however, at luncheon more than an hour later I found that I was thirty pheasants behind my adversary, I shook my head and so did everybody else. On the whole, that luncheon, of which we partook in a keeper's house, was a very pleasant meal, though van Graaff talked so continuously and in such a boastful strain

that I saw it irritated our host and some of the other gentlemen, who were very pleasant men.

After luncheon we found the weather had changed. The fair promise of the morning had departed; the sky was overcast and a wind blowing in strong gusts was rising rapidly, driving before it occasional scurries of snow. The covert we were going to shoot, into which we had been driving pheasants all the morning, must have been nearly a mile long. At the top end it was broad, narrowing at the bottom to a width of about two hundred yards. Here it ran into a horseshoe-shaped piece of water that was about fifty yards in breadth. Four of the guns were placed round the bow of this water, but on its further side, in such a position that the pheasant should stream over them to yet another covert behind at the top of a slope. Van Graaft and I, however, were ordered to take our places, he to the right and I to the left, about seventy yards up the tongue in little glades in the woodland, having the lake to our right and our left respectively.

Well, we took up our stands, and while we were doing so, suddenly the wind increased to a tearing gale which seemed to me to blow from all points of the compass alternately. Rooks flying homewards and pigeons disturbed by the beaters were swept over us like drifting leaves; wild duck, of which I got one, went by like arrows; the great bare oaks tossed their boughs and groaned, while not far off a fir tree was blown down, falling with a splash into the water.

THE heat began. For the next three-quarters of an hour or more I had such covert shooting as I suppose I shall never see again. High above those shrieking trees, or over the lake to my left, flashed the wind-driven pheasants in an endless procession. Oddly enough, I found that this wild work suited me, for as time went on and the pheasants grew more and more impossible, I shot better and better. One after another, down they came far behind me, with a crash in the brushwood or a splash in the lake, till the guns grew almost too

hot to hold. The excitement was great and the sport splendid, as anyone will testify who has shot December pheasants breaking back over covert and in a tearing gale. Van Graaft also was doing very well, but the guns in front got comparatively little shooting. They were forced to stand there, poor fellows, and watch our work from afar.

As the thing drew towards an end the birds came thicker and thicker, and I shot better and better. This may be judged from the fact that notwithstanding their height and tremendous pace, I killed my last thirty pheasants with thirty-five cartridges. The final bird of all, a splendid cock, appeared by himself out of nothingness when we thought that all was done. I think it must have been flushed from the covert on the hill, or been turned back just as it reached it by the resistless strength of the storm. Over it came, so high above us that it looked quite small in the dark snow-scud.

"Too far—no use," said Lord Ragnall as I lifted the gun.

Still I fired, holding I know not how much in front, and lo! that pheasant died in mid-air, falling with a mighty splash near the bank of the lake, but at a great distance behind us. The shot was so remarkable that everyone who saw it, including most of the beaters, who had passed us now, uttered a cheer, and the red-waistcoated old Jenkins, who had stopped by us, remarked, "Well, bust me if that baint a master one!"

Scroope made me angry by slapping me so hard upon the back that it hurt and nearly caused me to let off the other barrel of the gun. Charles seemed to become one great grin, and Lord Ragnall, with a brief congratulatory, "Never enjoyed a shoot so much in my life," called to the men who were posted behind us to pick up all the dead pheasants, being careful to keep mine apart from those of Sir Junius Fortescue. Then, as all further shooting was out of the question because of the weather, we walked back to the castle to tea.

AS I emptied my cup, Lord Ragnall, who had left the room, returned and asked us to come to see the game.

So we went to find it laid out in endless lines upon the snow-powdered grass in the quadrangle of the castle, arranged in one main and two separate lots.

"Those are yours and Sir Junius," said Scroope. "I wonder which of you has won. I'll put a sovereign on you, old fellow."

"Then you're a donkey for your pains," I answered, feeling vexed, for at that moment I had forgotten all about the bet.

I do not remember how many pheasants were killed altogether, but because of the gale the total was much smaller than had been hoped.

"Jenkins," said Lord Ragnall presently to Red-waistcoat, "how many have you to the credit of Sir Junius Fortescue?"

"Two hundred and seventy-seven, my lord, twelve hares, two woodcocks and three pigeons."

"And how many to that of Mr. Quatermain?"—adding, "I must remind you both, gentlemen, that the birds have been picked as carefully as possible and kept unmixed, and therefore that the figures given by Jenkins must be considered as final."

"Quite so," I answered, but van Graaff said nothing. Then while we all waited anxiously, came the amazing answer:

"Two hundred and seventy-seven pheasants, my lord, same number as those of Sir Junius, Bart; fifteen hares, three wood-pigeons, four partridges, one duck and a beak—I mean a woodcock."

"Then it seems you have won your five pounds, Mr. Quatermain, upon which I congratulate you," said Lord Ragnall.

"Stop a minute," broke in van Graaff. "The bet was as to pheasants; the other things don't count."

"I think the term used was 'birds,'" I remarked. "But to be frank, when I made it I was thinking of pheasants, as no doubt Sir Junius was also. Therefore if the counting is correct there is a dead heat and the wager falls through."

"I am sure we all appreciate the view you take of the matter," said Lord Ragnall, "for it might be argued another

way. In these circumstances, Sir Junius keeps his five pounds in his pocket. It is unlucky for you, Quatermain," he added, dropping the *Mr.*, "that the last high pheasant you shot can't be found. It fell into the lake, you remember, and I suppose swam ashore and ran."

THEN, just as we turned to go, something happened. The round-eyed Charles ran puffing into the quadrangle, followed by another man with a dog, who had been specially set to pick my birds, and carrying in his hand a much bedraggled cock-pheasant without a tail.

"I've got him, my Lord," he gasped, for he had run very fast, "the little gent's, I mean—that which he killed in the clouds with the last shot he fired. It had gone right down into the mud and stuck there; Tom and me fished him up with a pole."

Lord Ragnall took the bird and looked at it. It was almost cold but evidently freshly killed, for the limbs were quite flexible.

"That turns the scale in favor of Mr. Quatermain," he said, "so, Sir Junius, you had better pay your money and congratulate him, as I do."

"I protest," exclaimed van Graaff, looking very angry and meaner than usual. "How am I to know that this was Mr. Quatermain's pheasant? The sum involved is more than five pounds and I feel it my duty to protest."

"Because my men say so, Sir Junius; moreover, seeing the height from which the bird fell, their story is obviously true." And when a further examination of the pheasant revealed that it had been killed with number three shot, Lord Ragnall added:

"You will agree that settles the matter, Sir Junius. And now, as a bet has been made here it had better be paid."

"I have not enough money on me," said van Graaff sulkily.

"I think your banker is mine," said Lord Ragnall quietly, "so you can write a check in the house. Come in, all of you; it is cold in this wind."

So we went into the smoking-room, and Lord Ragnall, who I could see was

annoyed, instantly fetched a blank check from his study and handed it to van Graaff in rather a pointed manner.

He took it and turning to me, said:

"I remember the capital sum, but how much is the interest? Sorry to trouble you, but I am not good at figures."

"Then you must have changed a good deal during the last twelve years, Sir Junius," I could not help saying. "Still, never mind the interest; I shall be quite satisfied with the principal."

**S**O HE filled up the check for two hundred and fifty pounds and threw it down on the table before me, saying something about its being a bother to mix up business with pleasure.

I took the draft, saw that it was correct though rather illegible and proceeded to dry it by waving it in the air. As I did so it came into my mind that I would not touch the money of this successful scamp, won back from him in such a way. Yielding to a perhaps foolish impulse, I said:

"Lord Ragnall, this check is for a debt which years ago I wrote off as lost. At luncheon to-day you were talking of a Cottage Hospital for which you are trying to get up an endowment fund in this neighborhood, and in answer to a question from you Sir Junius Fortescue said that he had not as yet made any subscription to its funds. Will you allow me to hand you Sir Junius' subscription—to be entered in his name, if you please?" And I passed him the check, which was drawn to myself or bearer.

Lord Ragnall looked at the amount, and flushed, then asked:

"What do you say to this act of generosity on the part of Mr. Quatermain, Sir Junius?"

There was no answer, because Sir Junius had gone. I never saw him again, for years ago the poor man died quite disgraced. His passion for semi-fraudulent speculations re-asserted itself and he became a bankrupt in conditions which caused him to leave the country for America, where he was killed in a railway accident while traveling as an immigrant. I have heard, however, that he was not asked to shoot at Ragnall any more.

The check was passed to the credit of the Cottage Hospital but not, as I had requested, as a subscription from Sir Junius Fortescue. A couple of years later, indeed, I learned that this sum of money was used to build a little room in that institution to accommodate sick children, which room was named the Allan Quatermain ward.

Now I have told all this story of that December shoot, because it was the beginning of my long, close friendship with Ragnall.

When he found that van Graaff had gone away on that evening without stopping to say good-by, Lord Ragnall made no remark. Only he took my hand and shook it.

I have only to add that although, except for the element of competition which entered into it, I enjoyed that day's shooting very much indeed, when I came to count up its cost in ammunition, tips and the like, I felt glad that I had not been asked to any more such entertainments.

### CHAPTER III

#### MISS HOLMES

**T**WO and a half hours passed by, most of which time I spent lying down to rest and get rid of a headache caused by the continual rapid firing and the roar of the gale, or both, also in rubbing my shoulder with ointment, for it was sore from the recoil of the guns. Then Scroope appeared as, being unable to find my way about the long passages of that great old castle, I had asked him to do, and we descended together to the large drawing-room.

It was a splendid apartment only used upon state occasions, lighted, I should think, with at least two or three hundred wax candles, which threw a soft glow over the paneled and pictured walls, the priceless, antique furniture and the bejeweled ladies who were gathered there. To my mind there never was and never will be any artificial light to equal that of wax candles in sufficient quantity. The company was large; I think thirty sat down to the dinner that night, which was given to introduce Lord Ragnall's future wife to

the neighborhood whereof she was destined to be the leader.

Miss Manners, who was looking very happy and charming in her jewels and fine clothes, joined us at once and informed Scroope that "she" was just coming; the maid in the cloak-room had told her so.

"Is she?" replied Scroope indifferently. "Well, so long as you have come I don't care about anyone else."

Then he told her she was looking beautiful and stared at her with such affection that I fell back a step or two and contemplated a picture of Judith vigorously engaged in cutting off the head of Holofernes.

Presently the large door at the end of the room was thrown open, and the immaculate Savage, who was acting as a kind of master of the ceremonies, announced in well-bred but penetrating tones, "Lady Longden and the Honorable Miss Holmes." I stared like everybody else, but for a while her Ladyship filled my eye. She was an ample and to my mind rather awful-looking person, clad in black satin (she was a widow) and very large diamonds. Her hair was white; her nose was hooked; her dark eyes were penetrating and she had a bad cold in her head. That was all I found time to notice about her, for suddenly her daughter came into my line of vision.

TRULY she was a lovely girl, or rather young woman, for she must have been two or three and twenty. Not very tall, her proportions were rounded and exquisite and her movements as graceful as those of a doe. Altogether she was doe-like, especially in the fineness of her lines and her large and liquid eyes. She was a dark beauty with rich brown, waving hair, a clear olive complexion, a perfectly shaped mouth and very red lips. To me she looked more Italian or Spanish than Anglo-Saxon, and I believe that as a matter of fact she had some Southern blood in her on her father's side. She wore a dress of soft rose color, and her only ornaments were a string of pearls and a single red camelia. I could see but one blemish, if it were a blemish, in her perfect person, and that was a

curious white mark upon her breast which in its shape exactly resembled the crescent moon.

The face, however, impressed me with other than its physical qualities. It was bright, intelligent, sympathetic and, just now, happy. But I thought it more: I thought it mystical. Something that her mother said to her, probably about her dress, caused her smile to vanish for a moment, and then, from beneath it, as it were, appeared this shadow of innate mysticism. In a second it was gone and she was laughing again, but I, who am accustomed to observe, had caught it, perhaps alone of all that company. Moreover, it reminded me of something.

What was it? Ah! I knew—a look that sometimes I had seen upon the face of a certain Zulu lady named Mameena, especially at the moment of her wonderful and tragic death. The thought made me shiver a little, I could not tell why, for certainly, I reflected, this high-placed and fortunate English girl had nothing in common with that fate-driven Child of Storm whose dark and imperial spirit dwelt in the woman called Mameena. They were as far apart as Zululand is from Essex. Yet I was quite sure that both of them had touch with hidden things.

LORD RAGNALL, looking more like a splendid Vandyke than ever in his evening dress, stepped forward to greet his fiancée and her mother with a courtly bow, and I turned again to continue my contemplation of the stalwart Judith and the very ugly head of Holofernes. Presently I was aware of a soft voice, a very rich and thrilling voice, asking quite close to me:

"Which is he? Oh! you need not answer, dear. I know him from the description."

"Yes," replied Lord Ragnall to Miss Holmes, for it was she, "you are quite right. I will introduce you to him presently. But, love, whom do you wish to take you in to dinner? I can't—your mother, you know—and as there are no titles here to-night you may make your choice. Would you like old Dr. Jefreys, the clergyman?"

"No," she replied with quiet firmness,

"I know him; he took me in once before. I wish Mr. Allan Quatermain to take me in. He is interesting, and I want to hear about Africa."

"Very well," he answered, "and he is more interesting than all the rest put together. But, Luna, why are you always thinking and talking about Africa? One might imagine that you were going to live there."

"So I may one day," she answered dreamily. "Who knows where one has lived or where one will live?" But again I saw that mystic look come into her face.

I heard no more of that conversation, which it is improbable that anyone whose ears had not been sharpened by a lifetime of listening in great silences would have caught at all. To tell the truth, I made myself scarce, slipping off to the other end of the big room in the hope of evading the kind intentions of Miss Holmes. I have a great dislike of being put out of my place, and I felt that among all these local celebrities it was not fitting that I should be selected to take in the future bride on an occasion of this sort. But it was of no use, for presently Lord Ragnall hunted me up, bringing the young lady with him.

"Let me introduce you to Miss Holmes, Quatermain," he said. "She is anxious that you should take her in to dinner, if you will be so kind. She is very interested in—in—"

"Africa?" I suggested.

"In Mr. Quatermain, who, I am told, is one of the greatest hunters in Africa," she corrected me with a dazzling smile.

I BOWED, not knowing what to say; Lord Ragnall laughed and vanished, leaving us together, and dinner was announced. Presently we were wending in the center of a long and glittering procession across the central hall to the banqueting chamber, a splendid room with a roof like a church that was said to have been built in the times of the Plantagenets. Here Mr. Savage, who had evidently been looking out for her future ladyship, conducted us to our places, which were upon the left of Lord Ragnall, who sat at the head of the broad table with Lady Longden on

his right. Then the old clergyman, Dr. Jeffreys, a pompous and rather frowsy ecclesiastic, said grace, for grace was still in fashion at such feasts in those days.

Certainly there was a great deal to be thankful for in the eating and drinking line, but of all this I remember little, except a general vision of silver dishes, champagne, splendor and things I did not want being constantly handed to me. What I do remember is Miss Holmes and nothing but Miss Holmes: the charm of her conversation, the light of her beautiful eyes, the fragrance of her hair, her most flattering interest in my unworthy self. To tell the truth, we got on "like fire in the winter grass," as the Zulus say; and when that dinner was over the grass was still burning.

I don't think that Lord Ragnall quite liked it, but fortunately Lady Longden was a talkative person. First she conversed about her cold in the head, sneezing at intervals, poor soul, and being reduced to send for another handkerchief after the entrées. Then she got off upon business matters—to judge from the look of boredom on her host's face I think it must have been settlements. Three times did I hear him refer her to the lawyers—without avail. Lastly, when he thought he had escaped, she embarked upon a quite vigorous argument with Dr. Jeffreys about church matters—I gathered that she was "low" and he was "high,"—in which she insisted upon his lordship acting as referee.

"Do try to keep your attention fixed, George," I heard her say severely. "To allow it to wander when high spiritual affairs are under discussion" (sneeze) "is scarcely reverent. Could you tell the man to shut that door? The draught is dreadful. It is quite impossible for you to agree with both of us, as you say you do: Dr. Jeffreys is at one pole and I am at the other." (Sneeze.)

"Then I wish I were at the Tropic of Cancer," I heard him mutter with a groan.

In vain, he had to keep his "attention fixed" for the next three quarters of an hour. So as Miss Manners was at the other side of me, and Scroope,

unhampered by the presence of any prospective mother-in-law, was at the other side of her, for all practical purposes Miss Holmes and I were left alone.

**S**HE began by saying:

"I hear you beat Sir Junius Fortescue out shooting to-day and won a lot of money from him which you gave to the Cottage Hospital. I don't like shooting and I don't like betting, and it's strange, because you don't look like a man who bets. But I detest Sir Junius Fortescue, and that is a bond of union between us."

"I never said I detested him."

"No, but I am sure you do. Your face changed when I mentioned his name."

"As it happens you are right. But, Miss Holmes, I should like you to understand that you were also right when you said I did not look like a betting man." And I told her some of the story of van Graaff and the two hundred and fifty pounds.

"Ah!" she said when I had finished. "I always felt sure he was a horror. And my mother wanted me, just because he pretended to be low-church, to—but that's a secret."

Then I congratulated her upon her approaching marriage, saying what a joyful thing it was now and again to see everything going in real, happy, story-book fashion: beauty male and female united by love, high rank, wealth, troops of friends, health of body, a lovely and an ancient home in a settled land where dangers do not come, respect and affection of crowds of dependents, the prospect of a high and useful career of a sort whereof the door is shut to most people, everything in short that human beings who are not actually royal could desire or deserve. Indeed, after my second glass of champagne I grew quite eloquent on these and kindred points, being moved thereto by memories of the misery that is in the world which formed so great a contrast to the lot of this striking and brilliant pair.

She listened to me attentively and answered:

"Thank you for your kind thoughts

and wishes. But does it not strike you, Mr. Quatermain, that there is something ill-omened in such talk? I believe that it does, that as you finished speaking it occurred to you that after all the future is as much veiled from all of us as the picture which hangs behind its curtain of rose-colored silk in Lord Ragnall's study is from you."

"How did you know that?" I asked sharply in a low voice. For by the strangest of coincidences as I concluded my somewhat old-fashioned little speech of compliments, this very reflection had entered my mind, and with it the memory of the veiled picture which Mr. Savage had pointed out to me on the previous morning.

"I can't say, Mr. Quatermain, but I did know it. You were thinking of the picture, were you not?"

"And if I was," I said, avoiding a direct reply, "what of it? Though it is hidden from everybody else, he has only to draw the curtain and see—you."

"Supposing he should draw the curtain one day, and see nothing, Mr. Quatermain?"

"Then the picture would have been stolen, that is all, and he would have to search for it till he found it again, which doubtless sooner or later he would do."

"Yes, sooner or later. But where? Perhaps you have lost a picture or two in your time, Mr. Quatermain, and are better able to answer the question than I am."

**T**HREE was silence for a few moments, for this talk of lost pictures brought back memories which choked me: memories of my wife whom I had lost, and of . . .

Then she began to speak again, low, quickly and with suppressed passion, but acting wonderfully all the while. Knowing that eyes were on her, her gestures and the expression of her face were such as might have been those of any young lady of fashion who was talking of every-day affairs, such as dancing, or flowers, or jewels. She smiled and even laughed occasionally. She played with the golden salt-cellars in front of her, and upsetting a little of

the salt, threw it over her left shoulder, appearing to ask me if I were a victim of that ancient habit, and so on.

But all the while she was talking deeply of deep things such as I should never have thought would pass her mind. This was the substance of what she said, for I cannot set it all down verbatim; after so many years my memory fails me.

"I am not like other women. Something moves me to tell you so—something very real and powerful which pushes me as a strong man might. It is odd, because I have never spoken to anyone else like that, not to my mother, for instance, or even to Lord Ragnall. They would neither of them understand, although they would misunderstand differently. My mother would think I ought to see a doctor—and if you knew that doctor! He,"—and she nodded towards Lord Ragnall—"would think that my engagement had upset me or that I had grown rather more religious than I ought to be at my age and been reflecting too much—well, on the end of all things. From a child I have understood that I am a mystery set in the midst of many other mysteries. It all came to me suddenly one night when I was about nine years old. I seemed to see the past and the future, although I could grasp neither. Such a long, long past and such an infinite future! I don't know what I saw, and still see sometimes. It comes in a flash and is in a flash forgotten. My mind cannot hold it. It is too big for my mind; you might as well try to pack Dr. Jeffreys there into this wineglass. Only two facts remain written on my heart. The first is that there is trouble ahead of me, curious and unusual trouble; and the second, that permanently, continually, I, or a part of me, have something to do with Africa, a country of which I know nothing except from a few very dull books. Also, by the way—this is a new thought—that I have something to do with you. That is why I am so interested in Africa and you. Tell me about Africa and yourself, now while we have the chance." And she added in a louder voice, "You have lived there all your life, have you not, Mr. Quatermain?"

"I rather think your mother would be right—about the doctor, I mean," I said.

"You say that, but you don't *believe* it. Oh! you are very transparent, Mr. Quatermain—at least to me."

**S**O, hurriedly enough, for these subjects seemed to me uncomfortable, even dangerous in a sense, I began to talk of the first thing about Africa that I remembered, namely of the legend of the Holy Flower that was guarded by a huge ape, of which I had heard from a white man who was supposed to be rather mad, who went by the name of Brother John. Also I told her that there was something in it, as I had with me a specimen of the flower.

"Oh! show it to me," she said.

I replied that I feared I could not, as it was locked away in a safe in London, whither I was returning on the morrow. I promised, however, to send her a life-sized water-color drawing, of which I had caused several to be made. She asked me if I were going to look for this flower and I said that I hoped so, if I could make the necessary arrangements. Next she asked me if there chanced to be any other African quests upon which I had set my mind. I replied that there were several. For instance, I had heard vaguely through Brother John, and indirectly from one or two other sources, of the existence of a certain tribe in East Central Africa, Arabs or semi-Arabs, who were reported to worship a child that always remained a child. This child, I took it, was a dwarf, but as I was interested in native religious customs, which were infinite in their variety, I should much like to find out the truth of the matter.

"Talking of Arabs," she broke in, "I will tell you a curious story. Once when I was a little girl, eight or nine years of age—it was just before that kind of awakening of which I have spoken to you—I was playing in Kensington Gardens, for we lived in London at the time, in the charge of my nurse-governess. She was talking to some young man who she said was her cousin and told me to run about with my hoop and not to bother. I drove

the hoop across the grass to some elm-trees. From behind one of the trees came out two tall men dressed in white robes and turbans, who looked to me like scriptural characters in a picture-book. One was an elderly man with flashing black eyes, hooked nose and a long gray beard. The other was much younger, but I do not remember him so well. They were both brown in color but otherwise almost like white men, not negroes by any means. My hoop hit the elder man, and I stood still, not knowing what to say. He bowed politely and picked it up, but did not offer to return it to me. They talked together rapidly and one of them pointed to the moon-shaped birthmark which you see I have upon my neck, for it was hot weather and I was wearing a low-cut frock. It was because of this mark that my father named me Luna. The elder of the two said in broken English:

"What is your name, pretty little girl?"

"I told him it was Luna Holmes. Then he drew from his robe a box made of scented wood, and opening it, took out some sweetmeat which looked as if it had been frozen, and gave me a piece that, being very fond of sweets, I put into my mouth. Next he bowled the hoop along the ground into the shadow of the trees,—it was evening time and beginning to grow dark,—saying, 'Run, catch it, little girl.'

"I began to run, but something in the taste of that sweet caused me to drop it from my lips. Then all grew misty, and the next thing I remember was finding myself in the arms of the younger Eastern, with the nurse and her 'cousin,' a stalwart person, like a soldier, standing in front of us.

"'Little girl go ill,' said the elder Arab. 'We seek policeman.'

"'You drop that child,' answered the cousin; doubling his fists.

"Then I grew faint again, and when I came to myself the two white-robed men had gone. All the way home my governess scolded me for accepting sweets from strangers, saying that if my parents came to know of it I should be whipped and sent to bed. Of course

I begged her not to tell them, and at last she consented. Do you know, I think you are the first to whom I have ever mentioned the matter, of which I am sure the governess never breathed a word, though after that whenever we walked in the Gardens her 'cousin' always came to look after us. In the end I think she married him."

"You believe the sweet was drugged?" I asked.

She nodded. "There was something very strange in it. It was a night or two after I had tasted it that I had what just now I called my awakening and began to think about Africa."

"Have you ever seen these men again, Miss Holmes?"

"No, never."

**A**T THIS moment I heard Lady Longden say in a severe voice:

"My dear Luna, I am sorry to interrupt your absorbing conversation, but we are all waiting for you."

So they were, for to my horror I saw that everyone was standing up except ourselves.

Miss Holmes departed in a hurry, while Scroope whispered in my ear with a snigger:

"I say, Allan, if you carry on like that with his young lady, his Lordship will be growing jealous of you."

"Don't be a fool," I said sharply. But there was something in his remark, for as Lord Ragnall passed on his way to the other end of the table, he said in a low voice and with rather a forced smile:

"Well, Quatermain, I hope your dinner has not been as dull as mine, although your appetite seemed so poor."

Then I reflected that I could not remember having eaten a thing since the first entrée. So overcome was I that, rejecting all Scroope's attempts at conversation, I sat silent, drinking port and filling up with dates until not long afterwards we went into the drawing-room, where I sat down as far from Miss Holmes as possible and looked at a book of views of Jerusalem.

While I was thus engaged, Lord Ragnall, pitying my lonely condition or being instigated thereto by Miss Holmes, I know not which, came up

and began to chat with me about African big game shooting. Also he asked me what was my permanent address in that country. I told him Durban and in my turn asked why he wanted to know.

"Because Miss Holmes seems quite crazy about the place and I expect I shall be dragged out there one day," he replied quite gloomily.

It was a prophetic remark.

At this moment our conversation was interrupted by Lady Longden, who came to bid her future son-in-law good-night. She said that she must go to bed and put her feet in mustard and water, as her cold was so bad, which left me wondering whether she meant to carry out this operation in the bed. I recommended her to take quinine, a suggestion she acknowledged rather inconsequently by remarking in somewhat icy tones that she supposed I sat up to all hours of the night in Africa. I replied that frequently I did, waiting for the sun to rise next day, for that member of the British aristocracy irritated me.

Thus we parted, and I never saw her again. She died many years ago, poor soul, and I suppose is now freezing her former acquaintances among the shades.

## CHAPTER IV

### HARŪT AND MARŪT

**A**FTER Lord Ragnall had seen the guests who did not remain for the night, he returned and asked me if I played cards, or whether I preferred music. I was assuring him that I hated the sight of a card when Mr. Savage appeared in his silent way and respectfully inquired of his Lordship whether any gentleman was staying in the house whose Christian name was Here-come-a-zany. Lord Ragnall looked at him with a searching eye as though he suspected him of being drunk, and then asked what he meant by such a ridiculous question.

"I mean, my Lord," replied Mr. Savage with a touch of offense in his tone, "that two foreign individuals in white clothes have arrived at the castle, stating that they wish to speak at once

with a Mr. Here-come-a-zany, who is staying here. I told them to go away as the butler said he could make nothing of their talk, but they only sat down in the snow and said they would wait for Here-come-a-zany."

"Then you had better put them in the old guard room, lock them up with something to eat, and send the stable-boy for the policeman, who is a zany if ever anybody was."

"Stop a bit," I said, for an idea had occurred to me. "The message may be meant for me, though I can't conceive who sent it. My native name is Macumazana, which possibly Mr. Savage has not caught quite correctly. Shall I go to see these men?"

"I wouldn't do that in this cold, Quatermain," Lord Ragnall answered. "Did they say what they are, Savage?"

"I made out that they were conjurers, my Lord. At least when I told them to go away one of them said: 'You will go first, gentleman.' Then, my Lord, I heard a hissing sound in my coat-tail pocket, and putting my hand into it, I found a large snake which dropped on the ground and vanished. It quite paralyzed me, my Lord, and while I stood there wondering whether I was bitten, a mouse jumped out of the kitchen-maid's hair. She had been laughing at their dress, my Lord, but now she's screaming in hysterics."

**T**HE solemn aspect of Mr. Savage as he narrated these unholy marvels was such that like the kitchen-maid, we both burst into ill-timed merriment. Attracted by our laughter, Miss Holmes, Miss Manners, with whom she was talking, and some of the other guests approached and asked what was the matter.

"Savage, here, declares that there are two conjurers in the kitchen premises, who have been producing snakes out of his pocket and mice from the hair of one of the maids, and who want to see Mr. Quatermain," Lord Ragnall answered.

"Conjurors! Oh, do have them in, George," exclaimed Miss Holmes, while Miss Manners and the others, who were getting a little tired of promiscuous conversation, echoed her request.

"By all means," he answered, "though we have enough mice here without their bringing any more. Savage, go and tell your two friends that Mr. Here-come-a-zany is waiting for them in the drawing-room, and that the company would like to see some of their tricks."

Savage bowed and departed, like a hero to execution, for by his pallor I could see that he was in a great fright. When he had gone we set to work and cleared a space in the middle of the room, in front of which we arranged chairs for the company to sit on.

"No doubt they are Indian jugglers," said Lord Ragnall, "and will want a place to grow their mango-tree, as I remember seeing them do in Kashmir."

As he spoke, the door opened and Mr. Savage appeared through it, walking much faster than was his wont. I noted also that he gripped the pockets of his swallow-tail coat firmly in his hand.

"Mr. Hare-root and Mr. Mare-root," he announced.

"Hare-root and Mare-root," repeated Lord Ragnall.

"Harût and Marût, I expect," I said. "I think I have read somewhere that they were great magicians whose names these conjurers have taken." (Since then I have discovered that they are mentioned in the Koran as masters of the Black Art.)

A moment later two men followed him through the doorway. The first was a tall, Eastern-looking person with a grave countenance, a long white beard, a hooked nose and flashing, hawk-like eyes. The second was shorter and rather stout, also much younger. He had a genial, smiling face, small, beady black eyes and was clean-shaven. They were very light in color; indeed, I have seen Italians who were much darker, and there was about their whole aspect a certain air of power.

Instantly I remembered the story that Miss Holmes had told me at dinner and looked at her covertly, to see that she had turned quite pale and was trembling a little. I do not think that any one else noticed this, however, as all were staring at the strangers. More-

over, she recovered herself in a moment, and catching my eye, laid her finger on her lips in token of silence.

The men were clothed in thick fur-lined cloaks which they took off and, folding them neatly, laid upon the floor, standing revealed in robes of a beautiful whiteness and in large plain turbans, also white.

**H**IGH-CLASS Somali Arabs," thought I to myself, noting the while that as they arranged the robes they were taking in every one of us with their quick eyes. One of them shut the door, leaving Savage on this side of it as though they meant him to be present. Then they walked towards us, each of them carrying an ornamental basket made apparently of split reeds, that contained doubtless their conjuring outfit and probably the snake which Savage had found in his pocket. To my surprise they came straight to me and, having set down the baskets, lifted their hands above their heads, as a person about to dive might do, and bowed till the points of their fingers touched the floor. Next they spoke, not in Arabic as I had expected that they would, but in Bantu, which, of course, I understood perfectly well.

"I, Harût, a priest and doctor of the White Kendah People, greet you, O Macumazana," said the elder man.

"I, Marût, a priest and doctor of the People of the White Kendah, greet you, O Watcher by Night, whom we have traveled far to find," said the younger man. Then together:

"We both greet you, O Lord who seem small but are great, O Chief with a troubled past and with a mighty future, O Beloved of Mameena who has 'gone down' but still speaks from beneath, Mameena who was and is of our company."

At this point it was my turn to shiver and become pale, as any may guess who may have chanced to read the history of Mameena, and the turn of Miss Holmes to watch *me* with animated interest.

"—O Slayer of evil men and beasts," they went on in their rich-voiced, monotonous chant, "who, as our magic tells us, are destined to deliver our land

from the terrible scourge, we greet you, we bow before you, we acknowledge you as our Lord and brother, to whom we vow safety among us in the desert, to whom we promise a great reward."

Again they bowed, once, twice, thrice; then they stood silent before me with folded arms.

"What on earth are they saying?" asked Scroope. "I could catch a few words." He knew a little kitchen Zulu.

I told him briefly; the others listened.

"What does Mameena mean?" asked Miss Holmes with a horrible acuteness. "Is it a woman's name?" And hearing her, Harüt and Marüt bowed as though doing reverence to the name. I am sorry to say that at this point I grew confused, though really there was no reason why I should, and muttered something about a native girl who had made trouble in her day.

**M**ISS HOLMES and the other ladies looked at me with amused disbelief, and to my dismay the venerable Harüt turned to Miss Holmes and with his inevitable bow, said in broken English:

"Mameena very beautiful woman, perhaps more beautiful than you, lady. Mameena love the white lord Macumazana. She love him while she live, she love him now she dead. She tell me so just now. You ask white lord tell you pretty story of how he kiss her before she die."

Needless to say all this very misleading information was received by the audience with an attention that I can but call rapt, and in a kind of holy silence which was broken only by a sudden burst of sniggering on the part of the idiotic Scroope. I favored him with my fiercest frown. Then I fell upon that venerable villain, Harüt, and belabored him in Bantu, while the audience listened as intently as though they understood.

I asked him what he meant by coming here to asperse my character. I asked him who the deuce he was. I asked him how he came to know anything about Mameena, and finally I told him that soon or late I would be even with him, and paused exhausted.

He stood there looking for all the world like a statue of the patriarch Job as I imagine him, and when I had done, replied without moving a muscle and in English:

"O Lord, Zikali, Zulu wizard, friend of mine. All great wizard friend, just like all elephant, all snake. Zikali make me know Mameena, and she tell me story and send you much love and say she wait for you always." (More sniggers from Scroope and still intenser interest evinced by Miss Holmes and others.) "If you like, I show you Mameena 'fore I go." (Murmurs from Miss Holmes and Miss Manners of "Oh please do.") "But that very little business, for what one long-ago lady out of so many?"

Then suddenly he broke into Bantu, and added, "A jest is a jest, Macumazana, though often there is meaning in a jest, and you shall see Mameena if you will. I come here to ask you to do my people a service for which you shall not lack reward.

"We, the White Kendah, the People of the Child, are at war with the Black Kendah, our subjects who outnumber us. The Black Kendah have an evil spirit for a god, which spirit from the beginning has dwelt in the largest elephant in all the world, a beast that none can kill but which kills many and bewitches more. While that elephant, which is named Jana, lives, we, the People of the Child, go in terror, for day by day it destroys us. We have learned, how it does not matter, that you alone can kill that elephant. If you will come and kill it, we will show you the place where all the elephants go to die, and you shall take their ivory, many wagon-loads, and grow rich. Soon you are going on a journey that has to do with a flower, and you will visit peoples named the Mazitu and the Pongo, who live on an island in a lake. Far beyond the Pongo and across the desert dwell my people, the Kendah, in a secret land. When you wish to visit us, as you will do, journey to the north of that lake where the Pongo dwell, and stay there on the edge of the desert shooting till we come. Now mock me if you will, but do not forget, for these things shall befall in their season,"

though that time be far. If we meet no more for a while, still do not forget. When you have need of gold or of the ivory that is gold, then journey to the north of the lake where the Pongo dwell, and call on the names of Harút and Marút."

"And call on the names of Harút and Marút," repeated the younger man, who hitherto appeared to take no interest in our talk.

**N**EXT, before I could answer, before I could think the thing out indeed, for all this breath from savage and mystical Africa blowing on me suddenly here in an Essex drawing-room seemed to overwhelm me, the ineffable Harút proceeded in his English conjurer's patter.

"Rich ladies and gentlemen want see tricks by poor old wizard from center Africa. Well, we show them, but please 'member no magic, all quite simple trick. Teach it you if you pay. Please not look too hard, no want you learn how it done. What you like see? Tree grow out of nothing, eh? Good! Please lend me that plate—what you call him—china."

Then the performance began. The tree grew admirably upon the china plate under the cover of an antimacassar. A number of bits of stick danced together on the said plate, apparently without being touched. At a whistle from Marút, a second snake crawled out of the pocket of the horrified Mr. Savage, who stood observing these proceedings at a respectful distance, erected itself on its tail upon the plate and took fire till it was consumed to ashes, and so forth.

The show was very good, but to tell the truth I did not take much notice of it, for I had seen similar things before and was engaged in thoughts excited by what Harút had said to me. At length the pair paused amidst the clapping of the audience, and Marút began to pack up the properties as though all were done. Then Harút observed casually:

"The lord Macumazana think this poor business and he right. Very poor business; any conjurer do better. All common trick—" Here his eye fell

upon Mr. Savage, who was wriggling uneasily in the background. "What matter with that gentleman? Brother Marút, go see."

"Brother Marút" went and freed Mr. Savage from two more snakes which seemed to have taken possession of various parts of his garments. Also—amidst shouts of laughter—from a large dead rat which he appeared to draw from his well-oiled hair.

"Ah!" said Harút, as his confederate returned with these prizes, leaving Savage collapsed in a chair, "snake love that gentleman much. He earn great money in Africa. Well, he keep rat in hair; hungry snake always want rat. But as I say, this poor business. Now you like to see some better, eh? Ma-meena, eh?"

"No," I replied firmly, whereat everyone laughed.

"Elephant Jana we want you kill, eh? Just as he look this minute."

"Yes," I said, "very much indeed, only how will you show it to me?"

"That's quite easy, Macumazana. You just smoke little Kendah 'bacco and see many things, if you have gift, as I *think* you got, and as I almost *sure* that lady got." And he pointed to Miss Holmes. "Sometimes they things people want see, and sometimes they things people not want see."

"Dakka," I said contemptuously, alluding to the Indian hemp on which natives make themselves drunk throughout great districts of Africa.

"Oh! no, not dakka; that common stuff; this 'bacco much better than dakka; only grow in Kendah-land."

**T**HEN while we watched he placed some tobacco—at least it looked like tobacco—in a little wooden bowl that he also produced from his basket. Next he said something to his companion Marút, who drew from his robe a flute made out of a thick reed, and began to play on it a wild and melancholy music, the sound of which seemed to affect my backbone as standing on a great height often does. Presently, too, Harút broke into a low song whereof I could not understand a word, that rose and fell with the music of the flute. Now he struck a match, which seemed

incongruous in the midst of this semi-magical ceremony, and taking a pinch of the tobacco, lit it and dropped it among the rest. A pale blue smoke arose from the bowl, and with it a very sweet odor not unlike that of the tuberoses gardeners grow in hot-houses, but more searching.

"Now you breathe smoke, Macumazana," he said, "and tell us what you see. Oh! no fear, that not hurt you. Just like cigarette. Look!" And he inhaled some of the vapor and blew it out through his nostrils, after which his face seemed to change to me, though what the change was I could not define.

I hesitated till Scroope said:

"Come, Allan, don't shirk this Central African adventure. I'll try if you like."

"No," said Harút brusquely. "You no good."

Then curiosity and perhaps the fear of being laughed at overcame me. I took the bowl and held it under my nose, while Harút threw over my head the antimacassar which he had used in the mango trick, to keep in the fumes, I suppose.

At first these fumes were unpleasant, but just as I was about to drop the bowl they seemed to become agreeable and to penetrate to the inmost recesses of my being. The general effect of them was not unlike that of the laughing gas which dentists give, with this difference, that whereas the gas produces insensibility, these fumes seemed to set the mind on fire and to burn away all limitations of time and distance. Things shifted before me. It was as though I were no longer in that room but traveling with inconceivable rapidity.

SUDDENLY I appeared to stop before a curtain of mist. The mist rolled up in front of me and I saw a wild and wonderful scene. There lay a lake surrounded by dense African forest. The sky above was still red with the last lights of sunset, and in it floated the full moon.

On the eastern side of the lake was a great open space where nothing seemed to grow, and all about this

space were the skeletons of hundreds of dead elephants. There they lay, some of them almost covered with gray mosses hanging to their bones, through which their yellow tusks projected as though they had been dead for centuries, others with the rotting hide still on them. I knew that I was looking on a cemetery of elephants, the place where these great beasts went to die, as I have since been told the extinct moas did in New Zealand. All my life as a hunter had I heard rumors of these cemeteries, but never before did I see such a spot, even in a dream.

See! There was one dying now, a huge gaunt bull that looked as though it were several hundred years old. It stood there swaying to and fro. Then it lifted its trunk, I suppose to trumpet, though of course I could hear nothing, and slowly sank upon its knees and so remained in the last relaxation of death.

Almost in the center of this cemetery was a little mound of water-washed rock that had endured when the rest of the stony plain was denuded in past epochs. Suddenly upon that rock appeared the shape of the most gigantic elephant that ever I beheld in all my long experience. It had one enormous tusk, but the other was deformed and broken off short. Its sides were scarred as though with fighting, and its eyes shone red and wickedly. Held in its trunk was the body of a woman whose hair hung down upon one side and whose feet hung down the other. Clasped in her arms was a child that seemed to be still living.

The Rogue, as a brute of this sort is called, for evidently such it was, dropped the corpse to the ground and stood a while, flapping its ears. Then it felt for and picked up the child with its trunk, swung it to and fro and finally tossed it high into the air, hurling it far away. After this it walked to the elephant that I had just seen die, and charged the carcass, knocking it over. Then having lifted its trunk as though to trumpet in triumph, it shambled off towards the forest and vanished.

The curtain of mist fell again, and in it, dimly, I thought I saw—well, never-

mind whom or what I saw. Then I awoke.

"WELL, did you see anything?" asked a chorus of voices.

I told them what I had seen, leaving out the last part.

"I say, old fellow," said Scroope, "you must have been pretty clever to get all that in, for your eyes weren't shut for more than ten seconds."

"Then I wonder what you would say if I repeated everything," I answered, for I still felt dreamy and not quite myself.

"You see elephant Jana?" asked Harút. "He kill woman and child, eh? Well, he do that every night. Well, that why people of White Kendah want you kill him and take all that ivory which they no dare touch because it in holy place and Black Kendah no let them. So he live still. That what we wish know. Thank you much, Macumazana. You very good look-through-distance man. Just what I think. Kendah 'bacco smoke very well in you. Now, beautiful lady," he added, turning to Miss Holmes, "you like look too? Better look. Who know what you see?"

Miss Holmes hesitated a moment, studying me with an inquiring eye. But I made no sign, being in truth very curious to hear her experiences.

"Yes," she said.

"I should prefer, Luna, that you left this business alone," remarked Lord Ragnall uneasily. "I think it is time that you ladies went to bed."

"Here is a match," said Miss Holmes to Harút, who was engaged in putting more "tobacco" into the bowl, the suspicion of a smile upon his grave and statuesque countenance. Harút received the match with a low bow and fired the stuff as before. Then he handed the bowl from which once again the blue smoke curled upwards, to Miss Holmes, and gently and gracefully let the antimacassar fall over it and her head, which it draped as a wedding veil might do. A few seconds later she threw off the antimacassar and cast the bowl in which the fire was now out, onto the floor. Then she stood up with wide eyes, looking wondrous lovely

and, notwithstanding her lack of height, majestic.

"I have been in another world," she said in a low voice, as though she spoke to the air. "I have traveled a great way. I found myself in a small place made of stone. It was dark in the place; the fire in that bowl lit it up. There was nothing there except a beautiful statue of a naked baby which seemed to be carved in yellow ivory, and a chair made of ebony inlaid with ivory and seated with string. I stood in front of the statue of the Ivory Child. It seemed to come to life and smiled at me. Round its neck was a string of red stones. It took them from its neck and set them upon mine. Then it pointed to the chair, and I sat down in the chair. That was all."

HARUT followed her words with an interest that I could see was intense, although he attempted to hide it. Then he asked me to translate them, which I did.

As their full sense came home to him, although his face remained impassive I saw his dark eyes shine with the light of triumph. Moreover, I heard him whisper to Marút words that seemed to mean: "The Sacred Child accepts the Guardian. The Spirit of the White Kendah finds a voice again."

Then, as though involuntarily, but with the utmost reverence, both of them bowed deeply towards Miss Holmes.

A babel of conversation broke out.

"What a ridiculous dream," I heard Lord Ragnall say in a vexed voice. "An ivory child that seemed to come to life and to give you a necklace. Who ever heard such nonsense?"

"Whoever heard such nonsense?" repeated Miss Holmes after him, as though in polite acquiescence, but speaking as an automaton might speak.

"I say," interrupted Scroope, addressing Miss Manners, "this is a drawing-room entertainment and a half, isn't it, dear?"

"I don't know," answered Miss Manners doubtfully. "It is rather too queer for my taste. Tricks are all very well, but when it comes to magic and visions I get frightened."

"Well, I suppose the show is over," said Lord Ragnall. "Quatermain, would you mind asking your conjurer friends what I owe them?"

Here Harût, who had understood, paused from packing up his properties and answered:

"Nothing, O great Lord, nothing. It is we owe you much. Here we learn what we want know long time. I mean if elephant Jana still kill people of Kendah. Kendah 'bacco no speak to us. Only speak to new spirit. Good-night, O great Lord. Good-night, O beautiful Lady. Good night, O Macumazana, till we meet again when you come kill elephant Jana. Blessing of the Heaven-Child, who give rain, who protect all danger, who give food, who give health, on you all."

Then, making many obeisances, they walked backwards to the door, where they put on their long cloaks.

**A**T a sign from Lord Ragnall I accompanied them, an office which, fearing more snakes, Mr. Savage was very glad to resign to me. Presently we stood outside the house amidst the moaning trees, and very cold it was.

"What does all this mean, O men of Africa?" I asked.

"Answer the question yourself when you stand face to face with the great elephant Jana that has in it an evil spirit, O Macumazana," replied Harût. "Nay, listen. We are far from our home and we sought tidings through those who could give it to us, and we have won those tidings: that is all. We are worshipers of the Heavenly Child that is eternal youth and all good things, but of late the Child has lacked a tongue. Yet to-night it spoke again. Seek to know no more, you who in due season will know all things."

"Seek to know no more," echoed Marût, "who already perhaps know too much, lest harm should come to you, Macumazana."

"Where are you going to sleep to-night?" I asked.

"We do not sleep here," answered Harût. "We walk to the great city and thence we find our way to Africa, where we shall meet you again. Go in, Macumazana, ere you take harm in this

horrible cold, and take with you this as a marriage gift from the Child of Heaven whom she met to-night, to the beautiful Lady stamped with the sign of the young moon who is about to marry the great lord she loves."

Then he thrust a little linen-wrapped parcel into my hand and with his companion vanished into the darkness.

**I** RETURNED to the drawing-room. "They have gone," I said in answer to Lord Ragnall, "to walk to London as they said. But they have sent a wedding-present to Miss Holmes." I showed the parcel.

"Open it, Quatermain," he said.

"No, George," interrupted Miss Holmes, laughing. "I like to open my own presents."

He shrugged his shoulders and I handed her the parcel, which was neatly sewn up. Somebody produced scissors, and the stitches were cut. Within the linen was a necklace of beautiful red stones, oval-shaped like amber beads, and of the size of a robin's egg. They were roughly polished and threaded on what I recognized at once to be hair from an elephant's tail. From certain indications I judged these stones, which might have been spinels or carbuncles, or even rubies, to be very ancient. Possibly they had once hung round the neck of some lady in Old Egypt. Indeed, a beautiful little statuette, also of red stone, which was suspended from the center of the necklace, suggested that this was so, for it may well have been a likeness of Horus, the son of Isis, the infant of one of the great gods of the Egyptians.

"That is the necklace that I saw which the Ivory Child gave me in my dream," said Miss Holmes quietly.

Then with much deliberation she clasped it round her throat.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PLOT

**T**HE sequel to the events of this evening may be told very briefly, and of it the reader can form his own judgment. I narrate it as it happened.

That night I did not sleep at all well, whether because of the excitement of the great shoot or of the strange events of the evening, I cannot say.

For hour after hour I lay thinking, and in an irritated way listening for the chimes of the Ragnall stable-clock which once had adorned the tower of the church and struck the quarters with a damnable reiteration. I concluded that Messrs. Harût and Marût were a couple of common Arab rogues such as I had seen performing at the African ports. Then a quarter struck and I concluded that the elephants' cemetery which I beheld in the smoke undoubtedly existed and that I meant to collar those thousands of pounds' worth of ivory before I died. Then after another quarter, I concluded that there was no elephants' cemetery—although by the way my old friend Dogeetah, or Brother John, had mentioned such a thing to me—but that probably there was a tribe, as he had also mentioned, called the Kendah, who worshiped a baby, or rather its effigy.

Well now, as had already occurred to me, the old Egyptians of whom I was always fond of reading when I got a chance, also worshiped a child, Horus the Savior. And that child had a mother called Isis symbolized in the crescent moon, the great Nature goddess, the mistress of mysteries to whose cult ten thousand priests were sworn—do not Herodotus and others, especially Apuleius, tell us all about her? And by a queer coincidence Miss Holmes had the mark of a crescent moon upon her breast. And when she was a child those two men, or others very like them, had pointed out that mark to each other. And I had seen them staring hard at it that night. And in her vapor-invoked dream the "Heavenly Child," alias Horus or the Double of Horus, the *Ka*, I think the Egyptians called it, had awakened at the sight of her and kissed her and given her the necklace of the goddess, and all the rest. What did it mean?

I went to sleep at last wondering what on earth it *could* mean, till presently that confounded clock woke me up again and I must go through the whole business once more.

**B**Y DEGREES—this was towards dawn—I became aware that all hope of rest had vanished from me utterly, that I was most painfully awake, and what is more, oppressed by a curious fear to the effect that something was going to happen to Miss Holmes. So vivid did this fear become that at length I arose, lighted a candle and dressed myself. As it happened, I knew where Miss Holmes slept. Her room, which I had seen her enter, was on the same corridor as mine, though at the other end of it near the head of a stair that ran I knew not whither. In the portmanteau that had been sent over from Miss Manners' house, amongst other things was a small double-barreled pistol which, from long habit, I always carried with me loaded, except for the caps that were in a little leather case with some spare ammunition attached to the pistol belt. I took it out, capped it and thrust it into my pocket. Then I slipped from the room and stood behind a tall clock in the corridor, watching Miss Holmes' door and reflecting what a fool I should look if anyone chanced to find me.

Half an hour or so later, by the light of the setting moon which struggled through a window, I saw the door open and Miss Holmes emerge, wrapped in a kind of dressing-gown and still wearing the necklace which Harût and Marût had given her. Of this I was sure, for the light gleamed upon the red stones. Also it shone upon her face and showed me without doubt that she was walking in her sleep.

Gliding silently as a ghost, she crossed the corridor and vanished. I followed and saw that she had descended an ancient, twisting stairway which I had noted in the castle wall. I went after her, my stocking feet making no noise, feeling my way carefully in the darkness of the stair, for I did not dare to strike a match. Beneath me I heard a noise as of some one fumbling with bolts. Then a door creaked on its hinges and there was some light.

When I reached the doorway I caught sight of the figure of Miss Holmes flitting across a hollow garden that was laid out in the bottom of the castle moat, which had been drained.

This garden, as I observed when we walked through it on the previous day on our way to the first covert that we shot, was bordered by a shrubbery through which ran paths that led to the back drive of the castle.

Across the garden glided the figure of Miss Holmes, and after it went I, crouching and taking cover behind every bush as though I were stalking big game—which indeed I was. She entered the shrubbery, moving much more swiftly now, for as she went she seemed to gather speed, as a stone does which is rolled down a hill. It was as though whatever might be attracting her, for I felt sure she was being drawn by something, acted more strongly upon her sleeping will as she drew nearer to it. For a while I lost sight of her in the shadow of the tall trees. Then suddenly I saw her again, standing quite still in an opening caused by the blowing down in the gale of one of the avenue of elms that bordered the back drive. But now she was no longer alone, for advancing towards her were two cloaked figures in whom I recognized Harût and Marût.

THERE she stood with outstretched arms, and towards her, stealthily as two lions stalking a buck, came Harût and Marût. Moreover, between the naked boughs of the fallen elm I caught sight of what looked to me like the outline of a closed carriage standing upon the drive. Also I heard a horse stamp upon the frosty ground. Round the edge of the little glade I ran, keeping in the dark shadow, as I went cocking the pistol that was in my pocket. Then suddenly I darted out and stood between Harût and Marût, and Miss Holmes.

Not a word passed between us. I think that all three of us subconsciously were anxious not to awake the sleeping woman, knowing that if we did so there would be a terrible scene. Only after motioning to me to stand aside, of course in vain, Harût and Marût drew from their robes curved and cruel-looking knives, and bowed, for even now their politeness did not forsake them. I bowed back and when I straightened myself those enterprising

Easterns found that I was covering the heart of Harût with my pistol. Then with that perception which is part of the mental outfit of the great, they saw that the game was up, since I could have shot them both before a knife touched me.

"You have won this time, O Watcher-by-Night," whispered Harût softly, "but another time you will lose. That beautiful lady belongs to us and the People of the White Kendah, for she is marked with the holy mark of the young moon. The call of the Child of Heaven is heard in her heart and will bring her home to the Child as it has brought her to us to-night. Now lead her home still sleeping, O brave and clever one, so well named Watcher-by-Night."

Then they were gone, and presently I heard the sound of horses being driven rapidly along the drive.

FOR a moment I had hesitated as to whether I would or would not run in and shoot those horses. Two considerations stayed me. The first was that if I did so my pistol would be empty, or even if I shot one horse and retained a barrel loaded, with it I could only kill a single man, leaving myself defenseless against the knife of the other. The second consideration was that now as before I did not wish to wake up Miss Holmes.

I crept to her, and not knowing what else to do, took hold of one of her outstretched hands. She turned and came with me at once as though she knew me, remaining all the while fast asleep. Thus we went back to the house, through the still open door, up the stairway straight to her own room, on the threshold of which I loosed her hand. The room was dark and I could see nothing, but I listened until I heard a sound as of a person throwing herself upon the bed and drawing up the blankets. Then knowing that she was safe for a while, I shut the door, which opened outwards as doors of ancient make sometimes do, and set against it a little table that stood in the passage.

Next, after reflecting for a minute, the circumstances being awkward in many ways, I went to my room and

lighted a candle. Obviously it was my duty to inform Lord Ragnall of what had happened, and as soon as possible. But I had no idea in what part of that huge building his sleeping place might be, nor, for patent reasons, was it desirable that I should disturb the house and so create talk. In this dilemma I remembered that Lord Ragnall's confidential servant, Mr. Savage, when he conducted me to my room on the previous night, which he made a point of doing, perhaps because he wished to talk over the matter of the snakes that had found their way into his pockets, had shown me a bell in it which he said rang outside his door. He called it an "emergency bell."

I considered that bell but was loath to ring it for the reasons I have given. Then I went outside the room and looked. As I had hoped might be the case, there ran the wire on the face of the wall connected along its length by other wires with the various rooms it passed.

**I** SET to work and followed that wire. It was not an easy job; down staircases and various passages I went with my eye glued upon the wire, which occasionally got mixed up with other wires, till at length it led me through a swing door covered with red baize into what appeared to be a modern annex to the castle. Here at last it terminated on the spring of an alarming-looking and deep-throated bell that hung immediately over a certain door.

On this door I knocked, hoping that it might be that of Mr. Savage and praying earnestly that it did not enclose the chaste resting-place of the cook or any other female. For, too late, I mean after I had knocked, it occurred to me that if so my position would be painful to a degree. However, in this particular, Fortune stood my friend, which does not always happen to the virtuous. For presently I heard a voice which I recognized as that of Mr. Savage, asking, not without a certain quaver in its tone:

"Who the devil is that?"

"Me," I replied, being flustered.

"'Me' wont do," said the voice. "'Me' might be Harum, or it might be

Scarum, or it might be some one worse. Who's Me?"

"Allan Quatermain, you idiot," I whispered through the keyhole.

"Anna who? Well, never mind. Go away, Hannah. I'll talk to you in the morning."

Then I kicked the door, and at length, very cautiously, Mr. Savage opened it.

"Lord, sir," he said, "what are you doing here, sir? Dressed, too, at this hour, and with the handle of a pistol sticking out of your pocket—or is it—the head of a snake?" And he jumped back, a strange and stately figure in a long white night-shirt which apparently he wore over his underclothing.

I entered the room and shut the door, whereon he politely handed me a chair, remarking:

"Is it ghosts, sir, or are you ill, or is it Harum and Scarum, of whom I have been thinking all night? Very cold, sir, being afraid to pull up the bedclothes for fear lest there might be more reptiles in them." He pointed to his dress-coat hanging on the back of another chair, with both the pockets turned inside out, adding tragically: "To think, sir, that this new coat has been a nest of snakes which I have hated like poison from a child, and me almost a teetotaller!"

"Yes," I said impatiently, "it's Harum and Scarum, as you call them. Take me to Lord Ragnall's bed-room at once."

"Ah! sir, burgling, I suppose, or mayhap worse," he exclaimed as he threw on some miscellaneous garments and seized a life-preserved which hung upon a hook. "Now I'm ready, only I hope they have left their snakes behind. I never could bear the sight of a snake, and they seem to know it—the brutes."

**I**N DUE course we reached Lord Ragnall's room, which Mr. Savage entered and in answer to a stifled inquiry, exclaimed:

"Mr. Allan Quatermain to see you, my Lord."

"What is it, Quatermain?" asked Ragnall, sitting up in bed and yawning. "Have you had a nightmare?"

"Yes," I answered; and Savage having left us and shut the door, I told him everything as it is written down.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed when I had finished. "If it had not been for you and your intuition and courage—"

"Never mind me," I interrupted. "The question is—what should be done now? Are you going to try to arrest these men, or will you—hold your tongue and merely cause them to be watched?"

"Really, I don't know. Even if we can catch them, the whole story would sound so strange in a law-court, and all sorts of things might be suggested."

"Yes, Lord Ragnall, it would sound so strange that I beg you will come at once to see the evidences of what I tell you, before rain or snow obliterates them, bringing another witness with you—Lady Longden, perhaps."

"Lady Longden! Why, one might as well write to the *Times*! I have it! There's Savage. He is faithful and can be silent."

So Savage was called in, and while Lord Ragnall dressed himself hurriedly, told the outline of the story under pain of instant dismissal if he breathed a word. Really, to watch his face was as good as a play. So astonished was he that all he could ejaculate was:

"The black-hearted villains! Well, they aint friendly with snakes for nothing."

**T**HEN, having made sure that Miss Holmes was still in her room, we went down the twisting stair and through the side doorway, locking the door after us. By now the dawn was breaking, and there was enough light to enable me in certain places where the snow that fell after the gale remained, to show Lord Ragnall and Savage the impress of the little bed-room slippers which Miss Holmes wore, and of my stocking feet following after.

In the plantation things were still easier, for every detail of the movements of the four of us could be traced. Moreover, on the back drive was the spoor of horses and marks of the wheels of the carriage that had been brought for the purposes of the abduction. Also, by great good fortune, for this seemed

to prove my theory, we found a parcel wrapped in native linen that appeared to have fallen out of the carriage when Harût and Marût made their hurried escape, as one of the wheels had gone over it. It contained an Eastern woman's dress and veil, intended, I suppose, to be used in disguising Miss Holmes, who thenceforward would have appeared to be the wife or daughter of one of the abductors.

Of these discoveries and many other details, on our return to the house, Lord Ragnall made full notes in a pocketbook, and we all signed them.

There is not much more to tell—that is, of this part of the story. The matter was put in the hands of detectives, who discovered that the Easterns had driven to London, where all trace of the carriage which conveyed them was lost. They, however, embarked upon a steamer called the *Antelope*, together with two native women, who probably had been provided to look after Miss Holmes, and sailed that very afternoon for Egypt. Thither it was useless to follow them, in those days, even if it had been advisable to do so.

**T**O RETURN to Miss Holmes: She came down to breakfast looking very charming but rather pale. Again I sat next to her and took some opportunity to ask her how she had rested.

She replied, very well and yet very ill, since, although she never remembered sleeping more soundly in her life, she had experienced all sorts of queer dreams of which she could remember nothing at all, a circumstance that annoyed her much, as she was sure that they were interesting. Then she added:

"Do you know, Mr. Quatermain, I found a lot of mud on my dressing-gown this morning, and my bedroom slippers were also a mass of mud and wet through. How do you account for that? It is just as though I had been walking about outside in my sleep, which is absurd, as I never did such a thing in my life."

Not feeling equal to the invention of any convincing explanation of these phenomena, I upset the marmalade pot onto the table in such a way that some of it fell upon her dress, and then cov-

ered my retreat with profuse apologies. Understanding my dilemma, for he had heard something of this talk, Lord Ragnall came to my aid with a startling statement of which I forgot the purport, and thus that crisis passed.

Shortly after breakfast, Scroope announced to Miss Manners that her carriage was waiting, and we departed. Before I went, as it chanced, I had a few private words with my host, with Miss Holmes and with the magnificent Mr. Savage. Lord Ragnall asked me for both my English and my African addresses, which he noted in his pocket-book. Then he said:

"Really, Quatermain, I feel as though I had known you for years instead of three days; if you will allow me, I will add that I should like to know a great deal more of you." (He was destined to do so, poor fellow, though neither of us guessed it at the time.) "If ever you come to England again I hope you will make this house your headquarters."

"And if ever you come to South Africa, Lord Ragnall, I hope you will make my four-roomed shanty on the Berea at Durban your headquarters. You will get a hearty welcome there and something to eat, but little more."

"There is nothing I should like better, Quatermain. Circumstances have put me in a certain position in this country; still, to tell you the truth there is a great deal about the life of which I grow very tired. But you see I am going to be married and that, I fear, means an end of traveling, since naturally my wife will wish to take her place in society."

"Of course," I replied, "for it is not every young lady who has the luck to become an English peeress with all the et-ceteras, is it? Still I am not so sure but that Miss Holmes will take to traveling some day, although I am sure that she would do better to stay at home."

He looked at me curiously, then asked:

"You don't think there is anything really serious in all this business?"

"I don't know what to think," I an-

swered, "except that you will do well to keep a good eye upon your wife. What those fellows tried to do last night and, I think, years ago, they may try again, soon, or years hence, for evidently they are patient and determined men with much to win. Also it is a curious coincidence that she should have that mark upon her which appeals so strongly to Messrs. Harut and Marut. And, to be brief, she is in some ways different from most young women. As she said to me herself last night, Lord Ragnall, we are surrounded by mysteries: mysteries of blood, of inherited spirit. And beyond these are other mysteries of the measureless universe to which we belong."

I SUPPOSE that I spoke somewhat solemnly, for he said:

"Do you know you frighten me a little, though I don't quite understand what you mean."

Then we parted.

With Miss Holmes my conversation was shorter. She remarked:

"It has been a great pleasure to me to meet you. I do not remember anybody with whom I have found myself in so much sympathy—except one, of course. It is strange to think that when we meet again I shall be a married woman."

"I do not suppose we shall ever meet again, Miss Holmes. Your life is here; mine is in the wildest places of a wild land far away."

"Oh! yes, we shall," she answered. "I learned this and lots of other things when I held my head in that smoke last night."

Then we also parted.

Lastly Mr. Savage arrived with my coat. "Good-by, Mr. Quatermain," he said. "If I forget everything else I shall never forget you and those villains Harum and Scarum and their snakes. I hope it won't be my lot ever to clap eyes on them again, Mr. Quatermain, and yet somehow I don't feel so sure of that."

"Nor do I," I replied with a kind of inspiration.

**The next installment of "The Ivory Child" finds Quatermain and Lord Ragnall in Africa, engaged in a strange and desperate quest. This will appear in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, on sale February 1st.**



# “AT \$32 PER”

*An exciting battle in a world-old war, that of the sexes. The woman wins and loses—and wins again?*

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By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Author of "Marked Cards," "Among the Personals," etc.

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THE only fluffy things about Amy French were her name and her hair. Apart from these drawbacks, she was one hundred per cent business woman for nine-twenty-fourths of six days of fifty weeks of every year—holidays deducted.

Hers was a career such as elderly failures love to write about in “Success and Efficiency” periodicals. It had been very edifying, this career. It had served as an example to many a fellow toiler. Here are its high spots in a mere mouthful of words:

Amy’s father had been a patrolman. He died just as Amy had entered the Normal College. The three hundred dollar yearly pension, plus his life insurance annuity, had been just enough to keep his widow in comfort; and had left, over and above, nothing that Amy had cared to waste on her own support.

So the girl had switched from the first of her four proposed Normal College years to one double-time year at a business school, and had thence slipped into the battle-line of work-seeking stenographers. Her first job, as a “sub” in the stenographic corps of the big mercantile house of Beardsley & Company, had netted her seven dollars and fifty cents a week.

On this sum she existed, until she could earn enough to live. And as she was a glutton for work and had a so-called “man’s brain” for business detail, she rose rapidly.

Now, at twenty-five, she was the envy of every one of Beardsley & Company’s three hundred and twelve girl employés. For she was secretary to the junior partner. And her salary was thirty-two dollars a week.

To a man with a fifteen-thousand-dollar income, thirty-two dollars a week is insignificant. To a five-hundred-dollar-a-year worker, it is affluence. As there are more five-hundred-dollar people than fifteen-thousand-dollar folk in the world (and none of the latter in Amy French’s world), thirty-two dollars a week is affluence to the majority—especially when it is earned by an unencumbered girl, in a business realm where women’s salaries seldom go above twenty dollars.

Amy’s world knew of one or two women—buyers, millionaires’ private secretaries, and so on—who earned more. But they were of a certain age and most of them were supporting somebody. To have that salary at an age when life runs at its fullest, and to have no one to take care of, with it—

this was well nigh unheard of. Beauty, youth, infinite capacity for a good time, and almost infinite money to gratify that capacity—what more could mortal girl want? Wherefore, of her own set, Amy was the plutocrat and the Favored of the Gods.

She had a glorious time in life. She had all the money she really needed, and almost as much as she wanted. She could—and she did—dress well, eat well, lodge well. She had spending money, for theater, for vacation, for anything else. She even had money, occasionally, to swell her account in the Aaron Burr Savings Bank.

THERE was a man. He was on the clerical force of Beardsley & Company. His name was Karl Hunt. His salary was twenty-five dollars a week. He was in love with Amy. And Amy tried harder and harder every day not to be in love with him.

Even as she had conquered business obstacles, she conquered in this new fight, though it was harder than any other she had waged. She had clearly-defined ideas and ideals. And these she lived up to. Hunt's fervid love-making left her outwardly cold. He approached a proposal from every possible angle, dozens of times, during three months of ardent courtship—only to meet on every side a blank wall of discouragement that killed the love words, unborn, on his lips.

And so matters went on—Amy remaining persistently friendly, Hunt hopelessly ardent—until at last, one day in the early spring, courage overcame discouragement, and he spoke.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. He and Amy had been for a walk in the park. And when they returned to the big, airy flat she shared with her mother, they found Mrs. French had gone to see a neighbor. The coast was clear, the time perfect. Some of the languor of the springtime seemed to have got into Amy's ice-clear brain, dulling its usual vigilance. For she failed for once to note the preliminary warnings and to guard against their result.

On their way from the park they had been talking of a rumored reorganization of an unknown nature in Beards-

ley & Company—one of those rumors, sometimes absurd, sometimes amazingly accurate, that rise no one knows how, and run, like gripe germs, through a storeful of workers.

Hunt had heard the vague gossip and he had spoken to Amy about it. He knew no details. And Amy, better versed than he with the workings of the executive departments, was busy weighing what he had said and trying to decide whether or not a grain of truth might be sifted from the story.

So busy was she with this problem, as she laid aside her hat, on coming into the apartment's living room with Hunt, that she fell silent. Indeed, she failed to catch the drift of several things her guest was saying. All at once she found herself looking at him in blank bewilderment, as her mind belatedly repeated to her the words he had just spoken. Something in their intonation had roused her from her reverie.

"I wont be held off any longer," he was saying, half-defiantly. "I love you and you know I love you, and you've known it all along. A woman always knows, they say. *You* knew, anyhow. And you've kept me from telling you. But you can't, any longer. I love you. And—"

AMY sat down somewhat suddenly in the nearest chair and looked at him with an expression of frank chagrin that checked his impulsive step toward her.

"There!" she exclaimed in despair. "You've done it now! How I happened to let you, I don't know. You've gone and spoiled everything. Oh, dear!"

There was a disappointment in her words and in the interjection that ended them—a disappointment such as one might voice for tearing a new dress or letting the steak burn. It puzzled Hunt.

"What have I spoiled?" he demanded. "I don't understand you at all, Amy. I told you I loved you. How has that 'spoiled' anything? I love—"

"It's spoiled *everything!*" she retorted. "Everything. All our friendship and the good times we've had together, and—"

"Spoiled' them?" he broke in. "Yes,

it's 'spoiled' them the way a bar of gold is spoiled when it's fashioned into a crown. Friendship is mighty well 'spoiled,' when it changes to love. And oh, girl, dear, I *do* love you so! I've been so crazy to tell you, and you'd never give me a chance, till now. Say you care a little bit. *Say it, sweetheart!* I—

"Oh, *don't!*" she begged, in honest distress. "Don't make it worse, Karl."

"Worse?" he babbled, dumfounded.

"Yes, worse—if it *could* be worse. Can't you see how it smashes our friendship? Can't you forget what you've just said and let us be—as—as we were?"

"Never in ten thousand years!" he declared. "And ten thousand nevers besides that. I've been in misery. And—and now you know I love you. I've been able to say it at last. 'Forget' it? I couldn't if I wanted to. And it's the very last thing I'd want. I can't understand you, dear. Is it so unpleasant to you to be loved the way I love you? Why do you want us to 'forget' it? Can't you care for me at all?"

"Yes," she made answer, meeting with level eyes the eager tenseness of appeal in his. "Yes, I can—only too easily. But"—as he started forward, with a half-uttered cry of joy—"I am not going to. I wont let myself. That's why I asked you to forget it and just be friends again."

"You—you say you *can* learn to care for me? I—"

"And I also say I wont. That is final, Karl."

"Final? It isn't even the beginning."

"It's the end. And of the friendship, too, I'm afraid!" she said, a strain of sadness underlying the usual clear crispness of her voice. "I see that, now. We can't go back to where we were. You'd never be content with it. And I'd always be remembering and be on my guard. No. It will have to be the end of your coming here. And—and I'm so sorry!"

"I don't understand you," he protested in dire perplexity, "I don't understand anything about it. It doesn't make sense. I've told you I loved you. If you didn't want me, it would be simple enough to account for the way you've been talking. But you confess you could

learn to care—'only too easily,' you said; so please explain it, wont you?"

**T**H E boyish incoherence of his appeal sent a swift mist across her steady eyes. Then, at once, she was her cool-headed self again.

"Will you be patient and listen to me?" she asked. "I'll try to explain it. I didn't want to explain. Because I know how hard and heartless it must sound. Common sense always does. And it *is* common sense. Will you listen to me, Karl?"

Dumbly, still dizzy with perplexity, he nodded.

"What is your salary?" she asked.

"Twenty-five a week," he answered, dashed by her curt tone.

"Good!" she approved, "—not the salary, but your telling the truth about it. Every man I ever knew, from the errand boy on up to the general manager, lies about the amount of his pay. It seems to be as much a masculine trait as snoring or hating to shave."

"What's that got to do with—?"

"With my not marrying you? It has a great deal to do with it. It is why I wont let myself care. We pay thirty-five dollars a month for this flat, Mother and I. Could you and I afford as nice a flat in as good a neighborhood on twenty-five dollars a week?"

He stared, dazedly, at her, without reply.

"Our grocery and butcher bills last week," she went on, "were eleven dollars and seventeen cents; and it was a light week. Could you afford to pay those bills every week—besides gas and car-fare and clothes (this dress cost thirty dollars)—on your salary of twenty-five dollars? Could you take me to the theater every Saturday night—as Mother and I go—and buy me supper afterward? Could you? Could I go to the Islands for two weeks, as I went last year? In short, could I have half the spending money, the clothes, the amusements, the home comforts, the luxuries that I have now? Of course, Mother's pension and the insurance money eke out the expenses of the flat now. But they couldn't, if I were married. What have you to offer in exchange for all I'd have to give up?"

"Myself," he answered unsteadily. "That's all. I'm sorry it isn't enough."

"It isn't enough, Karl! I don't mean to be unkind or nasty, but it *isn't* enough. And I haven't spoken about the chief thing I'd be sacrificing."

She opened a tiny trunk-shaped vanity box that she had laid on the table alongside her hat, and produced from it a brass key.

"That," she said simply.

"That?" he stuttered. "That's just a measly latch-key."

"No," she denied. "It's Independence."

"Oh, I don't understand you at all!" he groaned. "It's like some nightmare. You talk as if you had no heart."

"No," she corrected, gently, "only as if I had a brain, too. And I have."

"You have no heart!" he accused. "I offer you all a man can offer—my love, my future—everything. And you calmly say it isn't enough and that you prefer to keep your own luxuries. Luxuries! I'd work my hands to the bone to get for you. Oh, you're heartless. You are utterly selfish!"

SHE bent her head a little, as though the whirlwind of his invective was a tempest that beat against her. But instantly she rallied.

"I think there is nothing more to be said," she responded, as he paused for breath. "I can't blame you for feeling as you do. And you are right—according to your own ideas."

"No!" he contradicted. "I was wrong. All wrong, dear. It can't be true. It can't. I've known you for months and months. You're white and honest, and clever—not the kind of woman who can mean such things as you've just said. You *don't* mean them."

"I'm afraid I do," she sighed. "And I'm in the right. That's just the trouble, Karl. I started to explain to you, a few minutes ago. But somehow we got switched away from it. Do you care to listen while I try again?"

Taking assent for granted, she went on:

"From the beginning of the world, it used to be Woman's one aim in life to get a husband. Marriage was her great goal. Everything was bent toward that

one end. For it, she made herself pretty and attractive. For it, she learned to cook and wash and sew—all to catch a husband, to find some one who would permit her to be a general house-servant and a nurse, for the rest of her days, at no wages. It was a gorgeous ambition, wasn't it?"

He made some inarticulate protest. She continued:

"Women used to leave the ease of their well-to-do parents' homes to starve with some worthless man. Women who didn't make legalized slaves of themselves were sneered at as 'old maids.' A man could pick and choose. All a woman asked was the privilege of being his chattel and of drudging for his welfare, till the day of her death. All the payment she asked was one cheap gold ring for her third finger. Women were so afraid the price might drop or the marriage market slump, that they banded together to crucify every woman who dared to undersell their rates and to waive the right of the wedding ring."

"Amy!"

"That's right! Look shocked. Thirty years ago, any unmarried girl who said that would be looked on with horror. For, innocence (that's a polite word for *ignorance*) was part of the pitiful stock-in-trade set forth to catch a husband—part of the allurement a girl offered to induce some man to accept her as an unsalaried drudge."

"This is the crazy feminist screech we read about in the papers!" growled Hunt in crass contempt. "I never thought that *you'd* sink to it."

"I haven't; I've *risen* to it. I am earning thirty-two dollars a week. My mother has about fourteen dollars more. On that, we live beautifully. We lack for nothing. I earn every dollar I get. And I'm entitled to all the pleasure I can get out of every dollar I earn. I suppose," she added, as an afterthought, "you wouldn't expect me to keep on working at Beardsley's after we were married?"

"You know I wouldn't!" he blazed. "I'm no—"

"Yes," she assented, "I knew you wouldn't. So instead of having a reinforced income of thirty-two dollars per, and my freedom and all that both those

things mean, I'd have to live on a share of twenty-five dollars a week. I would have to keep house. I'd have to cook and dust and sweep and mend. We couldn't keep a maid, of course. And everything but the washing and the scrubbing would have to be done by me. We'd have money for mighty few amusements. I'd have to make one dress last as long as I make three last, now. I'd have to be at your beck and call. I'd have to save and scrimp and go without things and lie awake nights planning how to make one dollar do the duty of five.

"I've had to work hard to get up to where I am now. And I'm entitled to every atom of fun I can wring out of life. Not one girl in a thousand has such a salary as mine. Why should I throw away that salary and all it brings me? Why should I become a servant, a drudge, and, later, a nurse? Why should I make myself poor and a slave?"

"For love," he answered very simply, all his perplexity and wrath gone. "For love, and to fulfill your destiny."

"Old fashioned drivel!" she scoffed.

"Girl, dear, this hasn't been *you* talking. It has been the mass of feminist stuff you've swallowed and can't digest. The real *you* is a true woman, to the very soul—not a calculating human machine who uses money and not heart as a measure of life. You don't mean what you say. You may think you do, but you don't. What has been right and natural, since the days of Eve, will keep on being right and natural to the end of the chapter. What has gone on for six thousand years is not likely to stop short and change itself, in a single quarter century. Nothing in nature has ever done that."

"Woman has—"

"Woman has been let into the industrial world, during the last few years. She has not 'invaded' that world, as she likes to think she has. She has been invited into it by Man; because a million industries have suddenly expanded and branched out in such a way that more workers are needed. And women have been called on to fill that need."

"Nonsense! The—"

"The old-time store had from one to six clerks. And those clerks were gen-

erally men. Then came the department store. It hired hundreds of clerks. And, because the proprietors wanted bigger profits and because women would work more cheaply than men, women were invited to take the jobs. It has been the same in factories; in business offices; in public schools; in every line of endeavor. There was need of more workers at low pay. And women were allowed to fill that need. So, pretty soon they took to declaring that a Woman's Era had dawned. And they shouted—a lot of 'em—that Woman was coming into her heritage at last and that Man's day of supremacy was over. The possession of wages drove them crazy. As it's driven *you* crazy."

"**N**O," SHE denied, hotly, "it has driven us *sane*! When men held the purse strings, and doled out the pennies to us, we were their slaves—as I should be yours, if I were fool enough to marry you. When we learned to earn our own living, we became free, for the first time in all history. I, for one, mean to stay so, until I can be made as comfortable by marrying."

"Free? No. There is no freedom except in happiness. And the woman who tries to strangle her own heart and to slap Mother Nature in the face is never happy. You think you're happy. You're not. You're only having a good time. That isn't being happy—any more than a shiny new penny is a gold dollar. You will find out the difference when night comes—when the first jolly feeling is gone and you're just a middle-aged, tired, bored, single woman with a nice salary and nothing else. Have you ever seen the look such women give, on the sly, to some poor mother who passes them on the street, with a youngster hanging on to each of her arms and a stupid-faced husband plodding contentedly beside her? Well, I've seen it. And it's brought a lump to my throat."

"That is all sentimental slush!"

"It is the sort of sentimental slush that hardens into a strong enough mortar to hold the whole fabric of the world together. Dear girl of mine, you can't buck against Nature any more than you can hold out against God."

"It—"

"Drop it! I love you. You say you can easily learn to care for me. That means you *do* love me, but that you won't confess it for fear of being poor for a while. It isn't worthy of you, darling. You're turning your back on the most wonderful, God-given happiness in all life. You're doing it, just for the sake of a chance to spend more money than you need to and for an independence that is only another word for uselessness. You're swapping the substance for the shadow. I'm not worthy of a girl like you. I don't pretend to be. And I'm only earning twenty-five dollars per,—as you so carefully remind me,—twenty-five per cent less than your own salary. But I sha'n't always be earning so little. With you to work for—"

"You won't be hampered by having me to work for," she raged. "If you were a billionaire and the last man on earth, do you suppose for an instant that I'd marry you?"

"But you said—"

"That was before I knew how you regarded women. I've tried to listen patiently to your ranting, ignorant arraignment of us. And I've fought back the things I wanted to say. But now that I have had a glimpse of your real self, now that I see how you look on us all —how you sneer at our gallant fight for emancipation—"

"Emancipation from what?"

"From the tyranny of the ages."

"The tyranny that has always made a decent man protect a woman with his own life? The tyranny that makes a woman's unsupported word, in court, outweigh all the evidence a man can bring forward? (If you doubt that, ask yourself if in all the history of law there was ever a woman who brought a breach of promise suit, who didn't win her case, no matter how flimsy that case was.) Do you mean the tyranny of laws that make a man responsible for all his wife's debts and that forbid him to disinherit her and that won't even let him sell a dollar's worth of his own property without her signature? Do you mean the tyranny that almost invariably refuses to punish a murderer? The tyranny that says: 'When the majority of

women want the vote they will be welcome to it?' Do you?"

"Oh," she interposed, dazedly, "it's useless to try to make you understand! It is enough for me to know that you look down on women, as—"

"Stop!" he ordered. "I can't let you go on getting a wrong idea of me. Women, as women, are the most perfect part of this dreary old world. Every man knows it. Look at the men who are slaving their lives out. Are they doing it for their own pleasure? You know they aren't. It's always for some woman. And they glory in doing it. At the end of the day or at the end of the battle or at the end of the world, there's always a woman waiting. Next to God, it is she we worship. It is she who makes life worth while. It is *you* who are some day going to make *my* life worth while, dear heart. It won't be to-day. It won't be to-morrow. But some day the dollar will be spent and all the candy eaten. And then you'll come home—to *me*. And I'll be waiting—waiting, if it's a whole life-time. I won't bother you again till then. Good-by, little girl."

IT TOOK an entire week for Amy French's righteous rage against Hunt to simmer into sulkiness; and another whole week for sulkiness to merge into a pathetic grievance. And by the end of a month she found herself—to her own keen disgust—missing him terribly.

For, since the Sunday when a perfectly good love scene had distorted itself into a furious sex-argument and arraignment, she had not once set eyes on Karl. He called no more at the flat. Hitherto, Karl had made pretenses to pass through her department at Beardsley's, pausing for a chat; now he kept to his own part of the building.

Amy sought to buoy up her sinking balloon of anger by recalling all the abominable things Hunt had said about herself and her fellow-warriors in the Emancipation conflict. But gradually she found it harder and harder to bring back to memory the exact wording of those unforgivable slurs. And at last, all of his tirade she could remember were the phrases: "Sweetheart," "Dear girl of mine," and "I love you."

She was heartily ashamed of herself, but she had a way of being honest—even with herself. And in time she took herself in hand and forced herself to look fairly and squarely into her own heart. And there she read that she loved Karl Hunt, and that the world, without him, was growing to be a very unprofitable and tiresome place—even at thirty-two dollars per.

Because her thoughts were, for the first time in eight years, centered upon something other than her work, Amy missed many minor signs of coming storm, in the office—signs that in former days would have set her to conjecturing. As it was, she went through her days' routine, mechanically, then hurried home at the first possible moment and into her prettiest clothes in the shamed hope that Karl Hunt might call. But he did not.

And then, one morning, she quite lost her last ragged remnant of self-respect. On reaching her desk she scrawled a note and sent it to Hunt by an office boy. She wrote it in a rush and held herself tightly in her chair to keep from hurrying out of the room to call back the messenger. And yet the missive held nothing more incriminating or degrading than the scribbled words:

"Dear Karl: What has become of you?"  
A. F."

THAT day, the world came to an end—at least, Amy French's professional world. At ten o'clock the first whisper of an immediate change swept through the employees' ranks. At eleven it was confirmed to Amy by a letter she took at the junior partner's dictation.

Beardsley & Company had not been "reorganized." It had been "taken over." Both partners were retiring, and the whole concern had been bought by the rival firm of Durling & Mickens.

At noon, the story of the long-pending deal was made public.

At one o'clock, the junior partner tactfully told Amy that he "was informed the new proprietors and department chiefs were already supplied with an ample force of secretaries;" and that she might, if she chose, accept two

weeks' pay in lieu of a fortnight's notice to quit.

He was very nice about it; and he added something consoling in the form of a hint that this was the slack season and that he hoped Amy had laid by enough money to tide her over, as no job such as she had been occupying seemed to be vacant just then. And he patted her hand—thus invoking a gust of indignation which dried her unshed tears.

Amy French had left home that morning, one of the best paid women workers in the city. She went home that night a working girl out of a job.

She knew that positions such as hers are seldom "filled from the outside." Employees work up to them. A high priced secretary who has lost her job in one business house stands scant chance of receiving the same position in another, without climbing once more the greater part of the steep ladder.

Luckily, her mother was dining with some friends that night. So Amy was able to face the situation alone, unhampered by well-meant sympathy. And so busy was she in the wretched task of readjusting her plans to this cataclysm, that the bell rang twice before she so much as noticed it.

Then, listlessly, she answered the summons. And she opened the flat door, to discover Karl Hunt on the mat. For a moment she gazed at him in stark wonder, wholly forgetting the summons she had sent him. So much had happened that day, she had not yet tried to "place" Karl in the new scheme of things; and all day she had remembered him only subconsciously—as she had of late been doing, unwittingly, day and night. His advent, just now, took her at a grossly unfair disadvantage.

Amy tried to say something. So did he. Neither succeeded. Then Amy tried once more. What she intended to say, she could never remember. It was something that was polite without sounding too cordial. To her horror, she heard her treacherous voice murmuring, through no volition of her own, the following idiotic words:

"The—the dollar's all spent. And I—I—oh, I want to come *home!*"

# AN INNOCENT ABROAD

*He was a typical young American: frank, alert, capable. When he went to Europe these qualities led him into a series of surprising adventures which are described in a most lively and spirited fashion. The first of these delightful episodes follows: don't fail to read it.*

## “The Affair of the Santa Mona

An introductory note by Colonel Green

*To the best of my ability, I have tried here to recount such few of the adventures of Mr. Edmund H. Martin as came under my personal notice. That I, Colonel Green, a retired medical officer, sixty-seven years old, of quiet habits but observant disposition, should have become the Boswell of this amazing young man must always remain to me an insoluble puzzle. I have no explanations to offer—only these facts to present. I shall commence unfashionably at the beginning; I shall try to show how imperceptibly our companionship grew; and I shall find courage, as I proceed, to relate those more sensational adventures, my own share in which, even at the present moment, fills me sometimes with feelings of mingled apprehension and wonder.*

AT ABOUT nine o'clock on a brilliant February morning, the motor-omnibus which had been down to meet the train de luxe from England came into sight, ascending the winding roadway to the Paradise Hotel. About a dozen of us were loitering in front to watch the new arrivals. It had become quite a source of amusement with some of the habitués of the place to watch the confident arrival of newcomers, and to see them pass through the various grades of doubt to despair when they inquired what accommodation could be offered them in this highly popular caravansery. On this occasion, the omnibus contained a single passenger only, a passenger, however, of singular and noteworthy appearance. I am forced to admit that when he stepped out of the omnibus and looked around him, we were none of us favorably impressed with the appearance of Mr. Martin—

Mr. Edmund H. Martin, as he preferred to call himself. He was large, and abominably dressed in a suit of impossible checks. He wore bright yellow boots with bulgy toes. His tie seemed to have gathered together every color of the rainbow into its motley mesh.

As he stood there gazing around him, I heard a little titter from Mrs. Moggeridge and her daughters, and I caught the supercilious look exchanged between two of our young men who were lounging against the pillars. The newcomer, it must be confessed, did not conform in any way to recognized standards, yet even in those first few moments I found something about his appearance which attracted me. Notwithstanding his great size—he was six feet three and very broad—his face was innocent of any beard or mustache. He seemed, indeed, to possess the fresh-complexioned visage of a boy. He

# *By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM*

*That remarkable talent which created "Anna, the Adventuress," "The Long Arm of Mannister" and "Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo" has now produced a story-sequence which is even more consummately interesting.*

*These stories will all appear in The  
BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.*

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## **Spring"—the first story of the series**

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stood there, an incipient smile struggling for the least encouragement to take formal possession of his good-humored face, looking around him for some one to whom he could address the remark which it eventually fell to my lot to receive.

"Say, this is a bully place!" he exclaimed, appealing first to me and then to us all generally.

Mrs. Moggeridge and her daughters—very lady-like young persons—turned around and strolled away. The two young men were gazing over the tops of the trees. An old lady who was knitting seemed to find some cause for personal offense in this simple expression of contentment. Unfortunately, an elderly gentleman of kindly disposition who was sitting on a garden seat, and who might have made some response, was stone deaf. It remained for me, therefore, either to welcome this young man or—not.

"You see it quite at its best," I remarked. "With the wind in its present quarter, the climate here is almost perfection."

"Guess I'll see about my room," the young man went on, unwillingly giving over what I believe he called a grip, to an insistent porter.

"Are your rooms engaged?" I asked.

"Not yet," the newcomer replied. "I'll soon fix that all right."

HE DISAPPEARED with an air of easy confidence. There was a little exchange of smiles. The hotel was not only always impossibly full, but the whole business of letting rooms was immensely complicated from the fact that no one was ever willing to leave. We watched the disappearance of this young man into the office, and I distinctly saw signs of ill-natured but pleasurable anticipation in the faces of several of the people standing around.

"What an extraordinary person!" Mrs. Moggeridge exclaimed.

"American, of course," the elder daughter observed.

"He may be very rich," the younger one added reflectively.

"We don't want that sort of person here," the dear old lady by my side snapped.

"Did you ever see such a get-up?" one of the young men yawned. "Bet you they'll send him down to the *Iles d'Or*."

Mr. Edmund Martin, however, was apparently possessed of some gifts of persuasion. When he finally emerged from the office, it was to superintend the collection of his baggage. He caught my eye and beamed upon me.

"See you later," he promised amiably. "I'm going to see if I can get some breakfast."

The little air of disappointment was almost apparent. The old lady picked

up her knitting and went off into the office to complain of anyone having been given a room, when a friend of her cousin's, strongly recommended by herself, had been sent to another hotel only the day before. I nodded back to Mr. Edmund Martin as pleasantly as possible.

"See you down at the golf links," I remarked.

"Sure!" he replied heartily. "So long, all," he added, as he moved steadily off in the direction of the restaurant.

I PLAYED my usual round of golf with an opponent of long standing. On looking up after successfully holing my putt on the last green, I found the horizon temporarily blotted out. Mr. Edmund H. Martin, looking larger than ever, was applauding my performance.

"Say, that was a dandy putt," he declared, removing a large cigar from his mouth. "You come right along in with me and I'll mix you a cocktail."

Every natural instinct I possessed prompted me to refuse this—to me—somewhat extraordinary invitation. It was not my habit to take anything to drink in the morning except sometimes a little Dubonnet and soda, and I was already conscious of the somewhat supercilious interest aroused in my companion by the familiarity of this extraordinary young man. The refusal, however, seemed to wither away upon my lips.

"Thank you very much," I replied. "I shall have to offer my opponent a little refreshment in exchange for his five francs."

"Why, that's all right," the young man declared heartily, leading the way towards the pavilion. "I'll mix for the whole crowd. I'll give you something that will put a little sting into your carcass."

I am convinced that this young man was possessed of certain mesmeric powers. My opponent, who was in a very bad temper, and who was also a retired colonel, but a soldier, as he was sometimes pleased to explain, followed meekly in my wake. We watched the little bar being turned upside down, and

we watched the preparation of a concoction which I, for my part, was perfectly certain must inevitably prove highly injurious. In the end, however, we not only drank the wineglassful of yellow-white liquid which was tendered to us, but I am bound to say that we enjoyed it. My opponent crossed his legs and began to explain his defeat. I myself was conscious of a pleasant sense of good-fellowship. I inquired our new friend's name and introduced him to several of the habitués.

"What about a round with me this afternoon, Colonel?" he suggested.

"I shall be delighted," I assented promptly, abandoning without hesitation my principle of an hour's sleep after luncheon.

Our new friend mixed cocktails for several of the people to whom I introduced him, and we left him there, looking hungrily around for a new victim.

"Something about that drink," my companion remarked lazily, as we strolled up to the hotel, "which seems to have done me good, Green. You really did play a fine game this morning."

"I was very lucky to beat you," I declared modestly. "You were driving much straighter than I was . . . I never thought that these American drinks were so pleasant. Let us sit down and watch the tennis for a few minutes. Most becoming costume these young ladies wear nowadays."

WE SAT there for some time, basking in the sunshine and chatting amiably. I enjoyed my lunch none the less for finding our new friend only a few tables off and receiving a very hearty greeting from him. I found him, according to arrangement, waiting upon the tee at two o'clock.

"What," I asked him, "is your handicap?"

He grinned.

"Never mind about mine. What's yours?"

"I am twelve," I replied diffidently, "but I occasionally play a nine game."

"I am about the same myself," he announced. "We'll start level, anyway."

He insisted upon my taking the honor and I drove what I considered to be an excellent ball, within forty yards of the green. My opponent, discarding the driver which the caddy offered him, took a light iron from his bag and hit a ball further than I have ever seen it propelled by human means before. He carried the green and very nearly disappeared into the hedge beyond. As soon as I had recovered, I announced my intention of returning to the pavilion.

"I am not going to play with a Braid in disguise," I told him. "If you can do that sort of thing, you ought to have told me."

He took me by the arm almost affectionately. Against my will, but without any desire for resistance, I was led along the course.

"Say, Colonel," he confided, "I'm a holy terror from the tee. You wait till you see me drive! But it's those little short shots I can't manage. And as to putting—well, you wait! I can't seem to keep the ball on the green, even."

I played a very nice approach within a couple of yards of the pin. My opponent overran the green about sixty yards, cheerfully missed his third, and was nearly back again in the hedge with his fourth. I won the hole and recovered my good humor.

"It would be worth your while," I remarked, as I watched him drive nearly three hundred yards, "to give a little time to your short game."

"I always mean to practise," he agreed. "No chance in New York, though."

We had a very interesting match, which I succeeded in winning. I was then initiated into the mystery of a Scotch highball, after which I felt it advisable to go and have a nap before dinner. When I descended to the lounge, a little earlier than usual, I discovered Mr. Edmund Martin, attired, to my relief, in conventional if somewhat eccentric dinner garb, seated in an easy-chair with a cigarette in his mouth, and a small memorandum book, which he was studying in a puzzled fashion, held up in front of him. The moment I appeared, he held up two

fingers to a waiter, who disappeared as though by magic.

"That's all right, Colonel," he explained, as I watched the man's hasty exit. "He's got a couple of the right sort on ice for me, waiting for you. Just sit down for a moment, will you? What is this game all the nice old ladies here want me to play with them?"

I took the memorandum book from his hand. Down the engagement columns, at intervals for the next fortnight, were such entries as "Mrs. H.," "Mrs. A.," "Miss Fuzzy-Wuzzy," "Miss Giglamps," and various other fancy pseudonyms, some of which I readily recognized.

"Had to put down something where I didn't catch the names," he pointed out. "What is the game, anyway?"

"Auction bridge, of course," I told him. "They are all crazy on it here. Can't you play?"

"Not that I know of," he replied evasively. "I never tried."

"Then what on earth did you accept all these invitations for?"

I had clearly cornered Mr. Edmund H. Martin. He scratched his chin reflectively.

"What was I to do?" he grumbled. "I like to be friendly with everyone, and I hate to say 'No' when a lady comes up and asks me to join in a simple little game of cards."

"That's all very well," I objected, "but you can't play the game. You'll spoil the rubber."

"Not I," he assured me cheerfully. "Between you and me, there's nothing with cards I can't do. Just you watch here."

He took a pack of cards from his pocket, and for several moments I watched him, almost stupefied. Cards came up from his neck, down his trousers legs; they fell in little showers upon the table, apparently from mid-air. He even produced an ace of spades from my shirt-front.

"You see, I'm no mug," he declared modestly. "As for this particular game, why, I'll just look into the rules. You haven't got a book about it, have you?"

I sipped the most insinuating contents of one of the glasses which the

waiter had just brought us, and afterwards I fetched him my Badsworth and left him studying it. That night I saw him, one of four solemn performers seated, smileless and eager, at a card-table in a corner of the lounge.

**H**E JOINED me at about ten o'clock. He looked a little older and was glancing about feverishly for a waiter.

"Get through all right?" I inquired.

"I guess so," he answered. "I fell a bit behind, now and then, but as soon as I tumbled to it that we weren't playing for money, I dealt my partner a hundred aces once or twice, and that made things all right because she kept on having to play the hands. They are talking about it all over the hotel. It seems that no one has had a hundred aces six times in one evening before."

"Look here," I begged him earnestly, "you mustn't be up to any of those tricks here. The people wouldn't understand it. Bridge is a very solemn function, and they wouldn't take it as a joke, anyhow."

"Joke? It wasn't a joke at all," he assured me. "I did it on purpose. If you'd seen my partner's face as she kept on picking 'em up—dear old thing about seventy, she was, with a blue ribbon in her hair—you'd have forgiven me fast enough. She clean forgot a kind of lapse I'd had, playing the hand before. Why, I tell you I made quite a hit. They've asked me to play with them every Tuesday till the hotel closes."

"But you're only going to stay a fortnight," I reminded him.

"That's their trouble," he replied. "Anyway, I've taken a fancy to the game."

I induced him without difficulty to partake of a little refreshment with me, and left him, half an hour later, in a deserted corner of the lounge, with a large whisky and soda by his side and a freshly-lit cigar in his mouth, dealing out four hands, and, after referring them to Badsworth, carefully playing the cards.

"There's something in this game," he declared cheerfully, as he bade me good-night. "I'll have the hang of it all right by to-morrow."

**F**OR the next few days, although spasmodically I saw a great deal of my new friend, I was compelled to deny myself any close association with him, owing to the presence of my sister, Lady Chalmont, who had come over from Cannes to stay with me. On the fourth day after her arrival, however, I took her to a little out-of-door restaurant at Carcaran. We were in the middle of a very excellent lunch when a familiar voice from the other side of a clump of rhododendron bushes attracted our attention. My sister listened for a moment.

"It is your delightfully original friend, Mr. Edmund H. Martin, as he calls himself!" she exclaimed. "Do let us get him to join us."

We both rose and moved towards the narrow path which led through a tangle of rhododendron shrubs to the next table. Then my sister, who was leading, stopped short and turned to me with a frown. A little peal of distinctly feminine laughter reached us from the other side of the shrubs.

"Perhaps you had better first ascertain who Mr. Martin's companions are," she remarked drily.

She returned to her seat, whilst I threaded the winding path and came out upon a little luncheon party in the small green enclosure. There were several pails from which protruded the necks of gold-foiled bottles. There was a profusion of food and fruit upon the table, and there was Mr. Edmund H. Martin, red in the face and very jovial in appearance, the central figure of one of the most disreputable companies I have ever set eyes upon. The ladies who sat on either side of him were, to use a mild adjective, cosmopolitan. Of the two men, one looked like a cross between a country book-maker and a prize-fighter, and the other was a Frenchman whom I knew slightly, a man who notoriously lived by his wits in any place upon the Riviera where he found himself able to induce a hotel proprietor to give him credit.

My new friend, who was wearing a very light gray suit and another amazing tie, was in the act of indulging in a hearty laugh. Suddenly he saw me. The laugh faded away. He sat with

his mouth wide-open for a moment. Then he waved his hand with a feeble attempt at boisterous cordiality.

"Why, Colonel," he exclaimed, "I thought that you'd taken your sister back to Cannes to-day!"

"My sister has decided to remain with me a little longer," I told him, "so I brought her over here to lunch. I thought I heard your voice and it occurred to my sister that if you were alone—"

"I'd like to introduce my friend," Martin interrupted. "This is Colonel Green—Major Grinley," he began, indicating the Englishman of pugilistic appearance; "Monsieur le Comte de Faux," he went on, motioning towards the Frenchman; Mademoiselle—well, these French names fairly bother me," he wound up confidentially, "but these two young ladies are friends of the Comte."

He looked at me wistfully, as though anxious to see how I would accept the situation. I contented myself with a general bow. It was perfectly easy to see that my arrival was disconcerting to the little party.

"Did you say that Lady Chalmont was with you?" Martin inquired.

"She is on the other side of the rhododendron bush," I told him.

The young man sprang to his feet.

"Say, isn't that bully!" he exclaimed, looking almost miserable. "You'll excuse me, Comte and young ladies? I must just pay my respects to Lady Chalmont."

"You'll come back?" they all cried, almost in unison.

"Right away," he assured them heartily. "Now then, Colonel."

I LED him along the narrow path in silence. My sister really behaved quite charmingly. She had commenced, in fact, to share my unaccountable partiality for the young man, and although she shook her head reproachfully, her tone was still good-humored.

"Mr. Martin," she demanded, "tell us exactly what you are doing here?"

"Just a few friends," he explained, "—a little luncheon party got together on the spur of the moment."

"I heard ladies' voices," my sister in-

sisted. "Are your guests from the hotel?"

"Not exactly," Martin admitted. "The young ladies are friends of the Comte. We fixed this up down at the casino last night. A very charming man, the Comte de Faux."

"Where did you get hold of Major Grinley?" I asked drily.

"An officer in your British Army, sir," Martin reminded us. "He is out here just now on a most important affair of business. He is representing, in fact, a syndicate of British financiers."

I groaned. My sister leaned a little forward.

"Mr. Martin," she asked kindly, "how much have they had out of you already?"

The young man looked a little hurt.

"Lady Chalmont, I don't know why you should allude to my friends—"

"How much?" my sister persisted.

"I was fortunate enough to run across the Comte," Martin replied stiffly, "last night when he was in urgent need of five hundred francs, and I have obliged Major Grinley by cashing a check for him—a friend's check."

"For a large amount?" I inquired.

"A matter of forty pounds—a mere trifle."

"It might have been worse," I remarked laconically.

Our young friend stood before us with his hands in his pockets, looking very much like a guilty school-boy who has been found out in some peccadillo.

"You don't seem to like my guests, Colonel," he observed dejectedly.

I shook my head.

"I know both of them by reputation. Would you be annoyed if I told you exactly what I thought of them? In any case, I will risk it so far as to tell you that I think they are both crooks."

"A French nobleman and a major in your British Army!" he protested.

"Excellent material in adversity," I assured him.

Martin was looking rather like a spoilt child. My sister laughed outright at him.

"It's no use looking cross, Mr. Martin," she declared. "You know very

well that my brother is only speaking for your good, and you must admit that you are just a little inclined to make friends easily, aren't you?"

"As a matter of fact," I inquired, "where did you meet them?"

"We met in the buffet of the Gare de Lyons and traveled down to Hyères together," Martin explained. "Most agreeable journey it was, too."

"Did you play cards?" my sister asked innocently.

"A little poker game," he admitted. "I won a trifle."

Knowing something of this young man's methods with cards, I turned away to hide a smile. He left us, a few minutes afterwards, and we heard the enthusiastic reception accorded him by his little party of guests on his return. I paid the bill in silence, and we strolled up to the waiting car.

"I am afraid that your interesting young American friend has got into rather bad hands," my sister sighed.

"I am sure of it," I agreed.

"We'll talk to him to-morrow," she continued. "He really is a most extraordinary young person, but I can't help feeling a certain amount of interest in him. He seems very simple to be wandering about the world alone."

"He has lived in New York for some years," I remarked dubiously.

"Oh, I am not saying that he is unintelligent," she declared, "but he is far too ingenuous and trusting. Tell the man to drive very slowly, Henry, and take the road back through the peach orchards."

**W**E INVITED Martin to lunch with us the next day, and at about half-past twelve he duly arrived, the greater part of his person obscured by a bunch of violets as big as a bucket, which he gallantly offered to my sister. No allusion whatever was made to our meeting of the day before, but about halfway through the meal he leaned over the table a little confidentially.

"Say, Colonel," he inquired, "how do I get hold of money down here?"

"It depends upon the amount," I replied drily.

"Oh, not much—say three thousand pounds."

"You take the 'bus into the town and ask for the English Bank," I told him. "You get them to wire to your bankers in London, and by this time tomorrow you would probably be able to draw it."

"Capital!" he declared. "We couldn't do much better than that at home."

"But, Mr. Martin," my sister asked seriously, "what do you want three thousand pounds for?"

He beamed upon us both.

"To tell you the truth," he confided, "I have had a very interesting little speculation suggested to me."

"By the Comte de Faux or Major Grinley?" my sister asked innocently.

"Say, how did you guess that?" Martin exclaimed. "You're dead right, anyway. Like to hear about it?"

My sister sighed.

"Immensely!"

"And you, Colonel?"

"Of course!"

**H**E GLANCED around to be sure that our table was out of the reach of eavesdroppers. His voice became more rounded, even portentous.

"Say," he began, "there's one thing I don't want you two people to misunderstand. My friends the Comte and Major Grinley are on the square all right, but they've been badly treated. They showed me the whole correspondence and they've been white all the way through. If what they are suggesting at the present moment seems to you a bit like sharp practice on the men who've sent them out here, you must remember that, after all, it's every man for himself in this world."

"It is," I agreed, "and every man has to look out for himself."

"Now the Comte and Major Grinley," Martin continued, "have been sent out here on behalf of an English syndicate of capitalists, to inquire into a wonderful mineral-water spring not many miles away from this spot, and to make terms for securing the same, providing everything was O. K. The purchase price was not to exceed thirty thousand pounds for the spring itself and the woods surrounding it—an estate of some two thousand acres. The

Comte and Major Grinley, if they succeeded in bringing the thing off, were to have so much in shares and so much cash. I have seen that in writing. And there's another thing to be remembered. It was the Comte who discovered the spring, as it is only a few miles away from the boundary of his own property."

"So the Comte has property here?" I interrupted.

"I should say so," Martin declared. "Now they've bottled some of the water and sent it to London and had a favorable report. They've interviewed the proprietor—he is little more than a French peasant—and they've managed to work the price down to twenty-five thousand pounds. It's a magnificent property, and believe me there's a huge fortune in the mineral spring. The Comte and Major Grinley have given no end of time to this matter and spent a great deal of money. Now they've made their report and the men at the head of the syndicate are hesitating. They are grumbling about giving the Comte and Major Grinley any interest in the five thousand pounds they are saving, and they talk of sending another man out to make a special report. The long and short of it is, there's no money in London. They can't raise the stuff. And here are my two friends committed to the purchase of that estate for twenty-five thousand pounds, and the deposit's got to be paid over this week."

"A very awkward situation," I admitted.

Martin nodded. He seemed encouraged by our sympathetic attitude.

"Well," he proceeded, with an air of growing importance, "they came to me and they asked my advice as an American man of business, and I guess I let them have it quick. What I said was, if the value is really there, get an offer elsewhere. If the syndicate don't act up to their promises, throw 'em overboard. That's their own look-out. At first I couldn't get either the Comte or Major Grinley to see it. The worst of these aristocrats and army folk is that they've an exaggerated sense of honor, you know. No use at all in business."

I choked a little and hastily drank some wine. My sister did not even smile. She was hanging upon Martin's words.

"However, I talked 'em over," he concluded, pulling his waistcoat down with an air of satisfaction, "and here's the long and short of it. I'm going to buy that spring and estate, and if you two feel in any way interested, why, I'll take you both up there to have a look at it this afternoon."

"As to the value—" I began.

"Wait till you've looked over the place," Martin begged me. "It's not more than half an hour's ride from here. What do you say?"

"I should be delighted to go," my sister assented.

**A**N HOUR or so later, we arrived at a lonely spot on the top of a range of hills between Toulon and Hyères. We all descended, and our young friend led the way across a stony field, planted with a few unwholesome-looking vines, and past a whitewashed hovel into a wood.

"Is this the place," I asked dubiously.

"This is the place," Martin replied. "The spring is just a little further in."

Some efforts had evidently been made to preserve the spring itself from trespassers. There was a barbed-wire fence around it, and a small gate secured by a padlock. A man, who had apparently seen our approach, issued from the hovel and with many bows produced a key. Martin drew out a phrase-book from his pocket.

"*Ont les messieurs, Comte de Faux et Major Grinley, visités ici aujourd'hui?*" he demanded, speaking louder than usual, with the idea, apparently, of making his words more easily apprehended.

"*Mais non, monsieur,*" the man replied.

"*C'est bien!*" Martin declared, replacing the phrase-book in his pocket. "*Ouvrez la porte, s'il vous plaît.*"

We were conducted into a glade and shown the spot where the water came bubbling up from an undoubted spring. Our guide produced a tin mug. We tasted the water and on the whole ap-

proved. It was, without doubt, excellent. Then we wandered a little further through the wood and out on the other side. The land, so far as one could see, was stony and poorly cultivated, but the view was magnificent. At our feet lay the harbor of Toulon, and beyond, the blue Mediterranean. The peasant and my sister talked fluently, and Martin made unhappy attempts to follow their conversation with the aid of the phrase-book. Finally we left the place and took our seats once more in the automobile.

"Pretty spot," Martin remarked tentatively.

"Very," I agreed.

"And the water seems good?"

"I am not much of a judge of water," I replied guardedly, "but I should say that it was good water."

We drove down towards San Salvador almost in silence.

"I am going to buy that place," Martin announced.

IT APPEARED to me that the time had arrived for plain speech. It had become perfectly clear to me, during my very brief acquaintance with this young man, that sooner or later he was foredoomed to become the prey to one or more of those many adventurers whom one meets in all places of the world. My sister Mary and I had talked this matter over, and we had both come to the same conclusion. His simple, trustful nature and complete guilelessness, while it made him, in a sense, an attractive companion, were a very evil equipment for a young man so completely alone in the world. Major Grinley and the Comte de Faux were both acquaintances of mine, but I felt it my duty to speak out.

"Martin," I said, dropping at that moment and for ever afterwards any more formal habit of speech, "I feel it my duty to warn you against doing anything of the sort. The very fact that these two men are concerned in the transaction makes me suspicious. They are, to speak frankly, nothing more nor less than adventurers. They have selected you as a probable victim. Take my advice and have nothing whatever to do with them."

The smile faded from our young friend's face.

"Say, you're not serious, Colonel?"

"My brother is not only serious."

Mary intervened, "but I am bound to say that I entirely agree with him. You must take our advice, Mr. Martin, and have nothing more to do with the matter."

"You must see for yourself," I added, "that twenty-five thousand pounds for two thousand acres of wood and stony fields seems a little excessive."

"It's the spring, Colonel," Martin explained eagerly. "It's astonishing the craze there is for water, nowadays, even over on our side. People will pay anything for it—the right sort, that is. I tell you, sir, there are millions of dollars in that spring."

"That may be so," I replied drily, "but I do not think that in any transactions with the Comte de Faux and Major Grinley the millions, or any part of them, will come into your pocket."

OUR young friend relapsed into deep and gloomy silence. We drove back through San Salvador and Costabelle into Hyères, and at his request dropped him at the bank. My sister returned to the hotel and I myself dropped in at the Casino for an hour, as was sometimes my custom during the afternoon. The first persons I saw when I entered the concert room were the Comte de Faux and Major Grinley, sitting at one of the small tables outside the American Bar and talking earnestly together. Both men recognized me when I entered, and I saw a meaning glance pass between them. Immediately afterwards they rose and approached me.

"Colonel Green, isn't it?" Major Grinley exclaimed, holding out his hand. "We have not met for some time."

"Monsieur the Colonel!" the Frenchman echoed, with a low bow.

I shook hands with them cordially enough—there was no particular object in betraying my suspicions. As soon as they perceived my attitude, they were most effusive and insisted upon my taking a whisky and soda with them.

"We were wondering," Major Grinley said, "what had become of our very interesting young American friend, Mr. Martin."

"I left him in the town," I replied. "We lunched with him to-day and have just been out to see the spring."

They were both decidedly anxious.

"Yes?" Major Grinley muttered interrogatively.

"A marvelous spring!" the Frenchman declared. "Such water! Such purity! Such a flavor!"

"If we succeed in this little transaction of ours," Major Grinley told me confidentially, "it should mean at least a hundred thousand pounds in your young friend's pocket. Within two years it will be perfectly easy to float a company for ten times what Mr. Martin is giving for it."

"I am not a financier," I confessed, "and I know nothing of the value of property out here, but twenty-five thousand pounds seems to me rather a large sum."

Major Grinley set himself to efface that impression. He told me of the profits of Perrier Water; he spoke of the fabulous fortunes which had been made by the most inoffensive-looking streams. Every now and then the Frenchman came to his aid in a sort of staccato chorus.

"Well, after all," I concluded, "it is Mr. Martin's own business. He seems very young to be traveling about the world alone and to have the control of his own money, but I suppose his guardians consider him competent."

"He is a young man of great wealth, eh?" the Frenchman inquired. "There is no doubt about his position?"

"I know nothing whatever about the matter," I replied, a little stiffly. "For anything I know, in fact, he may be an adventurer."

I TOOK my leave of the two men, a few minutes afterwards, and returned to the hotel. For the next two days my time was fully taken up with golf and picnic engagements, and I saw nothing of my new acquaintance. I noticed that his table was unoccupied, and upon inquiry from the head porter

I learned that he was spending a day or two with the Comte de Faux, who had a villa in the neighborhood. On the fourth day, he turned up to luncheon at the hotel with his two friends. We all met in the hall, and Martin insisted that I should join them for luncheon. I gathered that the little deal had been concluded with complete satisfaction to both parties. Major Grinley and the Comte de Faux were miracles of good humor and contentment, and Martin was full of exuberant spirits of youth. Major Grinley, towards the close of luncheon, raised his glass.

"I drink," he said, "to the future of the sweet water of the Santa Mona Spring!"

"You have really bought it, then, Martin?" I asked.

"Mr. Martin," the Comte de Faux explained, "has this morning signed an agreement to purchase from us the Santa Mona Spring Estate for twenty-five thousand pounds. Your young friend, Colonel, is to be much congratulated. I venture to promise you that if in twelve months' time he should care to part with his interest, my friend Grinley here and I could turn the affair into a company with a capital of from a hundred to a hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

I went on with my luncheon and said nothing. The Comte turned presently to me.

"You do not appreciate, I fear, this good fortune which has come to your young friend," he remarked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I know nothing of land values out here," I replied. "To me it seems an awful price to pay for a barren hill-side and a tiny spring."

"It is the tiny spring," the Comte de Faux declared, "from which the money comes bubbling up. And then, behold! As the waters become known, hotels will spring up, hotels and villas, golf courses, and why not a casino? Upon whose land, I ask you? Upon the land of this young man! He has acquired it all. Considering his youth, Mr. Martin is a wonderful man of business. He is so keen upon his bargain that he has made us consent to a for-

feit of ten thousand francs should we fail to hand over the title-deeds to him this week. His only fear is lest he might lose this wonderful chance."

I bowed.

"Mr. Martin doubtless knows his own business."

"You bet!" my young friend agreed, solemnly winking at me from behind a vase of carnations. "Of course, I'm a beginner at this sort of speculations, but the Mona Spring is going to be all right. I've lost a bit here and there—want of experience, you know, and that—but you can bet your bottom dollar that I'm all right this time."

A LITTLE later on, I took leave of the three, and they all drove off together to the town in high good humor. I was sorry to part with Martin, for, curiously enough, during the last few days I had quite missed his company. About four o'clock, however, he returned alone. He was in a hired victoria, and to my surprise I saw that he was bringing all his luggage. I stepped out to meet him.

"Hullo!" I exclaimed. "I thought you were going to stay with the Comte for a few more days?"

He overpaid his coachman disgracefully and laid his hand familiarly upon my shoulder.

"There was some talk about it," he admitted. "I felt like coming back, though."

"Any trouble with your friends?" I asked. "I thought you all seemed so pleased with one another and your deal to-day."

"That's just it," Martin sighed. "I rather expect to go on feeling pleased with myself, but I am not so sure about those other two. We'll talk about it later. Say, is your sister still here?"

"She is out for a picnic to-day," I told him.

"Then you'll both dine with me tonight," Martin insisted. "Not a word! I shall expect you at half-past seven."

My sister and I were a few minutes late for dinner that evening. When we took our places, we found our table was covered with a perfect canopy of flowers. A magnum of champagne stood by its side in an ice-pail, and

Martin welcomed us with a face like the rising sun.

"Just a little celebration," he explained cheerfully, as we took our places . . . "Gee whiz! Look what's coming!"

Down the middle of the room, unescorted by any waiter, approached in great haste Monsieur le Comte de Faux, followed by Major Grinley. They were still in morning clothes, and they had the appearance of having just left their automobile. They came straight to our table, and they both of them forgot to bow to my sister. They stood over Martin, taking up positions one on either side of him.

"If you imagine for a single moment," Major Grinley began, his voice shaking with passion, "that we, the Comte and I, are going to be swindled in this manner by a child of your years, let me assure you—"

"It is a public room, this," the Comte interrupted, striking his hands together. "Behold! I shall smack you on the face unless some instant and satisfactory explanation be tendered. I ask you, sir, is this a joke?"

MARTIN had been leaning back in his chair, turning from one to the other. His expression of blank amazement was wonderful.

"Say, I'm not exactly catching on," he confessed pleasantly. "Put it in plain words, will you—one at a time, if possible?"

"Behind our backs," the Comte declared dramatically, "you sought out the honest peasant, Jean Lecrois, and you have purchased from him the Santa Mona Spring Estate. You have paid Jean Lecrois two thousand, one hundred pounds. I have seen the receipt."

"Look here," Martin suggested, "let's talk this over. You came to me, didn't you, and you offered to sell me the Santa Mona Spring Estate for twenty-five thousand pounds."

"You agreed to buy it!" they both exclaimed in unison.

"Let us put the matter down in black and white," Martin continued smoothly. "As a matter of fact, you had already the offer of the property from Jean

Lecrois for two thousand pounds. You were out here to buy it for a syndicate who would have given five thousand pounds. Instead of concluding the deal and pocketing a very handsome profit, you were apparently led away by the pleasant prospect of making a fortune at one *coup*. Now listen, gentlemen: Did you or did you not propose to sell me for twenty-five thousand pounds an estate you were buying for two thousand, and which you were pledged to hand over to a syndicate for five?"

The Count closed his eyes and waved his hands in frantic gesticulation.

"That has nothing to do with it," he almost shrieked. "The point remains that you intervened and bought the estate for yourself behind our backs."

Martin grinned broadly.

"It was a shabby trick," he confessed, winking furtively at me.

MAJOR GRINLEY plunged into the discussion with a change of tactics.

"Look here," he suggested, "let us talk reasonably. We were perhaps foolish to try and make too big a thing of this. We honestly believed the estate to be of vast value. The five thousand pounds offered by the syndicate was a ridiculous price."

"You would have made three thousand pounds profit," Martin observed.

Once more the Count's gesticulations were almost feverish.

"What is that?" he demanded. "Such chances come in one's way but seldom. You have stepped in and bought the estate. Very well, we must accept defeat. You have bought it for two thousand, one hundred pounds, so you will not buy it from us for twenty-five thousand pounds now. All that

we ask is what you, as a man of honor, cannot fail to grant. Make it over to us at the price at which you bought it."

"So that you may still make your three thousand pounds profit," Martin remarked. "That's the idea, is it?"

"It is our affair entirely," Major Grinley insisted. "You knew nothing about the estate. It was we who took you there."

Martin was suddenly grave. A change had come over his boyish face. His pink and white complexion seemed less manifest. He was the man of affairs, solemn and impressive.

"Look here," he said, "what I think you'd both better understand is this: You set yourselves out to rob me, and you've had the worst of it. I have bought the Santa Mona Spring Estate and I am going to develop it. So there's an end of that. And now listen to me. You come here blustering but the boot's on the other leg. You owe me a forfeit of ten thousand francs for not concluding your agreement to sell me the estate. Don't interrupt, please. And let me just remind you that the manager is over there with his eye upon you. He doesn't like brawlers in the dining-room. Take my advice. Go outside into the lounge. Sit down and think it over. If you've anything to say when we come out from dinner, I'll listen to it."

They went out of the room like dazed men. We saw the lights of their automobile flash by the window a moment later. Martin's features gradually relaxed. Once more he became the ingenuous youth.

"We sha'n't see them again in a hurry," he remarked. "Waiter, open that magnum."

The second episode in the adventures of "The Innocent Abroad" will appear in an early issue of the BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



# "I CAN'T EXPLAIN"

*A sprightly little comedy wherein a small woolly dog causes many alarms and excursions and eventually brings about the happiness of two attractive young people.*

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■ By G E O R G E H I B B A R D ■

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THE dinner had been too long. The views of the man with whom Stanwood talked before "joining the ladies" were too narrow. The voice of the young woman who sang afterwards was too high. The opportunities of speaking to the people whom he really wished to see were too short. The whole evening had been a misfit and a misfortune. His spirits had fallen too low to permit his struggling with such social disaster, and he made his escape at an early hour to receive his hat and coat and stick from the waiting butler.

As he passed out from the porte cochère he found that the night had turned to rain. Furthermore, with the rain were mingled snow and sleet. He wished he had given orders to have the automobile come for him. He thought of turning back and telephoning, but instead he turned up his coat collar and kept on. The long curving path was already coated with the freezing downpour. When he came out on Mohegan Avenue it stretched before him dark, dismal and deserted.

A block was accomplished before he came on anyone. Then he noticed a man advancing toward him who slipped

and slid and stumbled even as he did himself. Slowly they drew nearer to each other. The other was still some distance off, when he saw the approaching figure fall heavily. The person endeavored to rise, but sank back and remained prostrate. Stanwood, with a few more glissades and the accomplishment of an evolution which resembled the execution of an incomplete figure eight by an inexperienced skater, finally brought up beside him.

"Hello," he said with helpful intention. "What's the matter?"

"Why, of course," replied the stranger with considerable acerbity, "I have just sat down here to enjoy the pleasant evening—or do you think I have suddenly come into a fortune and want a quiet moment to consider how I shall spend it?"

Stanwood, who looked more closely, discovered that the speaker was young and well dressed; and he immediately realized that his words were pronounced with the accent of complete sophistication.

"I mean," exclaimed Stanwood indignantly, "how much are you hurt?"

"I can't tell you, exactly," replied the other, "whether my left tibia is frac-

tured or whether it is merely my ankle that is sprained. Anyhow, I can't get up or move, and I'm in a beastly fix."

"To have one's leg broken or even to have one's ankle sprained is not pleasant," condoled Stanwood.

"It is not that. It is not either of those, to be exact," replied the stranger.

"I'd better go into one of these houses and telephone for a taxi or an ambulance," Stanwood suggested.

"That won't do any good. At least that won't be of any use at the moment. The fact is just this: I've got to get somewhere in a hurry to some one, and here I am. I can't explain. Perhaps, though, you could help me."

"I know the people in this first house. I'll—"

"No," interrupted the stranger decidedly. "There is no time to wait for anything to come to carry me—and I couldn't do anything then. I haven't got to be anywhere, though, so much as I've got to get something somewhere."

"I don't understand," said Stanwood blankly.

"Of course you don't. How should you? As it is and the way I am, why, I'm forced to depend on you. There's nothing for it but for me to ask you to take what I give you and give it to the one who is waiting for it."

"Of course," agreed Stanwood, "if I can be of any service; but where—"

"Do you know the large house on the northeast corner of West Street and the Avenue?"

"Yes," said Stanwood after a moment's reflection, "old Miss Stimson's—"

"Exactly," continued the young man on the sidewalk. "It has large grounds round it, and there is a pergola—I think that's the word—connecting it with a garden. In that you will find a young lady."

"On such a night as this!" Stanwood exclaimed.

"Do you suppose she will be there for pleasure? There is a reason. I can't explain. You will give her what I give to you to give her."

THE suddenness of the adventure had somewhat upset Stanwood, but the charm of it was beginning to work upon

him. In his comfortable, conventional existence the unexpected was something to be welcomed, and after an evening of boredom such an event was an undoubted prize. He was utterly at a loss, but nevertheless intensely eager.

"Yes," he said quickly.

What could be the unimaginable article to be entrusted to him for the mysterious mission on which he was to be sent?

"See here," said the recumbent man. "I hate to trouble you, and I wouldn't if it wasn't important and urgent."

"Yes—yes—" Stanwood agreed.

"I'll just have to throw myself on your mercy and—Here!" He thrust his hands beneath his overcoat while Stanwood watched him breathlessly. "Here you are."

In the darkness, Stanwood was for a moment doubtful; and then he discovered that the other was holding out to him a small white dog. It was of the fluffy, fleecy kind that inevitably suggests a toy character and leads the observer to doubt whether it has not somehow become detached from a green stand with red wheels intended to be drawn with a blue ribbon. That it was alive, however, was evident from the manner in which it indignantly winked its pink eyes.

"What am I to do with that?" Stanwood exclaimed in astounded bewilderment.

"What I tell you. Take it to the young lady who is waiting. There isn't a moment to lose. I can't explain. You will do me a great service and also the young lady."

The last statement decided Stanwood. He had been interested before. Rapid thought convinced him that he must see the thing through, if for no other reason than to satisfy his curiosity about the unknown feminine being who was to receive on such a night and in such a manner such an unexplicable object. He felt the animate bundle of white yarn thrust into his hands.

"Go along. Hurry up," importuned the other. "I can take care of myself some way."

The tone of real urgency with which the words were spoken incited him. The part of all true good Samaritans was

not to question why. Theirs but to do or die.

"All right," he answered impulsively, and started up the Avenue. "You're certain I can't do anything for you?"

The other made a motion urging him to hurry.

**S**TANWOOD took to the roadway as affording better foothold. As he trudged through the slush, with clots of wet, heavy snow falling upon him from the branches, he tried rapidly to consider his position. Ten minutes before, he could not have imagined with the greatest effort a combination of circumstances which would have resulted in his being forced to struggle through the inclement night bearing a small, white, woolly dog in his arms. The affair grew more perplexing. Passing a lamp, he noticed that a paper, evidently a note, was tucked under the animal's collar. Perhaps the delivery of this was the object sought—but why the singular method of conveyance? At least he was about to behold the recipient, and undoubtedly she would enlighten him.

Once he remembered he had most rebelliously gone to a formal reception held by Miss Stimson for some distinguished lights of science sojourning in the place. On that occasion he had entered through the stately front door. In contrast, the sensation afforded by stealing across the lawn through the shrubbery was marked. He experienced all the sensation of a prospective burglar new at the business. Plodding over the snow-covered grass, he reached the pergola. As he came near to it a figure darted out to meet him.

"Here I am, Ernest."

At the sound of the voice Stanwood concluded that one of the misfortunes of his life consisted in his being obliged of necessity to confess that he was himself.

"I'm not Ernest," he admitted apologetically.

"Oh," she cried with a sweet, soft gasp.

In moments of idleness he had sometimes sought to picture to himself the completely beautiful One. He had always failed, for some feature or some fact of the consummate whole had ever

remained illusively vague and unseizable. Suddenly to come upon the ineffable ideal, existing, breathing—panting, in fact, with excitement—and standing before him clad in a rough coat and a soft down-drawn hat, was immensely disconcerting. She brushed back a damp, straying strand of dark hair from her dark eyes and gazed at him in affright.

"It's all right," Stanwood declared. "He's met with an accident."

"How much is he hurt?" she demanded with anxious solicitude. "What do you mean by saying it's all right?"

"He's only sprained his ankle," declared Stanwood, risking the statement boldly and wishing that the same tender care had been expressed on his account. "He couldn't come and sent me," he continued, producing the dog, which he had found he could carry most easily under his coat. "Here."

"Oh, Prunella!" she cried rapturously.

"What?" he stammered in perplexity.

"That's her name," she said.

"Of course. How stupid of me!"

He paused, for he found that she had turned and was running rapidly away. She had hardly gone half a dozen steps, however, when she darted swiftly back.

"Oh, I ought to thank you. I don't want you to think I am ungrateful. You are most kind."

"Yes—but—" Stanwood protested.

"I am in an awful hurry. I can't explain—I've got to go—"

At the words she was off and he was left in the blackness of the night with the wind driving the sleet in his face.

**A**RTHUR STANWOOD cast his eyes out of the window. Having accomplished this remarkable action, he remained sitting just as he was. The reality of his own comfortable library was about him. Still, he could not doubt the happenings of the night before. Standing out beyond everything else, before everything else and above everything else, was the unquestionable fact that he had at last found incontestably the most adorable girl in the whole world. How was he to see her again?

The telephone at this moment gave forth its sharp, unfeeling, fateful jangle.

He rose impatiently, put the receiver angrily to his ear, and the world took on a new aspect and a new meaning.

"Please," insisted a voice he had no difficulty in recognizing, "may I speak to Mr. Stanwood?"

"Yes—yes," he replied with undignified eagerness. "I'm he."

"I am so sorry to trouble you," the voice continued sweetly, "but you must come to Miss Stimson's at once. I want to see you."

"I'll be there instantly," he replied without hesitation.

"I hope I am not asking too much," she went on apprehensively, "—that I am not putting you out too much."

"Not a bit," he answered with conviction. "There's nothing on earth—"

"I can't explain," she interposed over the telephone. "You'll come at once."

The distance was not great, and the automobile covered it quickly. Miss Stimson's drawing-room, to which the servant led Stanwood, was large, imposing and depressing. However, he had not long to wait. Hardly had he walked up and down it twice in his impatience when he heard some one enter and he turned quickly.

"You are so kind," she declared as she ran to him holding out both her hands, "and so nice."

"I was just wishing—" he began fervidly.

"There wasn't anyone else for whom I could send," she interrupted. "Any intimate friend would ask questions, and then you know about last night. Don't you see, as a stranger I don't have to make explanations to you—that is, if, as a stranger, you are willing to help me?"

"I don't want to be a stranger," he protested, as he felt fatuously.

"I knew I could call upon you," she exclaimed joyously, "and I don't feel really that you are a stranger or are going to be."

"That's better," he said. "But how did you know who I am?"

"Why, of course, I know you. Aren't you one of the prominent and important young men of the city? I have seen you lots of times."

"I haven't—I wish I had—seen you—"

"Oh, I," she replied demurely, "I am a very inconspicuous, unimportant person. I'm just Miss Dale—Effy Dale—Miss Stimson's secretary or reader or companion or something like that. At least I'm all of those. Therefore I have to be very circumspect and I can't go to see Ernest alone."

"Oh, Ernest," he said discontentedly, "Ernest again. Ernest who?"

"Ernest Waterbury—why—you know—last night—Don't you know him?"

"The man who slipped up—no, slipped down?"

"He didn't tell me anything and I never imagined you didn't. But you might not. He's old Mr. Waterbury's nephew and is very studious and has just come back from the American archaeological college in Athens. Old Mr. Waterbury might not like young women coming alone to call on him."

"Benjamin Waterbury—if that's who you mean—is a crusty old specimen, and I don't think he would."

"Exactly. Ernest can't move with his sprained ankle—it was badly sprained; and I want to see him and"—she faced about and pointed to a table, "—please take that to him."

ON THE table Stanwood beheld a pretty basket with a wicker top over it, which she had clearly placed there when she came into the room unseen by him. It was just such a basket as filled with dainties would naturally be taken to an invalid in whom the bearer had a great interest. A sharp pang pierced his heart. At least, if this was not actually the case, he realized that it was what fittingly should have happened as the proper accompaniment of his emotions. Of course they were in love with each other, and she was about to convey to the sufferer these delicacies—probably prepared by her own fair hands. He himself was merely a supernumerary on the scene and filled no more important or personal a place than the postage stamp on a love letter. Well—it was not a very glorious part for which to be cast, but—

"Very well," Stanwood replied submissively, "the automobile's out there."

"Perhaps we had better not take it," she objected. "I don't know that it would be wise for me to be seen with you in it."

They set out. In spite of the unsatisfactory conditions, Stanwood enjoyed the brisk walk to the big Waterbury house still further up the Avenue. At moments he forgot that all was lost. She was so charming, chattering so delightfully about everything except the matter directly in hand that he lost himself in the pleasure of the moment. Suddenly he bethought himself.

"Let me carry the basket," he said.

"No—no," she exclaimed with surprising intensity as she quickly swung it away from him.

His ears could not have deceived him. Certainly he had heard a curious noise. Listening more closely, he caught the sound of a low, muffled bark. He glanced at her. No denial of the incontestable fact was possible, and she attempted none.

"Oh," she cried unhappily, "I didn't want anyone to know. I hoped Prunella would keep still. I had to take the chance."

"I thought you were taking things such as they make for sick people to— to Ernest."

"There are some fruit and flowers, but Prunella is underneath. Oh," she implored as for an instant she placed her hand on his arm, "what can I say? Please don't ask me any questions. Please—I can't answer them. I can't explain."

As Stanwood instantly recognized, nothing remained for him to do but to take up the thread of the indifferent discourse in which they had been engaged. He rushed headlong into an elaborate discussion of the merits of tennis as a game compared to golf. Still, he could not help feeling a lightness of heart at the discovery that there was more in the basket than gifts for the pampered Ernest.

The speedy arrival at their destination was a distinct disappointment. The discovery that the share which he was expected to take in the expedition consisted in waiting in a reception room was not exhilarating. The servant informed them that the invalid was sit-

ting up, and as had evidently been arranged by telephone, Stanwood's companion was taken to him at once.

"I wont be a minute," she assured Stanwood, consolingly.

**S**HE was as good as her word, but the brief space in which he had for his only solace the inspection of the stern and frigid Waterbury furniture was not conducive to any elevation of spirit. When, indeed, in a few moments, she returned, he was distinctly out of temper.

"Now it's all right," she announced serenely when they were outside.

"I'm not certain it is," he replied dolefully.

"Oh," she said anxiously, "I know I'm not out of the woods yet—but you've helped me so much and somehow, do you see, I feel that you are going to bring me good fortune although I'm in such an awful difficulty."

"You are?" he exclaimed, stricken at her tone by compunction for his selfish thoughts.

"Why do you suppose I am doing all this—going to see Ernest now—"

"No doubt," he replied, "by way of bringing first or second or final aid to the injured."

"He has only sprained his ankle. There was no reason for me to see him for that. It was a—matter of business. My immediate prospects in life are involved. If it had not been so important, do you think I'd have taken the step of asking you—"

"I hope so," he interposed.

"I couldn't. I don't know you, but it has all been necessary. I can't explain."

"I don't ask you. I only ask you if I can be of any more use."

"No," she replied thoughtfully. "Not now. I am going to send you away. I haven't any right to let you walk back with me."

"But if I want to do it more than anything else in the world—"

"I must not allow it, no matter how much I wish—" She checked herself in a divine confusion. "No," she cried, and held out her hand. "Good-by."

"Can't I see you ever—any more—" he demanded.

"I don't know. When all has happened as it has, what must you think of me!"

"If I think you—" he began and also checked himself, as he realized that he was about to speak with an unmissible ardor.

"I shall always think of *you* as having behaved—nobly," she said with conviction, "—coming to my assistance and not trying to find out. Oh, you must let me go and—and don't make it harder."

He could not believe that tears stood in her eyes, and yet they were very soft and melting. They were eyes, he felt, in which tears easily rose just as her perfect lips were manifestly the abode of frequent and easily evoked smiles.

"I can't, I can't," he protested.

"You must. You must," she repeated mockingly; and seizing his hand and squeezing it closely, she was away.

**W**ITH Stanwood, the next day passed in discontent. The succeeding twenty-four hours formed a period of despondency. Another setting and rising of the sun brought a state of despair. He could not drive from his mind the thought of what had occurred and—of her. When so much had happened so suddenly, was nothing else to take place? He was growing more rebellious against Fate when on the third afternoon as he stepped from his automobile at the bachelor apartment house at which he lived, he heard himself addressed in an obsequious tone.

"Excuse me, sir—do you want a dog?"

"Now look here," he exclaimed as he glanced at the small, shabby, bent old man who stood before him, "what leads you to imagine I want a dog—out of the blue sky like this?"

"Why," replied the other argumentatively, "aint your name down on the catalogue of the dog show as a frequent exhibitor? Aint you well known as havin' a great liking for 'em?"

"Well," Stanwood replied decidedly, "I don't want one now."

The man shuffled away, while, as he went, Stanwood's eyes fell upon him.

"Come back," he directed quickly.

Out of the capacious pocket of the man's coat appeared a small canine head.

Of course, Stanwood quickly reflected, all members of that fleecy, Christmas-tree species looked more or less alike, but in this case— He did not hesitate.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded.

"Why, my wife's cousin," replied the vendor glibly, "who lives down in Newark, New Jersey, breeds them; and he sent me this one, thinking perhaps I could sell it."

"I don't believe a word you say," Stanwood announced positively, "but I can't be bothered going into it. Of course, as a good citizen, I ought not to consent to be an accessory in anything of the sort, but life's too short to turn amateur detective. I want the dog. Come in."

The transfer was quickly arranged, for Stanwood readily agreed to terms which he knew were extortionate. When the seller finally left the room, he placed his new possession on the table and sat down opposite to it.

"Well, Prunella," he said.

The recipient of the remark continued to stare at him with cold, unresponsive eyes. Not the slightest flicker of an eyelid indicated recognition; no motion of the tail wagged response. Stanwood sent for a chicken bone by way of establishing himself upon a better footing.

Was existence henceforth to be made up for him wholly of little woolly dogs? Still, he was overjoyed. At last he possessed a legitimate reason for seeking her. He need not delay. With such an open sesame he could present himself at once at the Stimson portals. Without regard to any ruffled feelings he snatched the small gormandizer away from the chicken bone. He was just leaving the room when he was called back by the telephone.

"You're Mr. Stanwood," came a volley of words through the receiver. "I'm Ernest Waterbury. You know who I am?"

"Yes," replied Stanwood breathlessly.

"I want to ask something of you, a great favor, to me and to Miss Dale."

"Yes—yes," Stanwood agreed.

"Miss Stimson is so old-fashioned, that she will not have a telephone. I

haven't any way of sending a note and it would take too long. Will you go and see Miss Dale?"

"Of course," acceded Stanwood; "but Miss Dale wont see me."

"Send in word that I sent you and she will come at once. Tell her that I cannot send her what she wants. Say that it's impossible because of Uncle Benjamin. She must know this immediately. I can't explain. Tell her that I am so sorry, that I'd give anything if it had not happened like this."

"Is that all?"

"Miss Dale will understand. I can't explain, as I tell you. The important part is to hurry so that she can make some arrangement if possible. If you don't go instantly, she may not have a chance."

"I'm off," shouted Stanwood.

**H**E REGRETTED that he had missed the automobile. To send for it would waste time. Anyhow, by fast walking, he could reach the Stimson house in ten minutes. He dropped the dog as being troublesome to carry in his rapid course. Seizing a hat, he dashed from the room. Only an hour before he had been in despair of finding a means of obtaining an interview with Effy. He could not doubt at present that this was to be accorded to him. What next would transpire? He strode excitedly up the Avenue.

In the drawing-room in which she had first received him, he was obliged to wait only a few minutes.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried, running to him in manifest trepidation.

"Why," he blundered forth his confused message, "that young man, Ernest —what's his name—telephoned me just now to ask me to tell you that he couldn't possibly send you what he wanted—that something about Uncle Benjamin made it impossible."

The effect of his words on her was more distressing even than he had expected. She gazed at him for an instant almost in affright, and then fairly wrung her small hands.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she exclaimed in great apprehension. "I don't know what will become of me."

"It's as bad as that?" he stammered

in sincere commiseration. "Can't I do anything? If I only could!"

"I don't see how that's possible," she replied helplessly and hopelessly. "Oh, well, I suppose I can take care of myself in some way."

He was longing for the ability to give her some comforting word. At the instant with the sight of such beauty in distress before him, the one most desirable thing in all the world appeared to be the power to offer aid.

"You must think I am perfectly absurd," she said, looking up at him.

"I think you are perfectly adorable," he declared in spite of himself.

"You have been so good."

"Not as good as I have wanted to be. I was thinking how I could see you."

"And I wouldn't let you."

"No, but even without this I had a way. I hate to speak about such a little thing when you are so troubled—"

"What is it?" she asked tearfully.

"Just before I got this message I was going to bring back something to you. Haven't you lost something?"

"Why, yes—" she replied quickly and with aroused attention.

"I thought so," he continued. "I hadn't a doubt that it was Prunella."

"Prunella!" she exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes. A man only a short time ago came to me offering for sale an animal that was so exactly like Prunella that I was certain."

"Like Prunella," she cried, taking a step toward him.

"As like as two—two white golf balls."

"A man brought it to you?"

"He'd evidently stolen her or got her from some one who had stolen her."

"Oh," she sobbed joyfully, and sank in a chair. "It's too good to be true."

She only remained seated for an instant, and then sprang up and made a rush toward him.

"Why, you have saved me," she explained, holding out her hands toward him. "Oh, I could—could kiss you."

"Don't hesitate," he said.

"I'm so happy," she declared, drawing back, "that I could hug the whole world."

"Because I have Prunella?"

"She isn't Prunella. She's Isolda."

"She looks exactly like Prunella."

"Of course. They are—are twins. Isolda belongs to Miss Stimson—named out of Wagner, you know—and Prunella belongs to Mr. Waterbury."

"Yes, of course," he responded feebly, "certainly, no doubt, but—"

"I had to keep saying to you 'I can't explain,' because after all, you know, you were a stranger—then. Well, several days ago I took Isolda out for her usual afternoon walk. I had not gone far when suddenly I called and she did not come. She had completely disappeared. I couldn't find her. I hunted everywhere. I was nearly frantic. She is the apple of Miss Stimson's eye. She is the one thing for which she really cares, and to have anything happen to her was the one unforgivable crime. I had let her get lost. Miss Stimson would certainly send me away. I haven't a penny or a belonging of any kind in the world. I shouldn't have anywhere to go. I was frightened to death. Suddenly I remembered that no one could tell one from the other—Isolda from Prunella. I knew that Mr. Waterbury was out of town. I had managed to keep from Miss Stimson the fact of Isolda's loss, but I couldn't do that for long. Perhaps it was not right, but I hoped all the time she would come back or be found. Late in the evening I telephoned to Ernest to lend me Prunella. He was bringing her to me when he fell and hurt himself."

"And I brought her to you," Stanwood broke forth in the excitement of sudden and dazzling enlightenment.

"Yes," she sped on with hurried words. "Only Mr. Waterbury suddenly came back and Ernest had to have Prunella there. He is Mr. Waterbury's heir, and Mr. Waterbury is just as crazy about Prunella as Miss Stimson is about Isolda, and he is just as crotchety and cross and quick-tempered. Ernest could not displease him, particularly as he is engaged to Molly Wilkins."

"Oh," exclaimed Stanwood, drawing a deep breath, "he is engaged to Molly Wilkins."

"Yes, only it has not been announced yet—but we have been friends since infancy and I know. Well, as Miss Stimson had gone away for a day,—she always considers that traveling doesn't agree with Isolda,—it did not matter. Then she came back and I telephoned from a telephone station to Ernest that I must have Prunella again at once. He said his Uncle Benjamin had taken her with him to his place on the lake shore, but that he might be back at any moment. Evidently, though, he did not come and wasn't coming—and when you told me I just stood here with all the future—for Miss Stimson would never forgive me—staring me in the face like a ghastly ghost. And here you come and change everything and make all the world bright and happy again. Oh, will you get Isolda for me?"

"I'll have her here in fifteen minutes, if I have to run all the way."

ON AN evening when autumn was not as yet greatly advanced, two figures stood—very close together—in the semi-obscurity of the big hall of Miss Stimson's great house. They both eyed doubtfully a massive, closed door which was before them.

"Miss Stimson is in there," she announced.

"Very well," he said, going forward slowly. "Do you think she will make any objection?"

"She will be delighted," she declared with confidence. "Aren't you the representative of the Stanwood family, one of the oldest in town? That a poor little mouse of a poor relation like me should be so fortunate will be such a shock to her that I know she will lose her eyeglasses. She will think that I ought to consider myself the happiest girl in the world—and I am."

"Fudge," he declared, "I'm the only one who knows anything about happiness. I assure you I've got a particular make all my own which never existed anywhere before. I can't tell, though, just how is the best way to break it to her. Suppose that you—"

"Oh, no," she begged. "I should be too confused to say anything. I can't explain."

"Well, I can," he announced decidedly as he kissed her and advanced valiantly to the door with his arm about her.



# The Way Out

*An exciting and colorful story of the sea, and  
of two men and a woman who worked out  
their destinies upon the good ship "Nagasaki."*

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By W. TOWNEND

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"**Y**ES," said the second mate in a dreamy, contented tone, "that's my way of lookin' at it. When a man gets to thirty—I don't care who he is, he ought to be married. It's time he was settlin' down. Especially if he's at sea. He needs an anchor. An' the girl—it don't matter a row of pins about the girl; not if she's sensible, an' can cook an' sew an' darn socks an' save money an' make the home comfortable an' worth comin' back to. That's the kind I'm after, I tell you. As for botherin' about good looks or bein' head-over-ears in love, that's silly. Once you've a wife like I spoke of, you're bound to be happy, an' you wont look at another girl as long as you live. A man wants a home, an' nothin' else counts—nothin' else in the world."

So saying, he slid off the hatch and stood for a moment on the deck, yawning and stretching his arms upward.

"Fine day, clear sky, warm breeze: wouldn't think it December, would you?" And he walked off in the direction of the poop.

Mr. Harrington raised himself on one elbow and gazed after him with an expression of disapproval on his

square-jawed face that puzzled me, used as I was by this time to his moods.

"I've heard that before," he said. "Funny, how many men go through life thinkin' the same things an' makin' the same mistakes. An' will they listen to reason? Not they—not for one minute. They must find out for themselves. It's no good arguin' with the H. P. crank when we're racin', is it? Not a bit. Well, it's the same with men when they're talkin' of women. Marryin' for a home, eh? Was that what he said? Without botherin' about anything else, an' never wantin' to look at a girl afterward . . . . Well, that's just so much blitherin' nonsense. Somehow, I'd ha' thought even the second mate of the *Umballa* would known better than that by this time. He'll learn, prob'lly, will Tommy Watson; he'll learn all right. Maybe he'll learn too late, though, same as one man I was shipmates with. An' he was a better man than most of us, too."

**A**FTER this, Mr. Harrington was silent for perhaps a dozen breaths, and I waited patiently, wondering if there were more to follow. Presently

he gave an odd little laugh and sat upright.

"Did I ever tell you of the days when I was chief engineer? Yes, son, it's gospel truth, though you mightn't think it to look at me. Chief engineer of the *Nagasaki* I was, boss of my own engine-room, an' as good as the best of 'em. Now—now I'm second on the rottenest, mangiest old rat-trap that ever crossed the Western Ocean in four weeks, askin' myself how long I'm goin' to hold my job, an' when the next calamity's goin' to hit me.

"Dave Lindsay was captain of the *Nagasaki*: a friend of mine, an' as good a man as you'd meet in a dozen voyages half across the world an' home again. He was diff'rent from most men. Dunno' why, but he was. More quiet an' serious, perhaps. He must have been about two an' thirty in them days, which was young to be in command of the *Nagasaki*. An' he looked younger. A big-built man he was, too, very lean an' straight-backed, with a brown, clean-shaved face an' black hair, an' eyes that seemed to be lookin' right through you. Kind-hearted, too: he wouldn't have hurt a blind kitten to save his life; but he wasn't soft. I've seen him put the fear o' death into as tough a crowd as ever signed on at Cardiff, an' that's sayin' a lot.

"I've been glad always I'd no hand in the marryin' off of Dave Lindsay. It was Dave's own doin' from beginnin' to end. As for marryin', Dave was the last man in the world you'd have thought would want a wife. Why? It wasn't the way he was built. Or that's what we thought. Some men aren't. He used to say, takin' 'em all round, women did more harm than they were worth. A man was better without 'em, an' so on. An' why was that? Because, son, bein' ignorant, Dave Lindsay judged all women from those that he'd met since he'd been at sea—on the waterfront an' in such like places. Which was foolish.

"But here's the queer part of it: all this time there was a girl in Cardiff eatin' her heart out for love of Dave. Yes, it's a fact. An' I was sorry for her, blamed sorry. It's hard on a girl that's in love an' the man doesn't care

for her. She mustn't show what she feels like, of course. It's not proper. But this partic'lar girl—Maggie Douglas her name was—told her secret whenever Dave came within sight of her. She might close her lips an' smile an' say nothin', but she wasn't able to hide the truth in her eyes.

"Poor Maggie! An' Dave never so much as looked at her, except as a friend. She was one of those girls that does everything a shade better than anyone else: she could cook an' make her own dresses an' keep house—she'd kept house for her father for years an' years; retired sea-captain he was, troubled with rheumatics an' cranky over it. An' she could make a shilling go further than most women made three. A nice girl she was, but no beauty, an' maybe a year older than Dave. A woman through an' through, for all her plainness: the kind that will bring happiness to a man where a girl with nothin' but good looks an' a taste for clothes will drive him to drink.

**I** REMEMBER once round at the house, her speakin' to me about Dave. That was when he was second mate of the *Crocodile* an' I third engineer—a good few years before what I'm tellin' you of happened. 'He's a nice boy,' she says, 'one of the very best.' An' says she, 'I can only hope that he don't do like so many men.' 'Oh!' says I, 'an' what do you mean by that?' 'Why,' says she, an' the color comes rushin' into her cheeks, 'why, I'll be disappointed if he marries foolishly; that's all. Look at the men we know, an' then think of their wives. But Dave's got more sense. He wont do anything hasty, at least.' An' years after, what she'd said that day come back to me, an' I thought how little she really knew what she'd spoken of. For why? Because Dave did all that she'd hoped he wouldn't—with his eyes open.

"The voyage before I got my job as chief of the *Nagasaki*, when I was still second on the *Narcissus*, I run across Dave Lindsay in Barry. I hadn't seen him for three years or so; we'd a lot to talk about, good an' bad; an' at last —when we were sittin' in the back

room of a small hotel—he leans forward across the table with his chin on his fists. ‘Harrington,’ he says, ‘would you be surprised to hear that I’m thinkin’ of gettin’ married?’

“I looked at him an’ I says: ‘Who to?’ He kind of grins at me, very red in the face. ‘To Maggie Douglas,’ he says, an’ I grabs hold of his hand. ‘I’m mighty glad,’ says I. ‘She’s the dearest girl in the world,’ says he, ‘an’ she’ll make me a good home.’

“He didn’t need to say any more after that. Poor little Maggie! He didn’t love her. I was certain of that from the way he spoke. He wanted a home an’ he wanted some one to look after it. Did I blame him? How could I? He was thirty-two at the time, an’ lonesome. Think of comin’ back home from a five months’ voyage to lodgings in Cardiff! You eat what they choose to give you; you pay what they ask, an’ you drink. That’s the one comfort for such as us. You drink an’ you try to forget. I knew how Dave felt.

“An’ Maggie! I was glad for her sake; she’d been crazy about him for fifteen years. ‘She’s the one girl in the world I could marry,’ says Dave. ‘The others aren’t worth a brass farthing. An’ she’ll take care of me, too.’ Just like a man, that, eh? Selfish, of course. Well, an’ why not? Her father had died, an’ though she’d the house, she’d have had to have earned her livin’ sooner or later. An’ how? No, she was lucky to get him. An’ there wasn’t a happier girl in Wales than Maggie Douglas.

“She told me herself the day they were married, which was the same week the *Narcissus* sailed for the Mediterranean. A real wedding it was, too. Poor Maggie! Dressed in white, she was, with a veil an’ a bouquet of flowers, but not even that could give her good looks. An’ Dave! He went through it manful; repeatin’ the answers same as he might have been talkin’ to the engine-room down the speakin’ tube from the bridge. I gave the bride away —me, of all men!—enough to have queered the whole thing from the start. An’ after they’d signed the book in the vestry she turns to me an’ says: ‘Mr. Harrington, I think I’m the happiest

girl in the world. Dave’s too good for me, I know, but he’ll never have cause to be sorry for takin’ me for his wife.’ Funny, wasn’t it?

“IN LESS than three months the *Narcissus* reached home again an’ I learnt they were sendin’ me chief on the *Nagasaki* the next trip. I was glad when I heard, ‘cause I was sure th’n that things’ud run smooth without any worryin’ an’ unpleasantness between the bridge an’ the engine-room such as you’ll find in most ships—even this one. ‘No more second engineer for me,’ thinks I, but I didn’t know that in two years I’d be offered a job as third an’ glad of the chance.

“Anyway, in about a week’s time we were ready for sea: a long voyage it was to be—Mediterranean, Western Ocean an’ then whatever Providence an’ the owners could grab. A fine ship, the *Nagasaki*, an’ it don’t seem possible now that they ever let me—well, that’s done with. The day we sailed, up to our eyes in work, endeavorin’ to find out if the gang we’d signed on for the stoke-hole had the slightest knowledge of the elements of firin’ or not, Mrs. Lindsay, Maggie Douglas that was, sent word down to the engine-room that she wanted to speak to me.

“I ran up on deck an’ found her waitin’, as plain an’ as wholesome an’ as badly dressed as ever. ‘Mr. Harrington,’ she says, ‘will you do me a favor?’ ‘A favor!’ says I, rather surprised. ‘Why, yes.’ ‘Will you see that Dave doesn’t run any risks while he’s away?’ She was kind of embarrassed an’ shy. ‘I don’t know what I should do if he shouldn’t come back to me. Life wouldn’t be worth livin’ without him.’ An’ of course I swore faithful I’d do as she asked, an’ that no harm would happen to Dave.

“At the time I’m talkin’ about, I was chief engineer an’ I could, without insultin’ the dignity of the cabin, mix on more or less equal terms with the skipper. So before I’d been on the *Nagasaki* a matter of three weeks I knew Dave Lindsay better’n I’d ever hoped to. A good man was Dave, one of the best, an’ he was just as trustful of other people an’ as down on

what wasn't square as ever he'd been in the past. Now an' again when we were talkin' about things that we'd known or heard of, he'd flare up. 'Harrington,' he'd say, 'the man isn't fit to live. He ought to be hanged.' Or: 'If I'd done what he has I'd shoot myself. I would so. I couldn't live with that on my conscience, not for one day.' Funny in some respects was Dave, but he meant what he said, every word.

"**W**E DIDN'T talk very much about home. I used to try an' keep off it. I'd reasons. But once, I remember, two days from New York, he said he'd be glad when the voyage was over. 'I want to be back in Cardiff again,' he says, an' I wondered. An' then a little later he says: 'A man's a born fool if he don't marry an' make a home for himself, Harrington.' 'He's more than a fool, Dave,' says I. 'You've managed to pick a girl who'll be awful good to you an' you ought to be thankful.' 'An' so I am thankful,' he says. 'She's one of the finest women God ever put life into. An' what's beauty? It's no more than skin deep, is it? A plain woman's the best in the end.'

"Somehow, I didn't like what Dav'd said. Why? Dunno. To my mind, a man's got no right to think that his wife's not beautiful, let alone hint it to other men. He was fond of the girl. I'm not tryin' to make out that he wasn't. But he wasn't in love; he never had been, an'—of course—he never would. Or that's what I thought. But he'd make his wife happy, I knew, if for no other reason than that he'd promised.

"Well, an' that was how things were when we reached Vera Cruz, chartered from Philadelphia with a cargo of machinery. An' it was in Vera Cruz that we ran into trouble such as I'd never dreamed of. Oh, yes! I'd bring Dave safe home again, of course; no harm would come to him—neither shipwreck, nor heavy weather in mid-Atlantic, nor fire, nor yellow fever, nor a knife in the back in a waterfront riot. I'd thought of everything except what actually happened. An' I was helpless to guard against that.

"An' was Dave to blame? No, son,

he wasn't. You could blame no one. I dunno', but it seems to me that a man often does what he oughtn't, not because he wants to, but because he can't help it. I can't say that I've learnt much in the years that I've drifted, but I've learnt this: never to judge without hearin' both sides of the question first—an' if you're wise, don't even judge then.

"Takin' 'em all round, there's not much diff'rence between any one of them West Indian or Caribbean ports an' another: an' probably I'd have forgotten by this time I'd ever been near Vera Cruz but for the last night before sailin' for Porto Rico. Dave comes to me about tea-time. 'Harrington,' says he, 'the hatches are almost empty, an' we'll be out of this hell of a place by ten in the mornin'. Let's go ashore for a drink.' An' havin' a thirst, I says I'd be only too glad to oblige. An' that was how it began—the whole miserable business.

"**I**T WAS one of them dark, soft nights when the sky's black velvet, an' the stars, millions of 'em, blaze like big diamonds an' the scent of the flowers goes to your head an' you feel that nothin' matters no more; you're young again an' you're happy, an' everything in the world's yours for the askin' an' yet you're most awful sorrowful an' melancholy an' lonesome. I dunno'. It's hard to describe, but that's how I was that night. There's some men that can't live in the tropics; they go mad, or else—after a while—they forget that they're white, an' that's worse.

"That night! Maybe after I'm dead, I'll forget it, but not before. For about two hours, perhaps three, we sat at a small table, drinkin' an' smokin' an' lookin' at the people near us, all the time listenin' to the music an' not sayin' a word. Ever hear that Mexican, Spanish kind of music? It just seems to catch you by the throat an' make your heart ache for what's gone, an' set you thinkin' of things you'd give all you possess not to remember. I'd not been payin' much attention to Dave for a long time, an' all at once just as they finished *La Paloma*—or some such name, a piece they play always—he

touches me on the arm. 'Harrington,' he says, 'for God's sake, let's go. I can't stand any more of it.' An' with that he gets to his feet an' goes out. 'Any more of what?' I says when we were on the Plaza. 'What is it, Dave?' 'That music,' says he, shiverin'. 'That dam' music. Let's go aboard,' he says. 'I'm tired. Thank God we'll be homeward bound to-morrer!'

"We walked slowly toward the water, both of us quiet an' not talkin', until some one says to us in a low voice an' in English: 'May I speak to you a minute?' an' we swung round to see what it was. I wasn't prepared for what followed, an' no more was Dave. Standin' under the arch of a patio with the light of a lamp full on her face was a girl. An' what a girl! Sometimes you see them like that, but not often. Once in a lifetime. The second in mine. Tall, she was, an' slim an' straight-backed an' good-lookin', with coppery gold hair an' gray eyes an' a tender, droopin' mouth, like another girl I'd known, an' a skin like you see in Devon an' nowhere else. An' thoroughbred she was, from the crown of her head to the tips of her toes. You hadn't to look twice to see that, any more than to see she was frightened.

"'Are you the Captain of the *Nagasaki*?' she says, keepin' her eyes on me. I looked at Dave. 'Come this way,' she says, 'both of you. I've something to say to you.' An' she turned an' made off up a side street with us at her heels.

**S**HE came to a doorway an' halted, glancin' from one side to another. 'Listen to me,' she says: 'you're English, an' I want you to help me.' All tremblin' she was, like her courage was leavin' her. 'Whatever it is,' says Dave, 'we'll do it.' I didn't speak. 'Yes,' she says, 'you'll help me, I know.' An' then she told us she'd been tryin' to find us for hours. A message to the ship had been brought back sayin' we'd gone ashore, so she waited an' was on her way down to the harbor herself when she saw us. I tell you, it takes some pluck for a girl to go wanderin' around the streets of Vera Cruz all by herself. Any girl, let alone that girl!

"'An' what is it?' says Dave. 'What can we do for you?' 'Will you take my father an' me as passengers on the *Nagasaki*?' she says. 'It's a question of life or death.' An' gradually in whispers it come out. It had something to do with a plot against Diaz, the President. Her father had got himself mixed up with a revolution, an' papers with his name on them had been stolen. 'An,' says the girl, 'you know what that means. He's sick: if I don't save him,' she says, 'nothin' on earth will. He's helpless to save himself. Will you take us?' 'I'll do it,' says Dave, 'an' you're not to worry. Everything 'ull be all right. We'll get your father on board before daybreak, an' the *Nagasaki* will put out to sea by ten in the forenoon or I'll know the reason.'

"Well, for once in a way there was no hitch. We got the girl an' her father aboard while it was still dark. How? Easy enough, really. Ever try what twenty-five dollars will do in Mexico? An' actually, as Dave had said, by ten in the mornin' the *Nagasaki* was steamin' out to sea carryin' two passengers, a sick gentleman an' his daughter, travelin' for health, an' signed on the ship's papers under false names, as purser an' stewardess, for the sake of the Board o' Trade regulations.

"As a general rule, there's not one woman sets foot on the deck of a tramp steamer from one voyage end to another. An' yet, there we were, thousands of miles from home, with that girl a passenger on the *Nagasaki*.

"I can see her now, if I close my eyes, down in the engine-room, askin' questions an' watchin' the cranks whirlin' round an' round, an' peerin' into the stoke-hole—she would do it, an' hot as the pit it was, too—an' on deck leanin' over the rail starin' down into the blue water, or on the upper bridge with Dave, or waitin' hand an' foot on that old devil of a father of hers. Yes, son, you'll travel a long, long way without meetin' a girl like that. There wasn't a man on board the *Nagasaki*, from Dave Lindsay himself down to the drunkenest, roughest coal-trimmer, down to myself, even, that didn't respect her the minute he set eyes on her. Clean-built, an' good an'

lovely. An' upright an' honest an' trustful. That was what did the mischief. She was only a girl, just twenty, but a woman same as the rest of 'em.

"WE DIDN'T see much of her the first day; she stayed in the cabin lookin' after her father. An' him! Son, I mistrusted that man the first time I seen him. An' what business of his was it to go mixin' in revolutions with a girl like that on his hands? A big man he was, name of Hillyard, fat an' broad-shouldered, with a heavy-jawed face, yellowish white in color, an' scared eyes that were never still, never. Like one of them vultures he was, that you see in Vera Cruz. An' somehow, lookin' at him, I wondered if he was quite as innocent as he made out. Maybe he'd been in the plot against Diaz as deep as any. But the girl she just worshiped him.

"When did I first notice the way things was driftin'? It's hard to say. What I didn't pay partic'lar heed to at first, later on I remembered.

"We'd not been at sea for two days when I saw something was wrong with Dave. P'raps I was blind. 'Dave,' I says to him, 'you're not well.' 'Me!' he says. 'Me! I'm all right. There's nothin' the matter with me—only the weather, perhaps. It's too hot.' No excuse at all would have been better than that. Weather! Where was the weather that Dave Lindsay minded? 'You're sick,' says I. 'Else you're worryin'. You don't talk; you don't smile; they tell me you don't eat at meal-times. What is it, Dave?' I says. 'Tell me.' An' just then the girl comes on deck—dressed all in white, with her copper-red hair showin' under her straw hat, an' her cheeks pink with the breeze from the sea. Dave gives her a queer kind of look, an' the red comes slowly into his face. An' then before I knew what I was drivin' at in my own mind, there it was, the whole, wretched, miserable business, as clear as daylight.

"Dave,' says I, 'what's wrong with you?' He turns an' stares at me like he'd never seen me before. 'Harrington,' he says, 'the trouble with you is

you imagine what doesn't exist.' But I was right, all the same, an' he knew it. Son, I was to be sorrier for that man than for any other, save an' exceptin' only myself.

"AN' THE girl! I wasn't sure. But I was scared—badly. Did she know? That's what I couldn't tell. An' where would it end? The more I thought of it, the less I liked it. Did I speak? I did not. How could I? It was none of my business. But wasn't it? I remembered Maggie. Would I see after Dave an' bring him safe back to her? I would. I'd promised. It seemed easy, didn't it? An' now—this came. The last thing in the world I'd have thought of.

"Dave was doin' his level best to act square, I knew. He'd not said a word to the girl he shouldn't have said—nothin' that counted, at least. But God only knows what he was thinkin' those nights between Vera Cruz an' San Juan! I'd come on deck before turnin' in, an' see him pacin' to an' fro on the upper bridge, bareheaded, with his hands deep in his pockets an' his chin sunk on his chest, never stopping, one end of the bridge to the other like a sentry. For the first time in his life, Dave Lindsay had fallen in love.

"I've made pleasanter voyages than that. An' the hot sun an' the calm sea just seemed a mockery, a spite: we wanted head winds an' heavy weather for what was happenin'. Or I thought so, at least.

"When we reached port, I was kept pretty busy down in the engine-room, an' I didn't get much chance of talkin' with Dave—he bein' busy, too. There wasn't much goin' ashore for him, either, mostly because of the girl an' her father. The sick man kept to his room—he wasn't well, so we heard—but at night times, when it was cooler, he'd come on deck for a breath of fresh air. 'Shouldn't you see a doctor?' I says to him one evening just as I was off on shore for a drink to get the taste of machine oil out of my mouth. 'A doctor!' says he sharply. 'Why should I see a doctor?' The girl takes hold of him by the hand an' he quiets down. 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Harring-

ton,' he says. 'I'm not quite myself. Doctors can't cure me; it's rest that I want more than anything. By the time we reach England you wont know me.' I wondered. Suspicious I was. Was it illness or just fear?

"On a Friday, the unluckiest day of the seven, we hoisted the Blue Peter an' steamed out past Cabra Island, bound for London with a cargo of sugar. In a few days over a fortnight we'd be home. An' knowin' all that I did, I hated to think what them two weeks might bring.

**A**N THEN, the second day out, Sunday afternoon, 'long about six bells, what I had wanted to know, I knew. I'd been in my bunk, tryin' to sleep an' not doin' it, on account of the heat an' the flies an' the—the worry; an' I stepped out on deck. Dave an' the girl were talkin' together by the ladder that led to the after deck. They didn't see me, an' I just stood an' watched them outside the door of my room; kind of curious. An' when I caught sight of the look in the girl's face, the happiness that comes once in a lifetime to a woman—no, twice; first when she knows that the man she loves loves her, an' second when she feels her child in her arms—a lump kind of rose in my throat an' choked me. She was smilin', her chin tilted, her eyes bright, the pink in her cheeks like roses, an' her red copper hair blowin' this way an' that in the breeze. A tall girl she was, as I said, but she had to look up at Dave. What she'd hugged to herself as a secret was a secret no longer. She couldn't have hid it, no more than poor little Maggie Douglas had done years before.

"I turned then an' went to my own room, where I sat on the settee with my arms on my knees, tryin' to think. But what was the good? Can you put out a burnin' ship with a bucket of water? The same thing as this. An' Maggie at home prayin' no harm would come to her man! A mix-up, wasn't it? An' Dave, of all men! But it was the girl on the *Nagasaki* I felt sorry for most. She'd suffer, of course: she was bound to—if Dave spoke, if he didn't speak. An' where was the way out?

"Now, bein' young an' foolish, you'd think maybe there'd been trouble enough on the voyage already, wouldn't you? Well, you'd be wrong. What had happened before was nothin'. It was hard to believe at first. But I'm gettin' now so that if anyone said I was King of England, cheated out of my lawful rights by Mr. Disraeli or Mr. Gladstone, or whoever was runnin' the show the year I was born, I'd believe it.

"Anyway, after a while, an hour or so, maybe less, I reaches down a bundle of papers I'd picked up before leavin' San Juan an' hadn't had time to look at. Most of them came from London, some from New York, but the first I laid hands on—the latest—was from Kingston, Jamaica.

"The paragraph itself wasn't of much importance. Prob'lly I wouldn't even have glanced at it if I'd been in my right senses. But I did. An' I read it three times before I knew what it meant. An' what was it? Only this: an Englishman, in business in Mexico City, manager of some company, was missin'; so was one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. He'd been seen in Vera Cruz by a friend, but since then, all trace of him had been lost. Nothin' had been suspected till two or three days after he'd gone off on a trip for his health. An' the name: Hillyard, a stout, clean-shaven, elderly man. That was about all. I've got the clipping somewhere or other now, with that piece about the *Arabella* I read you, an' Jack Fraser's death notice, an' some others. But it was funny, wasn't it? Especially, after all that talk about revolutions an' plots an' bein' in danger of death. An' the girl! She didn't know, I swear. Poor kid! Son, I was sorry. Life's so damned unnecessary cruel.

**I**DUNNO' what made me do it, but as soon as I got a chance I spoke to the girl about what she thought of Mexico. 'How long were you there?' says I. 'Oh, a long time!' says she. 'Father an' I came out eight years ago, when I was twelve, an' you can't tell how I'm lookin' forward to bein' home again an' seein' the shops an' the policemen an' 'busses.' 'It wont be much more than two weeks now,' says I,

'before you're in London.' 'Yes,' she says, smilin', 'an' I'll enjoy every minute I'm there, I'm certain. An',' says she, 'Captain Lindsay's promised to take me to theatres an' things. It's good of him, isn't it?' 'Yes,' says I, 'it's good all right,' but I was thinkin' of Maggie perhaps comin' to London to meet us. Lord! it was tough, somehow, on both of 'em.

"That night, things came to a head. I'd no right to do what I did, o' course. I listened, without bein' able not to, an' I heard what I'd no right to hear. An' yet it was just as well, maybe, I did. I'd been down below in the engine-room an' stoke-hole in the fourth's watch, an' about eleven o'clock the heat got me an' I came on deck. A dark night it was, stars above an' the sea black an' full of phosphorescence, like silver along the hull, with no sound but the noise of the cranks an' the clang of the furnace door; an' the stillness was so still you could almost feel it. How long I stood there leanin' over the rail I've no idea. Perhaps I dozed. An' that's how fellers go overboard sometimes, an' don't get picked up, sleepin'. An' then I sort of came to myself, woke up, prob'ly, an' the next thing I knew out of the silence there came voices: the girl talkin' to Dave.

"It wasn't much that I heard, but it was all that I needed. They were quite near me, by one of the boats. 'Dave,' says she with a little laugh, 'Dave dear, what's troublin' you? Is it something I've guessed? That I've seen in your eyes for a week? Must I say it myself an' be 'shamed for ever?' 'Oh, my dear, my dear!' says Dave, kind of chokin'. 'Do you love me, Dave, really an' truly love me?' says the girl, very soft an' tender, like a girl will, just to hear what she knows already. 'You really an' truly love me?' 'God help me!' says Dave, 'I do.' An' a chill seemed to grip me an' send the blood cold in my veins. I couldn't breathe scarcely.

"An' Dave,' says the girl, 'Dave, I believe that I loved you the first minute I saw you at Vera Cruz, there in the street, under the lamp. I knew you were straight,' she says, 'an' would help me; an' now—now,' she says, 'it

seems too good to be true.' Poor little girl! Even I—well, I knew. Why do things happen like that? Whose fault was it? Neither the one nor the other's. They'd drifted together like ships in a fog. Fate was too strong for them!

"I didn't listen to no more. I just tip-toed round to the other side of the deck an' come back whistlin'. Dave an' the girl were standin' a little apart from each other. 'Huilo!' I says. 'What are you two doin' this time o' the night? Too fine to be under cover, isn't it, Miss Hillyard?' I says. She gives a soft little laugh in the darkness. 'Yes, Mr. Harrington, it is,' she says, 'much too fine. Captain Lindsay an' I have been talkin' about home, an'—' 'You'll be glad to get home, wont you?' says I. 'An' you too, Dave, wont you? Better than bein' at sea, isn't it?' 'Of course,' says Dave, an' somehow his voice sounded diff'rent from what I'd ever heard it—kind of hopeless an' tired.

"MORE than an hour after I came on deck again. It was past eight bells by this time, midnight, an' the third's watch. Dave stood in the same place where'd I'd seen him before, by the rail overlookin' the after-deck. 'Well,' says I, very deliberate. 'Hullo, Harrington,' says he, 'what's wrong?' 'Nothin',' says I. 'Dave,' I says all of a sudden, 'I want to speak to you—not as Captain of the *Nagasaki*, but just to Dave Lindsay, a pal of mine, as man to man.' 'Yes,' says he. 'Yes, what is it?' 'I came on deck unexpected an hour ago,' I says, 'an' I heard.' I caught hold of his arms. 'Dave,' says I, 'are you mad? Clean, stark, starin' mad?' He gives a little whimper. 'Oh, my God, my God!' says he, 'what am I to do?' An' then I took him into my room an' closed the door.

"For a long time we didn't either of us speak a word. When he raised his head an' lowered his hands from his face he looked older by years—worn-out an' tired an' wretched. 'Harrington,' he says. 'I've been mad. But I can't help it,' he says in as dreary a way as I ever heard. 'I can't. I'm crazy about her, just crazy with love of her. I didn't know—I swear it—not till a few days ago. I didn't know what bein' in

love meant. Now I do. Harrington,' he says, 'I swore that she'd never know, never. But it was her bein' near me tonight that did it. I said what I shouldn't have. Just the touch of her, her voice—' An' he groans like he was hurt, which he must ha' been. 'I've gone through hell in the past week,' says he, 'I'm there now. What am I to do? What am I to do?' Like a child, he was. Poor devil! 'Does she know about Maggie?' I says. 'Know?' says he. 'Know! Of course not. An' she must never know. It would break her heart.'

"I didn't say anything for some time, an' then: 'She's had more than her fair share of trouble,' says I presently, 'an' there's more to come.' 'She's worryin' about her father,' says Dave, 'that they'll track him an' kill him, the Mexican Government, an—' An' at that I began to laugh. 'Dave,' says I, 'look what I've got for you.' An' I showed him the piece I'd cut out of the paper about the man who'd escaped from Mexico City with the money that wasn't his: the man that we'd rescued an' taken off on the *Nagasaki*.

"Dave read it through, slow an' deliberate. 'My God!' says he, 'are we all liars, him an' me, an' the rest of us?' He sat with his face as grave an' hard as the stone Buddha you see in the temples. 'Poor little girl!' says he. 'I can't tell her, Harrington,' he whispers. 'I can't. It 'ud kill me—it would so, if she found out that I'd lied to her. An' yet,' says he, 'what else will it be? Mother of God, what else but that?'

"An' then he seemed to go all to pieces: an' him whom I'd thought without feelin's sat in my room just sobbin' his heart out. It's an awful thing for a man to cry in front of another man. It's awful to have to hear him. I waited, without speakin'. 'Harrington,' he says after a time, 'the girl's too good to be treated in no other way but what's right. I must play straight an' do what I ought to have done sooner. There's only the one thing: she must go.'

"An' at that I blazed up at him. 'Talk sense, Dave,' I says, 'if you can. Don't be a fool! How can she leave the ship in the middle of the Atlantic, more than two weeks from England?' He gets up

very slow an' heavy, like he felt old an' worn-out. 'If we do take him to England,' he says, 'the police will get him.' He shrugs his shoulders. 'I'll be turnin' in now,' he says, an' he goes out, leavin' me starin' after him.

"**T**HE next day, hot an' calm an' sunny, like every other one of those days, I came on deck in the forenoon watch. A kind of suspense, a waitin' for trouble seemed to be hangin' over the whole ship. Dave was on the upper bridge, leanin' out over the starboard side, all hunched up, just gazin' out as if he expected something. On the lower bridge, outside the chart-room, the girl stood by herself, her hand on the rail, her gray eyes full of happiness an' love, an' a faint little smile on her lips. Near her was her father, big an' heavy an' fat, sitting in his chair, breathin' deep. He looked up when I climbed the ladder, an' nodded. 'Fine weather we're havin', aren't we?' says he. We said a few words an' then the talk turned on himself, an' what he had done: the Mexican Government, Diaz, an' so on. 'I've passed through a lot,' he says, 'but soon I'll have rest an' peace an' quiet at last, with my little girl to take care of me till I'm better.' An' I shivered like some one had stepped over my grave. The infernal liar! An' think, son, of the way things were workin'. Whatever happened, it was the girl that would suffer.

"Then Dave came down the ladder. 'Chief,' says he, an' him callin' me chief, I knew it was serious. 'Just a minute, please.' An' when we were by ourselves in the chart-room he turns on me quickly. 'Harrington,' he whispers. 'I've made up my mind: you must do what I daren't. Tell him—the father—what you told me. Show him the paper. You must. It's the only way. That first, an' the rest will follow.' I didn't argue: I did as he asked, wonderin' a little what was to come next.

"'Mr. Hillyard,' says I, an' there was not one near us, for the girl had gone to her room, 'Mr. Hillyard,' says I, an' my brain was workin' same as those cranks you hear, fast an' fast, 'I've been thinkin' how glad you must be you've escaped from those Mexicans.' He

stared at me like he suspected. 'Why, yes,' he says, lickin' his puffy lips. 'Yes, Mr. Harrington, you're right. I can breathe freely now. It's not nice to think of a knife in your ribs or a bullet through the back of your head, is it?'

"Mr. Hillyard," says I, "would it be as bad as all that? Are you so sure?" I says. "Wouldn't they rather have you in prison?" An' his face goes gray an' little beads of sweat come out on his forehead. "How much was it you made off with?" says I. "The papers say a hundred an' fifty thousand, but I don't believe it."

"I didn't get no further, for he stops me. 'What!' says he with a little scream. 'What's that? My God!' he says, 'what lie are you tellin' me?' 'Be quiet!' I says. 'It's no lie an' you know it. Listen!' says I, 'you're in business in Mexico City, an' crooked. You're runnin' from prison with a hundred an' fifty thousand dollars that isn't yours. An',' says I, 'you talk about revolutions an' plots an' Diaz an' how sick an' weak an' patient you are!'

"I'm blowed if he didn't try an' smile at me. 'You can't prove it,' he says. But his face was enough to convict him in any law court the world over. 'Read this,' I says, givin' him the piece of paper. 'They've sent your description out, an' they're after you. An' now, Mr. Hillyard,' I says, 'what's to be done?' I thought he'd go off in a stroke; he looked awful. An' the next thing there was the girl by my side, her face white an' her eyes blazin'.

**S**HE'D heard. I just stared from one to the other: from that girl—tall an' slender an' straight, her hands by her sides, her fists clenched, her small teeth pressed down over her lower lip, an' a spot of pink in each cheek—to the man in the chair, quiverin' with fright, flabby an' sick an' as big a coward as ever walked. An' God forbid that ever a woman looks at me the way that girl looked at her father. 'Give me that piece of paper,' she says, 'at once.' He does an' she reads it through. 'I was proud of you once,' she says after a while, 'an' I never knew.' That was all. Says he: 'It's all a mistake, all. It's not true.' 'Why keep on pre-

tendin'?' she says very slow an' cold. 'You lied to me.' He gives a little bleat like a sheep, an' me—I left them together, the man an' the girl: the best an' the worst on board the *Nagasaki*.

"'You told,' says Dave. I nodded, feelin' sick. 'An',' says I, 'she heard me, an' she read what was in the paper.' 'Come on,' says he, 'an' whatever you do, don't leave me.' Not understandin', I followed him down the ladder.

"Dave goes straight up to the girl. 'You know?' he says. 'Yes,' says she quietly, 'I know.' The father sat up in his chair. 'Well,' says he, 'an' what's to be done? Anything?' I can never forget it: the blue sea showin' between the rails an' the blue sky under the awinin's an' the white paint of the bridge, an' the girl's white dress, an' the smell of hot oil, an' us four playin' with people's lives like they were chessmen. An' that girl! True as steel she was, an' meanin' to stand by her father, scoundrel or not. She stared at Dave, with her face grave an' her eyes stony, an' her heart breakin'. I knew. I'd seen that look before. 'It'll be all right when we reach England,' says the man, noddin' his wicked old head. 'No one will know, there. The police wont be expectin' me this way; an' Captain,' says he, 'if you smuggle me through safe, you'll never regret it. I've money to spare an'—' The girl quivers like some one had struck her. 'Father,' she says gently, 'please—not that.' An' Dave's face is white under the brown.

"'It's England we're bound for now,' says the girl in a hopeless voice, 'an' there's no way out of it, I know. But I wish it were anywhere else. Think of us goin' home like this—after all these years. Think of it: home, an' afraid of the police! I'd rather be goin' back to Mexico City. Home, an' the police huntin' us!' She gave a laugh that hurt me to listen to—so hopeless an' sad.

**N**OT even then, had I seen the way things were driftin'. 'Maybe it would be safe,' says Dave. 'More likely it wouldn't. They'd be watchin' the ports.' An' there was nothin' to choose between him an' the girl for misery. An' then the sick man went very limp an' still an' ghastly, an' the girl dropped

on her knees by his side, tender an' lovin', yet scornful an' full of hate for what he had done to her. 'It's my heart,' he says. A minute or two later he was all right again.

"But the worst of it all to my mind was the girl thinkin' that Dave was savin' her father, an' nothin' more. An' she never knew. How could she? Selfish of Dave? I don't think so, son. As matters were, it was hopeless. What if he'd spoken the truth! Would it have helped? How? She'd lost faith in her father. Was she to lose faith in Dave? What would she have thought of him afterward, if he'd said he was married? Could he have tried to pretend that he didn't care? No. He could not. He did care. He couldn't trust himself near her. There was no other way but good-by. An' as things were, it wasn't Dave givin' the girl up because of Maggie: it was the girl givin' up Dave because of her father! See!

"Even I wasn't expectin' what came next. 'There's the one way,' says Dave, 'an' the one only.' 'An' that?' says the girl. 'To leave the ship an' at once,' says Dave. Which was foolish, of course. 'How, Dave?' says I 'How will you do it?' There was no port to touch at, unless we turned back, which even Dave wouldn't do. There's a limit even to fakin' a log-book. 'You don't mean to turn back,' I says, 'do you?' 'Turn back!' says Dave. 'Of course not. She'll see our signal an' stop.' An' then he pointed, an' we saw for the first time a liner comin' toward us—a smallish passenger boat, steamin' only a little faster than us. 'She's a Frenchman,' says Dave, an' he calls to the mate on the upper bridge to ring the telegraph to stand by. 'It was the one chance in a thousand we'd sight her,' he says. 'But when I seen the smoke in the distance I guessed who it was, an' told —told you to tell.' He had his eyes fixed on me; he never so much as glanced at the girl, but I knew from his looks that a thousand devils was gnawin' his heart.

"THE liner answered our signal an' stopped. We did the same, Dave still standin' beside us, an' givin' the mate his orders. 'Dave,' says I, 'what's

it mean?' 'Mean!' says he, an' he spoke like a man who's not sure of himself. 'Mean! We want a doctor, that's all.' He turns then to the sick man in his chair. 'Mr. Hillyard,' he says, 'they're sendin' a doctor. He'll be a Frenchman, of course, but there's not a ship's doctor alive who's not open to reason. If you'll go to your room I'll explain that you're sick. When he sees you, you do the rest. You've money, an' money talks. Also,' he says, 'St. Pierre's as good a hidin'-place as anywhere else on earth—for the time bein' at least. You're goin' to be transshipped. Understand!' An' with that, he swings round an' goes off, an' the girl looks after him, droopin' kind of, like—like a tall white lily after a storm.

"She touches her father's arm. 'Come,' she says, 'you must be in your bunk when he first sees you, at least.'

"THE boat from the liner comes alongside an' we watches, the crew linin' the rails an' whisperin' about Mexican revolutions an' refugees an' so on. Dave meets the doctor at the head of the steps, a young Frenchman in spec's an' a little fair beard, carryin' a case of instruments an' fair sweatin' with happiness an' pride. They went into the cabin together, talkin'. Later the doctor comes out an' jabbers something down to the boat. Dave comes after him an' speaks to the mate, an' then we hear that the sick gentleman's been taken worse an' is to be sent off to a liner so's he can get to Martinique an' into a hospital. But I heard one of the hands say to another as he went for'ard: 'Maybe he's ill, but it's more than like that he's scared of the Mexicans trackin' him down if he goes to London, an' he's puttin' 'em off the scent.'

"They carried him to the rail on a stretcher—a hatch cover it was, an' a mattress, an' lowered him over the side. An' then I saw the girl walkin' slowly toward us. White to the lips, she was, with her eyes full of misery an' pain an' sufferin'—but as brave as they make 'em. Just as I started to move off, she spoke to me: 'Don't go, Mr. Harrington, please.' An' I saw that she meant it. She didn't dare be by herself

with Dave. An' Dave, he gripped hold of my wrist. 'Thank you for what you've done for us,' says the girl, lookin' Dave full in the face. 'I'll never forget it.'

"Dave doesn't speak. He can't—not then. She goes on very quietly. 'I never, never for a moment suspected my father had done what he had done. If,' she says, 'if I had, we'd never have left Mexico City. I thought he was what he told me.' She held out her hand. 'I'm sorry,' she says in a tired way, 'but you've got to forget that you ever met me. It can never be, Dave, never. You understand, don't you? Maybe I'm cruel,' she says, 'in givin' you up, but I have to be—for my sake an' my father's as well as yours. I must never see you again, never.' Son, think of it! Think of the mockery of that good-by! An' Dave—poor devil! 'It's all for the best,' says the girl, 'you're not to keep thinkin' of me, dear,' she says, 'an'—She stops, not able to speak. 'Good-by,' says Dave with a kind of sob. 'Good-by, dear.' An' then he drops her hand an' she turns to the steps with her lips tremblin'. 'And I thought I was goin' home!' she says.

**W**E LEANT over the rails an' looked down into the boat as it pushed off. 'Oh, God!' says Dave softly, an' nothin' more. He went up to the bridge, an' before the girl an' her father had reached the liner, the *Nagasaki* was movin' once more, headed for the Scilly light an' the Channel.

"The rest of the voyage passed quickly—fair weather, blue skies, fresh wind, all the way to the South Foreland an' up the river. But it was lonesome an' empty an' dull, somehow, without the girl. The whole ship was diff'rent. Dave never spoke about what had happened till the night before we reached London. We were on deck together, talkin' an' smokin' an' thinkin'. 'It seems like a year since we left, doesn't

it? A lifetime,' he says, 'an' just those few days from Vera Cruz to San Juan to remember!' A little later he says: 'Harrington, what else could I have done, eh? There was no other way out of it, was there? I've broken her heart,' he says, 'an' ruined her life—an' she doesn't know it was me. I've tried to forget, but I can't, an' I know that I never will.'

**N**EXT mornin' almost the first person we saw on the dock was Maggie, who'd come across from the Bristol Channel to meet her man. When we were made fast an' the gangplank was run out she hurried aboard. Dave stood at the rails waitin'.

"'Dave,' she says, 'oh, Dave, Dave!' An' she puts her hands on his shoulders an' kisses him. 'I've been awful lonesome without you, Dave.' She wasn't a bit afraid of lettin' us know she loved him, an' she didn't care even if she was cryin' with happiness or her nose was pink an' her hair comin' down at the back. 'Have you missed me?' she says.

"'Maggie,' says Dave. 'I've thought of you every minute I've been away.' An' then they went off to his room, like they were boy an' girl sweethearts. But he might smile an' say nice things, yet he couldn't for one instant hide the pain in his eyes, the longin' for that other girl who'd come into his life just a few months too late. It was a lie he told Maggie, of course, about thinkin' of her all the time since he'd left; but, son, there's many a truth that's a sight worse an' more cruel than that lie."

Mr. Harrington drew in his breath with a sigh and for a moment sat staring out at a passing steamer. "What a day!" he muttered. "Like summer, isn't it? An' a week from now we'll have Christmas an' bad weather, sure as fate. That's always the way. Well, I'd better be goin' below now if I want any sleep before eight bells. Good-by."

### "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"

**A** COMPLETE book-length novel by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, entitled "Thou Shalt Not Kill," will be a notable feature of the next BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. It is a brilliant story, with an exceptionally attractive heroine, and we are confident that you will find it of the deepest interest.



# Bids for Uncle William

*A quaint little romance of an unusually appealing quality.*

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By JOHN BARTON OXFORD

Author of "The Princess Urline," "Tobin's Horseshoes," etc.

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THE one-thirteen train, rumbling into Westbridge, aroused old Johnny Mullen from the comfortable snooze he was enjoying on the seat of the ancient coupé, with which he lay in wait at the station for some chance fare.

"Kerridge, marm?" called Johnny, holding up a tentative forefinger to a quietly-dressed, pleasant-faced young woman who came into view around the corner of the little stone station.

He said it rather hopelessly, as if he quite expected her to pass him by as did the bulk of the passengers who alighted from the trains. To his surprise she approached the ramshackle equipage.

"Can you get me out to the Bradley place—William Bradley's?" she inquired.

"Uncle William's?" Johnny inquired, scrambling down from his perch, opening the coupé's loud-squeaking door and with much ostentation brushing off the dusty cushions. "Sure, marm! Git right in. Any baggage?"

At that moment the door of the station waiting-room opened and banged shut. A young man, broad of shoulder, slim of hip, breathing the athlete in his every movement, made for the

coupé. He had a firm mouth, a cleft chin, and decidedly nice eyes. At the sight of the girl, just about to enter the coupé, those nice eyes widened.

"Why, Emily! How d'e do!" he exclaimed. "This is a surprise! Were you on that train, too?"

"Why, how do you do, Robert?" said she. "I'd no idea of seeing you! Going out to Uncle William's?"

"I surely am," said he.

"Then come with me in the carriage," she suggested.

Robert West's eyes twinkled. "Grand good idea," he agreed, "if it'll hold together long enough to get us there. Think it will, Johnny?" he ended, turning abruptly to the coupé's owner.

"I'd take a chance on ut, sor," Johnny advised.

"Just as you say," laughed West, helping the girl in. Then he climbed in beside her and slammed the door.

JOHNNY MULLEN went through the necessary rein-jerking, whip-flourishing manoeuvres to get his shambling steed into motion, and the coupé rattled out of the station yard.

"You ran down to see how Uncle William's getting on?" West inquired, as Johnny with much urging, verbal

and otherwise, got the horse into something approximating a trot.

"Did you know Uncle William has decided to go to the Corliss Home for Aged Men in Northport?" she asked, and then without waiting for an answer from him, she rattled on: "It would be a shame. He mustn't do it. He's been used to his own home and all sorts of care from Aunt Mary all his life. He'd never be happy. I came down here to take him back with me."

"Did you?" said he, and his tone told plainly his hearty approval of her course. "Well, I'll relieve you of that responsibility. I've come down to get Uncle William to go back with *me*."

Emily Norcross wrinkled those pretty brows of hers. Also she gently but firmly shook her brown little head.

"It wouldn't be relieving me," said she. "You see, I really want Uncle William with me."

"So do I, for that matter," he said with just a touch of asperity in his voice.

"Of course you do," she replied. "Who wouldn't want him? He's such a dear old man, and so pathetically helpless since Aunt Mary died. There are so many little things I could do for him; he would probably be much happier with me."

"Really, it's up to me," he argued. "I'm Uncle William's own nephew—his sister's son. You are only Aunt Mary's brother's daughter. That gives me a prior claim."

"I don't know about that," she demurred. "Uncle William has always seemed very near to me. It's not fair, putting in these claims of closer relationship. I want him very, very much."

"And my mind is quite as set on having him with me," he maintained stoutly.

A humorous twinkle came into his eyes.

"Tell you what we might do," he suggested. "We might match pennies for him."

"We'll do nothing of the sort," she vetoed. "And it's not a nice suggestion, either."

She turned her eyes and looked steadfastly out of the coupé's dingy

window. The furrow just above her straight little nose was deeper now. West was watching her, still with that covert twinkle in his eyes.

"You really want Uncle William with you as much as you say?" she asked at length.

"I've stated my desires in that direction very feebly," said he.

He heard her sigh.

"He is so quaint and dear and altogether lovable," she mused. "But I suppose you have some few rights in the matter. I don't see any way out of it but for us to bid for him."

"Bid for him?" he repeated, not catching her meaning fully.

"Yes, *bid* for him," she reiterated. "You want him and I want him; and despite all your claims of closer relationship, I won't admit they're valid, nor that we are on anything save equal terms in the matter."

"Therefore, we'll leave it to Uncle William himself. You tell him what you'll do for him, and I'll tell him what I'll do for him, and may the best man win."

"That's an eminently fair proposition for both of us," he declared. "We'll do it."

TEN minutes later the coupé turned into a little driveway and stopped before a little low, rambling, comfortable looking story-and-a-half white house. Big cherry-trees, the petals of their blossoms sifting down like some new variety of very fragrant snow, towered above it. A pale green vine clambered over the lattice-work of the tiny porch. Back of the house an orchard of gnarled old trees was a riot of delicate pinky-white blossoms.

Just as the coupé halted, Uncle William, his spectacles pushed up on his forehead, the daily paper still in his hands, stepped out on the front porch. He was a tall old man, somewhat stooped of shoulder. His face was the gentle, eager face of an inquisitive child.

"Hello, folks!" Uncle William greeted them. "I wa'n't lookin' for ye—nary one of ye. But that don't mean I ain't jest as glad to see ye."

Emily Norcross was nothing if not

direct in her methods. She never beat about the bush in anything she did. Now she ran lightly up the steps, a pretty, girlish figure, threw her arms about the old man and kissed him resoundingly on either cheek.

"I just got your letter last night, saying you'd made up your mind to give up here and go to the home at Northport," she said. "Whatever in the world made you think of doing anything like that, Uncle William?"

Uncle William, having gripped his nephew warmly by the hand, led the way into the house, set out chairs for them and himself slouched comfortably in a corner of the worn haircloth sofa.

"Well," he observed judicially in answer to the girl's question, "I've had a dreadful sight of trouble with housekeepers since your Aunt Mary died. They aint one of 'em was wuth their salt. I shouldn't 'a' hung on this long if it hadn't been for Spotty. Spotty was the cat your Aunt Mary sut such a store by, you remember. I didn't know what I should do with her when I broke up here. But Spotty up and threw an awful fit last week and in the midst of it her sperrit took its flight, so really there wa'n't no need of my stayin' here any longer, and over to the home—"

"Uncle William," West interrupted, "I'm surprised you should think for a moment of going over there. If you're going to break up here, you'd much better come with your own people."

"You see I came as soon as I got your letter," said the girl, "to ask you to come with me, and Robert came down on the same train. Neither of us knew the other was coming. I think it shows you pretty clearly how we feel about it. I want you and he wants you, and we've been quarreling all the way from the station as to which should have you. You're *not* going to that home. You're coming with either Robert or me."

"Sho!" said Uncle William, but his eyes moistened and he seemed vastly pleased with this attention.

"We're each going to tell you what we'll do for you, and let you decide for yourself which one you'd rather make your home with."

"Sho!" said Uncle William again.

EMILY looked questioningly at Robert, as if to ask which of them should have the floor first. He nodded his head towards her.

"Go ahead! You first," said he.

"Now I have the dearest little place, Uncle William," said the girl. "There's an extra room that you shall have for your own. It sha'n't cost you a cent for living expenses, either. I wouldn't think of it. Just having you with me will be payment enough for me. You know I'll make pan-dowdies for you and buckwheat cakes every morning. And I could look after your clothes, and do your mending.

"You know how fond you are of reading. Well, I'll take you with me to the Parker Library every day, if you want to go. I'm in charge of the whole place, now. I'll give you a little table all your own in one corner of the reference room, and I'll detail one boy to do nothing but get you the books and the papers you want."

She paused. Uncle William was rubbing his chin reflectively.

"Say, that'd be pretty cute, wouldn't it?" he said. "I reckon I should like that first rate. I guess it would about suit me, but—"

"You've seen my rooms, Uncle William," West now put in. "You know what they are and how they suit you, especially that old leather rocker by the table. I still have it. You know how it's been when you've been with me in the city for little visits. Well, if you come with me that's the way it will be all the time. It wont cost you a cent with me, either. We'll take in the ball games when they're going, and the shows, and daytimes while I'm at the office you could take in the movies, or go downtown and see Billy Bradford or some of the other boys you know in town. There'd always be cigars and tobacco for you—"

"I forgot to say I like the smell of smoke as well as Aunt Mary did," Emily interrupted breathlessly.

"You know how it would be, Uncle William—just like one of those visits, only lasting just as long as you can be contented," West finished.

"That sounds awful good, Bob—awful good," said Uncle William. "But

so does yours, Emily," he added, turning impulsively to the girl. "I snum, I dunno which I'd ruther do. If jest one of ye'd come and asked me, instead of *both* of ye, 'twould 'a' been a good sight easier for me to decide. I can allus think better when I'm alone," he added. "Tell ye what: you two go out for a while and leave me to thrash it out. Go down to the orchard and look at the blossoms. I never see 'em so purty as they be this year. I'll call ye when I've decided."

**T**HEY went down to the orchard. The wisp of breeze sent the petals sifting all about them.

"Well, who's the lucky bidder?" West asked.

The girl pulled off a spray of blossoms and stuck them in her hair.

"I'm just selfish enough to hope it is I," said she.

"Stingy!" he chided, picking up a handful of the fallen petals and showering them over her.

She caught up another handful and pelted him with them.

"Stingy yourself!" she returned. "You are hoping you'll be the lucky one just as hard as I am."

"Do you want him so very much?" he asked gravely.

"Do I?" she replied in tones that left no doubt.

He walked beside her in silence for a moment. His eyes were upon that spray of apple-blossom in her hair.

"It seems a shame we can't both have him," he said at length.

It was she who was silently thoughtful now.

Half the length of the orchard they went in another period of silence. His eyes were still on that spray of blossoms in her wavy brown hair.

"There is a way we can both have him," he observed at length. "That is, a sort of way we might arrange it to have him with us both—"

He reached up and touched that spray of apple-blossoms just above her white forehead. He pretended it was slipping, that it needed adjusting. The girl knew better, but she didn't let him know it. A gnarled old greening tree—

oh, a very wise old tree!—showered them copiously with drifting white flakes.

**H**EY!" Uncle William bellowed from the back door. "Hey! Come a-runnin'! I've made up my mind."

Emily was flushing beautifully as she ran lightly up to him, standing there on the back steps.

"Don't tell us!" she begged as she ran to him. "Don't tell us which one it was you chose. You see you wont have to make any choice. You're going to live with *us*!"

"Git out!" said Uncle William, and laughed uproariously.

"Now you've went and sp'iled it all, aint ye?" Uncle William chided them when he had sufficiently recovered his breath. "Taint likely I can come and live with ye *now*. Three's a crowd—allus and eternal a crowd. I'm goin' over to the home, jest as I'd planned. You see, Eli Morse that I used to be allus playin' checkers and hobnobbin' with is over there. I allus thought an awful sight of Eli. He writes me glowin' reports of the home and how comfortable he is. I'm goin' to have a hey o'd time over there with Eli.

"And if you must know it, that's what I'd decided on when I called ye jest now. I sent ye outer the house so'st I could think up some way of tel-lin' ye without hurtin' the feelin's of either of ye. I don't care about your feelin's now. Nothin' aint a-goin' to hurt 'em much in your present state.

"So I'll git over to the home jest as soon as I can. But there's one thing I want to do before I go. Me and your Aunt Mary took a heap of comfort in this place. I don't want to sell it. I don't have to. I've got enough to see me through besides. But I do want it to go to some one that'll take as much comfort as me and she did. So to-morrer I'm goin' to have the deed made out to the two of ye, j'intly. You can be here some summers, at least, and maybe sometime you'll want to come here for good. Besides I guess you'd like to keep that orchard after what it's went and done to ye."

**T**HEY had agreed to disagree—but had been entirely friendly about it. And the whimsical Sybil must needs celebrate the granting of her decree at Reno by writing a sprightly little letter to her now ex-husband. "I haven't been so happy since our wedding day," she wrote, among other surprising things. Kenneth answered curtly. "I hope," he averred, "that I'm man enough not to be henpecked by my divorced wife." He started on a trip around the world, sailing west from San Francisco. She did the same, but in the opposite direction, across the Atlantic. Yet she continued to write him, telling of her shipboard friendships—in particular, with a certain Arthur Delaney. And Kenneth answers her, telling of his shipboard friendships—with a woman he describes as "a little devil," and with another whom he calls "a madonna." Sybil cables him: "Beware madonna. Cultivate little devil."

## Love Letters of a Divorced Couple

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BY WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON

*Author of "Periwinkle," "The Triumph of Life," "Debonnaire," etc.*

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Alhambra, Palace Hotel, Granada.  
January 15th, 19—

**K**ENNETH DEAR:  
I have received your letter written six weeks ago, and have at once wired you warning you against your so-called madonna. I confess I'm a little anxious about you in a motherly way. Kenneth, you certainly need leading strings. I wish some one could invent for the benefit of susceptible men some sort of spectacles the opposite of rose color—some kind of smoked glasses that would make women look even blacker than they are, instead of tinting them like the dawn.

The truth is that with all your high-handed cynicism and worldly wisdom you are so incorrigibly innocent at heart, so infantile, that at sight of the first baby-faced creature in a perambulator next to yours, you positively crow with delight and eagerness to get at her. Then, as your nurse happens at the moment to be in another hemisphere, you climb down and gingerly

approach your new acquaintance. In another instant you are playing at putting her to bed by tucking in her steamer rug with all the amazing gravity of three years old! And if she'll promise to be a good girl, you'll show her your pretty toy temples!

Then a curious thing happens—there's magic in the air. After an hour's idle prattle, you begin to grow. In a few more minutes you're seventeen, and the baby-faced creature has been jerked up into the sky for you to worship.

If this goes on you'll run the whole gamut of a lifetime in a week or two. Give an idealist the wrong sort of love affair, and he'll race through the seven ages of man in as many days.

As a matter of fact, it's worse than the seven ages of man because, after you literally reach your second childhood, you die, and that's the end of you, but in this sort of thing you don't die—unless you take it into your head to shoot her and be hanged for it—which might indicate that you had at last found wisdom!

You may wonder what it is in your letter that leads me to distrust your child-madonna. I'll tell you. I distrust the blush when you tucked her in. You considered it maidenly. It wasn't. It unmistakably gave her away. Do you think I or any other nice sort of woman would blush because a man was merely polite, and rendered the service of a steward?

Then there's another thing that betrays her. She says she's going to rejoin her army-officer husband in India. Then why does she go gallivanting off to a lot of old temples with you? She must be impatient to see him. She must be a devoted wife!

Kenneth, it's a safe rule to fight shy of women with baby faces. If a woman is thirty years old and has a baby face, mark my words, she's a thousand years old at heart. She's hard by nature. Do you think a tender-hearted woman could live to be even thirty and not show signs of what her pity and sympathy and unselfishness have caused her?

The world says that wrinkles are signs of age in a woman—the crow's feet next the eyes, the furrows across the brow. The world as usual is wrong. The crow's feet mean that a woman has kept young too long. She may not have preserved the youthful softness of her complexion, but she has preserved the youthful softness of her heart. People say:

"She worries over such trivial things. She takes life much too seriously. It makes the poor dear look so passée."

Nonsense! It makes the "poor dear" seem very immature. Youth, and youth only, takes life seriously and worries over trivial things. Not until our eyes lose their perplexity and our brows their puzzled frown, do we begin to grow really old. It isn't till we cease to be young that we chuckle at the littlenesses of life.

It's a mystery to me, Kenneth, why you're so incapable of understanding women. You're exceptionally intelligent—you have perception and intuition.

It seems to be about as impossible for a man to learn the woman lesson as for a donkey to learn differential

calculus—and yet the silliest woman knows the man lesson almost as soon as she is born.

Poor old Kenneth! I really feel anxious about you! But I hope that Rozzie will act as a balance. I wired you to cultivate the "little devil" because I am sure she is far safer and more wholesome for you than the Ghirlandajo madonna. Can you guess how I knew? I'll tell you. It's because she burst out laughing at Sir Peter when he took her for a mountain goat and was just on the point of shooting her. Any girl with such a remarkable sense of humor and such real pluck must be the right sort.

Now, for the last time, Kenneth, let me revert to the subject of this letter-writing of ours. I say "for the last time," not because I have the slightest intention of stopping but simply because I haven't—so why keep arguing about it when there are so many other things to fight about?

You know I never would have believed it could have been so exhilarating to fight with you. It certainly didn't use to be!—but perhaps that was because we tried so hard not to. I almost believe married people ought to be made to fight to a finish. Instead of trying to live on the principle that "a soft answer turneth away wrath," they ought to be taught that wrath turns away those insidious soft answers. It positively ought to be one of the marriage vows—"to love, honor and fight to the death." If everybody had to do it, they'd grow lax about it. They'd break that vow like the others, and peace would permanently reign!

It strikes me that this suggestion, Kenneth, is quite as practical as those of most reformers.

There was something I wanted to say to you but I forget what it was. No, I remember: about our writing to each other. Well, this letter is my answer to your objections, and so will the next be, and the next. So that settles the question once and for all.

Yours inexorably,  
SYBIL.

P. S.—Please don't answer by saying I am prejudiced about the madonna.

Grand Hotel Europe, Yokohama.  
January 26th, 19—

DEAR SYBIL:

I have received your preposterous telegram and must confess that it sounds as if you were trying to be witty at another woman's expense—and not succeeding. I am once again compelled to deplore the harshness evinced by women in their judgments of each other. I fear you are becoming suspicious, Sybil—at any rate, you are prejudiced.

I anticipate a pleasant and instructive tour with the Royces, old Kenway and the little woman you have so unjustly maligned. She, by the way, found a telegram awaiting her here which informed her that her husband had been unexpectedly recalled to England. Her situation, needless to say, was rendered slightly complicated and embarrassing by this news. She looked so forlorn and lonely that my heart ached for her.

Nevertheless, it will give her more time with us and a better opportunity to study Oriental architecture under my guidance. The only difficulty is that Kenway and the Royces have to be in Rome early in February, and this will leave us alone. I confess the situation rather perplexes us; she seems disturbed at the prospect. There has evidently been some mistake.

You see her husband has given up their house, expecting to rejoin her in the hill country later. In the meantime, friends were to have met her here and she was to have stayed with them at Kioto pending her husband's return, when she was to have met his steamer at Bombay. You see it is all very hard for her, and makes one want to do all one can to relieve her distress.

I trust you will now feel conscience-stricken at the thought of your cruel insinuations against this dear, helpless little woman.

Yours for justice,  
KENNETH.

Alhambra Palace Hotel, Granada.  
March 14th, 19—

DEAR KENNETH:

I don't feel conscience-stricken. I don't believe the dear, friendless lit-

tle woman has any husband at all. It looks fishy. But I've warned you enough—only *do* be careful after the Royces leave you. As they have to be in Rome early in February, they must have started already—so already I am really beginning to tremble at thought of the dangers besetting you.

Do write at once and relieve my anxiety. Also admit that I am not biased. Of course you used the hackneyed old masculine platitude about the prejudice of women. Believe me, it is you who are unjust. My judgments are not prejudiced.

I don't know her, but I know her type—and I know you, and the world.

Do you ask where I've learned such a lot about the world? Heavens! If divorce doesn't make a woman worldly, what does? I've learned more, I can tell you, since my divorce than I ever dreamed of before.

Divorce teaches more man-and-woman lessons than are ever taught by marriage.

I've been having experiences myself. But, unlike you, I'm not in any serious danger of being hoodwinked. Women of the world aren't, you see. As a matter of fact, my own wanderings so far have proved deliciously diverting—in spite of predicaments. Or perhaps I should say *because* of predicaments.

Anyone can enjoy adventure—it's only the really adventurous who appreciate the finer thrills of misadventure. I always envy the person whose past is a collection of rare moments, to be fingered fondly by memory, as collectors finger the choicest examples of their folly.

But give me fire to play with!—give me not only rare moments but crucial moments. I'd never be contented with a collection of mere snuff-boxes and fans. I'd have little curios—weapons, and a crystal ball into which I dare not gaze, and an alchemist's love-phial, and a Borgia locket with its grain of poison—or, to come down to modern times, now that Nature herself is such an old witch, give me just one speck of magic radium, the risky metal and for that reason the most precious!

If you like, I'll jot down for your

delectation one or two piquant experiences of mine. At the time of their occurrence they seemed decidedly less funny, but, thank goodness, the humor of such episodes lives after them—the evil dies.

HAVE I mentioned a man on board named Pinkie Monroe? He's the sort you would call "a rank outsider." He used to sit at the steamer's best piano and thump out accompaniments limited to two or three chords. I suppose he was what some people describe as a good fellow. No one who likes likableness in large doses could help liking Pinkie. Arthur says he's as loud as a brass band and as popular as pie. This is doubtless true. But it's well to remember that pie now and then possesses sinister qualities.

We left the steamer at Gibraltar, as I decided to wander up slowly through Spain, arriving in Paris and London for the season.

I've heard people say that the Rock, like so many of Nature's wonders, is disappointing. I cannot agree. It is perhaps less awe-inspiring than I'd expected, but it looks so solemn and massive, so Northern and out of keeping with the sunny shores of Southern Europe, that it seems as typically English as St. Paul's or London Bridge. Arthur says, rather satirically, that the Divine Providence that created it must have been distinctly pro-British and imperialistic at the time! He says it's clearly another instance of the *entente cordiale* that once existed between Heaven and the British Empire. But then Arthur is an Irishman by descent. He even goes so far as to insinuate that Gibraltar is now so honey-combed with guns that if there were any heavy firing the poor old Rock would crumble into the sea!

Arthur, I fear, is just a little jealous of my new friend, the English general. Sir Lawrence, by the way, was very kind the day we landed. He seemed to feel that as this was a garrison town I was in a sense his guest. He sent an orderly to help Jeannette with my belongings and took me himself to the hotel. Arthur was so furious at being thus supplanted that he went over to

another hostelry and kept away from me all day.

THIS is where Pinkie comes in. Pinkie, being alone in Europe, made bold to call on me after dinner. Through some stupidity he was shown up to my private sitting-room before I could say whether I was in or out. As he entered, I saw that a change had come over him, and though I'd have thought that any change in Pinkie must naturally be for the better, this was decidedly for the worse.

I saw at once that he somehow considered himself more worldly and wicked since setting foot on foreign soil. There was a new comprehension and double meaning about him rather unpleasant to behold.

I have noticed this strange metamorphosis in many Americans when they first discover the Old World—but never more markedly than in Pinkie.

He seated himself on the sofa beside me and leaned back with an assumption of rakish ease. It was as though something in his character had worked loose. His manner had a sprawling and devilish air, as much as to say confidentially:

"We're away from home, so don't worry about the consequences."

I tried to keep the conversation casual. It occurred to me that he was just the type of young man who, when he was not singing popular songs, would derive supreme satisfaction from talking about his business prowess. There was a certain blatant prosperity about him, something essentially commercial. The subject succeeded beyond my hopes. He warmed up to it, and I saw for the first time glimmerings of real ability in him.

Curiously enough, I was rather entertained—his business seemed so unusual. You'd never guess what Pinkie is. Pinkie is a buyer of champagne corks! It seems they grow on trees—the bark, you know—and the only sort that really keep the sparkle in grow somewhere in Spain or Portugal. And Pinkie buys simply millions of them for some California brand. In spite of the unusualness of this calling, I might have known it was Pinkie's. It

sums him up. He is the perfect embodiment and symbol of our American champagne—cheap, a little flat, and very sugary and headachy. In short, he's an attempt.

I only wish that I might have put one of his own corks into him. But there's no bottling up Pinkie. The climax of his call was like a nightmare. It may seem incredible, but it's true. The fellow wound up the evening by suddenly putting his arm around me and trying to kiss me!

**I** WAS so surprised that I hardly knew what to do. It wasn't pleasant, Kenneth—in fact, it was rather pitiful, the thought of being alone in a world where that sort of episode is possible—a jungle filled with such grotesque monsters.

I believe I was even more forlorn than annoyed. It was like a bad dream. When I felt his soft arm around me, I stood up mechanically. There was something as old as the world about it all. I moved away from him wearily. He must have been greatly disillusioned by the way I did so. He was so taken aback that he could only sit staring at me, open-mouthed.

I don't know whether I laughed or not. If I did, I imagine it sounded like the uncanny laugh of a person dreaming of something funny, or of something that they are pretending is funny in order to escape the horror of it. I said to him:

"You idiot! Haven't you any intelligence whatever? Why did you try that?"

"I don't know," he answered, still swaggering a little. "Why does any man try to kiss a pretty woman?"

"But do I seem—"

"No," he beamed at me reassuringly. "No, not a bit. But you see—"

"Well—?"

He grinned sheepishly.

"Do you remember that divorcee song that made such a hit in 'The Dandelion'? That's what I mean. The tune goes this way—" And he actually hummed it for my benefit.

"I thought as you were a grass widow—"

I winced. "Ah, I see."

**A**FTER he had gone I stood a long time beside the closed door without moving. My hotel sitting-room looked gloomier than ever. I crossed at last to the window and glanced out. The narrow Gibraltar street was dark and muddy. I turned back shivering, put out the lights and groped my way into my bedroom.

Jeannette had not yet come up. She had been unusually inattentive. She had not even unpacked my night things. She was doubtless receiving callers in the servant's quarters—Lord Bodeam's valet or the General's orderly.

What a stale and ugly farce this is in which maids and their mistresses become similarly entangled!

I did not ring for her. I was not in a hurry. It seemed to be quite unnecessary to hurry about anything. There was nothing, in fact, worth hurrying for. I sat in the uncomfortable chair at my dressing table, leaned forward with my chin in my hands, stared dully at my reflection in the glass, and waited to be unhooked.

The self I saw rather bored me. I admit she may have been fascinating to some people. It would be false humility to deny it. The follies of men have proved it. I admit, too, that she had a thoroughbred look. Her face, you know, has always appealed to fashionable portrait painters—Mowbray, Duplessis and the rest. They say she carries her head so well, and wears good clothes so naturally.

But I always mistrust the compliments of fashionable portrait painters. They have fish to fry.

What did it matter, anyway? The point was this: was there no trace of bitterness in the expression of this woman in the glass? I hoped not. The subtlest suggestion of that would ruin whatever charm she had. I would have fought against it to the last ditch—to the last wrinkle—which is the same thing in a woman's warfare.

Yes, I'd have fought that little trace of bitterness even with paint. What a paradox and mockery it is that woman's most desperate battles are sham battles!

I rose and rang impatiently for Jeannette.

My sleep was the sort that seems to be only about an inch deep. All night long Pinkie's sickening refrain from the song about the grass widow rang ceaselessly in my head. And curiously enough, I had that funny nightmare I used to have when we were first married—that I had lost my wedding ring and everyone was staring at me. I woke up, and somehow I had to get up and get it—I've always kept it, as a sort of souvenir—and put it on for a moment or two. I went to sleep more soundly then. But the next morning I had a headache—I, who hardly ever do. But you see it was the Pinkie brand.

More later, Kenneth. I must stop for the present. The mere memory of that headache is almost giving me another.

Yours,  
SYBIL.

Grand Hotel Suisse, Cordova.  
March 19th, 19—

DEAR KEN:

I'm in the mood for writing to you again, though I have heard nothing from you and you don't deserve a letter. I find that it entertains me to journalize for your benefit. It serves two purposes—it helps me to analyze and understand the curious things that are happening to me—also to keep you from escaping the salutary influence of your wife that was.

I'll begin with General Camoys. It seems appropriate. There's something about our friendship which has, so to speak, a lot of beginningness about it. And the end is not in sight.

I have told you of my first night in Gibraltar. Now for the second, which I much prefer to remember—though it too was disturbing—but in such a different way.

I had really been humble minded enough to suppose that General Camoys would be too busy resuming his military duties even to think of me again. He evidently wasn't. He dined with me at my hotel.

Arthur Delaney was thoroughly enraged. He had to leave the next day for London, so that was his last evening. He wildly refused to make a third at dinner, and rushed off head-

long to dine with a chalky Spanish woman at Algeciras, who had scraped an acquaintance with him on the steamer.

I cannot blame Arthur. The General's manner toward him is really insufferable—simply as if he didn't even see him. That would be sufficient under any circumstances to offend the pride of a man like Arthur, but in the present instance it must have been terribly exasperating. You see the General ignored him not because Arthur was Arthur, but because I was I.

It was as if everyone else had put on invisible caps for the time being, and he looked straight through them all at me—without even knowing that he was doing so. What a world of psychological meaning there is in the old fairy tales, with their invisible caps and magic wands and carpets, and miraculous transformations! People say we oughtn't to teach such nonsense to modern children. We ought to teach them all facts. We ought to impart only useful analogies—such as how the flowers get married, and the physiology of the queen bee. Perhaps they're right. The psychology of fairy stories is too advanced a study.

After dinner, the General took me high up on the Rock to a vantage point where civilians are allowed. And there we looked down upon a scene full of mystery and enchantment. Far off to our left over the sea, the moon rose large and bright, flooding our view from one side like a spotlight in a theater.

I felt that I was living in a painting and wondered why there is all this talk about Art as apart from Nature, when Nature herself is capable of such tricky effects and illusions.

BELLOW us the harbor was spangled with the lights of ships of all nations, and off to the right, far down, lay the cluster of luminous windows that is Algeciras at night. Arthur was down there somewhere with his chalky Spanish woman. I felt a sort of motherly concern for him as I looked down at the lights. I asked the General an unanswerable question—motherly questions are so apt to be unanswerable.

"How far does a man go when he reacts?"

He shrugged.

"How far does a bullet go when it ricochets? That's one of the things we cannot estimate. Sometimes the distance is incredible, the result appalling. I once knew a man who went to a house in Park Lane, and ricocheted all the way to India."

"Was the woman to blame?"

"No."

"You say that to be charitable."

"No—you see it's the incalculable chance."

We stood gazing out into the distances beyond the Strait. The atmosphere was no longer very clear. The Mediterranean lay like a silver field vaguely spangled here and there with touches of gold and purple and white, as if strewn with buttercups, gentians and lilies.

I've seen people smile at modern paintings—I've heard so often the supercilious question, "Now what is *that* supposed to be? That's not Nature."

Then neither was this Nature that claimed us to-night. It might have been a sea; it might have been a field; it might have been an immense artificial panorama. What then was the secret of this picture? Does the Divine Painter *always* know His meaning? I like to think not.

It seems to me I saw a great shadow beyond the sea—a mountain in Morocco.

"Do I really see it?" I asked the General. "Or do I merely imagine so because I know it's there?"

He shrugged again.

"Do you know it's there? How do you know the mountain hasn't been moved hence and cast into the sea? What difference does it make, anyway—as long as you think you're looking at it? That's life, isn't it?"

"Yes, but tell me."

"Can't you take it on faith?"

"I suppose I can. It's so much easier to take shadows on faith than other things."

"But that mountain isn't a shadow. It's one of the Pillars of Hercules. Another's behind us. We are standing at the gate."

I understood that his meaning was not geographical.

"That gate is well defended," I said, "here on our side."

**H**E'S not the sort of man whose expressions respond to the passing word. He seems to have evolved beyond mere smiles and frowns.

"Yes; but the gate is open to friendly powers." I cannot describe the way he said that word *friendly*. In spite of the hosts of friends he must have, his voice had a note of hunger in it.

"Over there," he said, still gazing at the dim horizon, "lies the Garden of the Hesperides."

Something in him compels me to personalities. Perhaps it's because I know that from other women he would resent them. Whereas from me he seems almost to need them—he is so lonely at heart. There's nothing more dangerous than being needed.

"The Garden of the Hesperides," I echoed musingly. "Have you ever eaten of the fruit?"

He shook his head.

"Happiness is a legend."

I could have wept for him. Our conversation had suddenly assumed a sort of subtle abruptness, more sympathetic than tears.

"It's now you who lack faith," I told him. "What did she do? Of course you were the man who went to India."

He did not seem surprised that I had taken this for granted—we were taking so much for granted, he and I. He answered:

"She made me choose between her and the Army. She was not fitted for knocking about with a soldier all over the world."

"I see. She preferred the adventures of Park Lane."

"I don't know. I don't blame her. She was doubtless wise to look for happiness where she thought she'd find it."

"Did she find it?"

"I hope so."

"That's like you."

He quietly turned to me for the first time.

"Would you have made me choose?"

**T**HAT took my breath away. I have known a great many men, and some have said a lot more to me than that—but I have never had exactly the same feeling of being as it were in a corner—a corner that I couldn't escape from if I would, and wouldn't escape from if I could.

I wish I might make you understand, but of course a man can't understand—a man's content just to do the cornering.

But General Camoys did not seem to be flirting with me. The art of flirtation seldom achieves such quiet directness.

So I was off my guard. That's the commonest mistake we women make. We're always on guard against sham—never against sincerity. We make a pretense of fearing flirts—we don't even pretend to fear a lover. Yet the one is a mere bogie man—a mere Pinkie—and the other a real danger.

And as for the man who's both—the man who has sincere moments—he's the most dangerous of all. He has the advantage of believing now and then in his insincerity—he deceives women because he deceives himself.

Lawrence Camoys is one of those men. At least I think so. I don't know, and probably he doesn't know either. That's the baffling part of him—the fatal fascination of him. It may be that he's insincere and has sincere moments, or it may be that he's sincere and has insincere moments. Which the moment was that night as we stood together high above the sea, I shall never know.

I answered:

"If I had loved you I would have knocked about the world with you. I'd not have preferred Park Lane."

"Yet you American women are very cold."

"Are we?"

"You have that reputation."

"Perhaps so. But we often lose our reputations."

"Does that imply heart?"

"Sometimes. Besides, you must not judge all of us by those who buy coronets. And even that isn't as American a failing as people think. You English do it yourselves."

"It's nice to think that there are still some privileges that can't be bought," he said.

I could not help asking him what privilege he meant.

He answered for the first time, rather awkwardly:

"This standing here with you, you know."

I nodded. I honestly shared his feeling about it, but I could not help smiling. He was not as grown up as I had thought.

"It's rather jolly—don't you think so?" he said.

I had rather expected that adjective, and somehow it pleased me when it came—it was so natural to him, and sincere, and the opposite of high-flown.

**W**HAT a conglomerate abundance of approval the English pour into that word *jolly*. Never was another adjective so prodigally and multifariously misused in any language. It applies to everything nice, from buns to Beethoven. I have even heard it describe a sarcophagus in a Cathedral crypt.

So I realized that the General was not trailing off into flippancy. But that was actually the extent of his gallantry that night. You see the episode finishes, as most of them do in real life, with an anti-climax.

Our mysterious moonlight and mountains became in the end merely "jolly." I wonder if the whole affair will end as lightly? I suppose I ought to hope so—but you see I'm a woman, so I don't.

As we walked home, he asked:

"Where do you go from here?"

"To Granada."

"Good. I shall be passing through. And then?"

"Cordova."

"I might stop there on my way to England. Where next?"

"Madrid and Paris."

"It would be nice if our dates fitted."

"Very."

"And then you're coming to London?"

"Yes."

"Splendid!"

We were now at my hotel, and he gave me one of those handshakes in which there's more hand than shake. It was the sort of quiet grasp that bears about the same relation to the handshake of convention as a spell-bound silence does to chatter.

I could not help realizing how much the friendship of such a man might mean to a woman alone in a world peopled with Pinkies.

Doubtless I have been unwise to let myself dwell on that thought, but you see, as I have said, he put me off my guard at the start—and once you're off you can't so easily get on it again.

Remember that, Kenneth. And now good-by for the present.

Bewilderedly,

SYBIL.

P. S.—Arthur came to see me the next morning, and said that the Spanish woman ate such horrid things for dinner that he couldn't stand her. I'd have known anyway that he'd been a good boy. It's so easy to tell. He forgave me very generously for dining with his rival. In fact, he heaped coals of fire on my head. He asked me to marry him.

#### CHAPTER IV

Hotel Ritz, Paris.  
April 5th, 19—

EAR KENNETH:

Not a word from you in answer to any of my letters or my telegram! I cannot help being anxious. I know it's silly, but I can't help feeling that you're in some sort of trouble.

I do hope that designing madonna of yours has not chained you to her shrine. If she has, of course you have no more capacity for letter writing than a whirling dervish. Does that sound rather incongruous?—a whirling dervish at a Christian shrine? Perhaps it's not as incongruous as you suppose.

There's as much East as West in a man who's infatuated. That's where the twain do meet—in spite of Kipling.

Ah, well—enshrine her if you must, after the approved Christian fashion—

set lilies at her feet, a diadem in her hair—keep the altar-flame burning perpetually—and imagine yourself a monk at his devotions.

Oh, deluded one! Can't you see that it's all a parody of true adoration? Can't you see that she's only a make-believe madonna—a mere image of an image? And can't you realize that even you yourself are not genuine? It's like passing off a counterfeit on a counterfeiter.

You poor dear, with your trumpery offerings which you pretend to think so real!—your waxen lilies—your "perpetual flame" that will flicker out at the first breath of fresh air!

Do you think these are symbols of her immaculacy? No. They are symbols of her mock modesty.

And don't for an instant imagine yourself a Christian monk, because you're not and never will be. The truth is you're as hopelessly Oriental through all this mummery as if you were smoking opium and wearing a pigtail!

I can't help telling you frankly, my dear Kenneth, that your whole course of action since I left you seems to me highly irrational. The very moment you're divorced in monogamous America, off you go as fast as you can to polygamous Asia! It really does worry me. It suggests a disastrous drop from the frying pan into the fire.

Well, Kenneth—I'm afraid the heart of every man is a sort of harem at best—filled with a lot of—what shall I call them?—*momentary women*.

Oh, these *momentary women*, Kenneth—their shadows lengthen into Eternity! Do beware of them.

What are you saying? I seem to hear you muttering about glass houses.

Well, I suppose you're right, Ken. I suppose I myself have been little more than a *momentary woman* so far as you're concerned. But surely I have some advantage over the fly-by-night variety. I am, so to speak, more permanent.

You see, I can truthfully sign myself:

Always and forever your divorced wife,

SYBIL.

Hotel Ritz, Paris.  
April 12th, 19—

DEAR KEN:

Still no word from you!—not a line for almost a month. Of course I realize that as my letters have to be forwarded to you from your bankers and as you are pretty constantly on the move, delays are inevitable, but even if you were traveling in another planet I ought to have heard from you by now—at any rate, in reply to my earlier letters.

Can it be that you are merely obstinate and won't write because you don't approve of this correspondence?

Is it because you really do hate me, Kenneth? I almost hope that's the reason. I'd rather have you hate me than love somebody else.

Remember, Ken, she's a married woman, and why on earth your divorce should convey any privileges to her, no one but a *Mad Hatter* would be ingenious enough to explain. The trouble is that you would be lured into an affair so innocently, you would go at it in such an old-fashioned, romantic, treasure-seeking sort of way that you would not see the danger until too late.

And all the time she would know she was doing wrong. She would be absolutely prosaic and practical in her complete comprehension of the morality and psychology and physiology of the situation. She might, of course, appear to lend herself to your adventurous crusade, your "high emprise" sort of madness—but inwardly she would be about as adventurous as a loaf of bread.

You see, Kenneth, women always know it when they're doing wrong. It's only men who have the happy faculty of breaking the ten commandments through rose-colored spectacles.

I suppose you are again wondering at my immense display of worldly wisdom. I have acquired a lot, haven't I, Kenneth? I only hope it doesn't go too deep into me, that's all, and taint the source. I don't mind it so much on the surface,—it helps,—but I don't want it to get really into my blood, you know. It's one thing to be vaccinated by worldly wisdom—it's quite another thing to have the smallpox.

Do you remember how we used to learn at school that the earth was shaped like an orange? I don't want to learn at this later school that the orange is decidedly over-ripe.

I MET a Spaniard in Granada—Don Miguel d'Estranza—who had a letter of introduction to me from one of the Spanish attachés in Washington. His attentions rather tended to foster my unpleasant conclusions as to the world's over-ripeness. He was not at all the Don of history or fiction. He was the very antithesis of a Don Quixote.

His face was sallow and rather puffy, though he could not have been over thirty. His hair was black, sleek and scant. His lips were unnaturally red—almost as if he had rouged them—and his little mustache, like a line of black paint, was too flat to hide them. His black eyes were heavy-lidded, as if he needed sleep, and he had a habit of opening them wide now and then and staring about as if trying vainly to overcome an ennui that was like a drug.

In height, he came about to my shoulder. His figure had the degenerate look—meager, undersized, and supine—the shoulders round, the chest hollow, and the back slightly protruding.

He dressed in English tweeds, which ill-became him—they seemed so much too sturdy for him. As I noticed them I could not help inwardly inveighing against the crass stupidity of tailors that they could be such unimaginative slaves to their own fashion plates as to clothe a man like d'Estranza in exactly the same garb as General Camoys.

His gloves, however, were more in accord with his emasculated appearance. They were of light yellow kid, which accentuated every little snare and cynical gesture. I can see them now in my mind's eye—a sort of yellow blur flickering in front of him.

He's the kind of person one remembers out of focus. In spite of my detailed description, he's indeterminate to me—a shadow with this yellow blur on it, and a patch of sallow face with a spot of vermillion for the lips—a creature atrophied, and yet vaguely virile in its decadence.

Don't you think I've described him rather graphically, Kenneth? Do you know I believe I have a sort of literary sense hidden away in me somewhere. Even you used to admit that I had a knack of expressing things easily. Or perhaps it comes from traveling on my own. That does sharpen one's wits.

What a pity it is that the intrusion of a personality like d'Estranza's, such an insidious little personality, could have utterly spoiled for me a city like Granada? It was as if I had a speck of dust in my eye.

**H**E SEEMED at first to be only courteous—hospitable on behalf of his birthplace. He was polite and considerate in his attentions and, as he proved to be well versed in Andalusian history and custom, I accepted them.

He showed me the Generaliffe, with its enchanted courts and gardens—told me fascinating stories of the family that had once lived and died there, generation after generation. And he took me to the wall, and we looked down at Granada, and he gave me quick bird's-eye impressions of the city's immortal past.

But even then something indefinable in his manner was beginning to spoil it all.

The next day he took me to the Alhambra, and I wished I had gone alone—because I was thinking of you, Kenneth, and your own architectural work—of how you have adapted so successfully the architecture of the old world to the needs of the new.

As I stood in that loveliest of all courts—the Court of the Lions—and looked at the countless fairy columns and the marble lace-work above them and the fountain, which is so inevitably the center of it all, I could not help saying to myself:

"How Kenneth would love it!"

Don Miguel then showed me the many hued tiles on the walls, whose lustrous glazing is a lost art. He showed me, too, the Ferdinand-and-Isabella inscription cut in the stone at the time of the Spanish occupation, when the Moors were driven from this glorious Alhambra of theirs forever. He said:

"You must see where the Moorish women bathed," and I saw the apartments and marble bath which had been used centuries ago by Linderaja, the favorite.

"The Moors knew how to keep their women faithful," said Don Miguel with an ironical smile. "They locked them up. They kept them secret, like the secret of their beautiful tiles. But we modern men have lost that art also. Yet we still can look at beautiful women."

He glanced up at me sideways, and his glance made me think of a lizard. It did not seem harmful, but merely alert and tentative—yet there was something undeniably reptilian about it.

I became doubly engrossed in historical data. I tried to think of a subject appropriate and yet particularly dry—much drier in fact than the baths of the harem.

Somehow this Linderaja, the beautiful favorite, though dead for hundreds of years, seemed dangerously alive at the moment. But she interested me. There are few women, I suppose, who haven't a sort of personal interest in the far-off sister who has been a power behind a throne. I couldn't help asking Don Miguel to tell me more about Linderaja.

**S**O HE recounted for me the glowing legends which I had not heard before—the story of the tourney in her behalf—the mysterious knight from England. He admitted that for once the lost art of locking woman up had failed. He told me of her last secret tryst within these very walls—and of how it was discovered. He took me to that part of the palace where the floor is darkly stained—the scene of her lord's vengeance against Linderaja and her lover.

He told it in the broken yet formal phrases of the foreigner speaking English—told it with all the irony and cynicism of the Spaniard of his type and class, and yet with a touch of genuine romance.

It was as if I had come on the flower of chivalry lying brown and dead on the ground. There was, indeed, not only the sadness but also the unpleas-

antness of dead flowers about him—a sort of staleness that makes a person impatient to throw them away.

He took me to a stunted orange tree that grew under one of the walls, and told me that according to tradition this tree marked the spot of Linderaja's fatal rendezvous. He pulled off one of the oranges and gave it to me as a souvenir. It was very small and withered.

The shadows of afternoon were deepening around us. He proceeded to spoil the Alhambra for me as he had spoiled the Generalife. He said:

"A man and a woman stood here then—a man and a woman stand here now. That's one art that is not lost."

I smiled with a sort of vague, deaf look, which every woman should keep in her armory. But I was not even yet really disturbed. This was only the troubadour in him—the perished past—the unpleasant dead flower of song and chivalry.

"No," I said casually, "it's easier to lose the trick of putting a gloss on tiles than the trick of putting a gloss on other things."

**H**E HAD no answer to that. He seemed to be trying to translate my meaning into Spanish. Evidently it was untranslatable, at any rate the philosophy of it—he looked so puzzled.

This was undoubtedly the propitious moment in which to absent myself from the Alhambra shadows. I said something about its being cold and late, and he took me home with Chesterfieldian politeness.

Before leaving me, he asked me if I might not be interested in seeing the gypsies in their caves on the outskirts of the town. He said the gypsy girls would dance for me, and their dances were as old as the hills they lived in—yet always new. He warned me that it would not be safe for me to go alone—the men were such thieves and cut-throats.

Of course I saw that it was a choice of evils. On the one hand a band of thievish gypsies lay in wait for me—on the other hand a rentilian Don. But I was keen for the adventure at all hazards—there was something so unlike

New York and Washington about it, and the dances promised to be quite refreshing after a course of White House balls.

Deciding that the gypsies would be less amenable than little Don Miguel to the subtle disuasions of deaf looks and aphorisms, I accepted him as my guide and protector.

Obviously I was a fool. But I've always felt safe with small men as protectors—they seem so much less dangerous than big ones. It's rather bad luck, don't you think, to belong to a sex that finds it risky even to be protected?

The next afternoon we climbed the hill that leads to the caves of the gypsies of Granada. I wish we hadn't.

I must now close, Kenneth, as it's time to dress for dinner.

Yours,  
SYBIL.

(*Telegram*)

Cairo, April 20th, 19—  
Please send letter telling end Don affair immediately.

KENNETH.

Hotel Ritz, Paris.  
April 21st, 19—

**D**EAR KENNETH:

How well my little stratagem succeeded! At last I have heard from you, and though it's only a telegram it tells me that you are still in the land of the living, and exactly where.

I hoped your curiosity would get the better of you. It didn't seem possible that you'd permit me to break off short at that exciting moment.

Forgive me for the ruse. The "Don affair," as you call it, was all too true. My one invention was "having to dress for dinner," and that was a fib by only a few minutes.

So you have come further west than you anticipated? You did not "about face" and return home by way of the Pacific.

Oh, Kenneth, how I would like to hear all about your journeyings. Did you really devote your time to the study of the temples of Japan, Ind'a and

Ceylon? And if so, was the study serious, professional, architectural—in short—and this is the vital point—did you pursue this study alone? If not, then it simply couldn't have been serious. So far as temples go, you will have learned nothing.

If she was with you and you remained in the state of imbecile credulity which possessed you in Yokohama, your chapters on Oriental architecture will be a perfect hodge-podge of misinformation. I really cannot bear to think of the rainbow tinted idiocy that may appear before the world as the work of my distinguished divorced husband!

It's a thousand to one, Ken, you don't know the difference between a Shinto shrine and the House that Jack Built!

But was she with you? Tell me that. Surely you did not travel together unchaperoned? I feel it in my bones that you've been in trouble. Of course I realize how guilelessly you could do it—under your precise and polished exterior, you're so unconventional. You're the sort of man the fine old mottoes fit. *Honi soit—Noblesse oblige*—and all that sort of thing. But that's your weakness, Kenneth. I hope you have done nothing to taint those ancient splendors with the touch of irony so often applied to them to-day.

**D**ID you really suppose I was not going to finish the story of my adventure with Don Miguel? I am—though, to tell the truth, I'd gladly let it drop.

Remember, I had seen the little Spaniard oftener than you may realize. You see, he took care to play the guide, and he knew such a lot about Granada's history and flashed such brilliant sidelights on that and other subjects that I—well, you can't blame me, can you, Kenneth, for having accepted his services?

The dancing of the Spanish gypsies even surpassed my expectations. I shall never forget the impression I received in the cave we visited. On entering it, I found myself in a sort of central cavern, a dark, small hollow in the breast of the hill. The roof, which was part of the hill itself, slanted so

low and the uneven hillside walls shut us in so closely that we seemed to be in a veritable trap.

We were evidently in a sort of central living room. There were great holes in the wall that opened into passages and bedrooms that were no bigger than boxes. The place was like a rabbit warren and very stuffy.

But I quickly forgot my first sense of fear and discomfort. The dance of one young girl in particular I shall always remember. We stood ranged close against the walls—half a dozen gypsies, Don Miguel and I. In one of the bedroom doorways stood a woman nursing a baby. She was watching the dance with a sort of impassive surliness impossible to fathom.

In another little room a white-haired old woman was sitting up in bed peering in at us with the same sort of unkind eyes. And I noticed that the faces of the men were just as resentful and inhospitable. Obviously they put up with our presence only because we were profitable visitors.

I wondered if this enmity of theirs was only racial, or whether for some reason they disliked Don Miguel. He had seen to it that I stood conveniently near the door, which I could have opened in an instant.

In spite of the Don's wasted little figure, I felt that his being here insured my safety. Though any one of these savage looking brutes could have disposed of him with a single blow, there was undeniably a subtle quality in him that held them as if in chains.

**T**HE central chamber in which we stood was not lighted, but the gloom was partly dispelled by an unseen lamp which shed its yellow light across our circle from one of the bedrooms.

D'Estranza was facing this light and I saw that his blinking eyes had the drugged look which bespoke his incurable ennui, and yet I felt that he was alert with an alertness which was not of mere outward eye and ear but of secret and more delicately perceptive senses.

And though the premature senility of his physique caused by sensuous indulgence and breeding to one strain was

accentuated by the primitive cave and the primitive men he stood facing, this too seemed to hide something latently efficient. As I've told you, he's the sort of man one remembers out of focus. Often I even saw him out of focus—at any rate I must have then. It seemed to me that as he stood there, responsible for my safety, there was something more than ever reminiscent in his personality, but it was not the troubadour spirit now. It was something about him that glimmered cloudily—like tarnished old armor. It was knightly. He was even that, for the moment—even a *Don Quixote!*

The girl who had kept us waiting entered from one of the bedrooms. She wore a shabby old scarlet dress with black velvet trimmings that looked moth-eaten. Her neck was bare, and her arms. She wore no beads, and her tangled black hair was without ornaments. She did not even carry a tambourine. She wore red cotton stockings and a pair of old kid slippers without buckles or bows. She could not have been over fourteen, and she looked as dowdy a little vixen as it's possible to conceive.

Afterward, when she danced, I decided her lack of adornment was an affectation—or else that she felt a savage contempt for anything less vital than blood and fire. And even then, at first, I felt she was the incarnate spirit of her tribe, that she had stripped herself of all of their trinkets and everything superfluous, retaining only their passions. It was as though she had absorbed for the moment all of the seething malice of these people, and was there to express for them the thing they themselves dared not loose.

**S**UDDENLY she gave utterance to it. She began to dance. She danced slowly at first, and I saw that her hands were a thousand times more effective minus the conventional tambourine. There was none of the rattle and tinkle, none of the little staccato knocking and tapping, none of the tricky spinning and balancing. How she must have scorned all that!

Never have I seen such hands, Kenneth, or rather such motions of hands.

It was as if they were feeling for something in the air—feeling for it ever more and more feverishly—something that was around her and below her. First it seemed to be something that Hell had sent up to her, and she seemed to greet it as it rose, and love it, and to lift it to her childish breast and fondle it there. Then it seemed something quite different descending on her from above, and she hated that, and reached up her unescapable hands and pulled it down and dashed it to the bare ground and stamped on it with her little feet in fury.

She danced faster and faster. Her scarlet dress seemed to burn—seemed to give out blinding light and withering heat. It was as if a flame were devastating the cave.

You can imagine the scene, Kenneth—the light from the side, the silent watching figures, the queer shadows on the walls. I remember that the shadow of the baby in the woman's arms looked like an ungainly monster.

And there was no sound whatever. The girl uttered none of the little cries of Andalusian dancers. There was something disturbingly silent about her. It was only her body that cried out.

I glanced at Don Miguel, toward whom her dance seemed to be mainly directed. His expression had not changed, but I had a feeling that he was looking bored just to exasperate her.

Suddenly she went close to him, faced him, and stopped. She stood transfixed and cold, with such a sharp effect of arrested motion—such a wanton killing of all rhythm and movement—that I felt my own heart stand still. I wish I could describe what I mean. It was like a sudden death-stroke. There was nothing outwardly sensual in this trick of hers—nothing of the physical suggestiveness which had characterized many of her motions—yet, curiously enough, it seemed by far the worst thing she had done.

It burned like ice.

**B**UT Don Miguel only shrugged a little and smiled at her with an assumption of mild entertainment.

The pause was breathless. I think she could have killed him.

After that her dance was rather listless and aimed toward no one in particular.

Don Miguel soon grew really bored, and so, when we had paid the girl's father the sum he demanded, we came away.

How refreshing it was to get out into the air and daylight! You see the adventure so far was quite harmless. I had braved the gypsies' den and escaped unscathed. Perhaps you think this episode too dwindle down at the end to an anti-climax. Possibly it does—possibly that is where Tragedy begins. Tragedy on the stage mounts splendidly to its climax—it is rational and triumphant—it achieves great spiritual disasters. But in life—well, Kenneth, sometimes Tragedy seems to have lost its majesty. What is it but just this dwindling process—a succession of unnecessary little "come-downs" and anti-climaxes?

We went to a café in a garden just off one of Granada's avenues. It was a sort of minor Bois de Bologne. There we had afternoon tea together, and before we had finished I said to myself, "Worse things happen over the tea-cups than ever were dreamed of in gypsy dens." At the second cup he asked me to marry him, and my very first thought was that his friend in the Embassy in Washington had written to him that I was rich. I knew I attracted him personally—I had a feeling that the gypsy girl's dance was, in some way, the cause of his nervous proposal—and yet I suspected that his chief motive was mercenary.

I told him that I had misgivings about marriage and had made up my mind never to try it again. I laughed with an assumption of lightness and said I had sworn off.

He opened his eyes wide in that curious way of his and stared about him, not at anything in particular but as if at Life. It was the characteristic blank look in which he seemed to be seeking relief for that incurable ennui.

**H**E LOOKED at me, and his heavy lids drooped again. He appeared more bored and yet more feverish than I had ever seen him.

Must I tell you, Kenneth, what he said and did? It will always remain branded on my memory. He said:

"I have a little house in Malaga—a lovely villa on the sea. If the Señora does not like the forms of marriage, why not—"

He seized my hand and pressed his lips against it, and for the instant I had the same stricken feeling that I had when the girl had stopped her dance short. The touch of his lips burned like ice.

You can imagine, Kenneth, my inward fury and scorn and shame. What was there in me that had given him this daring? Can it be that if marriage is a veil, setting a woman apart, divorce is a sort of spiritual undressing? Could it have been that the dancing girl's deathlike full stop, which had seemingly failed to touch him in the cave, had carried forward with provocative subtlety to this tea-table in a garden? The indefinable evil of that moment of hers had indeed seemed too virulent and far reaching to fail utterly. There had been something in it that must inevitably come to fruition, sooner or later, somewhere.

Or was it that the information in the letter from Washington still dominated his purpose?

I arose without a word, looked down at him a moment in utter indifference, without paying him the compliment of appearing even contemptuous, and strolled out of the garden alone.

He evidently understood. He did not follow me and, thank God, I have not seen him again.

You can imagine, Kenneth, that when General Camoys arrived in Granada the next morning, it was as if the Rock of Gibraltar itself had moved up there to defend me against the world.

Write to me soon, Ken.

Yours, slightly battered in spirit,  
SYBIL.



# LIFE'S ROAD

*Another of Miss Hoover's whole-souled stories of  
Jule and her son Jasper and her  
husband Milo.*

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By BESSIE R. HOOVER

*Author of "Pa Flickinger's Folks," "Jule's Dream Farm," "Diet Day," etc.*

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THE golden leaves had fallen from the young shade trees of Loretta Avenue, a thoroughfare of poor men's homes; a violet haze softened the outlines of the dingy street; sturdy zinnias bloomed redly in the cluttered front yards; and the voices of playing children were like half-perceived bird-calls to Jule Peebles, as she sat on the front porch of their little bungalow, behind the yellowing vines, waiting for a letter from her son Jasper, who was attending the State University in a distant town.

Loretta Avenue seemed almost to hold its breath as the postman came down the sidewalk, and Jule's very soul was absorbed in his approach, for she had received no word from her son for weeks; but when the postman passed the bungalow without even glancing that way, Jule arose and stood gazing unhappily after him, while Mrs. Simmons, a next-door neighbor, who got a letter that afternoon from her daughter Mamie, commented with offensive sympathy on Jule's disappointment.

Mrs. Jule Peebles was a thin, high-strung woman, and though scarcely middle-aged, had a white-streaked pompadour. She soon entered the house to get supper for her husband,

Milo Peebles,—a gray, quiet little man who worked early and late in a factory—and for Dorothy Mead, a nurse, whom Jule boarded in order to earn extra money for Jasper's education.

Dorothy Mead, a slight, dark-haired young woman, soon came home; she turned expectantly to Jule, the moment she entered the room.

"*No letters,*" informed Jule Peebles, and her despondency was reflected in Dorothy's face.

THAT evening as Jule and the nurse, who was quite one of the family, and Milo sat on the front porch in the pleasant moonlight, Jule said for the fortieth time that day: "I can't see into Jappie's not writin' any more."

"It aint worryin' me a bit," declared her husband.

"'Cause you hate to write a letter yourself," accused his wife. "But first Jappie wrote once a week to us and sometimes oftener to Dorothy here. Is that boy sick, 'way off at that there university—or is he forgettin' his folks?"

"We ought not to doubt him," claimed Dorothy Mead.

"That's the way to look at it," responded Milo gratefully.

"Yes, I know, Dottie, you take a

cheerful view, bein' trained that way as a nurse; but you're feelin' jest as queer about his not writin' as I be," affirmed Jule. "You and Jappie got pretty well acquainted early in the fall while I was so sick, helpin' each other with the housework—and he promised to write to you too."

"If you're goin' to worry over all of Jappie's girls, you wont do much else," her husband spoke dryly.

"I supposed when I got Jasper started into college the last of September that all my troubles would be ended," complained the boy's mother, "and here I am so worried I can't half eat or rest or sleep."

"You can't get your strength back if you don't stop worrying," pointed out the nurse.

"I was a-gettin' better every day, Dottie, with you showin' me how to diet—till his letters stopped," reminded Jule. "And I could set five or ten minutes with folded hands without doin' a stitch of work—and jest rest." Which was a great triumph in self-control for Jule Peebles.

"Jasper's probably tired of writin' so many letters, and mebbe he's havin' to study harder," said Milo.

"OR COULD it be some entirely new girl that's takin' his time?" imagined Jule. "Last summer it was Mignon Gray he was engaged to; but after that was broke off, he seemed interested in Dottie here. And he's such a good-lookin' lad the girls jest naturally pile after him."

"You can't blame a high-lifed young feller like our Jappie for skylarkin' with the girls a little," claimed his father.

"But he ought not to git engaged to anybody till he gits his education. You needn't mind my speakin' so plain about it, Dottie, 'cause it aint nothin' personal," excused Jule.

"He certainly shouldn't think of marrying while he's working his way through college." But after Dorothy Mead spoke, she sighed, and then added thoughtfully: "And there may be some perfectly good explanation why Jasper doesn't write."

"Dottie, you're such a good little

thing that it hurts you to believe ill of anybody; but I know Jappie better than you do—he aint perfect," allowed Jule, which was more than she would have wanted anybody else to say. "And mebbe Mignon Gray is writin' to him now and has set him ag'in' us. I wouldn't put it past her—bein' one of them sweet-actin' girls that will have a beau. Oh, I can't help but fear that it's girls that's—"

"Give the boy a chance," broke in his father, impatiently. "Take your mind off'n his letters, Jule, and probably one will come in a day or two."

"I've tried that—and I've tried not watchin' for the postman."

"Then write to Jappie and tell him jest how you feel; he'll answer back quick enough," claimed Milo.

"No, sir!" sharply refused his wife. "I have stopped writin' to that lad till he writes to me. And if we wasn't still payin' instalments on our bungalow, I 'ud take a little money and go and see what is the matter, but poor folks can't travel 'round like millionaires."

"Forget the letter—and look forward to Christmas, when the boy'll be home," advised his father.

"Christmas!" echoed Jule disconsolately. "Mebbe he can't come; he might be layin' sick and helpless somewhere. And I could bear his not writin' better if I didn't have to stand the sympathy of Mis' Simmons. What if her Mamie, who's workin' in South Bend, does write home regular—that don't do me no good? And there aint hardly a day but Mis' Simmons comes walkin' into this house without knockin', and begins tellin' me how dangerous a college town is—when her husband can't scurcely sign his own name."

DAY followed day in golden succession, and still no letter came from Jasper. And by the time the late fall rains began, Jule's anxiety was so great that she often lay awake all night.

On a beautiful Sunday in early December, when neither golden leaves nor fall flowers were left to give color to the dingy street, Dorothy Mead encouraged Jule to take a walk in the bracing air. And as Jule passed down Loretta Avenue, she never even

glanced overhead where opalescent clouds were piled in marvelous temples against the deep blue sky.

"Land, Milo, what's the matter?" she demanded, as her husband came panting up behind.

"It seems so kind of lonesome in the house without you—I thought I'd tag along, too," mumbled Milo sheepishly.

"Lonesome!" echoed Jule, "With Jasper and Janice both gone, it's like a tomb! And when Janice does drop in, she throws out things about Dottie Mead's takin' her place."

"Reverend Crowley's chapel looks rather cheerful," noticed Milo, as they approached a freshly painted building, the narrow, white-curtained windows of which were crowded with blossoming petunias.

A TALL old man, whose hair was snow-white and whose eyes glowed with friendly warmth, opened a side door. It was the Reverend John Crowley, founder of the mission. "I haven't seen you folks for the longest time; come in and rest," he invited.

"I hear you're worrying about your son," began the old man, as soon as they were seated in a small room in the rear of the building.

"Oh, Reverend Crowley, how can we help worryin'? Not a word from that boy for weeks, though we keep sendin' him the post-office money orders jest as we promised. And Monday I sent a registered envelope, so I know he's there. And it does seem every time the postman goes by without stoppin' as if I'd die of doubt. Reverend Crowley, don't you suppose somethin' awful's the matter?"

"No, ma'am, I don't," he returned emphatically. "I've got a leading that the boy's all right. Probably he's so carried away with his new life at the university that he don't stop to realize how you're feeling at home."

Milo's face cleared. "It's come to me a dozen times that there's nothin' to worry about; but Jule's bein' so blue is kinder wearin' on me. He might, you know, be sick."

"Make the best of it till you get news from him," advised John Crowley.

"But I didn't expect such treatment, and I can't make the best of it," disented Jule.

"There's only one thing for you to do, Mrs. Peebles—"

"You mean git religion."

"No," calmly denied the old man, "the longer I live the less I care about what is generally known as 'getting religion.' What you need most, Mrs. Peebles, is to get right with yourself. You're dribbling away your nervous energy fretting about something you're not to blame for. You can run your own life, but you can't run your son's. You've got to take courage and get interested in little things around you. Why, life's like a road; you go on and on; the scenery changes, and sometimes there does seem to be considerable desert to go through—"

"I've been in the Sahara so long now that I'm plumb worn out," interrupted Jule.

"But depend upon it, Mrs. Peebles, if you do your best, the road will lead out to some beautiful view—later on. And as I looked up at the clouds this morning, like holy temples high above us, and realized that they are just the breath of the Great Power that's keeping us all, why, I thought 'The road of life is full of wonderful views.' "

"I've got plenty of trust in things comin' right for other folks," admitted Jule.

"But when I see such beauty—even in the sky—I know that the good things of life are meant for all of us," said John Crowley.

"Beauty is like poetry; I don't have no time for it; I gotta work," Jule said drearily. "I could set by the hour and read Longfeller's poems—we studied 'em to club,—if I had a book and time! But I never considered such things any practical help."

"We all live by words, as much as by bread, when you come to think of it," declared the old minister. "Here's a line of verse I read the other day, 'Courage to face the road.' That's what you need, Mrs. Peebles."

"But it seems kinder sentimental to leave such a little thing as a poetry piece influence your mind."

"Still, courage is what you need.

You've got to go on; and it matters, not only to you, Mrs. Peebles, but to everybody about you—*how* you go on."

"Sure it does," responded Milo. "Sometimes me and Dottie Mead can scurcely eat, Jule's so fidgety. And Jappie's twin sister, Janice, she'd come home oftener if her mother didn't give her the blues."

"I'll write to Jasper myself," promised the old man, after a moment's thought, "—just a friendly note, telling him all about the street—and see if he'll answer me."

"Oh, thank you, Reverend Crowley. I'm sure he wouldn't slight your letter, 'cause Jappie's always awful polite to anybody outside his own family."

"And Jasper hasn't gone to war; you've got that to be thankful for. You know what the war is doing in foreign countries, and 'missing' is all the word of their boys that some mothers will get," he reminded Jule.

"But the thought of other women havin' worse sorrows don't make me no more contented. Still, I've gotta git my health back, or I'll be an old woman afore my time. A continually lookin' for a letter is draggin' me down. And I do imagine the awfulest things that might happen to Jappie—poisoned meat, fevers, and fights with other boys, till I'm as limp as a rag."

"You've got to control your thoughts, and keep a-going the best you can; and when you least suspect it, you'll come to your beautiful view," prophesied John Crowley, as they left him at the door of the mission, looking up at the sky, his fine old face intent on the beauty above.

**R**ESOLUTELY Jule endeavored to forget her poignant desire for a letter. She began to read the dai'y paper, even losing herself at times in thrilling accounts of the great war. And though she received no letter, she sometimes felt that Jasper was longing to see her. And once when Jule heard quick, firm steps cross the porch, she arose giddily, nearly fainting for joy. After all he had planned to surprise her; and she instantly forgave her son the wretchedness of the long weeks.

But it was only Milo, who entered the room and stood smiling pleasantly before her.

"Was it you, Milo Peebles," she angrily inquired, "that walked into this house just like Jasper—with all that clatter?" And tears of bitter disappointment hid her husband for a moment from her sight.

Being well used to his wife's outbreaks, Milo did not perceive that he had been mistaken for his son, but began with unusual animation: "Lawyer Craig he says—"

"I don't care what he says; if it hadn't been for him and his son, probably Jappie'd never 'a' got the fever to be a lawyer—and never left us."

"But Jappie's well and doin' fine and sends his—*love!*" happily shouted Milo.

"Where's your letter?" fiercely demanded Jule.

"It aint a letter from Jappie. Young Craig at the university was writin' his father here, and Jappie sent word to us. There, aint you glad?"

"But jest a drop of news sent careless like through others is almost as heart-breakin' as nothin' at all. And he never writ a word in answer to Reverend Crowley's letter."

Milo's face clouded for a moment, then he said sensibly: "The real thing is—the boy's well and doin' fine, and remembers us in his chum's letter."

**T**HREE Christmas holidays drew near, heralded, even on Loretta Avenue, by the cheerful signs of the season. And Jule tried to forget her anxiety in the preparations for her son's return. Faithfully she cleaned the small house; for since her visit to Reverend John Crowley's mansion, her health had slowly improved.

Jasper was expected the day before Christmas, and that evening, Milo, dressed in his best, went to meet the train, while Jule stayed at home to bake what she called a Poor Man's Cake—which, true to its name, took but one egg. And Dorothy had decorated the rooms with holly.

"It hurts me so I can't work, when I think of treatin' Jappie cool 'cause he stopped writin' to us," Jule told the nurse, "so let's act the first night he's

home, anyway, as if we hadn't minded. And if Jappie don't come with Milo, we wont be discouraged. He might be stopped by half a dozen folks—that boy's turrble popular. And if Mis' Simmons comes in and begins to blab about the presents she expects her Mamie to bring her from South Bend, we'll appear real interested. She's a well-meanin' woman."

Half an hour later, Milo returned without Jasper, and Jule continued her preparations for supper as if nothing were amiss. But for once Milo was miserable; he had had faith in his son, and he had even reached the imaginative heights of encouraging Jule to believe more than he himself felt quite sure of, and now Jasper had not come!

Milo had seen Young Craig at the depot, but had been too proud to inquire why Jasper was not with him; and now the sight of the holly-trimmed room, his wife's becoming white dress, and Dorothy Mead's lace-trimmed pink challis seemed to add to his disappointment.

"We'll eat," decided Jule with forced cheer, when supper was ready. "Probably Jappie came and Milo missed him some way; and he may have stopped in at his sister Janice's first. Land! I wisht it would snow—a bare Christmas gives me the blues."

"It felt like snow when I come home." Milo's voice was apathetic as he took his place at the table and stared disconsolately at the appetizing meal.

"You aint eatin' nothin'," noticed his wife a few minutes later, as she glanced at his untouched plate.

"I aint sick yit," assured Milo with a white face, "but I feel jest like I was goin' to have one of my old spells. My heart's been actin' funny for a week; but I didn't say nothin' thinkin' it might be jest a symptom that'd wear off."

"Oh, land, Milo, if you give out!" exclaimed Jule, dismayed.

"Eat a light supper and then lie right down," advised Dorothy.

"Mis' Simmons ast me as I passed her house if your quiltin' frames was home, and said she might be over after 'em," informed Milo, trying to talk about ordinary things. "There she is

now," he added, as some one opened the front door.

"I don't like any neighbor ramblin' in here day or night without knockin'," complained his wife. "Good evenin'," she called with forced hospitality.

**T**HEN, suddenly into the lighted room, his fine face flushed and eager, walked the once immaculate Jasper Peebles, shaggy-haired and carelessly dressed, and gazed entranced at the holly-trimmed table, his mother and Dorothy Mead in their pretty dresses, and Milo in his best.

"Mother!" cried Jasper, and caught Jule in his arms, just as she fainted for joy for the first time in her life.

And after Jule was quickly revived, Jasper seemed as radiantly happy to be at home as if he had been the most considerate of sons. "How fine you look! Did you do all this—just for me?" he questioned joyfully.

"It's Christmas Eve, Kid," reminded his father jocosely.

"I knew you would come, I knew you would come," repeated Dorothy.

"Dottie, she's the faithfulest girl," informed Jule, glowing with good feeling towards the whole world.

"Of course she is," Jasper said carelessly, scarcely seeming to notice Dorothy, as he smiled radiantly upon his mother. "I hope you're getting stronger, Mamma?" he added anxiously.

"I have been lately; but don't worry about that now. Set down and eat, Jappie dear," begged Jule, having forgotten in the excitement of his arrival her dreary weeks of waiting for a letter. "Your Pa here was so worked up about your not comin' home with Craig that he couldn't eat."

"I never was so hungry in my life, or so glad to get home," assured Jasper, as he sank gratefully into his chair at the table. "I walked from Niles."

"Walked!" echoed his parents and Dorothy Mead.

"Sure, I dropped off the train there. I wasn't much over three hours coming down; I got several rides. I had just enough money to carry me to Niles—and to buy something I wanted," he

added hastily, as if he had said more than he intended. Then he continued, "I found when I got to the university this fall that I had to have books that I hadn't figured on at home, and law books are expensive. Everything took extra money. And I didn't earn as much waiting on tables as I thought I would. But I came away without owing a cent!" he concluded triumphantly.

"Craig might have lent you the money for car-fare, your bein' such friends at high school," asserted Jule.

A shadow passed over Jasper's face. "I couldn't ask Craig for money."

"Didn't he stick by you—after eggin' you on to go to college with him?" jealously questioned Jule.

"Sure he did. We're good friends. But Craig's father is rich. Craig has money to spend. He joined a fraternity and goes with different fellows entirely. I'm working my way."

"How lonesome you must have been," sympathized Dorothy Mead.

"Lonesome! Dorothy, I almost expired before I met Hugh Allison."

"Couldn't you have borrowed money from him?" Jule wanted to know.

"He hasn't any to lend. He's poor, too. He took to me first on account of my name. His mother came from Peebles, Scotland."

"Well, of all things! I never knowed it was a town. But I can't bear to think of your havin' gone so poor; you was always such a lad to have the right kind of clothes—and to walk home from Niles!"

"What harm could walkin' a ways do him?" asked the boy's father. "And the lad done right not to borrow money." Though himself an epitome of all the humble virtues, Milo had never given his son any advice whatever concerning life—but was, nevertheless, intensely gratified at Jasper's self-denial. "And now tell me what you learned," he demanded, leaning his elbows on the table and munching happily at a chicken wing, as he looked proudly at his handsome son.

"What I learned!" repeated the boy. "Why, first of all that the law is much more difficult than I had supposed before I tackled it, and that I should have studied harder at high school; but it's

the only profession for me. And then I learned the meaning of *home!*"

"But what about Cæsar and Hannibal?" Milo wanted to know, connecting in some vague way these bygone worthies with a university course.

"Same old story, only more of it. But I did enjoy the library; I've been reading Shelley and Keats and Tennyson, and I found Charles Lamb—"

"All generals?" Milo inquired.

"Poets, except Lamb—and he was a poet, too, come to think of it. I hate war," broke out Jasper.

"It makes kind of interestin' readin', though," allowed his father mildly.

"But think of all the poor mothers whose only word from their boys will be 'Missin'," put in Jule, whose woe-ful troubles came freshly to her as she looked fondly at her son.

"I—I—SUPPOSE you was too busy to write to us—along towards the last, Jappie." Milo spoke nervously.

"Then you noticed I wasn't writing—the last few weeks of the term."

"Noticed!" broke out Jule, all the heart-ache of those weary weeks finding vent in one word.

"I hoped you wouldn't think much about it. And I sent word by Craig," reminded the young man.

"But just a card, Jasper Peebles, now and then to your mother!" Dorothy Mead said reproachfully.

"But, Dorothy, I couldn't write to anybody—towards the end of the term. I didn't have a cent for postage," confessed the innocent prodigal. "I planned everything out and had just enough for board and lodging and to get home on. Was that why Mamma fainted?"

"No, sir," denied Jule instantly. "I merely fainted 'cause it was you instead of Mis' Simmons that come in; and I'd be glad to faint every time she walks into my house without knockin'—if I could find out it wasn't her. Jest let her crow over me to-morrow with her, 'Oh, Mis' Peebles, step in and see what elegant presents my Mamie fetched me from South Bend!' But, land, what do I care, Jappie, with you safe to home; and knowin' now that you never meant to slight me—but that it was jest lack of stamps!"

"I would have sent you a dozen stamps in every letter, if I'd known how it was," assured Dorothy.

"Oh, it hurts me, Jappie, to think of your bein' so scrimped for money—and waitin' on tables jest like a common lad," lamented his mother.

"But I never had a better time in my life—after I got adjusted a little," claimed Jasper. "And my room-mate, Hugh Allison, had more pride to get rid of than I had; his grandfather is Sir Malcom Allison, and Hugh had been taught a good deal about the importance of the old gentleman's name that he had to unlearn."

"What, a live lord's grandson for a room-mate!" exclaimed Jule with awe. "How you do make friends!"

"Many girls at the university?" asked Milo slyly.

"Stacks of 'em—pretty ones, too."

"Did you git to know any of 'em very well?" Jule's voice was anxious.

"I was too darned poor to go round much," Jasper spoke with sudden savage energy. "Then I didn't have any dress suit, the times I was invited."

"And Mignon Gray—I'll betche she wrote you a string of letters," said his mother.

"I couldn't answer her last two letters." Jasper spoke reluctantly, as if even the mention of the girl to whom he had been engaged, still gave him pain.

"On account of postage?" his mother's voice was sharp.

"Certainly. And now, Mamma, let's not talk any more about her the first night I'm home."

"Aint you goin' to call on her durin' vacation?" Jule was unable to restrain her desire to hear everything in regard to Mignon.

"I don't know yet," Jasper answered in a troubled way.

"But here's Dottie, as sweet a girl as ever lived—and likes you better than you deserve; and yet you take *her* as a matter of course, and keep hankerin' after Mignon Gray, who's nothin'

but those swell clothes. I do wish, Jappie—"

"Tell us more about workin' your way, Kid," diplomatically interrupted his father.

"I found out that working my way through college—means working and thinking. Hugh and I made up our minds not to worry, nor to whine, nor to borrow money—and to study. We know how many cents there are in a dollar now, and how many minutes in an hour. Why, for two weeks we lived on stale bread and the jelly I found Mamma'd packed in my trunk, and we took long walks, too; so I didn't mind walking from Niles one bit. I saved seventy-five cents by doing it, and with that I bought Mamma a Christmas present." Jasper drew a package from his pocket and handed it to his astonished mother.

"It's Longfellow's poems. I thought you'd like them. I might have taken the money for postage, but it never occurred to me," he explained.

For a moment Jule could not speak; then she managed to say: "I guess Mis' Simmons is comin' now for them quiltin' frames," and dashed into the unlighted front room to hide her tears of pleasure. But it was only the wind rattling the door. And looking out the window, she saw that the ground was white with snow, and that Mamie Simmons was coming home, fairly staggering under a medley of bundles.

"I wouldn't give my one little book for all the junk Mamie's bought at the ten cent store; but I'm glad Mis' Simmons is goin' to have her girl with her Christmas, anyway," she said charitably to herself.

Then Jule Peebles, having vigorously wiped her eyes, returned to the lighted dining-room. And she found her son in his old place on the lounge, and as he smiled happily up at her and begged, "Give me the book, Mamma, and I'll read your favorite poem," Jule suddenly realized that she had come at last to her beautiful view on Life's Road.



# CLEANSING FIRE\*

*Detective-scientist Magnum solves  
an extremely strange arson mystery.*

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By MAX RITTENBERG

*Author of "Swirling Waters," The Strange Cases of Dr. Wycherley," etc.*

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SOMETIMES a private wrong may be a public right. The individual has to suffer for the good of the many. Nice questions of ethics arise for which no rule-and-rote solution is ready.

These philosophic reflections are not set down idly. They have a direct bearing on one of the strangest cases in which Magnum, scientific consultant, became involved. In legal prose it was entitled, "Morkel versus the Imperial Fire, Life and Accident Insurance Co., Ltd." The consultant had been retained on behalf of the Company to resist the payment of an insurance policy, and to prove that the plaintiff in person, or by deputy, or by fraudulent connivance, had been guilty of participation in the burning down of his own factory.

On the external face of it, the case was a simple one. This is how it was spread before Magnum by Sir George Herries, a director on the board of the Imperial.

"We want to make an example of this man Morkel," said Sir George in his best Kitchener manner. A newspaper writer had once referred to him

with casual irresponsibility as "the Kitchener of the insurance world," and Sir George had ever since cultivated a cavalry mustache and a decisive military manner.

He pursued: "An example which will put the fear of God into these shifty-eyed little manufacturers. When one of these petty swindlers finds his business on the down-grade, he insures it far beyond its real value, installs safety appliances to reduce his premium to a minimum, arranges that they become out of order, and has the place set fire to while he himself is ostensibly on a holiday. Nothing is more difficult to prove than arson, and they know it. We want absolute scientific proof to lay before the Court. That is why I have called on your services. First, we resist this civil action; and then we see to it that the Crown institutes criminal proceedings."

Magnum, business man as well as scientist, underlined one of Sir George's statements. "As you say, nothing is more difficult to prove than arson. The case will probably take up a large amount of my time. My fee will have to be based on the eventual expenditure of time."

Some discussion ensued, but Mag-

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num, very conscious of his own value, adopted a take-it-or-leave-it attitude which usually effected his purpose.

SIR GEORGE, a trifle subdued, resumed the thread of his explanation: "We have taken particular care to have the ruins of the factory left exactly in *statu quo*. A squad of our own watchmen have been guarding the place day and night. I don't trust the police force in a case such as this."

"Why not?"

"It is always possible that a constable might be bribed to turn a blind eye towards a man who entered the ruins to remove evidence of arson."

"Very improbable with the London force," commented Magnum.

"No man is beyond bribery," answered Sir George sententiously. "However, the point is that your investigation will deal with virgin material."

"Your own assessors?" interjected Magnum pointedly.

"Of course, our own assessors have made their routine examination."

"And found no evidence of arson?"

"Not definitely, or I should not have called on your services."

"Nor disturbed the remains of the building?"

"No." Sir George cleared his throat preparatory to delivering a dictum. "I have no doubt whatever in my own mind that it was arson," he stated, pressing a desk-bell which would summon his secretary. "Your work is to prove it."

Magnum did not openly contradict this statement, but he did not agree with it. Though he was retained by the Company at a substantial monetary figure, he did not regard himself in their service as a special pleader. His duty as a consulting analyst was much broader. It stood towards the public in general. His work was to lay bare technical *facts* which might otherwise be hidden. Hence his rather judicial, impersonal attitude towards the case.

The secretary, appearing to the summons of the bell, was directed to accompany Magnum and assist him with any detailed information he might need. This young fellow, by name Channing, was pleasantly blonde in appearance

and frankly unaffected in manner. Magnum liked him at sight.

"WHAT'S your opinion of the case?" asked the consultant as they drove eastward in a taxi.

"Mine? It doesn't count, you know," replied the young fellow unassumingly.

"Still—"

"Well, strictly between ourselves, sir, I think Sir George is barking up the wrong tree."

"Why?"

"One thing and another. In the first place, our chaps could find no evidence of criminal intent. I mean, nothing to clinch the point definitely. And then again, this man Morkel looks to me rather genuine. You should have heard him in the office when the Company refused to meet his claim! No actor—I don't care who he is, not even Beerbohm Tree—could have put up such a show. Of course, he has that foreign hysterical way with him—"

"Nationality?" interjected Magnum.

"Russian. Fur business, you know. Imported skins from Siberia and places like that, and had them furried in his factory by a crowd of his fellow-countrymen. I gather that he treated his work-people pretty decently."

"And his financial standing?"

"That's always a difficult matter to be sure about. You can't rely much on the reports of the trade agencies."

Magnum nodded agreement. He knew well that in England the organization of confidential trade reports is very unsatisfactory.

The taxi wormed through the rabbit-warren of the City of London, and emerged into the comparative breadth and open-air'd-ness of the Whitechapel Road. The names on the shop-fronts began to epitomize Central and Eastern Europe; the odors drifting from side-streets added the testimony of a Slavic menu. It was from this neighborhood that Morkel had recruited his work-people.

LEFT to himself, the chauffeur of the taxi would have floundered rather hopelessly in the by-ways of the

unknown East End, but guided by Channing, he brought them eventually to the heap of ruins which stood for Morkel's factory. It was like a battlefield skeleton in the sightlessness of its windows and the starkness of its broken limbs. What little woodwork that was left standing was charred and twisted like used kindling-wood. The stock of pelts and the accessories of the furrier's trade were now dust upon the winds. And where the fire had spared, the water from the hoses had rounded off the work of destruction.

The thought which first registered itself amongst Magnum's impressions was the completeness of the ruination. He had seen gutted premises before this, but none so utterly eviscerated. That fact was peculiar and noteworthy, because the building was, apparently, an easy target for a fire brigade. The factory was detached—yards and out-buildings separated it from factory neighbors on either side, while to the rear it looked over a canal, across which hose-jets might have easily been thrown. Nor was it a large and complex building, being merely two-storied and squarely squat on its own little plot of ground.

"The fire brigade must have been very late in arriving on the scene," was Magnum's first comment to Channing.

"Yes, sir, and that's a point of mystery. Morkel had a patent safety device with a wire leading to the fire station. I don't know if you've seen the system—the idea is that when the temperature of a room rises over a certain point, it makes an electrical connection and rings a bell at the brigade station."

"Yes, yes," nodded Magnum.

"The system failed to work."

"Show me the lead."

CHANNING directed a path amongst the ruins to which an electric wire protruded from a pipe in the basement, its free end melted to an unsightly blob of metal. "Sir George believes that the wire was cut inside the building."

"Was that the only precaution against fire in the factory?"

"No." Channing went into technical details of the equipment. "It was so

complete that it made a substantial reduction on Morkel's fire premium."

"Then he seems to have spent a good amount on protecting himself against fire."

"Yes and no. The firm that makes these appliances puts them in on the installment system. 'Pay us out of your premium reductions,' is what they advertise."

"Of course there was a night watchman as well?"

"Yes. He was asleep—drunk asleep—when the fire broke out. It ought to be a criminal offense, but it seems that one can't punish the man except by dismissing him."

"Nationality?"

"A Pole, and a senseless kind of animal."

Magnum trod cautiously among the rubble of ruin, searching with his eyes, sniffing with his ultra-keen sense of smell, reconstructing with his brain, from tiny indications, the course the fire must have pursued. The search was long and minute, yet it had led to no conclusions of value. Ruination had been so complete that it was small wonder the Company officials could find no definite proof of arson. The scientist began to experience an uncomfortable feeling—proceeding upwards from the region of the midriff—that his own efforts would be equally fruitless, and that the case would merely damage his carefully-built reputation for uncanny shrewdness.

However, he gave no hint of that to Channing. On the contrary, he staged a little comedy of portentous frowns followed by sage nods of the head, hinting of puzzles solved by master-strokes of deduction. He took samples of rubble for analysis from a dozen places, though he had small hopes of proving the presence of incendiary material. He even went to the length of lying flat on the ground in places, as though nosing out something imperceptible to grosser senses.

THE search, in brief, was inconclusive. The one solid fact was the fire. Whether it had been started by accident, or whether it was the result of deliberate intent, was still in doubt.

Leaving his samples of rubble for analysis in his laboratories by Meredith, his right-hand man and a genius in patience, the scientist proceeded to interview Morkel, the focus of the case.

Morkel was not difficult of access. Full of his grievance, he was eager to seize an opportunity of denouncing the rascally insurance company. Broad-built, black-bearded, with the high cheek-bones and the narrow eyes of his Russian origin, but sufficiently Englished by his long residence in London to have a plentiful command of the English language, he poured out a stream of explanation, vituperation, angry threats. It was as Channing had phrased it: "No actor could have put up such a show." Magnum came to the judicial conclusion that the fur importer was probably genuine.

Another possibility remained: that the fire had been started by some one with a grievance against Morkel—one of his work-people, perhaps—some man sweated to desperation, some woman insulted and revengeful. Channing had said that "he treated his work-people pretty decently," but this must be submitted to analysis. The motley crowd of hands drawn from the slums of Whitechapel ought to be interviewed discreetly. A mere shadow of a hint might serve as a clue, and with that foundation to work upon, Magnum should be able to build up a complete and scientifically impressive report for the benefit of the Company and the welfare of his own reputation.

Accordingly he made his way to Bow Street to obtain the services of a police-court interpreter familiar with the Slavic languages. In the very doorway he met with Callaghan, detective-inspector and a collaborator in many former cases. Magnum mentioned that he was seeking an interpreter.

"Very good, sir. I'll get you the right man."

"Some one who knows Russian, Polish, Czech and those kinds of languages."

Callaghan, by way of polite interest more than active curiosity, inquired the purpose.

"In connection with a fire insurance claim down in Whitechapel," responded

Magnum. "I'm retained to investigate for the Imperial versus Morkel."

Callaghan suddenly stopped dead short. He seemed to be wrestling with qualms of conscience. Then he whispered earnestly: "I would strongly advise you, sir, not to touch that case."

"Why? Good heavens, why?" demanded an astounded Magnum.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have said even that," murmured Callaghan, obviously ill at ease and divided between the claims of friendship and the obligations of official position. "But I mustn't tell you anything further. My advice to you is, leave the case to the Company's own assessors."

To escape further questioning, he hurried off.

**M**AGNUM was more than astonished: he was highly annoyed.

To be kept in the dark and treated as a child! He, Magnum! It was approaching an outrage. Interested in the case up to now as a professional problem, he became keenly anxious to solve the mystery from the angle of personal pride and self-esteem.

Deliberately brushing aside the inspector's advice, which might be well-meant but was certainly humiliating, Magnum engaged his interpreter and proceeded to Whitechapel to cross-examine Morkel's work-people.

It was tedious work and very trying to Magnum's irascible temper. These aliens were highly suspicious of him. A man who might have stolen a chicken in Poland in his childhood's days regarded Magnum as some mysterious emissary of Nemesis. Even when suspicion was overcome, there resulted an irrelevant jumble of family histories, misfortunes, illnesses, deaths—a welter of "hard-luck stories" garnished with appeals for help.

A whole two days of investigation left Magnum some ten pounds poorer in charitable contributions, and apparently no nearer to his object. There was no vindictive feeling towards Morkel as an employer of labor, so far as the interpreter could gather. Their general feeling was regret that the factory had been burnt down, throwing them out of immediate employment.

Returning to his laboratories in decided ill-humor, Magnum was greeted with an unexpected piece of news from Meredith, who had been toiling over the analysis of the samples of rubble.

"There are traces of petrol—combustion products," explained young Meredith with his mild and modest sureness, and gave technical details.

Magnum's ill-humor had vanished. "That's fine!" he exclaimed. "You never fail me. But you look tired to death." The boy had in fact been working almost continuously for forty-eight hours. "Come along with me to dinner and a music-hall!"

**T**RACES of petrol were an indication that the factory had been deliberately set on fire. That fitted in with Sir George Herries' view. The completeness of the ruin, the late call on the fire brigade, the drunken watchman—all these pointed to arson rather than accident.

Who could be the criminal?

The watchman?

Magnum had not hitherto been able to find the man at his East End home. While he sat snugly in a stall at the music-hall performance, he resolved to visit the suspect to-morrow, and force a confession out of him, by threats if necessary.

But why the warning from Callaghan? It seemed entirely out of the picture.

Had Callaghan's hint to do with Magnum's personal safety? An Anarchist focus, dangerous to meddle with?

The scientist had a fair share of healthy prudence, but he resolved to go on with his investigation.

The next morning he again enlisted the services of the interpreter, and proceeded in a taxi to the Whitechapel slum-street where Worschek, the watchman, made his one-room sketch of a home. Inquiry brought out from the landlady that the Pole was still away.

"Where?" demanded Magnum.

"In the country somewhere. They do not know where," translated the interpreter.

"Why is he away?"

"They say that he has a sick sister.

They think that he has gone to see her."

"Offer them a sovereign for the address."

But even the lure of the gold coin failed to secure the information. It seemed as if the landlady and the neighbors genuinely did not know. Magnum was turning away disgustedly when a postman came striding briskly down the alley, and made for the door of the dwelling-house. With a sudden inspiration, Magnum waited for him and coolly asked: "Anything for Worschek?"

"Yes, sir, one letter."

"That's right," said Magnum authoritatively, and reached out his hand for the letter. "Worschek asked me to take it for him."

The postman very properly hesitated, surveying the letter in his bundle and Magnum alternately. Then he refused the request, on the plea of postal regulations, and learning from the landlady that the Pole was away, went on with his rounds.

But Magnum had had opportunities to see the writing on the envelope. It was in firm, educated English lettering; the stamp was English, and in the top corner was a printed address of the sender: "St. Mary's Home, Claythorpe."

At a venture, Magnum repaired to a newspaper shop, looked up Claythorpe in a railway guide, found it to be a village in Essex, and ordered his taxi to drive there. He might have taken a train, but that would have meant some delay. A taxi was likely to be quicker.

**T**HE drive, after the clearing of frowsy Whitechapel and the pinched, huddled suburbs of the north-east, led pleasantly through glades of Epping Forest and into peaceful rural flats, orderly with centuries of patient nurture, as sleekly comfortable as the grazing cattle. They passed through villages which no self-centered Londoner has ever heard of—communities that pursue the simple round of seed-time and harvest, marrying and begetting, remote from the complexities of a great city, a world apart.

Claythorpe, reached at lunch-time,

might have been a thousand miles from London. At its one inn, they refreshed themselves and Magnum inquired the way to St. Mary's Home. A curious look of suspicion met the inquiry. The direction was given reluctantly.

Two miles on, the taxi stopped at a gate in a stone wall fencing in an estate of some size. A porter guarded the entrance. It suggested an asylum. Magnum asked to see the superintendent, mentioning the name of Worschek. A long wait ensued. The solid gate hid any view of what might be inside. At length the superintendent himself came to parley—a middle-aged man of authority with the stamp of the doctor about him.

Magnum, offering importantly the credential of his card, asked to see the watchman.

The reply was that Worschek was not there.

"If I could see his sister?" suggested Magnum.

"Impossible," answered the superintendent politely, but decisively.

"Will she be confined here for long?" fished Magnum.

"What is the object of these questions?"

The scientist had perforce to explain. His words were listened to impassively. "I am sorry that I cannot help you," was the answer, given with a hint of impatience.

"Is this an asylum for the insane?" demanded Magnum.

"No,"—curtly. "I will now bid you good-day." And the superintendent retired inside his solid gate.

MAGNUM returned to the village and began further questioning—which was met with rather sullen protestations of ignorance. When he pressed his inquiries, the attitude of Claythorpe became distinctly hostile. The mystery of it all pricked him to internal anger. What lay behind that stone wall? What bearing had it on the case of Morkel versus the Imperial? By now he felt very sure that some connection there must be. He resolved to send the interpreter and the taxi back to town and to wait himself around the neighborhood until the evening.

Then he would find means to climb the stone wall and solve at least one aspect of this series of mysteries. If a criminal lunatic were confined inside—which was his thought at present—then there would open out a reasonable solution of the fire at Morkel's factory.

The September evening came early with a fine mist drifting over from sea-wards. That made a big help in this rather burglarious enterprise. Magnum had bought a rope in another village and a convenient iron hook from a blacksmith. He knotted the rope into a simple form of a scaling ladder, and covered by the mist, made an easy entrance into the walled grounds.

It was park-land inside, trees and sward. Presently he came to a small house of a mid-Victorian pattern—stucco front, pillared portico, low windows like well-fed paunches. It suggested a middle-class country residence rather than an asylum. Magnum made his way round the side. Through a lighted window, unprotected by blind, he noted what was clearly a laboratory adapted for pathological work—microscopes, staining reagents, some anatomical specimens in spirit.

Magnum moved on until he had made a complete round of the house. It was very silent. There were no sounds of lunatic patients. Indeed, the house was so small that it was difficult to imagine that many patients could be accommodated there.

Perhaps there were other buildings inside the grounds. The scientist, walking pussy-footed, made onwards in the rear of the house. And presently he came to a wooden fence with a row of huts behind it looming vaguely through the fine, clinging mist. It was a simple matter to scale the fence. Magnum came to the end hut. A light showed inside. The window was only curtained with thin muslin.

Magnum approached cautiously and peeped inside.

One look was sufficient to send him recoiling in sheer horror, almost gasping for breath.

What he had seen inside was something he had never suspected in England, something that few men outside

the circles of public health officials would ever dream of. It was a reality that threw a flood of light on this mystery of the drunken watchman, his invalid sister, the hostile silence of Claythorpe, the fire at Morkel's factory, the strange warning given by Callaghan.

Magnum retreated hastily, scaled the wall to the wholesome outside air with a feeling of intense relief, made his way to a railway station, and so back to London.

He was very sure now as to who would know the inner history of Morkel's fire. That man would be the Chief Officer of Health for London.

IT was a curious interview on the following day. The Officer of Health knew Magnum, knew that he was to be trusted with information of public import, and under a seal of secrecy confirmed the suspicions which had crowded upon the scientist.

"It was the third case which had arisen in Morkel's factory," said the Officer of Health gravely. "There was only one course open to us in the public interest—to burn down the place. Whether infection had come from the imported furs or was inherent in the building is a point one could not determine. We had to make a clean sweep of it. Now as a matter of public policy, we could not condemn the building

openly. We got the watchman out of the way—poor devil, thinking of his sister, he was willing enough to fall in with orders—and we then set the place thoroughly on fire. The brigade was warned not to hurry. They were merely to isolate the fire and prevent its spreading to any neighboring building. As you have seen, we thoroughly gutted the place."

Magnum considered thoughtfully. "It is a curious point of ethics as to whom the loss should fall on," he commented.

"Yes. One could scarcely say that it was Morkel's fault. The loss ought not to be his. On the other hand, for reasons of public policy, we must not let it be known that we took action. On the whole, the department feels that the loss must be borne by the insurance company. They are a rich company, and can easily afford it. Now, if you will be kind enough to withdraw from the case, that is what will happen."

"Yes," admitted Magnum, "public interests are paramount."

And with the horror deep in his mind of that isolated leper colony at Claythorpe, unknown to the general public, unsuspected by them, he reported to Sir George Herries that in his opinion the fire at Morkel's factory was of accidental origin—cause unknown.

## The Third Hiller

By RICHARD BARKER SHELTON

**J**UST beyond the little stone bridge, spanning Mile-End Creek, a road branches to the left. It is a sorry little road, ankle deep with dust in summer, thick and heavy with mud the greater part of the rest of the year. If you follow along its many twists and turns you will come finally to a sharp

upward grade with sparse growths of stunted pine and oak on either hand.

At the top of this slope you will come upon a score of little dilapidated, unpainted houses, each with its tiny yard scratched bare by the scrawny chickens and uprooted by the lean pigs which seemingly roam at large.

Bulky, shapeless, hopeless-looking women will stare at you apathetically from the sagging doorsteps as you pass; barefoot men, at work in the dry, stony fields will take your measure sullenly from beneath the rims of tattered hats; dirty children will hide behind the trees and watch you with suspicious, furtive eyes until you are out of sight. For this is Third Hill, the one blemish in an otherwise prosperous and decidedly thrifty community.

I do not pretend to say how the Third Hillers ever came to be what they are. Indeed, I doubt if anyone has looked very closely into the matter or cared. Suffice it to say that they had been in possession of Third Hill for many generations. They had kept to themselves, intermarried and gone to seed, with no one to give the matter very much thought one way or the other.

Somehow, between tilling the stony fields and doing what little hunting there was to be done in the neighboring woods, they managed to keep alive, and that with the Third Hillers seemed to be the sum total of existence—to keep soul and body together and not to give too serious thought to the morrow.

Naturally, for miles around, the term "Third Hiller" was one of opprobrium. It stood for meanness and paltriness and shiftlessness and general uselessness. It meant that one's ethics were doubtful, one's morals questionable, one's veracity a thing not to be taken seriously, one's honesty entirely unlike Cæsar's wife. In fact, the crowning insult to anyone in the vicinity was to call him a "Third Hiller." It was a "fighting-word"—a taunt to stir even a quiet man to blows, unless the man thus designated happened of a verity to be a Third Hiller—in which case he was, of course, *ipse facto*, quite past resenting it.

**J**OBEADS was a typical Third-Hiller. His house was the smallest and most dilapidated of the group, his yard the barest, his chickens the scrawniest and the scratchiest, his two lean pigs the leanest.

Job for the greater part of the time sat on his door-step complaining whiningly of a pain in the back that "ketch'd" him whenever he tried to do

any work on the few sorry acres just behind the house, his pretense at the cultivation of which was the only visible means of livelihood for himself and his two children.

Mrs. Eads, unfortunately—or perhaps under the circumstances we'd better say fortunately—was dead. She had died when Lonnlie, the youngest child, was nothing but a baby. And that accounts perhaps for the fact that Florry Eads was rather a different breed of cat from the other Third Hillers; for to Florry had fallen the task of mothering her tiny brother. Certain it is that Florry Eads in her sixteen years of life had developed traits quite foreign to Third Hill. For instance, she did not look upon Lonnlie as a necessary nuisance. To her he was something far more—something to be loved and petted and spoiled, if all her undivided attention to the child could accomplish this.

Also Lonnlie was neither dirty nor ragged like the other little Third Hillers, who, alas, were for the most part regarded very much in the light of nuisances. That he might have such clothes as she deemed it proper for him to have, Florry picked berries in the summer and knit mittens in the winter. She did both these things with the utmost circumspection, lest the knowledge that she was earning money might make worse that "ketch" in her father's back and make him even a poorer provider than he was at present—if such a thing were possible.

But the berry season was short, and the prices for what she got always low, and somehow she never could seem to learn to knit very fast, and then to cap the climax something happened to Lonnlie's eyes. They had always been far too wide of pupils and altogether too unwinking. They worried Florry a great deal, and at last she had the doctor from the village up to look them over. She showed wherein she differed widely from the Third Hillers by paying him at each visit. She asked him all sorts of anxious questions. The doctor came four times. The fourth visit he said there was no need of his coming again. In a matter of a month at the most Lonnlie would be stone blind. There was

no help for it. No, an operation would do no good.

It was two days after she knew the awful, inevitable darkness was coming to Lonnie, that Florry faced her father in the tiny kitchen of the tumbledown little house one night. Her eyes were red. She had just rocked Lonnie to sleep.

"I want five dollars, Pa," she said.

Job Eads stared at her. He looked as if she had asked him for an empire. He put his hand up to that lame back of his.

"Five dollars!" he gasped. "Ye talk 'sif five dollars growed on bushes."

"I want to git somethin' for Lonnie," she explained.

Job Eads drew himself up indignantly.

"What aint that young 'un got already?" he demanded. "He's dressed like he was a young prince. I never had sech clothes in my life. You aint agontner buy him nothin' else. He's got enough."

"Taint clothes, Pa," said she. "I took him down to the store to-day with me. I want him to see all he can—while he can," she added with a catch in her voice. "Joshua Kent's carrying a line of toys now. He had some little ingynes there. Real cute little ingynes they was. You git the steam up in 'em and they runs little pieces of machinery jest as cunnin'! Joshua Kent he started some of 'em to let Lonnie see 'em. Lonnie he was tickled 'most to pieces. He aint talked of nothin' else since I got home with him. The one he wanted is five dollars."

Eads snorted. Also he rubbed his back and groaned.

"I aint got five dollars to my name," said he. "And here's the taxes comin' due and the int'rest on the mortgage that's gotter be paid, and you're talkin' about buyin' a five-dollar ingyne for that kid. Why, if I had five dollars, which I aint, I should save it for some of the things that's gotter be paid. Five dollars for a toy ingyne!"

"It's goin' to be sech a little, little while that he can see," Florry said unsteadily, "and he was so tickled with that ingyne. I should think you'd want him to have it."

"Want him to have it? Of course I

do, jest as much as you want him to," whined Job. "But where's the money comin' from? If I aint got it, I aint, hev I, and that's all there is to it."

He went out of the house angrily. She heard him settle himself on the front step. The reek of his pipe came drifting in to her.

**T**HIRD HILLERS have no credit at the village store. Joshua Kent learned his lesson in that respect years and years ago. Still, exceptional cases might meet with exceptional rulings. Bright and early the next morning Florry was at the store. She wanted that little steam engine; she would pay for it just as soon as she could.

Joshua Kent shook his head. His terms for all goods were cash. He couldn't make any exceptions. Florry went out, heavy-hearted, but on the way home a scheme came to her mind. At noontime Joshua Kent went home to dinner, leaving Perry Flood, his clerk, in charge of the store. Maybe Perry, being younger, would let her have that engine on credit. At noontime she was back at the store.

She looked very flushed and pretty as she stood there before the counter piled high with print goods, putting her case to Perry Flood.

Perry was a hatchet-faced young man with an extremely blasé air about him—when Joshua Kent was not about. His bushy eyebrows drew together as he looked at Florry across the print goods. He smiled and leaned farther across the counter.

Furtively he looked about him to assure himself there was no one else in the place. Then he began speaking to the girl in lowered tones.

She did not catch the exact drift of his words at first; but when she did her face flamed crimson. She caught up one of the bolts of calico and banged it down with all her force on Perry Flood's curly head. Then she ran out of the place with Perry Flood's oily, guarded words choking her with shame and anger.

**L**ONNIE fell asleep in her lap after supper that night, still Prattling of that wonderful engine he had seen.

Florry was crying as she laid him in her bed and tucked the frayed coverlet carefully about him. Job had gone down to the village, ostensibly to sell some beets from the garden. Florry knew where the money for the beets would go and in what condition she might expect her father back—provided he came at all.

A moon, nearing its full, was doing its best to soften the harshness of Third Hill. A whippoorwill adown the slope trilled musically, and another answered the call. On the bed Lonnie stirred uneasily and murmured in his sleep. Florry caught two words: "L'il ingyne."

She started up with a smothered cry. She pictured Lonnie awakening in the morning with that coveted engine beside him in the bed—poor little Lonnie with the great darkness shutting down on him day by day. She began to pace up and down the uneven, creaking floor.

The whippoorwill ceased its plaint. The moon rode higher in the heaven. One after another the lights went out in the little shacks on the summit of Third Hill.

It must have been nearing eleven o'clock when Florry slipped out of the house and down the dusty road. The houses all along the way as she neared the village were dark. The night was very bright, very still and soft.

No one was stirring in the little square. She slipped across to Kent's store. She sought the deep shadows at the far side, and one after another began to try the windows. They were all locked; it was to be expected they would be. Peering through one of them she could see the moonlight glittering on the nickel boilers of the row of toy engines on the next counter to the print-goods.

She did not hesitate after that. With a bit of stone she broke the pane nearest the lock on one of the windows. It made a frightful crash and tinkle in the stillness of the night. She paused for a moment to listen. There was no sound save the gentle swish of branches above her head.

The lock clicked as her fingers reached for it; the window was cautiously lifted. The glisten of moonlight on polished nickel gleamed with com-

pelling brightness just beyond the dim pile of print goods. It wouldn't be stealing, anyway; it was just borrowing. For Lonnie would be able to see it for such a short, short time before the darkness came. Then she would bring the engine back.

**P**ERRY FLOOD had got himself into the habit of waking up at midnight and smoking a cigarette. It had become as much a part of his daily routine as his meals or his game of solitaire just before he went to bed.

That particular night, just as the clock on the Baptist Church was chiming midnight, he sat up in bed and reached for the box of cigarettes on the stand beside it. Then he suddenly remembered he had meant to bring some cigarettes back from the store with him, but had forgotten them.

Well, for one night he could get along without that midnight smoke. But the links of the chain of habit are well forged. They neither break nor yield. At ten minutes past twelve Perry Flood got out of bed, dressed himself, and started for the store.

He was just fitting the key in the lock, when he heard the soft scrape of a window. It was a disturbing sound, as was also the sound of some one dropping to the ground just around the corner of the store. There being a convenient pile of packing-cases hard by, Perry ducked hastily behind them. He had come to the store for cigarettes. If any desperate yeggs had seen fit to invade the place, they might do so for all him. It wasn't his store, and he placed a very high value on his hide.

Then some one came softly out of the shadows at the far side of the place. Perry Flood looked, gasped, gurgled inanely and jumped from his hiding-place.

In another instant he was gripping Florry Eads' arms and looking down at the little toy engine in her hands.

She would have screamed, but his hand over her mouth stopped her. He was smiling in the moonlight, smiling in a way that was not good to see.

"So you've been a-breakin' and enterin', hey?" he whispered close to her ear. "Darned if you aint the prettiest

little thief I ever laid eyes on, though. You're pretty enough to kiss, jest like I'm goin' to right now."

Her eyes flamed dangerously. She managed to free one arm, and swung the engine aloft; but he caught the arm before it could descend.

Then, holding her fast, he calmly kissed her.

"Do you know what I could do to you if I was a mind to?" he reminded her. "I could have you sent up for this. Yes, I could. You've broke and entered, and that aint no light affair."

He kissed her again.

"Now you listen to me," he went on. "You want that engyne, don't you? And I take it you wouldn't want to be took up for stealin', like I'd oughter have you. Well, if you don't, you do as I say, and don't you make a sound."

She began to tremble. She saw his burning eyes close to hers. She shrank back, whimpering in her fright.

"Lemme go," she panted. "Lemme go. I'll pay you for it—in time!"

He laughed as if at some choice joke.

"You bet you will," said he.

She saw a key flash from his pocket. It grated in the lock. The store door swung open.

"Come in," said he. "This is your own bed you've made. Come in, if you don't want me to have you sent up for a thief. What you waitin' there for? Come in, I say, unless you want me to rout Josh Kent out and hand you over to him. You know what that would mean."

She looked down at the little engine in her arms. Then slowly she stepped towards the open door.

But she only took that one step, for some one lurched into the square, glanced at what he saw there in the moonlight, and charged roaringly towards them.

Job Eads, stumbling home somewhat later than usual, had come upon them.

**P**EERRY FLOOD let out a yell of terror. Quickly he slammed the door shut and locked it. Florry, still clutching the shining engine, scurried down the steps and across the square. As for Job Eads, he stood irresolute for a mo-

ment, undecided whether to hammer down the store door or give chase to his recreant daughter. It was the latter course he ultimately chose, lurching after her in the moonlight and shouting wildly after her as she ran on.

Down the turnpike they sped, across the bridge, into the dusty branch road that leads to Third Hill and up the slope. She was gasping for breath as she gained the summit. Into the little dilapidated shack she staggered, spent with running, fumbled about in the dark, bumped against the bed and stooped over it. In another moment the little engine lay on the coverlet beside the sleeping Lonnie. She bent closer as if to kiss the face on the pillow, but with a choking intake of her breath straightened up and ran out of the house.

Panting up the hill, Job Eads had seen her run into the corn-field back of the house. Now, with a barrel stave in his hands, he stumbled thither and addressed the girl he could not see.

"A daughter of mine," he complained virtuously, "a-carryin' on like that with Perry Flood down to the store after midnight. How long's it been goin' on, you hussy? How long, I say? You aint too big nor grown up yet for a good tannin' as I'm a-goin' to show ye once I lay hands on ye. I'll find ye, too, in here if it takes me till mornin'. A daughter of mine carryin' on like that! Oh, I'll show ye!"

He had entered the corn patch. The long leaves rustled crisply as he moved through them. Ahead of him one corn stalk was in a state of violent agitation. The sound of some one crying her heart out smote his ears. Thither he moved, gripping his stave more tightly.

"Twont do ye no good to hide from me. I know where ye are, ye little—" His angry muttering stopped short.

He had all but stumbled over a figure, stretched prone among the corn. A grimy, tear-streaked face was lifted to him pitifully in the moonlight. The quivering lips were forming words, at the sound of which the uplifted stave fell from Job's hands.

"I aint a-hidin' from ye, Pa," the girl sobbed. "I was jest tryin'—jest tryin' to hide from myself."



# Mr. Truesdale Tells *the* Truth

*His wife made him promise to tell the exact truth; he tried it—with amazing results.*

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BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

Author of "The Last Man," "Pigs is Pigs," etc.

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M R. TRUESDALE came down to breakfast in fine spirits, and as he entered the dining-room he clapped his hands briskly, pinched little Ellen's cheek, tweaked little Joe's hair, and kissed Mrs. Truesdale with a resounding smack. He was a small man and not usually demonstrative; in fact, he was considerably afraid of his wife, who was a large, weepy woman with a double-chin, but the news that had come to Mr. Truesdale the day before was enough to make him feel jubilantly brave. He had learned that Mrs. Truesdale was one of the heirs of the great Hamlin estate, and that if O'Leary-Hamlin suit ended satisfactorily, Mrs. Truesdale would come in for the pretty sum of twenty-five thousand dollars.

"Good morning, everybody!" he exclaimed as he took his seat and opened his napkin. "This is a fine, large morning."

Maggie, the maid, brought in the appetizing platter of ham and eggs. She spoke to Mr. Truesdale.

"Mr. Bibber is at the back door, sir," she said. "He says may he speak to you a minute. I told him I didn't know was you in or not, but I'd see."

A shade of annoyance crossed Mr. Truesdale's face.

"No, I won't see him," he said. "You tell him I'm not in—do you understand? Tell him I've gone to town already."

"Edward!" said Mrs. Truesdale.

"What, my dear?" asked Mr. Truesdale meekly.

"The children!" said Mrs. Truesdale, frowning.

Mr. Truesdale looked at the children. They seemed to be all right. They were not putting their oatmeal in their drinking water.

"The children!" repeated Mrs. Truesdale. "What will they think? How can I raise them to be truthful man and woman if they hear you say such things?"

"But, my dear—" Mr. Truesdale began.

"No, not 'But, my dear,'" said Mrs. Truesdale. "There is no excuse for ever telling anything but the plain out-and-out truth, and you know it, Edward Truesdale. *I tell the truth. Don't I always tell you the truth?*"

Mr. Truesdale could not deny it. She told him the plainest, most unpleasant truths on all occasions. When he bought a new hat she would, for instance, tell him it made him look like a monkey.

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Truesdale meekly. "But—"

"Not one *but*, Edward Truesdale!"

said his wife firmly. "You can tell the truth if you choose, and you owe it to your children, to society, to morality and to me to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. See that you do!"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Truesdale.

"You give me your word?"

"Yes, Mary," he said. Mrs. Truesdale spoke again.

"I'm going to town to-day," she said. "I see Blitherwaite is advertising those Montenegrin gowns, like the one Mrs. Phillips has. I think one would be very becoming to me, don't you?"

Mr. Truesdale drew a long breath.

"No. No, I don't," he gasped at last.

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Truesdale. "Why don't you?"

"I—I think they are too young for you," said poor Mr. Truesdale miserably. "I—I think you are too old for them."

Mrs. Truesdale's jaw fell. She stared.

"Too old!" she exclaimed. "Edward! Do you think I am growing old?"

"You are growing older every day, of course, my dear," said Mr. Truesdale gently. "We all are."

"But I don't show it, do I, Edward," pleaded Mrs. Truesdale. "I don't look as old as—as Mrs. Pibbidy, do I?"

"N—" Mr. Truesdale began; and then he took a firm grip on himself. "Yes, my dear," he said, firmly, "you do. I think, although I have not seen you together for some weeks, you look older than Mrs. Pibbidy. The last time I saw you together you did look older than she, considerably older."

"Edward!"

"There is more gray in your hair," said poor Mr. Truesdale, "and you seem to have more wrinkles. I don't mind it in the least, Mary, but the truth—"

MRS. TRUESDALE'S bosom rose and fell violently. Her face became contorted into a hideous mask. Her lower lip trembled like jelly in an earthquake. With a sudden loud gurgle of woe she threw her arms on the table and buried her face in them and sobbed. Mr. Truesdale went to her and put his hand on her shoulder, but she pushed him violently away. The two children began to howl. Mr. Truesdale glanced

at his watch, and dashed for the door. He had just time to make his train. He hurried down the street.

"Ho, Truesdale!" a voice hailed him, and Mr. Truesdale looked up to see Mr. Gartner, his employer, drawing up to the curb in his big automobile.

"Get in here," said Mr. Gartner, "and I'll take you to town. I'll get you there before the train could. Fine morning for a ride."

Mr. Truesdale climbed in beside Mr. Gartner, and the car leaped forward.

"O'Leary is coming in to-day on that O'Leary-Hamlin matter," said Mr. Gartner as they spun along. "He's the most impatient man I ever knew. He wants me to turn over the papers to him to-day. That's nonsense. If he gets them and goes ahead he'll lose. If he takes the case out of my hands he'll lose anyhow. I want to hold him off until next week, so I can have time to get the Bates affidavit from Chicago. When he comes in, tell him the papers are not ready yet, will you?"

"I can't tell him that," said Mr. Truesdale.

"You *what?*" cried Mr. Gartner.

"I can't tell him that," said Mr. Truesdale again. "It would not be the truth."

"But it is to win the case for him," said Mr. Gartner. "He's a crazy, hot-headed fellow. Tell him that important matters prevented me from making out the papers."

"I can't. It wouldn't be the truth," said Mr. Truesdale.

Mr. Gartner looked at Mr. Truesdale suspiciously.

"All right," he said. "If you feel that way, I can fix it. I'll tear up the papers. You can tell him they were destroyed. —Oh, pshaw!"

A policeman had stepped into the middle of the street and was holding up his hand. Mr. Gartner halted his car.

"What's wrong, Officer?" he asked with pretended innocence.

"You're goin' about thirty miles an hour; that's what's the matter," said the policeman.

"That's nonsense!" said Mr. Gartner. "I was not going over fifteen miles. How fast was I going, Truesdale?"

"I—I had my eye on the speedometer," said Mr. Truesdale.

"There!" said Mr. Gartner triumphantly. "And what did that show?"

"Thirty-five miles," said Mr. Truesdale is an agony of spirit. "A—a little over thirty-five miles."

"I'll go with you to the magistrate's," said the policeman, and he climbed into the car. Mr. Gartner was exceedingly silent. The magistrate was not, of course, in court at this early hour, and they were obliged to wait for him. Mr. Gartner paid his fine. It was twenty minutes after nine when they climbed into the car again. Suddenly Mr. Gartner laughed.

"I'm on! I understand!" he said jovially. "It's a good joke on me, picking you up to-day of all days. How much was it for?"

"How much was what for?" asked Mr. Truesdale, puzzled.

"Why, the bet," said Mr. Gartner. "It's a bet, isn't it? You bet some one you could tell the whole truth for a full day, didn't you? It's all right, Truesdale. I hope you win it."

"It's—it's not a bet," said Mr. Truesdale. "It's nothing of that sort. I'm going to tell the truth—always. A man should always tell it."

Mr. Gartner stopped the car suddenly. He looked at Mr. Truesdale as one would look at some impossible animal curiosity. His face hardened.

"Quite right!" he said. "Quite right, Truesdale. I agree with you. But business is very slack. I have to cut down expenses where I can. You can have until the first of the month, Truesdale."

"The first of the month?" said poor Mr. Truesdale.

"To find another position," said Mr. Gartner. He started the car. "And I'll give you a good letter of recommendation. I'll say you always tell the truth. Keep it up, Truesdale. Stick to the absolute truth and you'll get somewhere."

**T**HREE was something sinister in the inflection he gave the word *somewhere*, but Mr. Truesdale was not as distressed as he might have been, for he knew where he could get another position without trouble. Hillbreadth & Simmons, a rival concern, had already approached him, seeking to secure

his services. He was sorry to be discharged, but he went up to the Gartner offices in a troubled but not depressed state of mind. In an hour or so Mr. O'Leary entered the office.

"Gartner in?" asked Mr. O'Leary.

"He's in," said Mr. Truesdale, "but he does not want to see you. He asked me to tell you the papers in your case had been destroyed, and that new ones would not be ready for a week."

"Destroyed!" said Mr. O'Leary. "How did that happen?"

"Mr. Gartner tore them up."

"He did, did he?" said Mr. O'Leary angrily. "Didn't he know I was coming in for them?"

"That was why he tore them up," said Mr. Truesdale. "He tore them up so I could truthfully say they were destroyed."

Mr. O'Leary uttered a cry of rage. He leaped over the small barrier and made straight for Mr. Gartner's door. Mr. Truesdale heard the angry words of the two men; he heard Mr. O'Leary take the case out of Mr. Gartner's hands; he heard Mr. Gartner tell Mr. O'Leary he was an idiot to think of doing such a thing, and then he saw Mr. O'Leary come from Mr. Gartner's room and rush to the elevator. The next moment Mr. Gartner came from his room and walked straight up to Mr. Truesdale. He grasped Mr. Truesdale by the back of the neck and ran him to the office door, ran him down the corridor and threw him down the marble stairs.

**A** FEW moments later Mr. Truesdale entered the offices of Hillbreadth & Simmons. He was hatless and scarfless and sore in forty-eight places. He had lost Mrs. Truesdale's chance of ever receiving the twenty-five thousand dollars from the Hamlin estate, and he had been thrown bodily out of his position, but he had still some life left. He asked to see Mr. Hillbreadth. Mr. Hillbreadth came out immediately.

"Hel-lo, Truesdale!" he exclaimed, as he saw Mr. Truesdale's disheveled condition. "What happened to you? Fall off a street car?"

"No," said Mr. Truesdale. "Mr. Gartner threw me down stairs."

Mr. Hillbreadth's eyes showed the

greedy look of a man about to profit by another's mistake. He knew Mr. Truesdale's worth.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Good! And you're willing to take up the offer I made you awhile ago? Fine! You can come right in and get into the harness. Gartner is a hot-headed fellow; I wonder you have stood his overbearing ways so long. He pushed you farther than patience could stand, eh?"

"No," said Mr. Truesdale. "He threw me down stairs because I told the truth."

Mr. Hillbreadth laughed.

"Told him to his face, eh?" he said. "Surprised the over-bearing fellow, I'll warrant. What did you tell him?"

"I did not tell him anything," said Mr. Truesdale, beginning to perspire freely. "I told one of his clients the truth."

"How's that?" asked Mr. Hillbreadth, frowning.

"I told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," said Mr. Truesdale. "The client asked me some questions, and I told him the exact, undeviating truth. I mean to tell nothing but the truth as long as I live."

"I see!" said Mr. Hillbreadth coldly. "You mean to tell the exact truth. And quite right, Truesdale—George Washington and so forth. Well, I congratulate you. It is splendid. It is nothing less than splendid."

Mr. Hillbreadth turned away.

"But—but the position you spoke of?" asked Mr. Truesdale, anxiously.

"Sorry," said Mr. Hillbreadth. "Just happened to think that Simmons hired a man yesterday. Have to excuse me —very busy to-day."

HE ENTERED his office and closed the door. Mr. Truesdale hesitated and then turned away. He entered a dairy lunch room and took a seat at a table. He was very hungry. He had had a strenuous forenoon. He ordered corned-beef hash, with a poached egg on top, a bowl of crackers and milk, a piece of apple pie and a cup of coffee. The waitress pinched a check and placed it beside his plate. Mr. Truesdale glanced at it and continued eating, but he turned very red in

the face. He remembered that he had given Mrs. Truesdale every cent he had had with him the night before. He had intended to draw a few dollars before he left the office for lunch, but being thrown down stairs had interfered with this. He did not have a cent in his pocket. The man across the table from him had a face that seemed familiar. Mr. Truesdale ventured to speak:

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but your face seems very familiar. I wonder—I wonder if you would do me a favor?"

The man looked at Mr. Truesdale.

"That's right," he said, "your face is familiar to me, too. Now, wait! I know! I met you in Mr. Gartner's office. My name is Hepthorp. I'm with Wittmar, Griggs & Co. What can I do for you?"

"I came in here and ordered lunch," said Mr. Truesdale, "and—and I don't happen to have a cent with me. If you could let me have—"

"Why, certainly!" exclaimed Mr. Hepthorp. "In a minute! I'd lend any man that works for Gartner anything he wanted at any time."

Mr. Truesdale cleared his throat.

"I—I ought to tell you," he said, "I'm not with Mr. Gartner any longer."

"That so?" said Mr. Hepthorp suspiciously. "Who are you with now?"

"I'm—I'm not with anybody," said Mr. Truesdale truthfully, and Mr. Hepthorp clapped his hand on his pocket suddenly and looked annoyed.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed. "Now, that's a shame! I thought I had brought some money with me, but I haven't a cent more than enough to pay my own check. You know how it is, old man. I'd let you have it in a minute if I had it, but—"

He rose hastily and left the lunch room. Mr. Truesdale saw him have a five-dollar bill changed at the cashier's window and saw him pocket the change.

THERE was but one thing left for Mr. Truesdale to do. He left his watch and chain at the cashier's window and went out upon the street. For a minute he stood like one dazed, and then he remembered that he had no hat, and that his wife had said she meant to do some shopping at Blitherwaite's. He

might catch her there. His luck seemed to have turned at last, for he found Mrs. Truesdale in the Ladies' Dresses Department. He told her the truth, and she listened contemptuously.

"Very well, Edward," she said, when he had ended. "Go and pick out your hat. When you have selected it I will let you have the money to pay for it. If I am not here I will be at the ribbon counter. You should be able to get an excellent hat for a dollar."

Mr. Truesdale was in no position to complain. He stole away to the Men's Hat Department and selected a dollar hat, and returned to find Mrs. Truesdale. She was no longer in the Ladies' Dresses Department, and he followed her to the ribbon counter. She was having a sharp controversy with a sales-girl regarding a certain piece of ribbon, but her purse lay on the counter. Mr. Truesdale knew the purse—he had given it to Mrs. Truesdale. It was a blue leather purse with a gilt chain handle. Mrs. Trusedale and the sales-girl moved to the far end of the counter, around the end, and were hidden by the intervening shelving. Mr. Truesdale took up the purse, opened it and extracted a dollar. He closed the purse and replaced it on the counter and felt a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Not a word!" said the store detective grimly. "Keep still and come with me."

With his other hand, the detective picked up the fatal blue purse.

"To the rear of the store!" he ordered, and Mr. Truesdale marched. It seemed, when he reached it, that the store had a Cell Department as well as others. The detective drew Mr. Truesdale into the cell.

"Now then!" he said. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

Mr. Truesdale remained mute. He was overcome by his emotions.

"Come, now!" ordered the detective. "What have you got to say? Speak up, and see that you tell the truth."

Mr. Truesdale shivered as he heard the words. He hid his face in his hands and sobbed like a child. Then he poured forth what seemed to the detective an incoherent story of being thrown

down stairs, of pawning his watch, of telling the truth in spite of everything. The detective remarked that all that was too thin, and when Mr. Truesdale further explained that his wife had sent him to buy a hat, and had told him to return for the money, and that he had merely taken a dollar from his own wife's purse, the detective laughed.

"You send for my wife, then," pleaded Mr. Truesdale. "My wife is at the ribbon counter. A big woman. Her name is Truesdale. And she knows Mr. Ripplington, the store manager. Send for her and for Mr. Ripplington."

"I'll go for them," said the detective.

MR. TRUESDALE seemed to have been in the cell—if it may be called a cell—for hours when he heard the key turn in the lock, and Mr. Ripplington, Mrs. Truesdale and the detective entered. With a shock of pained surprise Mr. Truesdale noticed, the very first thing, that Mrs. Truesdale carried in her hand the red leather pocket book she always carried when she did not carry the blue purse.

"Mr. Truesdale?" queried Mr. Ripplington. "I am sorry this affair happened. Mrs. Truesdale has explained it entirely. She has corroborated everything you told our detective here—everything. Of course—ahem!—we have to be a little careful in these matters—strange things happen. Of course there can be no doubt that it *was* Mrs. Truesdale's purse you took the money from—no doubt whatever. Guth, have you the purse?"

The detective took the blue leather purse from his pocket.

"This is your purse, Mrs. Truesdale?" asked Mr. Ripplington.

Mrs. Truesdale took the purse. She looked at the exterior of it. She opened the purse and looked at the contents. They were all utterly strange to her. This purse was lined with red moiré; her purse was lined with brown. Her purse was, as she knew, at home in the upper drawer of her dresser. She snapped the purse shut and looked Mr. Ripplington squarely in the eye.

"Of course this is my purse!" said Mrs. Edward Truesdale.



# The Man Who Will Be

*This powerful story, unlike Kipling's famous "The Man Who Was," looks to the future rather than to the past; we predict that you will find it impressive indeed.*

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By EUGENE P. LYLE, JR.

Author of "Blaze Derringer," "The Lone Star," etc.

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RUSHDALE was his home town, and trains stopped for ten minutes, but the young fellow in the smoking-car drew back from the window. He was close on twenty-seven, and he had not been near the home town since his graduation from high school; and yet he did not show himself on the platform for familiar greetings, even despite his tailored clothes and nonchalant manner of flash prosperity that would have made him so interesting to his old neighbors.

He wished the train would pull out; the barbed little pin-hooks of memory were beginning to tear at the raw. Then, after the conductor's warning, out of the waiting room came hurrying an old next-door-neighbor friend of his mother's, and with her a girl. Beefy Mrs. Shippey he would have known by her hat; it could have been the identical little lavender plush thing that used to bob past his house churchward every Sunday morning. The girl, he noted critically, had grown into a "pippin;" the kind you pack in the top layer.

As the train gathered headway, the wanderer craned his neck out the open window. He watched, rigidly, for a certain house in a certain row up there. He located it, a clay-yellow one, like the rest with a basement, and a narrow back yard slipping down the bluff. There was a woman in the back yard, bent over a washtub. She heard the train, and straightened—that is, she straightened after a pause, after putting one hand to the small of her back. She turned, then, and gazed down on the train. Though the dusk was thickening, her hair, one could see from the train—one did see from the train—was gray. Suddenly she picked something out of the tub—a towel or pillow-case—and waved it at the train, at somebody on the train.

"At Mrs. Shippey, of course," thought the tailored young man, but he drew back sharply from the window.

The gesture was so poignant that the chance fellow-traveler seated beside him noticed it.

"Oh, the merry washlady!" he said jocularly. "Well, it's certain you aren't

owing her anything, if it's you she's—"

"Not owing her anything!" There was a stricken bitterness in the young man's tone. He had not meant to say it aloud, or at all. He stirred angrily. "It was a cinder in my eye, and mind your own dam' business," he said.

"Oh, all right, duke," the chance fellow-traveler returned. He was an older man, a timid, lonely sort of man, wistfully eager for companionship; and the rebuff was uncalled for.

**I**NSTANTLY the young man was sorry. He reckoned as lost an investment of agreeableness and light-heartedness. During the casual intercourse he had learned that the older man carried a long and fat red-leather wallet containing sixty-eight hundred dollars in bills. Any one of a dozen oft-practised little revelations of temporary financial stringency, ventured at the right moment, insidiously prepared for, with precisely the right artful touch of embarrassed frankness, would have procured him a five-spot, maybe even a fifty, out of that wallet—as a loan, of course. It was almost always as a loan.

Darkness came on; the train was lighted, and pulled into Junction City, a division point. The young man stood up and gathered his suit-case, his cane, his light spring overcoat from the rack.

"Needing sleep, me. Better get my bunk cinched here, you know. Then I'll be back for a smoke before bed-time. Hate Pullmans, but I gotta be fresh for Chicago in the morning. 'By."

The older man nodded. The young fellow's heartily repentant tone was very mollifying.

"Like burning the kale, letting Mrs. Shippey get past. She's good for a two-tenner, anyway. Stuffed old blab!"

Thus the young man, on his way to the station ticket-window. He supposed that explained his impulse to dig among his few pieces of silver for a Pullman berth—that, and maybe the easy amusement in fascinating the rosy-cheeked pippin. He did not admit, nor really know, that his heart ached

—ached—for some intimate word about the gray-haired woman, back there, at the washtub.

The negro porter bore before him his suit-case, his cane, his light spring overcoat, and ushered him to a vacant section.

"Well, bless my soul, if it aint—Nick Buckhorn!"

At sound of his name, the young man turned, a slight frigidity of frown repressing what might have been his natural surprise. But the frown vanished for a smile, of the lips, that was most flattering.

"Bless *mine!* Mrs. Shippey!"

They were two sections ahead, eating lunch out of a shoe-box. Mrs. Shippey flutteringly made room for him, offered him a sandwich of white meat, a drumstick, a boiled egg, and gestured towards the cake.

"Oh, I forgot—Nick, Angie, you reck'leek one 'nother?—Angie-vine!"

**T**HIS to the girl, with rising exasperation. And it is true that she had not been very cordial. Therefore, the mother's exasperation. Any mother who could name a child Angevine, and on top of that call her Angie-vine, rubbing in the clinging effect, would welcome for that child the attentions of a creased-trouserered personification of flash prosperity. To Angie's credit, be it observed in the first glance of her, she had survived the cataclysm of the baptismal font. She did not simper, pout, or preen. She was solid and wholesome and honest, and—pretty. You could imagine her with a checked apron, and sleeves rolled up, and two firm-fleshed arms slanted into a dishpan, and it would all seem especially satisfying; but never could you imagine her as being cordial to Mr. Nick Buckhorn. In a word, during the past nineteen years Angie had achieved *not* being Angevine, not in the least.

The young man instantly abandoned his project for a two-tenner touch. Instinct made acute by experience showed him that with the girl his worldly young graces and frank, plausible tongue would, somehow, not carry. He continued his empire over Mrs. Shippey, partaking of her cake or a pickle

as if he were still the little boy next door. His elegance, being without affectation, only enslaved her the more. She never contrasted his lush ease with the gray-haired woman over the wash-tub, in the dusk of a long day of toil. Not so with the girl. Some such incongruity was in her mind, for her look was disconcerting.

"How glad," she said, with a certain deliberate air of merely making conversation, "you must have been to see your mother again, after so long!"

He looked at her quickly, and a shadow of pain crossed his ready smile. She feigned to assume—was that it?—that of course he had gone to see his mother, being so near. He had only boarded the train at Junction City, he explained, and pressure of business had prevented him from running down to Rushdale, but another time he hoped—

"Law-zee," Mrs. Shippey ecstatically chipped in, "you boys out in the world! Business? Pressure of business?" She paused to look him over in guileless admiration. "No wonder," she said, shaking her head at him, "no wonder Melissa is that proud of you! Try a piece of the chocolate layer."

He wished he had stayed in the smoker. Melissa was his mother.

"My address is a regu'lar busy little bug," he informed them lightly. "Yes, sir, regular grasshop. Keeps even me on the jump keeping up with it, and as for letters from home—well, they're not always forwarded, you know."

THE girl, not her mother, answered him; and she answered not to the airy froth, but to that other note, which was like hunger.

"Your mother," she told him, "is well and cared for, if that's what bothers you. She cares for herself, so she hasn't time to be sick. Still, anyone not seeing her every day might notice that she's beginning to break. She would, at her age, under the work she does. I don't mean your sister's husband isn't good to her, for he is, even if he isn't so terrible fortunate as some. But she believes in paying her way—that's your mother—under her own daughter's roof, or any other. She won't let your sister put out their wash-

ing, for instance. She does it herself, and just to-day, when we waved to her from the train, she was— Say," added the girl, "why mightn't that happy bug of yours hop you to Rushdale once? Then you'd see for yourself."

He felt that the direct young person looked for no reply to that, and he tried none—on'y squirmed with an airy grimace which suited her quite as well.

He looked at his gold watch, but did not look at the time. "What," he exclaimed, "so late!" There was a business acquaintance on the train, he said, and there was a deal that they had to talk over. Would they excuse him? So tickled to have seen them again! He waited not on Mrs. Shippey's reproachful disappointment; and as he started forward through the swaying train, his lower lip was twisted down, and one row of teeth caressed those of the other in soft, meditative grinding. His mind, his will, were set on the stranger's wallet, forward in the smoking car; but not on a five-spot or on a fifty. He was bent on the whole wad.

He was inspired to it by the girl's scorn. He must fill the empty shell of success with the kernel. With money he might show himself, and justify his mother's fond boasts of him. Money would fill out the armor of his tailored clothes. Money would hide the petty crook that he was.

As he closed the door of the sleeper behind him, the car lurched on a curve, and he caught at his derby with one hand and the platform rail with the other. There was no vestibule connecting with the chair-car ahead, and he waited until the jerking cars should round the curve before crossing the gap between the two platforms.

NOW there was a reverse curve ahead, and as the engine took it her leading truck-wheels smashed as if into a wall of metal and climbed. Then the rail eased off to the driving-wheel, spreading out of gauge.

Above the train's roar, Nick Buckhorn heard thumps of wheels on ties. He started to jump, when the galvanic impulse of disaster crashed over him. The Pullman bumped, reared, ripped out the coupling, violently spent itself,

and dropped back. In the tortured jumble between the two cars Buckhorn scrambled to his feet. He felt for his hat. It was gone, and his finger tips came away wet from his scalp. There was a belated crashing of woodwork; some car ahead had tumbled from a precarious balance. A hissing was everywhere, of air and steam from twisted pipes. Then rose the first scream, and after that they were not to be counted.

Nick Buckhorn climbed over a matted snarl of rods and timbers, and down upon the right-of-way. He glanced back at the Pullman. Its hind wheels had not left the track; the windows were shattered, nothing more; and he was vaguely relieved, because of the girl in there. Whereupon he set his face—his mind, too, and his will—forward towards the smoking-car, as if he had not been interrupted.

On the edge of an embankment he passed the chair-car next the Pullman. It was the one other coach that remained on the track. The rest of the train lay strewn down the side or at the bottom of the fill.

Here and there a point of light flared larger as it began to feed on jagged ends of woodwork. He broke into a run slantwise down the embankment towards the nearest. Behind him, from the chair-car on the track, came the conductor and brakeman with a lantern and wrecking ax; and after them, some of the passengers. He outdistanced them all, losing his footing, tobogganning with loose clods. It was urgent to beat out those fires. If not, people would burn to death.

Dark forms were squirming up through the windows of overturned cars. Some collapsed, half out. Others dropped to the ground, where, after a time, perhaps they stirred and sluggishly began to crawl up the bank. Many were either unhurt or unaware of their hurts, who turned to drag others out or leaped in again if it were a loved one still in there.

Soon there were little groups of rescuers, frantic and half palsied, goaded by the piteous cries. Young Buckhorn tore an ax from its rack in one of the cars, and labored in set fury. Men for-

got mortal horror long enough to recognize that this man had practical sense left, and they crowded him to do as he was doing. So, when he saw the work going forward as well as it could be done, he hastened to the next group, by that much drawing nearer the smoking-car, and plied himself as before.

**H**IS way to crime was thus beset, but he buckled to the obstacles in something like exaltation. This was a big job at last.

The force of rescuers was growing. A small town lay beyond the curve; and from that direction lanterns bobbed on the right-of-way and men shouted as they ran. Once fairly on the scene, some of them drew back in rigid, hair-spring poises. A hatless man stopped his ears. "I can't bear it," he groaned; but he was among the first who set to work.

Soon there was enough help, such as it was, until the relief train should come. There was enough without Nick Buckhorn. The barriers seemed down. He could go on now and find the smoking-car and his man of the wallet.

He climbed the bank to the track, which was as clear ahead as if the train had passed and were doing her schedule fifty miles beyond. He kept to the tie-ends, to make sure of the smoking-car in the long litter of wreckage below him. It was close behind the engine, he remembered.

Soon he saw the engine, her tender buried under upturned cars. He hastened on, for he told himself that one of those cars must be the smoking-car. But he stopped. The barriers he thought done with again interposed. They were cries that stopped him, which he could not pass. Down the bank, behind the piled-up jam over the engine tender, were two coaches, one covering the other, like a crushed sandwich. The cries came from these.

"If God lives—" came the raw chord of anguish from below.

"Ay, ye poor suff'rin' divils," a voice grated huskily at Nick's elbow, "ay, but rimimber, we've saved twinty dollars in new ties on this curve alone."

Young Buckhorn whirled in an impulse to strike, but the man, a section

laborer, was gulping down sobs between his inhuman phrases.

"Shut up! For—"

The cries swept away both voices. Those cries—that hedged the young thief round, and rose and cut him off when he would dart through to his plunder! They were cries for help, begging for life. Then came one that begged for death. Nick Buckhorn gave up. It was one over the limit, it "got" him—anybody begging to be killed! He made crazily down the bank for the two sandwiched cars.

The occupants of the upper car, where not killed outright, had been able to escape through the windows, those least hurt helping the others. The cries came then from the car beneath. This car had been shunted obliquely down the fill, and lay on its side. It must have jerked the car following partly in air before the coupling broke. At any rate, by a freak peculiar to cyclones and wrecks, there it was, that car, on top of the first car, jammed down; and on its back at that, wheels in air like a dead beetle's legs. Its metal roof sealed up the car beneath as tight as a slab of stone over a burial pit. Nor was there escape by either door. The car's front end was burrowed under the wreckage between it and the engine. The rear end was stove in and closed by the car on top. The passengers inside were entombed; that was the word for it.

Nick Buckhorn clambered up the bottom of the under car, getting foothold in a tangle of rods, and so climbed into the upper car through one of the upside-down windows. The section laborer followed, then the brakeman and a switchman from the town, both with lanterns. The brakeman ordered any others of the crowd to keep out; there would not be room. Buckhorn was already chopping with his ax into the ceiling underfoot. The section hand relieved him.

Many of the cries ceased when the chopping began; they were being answered at last. But the cries that did not cease were those that cut to the quick. They were of torture, and could not be stilled by hope.

"Gimme the ax!" cried the brakeman. Under the ax a jagged hatchway be-

gan to open, and the cries rose unmuffled. They were cries of men. The one that asked for death was no longer heard.

"The lantern—wait!" said Buckhorn.

**H**E SHOULDERED aside the man with the ax, and held the lantern over the hole. He could see hands, hideous fingers, reaching up to him out of the darkness. He lowered himself, and dropped among them.

"Now then, up there, help. Take his wrists." He was lifting by the waist the first man his arms closed about, and those above hoisted through the hole into the lantern light a shapeless bundle fast going limp.

"Ye're a good scout, but stop a minnit," the section laborer shouted down, and came down himself.

Between them they lifted the poor victims one after another and passed them through the hatchway, first those who had their legs and reached for the light, then those with arms or an arm, who dragged themselves nearer, and finally soft, crumpled masses that had to be sought for in the dark and were found if they still cried out or groaned. At last all seemed quiet in the car.

"Now a lantern," said Buckhorn. "We'll look—"

"An' see dead min's faces! No," said the section-man, "I'm sick. Give me a boost up, an' I'll hand wan down to ye."

Nick boosted him up and received the lantern. He was alone in the coach, unless there were more victims.

He went to the forward end first, trampling in glass. He found dead bodies of men, but none living. He turned back, to complete the length of the car. He had nearly reached the crushed-in rear end when he stopped and listened, holding his lantern low before him. It did not come from overhead. No, for now he was sure. It was a quivering gasp, a labored intake of breath. Then it found voice; broken words borne on a moan.

"God's sake, kill me—kill—"

It was the cry asking for death.

Stooping lower and lower under the slant of wreckage, he swung his lantern's glow at last over the legs and

back of a man. They might have been his own shadow cast before him, except that he could not see the head. Yet he heard:

"Thank God—some one! Oh quick, now—end it, end it!"

**B**UCKHORN put down his lantern and knelt. The man lay partly through the horizontal doorway of the overturned car. He was clamped flat on his chest between the lower and upper casing. The upper casing pressed across his shoulder blades like the jaw of a vise. He had tried to crawl through the doorway after the car turned over. But the car behind had crashed down on top, and smashed him flat.

Buckhorn laid the palm of his hand on the man's back. "Only another minute of it, old top. I'm going to get you out," he started to say; but the man half screamed at the touch and a violent tremor quivered down his spine. "Not that way! Kill me!" he groaned.

Unnerved, Buckhorn jerked away his hand and stumbled to his feet. Desperately he flung his weight, bearing upward, against the roof-like slant of wreckage overhead, but no part of the splintered mass could he budge. It was jammed as fast as a wall of cement. He saw a wrecking-ax in its rack, and did not think to call down others to help him. Nor would he have taken the time. A man who could not wait to die was a case too horribly urgent. It made haste a frenzy.

He snatched the ax and began chopping. He chopped away woodwork from over the door frame lying across the man, and the jammed débris above still held and did not close the gap. He was able now to free either broken, jagged end of the casing. Carefully he lifted it off the prostrate form and tossed it into the car. He had put his back against the sloping wreckage lest it give; and still braced in this way he bent over and swiftly drew the man out. Then, when he would have sprung from under and gotten his man to safety, he felt the mass above settling on his neck and shoulders. At that he might have stooped and leaped clear, but the crash wou'd bury the man. So

he stiffened his legs and strained against what, for him, was the falling roof of the world.

"Hey, you," he implored the man at his feet, "get away! Crawl, squirm, anything! For the love of—"

"My back!" the man groaned into the dust.

But he was lifting himself from his face, and during a moment, before his arms gave under him and he rolled over on his back, he looked up at Buckhorn. He was the man of the smoking-car.

It made little difference now, but as others facing death do consider trifles, so the young crook perceived this: that he had come to the smoking-car after all. Moreover, the cries that had turned him, or one cry, had brought him to his goal—to this!

"Bunk!" he muttered, in appreciative comment.

But the man, he of the wallet, was cursing. He lay as he had fallen last, on his back, his distorted profile beside the lantern hewn in yellow, and one filming eye on the shadowed Atlas-burdened figure over him.

**S**EE, now you can't kill me, now you can't," he moaned bitterly, "and I got to wait through more of this hell o' sufferin'. Say," he demanded suddenly, "there's nothin' holdin' you? Jump from under! Jump, curse you; let her come!"

Buckhorn grunted between his teeth. He had no strength for speech. He was being ground slowly lower. A litt'e more and the gently settling weight must find the hinges of his knees. Yet, by jumping, he might still save himself; and by saving himself bring welcome death a few minutes sooner for the man at his feet. The man understood the grunt, the negative, the boon withheld. His pain went into an agony of hatred.

"You,"—he wet his lips,—"you damned hero!"

On rage followed cunning in the pain-maddened wits. The fingers of the man's right hand began picking inside his waistcoat, and with a spasmodic twitch the man's wallet was flung at Buckhorn's feet.

"Jump for that, then!" cried the man. "Eh, wont you?"

He set his teeth. It was hard to have to argue, and his chest a mat of fractured bone; but he did, in broken, grating gasps.

"Fraid—'fraid you'd rob somebody, that it? Widow? Little kids? Shucks, I'm alone. Just alone. And say, there's thousands still there. All that's left. Nifty little embezzlement, all right, mine was. But runnin' away, everlastingly runnin' away—costs. Gee, I'm tired! Say, just step from under, wont you? For God's sake, quick!" he suddenly shrieked; "you'll kill us both!"

Buckhorn's knees were bending. His chin was wedged down upon his chest. At his feet the man who pleaded for death knew that it was coming swiftly at last, while rescuers would but prolong his agony. But he shrieked, shrieked, and shrieked again for help, staring up at Buckhorn.

Overhead the scuffling of feet ceased, then quickened; and a body, and another, and others, came dropping through the hatchway. A pair of shoulders, the section-man's, were planted beside Buckhorn's against the settling mass of wreckage; on the other side another pair, the brakeman's; and young Buckhorn sank into his rags between them.

He did not faint. It was more like dozing in and out of consciousness on a summer afternoon, with the drone of bees in his ears. The stir about him was that far away. He knew dreamily that they up-ended loose car-seats under the roof of the world, and so everything was all right and he let the oblivion of utter exhaustion steal over him.

IT WAS a jogging motion, and the night air on his face, that brought him to his senses. Two men were carrying him on a stretcher. He remembered, after a moment of effort, about the man of the wallet, the absconding embezzler. Had they got him out, too? He called to his bearers and asked.

"Feller you saved, you mean?" answered the brakeman's voice. "Well, 'twain't no use; he passed right on away."

"But the poor gink wouldn't let you

lose nothin', 'count o' him," said the other bearer. "He hung on till he'd showed us your wallet that'd slipped out o' your pocket, and seen us put it back."

Wonderingly Buckhorn fingered his tattered waistcoat. In the inside pocket bulged the dead man's wallet. But there was still another question.

"Did he—the poor gink, you know—did he say who he was?"

"Not a say; and he didn't leave a scrap to identify hisself by, neither."

Nick Buckhorn's hand mechanically closed over the wallet. He had got what he went after! But it was still the trifle he had contemplated when facing death. He pressed the wallet thoughtfully.

**W**HEN they set him down in the little railway station beyond the wreck, which the village doctor had transformed into a first-aid receiving ward, he swung himself off the stretcher to his feet, a gashed, bruised, grimy creature, and declared he was all right—not to bother about him. He staggered a little from weakness, but was able to thread his way among the pallets for the injured and pushed through a gate marked "Baggage & Express." He could be more alone in here. He wanted to examine the dead man's wallet.

"Anyway," he had reflected, "I don't know who he was. I don't know who he stole it from. I've got to keep it, that's a cinch."

Behind a pile of trunks under an incandescent globe, he opened the wallet, but he did not disturb the banknotes filling it. He searched for a bit of writing, a card, a name, a clue. If he found none, he would be saved all further argument with himself about keeping the money. He found nothing of card or paper. Even the gold lettering on an inner flap had been etched out with a knife point or wet toothpick. He stopped. He knew that he could decipher the impression of the lettering if he tried. Finally he did try. It was a revealingly uncommon name—*T. A. Koplinck*.

Nick Buckhorn remembered at once. For three years past Koplinck had been

the most hunted and the most unap-  
parent man on the continent. The rakin-  
g search for him had soon become a  
bigger news story than the initiatory  
sensation of his hundred-thousand dol-  
lar defalcation. Nick remembered also  
the name of the trust company that  
Koplinck had worked for. Conscience  
lacked no detail to draw the issue com-  
plete. The money belonged to that  
trust company.

However, the trust company was not  
one that even righteous men liked to  
pay money to, even its own money. It  
was a brutal buccaneer trust company.  
Nick Buckhorn had no need to remind  
his conscience that it was a railroad-  
juggling trust company. But slowly an  
unpleasant grin parted his lips. He  
was remembering that the trust com-  
pany controlled this railroad, which  
saved on the price of ties. Those  
moans of the injured in the waiting-  
room partly represented twenty dollars  
saved in ties. Nick thrust the wallet  
back into his pocket.

**A**S HE returned to the harrowing  
scene in the waiting-room many  
turned to look at him, even sufferers  
on their pallets lifting their heads, and  
with them all the expression was some-  
thing more tense than simple curiosity.  
Young Buckhorn paused half-way  
through the gate, halted by a debasing  
sense of fright. Was there some vic-  
tim of his petty swindles in this crowd  
who had recognized him and told the  
others?

"Yes, that's him," said some one—  
the brakeman, "like I was tellin' you."

"If it aint the same young feller," a  
voice cried tremulously from one of the  
pallets, "who got *me* out! See his  
wrists, where the steam scalded him,  
too."

The young crook's eyes opened wide  
on them, astounded, unbelieving; and  
suddenly he blinked, and blinked harder  
yet. They were—blessing him, these  
people! Blinking did no good. He  
had to turn. They'd be seeing the tears  
in his eyes in a minute.

From among the women preparing  
bandages there came to him, there just  
within the gate, Angie Shippey. She  
had not recognized him at once, with

all his flash prosperity torn and sodden.  
She tugged gently at a hanging ribbon  
of coat-sleeve.

"Nick," she said, "we didn't know,  
Mamma and I, if you were killed or  
not; and Mamma is at the telegraph  
office now, letting them know at home  
that we are all right, and telegraphing  
your mother too—"

"My mother?"

"Yes, that—that you were on this  
train, you know. Hadn't you better—  
oh, here's Mamma now!"

Angie called, and fat Mrs. Shippey  
came, the little lavender plush hat tilted  
awry and bobbing with emotion.

"Law-zee, aint it terrible?" she  
panted. "Angie, who—why, it's Nick  
Buckhorn—alive! But I got to say you  
don't look it. Your nice new suit—"

"Mrs. Shippey," Nick interrupted,  
"Angie says you wired my mother.  
Did—"

"No, I didn't. Seemed like a million  
poor crazy folks was ahead of me. But  
I got her on the long-distance into Dag-  
get's Drug Store, and for once in his  
life Mr. Dagget was real accom-  
modatin'. He sent for her right away,  
and we talked—"

"You didn't let her think I was  
killed?"

"Nick Buckhorn, of course not! I  
told her you was on the train, and how  
you'd just left us in the sleeper when it  
happened, and you must be all right as  
nobody was badly hurt in the last two  
cars; but," went on Mrs. Shippey, tak-  
ing breath for emphasis, "but she's  
coming anyway. Coming to her boy.  
Aint that Melissa all over? I says to  
her—"

"How? When?" demanded Melissa's  
boy.

The girl looked at him quickly,  
sharply; but her eyes softened as she  
noted the eagerness—more than that,  
the yearning hunger of a child—on the  
young wastrel's face.

"How?" echoed Mrs. Shippey. "By  
the relief train. All the doctors in  
Junction City wont be enough, and  
they're bringing some of ours from  
Rushdale, and Melissa's coming with  
them. I guess they wont be more'n an  
hour now getting here."

"In an hour?" he repeated.

"Maybe less. I—"

"Nick," said the girl, "you are going back with her, aren't you? Once these people find out she's your mother, that brakeman especially, and with all they'll tell her, she—she is going to be very proud of you, Nick."

**H**E STARTED almost as if he had been exposed, denounced, instead. Proud of him, his mother—and Angie Shippey predicting it? He flushed unhappily, his eyes wretched. The trail of a thief—zigzagging, indeed, into fire and scalding steam because people cried for help, yet a thief's trail to a dead man's pocketbook—for this his mother, unknowing, was to be proud of him!

"In an hour?" he repeated again, miserably.

The girl thought she knew the reason. "Pshaw, Nick," she rallied him, "suppose you haven't made your fortune yet, or even a dollar you can call your own? Goodness me, if that's why you're so downcast and ashamed about seeing your mother again—"

"Wait," he cried, pushing by her fiercely, "in an hour I can—"

"Make your fortune?" she called after him. But she was nearer right than she imagined. He had gone to rid himself of one.

Young Buckhorn was no saint. There are limits. He did not send the money back to the buccaneer trust company. He gave it to the village doctor, the

village banker, and the minister of the Baptist Church. All three were there present, and he gathered them together from their service in the cause of suffering, and asked them to step with him into the baggage-room for a moment.

There, behind the same trunks, he handed them sixty-eight hundred dollars from a worn red-leather wallet. It was for a fund, he said, with a vague gesture toward the mangled beings in the waiting-room. When they asked what name, he said there wasn't any name; the man whose money it was had passed out unidentified; but the money was to start a fund for other victims, or their families, where needed. Particularly where needed, young Buckhorn made it clear, to sue the railroad to a fare-you-well and choke it into doing the square thing by the widowed-mother list. The three good gentlemen dazedly accepted the money and the trust; and the banker was for tendering a receipt, when the young man buttoned the empty wallet in his tatters and left them.

He left by the baggage-room door, and hastened down the railroad track, back towards the wreck. The relief train would stop at the wreck. Nearly an hour yet! It seemed a long time now. Just when he had found himself, just when he was strongest, he most wanted the arms that had shielded his babyhood. He would creep into them, and know that he was safe.

## *The* Philanthropist

By ANDREW SOUTAR

**T**HE ancient in the white smock was sitting on the bench outside the inn; his legs were crossed; the elbow of his right arm rested in the palm of his left hand; the fingers of the right hand were balancing the bowl of an empty pipe. There

was no tobacco in the pipe; nevertheless, the ancient's lips continued almost despairingly to open and shut. All the while his watery eyes stared disconsolately in the direction of the churchyard on the other side of the road—divided from it by rusted iron railings. There

was a green mound near the railings, and I fancied—only fancied—that at last, I understood the sorrow that rested on the village of Merling-in-the-Dip. Nodding at the green mound, I said to the ancient :

"This village seems to be a vale of tears."

He removed the pipe-stem from his lips and blew out an imaginary cloud of smoke.

"Aye," he said, and sighed.

"I have been in the village two days," I told him, "without seeing a single person smile."

"We aint got no call to smile," he answered.

"Some one—some one is dead?"

"Aye." Another and a deeper sigh. "Noah Cobbleston."

"Recently?"

"Fifteen year agone!"

"Great grief," I said, reverently, "is not for a day. . . . He was a philanthropist?"

The ancient stooped with difficulty and picked up a flint.

"That's what he called hisself," he said, "but he was as hard as that 'ere stone. This village was as 'appy as the birds in the air afore he come to it, an' it's never smiled sin' he went out of it—an' never will ag'in."

And by degrees, I obtained from the ancient the story or romance, which you will, of Mr. Noah Cobbleston, shoemaker by profession. I cannot set forth the story in the dialect of the ancient, nor hope to convey an adequate impression of his grief-lined face as he talked.

**N**OAH COBBLESTON was fifty-two, and a bachelor. The only person in the village who believed in him and paid tribute to his learnedness (he was an omnivorous reader) was his housekeeper, a half-witted body who was grateful for a shelter in her declining years. Noah's shop had no window, or rather, no glass front, so that loiterers on the pavement were able to hold converse with him as he sat at work on a dilapidated shoe. Being the only shoemaker in the village, he secured all the trade—for what it was worth—and year in, year out he sat

there with his last between his knees, and on his right the candle-flame at which he warmed the wax-ends for sewing purposes.

Noah was friendless in the village because of his irrepressible contempt for what he termed the woeful illiteracy of the rustics; he looked down upon them, heaped contumely upon their heads, and wondered aloud, a thousand times a day, why he allowed himself to dwell among them. Not to be a creditor of Noah was to run the risk of studied insult while passing the shop. The creditors—and there were many—were mollified by soft words of flattery. There was Leachey, the butcher:

"How do we stand now, Noah?" he would inquire across the counter when it was sought still further to add to the debt. That "how do we stand" meant "When are you going to settle up?" but Noah, with the artfulness of the heckled politician, would divert the trend of conversation.

"Leachey," he would say, shaking his silver head, "I owe it to my own intelligence to shake the dust of this village of the untaught from my feet, but if there is one person that I shall regret leaving it is Mr. Ezra Leachey, whose capacity for assimilating the great truths of life is the one bright spot in this otherwise forsaken community."

"That's all right," retorted Leachey, on one occasion, "but I have my bills to meet, and if my customers don't choose to settle up, I shall be pushed out into the cold by my creditors. You see how things are, Noah?"

"Ezra," said Noah, solemnly, "you read the Book. What is said therein: 'He shall temper the wind to the shorn lamb!'"

"And that may be all right, too," said Mr. Leachey, "although I never heared of a lamb being sheared."

"Some day—some day," said Noah, wiping his lips with the back of his hand, "I shall come into my own, and then—and then, Leachey!"

"You be always 'coming' into your own," Leachey grumbled; "the trouble is that you never seem to 'get' there. . . . No, you can't have that shin-bone; it's for the rector. *He* pays."

"Ah!" Noah sighed, removing his eyes from the desired morsel. "I have a brother in the Western States who would sicken of a fever if his *chef* were to descend to shin-bones. But let that pass, Mr. Leachey."

"And if I were you, Noah," said Mr. Leachey, in a friendly way, "I shouldn't talk so much about them rich relatives of yours. The tradesmen in Merling-in-the-Dip mayn't be so learned as Mr. Noah Cobbleston, but you can't get eternal credit with that old story. They've been bitten so many times, that they can 'smell' a 'dog' a fortnight off."

"Sir," said Noah, fondling a small joint on the counter, "it is an insult to your own remarkable intelligence to give these villagers credit for so much perspicacity. . . . Will you be good enough to weigh that joint, and remove the bone?"

Mr. Leachey did as he was requested, but he weighed the bone along with the meat.

"No," he said, still in that friendly tone, "you'll have to think out another yarn; we're getting tired of the old one."

**A**S NOAH went back to his own shop, his brows were knitted; the unshaven chin moved to the workings of his mind. He called aloud for the housekeeper, and placed the latest purchase in her hands.

"Arabena," he said, softly and ingratiatingly, "I commit it to your care, knowing that you will serve it to my liking—slightly under-done, the batter crisp and acceptable to a sensitive palate. Go you to Mr. Grabble, tender him an expression of my deep regard, and my deep-rooted belief that his eldest boy is destined to make his mark in the world. Observe, also, that as a green-grocer who knows his business, Mr. Grabble commands my admiration.

. . . I should order a sack of potatoes, but don't allow him to bring your order down to less than four pounds."

"He was very ungracious yesterday," said Arabena, doubtfully. "Indeed, he was rude."

Noah waved his hand in dismissal.

"One cannot expect to make a silk purse out of a swine's ear, Arabena,"

he observed; then he went to his last, and resumed the stitching of a broken toe-cap. As he bowed his silver-haired head over his work he recalled the words of the butcher: "You'll have to think out another yarn."

During the afternoon of that day, Mr. Cobbleston found time to ruffle the coats of half-a-dozen villagers, and in one case he went so far as to threaten personal violence. Being blessed with considerable stature, he was able to lend impressiveness to his threat. At twilight, he was still sitting at the last—kept there by the knowledge that one shilling and sixpence would be the reward of mending the broken toe-cap. From out of the gloom of the street there came, suddenly, a well-aimed stone. Mr. Noah Cobbleston was struck on the temple, and fell forward across his last with a deep groan. Arabena found him there, and within half an hour the village was acquainted with the news that Mr. Cobbleston had been the victim of a dastardly outrage, and was lying unconscious in his room above the shop.

For a week, the village was plunged in grief—in the case of the tradesmen it was torment. Grocer, butcher, tailor, and baker kept watch on the window of that room in which the old man was fighting the greatest battle a man or woman is ever called on to fight. Gradually, human solicitude was beaten down in the breasts of the watchers; by the end of the week they had made their calculations of how much the "property" would fetch. They were waiting for the blinds to fall; then they would rush forward and mark their claims.

**B**UT Noah recovered. Arabena startled the watchers by running out of the house, screaming as she ran. In her hand was a check, drawn by "Noah Cobbleston, Esq., " in favor of Arabena Gethercol. And the amount—"One thousand pounds!"

Leachey, the butcher, snatched the check from the housekeeper's hand, and read it aloud to the other tradesmen gathered around him. For a moment they stared, incredulously, almost fearfully, at each other. Then, Leachey

smiled grimly. He grasped Arabena by the arm.

"It wont work, my good 'ooman," he said, shaking the check in her face. "Now out with the whole story."

"I told him it wouldn't," she sobbed, "but his poor mind's given way. He's settin' there, calling hisself a miserable old millionaire, and prayin' the good Lord to forgive him all his past iniquities."

Leachey released his grasp of her shoulder.

"Has the doctor seen him?" he inquired, sternly.

"Came this morning, he did," said Arabena, "but Mr. Cobbleston was asleep, and I wouldn't have him wakened. About half an hour after the doctor went—"

"Mr. Grabble," Leachey broke in, "with your permission, we'll go into your shop and question this female further. It's only fair to her—being a 'ooman—that we should warn her of the danger of being a party to a felony—as *he* would say."

They adjourned to the back parlor of Mr. Grabble's shop, their numbers being added to by several customers. The door of the parlor was shut and locked, and Arabena was advised to make a clean breast of things.

"When he woke up," she said tearfully, "he called me to the side of the bed. 'How does my bank balance stand, woman?' he asked, his eyes half-shut. I told him there was about fifteen pounds to the good—"

A draught of relief swept round the little parlor; not one of the creditors had been so hopeful.

"Fifteen pounds," he cried out, gripping me by the skirts like this"—She demonstrated the action—"Fifteen million, you mean," he said, and—and when I looked into his poor eyes, I could see how things were. One of my brothers was took the same way. 'Fifteen millions,' says he, 'and all this while—all these years, Arabena, I've been a miserable, grasping old miser, ungrateful to my friends, rude to the dear people of Merling-in-the-Dip. I've quarreled with them, held them up to ridicule, and they've always turned the other cheek to the smiter!"

"Oh! Yes," said Mr. Leachey, and although he smiled as he said it, there was a nasty bite in his voice. He winked knowingly at Mr. Grabble.

Arabena wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron.

"I've had a horrible dream, Arabena," he said to me after a minute."

"He's going to have another," came from Mr. Leachey.

"A horrible dream," he said. "I thought I was dead, and when I went up for Judgment I was asked: 'What have you done with all your money, Noah Cobbleston—','"

"That's what we'd all like to know," observed Mr. Leachey in a low voice.

"He gripped my hand—like that," went on Arabena, "and said in an awful voice: 'I couldn't answer, woman; I knew that I'd allowed my money to lie in the bank; I'd refused to pay my just debts; I was a sinner without a single virtue.'"

"And when he found that he wasn't dead—what then?" Mr. Grabble had taken up the examination.

"He said, 'I've another chance, Arabena; I'm going to make amends for the past. You,—how his poor eyes filled with tears as he looked at me,—'you have been a faithful servant. I'm going to reward you, first.' And he asked for a pen and some ink, and then he gave me that check."

"Tisn't worth the paper it's written on," said Mr. Leachey, brutally.

Arabena might not have heard, for she carefully folded the check and placed it in the sack-like purse which hung from her girdle.

"Wouldn't give you twopence for it," said Mr. Grabble.

"It was the way in which he gave it me," said Arabena, thoughtfully. "I was the first his poor mind turned to. There's something in that."

"Is he up?" inquired Mr. Grabble.

"Bless you!" she exclaimed. "He seems as right as ninepence until he opens his mouth. Then, he talks of the mansions he's been buying and what he shall do with them before he dies. And he goes on about the *chef* and the way his man has brushed his clothes. Lord! It breaks me heart to hear him raving on."

"Yes," said Mr. Leachey, drily, as he backed to the door. "I'll see him tomorrow. This is my slaughtering day, and sorry I am that it's only a cow and a couple of sheep I'm killing."

**I**N THE evening, and when the street lamps were lighted, Mr. Noah Cobbleston dressed himself in clothes that had lain at the bottom of a brass-cornered trunk for twenty years and more. Then, carrying a light cane under his arm, he went out on a pilgrimage of penitence, as he said. The first person he called on was Mr. Leachey, who was too occupied with the needs of three or four customers to give his caller more than an impatient nod. Mr. Cobbleston, with great deliberateness, took a check from an old leather wallet and gravely handed it to the butcher.

"Not a word of thanks," he said imperiously, waving his hand in the air as to silence any outburst of gratitude that might be premeditated. "Not a word. You have been a friend—a true friend. *That* is but a slight token of my regard."

"That" was a check for five hundred pounds, drawn in favor of the butcher.

Mr. Leachey reached for a bone, but Noah was out of the shop before the missile could be used. Then, on to Mr. Grabble. With similar ceremony, he handed the grocer a check for two hundred pounds, at the same time informing him that he would be pleased to contribute a little matter of a thousand towards the scheme for a recreation ground—a scheme in which Mr. Grabble was interested. Spatchett, the baker, was given a check for three hundred; Pilcher, the tailor, had to be content with a hundred.

And fortified with the feeling that he had undergone a little whitewashing, Mr. Cobbleston went homeward. That night, he read a volume of poems to Arabena, and sketched out in fancy the tour of the world which he intended to make. He took himself to bed about midnight and slept soundly till morning.

At nine o'clock the next morning, there was a little gathering in the back parlor of Mr. Grabble's shop.

"We'll go along and give the million-

aire the fright of his life. If it hadn't been for me,"—he glanced at Mr. Grabble as though he would extract some expression of gratitude at any cost—"a pretty pack of fools you would have looked. Where's the constable?"

The tailor had seen to that part of the business, and as the procession moved up the street, the constable brought up the rear.

Mr. Noah Cobbleston had flung off some of his newly-acquired importance, for he was back at his last when the creditors entered the shop. He glanced up at them as they formed in a semi-circle around his bench.

"I give you good morning, gentlemen," he said, pleasantly. "There seems to be quite an influx of orders to-day."

"How's your memory, now?" inquired Mr. Leachey, motioning to the constable to come nearer.

"Splendid, and I thank you," said the old man, heating a wax end in the tiny candle-flame at his side.

"Wonderful what a night's rest will do for a body. Eh?"

Mr. Leachey had taken his check from his pocket and was giving it a glance—a final glance.

"Wonderful," Mr. Cobbleston concurred.

"How many thousands have you got rid of in your sleep?" asked the butcher. "You were pretty free with your money last evening, you'll remember."

Mr. Cobbleston laid down the shoe on which he had been working, and wiped his hands on his leather apron.

"My dear Mr. Leachey," he said, slowly, "if you have come here to insist on thanking me for the little present I made you, I shall feel that philanthropy is impossible in these days."

**L**EACHEY burst into laughter, which was cut short by the appearance of Arabena. Vigorously, she pushed her way between the butcher and the old cobbler, and like a tigress prepared to defend her young she clenched her hands and shook them threateningly in Leachey's face.

"You sha'n't make fun of him," she cried. "No, not while there's a breath

in my body. Out you go, the crowd of you. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves to torment a man who's newly out of a sick bed?" She snatched up a bradawl. "Out you go," she commanded, "or some of you'll need a doctor."

Mr. Cobbleston was as much astonished as the creditors. He raised his hand, deprecatingly.

"Arabena, woman," he said chidingly. "What ails you?"

She broke into sobs.

"They've come to make game of you," she gurgled, "and I won't stand here and see them do it."

"You're a faithful housekeeper," said Mr. Cobbleston, gently, "and I cannot at the moment adequately express my appreciation of your loyalty. But, I think you have misjudged the intentions of these gentlemen."

"Has she?" Mr. Leachey gave a signal to the other creditors. "If you ask me, Mr. Noah Cobbleston, she's hit the mark. The game—your little game's up. Here's your check. Watch it." Deliberately, he held the slip of paper over the candle-flame. "Bring up your wax-ends," he said to the others, and they gathered around the flame. In a few seconds, there was a little pile of burnt paper at the base of the candle.

"A little firework display for your benefit, Mr. Cobbleston," said Leachey. "You see, we ain't such fools as you think we are. Didn't I tell you that we'd been bitten so many times that—"

And there he stopped. Mr. Cobbleston's attitude was the reverse of what he had anticipated. He had clasped his hands over his last. His head was bowed until the stubble on the firm old chin was lost sight of. And tears were racing down his wrinkled cheeks.

Mr. Grable said:

"You shall have another chance, Cobbleston. You've worked this trick as far as it'll go, but as there's fifteen pound in the bank to your credit, we're ready to give you the opportunity of squaring your debts."

Slowly, Mr. Cobbleston moved his head until his eyes rested on the heap of ashes near the candle.

"That's gratitude," he said with a sob that shook his whole frame. "Arabena!"

She dropped on her knees beside the bench.

"I have mine—*dearie*," she told him, shooting a malicious glance at those about her. "I wouldn't part with it for all the world."

A smile came into his eyes. He placed his grimy hand on her head and tenderly stroked her hair.

"I think," he said, with a deep sigh, "I think I was out of my mind last night. But this morning—this morning it all came right. . . . You can read, Arabena, can't you? Then, read that letter to my friends, here. It came this morning—only this morning."

He drew a letter from under the leathern apron, and Arabena read aloud:

LEDBURY CHAMBERS,  
CITY.

*Re Angus Cobbleston, Deceased.*

Dear Sir:

We beg to inform you that under the will of your late brother, Angus Cobbleston, rancher, of Calgary, you benefit to the amount of fourteen thousand pounds. The amount was paid into your account, to-day, and we shall esteem it a great favor if you will kindly appoint a day on which our representative may call on you to advise on the matter of investment, etc.

We are, dear sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
COX AND WREN  
(Solicitors).

A heavy silence rested on the assembly for a few minutes. Then,

"Came only this morning, it did," said Noah.

He touched the heap of ashes at the base of the candle-flame.

"Arabena, *dear*," he said, soothingly, "bring along your brush—there's a good woman."

THE ancient in the white smock rose to his feet as he came to the end of the story; the flint was still in his hand.

"When he died," he said, bitterly, "Noah left every penny he possessed to that scheming woman, and the last words she said to me were: 'Leachey, you should never look a gift horse in the mouth.'"

He hurled the flint at the rusted railings on the other side of the road; then shambled away.

## COMPLETE RÉSUMÉ OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS

PENNINGTON LAWTON dies very strangely. One bleak November morning this distinguished captain of capital, a man still only middle-aged, is found dead, seated quietly in the arm-chair by the hearth in his library. "Heart disease," the doctors say. But his stricken daughter Anita refuses to believe this verdict.

Summoning her fiancé Ramon Hamilton, a young lawyer, she tells him that the night before her father's death she had awakened at three in the morning, and heard voices—those of her father and another man whom she did not recognize. They seemed in angry altercation and she caught the word *blackmail*. Next morning her father was found dead.

Hamilton determines to consult Henry Blaine, the great detective. Meanwhile the Reverend Dr. Franklin, the pastor of Anita's church, calls upon her and breaks the astonishing news that in spite of her father's apparent vast wealth he has died a bankrupt: all his great fortune has been swallowed up in recent unsuccessful ventures. Franklin adds that her father's chief business associates, Mr. Rockamore, Mr. Carlis and Mr. Mallowe, will stand *in loco parentis* to her.

Mallowe, who is president of the Street Railways company, also calls upon Anita and confirms the clergyman's unwelcome tidings. He adds that while even Lawton's house has been lost with the rest of his fortune (Mallowe himself holds a mortgage on it, a copy of which he gives to Anita), Mallowe, as her guardian, will look after her and see that she is enabled to stay in the old house.

Hamilton brings Blaine to see Anita. The detective arranges a code of communication with Anita and asks for the copy of the mortgage Mallowe has given her. This document Blaine takes to his office and, after obtaining an authentic example of Pennington Lawton's signature from a letter, compares it with the signature on the mortgage. The latter, Blaine decides, is a forgery! Poor Lawton and his daughter have been made the victims of some monstrous conspiracy.

Blaine recognizes this forgery as the work of Brunell, a past master of the

art who has dropped out of sight for a number of years. Summoning a young operative named Guy Morrow, Blaine sets him on Brunell's trail; and by making the acquaintance of Pennold, an old friend of Brunell's, Morrow finally locates the one-time forger in the person of a map-maker who lives with his daughter in the Bronx. Under Blaine's orders, Morrow takes a room opposite Brunell's shop and obtains a wax impression of the door-lock; his activities are much complicated, however, by the fact that he meets and is greatly attracted by Brunell's daughter Emily.

SCHEMING to "get the goods on" the conspirators, Blaine arranges to have a number of young women, protégées of Anita Lawton, installed in various capacities in the offices of Mallowe, Carlis and Rockamore, and in the household of Dr. Franklin. The trap is carefully set.

Under Blaine's instructions, Hamilton calls on Mallowe and endeavors to learn definite details of the deal which had brought about Lawton's supposed bankruptcy. Mallowe evades giving them, but does show a letter purporting to have come from Lawton, asking help. Mallowe puts the letter back in his safe; and that night under orders from Blaine, Hamilton and a detective burglarize Mallowe's office and "borrow" the letter. Blaine pronounces it a forgery.

A note of Lawton's, loaned by Moore, the banker, proves to have been a forgery. The young women watchers installed in the offices of Mallowe and his associates report that a shady detective named Paddington has been a frequent caller. When Guy Morrow searches the old map-maker's shop, he finds concealed by a trap-door the apparatus by which the photographic forgeries were presumably made. So the proof of a conspiracy accumulates.

Blaine sends an operative named Suraci to follow a back-trail of Paddington's—where, two years before, he had appeared to be shadowing Lawton at a summer hotel. And now comes an amazing turn in the investigation: Ramon Hamilton suddenly disappears—"as if the earth had swallowed him."

**I**HAVE often pointed out the fact that, plan and plan and plan as he may, to conduct a crooked, nefarious project and get away with it, the criminal invariably leaves some gap in the machination of his scheme. He will assure himself that he has safeguarded it to the utmost, from every side and angle, that his construction is absolutely air-tight, and yet there is always that rift, minute though it be, that crevice through which the detective may insert the little silver probe of his specialized knowledge and discover the truth."

WILLIAM J. BURNS.

# The CREVICE

By WILLIAM J. BURNS

President of the William J. Burns International Detective Agency

and ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "The One Who Knew," "The Affair Opposite," etc.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CONFIDENCE OF EMILY

**A**LL during that day and the night which followed it, the search for Ramon Hamilton continued, but without result. With the announcement of his disappearance, in the press, the police had started a spectacular investigation, but had been as unsuccessful as Henry Blaine's own operatives, who had been working unostentatiously but tirelessly since the news of the young lawyer's evanescence had come.

No one could be found who had seen him. When he left the offices of the great detective on the previous morning he seemed to have vanished into thin air. It was to Blaine the most baffling incident of all that had occurred since this most complex case had come into his hands.

He kept his word and called to see Anita in the late afternoon. He found that she had slept for some hours and was calmer and more hopeful, which was fortunate, for he had scant comfort to offer her beyond his vague but forceful reassurances that all would be well.

Early on the following morning Suraci returned from Long Bay and

presented himself at the office of his chief to report.

"Here are the tracings from the register of 'the Breakers' which you desired, sir," he began, spreading some large thin sheets of paper upon the desk. "The Lawtons spent three weeks there at the time you designated, and Mr. Hamilton went out each week-end, from Friday to Monday, as you can see here, and here. They had no other visitors and kept much to themselves."

Blaine scanned the papers rapidly, pausing here and there to scrutinize more closely a signature which appeared to interest him. At length he pushed them aside with a dissatisfied frown, as if he had been looking for something which he had failed to find.

"Anything suspicious about the guests who arrived during the Lawton's stay?" he asked. "Was there any incident in connection with them worthy of note which the proprietor could recall?"

"No sir, but I found some of the employees and talked to them. The hotel is closed now for the winter, of course, but two or three of the waiters and bell-boys live in the neighborhood. A summer resort is a hot-bed of gossip, as you know, sir, and since Mr. Lawton's sudden death the servants have been com-

paring notes of his visit there two years ago. I found the waiter who served them, and two bell-boys, and they each had a curious incident to tell me in connection with the Lawtons. The stories would have held no significance if it weren't for the fact that they all happened to concern one person—a man who arrived on the eighth of August. This man here."

Suraci ran his finger down the register page until he came to one name, where he stopped abruptly.

"Albert Addison, Baltimore, Maryland," read Blaine. Then, with a sudden exclamation he bent closer over the paper. A prolonged scrutiny ensued while Suraci watched him curiously. Reaching into a drawer, the Master Detective drew out a powerful magnifying glass and examined each stroke of the pen with minute care. At length he swung about in his chair and pressed the electric button on the corner of the desk. When his secretary appeared in response to the summons, Blaine said:

"Ask the filing clerk to look in the drawer marked 'P.1904,' and bring me the check drawn on the First National Bank signed *Paddington*."

WHILE the secretary was fulfilling his task the two waited in silence, but with the check before him Henry Blaine gave it one keen, comparing glance, then turned to the operative.

"Well, Suraci, what did you learn from the hotel employees?"

"One of the bell-boys told me that this man, Addison, arrived with only a bag, announcing that his luggage would be along later and that he anticipated remaining a week or more. This boy noticed him particularly because he scanned the hotel register before writing his own name, and insisted upon having one of two special suites; number seventy-two or seventy-six. Seventy-four, the suite between, was occupied by Mr. Lawton. They were both engaged, so he was forced to be content with number seventy-three, just across the hall. The boy noticed that although the new arrival did not approach Mr. Lawton or his daughter, he hung about in their immediate vicinity all day and appeared to be watching them furtively.

"Late in the afternoon, Mr. Lawton went into the writing-room to attend to some correspondence. The boy, passing through the room on an errand, saw him stop in the middle of a page, frown, and tearing the paper across, throw it in the waste-basket. Glancing about inadvertently, the bell-boy saw Addison seated near by, staring at Mr. Lawton from behind a newspaper which he held in front of his face as if pretending to read. The boy's curiosity was aroused by the eager, hungry, expectant look on the stranger's face, and he made up his mind to hang around too, and see what was doing.

"He attended to his errand and returned just in time to see Mr. Lawton seal the flap of his last envelope, rise, and stroll from the room. Instantly Addison slipped into the seat just vacated, wrote a page, crumpled it, and threw it in the same waste-basket the other man had used. Then he started another page, hesitated and finally stopped and began rummaging in the basket, as if searching for the paper he himself had just dropped there. The boy made up his mind—he's a sharp one, sir, he'd be good for this business—that the stranger wasn't after his own letter, at all, but the one Mr. Lawton had torn across, and in a spirit of mischief, he walked up to the man and offered to help.

"This is your letter, sir. I saw you crumple it up just now. That torn sheet of paper belongs to one of the other guests."

"According to his story, he forced Addison's own letter on him, and walked off with the waste-basket to empty it, and if looks could kill, he'd have been a dead boy after one glance from the stranger. That was all he had to tell, and he wouldn't have remembered such a trifling incident for a matter of two years and more, if it hadn't been for something which happened late that night. He didn't see it, being off duty, but another boy did, and the next day they compared notes. They were undecided as to whether they should go to the manager of the hotel and make a report, or not, but being only kids, they were afraid of getting into trouble themselves, so they waited. Addison departed suddenly that morning, however, and as Mr. Lawton never gave any

sign of being aware of what had taken place, they kept silent. I located the second boy, and got his story at first hand. His name is Johnnie Bradley and he's as stupid as the other one is sharp.

"JOHNNIE was on all night, and about one o'clock he was sent out to the casino on the pier just in front of the hotel, with a message. When he was returning, he noticed a tiny, bright light darting quickly about in Mr. Lawton's rooms, as if some one were carrying a candle through the suite and moving rapidly. He remembered that Mr. Lawton and his daughter had motored off somewhere just after dinner to be gone overnight, so he went upstairs to investigate, without mentioning the matter to the clerk who was dozing behind the desk in the office. There was a chambermaid on night duty at the end of the hall, but she was asleep, and as he reached the head of the stairs, Johnnie observed that some one had, contrary to the rules, extinguished the lights near Mr. Lawton's rooms. He went softly down the hall, until he came to the door of number seventy-four. A man was stooping before it, fumbling with a key, but whether he was locking or unlocking the door, it did not occur to Johnnie to question in his own mind until later. As he approached, the man turned, saw him, and reeled against the door as if he had been drinking.

"Sa-ay, boy!" he drawled. "Wha's matter with lock? Can't open m' door."

"He put the key in his pocket as he spoke, but that too, Johnnie did not think of until afterward.

"That isn't your door, sir. Those are Mr. Pennington Lawton's rooms," Johnnie told him. "What is the number on your key?"

"The man produced a key from his pocket and gave it to Johnnie in a stupid, dazed sort of way. The key was numbered seventy-three.

"That's your suite, just across the hall, sir," Johnnie said. He unlocked the door for the newcomer, who muttered thickly about the hall being d——d confusing to a stranger, and gave him a dollar. Johnnie waited until the man had lurched into his rooms, then asked

if he wanted ice-water. Receiving no reply but a mumbled curse, he withdrew, but not before he had seen the light switched on, and the man cross to the door and shut it. The stranger no longer lurched about, but walked erectly and his face had lost the sagged, vapid, drunken look and was surprisingly sober and keen and alert.

"The two boys decided the next day that Addison had come to 'the Breakers' with the idea of robbing Mr. Lawton, but, as I said, nothing came of the incident, so they kept it to themselves and in all probability it had quite passed from their minds until the news of Mr. Lawton's death recalled it to them."

SURACI paused, and after a moment Blaine suggested tentatively:

"You spoke of a waiter, also, Suraci. Had he anything to add to what the bell-boys had told you, of this man Addison's peculiar behavior?"

"Yes, sir. It isn't very important, but it sort of confirms what the first boy said, about the stranger trying to watch the Lawtons, without being noticed himself, by them. The waiter, Tim Donohue, says that on the day of his arrival, Addison was seated by the head waiter at the next table to that occupied by Mr. Lawton, and directly facing him. Addison entered the dining-room first, ordered a big luncheon, and was half-way through it when the Lawtons entered. No sooner were they seated, than he got up precipitately and left the room. That night, at dinner, he refused the table he had occupied at the first meal, and insisted upon being seated at one somewhere back of Mr. Lawton.

"This Donohue is a genial, kind-hearted soul, and he was a favorite with the bell-hops because he used to save sweets and tid-bits for them from his trays. Johnnie and the other boy told him of their dilemma concerning number seventy-three, as they designated Addison, and he in turn related the incident of the dining-room. The boys told me about him and where he could be found. He's not a waiter any longer, but married to one of the hotel chambermaids, and lives in Long Bay, running a bus service to the depot for a string of the cheaper boarding houses. He

corroborated the bell-hops' story in every detail, and even gave me a hazy sort of description of Addison. He was small and thin and dark; clean shaven, with a face like an actor, narrow shoulders and a sort of caved-in chest. He walked with a slight limp, and was a little over-dressed for the exclusive, conservative, high-society crowd that flock to 'the Breakers.'

"That's our man, Suraci—that's Paddington, to the life!" Blaine exclaimed. "I knew it as soon as I compared his signature on this check with the one in the register, although he has tried to disguise his hand, as you can see. I'm glad to have it verified, though, by witnesses on whom we can lay our hands at any time, should it become necessary. He left the day after his arrival, you say? The morning after this boy, Johnnie, caught him in front of Mr. Lawton's door?"

"Yes, sir. The bell-hops don't think he came back, either. They don't remember seeing him again."

"Very well. You've done splendidly, Suraci. I couldn't have conducted the investigation better myself. Do you need any rest, now?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm quite ready for another job!" The young operative's eyes sparkled eagerly as he spoke, and his long, slim, nervous fingers clasped and unclasped the arms of his chair spasmodically. "What is it? Something new come up?"

"Only that disappearance, two days ago, of the young lawyer to whom Miss Lawton is engaged, Ramon Hamilton. I want you to go out on that at once, and see what you can do. I've got half a dozen of the best men on it already, but they haven't accomplished anything. I can't give you a single clue to go upon, except that when he walked out of this office at eleven o'clock in the morning, he wore a black suit, black shoes, black tie, a black derby and a gray overcoat with a mourning band on the sleeve—for Mr. Lawton, of course. Outside the door there, he vanished as if a trap had opened and dropped him through into space. No one has seen him; no one knows where he went. That's all the help I can offer you. He's not in jail or the morgue or any of the hos-

pitals, as yet. That isn't much, but it's something. Here's a personal description of him which the police issued yesterday. It's as good as any I could give you, and here are two photographs of him which I got from Miss Lawton yesterday afternoon. Take a good look at him, Suraci, fix his face in your mind, and then if you should manage, or happen, to locate him, you can't go wrong. I know your memory for faces."

THE "shadow" departed eagerly upon his quest, and Blaine settled down to an hour's deep reflection. He held the threads of the major conspiracy in his hands, but as yet he could not connect them, at least in any tangible way to present at a court of so-called justice, where everyone, from the judge to the policeman at the door could, and inevitably would, be bought over, in advance, to the side of the criminals. It was a one-man fight, backed only with the slender means provided by a young girl's insignificant financial ventures, against the press, the public, a corrupt political machine of great power, the desperate ingenuity of three clever, unscrupulous minds brought to bay, and the overwhelming influence of colossal wealth. Henry Blaine felt that the supreme struggle of his whole career was confronting him.

The unheard-of intrepidity of conception, the very daring of the conspiracy, combined with the prominence of the men involved, would brand any accusation, even from a man of Henry Blaine's celebrated international reputation, as totally preposterous, unless substantiated. And what actual proof had he of their criminal connection with the alleged bankruptcy of Pennington Lawton?

He had established, to his own satisfaction, at least, that the mortgage on the family home on Belair Avenue had been forged, and by Jimmy Blundell. The signature on the note held by Moore, the banker, and the entire letter asking Mallowe to negotiate the loan had been also fraudulent, and manufactured by the same hand. Paddington, the private detective with perhaps the most unsavory record of any operating in the city, was in close and constant

communication with the three men Blaine held under suspicion, and probably also with Jimmy Blundell. Lastly, Blundell himself was known to be still in possession of his paraphernalia for the pursuit of his old nefarious calling. Paddington, on Margaret Hefferman's testimony, had assuredly succeeded in mulcting the promoter, Rockamore, of a large sum in a clear case of blackmail, but on the face of it there was no proof that it was connected with the matter of Pennington Lawton's insolvency.

The mysterious nocturnal visitor, on the night the magnate met his death, was still to be accounted for, as was the disappearance of Ramon Hamilton; and in spite of his utmost efforts, Henry Blaine was forced to admit to himself that he was scarcely nearer a solution, or rather, a confirmation of his steadfast convictions, than when he started upon his investigation.

UNQUESTIONABLY, the man Paddington held the key to the situation. But how could Paddington be approached? How could he be made to speak? Bribery had sealed his lips, and only greed would open them. He was shrewd enough to realize that the man who had purchased his services would pay him far more to remain silent than any client of Blaine's could, to betray them. Moreover, he was in the same boat, and must of necessity sink or swim with his confederates.

Fear might induce him to squeal, where cupidity would fail, but the one sure means of loosening his tongue was through passion.

"If only that French girl, Fifine Dechausée, would lead him on, if she had less of the saint and more of the coquette in her make-up, we might land him," the detective murmured to himself. "It's dirty work, but we've got to use the weapons in our hands. I must have another talk with her, before she considers herself affronted by his attentions, and throws him down hard—that is, if he's making any attempt to follow up his flirtation with her."

Blaine's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Guy Morrow, whose face bore the disgusted look of one sent to fish with a bent pin for a salmon.

"I found Paddington, all right, sir," he announced. "I tailed him until a half-hour ago, but I might as well have been asleep for all I learned, except one fact."

"Which is—" the detective asked quickly.

"That he went to Rockamore's office yesterday morning, remained an hour and came away with a check for ten thousand dollars. He proceeded to the bank, had it certified, and deposited it at once to his own account in the Merchants' and Traders'. He evidently split it up, then, for he went to three other banks and opened accounts under three different names. Here's the list. I tailed him all the way."

He handed the Master Detective a slip of paper, which the latter put carefully aside after a casual glance.

"Then what did he do?"

"Wasted his own time and mine," the operative responded in immeasurable contempt. "Ate and drank and gambled and loafed and philandered."

"Philandered?" Blaine repeated, sharply.

"In the park," returned the other. "Spooning with a girl! Rotten cold it was, too, and me tailing on like a blamed chaperon! After he made his last deposit at the third bank, he went to lunch at Duyon's. Ate his head off, and paid from a thick wad of yellowbacks. Then he dropped in at Wiley's, and played roulette for a couple of hours—played in luck, too. He drank quite a little, but it only seemed to heighten his good spirits, without fuddling him to any extent. When he left Wiley's, about five o'clock, he sauntered along Court Street, until he came to Fraser's, the jeweler's. He stopped, looked at the display window for a few minutes, and then, as if on a sudden impulse, turned and entered the shop. I tailed him inside, and went to the men's counter, where I bought a tie-clasp, keeping my eye on him all the time. What do you think he got? A gold locket and chain—a heart-shaped locket, with a chip diamond in the center!"

"The eternal feminine!" Blaine commented; and then he added half under his breath: "Fifine Dechausée's on the job!"

"What, sir?" asked the operative curiously.

"Nothing, Guy. Merely an idle observation. Go on with your story."

**P**ADDINGTON went straight from the jeweler's to the Democratic Club for an hour, and dined alone at Rossi's. I was on the look-out for the woman, but none appeared, and he didn't act as if he expected anybody. After dinner he strolled down Belleair Avenue, past the Lawton residence, and out to Fairlawn Park. Once inside the gates, he stopped for a minute near a lamp-post and looked at his watch, then hurried straight on to Hydrangea Path, as if he had an appointment to keep. I dropped back in the shadow, but tailed along. She must have been late, that girl, for he cooled his heels on a bench for twenty minutes, growing more impatient all the time. Finally she came—a slender wisp of a girl, but some queen! Plainly dressed, dark hair and eyes, small hands and feet and a face like a stained-glass window!

"They walked slowly up and down, talking very confidentially, and once he started to put his arm about her, but she moved away. I walked up quickly, and passed them, close enough to hear what she was saying: 'Of course it is lonely for a girl in a strange country, where she has no friends.' That was all I got, but I noticed that she spoke with a decidedly foreign accent, French or Spanish, I should say.

"Around a bend in the path I hid behind a clump of bushes and waited until they had passed, then tailed them again. I saw him produce the locket and chain at last, and offer them to her. She protested and took a lot of persuading; but he prevailed upon her and she let him clasp it about her neck and kiss her. After that—Good Lord! They spooned for about two hours and never even noticed the snow which had begun to fall, while I shivered along behind. About half-past ten they made a break-away and he left her at the park gates and went on down to his rooms. I put up for the night at the Hotel Gaythorne, just across the way, and kept a look-out, but there were no further developments until early this morning. At a little after

seven he left his apartment house and started up State Street as if he meant business. Of course I was after him on the jump.

"He evidently didn't think he was watched, for he never looked around once, but made straight for a little shop near the corner of Tarleton Place. It was a stationery and tobacco store, and I was right at his heels when he entered. He leaned over the counter, and asked in a low, meaning tone for a box of Cairo cigarettes. The man gave him a long, searching glance, then turned, and reaching back of a pile of boxes on the first shelf drew out a flat one—the size which holds twenty cigarettes. He passed it quickly over to Paddington, but not before I observed that it had been opened and rather clumsily resealed.

"Paddington handed over a quarter and left the shop without another word. He went directly to a cheap restaurant across the street, and, ordering a cup of coffee, he tore open the cigarette box. It contained only a sheet of paper, folded twice. I was at the next table, too far away to read what was written upon it, but whatever it was, it seemed to give him immense satisfaction. He finished his coffee, returned to his rooms, changed his clothes, and went directly to the office of Snedecker, the man whose divorce case he is trying to trump up. Evidently he's good for a day's work on that, so I thought I could safely leave him at it, and report to you."

"Humph! I'd like to have a glimpse of that communication in the cigarette box, but it isn't of sufficient importance, on the face of it, to show our hand by having him waylaid, or searching his rooms," Blaine cogitated aloud. "I'll put another man on to-morrow morning. Leave the address of the tobacconist with my secretary on your way out, and if there is another message to-morrow, he'll get it first. You needn't do anything more on this Paddington matter; I think the other end needs your services more; and since you've already broken ground up there, you'll be able to do better than anyone else. I want you to return to the Bronx, get back your old room, if you can, and stick close to the Blundells."

BACK in his old rooms at Mrs. Quinlan's, Guy sat in the window seat at dusk, impatiently awaiting the appearance of a slender, well-known figure. The rain, which had set in early in the afternoon, had turned to sleet, and as the darkness deepened, the rays from a solitary street lamp gleamed sharply upon the pavement as upon an unbroken sheet of ice.

Presently the spare, long-limbed form of James Blundell emerged from the gloom and disappeared within the door of this little house opposite. Morrow observed that the man's step lacked its accustomed jauntiness and spring, and he plodded along wearily, as if utterly preoccupied with some depressing meditation. A light sprang up in the front room on the ground floor, but after a few moments it was suddenly extinguished, and Blundell appeared again on the porch. He closed the door softly behind him, and strode quickly down the street. There was a marked change in his bearing, a furtiveness and eager haste which ill accorded with his manner of a short time before.

Scarcely had Blundell vanished into the encroaching gloom, when his daughter appeared. She too approached wearily, and on reaching the little sagging gate she paused in surprised dismay at the air of detached emptiness the house seemed to exude. Then a little furry object scurried around the porch corner and precipitated itself upon her. She stooped swiftly, gathered up the kitten in her arms and went slowly into the house.

Morrow ate his supper in absent-minded haste, and as soon as he decently could, he made his way across the street.

Emily opened the door in response to his ring and greeted him with such undisguised pleasure and surprise that his honest heart quickened a beat or two, and it was with difficulty that he voiced the plausible falsehood concerning his loss of position, and return to his former abode.

Under the light in the little drawing-room, he noticed that she looked pale and careworn, and her limpid, childlike eyes were veiled pathetically with deep, blue shadows. As he looked at her,

however, a warm tint dyed her cheeks and her head drooped, while the little smile still lingered about her lips.

"You are tired?" he found himself asking solicitously, after she had expressed her sympathy for his supposed ill fortune. "You found your work difficult to-day at the club?"

"Oh, no,"—she shook her head slowly. "My position there is a mere sinecure, thanks to Miss Lawton's wonderful consideration. I have been a little depressed—a little worried, that is all."

"Worried?" Morrow paused, then added in a lower tone, the words coming swiftly, "Can't you tell me, Emily? Isn't there some way in which I can help you? What is it that is troubling you?"

"I—I don't know." A deeper, painful flush spread for a moment over her face, then ebbed, leaving her paler even than before. "You are very kind, Mr. Morrow, but I do not think that I should speak of it to anyone. And indeed, my fears are so intangible, so vague, that when I try to formulate my thoughts into words, even to myself, they are unconvincing, almost meaningless. Yet I feel instinctively that something is wrong."

"Won't you trust me?" Morrow's hand closed gently but firmly over the girl's slender one, in a clasp of compelling sympathy, and unconsciously she responded to it. "I know that I am comparatively a new friend. You and your father have been kind enough to extend your hospitality to me, to accept me as a friend. You know very little about me, yet I want you to believe that I am worthy of trust—that I want to help you. I do, Emily, more than you realize, more than I can express to you now!"

MORROW had forgotten the reason for his presence there, forgotten his profession, his avowed purpose, everything but the girl beside him. But her next words brought him swiftly back to a realization of the present—so swiftly that for a moment he felt as if stunned by an unexpected blow.

"Oh, I do believe that you are a friend! I do trust you!" Emily's voice thrilled with deep sincerity, and in an impetuous outburst of confidence she added: "It is about my father that I am

troubled. Something has happened which I do not understand; there is something he is keeping from me, which has changed him. He seems like a different man, a stranger!"

"You are sure of it?" Morrow asked, slowly. "You are sure that it isn't just a nervous fancy? Your father really has changed towards you lately?"

"Not only toward me, but to all the world beside!" she responded. "Now that I look back, I can see that his present state of mind has been coming on gradually for several months, but it was only a short time ago that something occurred which seemed to bring the matter, whatever it is, to a turning-point. I remember that it was just a few days before you came—I mean, before I happened to see you over at Mrs. Quinlan's."

She stopped abruptly, as if an arresting finger had been laid across her lips, and after waiting a moment for her to continue, Morrow asked quietly:

"What was it that occurred?"

"Father received a letter. It came one afternoon when I had returned from the club earlier than usual. I took it from the postman myself, and as father had not come home yet from the shop, I placed it beside his plate at the supper table. I noticed the postmark—'Brooklyn'—but it didn't make any particular impression upon me; it was only later, when I saw how it affected my father, that I remembered, and wondered. He had scarcely opened the envelope, when he rose, trembling so that he could hardly stand, and coming into this room he shut the door after him. I waited as long as I could, but he did not return, and the supper was getting cold, so I came to the door here. It was locked! For the first time in his life, my father had locked himself in, from me! He would not answer me at first, as I called to him, and I was nearly frightened to death before he spoke. When he did, his voice sounded so harsh and strained that I scarcely recognized it. He told me that he didn't want anything to eat; he had some private business to attend to, and I was not to wait up for him, but to go to bed when I wished.

"I crept away, and went to my room at last, but I could not sleep. It was

nearly morning when Father went to bed, and his step was heavy and dragging as he passed my door. His room is next to mine, and I heard him tossing restlessly about—and once or twice I fancied that he groaned as if in pain. He was up in the morning at his usual time, but he looked ill and worn, as if he had aged years in that one night. Neither of us mentioned the letter, then or at any subsequent time, but he has never been the same man since."

"**A**ND the letter—you never saw it?" Morrow asked eagerly, his detective instinct now thoroughly aroused. "You don't know what that envelope postmarked 'Brooklyn' contained?"

"Oh, but I do!" Emily exclaimed. "Father had thrust it in the stove, but the fire had gone out, without his noticing it. I found it the next morning, when I raked down the ashes."

"You—read it?" Morrow carefully steadied his voice.

"No," she shook her head, with a faint smile. "That's the queer part of it all. No one could have read it—no one who did not hold the key to it, I mean. It was written in some secret code or cipher, with oddly shaped figures instead of letters; dots and cubes and triangles. I never saw anything like it before. I couldn't understand why anyone should send such a funny message to my father, instead of writing it out properly."

"What did you do with the letter—did you destroy it?" This time the detective made no effort to control the eagerness in his tones, but the girl was so absorbed in her problem that she was oblivious to all else.

"I suppose I should have, but I didn't. I knew that it was what my father had intended, yet somehow I felt that it might prove useful in the future—that I might even be helping Father by keeping it, even against his own judgment. The envelope was partially scorched by the hot ashes, but the inside sheet remained untouched. I hid the letter behind the mirror on my dresser, and sometimes, when I have been quite alone, I took it out and tried to solve it, but I couldn't. I never was good at puzzles when I was little, and I suppose

I lack that deductive quality now. I was ashamed, too: it seemed so like prying into things which didn't concern me, which my father didn't wish me to know; still, I was only doing it to try to help him."

Morrow winced, and drew a long breath. Then resolutely he plunged into the task before him.

"Emily, don't think that I want to pry, either, but if I am to help you I must see that letter. If you trust me and believe in my friendship, let me see it. Perhaps I may be able to discover the key in the first word or two, and then you can decipher it for yourself. You understand, I don't wish you to show it to me unless you really have confidence in me, unless you are sure that there is nothing in it which one who has your welfare and peace of mind at heart should not see."

He waited for her reply with a suffocating feeling as if a hand were clutching at his throat. A hot wave of shame, of fierce repugnance and self-contempt at the rôle he was forced to play, surged up within him, but he could not go back now. The die was cast.

**S**HE looked at him—a long, searching look, her childlike eyes dark with troubled indecision. At length they cleared slowly and she smiled, a faint, pathetic smile, which wrung his heart. Then she rose without a word, and left the room.

It seemed to him that an interminable period of time passed before he heard her light, returning footsteps descending the stairs. A wild desire to flee assailed him—to efface himself before her innocent confidence was betrayed.

Emily Blundell came straight to him, and placed the letter in his hands.

"There can be nothing in this letter which could harm my father, if all the world read it," she said simply. "He is good and true; he has not an enemy on earth. It can be only a private business communication, at the most. My father's life is an open book; no discredit could come to him. Yet if there was anything in the cryptic message written here which others, not knowing him as I do, might misjudge, I am not afraid that you will. You see, I do be-

lieve in your friendship, Mr. Morrow; I am proving my faith in you."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CIPHER

**I**T WAS a haggard, heavy-eyed young man who presented himself at Henry Blaine's office, early the next morning, with his report. The detective made no comment upon his subordinate's changed appearance and manner, but eyed him keenly as with dogged determination. Guy Morrow told his story through to the end.

"The letter—the cipher letter!" Blaine demanded, curtly, when the operative paused at length. "You have it with you?"

Morrow drew a deep breath and unconsciously he squared his shoulders.

"No, sir," he responded, his voice significantly steady and controlled.

"Where is it?"

"I gave it back to her—to Miss Blundell."

"What! Then you solved it?" the detective leaned forward suddenly, the level gaze from beneath his close-drawn brows seeming to pierce the younger man's impassivity.

"No, sir. It was a cryptogram, of course—an arrangement of cabalistic signs instead of letters, but I could make nothing of it. The message, whatever it is, would take hours of careful study to decipher; and even then, without the key, one might fail. I have seen nothing quite like it, in all my experience."

"And you gave it back to her!" Blaine exclaimed, with well-simulated incredulity. "You actually had the letter in your hands, and relinquished it? In heaven's name, why?"

"Miss Blundell had shown it to me in confidence. It was her property, and she trusted me. Since I was unable to aid her in solving it, I returned it to her. The chances are that it is, as she said, a matter of private business between her father and another man, and it is probably entirely dissociated from this investigation."

"You're not paid, Morrow, to form

opinions of your own, or decide the ethics, social or moral, of a case you're put on; you're paid to obey instructions, collect data and obtain whatever evidence there may be. Remember that. Confidence or no confidence, girl or no girl, you go back and get that letter! I don't care what means you use, short of actual murder; that cipher's got to be in my hands before midnight. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand." Morrow rose slowly, and faced his chief. "I'm sorry, but I cannot do it."

"You can't? That's the first time I ever heard that word from your lips, Guy." Henry Blaine shook his head sadly, affecting not to notice his operative's rising emotion.

"I mean that I won't, sir. I'm sorry to appear insubordinate, but I've got to refuse—I simply must. I've never shirked a duty before, as I think you will admit, Mr. Blaine. I have always carried out the missions you entrusted to me to the best of my ability, no matter what the odds against me, and in this case I have gone ahead conscientiously up to the present moment, but I won't proceed with it any further."

"What are you afraid of—Jimmy Blundell?" asked the detective, significantly.

THE insult brought a deep flush to Morrow's cheek, but he controlled himself.

"No, sir," he responded, quietly. "I'm not going to betray the trust that girl has reposed in me."

"How about the trust another girl has placed in me—and through me, in you?" Henry Blaine rose also, and gazed levelly into his operative's eyes. "What of Anita Lawton? Have you considered her? I ought to dismiss you, Guy, at this moment, and I would if it were anyone else, but I can't allow you to fly off at a tangent, and ruin your whole career. Why should you put this girl, Emily Blundell, before everything in the world—your duty to Miss Lawton, to me, to yourself?"

"She trusted me," returned Morrow, with grim persistence.

"So did Henrietta Goodwin, in the case of Mrs. Derwenter's diamonds;

so did the little manicure, in the Verdun blackmail affair; so did Anne Richardson, in the Balazzi kidnaping mystery. You made love to all of them, and got their confessions, and if your scruples and remorse kept you awake nights afterward, you certainly didn't show any effect of it. What difference does it make in this case?"

"Just this difference, Mr. Blaine:"—Morrow's words came with a rush, as if he was glad, now that the issue had been raised, to meet it squarely—"I love Emily Blundell. Whatever her father is, or has done, she is guiltless of any complicity, and I can't stand by and see her suffer, much less be the one to precipitate her grief by bringing her father to justice. I told you the truth when I said that the cipher letter was an enigma to me. I could not solve the cryptogram, nor will I be the means of bringing it to the hands of those who might solve it. I don't want any further connection with the case; in fact, sir, I want to get out of the sleuth game altogether. It's a dirty business, at best, and it leaves a bad taste in one's mouth, and many a black spot in one's memory. I realize how petty and sordid and treacherous and generally despicable the whole game is, and I'm through!"

"Through?" Henry Blaine smiled his quiet, slow, illuminating smile, and walking around the table, laid his hand on Morrow's shoulder. "Why, boy, you haven't even commenced. Detective work is 'petty,' you said? 'Petty' because we take every case, no matter how insignificant, if it can right a wrong? You call our profession 'sordid,' because we accept pay for the work of our brains and bodies! Why should we not? Are we treacherous, because we meet malefactors, and fight them with their own weapons? And what is there that is 'generally despicable' about a calling which betters mankind, which protects the innocent, and brings the guilty to justice?"

MORROW shook his head slowly, as if incapable of speech, but it was evident that he was listening, and Blaine, after a moment's pause, followed up his advantage.

"You say that you love Miss Blundell, Guy, and because of that, you will have nothing further to do with an investigation which points primarily to her father as an accomplice in the crime. Do you realize that if you throw over the case now, I shall be compelled to put another operative on the trail, with all the information at his disposal which you have detailed to me? You may be sure the man I have in mind will have no sentimental scruples against pushing the matter to the end, without regard for the cost to either Jimmy Blundell or his daughter. Naturally, being in love with the girl, her interests are paramount with you. I too desire heartily to do nothing to cause her anxiety or grief. Remember that I have daughters of my own. As I have told you, I firmly believe that the old forger is merely a helpless tool in this affair, but my duty demands that I obtain the whole truth. If you repudiate the case now, give up your career, and go to work single-handed to attempt to protect her and her father by thwarting my investigation, you will be doing her the greatest injury in your power. The only way to help them both is to do all that you can to discover the real facts in the case. When we have succeeded in that, we shall undoubtedly find a way to shield old Jimmy from the brunt of the blame.

"Don't forget the big interests, political and municipal, at work in this conspiracy. They would not hesitate to try to make the old offender a scapegoat, and you know what sort of treatment he would receive in the hands of the police. Play the game, Guy; stick to the job. I'm not asking this of you for my own investigation. I have a dozen, a score of operatives who could each handle the branch you are working up just as well as you. I ask it for the sake of your career, for the girl herself, and her father. I tell you that instead of incriminating old Jimmy, you may be the means of ultimately saving him. —Go back to Emily Blundell now, get that letter from her by hook or crook, and bring it to me."

The detective paused at length and waited for his answer. It was long

in coming. Guy Morrow stood leaning against the desk, his brows drawn down in a troubled frown. Blaine watched the outward signs of his mental struggle warily, but made no further plea. At last the young operative raised his head, his eyes clear and resolute, and held out his hand.

"I will, sir! Thank you for giving me another chance. I do love the girl, and I want to help her more than anything else in the world, but I'll play the game fairly. You are right, of course. I can be of more assistance to her on the inside than working in the dark, and it would be better for everyone concerned if the truth could be brought to light. I'll get the letter, and bring it to you to-night."

MORROW was waiting at the foot of the subway stairs that evening when Emily appeared. The crisp, cold air had brought a brilliant flush to her usually pale cheeks, and her sparkling eyes softened with tender surprise and happiness when they rested on him. He thought that she had never appeared more lovely, and as they started home-ward his hand tightened upon her arm with an air of unconscious possession and pride which she did not resent.

"May I come over after supper?" he asked, softly, as they paused at her gate. "I have something to tell you—to ask you."

"Wont you come in and have supper with me?" she suggested shyly. "Caliban and I will be all alone. My father will not be home until late to-night. He telephoned to me at the club and told me that he had closed the shop for the day and gone down-town on business."

A shadow crossed her face as she spoke, the faint shadow of hidden trouble which he had noticed before. It was an auspicious moment, and Morrow seized upon it.

"I will, gladly, if you will let me wash the dishes," he replied, with alacrity.

"We will do them together." The brightness which but an instant before had been blotted from her face returned in a warm glow, and side by side they entered the door.

With Caliban, the black kitten, upon his knees, Morrow watched as she moved deftly about the cheerful, spotless kitchen preparing the simple meal. He made no mention of the subject which lay nearest his heart and mind, and they chattered as gaily and irresponsibly as children. But when supper was over, and they settled themselves in the little sitting-room, a curious constraint fell upon them both. She sat stroking the kitten, which had curled up beside her, while he gazed absently at the rosy gleam of the glowing coals behind the isinglass door of the little stove, and for a long time there was silence between them.

**A**T LENGTH he turned to her and spoke. "Emily," he began, "I told you out there by your gate to-night that I had something to ask of you, something to tell you. I want to tell you now, but I don't know how to begin. It's something I've never told any girl before."

Her hands paused, resting with sudden tenseness upon Caliban's soft fur, and slowly she averted her face from him. He swallowed hard, and then the words came in a swift, tender rush.

"Dear, I love you! I've loved you from the moment I first saw you coming down the street! You—you know nothing of me, save the little I have told you, and I came here a stranger. Some day I will tell you everything, and you will understand. You and your father admitted me to your friendship, made me welcome in your home, and I shall never forget it. It may be that sometime I shall be able to be of service to

you, but remember that whatever happens, no matter how you reply to me now, I shall never forget your goodness to me, and I shall try to repay it. I love you with all my heart and soul; I want you to be my wife, dear! I never knew before that such love could exist in the world! You have your father, I know, but oh, I want to protect you and care for you, and keep all harm from you forever."

"Guy!" Her voice was a mere breathless whisper, and her eyes blurred with sudden tears, but he slipped his arm about her, and drew her close.

"Emily, wont you look at me, dear? Wont you tell me that you care, too? That at least there is a chance for me? If I have spoken too soon, I will await patiently and serve you as Jacob served for Rebecca of old. Only tell me that you will try to care, and there is nothing on this earth I cannot do for you, nothing I will not do! Oh, my darling, say that you care just a little!"

There was a pause and then very softly a warm arm stole about his neck, and a strand of rippling brown hair brushed his cheek lightly as her gentle head drooped against his shoulder.

"I—I do care—now," she whispered. "I knew that I cared when you—went away!"

The minutes lengthened into an hour or more while Morrow in the thrall of his exalted mood forgot for the second time in the girl's sweet presence his battle between love and duty: forgot the reason for his coming, the mission he was bound to fulfill—the letter he had promised his employer to obtain.

The next installment of "The Crevice" will appear in the March BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE. You will find this on sale February 1st.

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# The Wooing of Fanchette

*Paul Duhamel had never heard of Dumas, "The Three Musketeers" or D'Artagnan. The result was the curious situation described in this unusually attractive story.*

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By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

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**H**E—Monsieur Sebastian Fiset, Curé of St. Jean parish, County Charlevoix, Quebec Province—was enjoying his pipe before his fire when Paul Duhamel, who was noted for his discretion, came to the door. The Curé admitted him and offered him a chair in his library.

"Well, Monsieur Duhamel, what can I do for you?" he asked.

Paul rubbed his hands together nervously, and the Curé, looking at him, could not avoid arriving at an opinion, based upon the experience of six and forty years of parish work.

"Now I should say," he pursued, "that you are thinking of getting married."

Paul Duhamel opened his dry lips, but, not being able to form a sound just then, only swayed his head indecisively.

The Curé nodded sagaciously. The young men of St. Jean would come to him in that way to ask his advice upon the same subject; still, Paul was seven and forty, if he was a day, and this behavior was strange in one so universally

esteemed for his discretion, and famous for tact and *savoir faire*.

"And I should say, Paul, that it is the widow Lebrun," the Curé pursued.

At this Paul found his voice. "*Non, non, Monsieur,*" he protested. "That is what everybody says."

"Paul," answered the Curé sternly, "it is now nearly a year since I last asked you why you did not marry. You told me that you intended to do so when two things could be accomplished. First, you wished to finish saving two thousand *piastres*. Second, you sought a woman suitable in all respects, prudent and wise, a good cook, a home-lover, not too beautiful, lest she attract other men, and not so plain as to be disagreeable to yourself; in fine, one of model character and tempering the soup of economy with the spice of charity. Those were your own words, Paul. And when one speaks like a poet, marriage is not far distant from him. *Bien, Paul!* Your new house on the hill approaches completion. For whom is it intended, if not for Madame Lebrun?"

"But, Monsieur, I do not love the widow Lebrun," protested Paul. "Yet

everybody has chosen her for my future wife, and it seems I have no choice. Even Fanchette is urging me to marry her."

Monsieur Sebastian was becoming decidedly interested. Fanchette Tremblay lived with Monsieur and Madame Pouliot, of the hotel, assisting them in summer and teaching in the village school during the winter months. Paul Duhamel had boarded with the Pouliots ever since Fanchette was in short dresses, except when they moved into the hotel during the tourist season. He was the stone-mason and plasterer, having studied his trade after spending some years at sea, and he was able to put money aside.

"Well, Monsieur le Curé," continued Duhamel, "I opened my heart to Fanchette, for the rumor was distressing to me. Madame Lebrun must be ten years older than I, but no doubt she is thrifty. And Fanchette urges me to marry her, because she intends to get married also."

This was news to the Curé. "Fanchette is betrothed?" he asked in surprise. "To whom?"

"A gentleman named D'Artagnan, Monsieur," replied the stonemason. "She met him in Quebec last summer, I gather, when she went there to visit Madame Pouliot's cousin. I understand that this Monsieur D'Artagnan is a gentleman of birth, and is in the bodyguard of the President of France."

Monsieur Sebastian was staring at his visitor, unable to find words for the moment.

"Has—has anybody seen this Monsieur—D'Artagnan?" he inquired at length, looking extraordinarily serious.

"No, Monsieur," admitted Paul. "But next autumn, when his term of service in the President's bodyguard has expired, he comes to Quebec, and then the betrothal will be announced. It is not to be revealed till then. Mademoiselle Fanchette wants me to be betrothed on the same day. She has confided in me because she tells me everything. She has no secrets from old Paul Duhamel."

"I understand, Paul," said the Curé.

"That is what I came to tell you, Monsieur," said Paul.

The Curé knitted his brows. "Hum! —well, Paul," he said, "I am glad you have told me, and of course I shall say nothing about it. But concerning your own case, the widow Lebrun is a capable woman, and I think you may safely take the advice of Mademoiselle Fanchette. In fact I advise you to rely altogether upon Mademoiselle Fanchette's judgment, for she is a girl of extraordinary sagacity. *Bon soir, mon ami.*"

WHEN his visitor had gone, Monsieur Sebastian flung himself down in his chair and laughed until his jolly old face grew purple.

"Now I wonder what Mademoiselle Fanchette has in mind," he said to his pipe, and then, rising, he went to his book-case and looked along the rows of volumes. As he had surmised, the one he sought was missing.

Before the Curé's pipe was finished Paul Duhamel was back at Madame Pouliot's. At first he had walked dejectedly, but as he approached the house he began to whistle, and by the time he entered he was smiling as though there were nothing in the world to trouble him. Fanchette was alone in the room, seated on one side of Madame Pouliot's big stove, sewing. She was not remarkably pretty, but who needs beauty at twenty-one? She had a wealth of brown hair, two red cheeks, dark, sparkling eyes with mocking lights in them, and the demureness of a Quaker alternating with the vivacity of a Quebecquoise. As Paul took his place opposite her he could not help reflecting how they had sat facing each other like that night after night in winter time for half a dozen years. They had had good times together, and Fanchette had promised to help him learn to read the next winter. When next winter arrived, though, she would be Madame D'Artagnan, and he would be seated opposite an empty chair in the new house — unless 'Madame Lebrun . . .

Fanchette raised her eyes. "I saw the widow Lebrun this afternoon," she said.

Paul stared at her gloomily. "Fanchette, why dost thou join the cry that

I must marry the widow Lebrun?" he asked.

"But dost thou care nothing about her?" asked Fanchette. "Bethink thee, Paul, thou art nearly fifty and not married. And thou sayest that thou art too old for a young girl, dost thou not?" she continued, raising her eyes again to his.

Paul groaned. It was not a loud groan, but it touched the girl's heart.

"It is better to marry a woman of mature age than not to marry at all," she said quickly, bending over her sewing. "And the widow Lebrun is thrifty. Only, Paul, thou must take care lest she slip through thy fingers, for Monsieur Fox, of the lumber mill, visits her weekly, they say."

Paul Duhamel did not feel the least jealousy of Monsieur Fox, the foreman.

"The widow Lebrun thinks thou art too economical," continued Fanchette. "And not gallant enough. She says that the man who marries her must wear fine clothes and be gallant in his manner and bearing."

Paul thought of the defunct Monsieur Lebrun, whose clothes were always filled with stone-dust and sand, and he could understand how his relict might prefer a different type this time. Monsieur Lebrun had been, like himself, a mason and plasterer, and had had a large business at Tête des Rochers.

"Otherwise," said Fanchette, "I think that she would have thee. And after all, *cher Paul*, when a woman gets to be five and fifty, and is no longer beautiful, and has to wear a false front to her hair, she cannot expect to pick and choose like a young girl."

Paul's heart began to sink still lower. He wished the widow Lebrun were young and beautiful—like Fanchette, for instance. Paul wished he were not so discreet by nature. He was half reconciled to the thought of the widow, since public sentiment seemed set upon the marriage, but he had not known that her front was false.

"I should buy a new suit from the store, Paul," said Fanchette, "before thou goest to Tête des Rochers again."

"Very well, Fanchette," said Paul.

"And do not choose a somber pattern, Paul," pursued the girl, "because the widow Lebrun confided to me that she detested men who dressed like crows."

IT WAS with a heavy heart that Paul set out upon his wooing the following Sunday. Still, he felt younger than he had felt for years, in his new suit, as he approached the widow's house. He felt so young, in fact, that the age of the plump widow struck him with a sense of embarrassment, which was not lessened when they sat down before the stove and Paul began to think how he and Fanchette had sat like that so many winters. Unconsciously he fixed his eyes upon the widow's front hair. He wondered how much of it was false.

"Why are you looking so hard at my hair, Monsieur Duhamel?" inquired the widow, growing uneasy under this scrutiny.

"I was thinking how beautiful it is," said Paul, remembering Fanchette's injunction to be gallant.

The widow Lebrun looked at Paul in wonder. A horrible suspicion began to enter her mind. Paul's suit, his tie, a certain noticeable strangeness in his demeanor—

"Monsieur Duhamel, are you not feeling well?" she asked solicitously.

"Ah, Madame, in your presence who could help feeling well!" said Paul.

The widow Lebrun began to be really alarmed. She had admired Paul Duhamel for a long time; she had approved his seriousness, his discretion, and, above all, his economy. In fact, on his account she had made Monsieur Georges Fox's life an unhappy one for several weeks, chiefly owing to her refusal to answer a very pressing question which he insisted on asking her periodically. And here was Paul, dressed like a *commis voyageur* on his holiday, and talking in a way that was quite incomprehensible to her.

Before she could find wit to answer Paul, however, the door opened and Monsieur Fox walked in. He was a stout, pompous-looking man of about fifty; just now his face was exceedingly red, and it was obvious from his demeanor that he had overheard Paul's

last remark. He glared so hard at him that Paul seized the opportunity to slip away soon after.

A week went by. Paul spent each night at home. The presence of Fanchette, sewing upon the other side of the stove, even with Madame and Monsieur Pouliot chatting in the room, seemed like a raft to cling to in this shipwreck of everything. Soon there would be no more Fanchette. The girl had showed him a letter from her betrothed.

"It is a pity thou canst not read, *cher Paul*," she said. "I should have liked thee to see the beautiful words he writes to me. Perhaps thou mightest have used some of them in thy suit with the widow Lebrun."

**T**HEY were at him all the time about her. Madame Rose Eva, the old postmistress, had tackled him that afternoon.

"Eh, Paul Duhamel, they tell me that thy new house is completed," she croaked. "Soon, doubtless, we shall learn the name of the bride who is to inhabit it. Is it a fact that thou goest outside St. Jean for her, Monsieur Paul?" she demanded archly.

Paul's tormentors forced him to stay within the house. He was just in the mood to marry Madame Lebrun, if only to secure peace and fixity of life. With Fanchette's betrothal nothing had seemed to matter very greatly.

"Paul, how does thy suit progress?" asked Fanchette when they were alone.

"I do not think she cares for me, Fanchette," said Paul.

"*Mon pauvre ami*, that is a woman's way," answered the girl, smiling. "The more she loves, the less is she willing to let it be known."

As Fanchette's eyes met his, an odd pang shot through his heart.

"And dost thou, then, hide thy feelings from the man whom thou lovest, Fanchette?" he asked.

"Ah, *mon Dieu, oui!*" exclaimed the girl, and, dropping her work suddenly, she put her handkerchief to her face and began shaking with laughter. Paul waited in astonishment for this strange paroxysm to subside. When at last Fanchette resumed her sewing her eyes

were filled with tears; they might have been, equally well, of sorrow or joy.

"Oh, Paul, thou dost not understand women at all," she gasped, and began choking again.

"Now, *mon cher*," she continued, "why dost thou not put the question to her and learn thy fate? That woman is mad with love of thee, and thou art treating her abominably."

Paul was startled. "How is that, Fanchette?" he asked.

"For months thou hast tantalized her with hopes of marriage," answered Fanchette. "She might have had other suitors, but has rejected them for love of thee. And now she is growing old, and is still unmarried. Her hair is coming out, and she has had to buy a half-set of front teeth—the upper ones, Paul. She would find it harder to get married now than six months ago, for she is aging swiftly."

Paul rose up with determination. "Next Sunday I shall do as thou advisest, Fanchette," he said.

Fanchette went out of the room. As she closed the door Paul heard a strange sound. It seemed like a sob. But a moment later he heard her laughing merrily in the next room.

**S**UNDAY came, and Paul Duhamel set out upon his journey. It was warm April weather, and hard walking along the road, thick with thawing mud. At the lumber mill Paul stopped and struck out again along the cliff toward the widow's house. The noise of rumbling wheels behind him made him look back. Monsieur Fox was driving toward him, evidently bent upon paying his respects also. When he saw Paul he pulled in his horse.

"*Bon jour, mon ami!*" he exclaimed, without a trace of animosity. "Truly I am glad to meet you. It was my intent to go to St. Jean to visit you, but one has not much time to spare nowadays, you know." He winked at Paul.

"Now if this were a week ago I could wager where thou wast going," he said, falling into the familiar speech. "But to-day—no! I am puzzled, Monsieur Duhamel."

"I think our road lies in the same di-

rection, Monsieur Fox," answered Paul.

"To Madame Lebrun? Is it to Madame Lebrun, then, that thou goest?" exclaimed the foreman, beginning to turn red with laughter. "*Nom de Dieu!* Dost thou not know that she is to marry me a week from Sunday?"

The good fellow got down from the *calèche* and put his arm round Paul's shoulder.

"Thou didst not know, *mon ami*!" he said. "I thought thou hadst been told. Madame Rose Eva promised to have the news broken to thee in a discreet manner, that thou mightest not suffer from the shock."

Paul's head was whirling. A black cloud seemed suddenly to have been lifted from his heart. He stretched out his hand and shook Monsieur Fox's warmly.

"A thousand congratulations," he said huskily, and, declining the fellow's hospitable offer to take him to Madame Lebrun's all the same, he turned back through the mire again.

But as he neared St. Jean his heart grew heavy again. True, it was good to be free, but he was growing old, and after that summer came there would be no more *tête-à-tête* interviews with Fanchette before the stove. She had grown into his life imperceptibly, since the days when she was a little thing and used to climb upon his knees, when he first went to board with Madame Pouliot. As he approached the big new house a sudden desolation overcame him. He passed up the village street. Two or three fishermen who loitered in front of the post office looked after him.

"He knows now that she will not have him," said one.

"What will he do with his big new house, then?" asked the other.

Paul Duhamel was wondering. He stood before it, gazing at the strong foundations, at the well-timbered clapboards in which he had taken such pride, which had once held so dear a secret of his heart, before anyone had ever spoken to him about the widow Lebrun—and before Fanchette had told him of her engagement to Monsieur D'Artagnan.

HE WALKED slowly round it, and something of the old enthusiasm came back. Then a thought which must have lain hidden in his head for a long time suddenly leaped out and stood, full-panoplied, before him.

"It will do for them!" he exclaimed.

He blushed hotly at the thought, remembering his first intent. And with his mind employed in melancholy meditations he started down the hill.

But when the white stretch of the road came into view he stopped. Somebody was coming up the street toward him. It was Fanchette. Paul did not want to see Fanchette just then. He drew back toward the house. Surely she was going into the post office.

She did not go into the post office. She came on and on. There could be no doubt now but that she was coming to the house. Paul gathered himself together and went to meet her.

"Paul," said Fanchette, "they have just told me. My poor Paul! How thou hast been deceived!"

Paul did not see the mockery in her eyes, for the bitterness of his heart overflowed.

"It is nothing, Fanchette," he answered. "Eh bien, I was an old fool to think of marrying at my age. Fanchette, I will tell thee a secret. This house is to be for thee."

"For me!" Fanchette exclaimed, startled, and looking at him with a very strange expression upon her face.

"For thee and Monsieur D'Artagnan," said Paul.

Fanchette put her little hands upon Paul Duhamel's shoulders, and there was just a hint of moisture in her eyes as she answered:

"That marriage will never take place, Paul."

Paul gave a jump, but Fanchette's hands were still fast in his coat lapels. It was the new suit he was wearing, which, though he would never know it, had weighed down the even balance against him and given the widow to Monsieur Fox. Fanchette could hardly keep from crying. Dear, stupid Paul!

"Monsieur D'Artagnan wishes to break off our betrothal," she said in a low voice.

"What! But he is a rascal!" Paul

exclaimed. "I shall compel him to marry thee!"

"But I don't want him, Paul," said Fanchette, really crying at last. "Paul, Paul, why didst thou build this house?" she asked. "Was it truly for me? No, because it was begun before I told you of the betrothal. Nor was it for the widow Lebrun, for at that time she was the farthest from thy mind. For whom was it, Paul?"

"It was for thee, Fanchette," Paul answered. "What an old fool I am. I had an old man's dream when I built this, but that was shattered long ago."

"But it needn't be shattered, Paul," whispered Fanchette. She laid her head down on his shoulder, and the tears flowed fast, all mockery gone. Then even Paul Duhamel understood.

**T**HIS is a great surprise, my children," said Father Sebastian, beaming upon them. "Dear me! Only yesterday, it seems, I baptized thee in the church, Mademoiselle Fanchette.

And now thou art to marry Paul." His blue eyes twinkled. "Paul, thou rascal, thou hast deceived everybody about that house," he said.

"But it was not intentional, Monsieur," protested Paul. "If it had not been for that scoundrel of a D'Artagnan!"

The Curé was coughing into his handkerchief. Evidently he had a bad cold, for his face was visibly becoming purpler. "Well, well, my children, I have long wished for this," he stammered at length. "And so the house is finished just in time."

"And the school closes next week, Monsieur," said Paul, "so that I shall become the only scholar. She will teach me to read."

"Ah!" said the Curé drily, "that will be a fine thing. There is no need for haste in returning me that book of mine, Mademoiselle Fanchette, for thy pupil cannot begin his lessons with any better story than 'The Three Musketeers.' "

## Exchange Prisoners

By GERALD MORGAN

**O**LD Jim Smith, the warden of the State prison in the little city of Sparta, was reading in his room within the prison walls, the room to which he had moved since the death of his wife seven years before. For in his way he was a sentimental man, and since that time even the little near-by cottage of his wedded life had seemed too large for him alone. The warden was a man of fifty-five. He had an occupation which had satisfied his brain and heart for twenty years. He had one grown son in New York,

doing well in Wall Street—a self-made man. The warden believed himself fortunate in the sight of heaven.

He had originally owed his appointment to Senator Scott—the great Tom Scott—schoolmate with him in the town of Sparta forty years before. Occasionally the Senator came to him, when he stopped at his old home in Sparta.

"I had to go down on my hands and knees to the Democrats to keep you in, Jim," he said, on one of his visits.

The warden had looked miserable, for he had no sense of humor.

"Never mind, Jim," laughed the Senator, "I'm going to have fried Democrats for breakfast every morning next winter."

"Jim Smith's a queer old fish," the Senator used to say. "His heart's in the prison. He's the only man in the State of New York who regards public office as a public trust. He's a *lusus naturæ*, not a Republican." And as for the warden, he regarded Tom Scott as a high-class sort of god.

And now this evening the warden sat in his room, wondering if the prison walls were not going to collapse and bury him. Before him on the table lay that morning's issue of the New York *Tribune*, its usual inconspicuous headlines enlarged and blackened.

#### SENATOR SCOTT'S SON SENTENCED.

FIVE YEARS AT HARD LABOR IN THE STATE  
PRISON AT SPARTA.

CONVICTED OF STEALING \$100,000.

Benjamin Scott, son United States Senator Thomas J. Scott, was to-day sentenced to the penitentiary at Sparta for five years. He was employed at the Northeastern National Bank of New York, where he was learning the business, nominally as assistant to the loan clerk, but actually in charge of the securities of the bank. He was the only man who had access to the boxes in which the securities were kept. Of course all the officers of the bank, from president to assistant cashier, had also such right of entry, but except at occasional periods of examination, they confined their duties to locking and unlocking the doors of the bank vault. Several months ago a customer of the bank, B. F. Brown, wished to substitute other securities in a loan protected by a \$100,000 C. R. & L. joint four per cent coupon bonds, registered to bearer—in such cases negotiable. The bonds were not to be found. The company and their financial agents having been notified, the numbers of the bonds were printed upon the Stock Exchange ticker in due course as lost. A few days later ten of these bonds were delivered to the officers of the bank by a firm of brokers. These bonds were easily traced to another firm, who said they had received them for sale "at the market" from Mr. Benjamin Scott. Scott was at once arrested. In defense he said that he had owned ten of these bonds himself, which he had kept in an envelope among the bank's securities, but he could not explain the identity of these numbers with those of Mr. B. F. Brown. As it was also

proved that young Scott, unknown to his father, was in debt to various bookmakers, the jury lost no time in bringing in a verdict of guilty. It is thought the judge would have been more lenient had the young man been willing to divulge the whereabouts of the other \$90,000 in bonds.

There were two other documents in the case lying on the warden's table. First a letter from the Tombs:

Dear Mr. Smith:

If Scott had pled guilty and told them what he'd done with the stuff I think he'd have got off under suspended sentence, in spite of the "one law for rich another for poor" talk in the papers. But as it was, what else could they do?

Sincerely yours,  
J. J. O'BRIEN, WARDEN.

Second was a telegram:

Do what you can for him.

Tom.

THE warden got up and began to pace the floor, talking aloud to himself a little, as men connected in any way with prisons are sometimes apt to do. "They won't get him out inside of two years," he said. Then he rang the bell.

"If Dr. Crane is in the prison now, I'd like to see him," he told the guard.

"He'll get here to-night, poor kid," he said to himself.

The Doctor knocked and entered.

"How's the tuberculosis just now?" the warden asked.

"Bad as ever," the Doctor answered. "Four new cases in the last month. No prison doctor at Sparta has ever needed guinea pigs for experimental purposes," he added grimly.

"He's coming to-night," the warden said to himself. "Poor kid!"

The warden paced the floor, frowning. Now and then he said, "Poor kid." At length, after a long time, his frown deepened and his jaw set. He lifted the receiver of his telephone. "I want to see Stevens and Mitchell," he said.

Presently the two guards, Mitchell and Stevens, knocked and entered the warden's room.

"You two have been with me nearly twenty years," the warden said. "You know I've always been on the square."

He paused. "I'm going to let a prisoner escape," he added, quietly.

The guards did not answer. One of them bent his head a little. The other showed no sign that he had heard.

"This is Monday," the warden continued. "Mitchell, you'll be on duty in the little yard on Tuesday from four in the afternoon till midnight. At half past four you get the prison mail from the carrier through the small gate." Mitchell nodded. "At precisely six o'clock a prisoner will walk out through that gate. Do you understand?"

"No prisoners are allowed in the little yard after three o'clock," Mitchell objected.

"That's just it," said the warden. "He'll go straight from my office. It's black night by six. You don't actually patrol that yard when you're on duty there, do you?"

"Not after the prisoners are in their cells," Mitchell answered. "I only walk about every half hour or so."

"Then you wont see him go," the warden went on. "Now Stevens, you'll be at guard post Number 9 on Tuesday from four till midnight. At half past ten you'll pretend to see a man jump the outer wall—shoot at him, and give the alarm."

"What, jump the outer wall?" Stevens exclaimed. "No one will believe that. It's sheer suicide. Do you remember when Deeson tried it in ninety-six? He splashed on the rocks like a bucket of water."

"They'll have to believe it," the warden said. "There's a heap of building sand below there which the contractors left last summer. That sand is going to look as if a man landed on it. The prisoner's on duty here in the office till eleven—special duty. He jumps at half past ten."

"It ought to be a clean get-away," said Stevens, "four and a half hours' start before the alarm is given."

"And as much more as he needs while we're looking for the man who jumped at half past ten," added the warden. "That'll run into days."

"But wont we lose our jobs for negligence?" Mitchell asked.

"Every damn one of us," said the warden.

Stevens looked up and grinned. "We'll be going out in good company, chief," he said. "Eh, Mitch?"

"I guess that's right," Mitchell answered. "We'll do it, chief. Good-night."

"Good-night, friends," said the warden.

**A**T HALF past nine that evening the deputy sheriff from the Tombs arrived with his prisoner. "We had a fine trip up," the sheriff said, "—fine scenery, fine air. And the boy here, he kept his nerve. Never knew a prisoner act better."

It was the usual "cheerful" talk, but the warden did not listen. He watched the boy. That was how Tom Scott looked in the days when they were twenty-three. The boy set his teeth and stood up like a soldier. That was how Tom Scott looked when they stood back to back during the street-car riots of '84 in Sparta. "He's game, anyhow, like Tom," thought the warden.

"Well, I got to go," said the deputy. "I got to catch a train. Find the papers all ship-shape, Chief? All right? Well then, good-by, Chief. So long, Mr. Scott. Hope we'll meet again. Different situation, of course. So long."

The warden walked to the door and shut it after the departing sheriff; then he turned to the boy. "Ben Scott," he said, "do you know I'm one of your father's old friends? Do you know I remember you when you were a little boy in Sparta?"

The boy caught his breath, smiled, and stretched out his hand. "Shake hands this once," he said. "I want to feel like a human being again, even if it's only for a minute. Father said you'd do what you could for me."

"He didn't have to ask," the warden said.

"Will I have to wear stripes?" asked the boy.

"Listen," said the warden. "You'll have to wear stripes and sleep in a cell as long as you're here. Those are two rules which I cannot break. But you wont be here after to-night."

"What?" exclaimed the boy.

"To-morrow I'll put you on duty in this office, from one till eleven. Your

clothes you'll find right in that bureau drawer. At exactly six o'clock to-morrow evening you'll cross the little yard, walk out through the gate—I'll point it out—and leave on the 6:45 express for New York. Here's a ticket I'm putting in your pocket. You needn't be seen till you get on the train. It's a hundred to one you won't be recognized. Go to some friend's house and lie low."

"Escape?" said the boy.

"Exactly!" the warden answered.

"Escape? And let the whole city of New York say I was a thief? And ran away because I was a thief? Escape? Not a bit of it. I'm no thief, and I'm no quitter. I'll stay here and fight it out till hell freezes over. That's what I'll do."

"Listen," replied the warden. "Listen to me, young man. You're Tom Scott's son, and as game as they make 'em, but you're going out of here because I say so. A judge in New York has got a right to sentence Tom Scott's son to five years—maybe—but he's got no right to sentence you or any man to death of consumption. See? This prison's rotten with it—forty years of it. Now you go to your cell—it's the last in the corridor—with Jim Sharpe the trusty, and listen to him. And when you're in your cell to-night, you'll have time for thinking." He rang the bell. "Send Sharpe here," he said. "Now Ben, there's the drawer where you'll find your clothes—that you, Sharpe? Bring this man his prison outfit—"

Ben Scott followed the trusty down the corridor to the room which was used for the bathing and dressing of incoming prisoners. The trusty shut the door.

"So you're Scott," he said, with considerable curiosity. "Tell us all about it."

"Well," he said, after Scott had finished. "So they framed you, same as concealed weapons." The trusty neither believes nor disbelieves; but there is a prison philosophy. "Say," he went on, scratching his head, "I used to be a runner in Wall Street once. These here bonds of your own, did anybody know you had 'em in the box?"

"Apparently not," said the boy.

"Did you tell anybody you were going to sell 'em?" asked the trusty.

"I don't know. Why?"

"Cause it wouldn't have been much of a frame-up, if they found the other guy's bonds right there in your envelope, where the first square-toes would trip over 'em, like that hunt-the-handkerchief, you've-got-to-hide-it-inplain-sight game they make us prisoners play. You've got to hand a jury some sense, Kid."

"Why, I don't know," said the boy. "Come to think of it, I did tell one man, but he was an officer of the bank—the assistant cashier."

"Well, I guess it was under his bed you'd oughter looked," remarked the trusty, quietly. "Come on now, I'll show you your cell."

ONCE inside, the trusty shut and locked the door. The boy sat down upon his cot. The rough surface of the prison clothes chafed his skin. He got up again. A copy of the prison regulations was posted on the wall; he stood and read it: "Meals at six, twelve and fifteen minutes for breakfast, fifteen for dinner and supper. Hours for work—variable. No conversation allowed at meals, at work or in the cell—only at periodical hours of 'recreation.'" "Rules for case of sickness"—the warden's words came back. "Rules for cleaning the cell." He shivered when he read those.

The boy looked again at the iron bars of the cell doors, and realized at last what prison means, what it means to be deprived of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And everywhere, from every nook and crevice, there rose the smell of chloride of lime in its never-ending, never-winning fight against filth and death and the darkness of old barbarian times. And then the boy thought of the cashier who put him in this place, and his blood rushed to his head. The cashier was a small, thin-necked man—the boy's fingers opened and shut. Throughout the night he did not sleep.

By morning, he had decided. He ate the breakfast which the trusty pushed through the gate, and was glad of the solitude. Till dinner-time he dozed, and at one o'clock a guard brought him to

the warden's office, where by special favor he was to be employed as clerk.

The warden dismissed the guard. "Well?" he asked.

"I'm going," the boy said. "I've been awake all night. I've thought at last who it was who tried to cheat me out of the five best years of my life. I'm going out to get him. I'll send you an exchange prisoner, Warden."

"There's the gate," the warden said. "You can see it through that window. Remember, at six sharp. You can change your clothes here between five and half past. Stay here till you go. You won't be missed till ten-thirty." He rang the bell. "You can begin your work on the books," he added. "I'll show you what I want copied. Do as much as you can."

All the afternoon he worked. At five by the clock he took his clothes from the drawer, put them on, and waited. The warden came in, drew the blinds and locked the door. They sat there and in silence watched the clock.

At a minute before six—it was quite dark—the warden rose and walked to the door. He simply said, "Good-by." The boy walked out across the yard. It was quite deserted. He put his hand to the grated door. At first touch the ponderous lock did not move; but a harder twist and a harder pull started a noiseless, inward swinging, and he stepped into the starlit, open night.

Ben Scott had lived in Sparta till he was fifteen years old; he knew the town and prison well; but he had seen neither town nor prison as he saw them that clear December night: A man and a woman silhouetted in the lamplight of a cottage threshold, living their lives out at the door of the place where no real life was; walls substantial, threatening, immense, rising sheer, as though to bar without all earthly happiness; two sentries up above patrolling the ramparts of the condemned, the starlight gleaming on their gun barrels. And borne on the clean, cold winter wind floated the ghost of an odor—the smell of chloride of lime—the infernal brimstone of that place. Over the hill lay the lights of the town; and in the direction of those lights the boy turned away.

ONE frosty night a week later, the warden entered Senator Scott's house just outside the town of Sparta. He found the Senator at his desk.

"Well, Tom," he said.

"Well, Jim," the Senator answered, "I've had a letter from Ben. He's safe, of course. And what's more, he seems to have figured out at last the man who stacked the cards on him. He's an officer of the bank. We've got him right."

"That's good," said the warden.

"But Jim," the Senator went on, "I suppose you'll lose your job for negligence."

"I suppose so," replied the warden, "but that's all they can do."

"You must let me look after you," the Senator said. "Of course people may say what they like, but I know what you did."

"That's all right," the warden answered. "My son's doing well. He'll see me through. But I'd like to have you look after two of my old guards. They'll lose their jobs too."

"I'll do that right enough," said the Senator, "but I'll look after you too."

"It's not necessary," the warden said. "My son can do that. He's doing fine. He's assistant cashier of the Northeastern Bank."

"He's what?" exclaimed the Senator, suddenly.

"Assistant cashier of the bank," the warden went on, calmly. "He wrote often he was doing his best to clear Ben."

Not the dimmest expression of surprise appeared on the Senator's face. "Well, Jim," he said, "I'm glad your son is doing so well. He's had better luck than mine, hasn't he? Good-by and good luck."

After the warden had gone, the Senator crossed and recrossed the room just five times. He hesitated for a moment, but for a moment only; then he sat down again, wrote a telegram and rang the bell.

"Send this," he said. The telegram read as follows:

Wm. J. Burns,  
New York City.

Discontinue investigation Northeastern  
Bank.

THOMAS J. SCOTT.

**W**HEN old Peter Conway died, the Pete Conway who owned the thousand acres of fruit land in the San Lucca Valley, he bequeathed to his nephew, David Marley, the sum of five thousand dollars with the proviso that he spend the money to see Broadway. In his declining days New York had become a passion with the old man who had come from the East, nearly fifty years ago. Marley had never been further from the Valley than Los Angeles in his life, and he had worked for forty dollars a month in his uncle's orchards. So the legacy seemed like a fortune to the boy, and the stipulation crowned him with knight-errantry. He set out. The San Lucca papers printed the news of his inheritance; the Los Angeles papers copied it—only the fortune had grown to fifty thousand dollars by that time. When he reached New York, his fame had preceded him, and David Marley found that the metropolitan journalists had raised his uncle's bequest to five hundred thousand dollars.—“The Adventure of the Understudy.”

# Broadway Nights

*“The Adventure of the Wonderful Idea”*

By W. CAREY WONDERLY

Author of “Manhattan Mad,” “The Chorus Man,” etc.

**B**ECAUSE of the city's immensity David Marley had believed he could successfully hide himself in New York at will. Very shortly, however, he saw his mistake. Every time he moved, he found himself again occupying the center of the stage. And they say New York is cold and selfish and too busy with its own affairs to bother about its neighbor's! David wished things were so.

He was in love with the town—although the Sunday supplements had done their best to spoil it all for him. He was afraid to pick up a newspaper, during his first days on Gotham soil, for fear of seeing some ridiculous story of the fortune he had inherited from his uncle. For not only was the figure quoted preposterous; the write-ups were absurd enough to make him swear.

“Why do you think I am living in a cheap hotel in a side street if I have just come into a half-million?” he said once to a young journalist who had button-holed him on the Avenue.

“Well,” replied the fellow, smiling crookedly, “you can get a better view

of Broadway from Forty-second Street than you can from the Louis XIV suite at the Superba.”

“Good Lord!” David wiped his brow. “Either you're mad or I am,” he said, as he broke away.

Then he had made the mistake of writing to the papers and insisting that what they had printed was purely fiction—imaginary. So, instead of David Marley's being forgotten completely in the regulation nine days, he managed to keep himself—unwillingly, Heaven knew—before the public for many weeks to come. One journal in particular was hot after an interview; it said their readers demanded it, that David owed as much to New York. David didn't see it that way, but he met the man on the job and found him to be a decent young chap. They became almost friendly, although David was careful, when in his company, not to say anything for publication.

Kaufman was sitting with him one morning in the mean little lobby of the Pavilion Hotel when Horace Archer presented himself. Kaufman smiled as he listened to the man's story.

"You see, Marley," said he, "you can't get away with it."

"It seems as if I can't get away from 'em," remarked David gloomily. Horace Archer had a play.

PEOPLE had come to Marley with pretty much everything under the sun. He had been asked to sponsor this drama, publish that book, control one patent, finance another hallucination. He was weary of explaining to men and women alike, but to Archer he said:

"If I had backed every play that has been sent to me, my friend, there wouldn't be enough houses on Broadway to shelter them all."

"But there is always room, even on Broadway, for a real success," insisted the author. "Mine contains the most wonderful idea!"

"Has it ever been done?" asked Kaufman.

"Yes, on the road. That is what makes me so sure of its fitness for New York. But I haven't the money nor the reputation—nobody believes in me. With your name, Mr. Marley—"

"What good would my name be without any money?" asked David, smiling not unkindly.

"Well, you know you can—if you will."

Marley turned to Kaufman.

"Do you see?" he said. "That is what you have done—to me and to him."

"With ten thousand dollars," continued Archer, speaking rapidly, "just ten thousand—do you know what we could do with that, Mr. Marley? You had expected me to ask for more, but—the piece will not require an expensive production; it is neither a musical comedy nor a costume play—just a modern drama with a small cast and a single interior."

"Then what do you want with ten thousand dollars?" asked Kaufman. "You can rent a theater by the week."

"I want to spend it for advertising," Archer replied. "My little offering, by an unknown author, with a cast not made up of Broadway players—it would be lost in New York! The worth-while critics wouldn't even both-

er to attend the première, and their understudies would damn it because my name isn't Broadhurst or Klein or Sheldon, and my leading lady hasn't got more diamonds than Gaby has reputation. It would die without a chance, I tell you. New York would never know I had been in its midst. But let me spend ten thousand dollars for advertising purposes—"

"You think that would make your play a success?" asked David.

"It would let New York know I was in town; at least, I shouldn't die without a chance. Don't you see that, Mr. Marley?"

"By George, I know what you mean!" ripped out Kaufman.

David began to laugh. Turning to Archer, he said:

"Mr. Kaufman represents the yellowest of all the yellows—and he is enthusiastic over your plans because, naturally, his paper would get a slice of that ten thousand. Unfortunately, I haven't got that much money in the world; if I had—" He was going to say, "I wouldn't be here in this cheap hotel," but the grin on Kaufman's face checked his tongue, and indeed he saw disbelief in the playwright's eyes too. That's what the Sunday supplements had done for him—made him out a liar every time he told the simple truth. Bitter resentment began to stir in his breast against these journals and their cubs. . . .

Horace Archer was saying:

"Mr. Marley, you'll at least look at my play?"

"What would be the use," asked David wearily, "when I tell you I can do nothing?"

"Don't say that until you read it."

"Advertising is a great stunt," popped Kaufman, officially, David thought.

"It has always seemed to me that a play must stand or fall on its own merits," observed Marley, speaking to Archer.

"But mine sha'n't have a chance to stand unless New York is made aware of the fact that it is showing a new play by an unknown author with a road star! Why, it would come and go without a chance, I tell you. Lend me ten thousand dollars and your name—"

"What possessed you to come to me?" asked David bluntly.

**A**RCHER glanced down at the tip of his boot.

"Well, I knew you had just inherited a fortune—and the conditions of your uncle's will," he answered at last, slowly. "It seemed to me that this would be a pretty good way for you to 'see Broadway,' Mr. Marley. Your name looms rather large in New York's mind just now, you know. That in itself would help—"

"All newspaper talk," muttered David, with a glance at Kaufman. "Would my name amount to anything without the money, Mr. Archer?"

"We'd have to have something."

"It pays to advertise," sang out the journalist.

"This chance means everything to my wife, Mr. Marley," said the playwright. "She is my star—a wonder-woman who only needs an opportunity to show Broadway. She is an actress, not a personality on parade. For years she has played in the provinces; perhaps for that very reason she cannot get a New York showing; but when she does! I know her every mood; this play was written for her. But without a chance it might just as well never have been started."

David turned to Kaufman; he was interested in spite of himself.

"Can't you do something for them?" he asked.

The journalist smiled.

"The advertising department can; I'm not acquainted with their rates. Of course I only handle 'news.'"

"And this man's play?"

"Isn't news, of course! If David Marley becomes the producer—"

"I wish to God I could!" snapped David.

Horace Archer jumped up and tugged at Marley's coat-sleeve.

"Come round to the Brittany Hotel with me and meet Mrs. Archer," he urged. "She'll read the play to you."

"Good Lord, man, what's the use?" David cried, rising to his feet. "I have told you ten thousand dollars is as far beyond my reach as—as Heaven. Why, then—"

The playwright had him by the arm; now he turned to Kaufman.

"Will you come? I am sorry I can't suggest a taxicab for you gentlemen, but the Brittany is just around the next corner—fortunately."

"You are wasting your time, my friend," said David. And he repeated it when Archer brought him, breathless and bewildered, into the room where Mrs. Archer sat waiting.

**S**HE was a pretty woman, small and blonde and quite girlish, Marley saw, the type which appealed to him most, and he was pleasantly surprised, for he had expected an altogether different sort. "Road star" spelled many things to David—and Cynthia Archer was none of them! She had delightful poise, a clear, musical voice, and she stood and sat and walked with unstudied grace—this combined with her beauty. And Horace Archer said she had genius as well.

He felt genuinely sorry as he looked at her that he couldn't help; and he was sure that his presence in this room must have raised great expectations in her heart. David was sentimental, or rather he was romantic—which you wouldn't have guessed from the appearance of the man; but this doesn't mean he was always ready to fall in love with a pretty woman. There was scarcely a time when he wouldn't have liked to help a pretty woman in distress, but then he would as gladly have lent a hand to a man. David was wholesome; New York would never quite spoil him. He felt now that Horace Archer was sincere, and that Cynthia was deserving. As he listened to her reading the manuscript he wished he could do something. He had possibly three thousand dollars in the wide world!

The play might have possessed all the possibilities of "Hamlet;" David knew little about plays. And his taste leaned toward farce; this seemed very dramatic. But Cynthia's voice was very pleasant and soothing, and Kaufman muttered "Good! Great!" once or twice, toward the end. He supposed this was at the curtain of the big act. Well, if the play was as splendid as all

that, why didn't Kaufman interest his paper in it—do something for them? He felt a burning resentment toward him, toward all his tribe, because he found himself placed in an unenviable position. Archer's play might be the great American drama for which the country waited, and yet he could do nothing for him. And when he confessed as much they—Cynthia and Horace would call him mean in their hearts and believe him to be a liar. By George, he'd get even with Kaufman and his kind yet! He'd show them to believe a man when he spoke the truth!

"Well?" said Archer.

Cynthia had put down the 'script; the reading was over.

"It's immense!" declared Kaufman, offering his hand.

"Incredible enough for a story?" asked Marley.

"What story is there in a good play which the author can't get produced?" asked the journalist in turn. "There must be hundreds of like cases here in New York at this minute. That isn't news."

"And yet you want to publish a lot of fool things about me which aren't true!" muttered David.

Kaufman smiled.

"You, David Marley, are news," said he. "Your uncle's will—"

David turned to Cynthia.

"I am sorry," he said simply. "If I could—"

"You won't?" she cried, starting up.

**D**AVID picked up his hat and turned it awkwardly in his hands. An idea was struggling in his brain, an idea which might prove just as wonderful as Horace Archer's. . . . He looked up and met Kaufman's mocking smile. That decided him.

"I—I'll come back later, if I may," said he, bowing.

"If you wish to bring your lawyers—or we will go to them," Horace cried, his face lighting up.

"I'll come back here—at three," said David, and he hurried out of the room, followed by Kaufman.

"You will?" asked the newspaper man.

"When will you learn to believe the truth, Kaufman? I have told you I haven't got ten thousand dollars to my name."

"Then why go back at three?"

"It's hard for a clever little woman like Cynthia Archer not to get her chance, to condemn her to the road for the rest of her days. I thought I'd like to talk—"

Kaufman smiled his famous crooked smile.

"Yes," said he, "Mrs. Archer is a very charming young woman, a genuine blonde without a blonde's temperament, the kind of actress the stock houses would eat up, without being a stock actress. Pretty, refined, youthful. . . . What did you think of Archer's curtain for the third act?"

Marley hesitated, and Kaufman caught him.

"Why, it was very—strong," said he.

"Then you think the play is worthy of Cynthia Archer?"

"I think she would make a hit even if the play wasn't a success," replied David, and Kaufman smiled—as David knew he would when he deliberately picked his words.

He got rid of the man after that, Kaufman hurrying away with a satisfied air that wasn't lost on David. And he knew that at least one newspaper would keep an eye on the Archers and their attempted invasion of Broadway.

**A**T THREE o'clock promptly he returned to the Brittany Hotel, and was sent up to the room where Horace and Cynthia awaited his coming. And there he offered his idea; he said he had nothing else but his three thousand dollars. They were welcome to both—to the idea and the money.

"—Since it will not require an expensive production, you said."

Then he started in to tell them the true story of his inheritance—and he saw, when he was through, that Cynthia at least believed him.

"If you had deliberately set out to do such a thing you would never have been able to put it over on the New York newspaper men," cried she.

"And now, when you insist, and offer all kinds of proofs!"

"They don't believe me," nodded David. "That is why I believe in my idea. If three thousand dollars—"

"We have a little money which we have been able to save and scrape," said Cynthia. "Together we can do it, I am sure. Speak, Horace."

"There wont be a penny for advertising," Archer said.

"We don't want to spend a penny for advertising!" cried David. "We don't because we can't. But we'll get our publicity just the same. Keep everything dark until the day is ready; we mustn't strike until the iron's hot, eh, Mrs. Archer?"

"It would never do to anticipate our climax," replied Cynthia. "The 'news' mustn't grow stale. New York forgets so soon!"

"Sometimes," said David grimly.

And so they began. Everything was done in secret. The theater was leased in Cynthia's real name, and she was introduced to the company as Miss Wilson; of course she was unknown to this cast of Broadway players. Her relationship to Horace was not divulged and neither was the title of the play they were rehearsing disclosed to the actors. Marley never showed up at the theater; it was really all done as quietly as it is possible to do such things. Horace was only afraid the company would grow suspicious of the venture and throw up their parts, but fortunately no such thing occurred. Possibly even they realized that this unknown play was developing big.

In the meantime, with his ear to the ground, Kaufman continued his visits to the Pavilion Hotel.

"I suppose," he said, once, "you haven't decided to do anything yet for Horace Archer?"

"What can I do, man?" demanded David.

"It was a good play."

"You said yourself that there were hundreds of them in New York at this minute. Cynthia,"—he stumbled purposely,—"Archer ought to go after a job at the Empire. I hate to see such a clever actress lost on the road, you know, Kaufman."

"Your heart is in the right place, Marley," replied the newspaper man, with his famous smile. "It would be a shame for such a pret—such a clever actress to return to the tanks. But then, when properly appreciated, such actresses as Cynthia Archer seldom leave New York. Have lunch with me to-morrow?"

**D**AVID said he would, but the next day when Kaufman showed up at the Pavilion, Marley had left that hotel without acquainting anybody of his destination. Now Kaufman rather expected to be confronted with this very situation, and he could scarcely restrain his appreciation.

"Left no mail directions, I suppose?" he said to the clerk.

"No, he didn't," replied the man. "And that makes it bad, for just this morning comes a letter marked 'important.'"

It required no great persuasion for Kaufman to be allowed to see the letter, and he returned it directly; but not before his sharp eyes had seen Whiteway Theater penned on the back of the envelope. He set off for that playhouse as fast as his legs would carry him—very much as David had expected him to do when he urged Cynthia to write that address on her letter, which was blank!

"These Hinterlanders think they're so blowed smart," muttered Kaufman, as he dashed toward Broadway.

At the theater he found it impossible to gain an entrance. The door-keeper told him a Miss Wilson was rehearsing a new play; he had never seen the lady before and didn't know the name of the play. Kaufman waited. An hour later, an actor came out whom he knew from past performances, and the newspaper man hailed him as a long lost friend.

"What's all this going on in there?" said he.

"Search me," replied the actor. "New play, new star."

"Shoe-string?"

"Doesn't seem to be—ready money in sight. Whoever is backing her appears to be there with the pennies."

"I see. Does Miss Wilson look like

this?" Kaufman gave a fairly good description of Cynthia Archer. "And does the play you're rehearsing run along these lines?" He described Horace's drama.

When the actor had heard him out, he nodded his head.

"Right-o, both times. What's the mystery?" he smiled.

"No mystery, but plenty of coin—you stick," Kaufman replied. "And now tell me if you've seen this person around the theater?" He drew a word-picture of David Marley for the fellow to place, drew it carefully, minutely, but the actor failed to recognize it.

"I haven't seen any such man," he insisted.

**W**HICH pleased Kaufman mightily. Not until then was he sure. And when he learned that the theater was leased in the name of Cynthia Dwyer he was ready to toss his hat in the air and shout. It was like Marley not to wish his name to figure in any way. Kaufman wondered what yarn they had told Horace. . . .

There were two clews he wished to follow up—Marley and Archer. He must find out where Marley lived and how and when he saw Cynthia. From the playwright he must learn what the wife had to say in regard to the production—Archer must be ignorant of the fact that David was supplying the money. A few days later, matters were further complicated when Kaufman's actor-friend confided to him that it was Miss Wilson to whom they were obliged to go when they wished to draw on their salaries; the company didn't even know that their star was the author's wife! Here was a bit of news, a story that was developing big. It was such copy as pleased the newspaper man best, for he was something of a scavenger.

He followed Cynthia one afternoon from the stage-door of the Whiteway Theater to a small restaurant in the West Forties, just off Broadway. Cynthia was veiled, but Kaufman knew her and he hung around on the opposite side of the street until he saw David Marley turn the corner and hurry along to the door through which the woman

had disappeared, some ten or fifteen minutes before. Later, peering into the room, Kaufman saw the girl and the man sitting together at a table over in a corner—there was food and drink before them but they touched nothing, heads forward, whispering. Again he waited, secreted on the opposite side of the street, and when Cynthia and David came out of the restaurant, he followed them around to the Brittany Hotel, where David left her at the elevator. So he didn't want to meet Horace! Kaufman rubbed his hands and smiled.

He was not really malicious, but his uppermost thought was for the paper he served, and now he believed he smelled a story. Such a story—with David Marley for its principal! He began to dog their every step, following David like a shadow—much to that young man's amusement.

Things were coming to a head now, for the play was rehearsed to the satisfaction of Horace Archer himself; it was time to pull off their *coup*. They began to lay their last lines, baited so cleverly that Kaufman was sure to bite. Coming out of the stage-door one afternoon, when he knew that Kaufman was lingering in the shadow, Archer let fall a package of letters, and when he came to gather them up, one lay unnoticed, so that he hurried off without reclaiming it. But the journalist saw it, and the moment that Horace had turned the corner Kaufman had his hands on the envelope.

The seal was broken; evidently Horace Archer had read it. This left no scruples for Kaufman to bother over. He drew the sheet from the envelope and glanced first for the signature. Unsigned, an anonymous letter!

This is to let you know that David Marley is in the habit of paying your wife a daily visit each afternoon when she returns from rehearsal and while you are still at the theater. A word to the wise.

A FRIEND.

Kaufman's eyes were alight; his fingers became all thumbs as he stuffed the page back in the envelope. The husband knew—at last! No doubt he was on his way to the rendezvous now.

There would be a scene, probably a shooting. He jumped in a cab in his anxiety to be there at the finish.

Fortunately the desk-clerk at the Brittany remembered him and he was permitted to go up to the Archer apartment unannounced. Arriving at their floor, he hung around in the corridor, not wishing to ring their bell. Once he thought of trying to gain an entrance by way of the fire-escape. A few minutes later, he was glad he hadn't attempted such a thing—Cynthia came out of her room and leaving the door ajar, hurried off down the long corridor, passing quite close to the crouching man yet failing to see him. Kaufman jumped up, even before she was out of sight, and ran toward the open door. A moment later he was down behind a Japanese screen, breathless but triumphant.

THE Archers occupied two rooms, and in the smaller, where Kaufman found himself, David Marley sat before a table on which stood a bottle and two glasses. Kaufman saw them over a corner of the screen; there were other things on the table, it is true, but these objects loomed biggest in the journalist's eyes; good local color is always appreciated, doubly by the masses that bought the paper for which Kaufman wrote. Presently Cynthia returned.

"Everything's all right," said she, sinking into a chair opposite David.

Then their heads went together; what they whispered was lost to the man behind the screen. Perhaps this is how he came to be discovered too early in the game; he must have upset the screen in his eagerness to lean near enough to hear their conversation. Anyway, over it went, and around turned David and Cynthia.

"Hello!" cried Marley. "What the devil, Kaufman?"

"Why, it's your newspaper friend!" gasped Cynthia Archer. All of a sudden she gave a little moan and sank into a chair. "Why is he here, David?" she demanded. "Everything is up now!"

Kaufman scrambled to his feet, meeting David with his crooked smile.

"I know all there is to know, Marley," he said. "Mrs. Archer is right: the game's up."

David flashed Cynthia a look; she seemed ready to burst into tears.

"You know about the—Whiteway Theater?" said David at last.

"About—our play?" whispered Cynthia.

"Yes to both questions," replied Kaufman grimly. "I know everything. Perhaps you'll deny this story when it appears to-morrow, Marley?"

"You mean that you'll connect my name with the Archers'?"

"Surely you'll not write this up in your paper, Mr. Kaufman!" flashed Cynthia.

"If it is the last thing I ever do," answered the journalist significantly.

"But we don't want the public to know!"

"Few people who are surprised as you have been want the public to know," smiled Kaufman. "I have all the necessary information: who Miss Wilson is at the Whiteway Theater, who leased the theater and who wrote the unnamed play which the company is rehearsing—Miss Wilson's husband. Why, even some of the actors didn't know that Horace Archer was Miss Wilson's husband!"

"You are a scoundrel, a damn human ferret!" cried Marley, his voice rising.

"You mustn't let him print those things, David!" wept the girl. "We have done everything so secretly!"

"I will give you ten thousand dollars, Kaufman, to kill that story," shouted David, his hand flying to his breast pocket. "Wait a minute, man, don't go; don't hurry off like that!"

Kaufman turned and smiled from the doorway.

"I understood that you hadn't ten thousand dollars in the world, Marley," he retorted.

"Never mind; I can get it. Listen to me!"

"You can't get it for me! Goodby!"

His hand touched the knob: at the same minute Marley sprang from his chair; Kaufman almost measured his length on the corridor floor, so quickly did he make his departure.

AN ELEVATOR had just stopped at his floor; somebody was getting off. Kaufman thought it must be Horace Archer; he was sorry he had knocked over the screen and so had been forced to show his hand before the real climax. But he had enough story—and he could telephone from the office to learn if Marley and Archer had come to blows. He turned the corner of the corridor, expecting to see the husband; instead, he came face-to-face with three newspaper men from rival sheets whom he knew in a business way. Somebody had tipped them off too! He must run; his paper must beat theirs to it. Possibly, however, they didn't know the whole story, about the theater lease and the disguised star. He—Kaufman—had even been present the day when David Marley had first met Cynthia Archer! David had been too busy appreciating her charms to listen to the reading of her husband's play.

He nodded to the three men.

"Tipped off ahead of us?" asked one, frowning.

"Oh, no!" smiled Kaufman. He leaped in the car. "Main floor—don't stop," he told the boy, as he slipped him a coin.

At the door of the Archer apartment David Marley and Cynthia stood waiting to greet the newspaper men. When they came up, introductions were in order, and they shook hands all around.

"Come in," said Cynthia, in her pleasant voice. "Mr. Archer is rehearsing a new scene in the next room. Horace!" She raised her voice slightly. "It was so damp and chilly at the theater; something went wrong with the fires," she turned to explain to the journalists. "That is why they are here to rehearse."

Horace opened the door of the larger room at that moment and came out, followed by two men and a middle-aged woman. One of the reporters recognized her as Mrs. Cartwright, a well-known Broadway *grande dame*, and one of the actors was Sydney Latham, the leading man. Everybody shook hands.

"It is just this," said Horace Archer, at last: "I've sent for you boys so

that everybody may have the same chance—a chance I didn't want to give you, by the way. But one of your tribe, Mr. Kaufman—"

"We saw him coming away," spoke up somebody.

"Exactly! He thinks he's got a 'beat.' The cad! You don't know me, gentlemen," resumed Archer, "but I have written a play, and my wife, Miss Cynthia Archer, is to star in it at the Whiteway Theater. This gentleman—but you may know Mr. Marley by sight, David Marley from California. He is going to produce my play. Now because Mr. Marley has refused dozens of times over to take hold of other folks' plays he didn't want it known that he was sponsoring mine. He has never appeared at a rehearsal; the theater was leased in Mrs. Archer's maiden name; the company wasn't even told the name of the piece they were preparing—Mrs. Cartwright, Mr. Latham and Mr. Wheeler will bear me out in that. You see, David Marley had refused so many young authors and he was afraid if they knew about my good luck in interesting him, they—the others—would be upon him like a pack of hungry wolves."

"Mr. Marley has the right idea there," observed one of the men, smiling.

"In the first place the piece was to be produced without my name figuring at all," cried Marley, starting up.

"And we were so confident of its success that we wanted to come in on rubbers," Cynthia piped girlishly. "Both Mr. Archer and myself are utterly unknown in New York; we thought our triumph would be all the greater if we made our bow to Broadway unheralded; and so we didn't let on to a soul. Then Mr. Kaufman—"

David spoke up:

"I know the man slightly. Some how he got wind of the fact that I am putting up the money for the Archers' venture. And he came here with a story of how he meant to publish the facts in his paper. I begged him not to do it, and told him why—just as I have told you, gentlemen, my reason for wishing to keep clear of this thing. I—I believe I even offered him

a check to keep my name out of it, but he insisted it was 'news' and as such had to be printed. He called it a—a beat."

"And we determined to get him there," interrupted Horace Archer. "Since he wouldn't do as we wished, we made up our minds that he shouldn't have the glory of a beat, and we telephoned to you. I 'phoned in the other room while he was here talking to Mrs. Archer and Mr. Marley—I hoped you would arrive before Kaufman got away."

"We met in the corridor."

"We wanted to 'gum-shoe' it to success!" cried Cynthia. "Now he has to go and spoil it all!"

"Mr. Archer will call to see your advertising man to-night, gentlemen," David said.

"And now I'm ready with any details you may want to know," added Horace. "If Kaufman hadn't been so all-fired smart—"

**N**EW YORK opened its eyes the next morning to find Cynthia and Horace Archer and David Marley the most advertised trio in all Gotham. During the night, the Whiteway Theater had been plastered with their names, and billboards from the Battery to the Bronx bespoke the new star, the new playwright and David Marley, producer. And then the papers!

The paid advertisements were very small—one had to look for them, in fact—but front-page spreads and woman's page heart-interest stories acquainted all who read, of the long road struggle of Cynthia Archer and the final capitulation of David Marley after he had read Horace Archer's play: "This is the first and only play ever sponsored by David Marley, who has become known to New York as the 'million-dollar kid from the San Lucca Valley' . . . who came East by the terms

of his uncle's will to see Broadway life."

The other papers said this; Kaufman's paper, the yellowest of all the yellows, told of a love affair between the young millionaire and the beautiful actress—that was why her husband's play was produced after Marley had turned down better stuff every day. It hinted of intrigue; it told of the rendezvous at the Brittany Hotel; it stated that "our reporter was offered a bribe of ten thousand dollars to keep this information out of the paper and from our million readers."

At once Cynthia Archer and David Marley started libel suits against the journal. Mrs. Cartwright, Mr. Latham and Mr. Wheeler, as well as Horace Archer himself, were in the next room rehearsing a new scene all the time Kaufman was talking to Cynthia and David. They heard everything. Kaufman was asked to produce his letter—and he found it had disappeared.

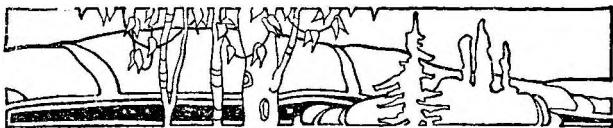
The suits never amounted to a row of pins, except for their advertising values. Long before they were settled out of court New York had come to the conclusion that it had been hoaxed, but being New York it merely laughed at itself. The papers, all of them, even Kaufman's journal, must have thought the same things about the Archers and David Marley before they were through, but—it was done. The Whiteway Theater was filled for three months, and then star and play went on the road and made a fortune—albeit Cynthia wasn't such a clever actress, nor Horace such a brilliant playwright after all.

David's share of the profits was twenty thousand dollars.

"I might toddle back to California with this roll," he told Cynthia and Horace. "I may see a bit too much of New York if I stay any longer. And yet, . . . H'm—I wonder."



# T. H E W I L D E R N E S S T R A I L



*An historical romance of the most delightful character. It will take you gratefully back to old days in Kentucky, when wilderness was king and the lives of men and women were heroic.*

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By H. BEDFORD-JONES

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## CHAPTER I

THE YEAR 1810 was more commonly known, at least in the Kentucky wilderness, as the thirty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States. Backwoods folk are simple folk, proud of what they and their fathers have done.

Although split with vexatious questions of Federal or Democrat, rent asunder by argument over the Great Conspiracy of Aaron Burr, and menaced always by the gathered allied hordes of Tecumthe across the Indiana border, the settlers in and around Louisville forgot all these things in the one supreme fact that this was the thirty-fourth year of the United States.

Law had come into the country, to the bitterness of many. Land-titles and sorry scoundrels had in combination ousted many a less famous man than Colonel Daniel Boone from his holdings. Whiskey and lawless border life, to say nothing of the more lawless river-ways, had ruined more than one good man both in morals and reputation. Some said the western country had gone to the dogs; others said that the dogs had all come to the western

country. Both sayings were true, in a sense.

So, then, in this thirty-fourth year of the United States, an old man stood on the Beargrass Creek Road, just out of Louisville, and swore volubly. A horseman had spattered him with mud. To his right was a fringe of trees, to his left the mudhole, and just beyond him was a bend in the road.

The old man was only five feet ten, but was thew'd like a giant. As he wiped the mud from his cheek and glared at the returning horseman, he displayed a strong, keen-eyed face which sat well above powerful shoulders and barrel-like chest.

"Consarn the lawyers!" he cried angrily. "If I had my way, I'd hang every cussed lawyer in Kaintuck! Hanging's too good for 'em. Consarn 'em, I'd—"

The horseman had reined in at the bend and was now back beside the old man. He was a large, athletic man, dressed in fine blue broadcloth, with pudding cravat and ear-high coat collar. He leaned over in his saddle with a smile.

"Sir, your pardon! The offense was unintentional. I take it that you have a grudge against lawyers, eh?"

"Huh!" The other grunted angrily,



# A Complete Book-Length\* Novel

*This is the sort of novel which, in book form, sells by the hundred thousand copies, at a price about eight times that of this entire magazine. It is one reason why the BLUE BOOK is so well worth buying.*

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Author of "Flame-hair, the Skald," "The Golden Ghost," "Waters of Strife," etc.

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yet with none of the sputtering fury of old age. His words seemed calculated, in fact. "Huh! Haint lawyers robbed me right and left an' driv me out o' Kaintuck? You're like all of 'em, consarn ye, slick and smooth! I aint lived seventy-six year 'thout bein' able to read a man's face. Ye black-hearted Wyandot, why didn't ye turn out o' the way—huh?"

At these final words the horseman went white to the lips. He was handsome, dark of hair and eye, with thin lips, virile features, and powerful hands. Despite the careful attire and courtly air, however, there was an indescribably cruel curve to his thin lips and nostrils, an arrogance in his bearing, which seemed rather out of place in democratic Kentucky.

"Sir, I asked your pardon," he said in a deep voice, twitching his riding-whip against his boot. "In deference to your age I pass over your words—"

"Cuss yer impudence!" broke out the old man hotly, a flame leaping out in his blue eyes. "You're one o' them Louisville vultures, huh? I kin tell. Pass over my words, do ye? Well, ye git down out'n that saddle an' I'll give

ye somethin' better to pass over. Hump down, consarn ye—I'll pay out one debt more on yer carcass afore I go back to Missouri!"

The old man did not look his seventy-six years. The wrathful earnestness of his bearing bespoke his entire willingness to chastise the lawyer, while there was a dangerous vitality in his high-browed face. The other gazed down steadily, contempt sitting in his proud, dark eyes.

"I have no quarrel with you, sir," he returned slowly. "Yet if you would seek redress through the courts, you may seek me at Louisville, where I am well known. My name, sir, is Charles Duval, and I regret that my apology did not—"

His stately courtesy and slight trace of contempt served only to infuriate the old man the more. With one swift forward stride, he gripped the bridle of the horse.

"Git down out'n that saddle," he broke in. "I aim to git a feel o' yer hide right here an' now, consarn ye! I don't want no courts."

"Hands off, you fool!" whipped out Duval, deadly pale. He made as if to

\* The reader should remember that the pages of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE contain from three to four times as many words as the average book page. Published in book form, this novel would fill about 250 pages.

raise his riding-crop, but paused and twisted in the saddle at sound of a cheery voice from the bend of the road just behind him. It was a vibrant, joyous voice, and the lilt of song rose clearly on the afternoon air.

Oh, I fit with Gen'ral Washin'ton an'  
I'd like to fight some more,  
An' I'm going to join with Gen'ral Clark  
when next we go to war!  
I'll tote my Kaintuck rifle, and I'll raise  
the Kaintuck boys,  
And we'll sculp the bloody Britishers—

THE singer jogged around the bend of trees and came to an abrupt halt as he sighted the two. His horse was good, his deerhide dress bad, his rifle brass-mounted, and his head bare. Glinting brown hair, a brown, clean-shaven face of youth and strong lines, and clear brown eyes formed a symphony of woods-coloring.

"Well, well!" His eyes twinkled slightly as he surveyed the scene before him. "Is this a highway robbery, friends? Strength assailed by old age —what an allegory we find here! And why not make youth the mediator, may I ask?"

His appearance seemed to quiet the rage of the old man, who released the horse's bridle and stepped back calmly. The newcomer met the steady look of Duval, but the twinkle passed from the brown eyes.

"Well?" he snapped suddenly. "Are you dumb, sir? I believe you intended to strike this old man with your whip?"

"Sir, you are at liberty to formulate your own beliefs," returned Duval coldly. "Kindly get out of my path at once."

"Ah, this is more like it!" exclaimed the stranger quickly. "And if I refuse?"

A tide of passion flooded over Duval's swarthy face. He pushed his horse toward the newcomer, lifting his whip. There was a slight, almost negligent motion, and he found himself staring into the mouth of the long rifle which had reposed on the brown man's saddle-bow.

"Well, try it," smiled the stranger, but with a glint in his brown eyes as

they rested on Duval's furious face. "I fancy my powder is still a bit too good for wasting, unless you force me. If you wish to pass, sir—take the mud."

For a moment Duval was choked by his rage. While plainly no coward, he was checked both at sight of the ready trigger-finger and the cold purpose in the brown eyes. The old man, watching keenly, stooped and picked up his fallen cap of coonskin.

"Devil take you," cried Duval hoarsely, the intensity of his passion clenching all his face into wild fury. "Sir, I—I—"

Whatever he might have said was stopped by a third of hoofs. Once more the bend in the quiet Beargrass Creek Road was invaded at a critical moment, and this time by a girl who rode from the direction whence Duval had come. And as before, the arrival broke off threatening hostilities.

She was a beautiful girl enough, with her fresh, firm face and clear gray eyes, and the red-gold hair falling over her shoulders. Her steed was bony and her gown was homespun, but Duval swung his horse around with a graceful bow and swept his hat to his stirrup as she drew rein.

"May I ride back to town with you, Madam Trigg?" he asked quietly, giving no hint of the storm which a moment before had convulsed him. "It seems there are strangers and odd characters about, and it may well—"

He was interrupted by a cry of surprise. The girl slipped from her saddle as the old man stepped forward, and with a swift hug and a laugh of rippling delight she flung her arms about his neck.

"You!" she cried. "Why, where on earth did you come from?"

"Come from town," said the old man jerkily. He stared into her excited eyes with a flush of pleasure on his rugged old face, and seemed lost to all around. "Come in with some beaver, Kitty. Paid the ol' debts, every last man, thank God! Clean's a whistle now. Goin' out to Dick Taylor's, comin' to see you-all, then goin' back home. Be in town to-morrow sure."

His abrupt, awkward speech drew another hug and a kiss from the girl,

who then turned to her horse and scrambled to the saddle.

"Be sure you come, then!" she cried merrily, and looked at Duval: "I thank you for the courtesy, sir, and avail myself of it right gladly—"

She broke off at sight of the brown-eyed stranger, who had not moved. Duval touched his spurs and brought his horse beside hers.

"Out of the way," he commanded sharply. "This lady wishes to pass."

The leather-clad stranger smiled a little.

"And so she shall, friend Duval," he drawled easily. "I told you once that *you* might take the mud."

"Confound you, sir—would you dare shoot me?" broke in Duval furiously. "I dare you to do it, sir!"

"Well, that's a dare easily settled!" laughed the other, but his eyes remained very steady. Pressing his steed with his knee, he moved aside and left the inner edge of the road clear. "The lady is not hindered. As for you, if you doubt either my ability or my will, why not test the matter?"

Duval noted the crooked trigger-finger, muttered an impatient word, then turned and splashed through the muddy water. The girl went on, still gazing at the stranger. As he drew upon the dry road and waited, Duval turned.

"Take care of yourself!" he cried, his face livid.

"That is my business in life, thanks," returned the stranger, lightly, and so he found himself alone with the old man. Carefully uncocking his rifle, he swung down from the saddle and gripped hands with the other.

"Well, you seem to be in no great need of help," he chuckled, surveying the huge chest of the gray-haired man. "What's the matter, anyway? Did you have a fuss with his excellency?"

"Kind of that way," grinned the old man, to whom speech now seemed to come slowly. "Muddied me, the cussed law-shark! All alike, consarn 'em."

"Well, now he's gone, can you tell me where Colonel Dick Taylor lives?"

"Goin' there," grunted the other, jerking a thumb over his shoulder. His keen blue eyes searched the younger face shrewdly. "Young man, ye

handled him right. You're a fine fellow. How are ye named?"

"Norton, John Norton," smiled the younger man. "I'm a captain in the Seventh Infantry, or was, and came up from New Orleans after resigning. So you're going to the Taylor's, eh? Know young Zach? Do you live around here?"

"Uh-huh, I know him. Used to live here." The old man's face darkened as he glanced around. "Them cussed lawyers skun me out o' my land, consarn 'em! Live in Missouri now. Lots o' game there. Come back here to pay my debts—no man can't say I aint honest. Them moccasins aint Cherokee-made, are they?"

"What's your name?" asked Norton with frank interest. He clucked to his horse, and the steed followed them as they trudged along the road. The other only glanced down again at the moccasins.

"Name's Boone," he grunted. "Them moccasins, now—they sartin look kind o' like—"

"Boone?" Norton stopped abruptly, a puzzled wonder in his eyes. "You're not Colonel Boone, by any chance? Colonel Daniel Boone?"

"That's me. About them mocc—" "

"Well, by thunder!" Norton gasped, then laughed aloud as he seized Boone's hand in a hearty clasp and looked deep into the keen blue eyes. "Why, Colonel, I spent two days looking you up in Missouri, over on the Femme Osage! Your wife said you had gone east, either to Virginia or Tennessee. I was mighty anxious to see you—in fact, that's why I threw up my army commission."

"Huh! To see me?" Boone looked at him, then jerked his head. "Well, come along to Dick's. Find the wife well, did ye? Now tell me 'bout where ye got them moccasins—"

**J**OHN NORTON was lost in amazement at the manner in which he had chanced on the one man in the country he most desired to meet. Daniel Boone was not greatly honored in that day. He had been out of the public view for twenty years and was not of the self-assertive type; his fame seemed to be

dying out with the older generation of frontiersmen. Driven into the Southwest, he still made long, lonely forays through the South and East, hunting and trapping and seeking the solitude he loved.

At Femme Osage, Norton had missed him by a month. Then the young ex-officer had come on by flatboat to Fort Massac, and from there overland to Louisville. He said no more of his journey than this, but Boone looked at the delicate yet decisive profile, the brown eyes which could twinkle like a star or leap out hard and cold like a sword—and nodded to himself.

"Ye knew Zach down to N'Orleans, mebbe? He's in the Seventh, aint he?"

"Yes," nodded Norton. "We were great friends, till he came North with fever. How is he? All right?"

Boone chuckled. "The cuss has got married, Norton."

"What? He has?" Norton whistled, then broke into a laugh. "Some one here?"

"No—him and me brought her over from Maryland. Got here a month ago. We located beaver on the way, so I went back an' got enough pelt to pay up some ol' debts here in Louisville—consarn them lawyers!"

Norton was not altogether surprised at Zach Taylor's marriage. He had gained his captaincy at the time Zach joined the regiment in New Orleans as lieutenant. Barely had the two men become friends when young Taylor went home on sick-leave. This had been two years before, and the reason for his prolonged absence was now evident. Norton's business concerned Colonel Richard Taylor, Zach's father, no less than it did Boone, so he had come on to Louisville after missing the old frontiersman at Femme Osage. Now, by a fortunate chance, he had come upon Boone as well—a good presage, he reflected. He was like to have need of all the friends he could muster.

The two tramped along between the cottonwoods, and in a few moments sighted the clustering log and frame buildings of the Taylor farm, six miles above the city itself. Colonel Taylor, or "Colonel Dick" as he was known

along the frontier, had been Collector of the Port of Louisville until Louisiana ceased to be foreign territory, in 1804, but for the past six years had abstained from politics altogether and devoted himself to his farm. With the exception of George Rogers Clark, who lived across the river from Louisville, he was the town's most prominent citizen, however; an old friend of President Madison, his influence at Washington bore no little weight.

As the two men approached the farm, negroes came running out, Boone was recognized with a delighted shout, and from the different buildings appeared the family itself. Colonel Taylor and his wife were joined by Zach and his bride, and while Norton's horse was led away he met with an exuberant welcome from the hard-featured, kindly-eyed lieutenant, his own elder by two years.

"Dad, this is Captain Norton," cried Taylor, introducing his friend in mad delight. "He's the man I've told you about so much—the officer who cleared out those river pirates by Nagatoces! Margaret—Mother! Upon my word, Jack, what the devil brought you here?"

This final outburst of helpless amazement evoked a general laugh, and Norton found himself placed at his ease by the quiet hospitality of old Colonel Dick. Boone was the guest of honor, however, and the old frontiersman was at once accorded an easy chair by the fireplace when the party gathered inside to hear the news.

Of this Boone brought little enough, beyond the fact he had cleared off his old debts and was ready to start for Missouri with a dollar in his pocket and a clear mind.

"You just missed Kitty Grigg," said Colonel Dick. "She was out here to visit Margaret, while I was trying to keep that skunk Duval from ridin' home with her—"

"Ye didn't do it," chuckled Boone. "We met 'em—consarn them lawyers!"

He proceeded to give a brief account of the meeting, which drew a roar of applause from Zach and his father. Norton, however, was bent on more

serious matters than visiting, and waved aside the eager questions which rained upon him.

"No, there's no news—General Harrison is keeping things pretty quiet along the border, and the last I heard there was no immediate talk of a British war. I believe Zach's going to get a captaincy before long, though. I've resigned, and the older officers won't transfer into the Seventh; they think the regiment won't last long—"

"You've resigned?" broke in Zach blankly. "Why—good Lord, Jack! You ain't goin' to take up farming? Got married?"

"Neither one," laughed Norton easily. "I have letters to you, Colonel Taylor, to Governor Harrison, and to Colonel Boone here—and I want help. There's been a good deal of piracy of late, as you may know, and my business here is to get that mysterious fellow, Blacknose—"

His words were drowned in a sudden crash, as Boone knocked over one of the huge andirons with his foot. Zachary Taylor darted to the door and slammed it with a bang; Mrs. Taylor went white, and Colonel Dick started abruptly.

"My dear Norton," he said quickly, frowning, "your business here had best wait until the morning, when we will go to town with Colonel Boone and talk it over then. Margaret, will you see that the guest-cabin is made ready? How did you make out with your beaver, Daniel?"

And Norton fell into an amazed silence, while old Boone told of his hunting trip. Why had the mere name of a river-pirate brought fear to such men as these, and pallor to the faces of the two women?

"By thunder!" he exclaimed inwardly, listening to the old frontiersman's jerky sentences. "I wonder if I've struck a bigger thing than they dreamed of at New Orleans?"

## CHAPTER II

**U**PON attaining his majority, three years before, John Norton had gained a commission through the influence of his uncle, a

merchant at New Orleans. Yellow fever had left him alone in the world six months afterward, and he had looked forward to a career in the army. By a curious combination of circumstances, however, he had now resigned that career to enter on a more hazardous and difficult task.

What he remembered of his life had been centered about New Orleans, but beyond a casual acquaintance with his uncle's business he had not lingered about the city save for a few weeks at a time. A few years of wandering in the Southern woods with friendly Indians, traders, and frontiersmen had given him a thorough mastery of woodcraft; with this his brief military career had not interfered, for he had conducted several treaty-making or mapping expeditions through eastern Louisiana, once as far as Florida.

Now, however, a new service had offered itself to him. The Ohio Valley trade came largely to St. Louis and New Orleans, by means of arks and flatboats. It was easy to float down with the current, and men took down their wares, sold them, and came back overland, for the return river journey was difficult. A few years before, banditti had been numerous until the Kentucky riflemen had broken up the Harpe and Mason gang of pirates. Since that time there had arisen a new king of the lawless, whose doings had all but paralyzed the river trade.

"Let me give you my own story first, gentlemen," said Norton quietly, as he rode between Colonel Dick and Boone, with Zach just ahead. "Since you seem to jump at the very name of Blacknose, things must indeed be in a poor state up here."

The others merely nodded. All four were riding slowly toward Louisville; the sun was but recently up, and in the brisk morning air all thought of danger or trouble seemed very vague and distant. Yet Boone's keen gaze never left the roadside.

"As you will, sir," responded Colonel Dick courteously. "My son has told us of you, and we would be only too glad to hear of your family. I knew a gallant gentleman of your name—a Major Charles Norton, of my own Vir-

ginia regiment under General Washington."

"He was my father." And Norton's face darkened.

"What, sir—your father!" Colonel Taylor drew rein suddenly.

"Yes. He brought his family west, expecting to settle at Cincinnati—he was a member of that society, of course, and was attracted by the name. He had barely reached there when he found a message from my Uncle John, who had gone to St. Louis. My father decided to join him, and undertook the trip with a brother officer named Moore.

"This was in the fall of 1790, when I was four years old. During the winter my father and Captain Moore built a large ark, and early in the spring embarked both families, with their property and slaves. The ark passed Louisville, and after that—it vanished."

"Good heavens, sir—what do you mean?" demanded Colonel Taylor, staring. Norton smiled.

"River pirates. I was fetched to St. Louis by my old nigger mammy in a crazy canoe; she died before she could more than tell who I was, having been shot. Beyond a doubt, the ark was surprised either by Indians or pirates, only my devoted old black mammy getting me away. The rest were never heard from again—"

Norton proceeded to give a brief account of how his uncle had adopted him, later removing to New Orleans, and of how his own life had fitted him for the task in hand.

"Now, as you all know," he continued calmly, "the river somewhere between here and Fort Massac has been terrorized by a band of river pirates. Whether whites or Indians, no one knows, for the simple reason that they take no prisoners. For some reason the rumor has crept out that their leader is called Blacknose, and is a member of the old Mason gang. This may or may not be true—"

"For heaven's sake, man, don't speak that name!" broke out the younger Taylor. "If any group discusses the name in these parts, they suffer for it. Dad urged the Legislature to send out the militia to guard

the river against him; three days later our barns were burned. The same thing has happened to other men. We know nothing more about the gang than you do, except that it must have an excellent spy system."

Norton listened, his face setting into cold lines.

"No one asks you to talk of him," he returned grimly. "I'll do all that's necessary. Three months ago the New Orleans merchants got together to discuss the damages being wrought upon the river-trade; they knew I was a woodsman and that I had had the luck to break up that Nagatoches gang, so they came to me. I accepted the task of smashing this Blacknose, and I mean to do it. Gentlemen, my letters."

With this, he handed a letter each to Boone and Taylor, then moved a few paces on to the side of the lieutenant.

"See here, Norton," exclaimed the latter, with a glance at his father, "let me join you in—"

"Not much, Zach." And Norton smiled grimly. "You're a farmer, not a woodsman; besides, you've a bride to take care of. No—that's final."

Taylor said no more, and John Norton gazed out at the view beyond the little rising knoll on which they stood. It was close enough to the river to be in sight of the falls, and directly opposite them, on the Indiana shore, was Clarksville. Norton's eye lingered a moment on the large house which stood at the point of rocks; he had learned on the previous day that this was the home of George Rogers Clark, one of the great frontier heroes, but now an old man and crippled.

His gaze swept on to Louisville, half of its one street hidden by a rising knoll of cottonwoods. The stone courthouse, the bell-roofed taverns, the Gault gardens at the upper end of town—Norton looked past these to Shippingsport, the little harbor below the falls, and his eyes narrowed. Here began his trail, as he knew well. From Shippingsport went out every ounce of freight to New Orleans from Louisville and all points up-river, for only experienced pilots could bring any craft through the falls. Louisville was to all intents the starting-point of river

traffic, and somewhere between Louisville and Fort Massac, at the juncture of the Ohio and Mississippi, had vanished a full third of all the rich cargoes sent down in the past three years.

HAVING already mapped out a vague plan in his mind, he turned to the two older men, and smiled slightly. Boone had just finished spelling out his letter painfully enough, and was staring at it in disgust; Colonel Taylor was looking at his horse's head with a stern sadness, the cause of which the younger man knew only too well.

"One moment, Colonel Dick," said Norton gently. The two gazed up quickly. "I wish to draw you into nothing which can—"

"Captain Norton," broke in the other sternly, "I have never refused to do my duty, whatever the consequences, nor do I intend to falter now. My aid is yours, sir."

"You mistake me," smiled Norton, trying to offset the hint of tragedy in the other's eyes. "Since conditions here are as you inform me, there is no reason for my incriminating you. If these river pirates really have a spy system in effect, my mission will be discovered sooner or later. Do you go on to town with Zach; from this moment we are strangers. The only good you can do me is to request those whom you can trust that they will supply all I demand and draw on the New Orleans merchants who signed that letter to you. For your sake and that of your family, do as I ask. In this manner you can serve me best. Colonel Boone will, I am sure, bear me out in this."

The old frontiersman nodded quickly. Colonel Taylor hesitated, then stretched a hand to Norton.

"God bless you, my boy—and if you need help in the open, come to me."

Norton smiled, exchanged a hand-grip and a word with Lieutenant Taylor, and watched father and son ride off toward the town. Then he turned to Boone, to find the old man looking glumly at him.

"Well?" he laughed questioningly. "Has Blacknose taken the heart out of you, or have you forgotten how to fire a rifle?"

To his intense amazement, Boone nodded and spat in the road.

"Yep. That's it. See here, Norton: I fit Injuns all my life and I aint quit yet, but my hide's got to feelin' good on my back. Now I'm goin' to help you, but I aint goin' to hunt them river pirates. I aint ripe to die, not by a good ways! No, sir! I'm a God-fearin' man, Norton, and I aint huntin' after trouble."

"What do you mean?" queried the perplexed Norton, taken utterly aback by the old man's attitude. "What can I count on—"

"You listen here." Boone's blue eyes wandered off among the trees as he spoke. "I aint afear'd o' no man livin', but I got a wife to pervide for. Now, we'll go down to the tavern and I'll bring you a feller who knows the hull country around here and who'll act as go-betwixt for anything you want. How you fixed on the military end?"

"I've letters to General Harrison from General Wilkinson, which will allow me to make use of the militia if I wish. Why?"

"Well, you 'tend to the military yourself an' listen here." Boone leaned over and dropped his voice, his eyes still on the trees. "Ye know where Blue River runs into the Ohio? Well, forty-five mile down the river from here, an' twelve mile this side o' Blue River, there's a big rocky cliff on the Injianney shore, with a cabin an' mebbe more cabins under it. But *you* stay on the Kaintuck side, mind. D'reckly opposite that cliff, ye'll find a big cottonwood blazed north an' south. Head right south from that there tree, an' in less'n two mile you'll find a cabin. That's where Red Hugh lives. Go an' find him if he's there; if he aint, wait till he comes back. Tell him 'bout me sending ye, and ask fer help if ye need it."

"Who's Red Hugh?" demanded Norton, wondering.

"That's more'n I can tell ye." And Boone shook his head. "I've knowned him off an' on hard on twenty year. He raises crops there, an' goes on regular spring an' fall hunts after Injuns. They killed off his fam'ly, I reckon,

an' God aint softened his heart yet—though He will some day, I reckon. He most gen'rally does—*Lay down! Quick!*"

The last three words shot out with vehement force; instinctively, Norton obeyed the swift gesture and ducked forward. Something sang over his head, almost brushing his hair; there came a crack on the wind, and he looked up to see a little drift of white rise from a clump of cottonwoods a hundred yards away.

Before he quite realized what had happened, the rifle was torn out of his hand and Boone was sighting. The flint fell uselessly, and with a muttered curse the old frontiersman slipped from his horse and ran for the trees whence had come the shot. Norton, now comprehending, was after him instantly.

Active though he was, he had hard work keeping up with Boone. Together they gained the trees, to find nothing more than a slight tinge of powder on the air, until Boone leaned over the ground, pointing.

"Here he was, the skunk! Come on, now."

His trained eye making out the tracks, Norton followed. After five minutes they came out on Beargrass Creek, and on the opposite shore was no trail.

"Slipped us," cried Boone savagely. "Consarn him! He might ha' gone up or down, so let's git out o' here whilst our hides are safe."

Whereupon, the old woodsman turned and incontinently made for the horses, as did Norton. The assassin had had time to reload, and tracking him in the river bed was impossible. When they had regained the horses, Boone held out something to Norton.

"Find the feller who owns this, an' ye've got him. I reckon your errand has slipped out, friend."

Norton smiled faintly at the grim sarcasm in the old man's voice, and looked at the object. It was the plug of a powder-horn, evidently dropped in haste. Finely carved in grayish horn, the stopper was crossed lengthwise by a band of red.

"You find a feller with a horn what's got a red streak in it," went on Boone,

"and' a wooden plug; he's wearin' Shawnee moccasins instead o' boots; he's left-handed, 'cause he rested his rifle that side o' the tree, an' I wouldn't wonder but what he was cross-eyed."

"Huh? Why cross-eyed?" queried Norton, frowning, and dropped the plug in his shirt.

"'Cause he didn't see me a-watchin' them trees," cackled the old man, and swung up to his saddle. "Now let's git away from here; it makes me plumb scared. What do you reckon ye'll do first off?"

"Take advice," smiled Norton easily. "All I can get. I fancy the pirates are in league with some one here, for they've dropped on the best cargoes and let the poor ones pass by. It looks as if they had spies here, sure enough."

"An' one of 'em's wearin' Shawnee moccasins," chuckled Boone. "Well, afore ye git desp'rit, go see Red Hugh. Now, you git up to the tavern an' wait till I come. I'm a-goin' to see Kitty Grigg."

"Kitty Grigg?" Norton's mind went back swiftly to the girl he had glimpsed on the previous day. "Who is she, Colonel?"

"Well, Ol' Abel Grigg 'lows she's his daughter," returned the other slowly. "'Fraid Abel aint much account, though. He was with me back in the Blue Lick massacre, and cert'nly fit good, but went to the bad later. I've knowed Kathleen sence afore I went to Missouri, and if sh'e's Abel's daughter, then, by gum, I'll sculp myself!"

"Grigg lives at Louisville, then?"

"No—he's a hunter, mostly. Has a farm back o' town a piece. Well, see ye later! What tavern ye goin' to?"

"The Steuben Arms, just beyond Doctor Gault's residence."

Boone nodded, and rode off along a forest trail leading to the south, while Norton pursued his course into town.

Who had fired that shot? He thought of Duval's threat, but Duval was no woodsman, and the assassin was, as his method of escape testified. It seemed much more likely that, as Boone had said, some hint of his mission had leaked out.

How that could have been, Norton knew not. He had breathed no word

of it to any man from leaving New Orleans until reaching the Taylor farm, nor had he discussed either piracy in general or Blacknose in particular. He had kept his ears open along the frontier but had learned nothing; no one had ever seen Blacknose, no one so much as knew whether there were a Blacknose or not. The name was a rumor, a border myth—and only in Louisville was it backed up by reality, reflected Norton.

He had not been sent on any false trail, that was certain. Neither the up-river farmers and merchants nor those of New Orleans could give him any definite information; yet both they and Norton knew well that in this year of grace, 1810, when settlements and cabins were scattered all along the Ohio and Mississippi, flatboat after flatboat could not vanish into thin air with their crews.

Norton's private opinion had been that Blacknose was a renegade who led a band of Indians and kept in touch with some one at Louisville for information. That opinion was sorely shaken by what the Taylors had said, however. He began to think the whole affair was engineered by river pirates alone, and so rode slowly into town, lost in thought. Nor did he forget the horn plug which now reposed in his pocket. Sooner or later he would find the man who wore Shawnee moccasins and whose powder-horn was mottled with a red streak, and he promised himself that something unpleasant would happen to the gentleman in question.

As he splashed through the mud in front of the courthouse, he saw the figure of Duval going up the steps. The lawyer had not observed him, however, and Norton watched him disappear inside. For the Far West the courthouse was a stately building, with its two stories, ornate cupola, and handsome pillars.

The Louisianian rode slowly on down the one principal street toward the lower end of town, and so came to the Steuben Arms, whose host had once served under the fiery baron in the late war. Indeed, it was for this reason alone that Norton had chosen the place, for it was none of the best; he had been

disappointed in finding Bower an infirm, mumbling old veteran.

Dismounting, he gave his reins to the waiting negro, nodded to old Bower as he passed through the public room, and sought his own chambers. He had no desire to hang about below-stairs, since the inn seemed frequented by rivermen.

**T**HE morning was well advanced when in response to a knock, Norton opened the door and admitted Colonel Boone and a stranger. This stranger was a peculiar individual, even for a time when the border was crowded with peculiar personages. He was dressed in a dirty shirt with dirty ruffles, an ancient beaver, ancient scarlet velvet breeches, shoes which had burst at the toes, and a greatcoat of reddish fustian. Below a greasy and disheveled wig, his face was small and pinched, yet very ruddy and healthy; he seemed to Norton an odd little old man, and his black eyes twinkled perpetually.

"Captain Norton, my friend, Mr. Elisha Ayres, Gent.," declaimed Boone with something like a grin. "Ayres, young Norton's the likeliest feller I've seen in a coon's age."

"That, sir," averred Mr. Ayres in a slow and precise tone, "is a truer knighthood than any which could be bestowed by the crowned heads of the Old World! I trust you appreciate the honor, Mr. Norton, sir! I am yours to command."

"You can trust Mr. Ayres, Norton," continued Boone. "Now, I'm goin' to git home. Pow'ful glad I met ye, Norton, and if ye need to do a little shootin', go find Red Hugh. Ye can trust Elisha—"

"You're not starting for Missouri—now?" inquired the astonished Norton.

"Not yet—goin' to crack a bowl o' punch at Doc Gault's first." And Boone shook hands with both men, then turned to the door. Norton had a last glimpse of the barrel-like chest, gray hair, and keen eyes; then Boone was gone with a final wave of the hand.

"Well, Captain Norton," began Ayres in his dry, precise manner, "Colonel

Boone has told me of your mission in these parts, sir. I congratulate you heartily, sir, and I congratulate these United States upon having a public servant of your spirit—”

Norton smiled to himself. He began to think that Boone had made the best of a bad bargain by passing off the first person he had picked up as an assistant.

“What is your business, Mr. Ayres?” he inquired, wondering how best to get rid of the ruddy-cheeked little man.

“I am a schoolmaster, sir;” and as he spoke, Ayres settled back in his chair and pulled forth a pipe. “By the way, Mr. Norton, the man who shot at you this morning is a hunter from down-river. His name I do not know, but he wears a fox-skin cap with the brush hanging, dresses in buckskin like yourself, and wears a black beard.”

Norton started.

“Are you jesting, sir? Do you know this man?”

“I do not.” And Ayres fell to work with flint and steel, until he had a light for his pipe. “I saw him last week, and chanced to note the red-streaked powder-horn. When my friend Colonel Boone told me of it, I remembered. That is all. Ah—one point further—he was discussing some of our host’s excellent Virginia whiskey, in company with one Charles Duval, Gent., a fellow townsman of mine.”

While Norton was still trying to assimilate the information imparted by this queer individual, the bell on the roof banged out its summons to dinner. Ayres arose with a grandiose bow.

“You will honor me, sir, by your company below? Then we can discuss matters at our leisure.”

Norton swallowed hard, nodded, and followed to the door. He began to think that he had sadly misjudged Colonel Daniel Boone.

### CHAPTER III

**N**ORTON rather regretted his hasty choice of taverns. The Steuben Arms had in its day been a fine inn, but its day was done. Located conveniently to Shippingsport,

its clientele now consisted largely of rivermen, merchants, and such of the townsmen as found its rates better suited to their purses than those of the new taverns.

Passing through the deserted travelers’ room, Ayres led his guest on into the public dining-room, where the long table was already partially filled. At the upper end sat Bower, the host—a feeble old man with tobacco-stained beard. The overhead fans were pulled by a negro girl in the corner.

Ayres settled down in a chair at an unoccupied space, Norton following suit. Then, when the little man had nodded to Bower and signed to a negro waiter, he turned and spoke in a low voice.

“Now, Mr. Norton, had you any definite plan of action? . . . Until the table fills up, we will pass unnoticed.”

Norton nodded, glancing around. A number of rivermen were talking loudly; two or three merchants were discussing prices—and profanity hung over the long room like a cloud.

“Well,” he returned slowly, “I thought that a boat might be well laden here, quietly pick up a force of men farther down the river, and so be used as a lure. With such a spy system as seems to prevail, however, that looks rather hopeless.”

Ayres nodded.

“A good plan, sir, a good plan, yet doubtful of success. As you say, the people in question would hear of it and you would be laughed at for your pains. The case, sir, calls for circumspection.”

“Quite so,” agreed Norton drily. “Have you any suggestions to make, sir?”

“I hope to have some, Captain Norton. Granted that an organization exists, we may presuppose it to be composed of white men. Negroes or Indians would be sure to let out the secret. Given, then, white men: these might be scattered settlers, or they might be a small band of determined men down-river, whose friends and directors work from Louisville or some such point. We may take it, I trust, that one or two members of the gang

ship on the designated boats and act as accomplices in the crime."

Ayres paused, in order to absorb a huge pinch of snuff—after which he allowed the waiter to get out of hearing, and prepared to attack his dinner.

"You are aware," he went on calmly, "that the richer cargoes go down in a fleet, under an experienced commodore. Invariably, one or two boats vanish overnight—but never at the same point in the river. It would be easy for a member of the crew to untie the moorings and let the boat slip down the stream. Now, remember these points; and remember also that if there is a down-river band, they must have a hiding-place where the stolen cargoes can be stored away until disposed of."

Concluding this speech with extreme haste, Ayres abruptly began his dinner as the nearer seats were filled up. Gathering that the discussion was ended for the present, Norton applied himself to dinner also. Whiskey was circulating freely, and while they ate, the rivermen filled the room with tales of river life, most of which were more spicy than refined.

"Gen'lemen, yew hear me!" broke out one of two men opposite Norton—a big, hairy man of immense build. His companion was bronzed, gloomy-eyed, and stern-faced, and both had been absorbing vast quantities of white whiskey. "Gen'lemen," boomed the big fellow, glaring around, "thar's gwine to be war, I'm tellin' yew! War! Yew hear me!"

"We hear ye all right," piped up a shrill voice. "Who's the war with?"

"Gen'lemen, your health!" And the big man emptied his glass. "Thet thar feller they call the Prophet—the one-eyed crazy dog, he's a-stirrin' up the Injuns. Yew hear me, gen'lemen, ol' man Harrison he's gwine to need Kaintuck rifles afore long! Who said ol' Dan'l Boone was in town?"

Whereupon there followed an excited discussion of Boone. In the midst, the gloomy-eyed companion of the big man brought down his fist with a crash on the table.

"This here generation's got to suffer for its sins!" he roared out in a vibrant voice, fastening his eye on Nor-

ton. "Friends, read the prophecies of the inspired Richard Brother! There'll ye find set forth about the Injun war, and the cursed Federals ruining the country! That there inspired man, he was a prophet. Damnation to the Federals, say!"

The gloomy-eyed man said no more, for a roar went up at his words.

"Ye drunken Democrat," cried some one, "take that!"

With which a heavy pitcher of molasses struck the gloomy-eyed man above the ear, smashed, and sent him down senseless. His big companion sprang up like a cat, drew back his arm, and a knife flashed across the room in a flame of glittering light. It did no harm, save to precipitate a general fight. Norton was just rising to escape, when a deep, cold voice broke in upon the uproar:

"Gentlemen, make way!"

Norton started. He looked up to see the figure of Duval entering the door, against which two fighting, cursing men had reeled. Duval took them by the shoulders and tore them apart; one went spinning down the room; the other crashed into the wall, and the lawyer strode forward.

That display of strength was not lost upon John Norton, nor the calm which instantly followed. Instead of being mobbed, Duval seemed to inspire these rivermen with fear—all save the big hairy man opposite Norton. He alone paid no heed; having caught the man who had laid out his companion, he was administering a sound thrashing when Duval caught him by the shoulder and tore him loose.

"Go to your seat," commanded Duval, cold and immobile. The other glared at him.

"Who the devil are yew?" he demanded hoarsely. "Take yer hand off'n me—I'm liable to sculp ye! Yew hear me! I'm gwine to lay out this cussed Federal. I don't care ef he's Black-nose hisself!"

A startled silence fell, while Duval still gazed coldly into the big man's eyes. There was something terrible in the lawyer's immobility; then Norton saw that he was holding a small pistol against the big man's chest.

"Go to your seat," he repeated icily. The other felt the pistol, glanced down at it, and obeyed sullenly. Norton felt a hand on his arm.

"Let us go, sir," murmured Ayres very softly. Norton nodded, rose, and they left the room together.

FIVE minutes later they were sitting side by side in the chairs before the tavern, pipes out. Norton's thoughts were dwelling on this man Duval, and he wondered afresh if the lawyer had been behind that attempted assassination of the morning. The man hardly seemed of such a nature; he had quieted the rivermen by sheer force of voice and muscle, and was plainly a man known and feared.

"Who is this Duval?" asked Norton, glancing at his friend.

"A lawyer, sir, who speaks of going to the Legislature next fall. He comes of a good Virginia family, settled here some three years since, and has a fair practice. A rising man, sir, a rising man. One of our ablest citizens, and already talks of raising a company in case General Harrison has trouble with the redskins."

Norton thought he detected a faint hint of sarcasm in the precise voice, but Ayres' pinched, red-cheeked face was expressionless.

"Well, have you any sort of plan, Mr. Ayres?"

"An excellent one, sir," came the surprising answer. Ayres knocked out his pipe slowly. "I would suggest that you follow Colonel Boone's advice, and go to see this man Red Hugh, of whom he told you. When you have seen him, you may expect a messenger from me at the Blue River settlement--on the Kentucky side, remember, for there are two. I may find it feasible to put your prior plan into operation and use a rich-haden flatboat for lure."

"Hm!" Norton looked at the other keenly. "Do you seriously believe that Duval had anything to do with the man who shot at me this morning?"

He was amazed, upon meeting the black eyes of his friend, to find in them a terrible earnestness.

"Sir,"—and the dry, precise voice quivered the slightest bit—"it is my

honest belief that if you remain in this town overnight, you will be murdered."

Startled, Norton gave the other a keen look. Then he smiled slightly.

"Murdered? Man, what do you mean? Is that gang—"

"I cannot say what I mean, sir," returned Ayres, rising. "I hardly know myself. God forgive me if I misjudge Charles Duval! But, sir, this is my sincere advice: go and find Red Hugh, and go within the hour. You are a woodsman; therefore go by the trails and not by boat. Trust no man. Sir, I—I have been doing much quiet investigation of late, and I am appalled. The whole thing is indefinite and terrible. Most of what was said in the dining-room there was lost upon you, but not upon me; and, sir, I will make you this prediction: That big riverman, who only came in from Cincinnati to-day, and who took the name of Blacknose in vain—that man will die."

"Good heavens, Ayres!" Norton rose, aghast at the solemn earnestness of the little schoolmaster. "Do you know what you're saying? This isn't the Indian border, but—"

"Sir, this is Louisville, State of Kentucky, in the thirty-fourth year of the Independence of the United States of America," responded Ayres gravely. He bowed. "You may count upon hearing from me, Mr. Norton, at Dodd's tavern at the Blue River settlement. Let your task be to scour the woods and settlements, meantime. Sir, your servant, and—and may God keep you!"

Whereupon, with another bow, the little man turned and marched stiffly away, his absurd beaver cocked jauntily over one ear and his fustian great-coat fluttering behind him. Norton stared after him, then sank into his chair and drew out his tobacco.

"By thunder!" he muttered slowly to himself, the while he stuffed his pipe, watching the lessening figure. "I seem to have set foot in a hornet's nest—and came near to getting stung this morning! Now, I wonder what that little fox of a schoolmaster suspects, and why he imagines I am in danger here in the town itself!"

The very thought was amusing to

Norton. He knew very well that in such centers of civilization as New Orleans, St. Louis, and Louisville, men did not condone murder. Even in the newer river settlements, the older generation who had passed through the lawless pioneer days were savagely set upon upholding a rude justice. Boone himself exemplified this, for Norton had heard of how the old frontiersman had made himself a terror while acting as magistrate in Missouri.

That he had anything to fear in Louisville, therefore, seemed impossible to Norton. Duval might well have hired the assassin of the morning; yet it was more likely that some hint of his mission had leaked out, thought the Louisianian. There was most certainly a secret organization of river-pirates; so much had been amply proved to him, but he was still inclined to smile at the terror it inspired.

"Still," he reflected sagely, "men like Taylor and Boone aren't exactly fools. And I rather believe Elisha Ayres is no fool, either. So, my assailant is black-bearded, wears a brushed fox-skin cap, and has a red-streaked powder-horn! Something gained, at all events. Mr. Ayres, I believe I will heed your warning."

Having plenty of money, Norton called one of the negroes loafing in the sun and ordered his horse saddled, then went down the street to the store of Audubon & Rosier, where he found the junior partner and purchased a few supplies. As he was leaving, Rosier leaned over the counter with a cautious glance at the door.

"Your pardon, sir—I believe your name is Norton?"

"It is, sir," returned the surprised Louisianian.

"Colonel Taylor spoke to me of you," went on the other rapidly. "You may rely upon us absolutely, sir. If by chance you meet my partner somewhere in the woods, do not fear to trust him. He is slightly touched in the head, but save for his long wanderings is—" A man passed outside, and without a change in his low tone Rosier continued. "As I was saying, sir, General Harrison can control the Indians excellently—"

Norton took the hint and passed out with a nod, storing away in his mind the name of the senior partner, Audubon. It occurred to him that if he was joining forces with a hermit Indian-slayer and a schoolmaster, a half-crazed merchant who evidently spent his time wandering in the woods would make a good third.

RETURNING to the tavern, he found it deserted in front, though a murmur of loud voices came from the dining-room. It seemed slightly odd that dinner was not yet over, but he went to his room, got his things, and after some search located Bower's daughter in the kitchens. He paid her his bill, then went around to the front for his horse.

Now John Norton was no fool, as may have been previously inferred. Despite his respect for the law, Ayres' words had set his nerves on edge, in conjunction with what had happened that day. Like all woodsmen, he much preferred danger in the woods to danger in the town; as he tied his purchases and rifle to his saddle, he found himself glancing nervously over his shoulder. And even as he set foot in the stirrup, he paused.

There was a horrible shuffling step from the doorway behind, and he whirled, hand on knife, to see the big, hairy riverman clutching the door-post. The giant's face was terribly convulsed, and one hand gripped at a knife-hilt whose blade was buried in his side. Barely had Norton comprehended, when the man pulled the knife free, coughed, and fell dead. With the same instant there rose a shrill yell from the doorway behind, and men came crowding out.

"There he is! Thar's the murderer!" went up the shout. "Git him, boys!"

A pistol flashed, and the ball sang past Norton's ear. Dodging behind his horse, he realized everything in a flash: Ayres' prediction had proved terribly true, and what was worse, the murderers were trying to fasten the crime on him. More ~~men~~ they were trying to kill him before he had a chance to deny his guilt. Whether Duval's work or not—

Sensing all this as he dodged, Norton wasted neither time nor movement. Before the first of the crowd poured out across the dead man, he made a flying leap for the saddle, gained it, and sent his horse ahead on the jump. He knew his one chance lay in getting out of town within the hour—as Ayres had predicted.

Another pistol cracked behind him, and another. The balls whistled harmlessly past, but served to draw attention. Several men leaped into the road, shouting; Norton drove his horse at them with a yell, and they fell away. Without thought, he had headed up-town and now had no choice but to continue his way along the south road.

The last of the fine brick houses was almost past, and the uproar behind him was being swelled by voices and bells. The final house was a splendid mansion—Norton knew it for that of a Doctor Gault. As he pounded past the terraced gardens, he glanced up to the doorway and caught sight of a group of figures—Colonel Taylor, Zach, Boone and others. A wave of the hand came to him, a shouted farewell, and Louisville fell behind.

"And now for the chase," thought Norton grimly, pulling in his steed a trifle. "They'll fasten that murder on me and get me—if they can. It's a neat manner to be rid of an enemy—the second attempt in one morning, the day after my arrival in town! Now I would call that quick work, brainy work, but desperate work. Whoever he is, Blacknose fears me—good! If I can match his villainy with honest woodcraft, he shall fear me more."

Twisting in the saddle, Norton looked back, having caught a sudden thud of hoofs. He thundered past a cross-roads, and although the town was shut out behind, the horseman who followed was plainly visible. He wore a crushed beaver hat, scarlet breeches, and a fluttering greatcoat; as Norton gazed in amazement, the other waved him onward. Ayres, for it was no other, drew up at the cross-roads, carefully spattered mud over the ~~red~~ from a puddle, then departed at a gallop by the eastern track and was lost to sight.

"Covering my trail—the old fox!" ex-

claimed Norton. "Mr. Ayres, my compliments. You may be a schoolmaster, but John Norton owes you his life this day!"

And he rode on to the south.

## CHAPTER IV

**T**HAT there would be pursuit Norton knew well enough. He knew also that if he were caught, he would not be brought back to Louisville alive; Blacknose, being a person of sufficient wit to make so shrewd and swift a plot, would have him safely shot in order to preclude all possible danger. Once past Sullivan's ferry, where the post-road crossed the Ohio to Vincennes seven miles below Shippingport, Norton knew that he would have the wilderness ahead and his own good wits to rely upon.

More than once he pondered on the subject of Charles Duval. He more than suspected the lawyer of being at the bottom of the affair at the tavern, though this seemed hardly possible on sober second thought. He had seen nothing of Duval in the crowd about the door, but the memory of how the man had silenced the riot during dinner still remained with him. Duval had influence, it seemed, and he was also a prominent citizen.

John Norton was preëminently just. He admitted to himself that he had taken an instant dislike to Duval upon meeting the latter on the Beargrass Creek Road the day before. The dislike was based on no solid ground. Duval was the type of man best fitted to capture the liking of frontiersmen—strong, powerful, unafraid and brainy. None the less, Norton did not like him. Either, he considered, his errand had been noised abroad and the river-pirates had tried to eliminate him, that morning, or else Duval had been behind the two attempts on his life.

"And if I'm to take my choice," he thought, "I'd say it was the pirates."

None the less, it was with a distinct shock that a moment later he recognized Charles Duval slowly riding toward him. Norton drew rein, astounded.

His track had degenerated into a mere forest trail, since he had struck away from the main pike which Ayres had followed, to throw off the pursuers. Trees were on every side, and Norton could only conjecture that he had come some four miles from the town. Yet here was Duval riding toward him—Duval, whom he had supposed was even then urging on his pursuers!

With him was walking a man, and Norton eyed the pair keenly enough as they approached. Duval's horse was warm, but not foam-flecked, and it was a warm day; the lawyer had been doing no furious riding; so much was clear. Almost reluctantly, Norton instantly absolved him of any complicity in the plot at the tavern. The man with him was very tall and gaunt, dressed in backwoods style, carried a rifle, had a bushy, grizzled beard, a thin, hooked nose and very deep-set dark eyes. He had not been at the tavern.

The pair sighted Norton almost as he saw them, and stopped for an instant in evident surprise. He saw Duval say something in a low voice; then both came forward. To Norton's great surprise, the lawyer advanced with hand outstretched and a smile upon his face which seemed sincere enough.

"Sir," exclaimed Duval heartily, "I must ask your pardon for my words of yesterday. I was somewhat in liquor, and irritated at the moment. May I have the honor of your name, sir?"

Norton, with no hint of his inward amazement, gripped the other's proffered hand and looked squarely into Duval's dark eyes. He read there only a sincere regret, however, and after giving his name proceeded to compliment the lawyer on his evident prestige among the rivermen as exemplified at the tavern that noon. Duval's eyes narrowed a trifle.

"Yes, I saw you go out," he returned, "and left myself shortly after. As to those flatboat-men, if some one did not overawe them occasionally they would run the town. By the way, Mr. Norton, meet Mr. Grigg, one of our old settlers and a solid farmer of the vicinity."

This designation seemed to draw a grin from Grigg, who stuck up a huge

paw with a muttered "Howdy!" to Norton. The latter found the backwoodsman's face a mixture of savagery, cunning and boldness; he wondered idly what Duval had to do with such a man.

"Mr. Grigg and a neighbor are having a land dispute," smiled Duval smoothly, as if reading the thought of Norton, "but we hope to settle it out of court. Thinking of buying a farm hereabouts?"

"No, I'm just on a tour," returned Norton easily. "I'm from Cincinnati, originally."

Which was quite true, but misleading. For one thing, Norton recollects that the man Grigg must be the father of the strikingly beautiful girl he had met on the Beargrass Creek Road yesterday; also, Colonel Boone's description of Grigg did not quite coincide with that just given by Duval. Remembering what Boone had said regarding Grigg's parentage of the girl, Norton eyed the man with no great favor.

Duval, of course, seemed to have no suspicion of what had happened at the tavern—which happening, indeed, having been too recent for him to know of it. Norton concluded the lawyer had left the place while he was absent at the store of Audubon & Rosier, and that after his leaving, the rivermen had formulated their plot. He wondered vaguely whether or not the redoubtable Blacknose himself had been present at dinner.

"Well, I must be going forward," he said. "Can you tell me if this trail will lead me around toward the river?"

"After a bit," nodded Duval, inspecting Norton's outfit piece by piece. "It runs past Mr. Grigg's farm, then forks. Take the fork to the left, which circles around to the river a few miles down. Your servant, sir!"

He bowed, Norton returning the compliment, and the three separated.

Passing through some marshy cane-brake, the Louisianian presently came to higher ground, found the trees thinning, and ~~perched~~ hemp and tobacco fields to the right. He was thinking of his own situation, however, and wondering at Duval's change of front.

What had caused the lawyer to take this sudden attitude?

Norton himself was a man who neither explained nor apologized for his own actions, and knew Duval for the same kind of man. There must be something behind his abrupt apology and surprising amiability, he concluded, though he was at a loss to conceive what it might be. Colonel Taylor had spoken none too warmly of Duval the day before, else he might have thought that Taylor had mentioned him and his errand to the lawyer, as he had done to Rosier.

"By thunder!" frowned Norton, gazing at the few negroes at work in the fields among the scattered stumps and girdled trees. "There's something almighty strange about this whole affair. Well, I'm out of it now, and if they can reach me in the woods—let them! I guess I'll call on the charming Madam Kitty Grigg. Hm! Duval seems to have been ahead of me there, too. I'm afraid that if I lingered in Louisville, Mr. Duval and I would get farther than apologies—"

He laughed a little, feeling that if he came to hand-grips with Duval the result might be dubious, but worth chancing. And so he came to Grigg's cabin, for farm it was not.

**T**HIERE was no mistaking the place; the girl herself was sitting on the steps of the log shack, at work sewing. Behind him, Norton saw the back-ends of the plantations he had passed, whose buildings were perhaps a mile or more distant. Grigg's cabin was placed amid a grove of half-dead maple and walnut—girdled but never cleared. Even as Norton drew rein and dismounted, the girl rising at sight of him, a sudden thought came into his mind: Duval had said that he was in liquor the day before. Now Norton had seen enough drunken men to know that Duval lied in that statement.

Dismissing this thought, however, he advanced to the shack with a smile. He had no cap and had ~~wanted~~ to buy one in town, and his ~~own~~ hair and bronzed face were very good to look upon in the warm afternoon sunlight.

"This is Madam Kitty Grigg?" he

smiled, bowing. "I met your father and Mr. Duval upon the road, and finding that I had to pass here, determined to crave the courtesy of a drink of water."

She looked at him steadily for a moment, one hand at her breast. Once again Norton noted the clear beauty of her gray eyes and gold-red hair, the character and fresh womanliness of her whole face.

"Sir—you met—my father and Mr. Duval?" she said slowly. Norton comprehended the alarm in her eyes, and laughed again.

"Aye, that I did, Kitty!" he cried gaily. "And your Mr. Duval did me the honor of an apology for what happened on the Beargrass Creek Road yesterday. But pardon—my name is John Norton, at your service now and always."

She looked into his eyes for a moment longer, then turned and walked around the corner of the house, beckoning. Norton followed, to find a spring trickling up beneath a crab-apple tree. Gravely, she dipped out a gourd of water, held it to him, and he drank.

"Thanks, Kitty!" he sighed. "You have nigh saved my life this day—"

"Then you had best save it for yourself," she returned quickly, yet with a laugh in her eyes, "by departing speedily. If Charles Duval gave you an apology, look to your steps, sir!"

"Eh?" Startled out of his gay mood, Norton looked keenly at her. "Now what may you mean by that, sweet Kitty?"

The girl, however, only shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"'Tis easy to see you are from Louisiana, Mr. Norton,"—and he marveled at the ringing timbre of her voice,— "since from you it is 'Kitty' and 'sweet Kitty,' while our Kentuckians will ever have it 'Madam Grigg' or mayhap 'Miss Kathleen.' "

"Faith, I had it *Kitty* from Colonel Boone," laughed Norton easily.

"Oh, but he is an old family friend—a second father." Abruptly, the girl fell serious, and put out an imploring hand to his arm, as she glanced at the trail. "Pray, Mr. Norton—go at once! You are in danger, I assure you—"

"Not a bit of it," broke in Norton soberly. "I'm in the woods to get out of danger, Miss Kitty. Even now, I suspect that horsemen are searching for me on the Lexington post-road. But I would like to know what makes you think I am in danger—"

"Because my father allows no one around here,"—and the girl drew back with a slight flush. Norton thought of Duval, but forbore to mention the obvious. "But—what do you mean? Why are men searching for you? Are you jesting?"

"Well, it's more or less of a joke," he laughed, seeing her quick alarm. Plainly, she knew more than did he; whether from Abel Grigg or not, danger threatened and she was afraid. So, with a light air, he told her of what had chanced at the tavern.

She listened quietly, her eyes flitting from his face to the trees and back again. She was stirred out of herself. Norton had never seen so rare a girl in all his life—clear, incisive, with gray eyes that could harden into ice or sparkle into star-glints. The brown homespun fell loosely enough about her slender figure, but Norton's fancy transformed it into brocade, and he imagined this girl as she would look were she dressed in the fashion of the New Orleans belles.

"By gad," he thought to himself, reaching the end of his story, "Boone was right! She is no daughter of Grigg's. What a glorious girl she is!"

"Evidently, sir, it was a plot against you," she said, her brow wrinkling deliciously in thought. "But why did you not stay and face the absurd charge?"

"For many reasons,"—and Norton was instantly on guard,—chief of which was that I have important business down the river. I believe that I take the left fork from this trail, do I not?"

"If you wish to reach the Tennessee settlements, yes," she returned drily. "If you want to reach the river, take the right fork, which brings you out just below the post-road at Sullivan's ferry."

"Eh? You are certain of that?"

"Of course!" There was wonder in the clear gray eyes. "Why?"

"Oh, no reason at all—I must have been hugely mistaken in my notions of your roads hereabouts," he smiled. "You see, I am going to the Blue River settlements and am a stranger in this country. Did you see Colonel Boone this morning?"

Norton was not at all surprised to find that Duval had directed him to the wrong road. He had half suspected as much, and guessed that when the lawyer reached town he would set the pursuers going in the right direction. He was, however, no little astonished when the girl shook her head in reply to his casual question. Though Boone had not said it in so many words, he had distinctly understood that the frontiersman had seen the girl that morning.

"No, Mr. Norton—I was looking for him even now. Was he in town?"

"He came to town with me from Colonel Dick Taylor's this morning, Kitty—or let us say Kathleen, which is more dignified and has a right Irish touch to it. I thought he had intended to visit you long ere this!"

"So had I," she returned, her eyes on the circling trees. "Still, he will be here before he leaves Kentucky. He was doubtless detained on business."

Norton nodded, remembering Elisha Ayres. Probably Boone had sought the little schoolmaster and the latter had detained him. Well, so much the better; friends were at work, and there seemed to be sore need of them all.

"When you see him, then, tell him of seeing me here," said the Louisianian. It would be well to have Boone kept informed. "He is a very good friend—"

"Wait," the girl broke in quietly, frowning. "What are you going to do? If the rivermen are after you, as it seems they are, you would be very foolish to take the river trail—"

"I am a woodsman, sweet Kitty," he laughed easily, "and I am willing to take my chance against any white man save only Boone—and perhaps one other. Would that honest Davy Crockett were here with me! He and I have had many a trail together, but—well, no matter. Trust me, Kitty; the forest can harm me not."

"But the river can, my confident paladin of Louisiana! Bethink you, the rivermen can use canoes to get ahead of you, lay an ambush—"

Norton uttered an ejaculation. She was right—he had overlooked the river. With a sudden anxiety in his brown eyes, he looked at her gravely, thinking hard. His was no lack of self-reliance, else he had not been on this present errand. But he was in a strange country, and the Kentuckians and rivermen were strange to him; above all, to find himself so swiftly and shrewdly attacked, as he had been that morning, was disconcerting. He longed for some man at his back, some man like young Crockett or old Boone, not dreaming what manner of man Fate was even then leading to his comradeship.

"What think you I had best do, Madam Kathleen?" he asked quietly. She flushed a little under his serious eyes, but met the look frankly.

"Take the Tennessee trail," she returned slowly. "Since you are a woodsman, and look it, this will be easy for you. Take the fork to the left, as you first intended; after a few miles, strike west and work back north to the river gradually, through the woods. Blue River is only forty-five miles distant. Do your enemies know your destination?"

"No—it is known only to Mr. Elisha Ayres, who is my friend and helper."

"Oh—you know him, then!" The gray eyes widened suddenly, and he was amazed at their quick friendliness and warmth. "Why, 'twas he who taught me learning! Well, then, by all means circle around through the woods to the Blue River, and God preserve you, sir!"

"I doubt not He will," responded Norton gravely.

He knelt beside the spring and dipped the gourd, more as an excuse for his stay than because he wished a drink. The girl refused the proffered vessel, and Norton put it to his lips.

**A**S HE drank, his eyes fell on the shadow cast by the corner of the log cabin. A tuft of grass suddenly leaped from shadow to sunshine; some

moving object at the corner of the cabin had caused the change. Norton was on his feet instantly, and a leap took him to the corner, hand on knife.

Quick as he was, he found the front of the cabin deserted. His horse was grazing quietly; there was no flutter of leaves, no swing of branches, to show that anyone had fled hastily into the trees. Half wondering if he had been mistaken, he glanced down at the ground by the cabin corner, as the alarmed Kathleen joined him.

"Ah!" he cried swiftly, stooping over a faint mark on the ground. "Get me that rifle from my saddle, Kitty! Here is a gentleman who wears a patched moccasin—"

"Stop!" The girl caught his arm as he rose, and her face was set in swift alarm. "It was my father—I told you he did not like to have strangers around! I patched that moccasin myself—please go, and quickly!"

"Hm!" Norton looked at her. "Does it occur to you, Kathleen, that your worthy father may have overheard what we said about my journey? By the way, are you so certain that he *is* your father?"

"Why—what mean you?" The color ebbed from her cheeks as she gazed at him. "Of course he is my father! Please depart, sir—"

"Nay, I dislike to be hurried." And Norton calmly pulled out his pipe. He was angry, but it showed only in his narrowed eyes. "Now our mutual friend, Colonel Boone, seems to have an idea that Abel Grigg is not your father, sweet Kitty. I confess that the same thought has come to me, since seeing him. Have you any coals inside?"

She stamped her foot, half in anger and half in dismay.

"Good lack, sir, will you not be gone?"

"Not until you fetch me a coal, at all events."

She looked at him, read determination in his face, and with an impatient gesture ran to the cabin door and vanished inside. After a moment she appeared with a brand in her fingers, evidently pulled from the fire inside. Smiling, he took it and set it to his pipe.

"Ah, that is better! Now, Kitty, as to your birth: Do you know anything of your mother?"

He fully expected fresh expostulation from her; instead, she nodded quietly.

"Yes, though I do not conceive your right to question me, sir."

"My right is the interest of a gentleman," he said gravely, and she flushed. "May I ask who your mother was?"

"I—I do not know her name," stammered the girl, helpless wonder in her eyes. "Her initials were H. E. M., but my father never speaks of her."

"You mean, Abel Grigg never speaks of her," corrected Norton. A new anger flashed into the girl's face.

"Oh, you are insufferable!" she cried bitterly. "I have tried to help you, and your impertinent curiosity—"

"Nay, Kitty, it is only the interest of a gentleman, as I said before," smiled Norton. "Still, you are right. My curiosity is impertinent, it may be, and if you were not the fairest maid I think I have ever seen, perhaps my interest in you would be less. Frankly, I expect to return to this vicinity before a great while, and shall look forward to seeing you again. But tell me, please—how is it that you know your mother's initials, but not her name?"

She looked at him for a long moment, divided between anger at his cool insistence and comprehension of the iron will behind his gentle courtesy. Her hand went to her dress.

"Because of this. It used to be my mother's, father has said—"

She laid a pin in his hand, and Norton stared down at it in rank incredulity. He turned it over and saw the graven initials on the back, "H. E. M." Then, reaching inside his buckskin coat, he brought out its duplicate and laid it beside the other. Both pins were identical—a small golden eagle, with half-obliterated enamel.

"By thunder!" said Norton very softly. "Kitty, do you know what this is?"

"No—a pin, that's all," she looked up at him, perplexed. He turned over his own pin, showing her the twined initials graven there, "C. N.—E. D."

"This was my only legacy from my

father," he continued slowly. "Ask Colonel Boone to tell you the story. My father was Charles Norton, my mother Eliza Darby—their initials, you see. But how on earth did you get yours? It could not have belonged to your mother, unless your father had given it her. And if Abel Grigg was an officer in the Revolution—then I'm a liar!"

"But what is it?" she queried, wide-eyed. He came to her side, pointing to the two little gold eagles, and explained:

"This broken enamel, here, showed Cincinnatus at the plough—the Roman story, if you remember,"—and she nodded to his words. "The motto was '*Omnia relinquunt servare rem publicam.*' Kitty, this eagle is from the order of the Society of the Cincinnati, composed only of Revolutionary officers and their eldest male descendants. I am a member, in virtue of my father's having been one before me—but how on earth did you get this? Does your father know what it is?"

"No, because I have asked him," she returned, excited interest in her eyes. "He says it is just a bauble—but please, please go now! He was here, and I'm afraid that—that—"

"Very well, Kitty." And returning one of the eagles to her, he replaced the other beneath his leathern shirt. "Say nothing to him of this, mind. I'll investigate it when I return. Farewell—and remember, I'll come back sooner or later!"

He raised her hand to his lips, bowing, and turned to his horse. He scarcely remembered more than that he rode off with a wave of his hand; his brain was in a wild riot of thought. It was a moral certainty that Abel Grigg had no right to wear that golden eagle and in fact knew nothing about it—where, then, had Kathleen Grigg's eagle come from?

"Just a bauble, eh?" muttered Norton, his lips tightening in anger. "Friend Grigg, I would be pleased to have you repeat those words to me! By thunder, you'd learn something about the Revolution in a confounded hurry!"

And so he rode off into the wilder-

ness, nor looked back to see the girl gazing after him, hands at her breast.

## CHAPTER V

**G**RADUALLY, Norton's mind settled out of chaos into order. The girl was no daughter of Abel Grigg; so much was certain. He felt a hot anger at thought of her in the hands of such a man. There was no chance that Grigg had lied to her about the eagle, for his very use of the term "just a bauble" showed Norton that the backwoodsman had not known what it was. No man who was a member of the Cincinnati but reverenced the order and all it stood for, and whenever he thought of those words Norton felt hot anger thrilling him.

Turning to his own situation, he dismissed the remembrance of Kitty Grigg for the present. Had her father overheard their conversation? If so, there was a bare chance of finding trouble waiting near Blue River. He saw, however, that she had suggested the wisest course to him. Half an hour later, coming to a fork in the trail, he promptly turned off to the south.

His best plan now lay in finding the man Red Hugh, of whom Boone had spoken, and enlisting his services. There might also be a messenger at Dodd's Tavern, if Ayres kept his word.

Norton perceived very plainly that he had been neatly driven out of Louisville as a fugitive, but he firmly intended to return otherwise—for divers reasons. If he was to detect the river-pirates or whomever formed the band of Blacknose, he must do it by means of scouting along the river. It might require weeks and months of arduous work and woods-living, and such a man as Red Hugh would prove invaluable. Were Boone right in his description of the man who slew Indians—and Norton knew of too many such to doubt—this Red Hugh would be more than apt to know all the river haunts this side the Mississippi.

"After all," he told himself cheerily, "things seem to have turned out very well! If Ayres does not forget his

promises, we may yet bring Blacknose to book."

He passed one or two scattered cabins that afternoon, shot a wild turkey, and camped for the night beside a creek, in perfect content. In case Grigg had not overheard his plan, he decided to let the man think he had followed the Tennessee trail; he was not at all sure that Duval and Grigg were not leagued against him, and knew better than to trust in the lawyer's seeming apology. Kitty's words rang in his mind—"If Charles Duval gave you an apology, look to your steps!"

"She knew the breed all right," he reflected, the next morning. "I should have known better myself. Well, now for the north and west!"

He made no effort to hide his camp. As the creek ran north, seemingly to the Ohio, he led his horse along its bed for a good mile, picked hard ground for the emergence, and rode off, leaving a carefully covered trail. Even were he followed, his pursuers would be a day or two later, he knew, so before noon be flung off all care and rode on through the woods.

Another turkey and a small deer fell to his rifle that morning, after which he wended his solitary way in peace, with meat and to spare. Stopping at noon, he lighted a small fire and proceeded to smoke enough of his fresh meat to last for a few days, as he was going on to the river, where game was thinned out. He had been following no trail and had seen no one all that morning; the forest seemed limitless and desolate, empty of all human life.

Norton, however, did not relax his vigilance. While he was engaged with his meat, he paused suddenly, caught up his rifle, and drew the feather from the touch-hole. He had heard no sound, but he had a subtle warning that some one was near; before he had unstopped his powder-horn, the bushes opposite were flung aside and two Indians appeared.

"How!"

They gazed at him, motionless, with only the single word of peace, and Norton returned the stare with interest. Both men were dressed in beaded buckskin; both wore medals and carried

Kentucky rifles, and both were unpainted; the larger man was strikingly handsome, while the other, who possessed but one eye, had a wild ferocity in his features.

Without a word more, the larger man laid his rifle on the ground and made an inquiring motion toward the meat. Norton told them to help themselves, and endeavored to make them talk; but neither would say a thing, save for a swift exchange of gutturals between themselves.

He watched them in no little interest as they ate, and came to the conclusion that they were no ordinary warriors. He knew little of the northern tribes, but from the fact that the one-eyed man wore moccasins of unmistakable Cherokee make, he guessed the two had been on a trip to the south. Having none of the Kentuckian's contempt for the Indian, Norton went on about his work quietly though watchfully, rather perplexed by the oddity of their silence. Pouring fresh powder into his pan, he set his rifle ready to hand, whereat he thought the handsome Indian smiled a little.

When they had eaten the better half of his deer, they both drew out small pipes of the precious calumet stone—a thing which in itself marked them as men of rank. Norton silently proffered them tobacco. The handsome chieftain made the ceremonial of four puffs and handed his pipe to Norton, who repeated it, thinking they would now talk. In this he was mistaken. The one-eyed man emitted a grunt as Norton made the four puffs in Indian fashion to the four quarters of the heavens, but that was all. Although he ventured a question, neither replied.

With that Norton gave a shrug, rose, and began tying his smoked meat to his saddle. He wished that he knew more about the northern redskins, for these were certainly men of some importance, but his experiences had been confined to Creek, Cherokee and Seminole, while these two were quite clearly of a different race—whether Shawnee, Miami, Wyandot, or Ottawa he could not tell.

As he turned to pick up his rifle, the larger man rose and came forward,

smiling. He reached forth an empty powder-horn, which was finely carved, and indicated by signs that Norton was to give him powder; it was not a demand, but a courteous request. Norton, at first inclined to anger, found himself suddenly impressed by this unknown Indian; having plenty of powder himself, he at length assented and poured a few charges into the empty horn.

At this, the Indian gravely proffered him a shilling—and Norton noted that it was English money. He was well aware that he was going through a remarkable experience, there being little enough money in the settlements themselves, to say nothing of Indians using it—a thing unheard of.

"You're welcome," he smiled, waving back the coin. "I don't wish payment—you're quite welcome, though I don't suppose an Indian would ever hand me out free powder."

Whether he was understood or not, he could not tell. The one-eyed man, still sitting over his pipe, grunted out something; the other turned with swift anger in his face and poured forth a flood of words. Norton guessed shrewdly that the one-eyed man had expressed entire willingness to give him free powder at any time—from the end of a rifle.

Abruptly, the friendly chief turned to Norton again, and made signs for the latter to remove his moccasins—at the same time unfastening his own. Puzzled, the Louisianian hesitated a moment and finally obeyed, seeing that the other meant it. Then the Indian held out his moccasins—ankle-high, and elaborately beaded and quilled. Norton drew back, glancing at his own torn and stained and unbeaded pair, which he had obtained from a Creek squaw on his way north.

"You mean to exchange with me?" he asked, wondering. "No, I can't do that, man! Why, those moccasins of yours are magnificent! Want to sell them?"

A lightning flash of terrible anger shot into the swarthy features, but was gone instantly. Again the Indian nodded and held out his moccasins. Understanding that he was being paid in

this fashion for his hospitality, Norton reluctantly accepted, amazed that an Indian should even think of payment. When he had donned the new and unusually fine pair of the Indian, he put out his hand—and met a smiling refusal to shake.

**F**ROWNING, he turned to his horse and mounted. As he rode away, his friend sent him a wave of the hand; then he splashed across the shallow creek near his camp, and the strange pair of redskins were lost behind him. It was odd, undoubtedly; that refusal to shake hands had been a very manly way of saying they were enemies, yet he knew there was no Indian war going on at present.

Unable to account for the whole experience, he dismissed it from his mind. It was one of the weird, silent happenings which the wilderness holds in store for those who penetrate her fastnesses; strange things, memories which remain forever yet which may never react upon the future, the ebb and flow of Dead Sea tides leaving nothing upon the shores of life save the brine of wasted energy. Had John Norton known who his two guests were, however, he might not have considered the incident closed, so far as he himself was concerned. To them, indeed, it might well prove a momentary thing.

So he dismissed it lightly enough, and looked ahead. As he sat by his campfire that night and considered his situation, he found it good. He was to seek a certain unnamed settlement on the Indiana shore, twelve miles this side of the Blue River, and on the Kentucky side would find Red Hugh; then on to Blue River, Dodd's tavern, and the messenger from Ayres. That afternoon he had seen the river hills to the north; so by keeping due west, getting off early, and pushing hard, he might find Red Hugh's cabin by the next night. He must have come a good twenty miles, he considered, of the forty-five lying between Louisville and his destination, for all that he had taken a circuitous course.

Before sunrise he was up and on his way again. Two hours later he drew up on a rising knoll amid the hills, and

saw the signal-fire of Destiny awaiting him.

It was a spiral of blue smoke, ascending from the valley beyond, and perhaps a mile away. Norton sat watching it for a moment; to his trained eye it showed a fire of green wood, too small for a careless settler's building, too large for that of Indian or backwoodsman.

Since his meeting with the two redskins, Norton had regained his caution. He knew that the Kentucky woods were filled with adventurers and peculiar individuals of all descriptions, to say nothing of Indians who might or might not be hostile. So, having made certain that there were no settlers' cabins in the vicinity, he dismounted and went forward on foot. His horse, an Indian pony he had bought at Fort Massac, followed at a little distance behind him, treading almost as silently as did Norton himself.

After proceeding some distance, he tied the beast to a tree and went on more cautiously still, for that fire interested him. It was evidently built by some one who feared nothing in the woods, yet was a stranger to woods' ways, and Norton thought for a fleeting instant that he might have chanced upon the retreat of Blacknose. With his rifle ready loaded and primed, he stole forward, using all his woodcraft.

But his all was not enough, it proved. While he was crossing a thickly overgrown hollow, he flushed up two cardinals from a canebrake just ahead, and as the birds went up Norton realized that his cunning had been in vain. He was just about to plunge into the high canebrake when the tall, yellowish stalks were brushed aside to disclose a figure of nearly his own height, and a white man stepped forth.

For a moment the two men stared at each other in mutual surprise and admiration, for both were striking in looks—Norton in his capable, alert, piercing-eyed way, the stranger in sheer manly beauty. He was an inch shorter than Norton, was this stranger who had risen from the midst of the cane; the effeminacy of the long hair curling over his shoulders was at once offset by a strong nose, large mouth and square

chin, and very large, deep-set, commanding dark eyes.

Norton was startled by the appearance of this man, who seemed not of the woods and yet a woodsman. He wore a magnificent ruffled shirt of finest French linen, flung open at the throat to display a neck as bronzed as Norton's own; his coat and knee-breeches were of black satin, his knee-high moccasins of rude home make; a watch fob-ribbon hung on one side of his belt, a powder-horn and hunting-knife opposite. Over one ear was stuck a long crayon, while in his hand he held a thin board with paper fastened to it.

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the stranger, then continued instantly in excellent English, staring hard at Norton: "Your coming was most unfortunate, sir! You frightened away the finest specimen of Kentucky cardinal I have seen this year!"

"Accept my apologies, monsieur," smiled Norton, speaking in French. "You are a Frenchman, then?"

"I? Not at all!" cried the other. "I was born in Louisiana, removing later to France, but this is my country. Who are you, sir, who speak French so excellently in this wilderness? Do you come from the French Grant up-river?"

"No, I gained that language in New Orleans," returned Norton, wondering greatly who this eccentric stranger might be. "I regret having frightened away your bird—I trust you did not anticipate dining upon him?"

The other looked bewildered.

"Eh? Dining? Do you eat such birds, sir?"

"Heavens, no!" And Norton laughed despite himself. "But what else could you want of him?"

The stranger broke into a frank laughter; so winning and direct was his whole attitude that the puzzled Norton felt an odd liking for the man.

"It seems we were both mistaken, then! I was limning the bird—but come to the higher ground in here. Did you ever see a cardinal's nest?"

"I never looked for one," returned Norton curtly. He followed to a small patch of drier ground in the center of the canebrake, and the stranger eagerly

pointed to a nest in the branches of a young cottonwood, to one side.

"Sit down—stay quiet!" commanded the other quickly. "They will return in a half-hour, sir—"

"Then I'll be on my way," broke in Norton drily, "for I have other business than watching birds, sir."

He turned, when the stranger set down the paper and board, on which only a few sketchy lines were visible, and caught at his arm.

"Pardon, sir—one moment! Are you lately from Louisiana? Do you know that country well?"

"I've lived there all my life, practically," said Norton. "Why?"

"Well"—and the other seemed to forget his birds temporarily—"I was but a child when I went to France, and last year I heard a monstrous strange story of Upper Louisiana, which I have never been able to authenticate. I met one of the men who had been on Colonel Burr's ill-fated expedition, and he assured me that on the banks of the Missouri there is a mountain of salt—"

"Travelers' tales," laughed Norton, but the other continued quickly:

"Wait, sir! He also stated very decidedly that had Colonel Burr succeeded in his venture, he would have been joined by a great tribe of Indians. This tribe inhabit a country of some nine hundred square miles, around the salt mountain, fight always on horseback, and are armed with the short Spanish carbines—"

"My dear sir," inquired Norton in frank wonder, "are you in earnest?"

"Of course I am!" And indeed there was no mistaking the eager interest of the stranger's handsome face. "I am a student of ornithology, sir—that is, I pursue the study in my spare time—but I am also keenly interested in such matters of ethnology, and if you could enlighten me as to this Indian tribe, I would appreciate it. You seem a person of no little refinement and culture—"

"Thank you," laughed Norton heartily. "Well, sir, I can assure you that this tale is a myth in all its branches, is not worthy of credence, and your informant was wholly wrong. I trust that is sweeping enough. Now, as I

am in some haste, I will leave you to your birds and pursue my way. Do you know how far I am from the Blue River?"

"I do not, sir,"—and the frank eyes twinkled at him. "I have been in camp here for a week past, watching this pair of birds at work. Fortunately my sketches are completed, but my provisions are gone, and I have lost my spare flints and cannot shoot. How say you—shall we seek the Blue River together, sir, and become gentlemen adventurers through the wilderness?"

**S**OMETHING in the merry, careless, wholly engaging manner of this man made the Louisianian warm toward him. He could not mistrust that frank, sturdy, piercing-eyed face; here was a man in whom there was no guile, and almost involuntarily Norton struck his hand into that of the other.

"Done!" he laughed happily. "By thunder, sir, I like you! Hold on, though—" He paused in dismay as a sudden thought struck him. "I must refuse your company, sir, for your own good. I am in some danger, and if you traveled with me it might turn out badly all around."

"Danger?" And when the other frowned, Norton discovered a strange quality of power in the strong face. "Do not tell me you are a criminal."

"I'm not." Norton hesitated, in some embarrassment. Another steady look from the deep-set eyes of the stranger, and he concluded suddenly to open his heart to this man, to whom he felt so greatly drawn. "Frankly, sir, I am in Kentucky for the purpose of rooting out a gang of river pirates known as Blacknose's gang. Their organization has discovered my purpose, and—"

"Oh, is that all!" And the other laughed, passed his arm through Norton's, and gently urged him through the canes ahead. "Nonsense, friend! *En avant!*"

"I guess you don't know much about that gang," grunted Norton.

"Well, I ought to," retorted the other drily. "Last year I lost a dozen hogsheads of the finest tobacco, some prime ginseng cured in Canton fashion, and

a good load of flax! I know them, and appreciate your danger. I am with you, sir, and with all my heart—there's the hand of John Audubon on it!"

"Audubon!" repeated Norton, his eyes kindling. "Why, I met your partner at Louisville—" He halted abruptly.

"And I'll wager that Rosier told you I was touched in the head, eh?" Audubon broke into a peal of ringing laughter. "Every man to his trade! Rosier cannot understand why I will not settle down behind the counter and make money. Nay, but I cannot! Now come along—here is my camp."

Norton followed into a small glade of cottonwoods, where a horse grazed beside a rudely erected brush shelter. He remembered that Rosier had said his partner was touched in the head, but he did not need to remember what else Rosier had said. He knew already that he could trust John Audubon—in fact, he felt that he could more than trust him.

## CHAPTER VI

**W**ITHIN an hour the two men had become firm friends. They were alike only in the saving grace of humor, for Audubon had been trained in a gentler school than Norton. The latter was amazed to find that his new comrade, as Rosier had said, left his family and business at Louisville in order to spend weeks in the woods; yet when Norton saw the drawings and sketches of birds which Audubon proudly displayed, he was forced to confess that the long weeks had borne fruit.

"I can't see what use they are, except to science," he said ruefully, "but I presume you get out of them the same keen satisfaction that I get out of a trail well blazed or a hunt well finished."

"Exactly," laughed the other. "But enough of this. Tell me about Blacknose."

Norton did so, relating all that had happened to him since his eventful arrival at the Taylor farm. Audubon listened in keen interest, stroking his long, powerful chin but saying nothing.

When Norton had made an end, the naturalist—for this, and not shopkeeping, was his real profession—quietly bundled up his drawings in a portfolio. He arranged them neatly and in precision, and not until he had buckled the last buckle did he break the silence which had fallen. Then his eyes clenched on the keen sword-gaze of Norton, and he smiled.

"I will go with you. My wife is with General Clark, and need fear nothing; I myself am accounted as a little crazed, so no man would hurt me. But let them wait! The day is coming when this country of ours shall take her rightful place among the nations who sit at the feet of science! Look at our bison and elk, our countless new species of every bird and animal—"

He broke off suddenly, laughed at his own hot enthusiasm, and continued.

"But, sir, your pardon. You are a soldier, and I am not—but in truth I have served in the navy of France, so let us demolish these river-pirates together. Poor Rosier would scarce credit my joining you, I fear!"

Norton smiled. He liked this animated, vivacious, strong young fellow immensely, and was far too well educated to share in the prejudices of the Kentuckians against him. Audubon had been in Louisville only a few months, his life having alternated between France and America, but his business venture with Rosier had been sadly crippled by the activity of the river pirates, and also by his own indifference. He did not lack energy for any pursuit which attracted him, however, and flung himself into Norton's problem with a whole-hearted enthusiasm which delighted the Louisianian.

The latter went over each point, from the description of the would-be assassin to his last meeting with Duval and Grigg. On this last, Audubon managed to throw some faint light.

"Grigg was accused of horse-theft this spring," he said thoughtfully. "He was even had up in court, but Duval defended him most ably, and had him acquitted. I have often seen them together, too. This fellow Duval is a most able lawyer, Norton; he is said to be a second Hercules in strength, and

seems to have plenty of money. So you met the famous Colonel Boone, eh? I hope for that pleasure some day; he is a famous man, a famous man!"

Norton tried to elicit some information about the two mysterious Indians whom he had met, but Audubon merely shook his head, knowing nothing of the redskins and caring less.

"As to this river piracy, one of our merchants, a Mr. Tarascon, last year tried to capture the men. His hogsheads of tobacco were privately marked in a certain place, and after losing two cargoes he had all the river captains watching for them. One Captain Brookfield, who runs a horse-power bark of forty tons, stated later that he had received a number of hogsheads from a settler at Blue River. He believed them to be the ones in question, but the private mark had been branded over very cleverly. So that plan came to nothing."

"At least," exclaimed Norton eagerly, "it would go to show that the Tarascon boats were looted between Louisville and Blue River, eh? Of course, others have vanished at different points; a band of pirates with confederates on the boats would not be so foolish as to commit all their piracies at one spot, especially after what happened to the Mason and Harpe gang through just such work. Well, I believe we can do no better than to seek this man, Red Hugh—if indeed you are willing to incur the risk of helping me."

"Do you wish me?" Audubon looked at him calmly. "I do not want to intrude—"

"Why, man,"—and Norton laughed in sheer happiness until his brown face lost all its cold grimness and expressed only eager delight—"when I left Louisville I wished that one of two men were with me—one of them Daniel Boone, the other a younger frontiersman named Crockett, whom I know well. Now I extend that to a third, and the third is named Audubon; I think, perhaps, that I would sooner have this same Mr. Audubon than either of the other two! You are a man, sir."

Audubon put out his hand, and Norton gripped it, eye to eye.

"And you," returned the other

slowly, "are—well, that compliment gains its whole value, sir, in coming from you. I can say no more."

It was enough, and with a song in his heart Norton returned to get his horse, while Audubon gathered his scattered belongings and made ready to depart. The bird-lover had a small double-barreled rifle which he had bought in Philadelphia some years before, and when he had replenished his stock of ammunition from Norton's store, the two set forth.

They were a strange pair—Audubon in his black satin and French shirt, Norton in his buckskin and magnificent moccasins. Both were well versed in threading wilderness pathways, however, and it was no great task to find the Ohio. Late that afternoon they pushed their horses to the brow of a small hill, and saw the great river lying before them. The hills, which drew close to the Ohio at Blue River, were some distance back from the banks at this point, dense patches of canebrake appearing along the lower ground. The summer heat had thoroughly dried out the canes, and at sight of the yellow-brown patches Norton nodded.

"I rode along the Indiana shore from Fort Massac to Louisville," he said, "and remember seeing these canebrakes from across the river. We're almost opposite a little settlement called Doe Run—"

"Yes," added the other quickly, "and we are some eight miles from the spot indicated to you by Boone. I went down-river to Henderson last month and remember seeing that rocky cliff on the Indiana shore. What think you—shall we press on and find your Red Hugh to-night, or wait till morning?"

Norton decided to camp where they were. The afternoon was far gone; there were no settlements on the Kentucky shore, and they would stand little chance of finding Red Hugh's cabin at night. So he went on with the horses, while Audubon went after meat; by the time Norton had made camp on a small hillock of dry ground among the canebrakes, his companion came in with a wild turkey and news that a storm seemed coming up from the south.

When darkness came down and their bird was cooking, Audubon's prediction was justified by a shrill whispering of the canes as the wind stirred them. A brush shelter was soon thrown up, however, and the two men settled down in comfort, regardless of the weather.

Norton found that his companion agreed with him on the course to be pursued. Leaving Ayres out of the case, they could do nothing but scout along the river-shores, and with the help of Red Hugh might hope to accomplish something. This settled, the horses were picketed and Norton fell asleep to the rustling of the canes and the soughing of the wind in the cottonwoods.

He wakened once, to find the fire burned out, the sky overcast, and a stiff gale sweeping over the valley. No rain had fallen, however, and despite the uneasy feeling that should have warned him, Norton slept once more.

**W**HEN he was roused again, it was by a shrill scream from a horse, followed almost instantly by a rush of feet and a volley of shots. Norton was on his feet at once, with a shout to his companion; Audubon was already up, however, as his voice testified.

"The cane's afire, Norton! A spark must have caught it—"

"Sparks don't fly against the wind," grunted Norton.

They stood silent, dismayed by the spectacle around them and by the truth of Norton's remark. Dawn had come up; the high wind from the south was still blowing, and the canebrake was afire along the edge of the higher ground behind them. The two horses had disappeared, frightened by the veil of smoke drifting over the camp.

"Had the canes been afire along the river below," went on Norton grimly, "we could lay it to our own fire. But this seems to me the work of other hands, Audubon. The canes have been fired at a dozen places—"

"Then we had best lose no time getting out of here," cried the other. "Hello! Where's my rifle?"

"Gone, with mine," Norton grunted angrily as he realized what had oc-

curred. "The enemy has trapped us and—"

"What? You mean—"

"Blacknose," nodded Norton, pale to the lips. "No use trying to break through that line of fire, because we're hemmed in all around."

Audubon stared blankly at him, cursed, then turned his eyes to the fire-sweep. Both men were quite well aware of their position. An enemy had removed their rifles and freed their horses, and the fire would do the rest.

The thirty-foot canes were blazing fiercely, the drifted smoke and flames completely cutting off all egress by the neck of higher ground through which the two had entered toward the shore. As the fire took hold, the explosions of water in the cane-joints became continuous; so loud were they that Norton could not but imagine himself in the midst of a battle. Audubon stared at the spectacle, awe-struck, for the flames and smoke were rising high; he already held his precious portfolio, seeming to care for nothing else.

The two men were soon aroused to their danger, however. Across the little opening on which they stood slipped an immense rattlesnake, followed quickly by a rush of rabbits; from one side came a tremendous crashing amid the canes, and by the lurid glare which paled the growing daylight Norton made out the form of a bear crushing his way in panic toward the river.

"Come on," he cried hastily, turning. "Our only hope is the river, Audubon! If we can splash through the shallows beyond the edge of the fire, we'll be safe."

"Lead the way, then," returned the other calmly. "Good God, what a sight!"

His leathern shirt already hot against his skin, Norton turned and plunged to where the bear was still crashing through the canes. The river was a hundred yards away, and so thick were the high canes that to force a passage was impossible; their only hope lay in following the course of the frightened bear. With hot anger raging in him against the fiends who had laid this trap, and with quick realization that Audubon's shot at the turkey the previ-

ous evening must have drawn their foes upon them, Norton dashed forward into the muck.

It was high time, for the nearer canes were already being fired by sparks. On every side the explosions were crashing out, while small animals scurried past in blind panic. A moment later the two friends gained the shore, however, and as they did so a canoe appeared a dozen feet away, paddled by a single man.

"Help!" cried Norton eagerly. "Come in here and get us off, friend!"

The canoe was drifting slowly, and even as the two plunged out into the shallow water, they were halted abruptly. The high brake around them shut out the glare from behind, and by the rapidly increasing daylight they saw that the single occupant of the canoe was covering them with a rifle.

"Hold on, thar!" he cried hoarsely. "This gun's primed!"

And Norton recognized Audubon's double-barreled rifle. There was now no doubt as to the identity of the canoeist—it was he who had thieved their rifles and set the canebrake afire.

"You'll pay for this work," exclaimed Norton, trying to repress his rage. His hand went to his belt. Audubon, also realizing at once who the man was, took a forward step.

"Come on, Norton—wade around the brake—"

"Stop!" The man in the canoe leveled the rifle full at them; he was barely three yards away, and an eddy of the stream floated the canoe around. "You-all aint in no danger. This here's a warnin' to git. They's a flat-boat comin' around the bend—swim out an' git took off; stay on her clar to Saint Looey, an' keep out o' this country, you,"—and Norton perceived that the remarks were addressed to him.

He also perceived something else. The man was holding the rifle at his left shoulder; he was bearded, wore a buckskin coat and a cap of fox, with the brush hanging over his back. Norton started suddenly. He had no need to see powderhorn or moccasins.

"So you're completing your work, eh?" he cried savagely. "You're the man who shot at me on the Beargrass Creek road the other day, eh?"

The villainous face of the man contracted.

"Aint no 'lasses stickin' to your feet, is they?" he jeered. "Right ye are, pardner. Now, you-all git aboard that flat-boat an' stay thar, see?"

Norton thought swiftly, his hand closing on the hatchet in his belt. This was one of the Blacknose gang, beyond a doubt, and was the man whom Ayres had seen talking with Duval. Was it possible that—

"Who hired you for this dirty work?" he demanded swiftly. "Tell me who Blacknose is, and I'll give you five hundred dollars—"

"Git out an' swim, ye cussed spy," snarled the man evilly. "I aint goin' to miss ye next time—"

**N**ORTON, who had drawn his hand behind him, flicked forward his wrist in an underhand throw, having no chance to raise the tomahawk. Even as the steel flamed out, the man caught the motion and fired; Norton flung himself forward, felt a hot sear of pain across his head, and plunged bodily on the canoe.

It was a desperate expedient, but Norton was too hot with anger to care for possibilities. Before the man could fire his second barrel, Norton's weight sent the canoe over backward; he went with it, felt himself grappled, and had a brief glimpse of Audubon leaping at the canoe as he went under.

The water was little more than knee-deep, but Norton felt something sting at his shoulder and knew his opponent had a knife out. Smashing down with his fists through the smother, he tried to free himself of the hand at his throat, but vainly. Already wounded, he felt a terrible weakness stealing over him, and the water choked his lungs. His fingers closed on a wrist, and he gripped it desperately as he struggled up to get his head above the water.

In this he succeeded, pulling his opponent with him, and for a moment the two men stood breast to breast. The riverman fought with an appalling savagery, snarling like a beast, and Norton knew his case was desperate. Blood blinded him; the hand about his throat drew tighter; and with only his

right hand holding off the menacing knife, he put down his left hand to his belt in a last desperate effort.

The other saw his object, but could not prevent it without loosing his hold on Norton's throat. Snarling again, he threw himself forward; Norton was not braced against the move, and went over backward into the water. It was life or death now, and the Louisianian knew it. Jerking his own knife free, he lashed out frantically. The blade drove home, but he pulled it free and struck, again and again.

Wounded, throttled, choked with mud and water, Norton felt himself loosed from that terrible death-grapple. He tried weakly to lift himself erect, but could only raise his head from the water, sobbing in the smoke-laden air, while burning cane-flakes fell all around. He could see nothing, but felt hands lifting him and heard the voice of Audubon in his ear. The words sounded faint and very far away.

Norton was by no means unconscious, but he was weak and nauseated and half-drowned. He was well assured that never again would he have to seek a left-handed man with red-streaked powder-horn. He needed no glimpse of the horror-struck visage of Audubon to tell him that their enemy would fire no more canebrakes.

He felt Audubon bundle him over the side of the canoe, with much difficulty, but was too weak to offer any assistance. Then Audubon himself climbed aboard and began to paddle the craft out into the river. Norton lay in the grip of a deadly coma until a burning flake settled on his back and aroused him as it ate through his leather shirt. He rolled over, quenched the burning in the water that half filled the canoe, and sat up.

Clutching at the gunnels, he stared about. Behind was the roaring mass of flame which had so nearly swallowed them, and they were already in the swift current of the stream. The river made a sharp bend just above them, toward which the smoke was drifting; they had already swept out of the murk, and Norton saw a flatboat floating down-river, half a mile away.

Setting his teeth against the giddi-

ness swirling over him, he reached down and grasped a paddle. At his feet were the rifles; Audubon must have recovered them, then. As he got his paddle over the side, Audubon looked around with a ghastly smile.

"All right, Norton?"

"Right enough. Keep her going."

Little by little he conquered himself. He was very weak, but as they neared the flatboat he managed to wave his paddle. The crew of the boat were lined up with rifles, but as Audubon stood up, at some risk to the canoe, they recognized his figure and got out their sweeps. Five minutes later they were alongside, and Norton fainted.

## CHAPTER VII

**S**ITTING on a big tobacco hogshead and watching the Indiana shore, with Audubon standing gloomily at his side, Norton felt his bandaged head tenderly and considered what was to be done.

"I saved the canoe from going under," said Audubon, "then rescued the rifles. I could give you no help until I saw your head come up. By the way, this was in the canoe."

He held out a powder-horn—mottled, with a streak of red running through it. Norton stared down at it, then with a grim laugh reached into the coat which hung in the sun with his other clothes, and drew out the stopper Boone had found on the Beargrass Creek road that morning. The plug slipped deftly into place; the horn matched perfectly.

"Well, so much for an assassin," he said grimly. "Now that you've had your initial taste of the work our foemen do, have you lost taste for the enterprise?"

"Not unless the enterprise has lost taste for me," laughed Audubon, with a glance around. The crew of the flatboat were safe out of hearing. "I told our friends here that we had set fire to the canes ourselves, by accident—"

"Good. Am I badly hurt? Where are we?"

"You should have care; the bullet scraped along your skull, and you have

a knife-gash in the side. We have just passed Buck Creek, and the rocky cliff for which we were making lies about three miles downstream. Best let Red Hugh pass, go to the Blue River settlement, and wait there until you are recovered."

Norton made no other reply than to reach for his half-dried clothes. The other looked at him, his fine face wrinkled into a frown of anxiety.

"It's rank madness, Norton!" he said quietly. "You're scarce able to walk, and are like to suffer—"

"I am going to find Red Hugh, if I die the next hour."

Norton finished drawing on the fine-beaded moccasins, slipped the red-streaked horn over his shoulder by its thong, and looked at his comrade. He felt shaky indeed, but so clearly did his whole manner evince the iron determination within him, that Audubon shook his head resignedly and turned to his own garments.

"The canoe is towing astern," he said simply.

Norton reached for his buckskin shirt, and staggered under a swirl of pain and weakness. Instantly the other was at his side, with a rush of protestation against trying to leave the hospitable flatboat.

"I am going to find Red Hugh," said Norton doggedly, and resumed his dressing as his head cleared.

They were slipping down the stream fast. Already the high cliff mentioned by Boone as a landmark was in sight, far ahead, and Audubon departed to find the captain. The latter readily assented to take the flatboat in close to the Kentucky shore, and sent his crew to the sweeps. The boat was going through to St. Louis, and her captain carried some freight for Audubon, so that the latter met with prompt obedience.

Meanwhile, Norton sat in the sun and wiped the wet rifles mechanically. Every trace of the storm had vanished and the morning was coming up splendid in summer warmth. Norton knew they were in a grave situation, however, and said as much when his comrade rejoined him.

The man whose canoe they now held

had undoubtedly been one of the Blacknose gang, and Norton strongly believed he had been one of a cordon of spies stretched at intervals along the river. Were this the case, the conflagration would be noticed, the man's body might be found, and the gang would waste no more warnings. Norton's one hope lay in getting ashore unobserved, presupposing the river to be watched; if the flatboat ran in close to the wooded Kentucky shore, he and Audubon might land unobserved by anyone who watched from a distance. The river seemed deserted, save for the distantly smoking canebrake far behind. Whether there were any Blacknose spies aboard the flatboat could not be told.

So, with fresh ammunition and weapons and with rifles well oiled, Norton and Audubon stood in the bow as the ungainly flatboat swept into an eddy and approached the well-wooded bank. On the opposite shore, the rocky cliff with its cabin below was still a trifle down-stream; above them rose a bluff, a solid mass of virgin timber that stretched through to Tennessee with cabins scattered in its depths. Save at Henderson and Louisville, the Kentucky shore was poorly settled as yet, Shawnee raids from the Wabash having discouraged too ambitious families.

The boat swept in to the bank, almost underneath a huge cottonwood, and with a hasty farewell to the river-captain, the two men leaped ashore and lost no time in reaching the summit of the bluff.

It was a harder task than it looked, however, and a good twenty minutes had passed when at length the two panting men gained the crest of the bluff and paused to rest. Norton knew he was in bad shape and conjectured that malaria had touched him, for the uncleared lands along the Ohio were notorious in this respect. With all his stubborn will set upon reaching Red Hugh, he tightened his lips and said nothing to Audubon of his reeling senses and disordered vision.

The flatboat was already far on her way to Henderson, once more hugging the Indiana shore. Norton motioned

Audubon to lead the way, and in five minutes they struck upon a faint trail which ran along the crest of the bluffs.

"Well, the Indians had their uses after all," sighed Audubon as they came upon it. "Whew! That was a stiff climb, Norton! Now where is this blazed tree of yours?"

Norton collected himself into coherence.

"Directly opposite that cliff on the Indiana shore—a big cottonwood, blazed north and south. We head straight south from it to reach Red Hugh's cabin."

"Well, we're not opposite that cliff yet. Come along!"

The trail ascended the bluff-crest toward a knoll which topped it. Norton caught himself staggering more than once; his wounds throbbed and ached, and his brain seemed on fire. None the less, he knew he was in no mortal danger, and was filled with a grim satisfaction over the events of that morning.

"There's no telling how many river-men that fellow has murdered," he thought to himself, "and he tried his bloody work once too often. So that's one snake out of our path! If the current only swept his body away, our friend Blacknose will be in a pretty wonder as to what became of him."

The trail was steeper now, and he clambered up painfully after Audubon. At last, fearing lest his senses slip away altogether, he sank down on a huge root.

"Do you look for the tree," he said as the other turned. "I must rest a moment."

With an anxious glance at his white face, Audubon nodded and broke into the trees, for they were already on the knoll. Norton leaned back, faint and giddy, and as his eyes fell on the trail he noted idly that it was hard, rocky soil, indented with the unmistakable marks of horseshoes. In his present state of mind this conveyed nothing to him; a settler might have passed along by the trail, or any wandering peddler might have made the tracks.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, utterly relaxing himself and grateful for the brief rest. He seemed to ache

all over, and for almost the first time in his life his whole body seemed wearied and fatigued. A strange lassitude had come over him.

"Norton!"

At the excited whisper he opened his eyes and sat up, to see Audubon peering through the bushes, finger on lip. The other beckoned hastily.

"Come in here! Be cautious."

**A**LREADY refreshed by his rest, Norton crept into the bushes. Audubon's excited eagerness put him on the alert at once, and he stole after the other with all the silent care of an Indian. Reaching a densely overgrown covert, Audubon paused and held up a hand, listening. From above there came a low, trilling bird-song, but Norton could make out nothing else.

"What is it, man? What did you find?"

"Listen!" whispered Audubon softly. "Isn't it like a goldfinch singing under its breath? The same little trills, the same sustained sweet notes in between—but it's a vireo, Norton! Would you guess it?"

Norton stared, but his friend was in deadly earnest. He heard the hidden bird change its song suddenly, and Audubon gripped his arm hard.

"There—that's the real vireo song, with the pulse-like, clear-cut notes! Did you ever hear such a thing before? That bird was giving a real goldfinch trill, man—"

"Where's the cottonwood?" broke in Norton drily. The other looked at him, his face blank on a sudden.

"Why—why—I clear forgot—"

Norton laughed, but Audubon suddenly gripped his arm harder. The bird above had broken off in mid-song, for no apparent reason. From somewhere outside the covert came the rattle of a stone, followed by a horse's snort.

"Keep quiet," breathed Norton, looking into the deep eyes of his friend. "Some one's on the trail."

Audubon nodded, and the two men stood tensed and motionless, every nerve on edge. With startling abruptness there came a deep curse from the trail.

"Damn it, pull up! I aint no Injun!"

There followed a chuckle in another voice—one that sent Norton's hand to his rifle.

"Winded, Abel? Well, there's no haste. What did that boat put in for?"

"How'n tarnation do I know?" growled the first. "Wa'n't none o' our boys on her."

"So much the better for her, then," laughed the second. "It's odd we didn't meet Tobin, Abel!"

A grunt replied. Norton glanced at his friend, his brown eyes aflame.

"Duval," he murmured under his breath. "Who's the other? Abel Grigg?"

Audubon nodded quickly, and his face was set in eager surmise.

"Is Tobin the man we—we met this morning, Norton?"

Norton pursed up his lips in a silent whistle, staring. Was the thing possible after all? He had vaguely suspected it before, yet it seemed incredible. He replied to the question with a mute shake of the head, as Duval's voice continued. It seemed that Duval and Grigg were pausing for breath on the trail opposite the covert.

"Listen here, Abel: this thing has to be finished up sharp, or that fool is apt to blunder on something that'll bring the Regulators down on us." Duval's voice was earnest, cold, menacing. "He got away from the boys at Louisville, and unless Tobin has met him and is attending to him, you'll have to do the work. I'll be busy in court at Henderson for a week to come."

"I'll 'tend to him," growled Grigg. "How 'bout layin' fer that cargo comin' down nex' month in Cap Brookfield's hoss-boat? We could ship a couple o' the boys on her an' do the business by them islands at the Wabash."

"Not so bad," returned Duval. "Lay it to a bunch of Shawnees, eh?"

"Sure. That feller Tecumsey and his brother, the Prophet, is raisin' hell all through the tribes, Duval, an' they's goin' to be a blow-up mighty sudden on the border. Now looky here. If you're a-goin' on to Henderson, I'll leave ye

here an' go to meet the boys, so I want to settle this business of ourn. How much you goin' to turn over fer the gal, eh?"

"I've told you before, Abel, that I'll give you five hundred cash and what stuff we've got in the cache. Take it or leave it."

"Well, that 'baccy in the cache will fetch about two hundred at Saint Looey, eh? Then we got that flax out o' the last boat, an' them ten kegs o' 'lasses—all right. You see to makin' out the papers an' I'll sign 'em. The gal wont consent, mebbe, but I'll swear she aint of age. You got to have a preacher weddin', though."

"Of course, you fool!" And there was an exasperated note in Duval's voice. "Haven't I said I wanted to marry her? But you've got to clear out, understand—go to New Orleans or Saint Louis, I don't care which, and stay."

"I'll do that, all right. Well, see ye at Henderson."

"Take care of that spy, mind!" called Duval. Only silence ensued. Then came a faint thud of hoofs, and again silence.

Norton and Audubon stared at each other. The former had forgotten his illness in his high excitement, for now he knew beyond a doubt that fate had given over his enemy into his hand.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated slowly. "Audubon, we've got the whole game on the table before us! The mysterious Blacknose is Abel Grigg, and Duval is in league with him—is probably the brains of the organization. The black-hearted scoundrel! When we tell what we've heard just now—"

"Who'll believe us?" broke in Audubon gravely, and shook his head. "It wont do, Norton! Duval is too prominent a man to be smashed without clear evidence. Besides, we wouldn't break up the gang by nabbing him and Grigg alone. Depend upon it, we could do little against that clever villain without more evidence than those words. But what a blackguard he is—to be robbing his own townsmen!"

"And that girl—Grigg's daughter!" broke in Norton, a flame of rage sweeping through him. "Did you hear them?

He's buying the girl, Audubon—buying her! Damn it, man, did you ever see that girl?"

Audubon gazed at him, astonished at the outburst.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "I've seen her once or twice in the store. Do you think that's really what they meant? Why, it can't be possible, Norton!"

None the less, Norton knew that the thing was true. He drew a deep breath as the full realization of his triumph broke over his mind. By a stroke of sheer luck he had solved the mystery of Blacknose—but was it luck? Had not one thing led to another in marvelous sequence—the canebrake, the fire, the flatboat, the landing, and finally the vireo singing the song of a goldfinch? Surely, there was more than luck in all this!

**A** NEW burst of rage came into his heart at thought of Kitty Grigg, however. So this evil-hoary old backwoodsman who was *not* her father was planning to sell her to Duval! Norton inwardly vowed that such a sale should never be consummated. He remembered the girl as he had last seen her by the cabin, glorious in her unstained beauty and her fine, clear poise—and groaned. With a sudden movement he reached inside his shirt and took out the little gold eagle still pinned to it.

"Audubon," he cried earnestly, "I swear by this emblem, which stands for the things I hold dearest—my country, and my father's memory—that before Duval carries through his purpose regarding Kitty Grigg, I'll do to him as I did to his servant this morning! So help me!"

The bird-lover gazed at him searchingly.

"Then—you know the girl?"

"Know her? Yes!" exclaimed Norton hotly. "I know her, and she's no daughter of Abel Grigg! Who her real family was will not be hard to find out if I can get in touch with some of the officers of the Cincinnati—but now for work. Audubon, you heard what those devils said about a horse-boat belonging to a Captain Brookfield. Do you know anything of such a craft?"

The other nodded, frowning.

"Yes. Brookfield is an odd genius who has invented a way of driving his forty-ton boat by horse-power against the river-current. He is at Louisville now, taking contracts for his next trip down the river, and sails next month."

"Well, see here!" Norton felt the fever gripping him again, but had already glimpsed a plan of action. "You get back to Louisville, see Elisha Ayres, and tell him about it. Ayres will communicate with me at Blue River."

"And you—?" queried the astonished Audubon.

"I'll trail that devil of a Grigg," said Norton hastily. "He said he was going to meet 'the boys,' and if I can find their cache we'll nab the whole gang! By thunder, Audubon, we've the whole thing in our hands now!"

"But—wait!" cried Audubon hastily, as Norton turned toward the trail. "First, get this man Red Hugh! If he's a hunter as Boone said, then you and he together will have no trouble picking up Grigg's trail, and you may need another rifle badly."

For a moment Norton considered this, while the fever swirled through him. He was sorely tempted to plunge off on the trail of Abel Grigg, but knew that there was sound advice in Audubon's words.

"All right," he said shortly. "Come—we'll find Red Hugh first."

His excitement overbore his illness for the moment, and returning to the trail he led the way to the very crest of the knoll. Duval and Grigg had been swallowed up in the forest, but staring them in the face was a giant cottonwood, blazed north and south. Pointing to it silently, Norton wheeled and headed away from the river into the trees.

How far they went through that wilderness he never knew, for after ten minutes he was fighting desperately against the pain and sickness which came over him. Worse than all, he was growing terribly weak; once he caught himself reeling, and only by a great effort did he keep on. Audubon had a small compass, by which they held directly south as Boone had commanded.

Then, almost without warning, Norton felt his knees giving way. He was

very clear-headed, but he seemed to have lost the power of motion. With a single low groan he caught at a tree, missed it, and plunged down. Audubon was over him on the instant, raising him against the tree, dread anxiety in face and voice.

"It's just—weakness," gasped Norton. "A touch of fever, I think. Get Red Hugh—put him on the trail of Grigg. I'll be all right with a bit of rest. Hurry, man!"

Audubon looked about, biting his lips. Before he could reply, however, a bush to one side of them waved slightly, the sunlight glinted on a rifle-barrel, and a voice rang out in harsh command:

"Hands up, you skunk! Drop that rifle—quick!"

Helpless, the naturalist obeyed. Norton tried to reach his rifle, but could not move, and with another groan of despair fell back, waiting grimly for what might come.

## CHAPTER VIII

INTO the clearing before them stepped a strange figure, rifle still covering the startled Audubon—a tall man clad in buckskin and coonskin cap, with, of course, moccasins. He was gaunt and huge-boned, gray hair falling over his shoulders and a grizzled red mustache and beard half-hiding his face. For all that, Norton was startled by the man's features.

They were anything but those of a riverman. True, the sunken gray eyes held a smoldering ferocity which was almost madness; but the high brow, fine nose and shapely head, even the delicate lines of mouth and chin beneath the flowing beard—all these expressed a keen intelligence, almost a nobility, which was utterly astounding to Norton.

"What's this—what's this!" The stranger lowered his rifle suddenly as his eyes fell on Norton's features. Carefully uncocking the weapon, he stared at the two friends, an indescribable expression of chagrin overspread ing his countenance. "Gentlemen, I must crave your pardon. From his

moccasins I took this gentleman for an Indian,"—and he gravely indicated Norton,—“for he is deeply browned and his features were all but hidden from me. God be thanked I did not shoot first!”

“Amen to that!” cried Norton feebly, essaying a faint smile. Audubon, no less astonished at the looks and speech of the stranger, made a slight bow, and spoke coldly:

“If your murderous impulse has quite abated, sir, pray lend this gentleman your aid. We are seeking the cabin of a man called Red Hugh. Do you know where it is?”

From what Boone had told him, and from the appearance and manner of the stranger, Norton had a very shrewd suspicion that this was no other than Red Hugh himself. Leaning on his long rifle, the man surveyed the two friends critically.

“Well,” he returned at length, “I may say yes to that question, sir. But I will barter my information for yours. You, sir,”—and he bent his sunken gray eyes on Norton—“are wearing a pair of Shawnee moccasins. As you probably know, the beads and quill work on those moccasins are peculiar. In fact, there is only one man besides yourself in the Northwest who wears such moccasins, and he is an Indian—the only Indian I have ever held under my rifle and spared. Where did you get them?”

Norton sat up, fighting off the dizzy weakness that all but mastered him. The man’s words sent eager curiosity through him.

“I had them from an Indian,” he returned quickly, and gave a brief account of the two he had encountered. Before he finished, a fresh spasm of nausea overwhelmed him, and he sank back in Audubon’s arms.

“Enough of this talk,” cried the naturalist angrily. “If you will guide us to this Red Hugh, sir, pray do so at once. We come to him from Colonel Boone—”

“If you had said that before, you would have bettered matters,” broke in the tall stranger. “I am he whom you seek. Come.”

Norton had lost all interest in the proceedings, for he could no longer

fight off the fever. Between them the other two got him to his feet and half-carried him along a faint trail indicated by Red Hugh. After what seemed centuries to the reeling Norton, they came to a cabin, and he dimly felt himself carried inside. He knew little of what happened next, save that he drank a bitter draught and fell asleep.

When he wakened, he stared around him with wondering eyes, trying to place himself. He tried to move, and found himself too weak to raise his arm; yet the terrible sickness had passed.

He was lying on a couch of skins, and by the deepness of the sun outside he guessed it was mid-afternoon. The cabin was a bare place enough save for the furs heaped around the floor, but directly opposite him, beside the hearth, was a strange contrivance made of a stretched elkskin almost covering the side wall. From where he lay he could see a row of words across the top of the big skin, clearly done in red paint as if with a brush:

WYANDOT — SHAWNEE — MIAMI — CREEK — DELAWARE — POTT. — OTTAWA.

Under each tribal name was smaller writing which he could not read.

For a space he stared at the thing in wonder. Then, with a rush, he remembered that he lay in the cabin of Red Hugh, and all which had gone before. There was work to be done! Abel Grigg must be trailed to his meeting-place with the other pirates. Norton made a terrible effort to rise, but collapsed with a groan of despair.

At the sound, a figure darkened the doorway, and he looked up to see the tall form of Red Hugh bending over him. His head was lifted and a rolled skin set beneath it: then the old backwoodsman drew up a stool, fetched a bowl of hot broth from the fire, and set to work feeding him with a spoon.

“Talk later,” he said gently. “First, you must eat. You have slept since yesterday, friend, and—”

Norton, feeling new strength with the first mouthful of broth, pushed the spoon away desperately. The words shocked him into energy, and again he tried to sit up.

"Since yesterday!" he exclaimed.  
"But Grigg must be followed—"

The iron hand of Red Hugh pushed him back.

"Eat!" And the deep command forced him to obey. "You lack only strength, Norton, and that will come in a few days. Now, to relieve your anxiety, your friend Audubon told me all that had passed. We tried to trail Grigg, but the scoundrel had covered his tracks like an Indian and I feared to leave you alone here. So Audubon went back to Louisville to confer with Ayres, and for the present matters must be left as they are."

"Then you know my errand?"

"Yes. Audubon told me the whole affair. Now finish this broth."

Leaning back, Norton obeyed, in a mingling of disappointment and content. It was hard that Grigg should have escaped, yet this Red Hugh seemed a capable person to trust in. Norton could not but wonder at the man. According to Boone, Red Hugh had spent the past twenty years here on the border, yet his manners and speech were those of a cultivated gentleman—and Norton could not understand the incongruity of it.

The rich broth gave him new life. When the last drop was gone, Red Hugh proceeded to cram an ancient pipe with tobacco, sternly denying the luxury to his guest, and settled himself beside the couch.

"Shawnee moccasins! Shawnee moccasins!" he muttered slowly, then brought his keen eyes to Norton's face. "Audubon said you were from New Orleans?"

"Yes," returned the Louisianian, with curiosity again stirring in him. "You seemed to recognize those moccasins, sir—how shall I call you?"

"Call me by my name—Red Hugh," said the other gruffly. "That is all the name I have held these twenty years, and it is good enough to die under. As to those moccasins, sir, you seem to have entertained an angel and a devil unawares."

"Those two Indians?" demanded Norton eagerly. "Who were they, then?"

"He with one eye is called the

Prophet," puffed Red Hugh slowly. "The bitterest-hearted devil unhung! The other, his brother, is the finest man on the border to-day, the one redskin I am proud to call friend. He has sat here where you now lie, telling me of his dream; he has built a town on the Wabash, not far from Vincennes, where he hopes to gather all the Indian tribes in peace, teaching them to lay aside the rifle and till the soil. Neither he nor his followers touch liquor—sir, God will punish our race for the evils we have brought upon these Indians! The man of whom I speak is a Shawnee, humbly born yet recognized as chieftain by a dozen tribes. His name is Tecumthe, or as the border makes it, Tecumsey."

The amazed Norton listened to this speech in blank astonishment. He had heard little of the two Indians in the South, and only on his Northern trip had he learned much of Tecumthe or his famous brother, the Prophet. Along the border they were hated bitterly, and that he had himself aided the two was no small surprise.

Even more amazing, however, was the way in which Red Hugh spoke. From Boone, Norton had understood that the man hunted Indians, as more than one frontiersman did, like wild animals.

"Tell me this," he asked, bewildered. "I thought you hated all redskins, Hugh? If that is true, what care you for the evil we have brought upon them, and why do you think so highly of Tecumthe?"

The other puffed in silence for a moment, his face set like stone.

"Look at that elk-hide yonder," he said at length, gesturing with his pipe toward the stretched skin, his voice deeply stirred. "Norton, that skin bears record of a hundred and a score Indians I have slain. Twenty years ago a band of red devils murdered my whole family, my wife, my children, killed my dearest friend, left me for dead—"

He paused, and after a space continued, his voice firmer.

"I recovered, and having naught to live for save vengeance, I took vengeance. Every redskin I have slain has

been a warrior under arms, and I have hunted them without pity or mercy, even as they have hunted me. This man Tecumthe is different. His heart is white, Norton. While the Prophet is stirring up war, Tecumthe is urging peace; he has a great vision of uplifting his race—but he cannot do it. His men are murdered along the frontier and he can get no justice. His lands are stolen, and Harrison will do nothing. If he loses the Wabash Valley, the Shawnees will be thrown back on the Sioux and Blackfeet, their mortal enemies—Well, let us get off this subject, Norton. You know who I am, and that is enough. We have to deal, not with Indians, but with men worse than Indians."

"Yes," said Norton bitterly. "This gang of river-pirates has murdered more men within the last year or two than have all the Indians since Fallen Timbers. Too bad Grigg escaped you; we had the whole gang under our hand right there, could we have trapped him."

RED HUGH laid aside his pipe and fell to stroking his grizzled beard as they discussed what was to be done. Norton was dismayed to find that he would be unable to get around for several days, though Red Hugh promised him a complete cure from his fever and wounds.

Nor could he obtain the information for which he had hoped, from this strange character. Red Hugh, who seemed well educated and only a trifle "touched" on the subject of killing Indians, had a supreme contempt for the settlers along the river, in the main. He had been only once to Louisville, and had lived his solitary life as far as might be without concerning himself with settlements. He knew nothing of the Blacknose gang, though he stated bluntly that once he and Norton set themselves to hunt down the pirates, it would be a matter of short accomplishment.

So with that small ray of comfort, Norton went about his recovery, impatiently enough. When three days had passed, he felt nearly himself once more; but in that space of time he had discovered many things.

In the first place, he was forced to reverse his earlier impressions of Red Hugh. While he was ill, the man took a lively interest in caring for him; no sooner was Norton on his feet, than Red Hugh relapsed into a brooding, morose individual who refused to talk about himself or his doings and only betrayed interest in Blacknose. Studying the man, Norton concluded that he had been a gentleman and a man of some consequence, but since the destruction of his family had devoted his whole life to revenge with a consequent loss of sanity on other topics.

He seemed to have absolutely no other business in life than killing Indians, for a living was easily gained by hunting. He had never troubled to take up land, and since there were no settlements in the vicinity, no one interfered with his squatting. All his vivacity and gentle care vanished as soon as Norton regained strength, and with this interest gone, he would sit and stare by the hour at his terrible elk-skin.

This Norton also found of keen interest, for every "hunt" had been carefully set down as to date and result. When they took the field against Blacknose, he conjectured shrewdly that Red Hugh would re-awaken once more, for judging by the elk-skin he was possessed of considerable prowess in the man-hunt. He must have gone about his revenge with a terrible skill; more than once the painted record showed that parties of two and three Indians had fallen to his rifle.

John Norton was in no sense horrified, though not at all in sympathy with the old man. There were many like him along the border. The settlers conceived and treated the red men as beasts, which too often they were, and no man was ever brought to justice for killing an Indian. Red Hugh's grievances were purely personal, however, and more than once Norton recalled Boone's words—"God aint softened his heart yet, though He will some day, I reckon." That day, it seemed to Norton, was very far distant.

Only once, after that first talk with the man, did he ever refer to his slain family. He had been examining Nor-

ton's moccasins, on the third evening, and suddenly he favored the Louisianian with one of his searching looks.

"If you were up in the Shawnee country," he said abruptly, "these leathers would either get you killed or crowned, Norton! Any Indian across the Ohio would recognize them instantly. Well—well—"

He stared into the fireplace, puffing at his pipe. After a moment he continued slowly as if musing to himself:

"They were Wyandots, a big war-party of them, and their chief wore moccasins with split soles. They killed us all, women and children alike—and after I recovered I went straight into the Wyandot country. I found that chief, a year later, and shot him in the midst of his own village; old Simon Kenton was with me, and we had a hard fight before we got away. Well, I had my revenge, but it did not bring back the dead wife and the little ones—the little ones—"

Upon that he strode from the cabin suddenly, and Norton never referred to his own similar story, deeming it best to keep Red Hugh's mind as far as possible from Indian atrocities. The man seemed no more than sixty years old, and save for that one topic his brain was as vigorous as that of Norton himself.

By the fourth evening the Louisianian was nearly himself again. Red Hugh's knowledge of herbs had rid him of the fever almost at once, and strength came back to him surely and swiftly. Burning with anxiety to waste no time, yet conscious of the necessity of regaining his strength, he had forced himself to bide in the idleness of recuperation, but now he could do so no longer. There was work to be done, and he was bent upon keeping control of things—for his own career lay in the balance. He had not resigned his commission in mad haste, but after much deliberation; did he succeed in eliminating the Blacknose gang, New Orleans and the Government had promised great things.

More than this, however, he had Kitty Grigg in mind. Once the present affair was concluded, he promised himself a trip to Cincinnati, where many

of the original members of the famous Order had settled. It should not be difficult to make inquiries and perhaps gain a clue to the girl's real family, he thought. So, calling Red Hugh into a gloomy consideration of the problem immediately at hand, he announced his intention of beginning work next day.

"The first thing is to go to Blue River and get word from Elisha Ayres," he said thoughtfully. "I can't go back to Louisville unless that murder charge is cleared up, which should have been done by this time. If not, we'll have to go on a thorough scout of the river, because Grigg and his band of pirates are somewhere down-stream."

Red Hugh nodded.

"Where are you going to meet the messenger from Ayres?"

"At Dodd's Tavern—Kentucky side."

"Hm!" The other frowned. "I haven't been there for two years, Norton, but I don't recall any tavern or settler of that name at either of the Blue River settlements. However, your friend doubtless knew what he was talking about."

"He seemed to," said Norton drily. "Blue River is only about twelve miles from here—"

"I have a canoe down on the shore. Feel strong enough to paddle?"

"Quite. If we find no word from Ayres, we can go on below Henderson and spend a couple of weeks scouting through the woods. The gang must have some sort of a rendezvous, Hugh, and it certainly has a cache of the stolen goods, for Grigg has to be careful in disposing of them. Which side of the river would you search?"

Red Hugh stared at his elk-hide, tugging at his grizzled beard.

"Well," he returned slowly, his deep-set eyes flaming a little, "they'd be like to use either side, Norton. If we skirmished around on the Indiana side around the Wabash, we might strike one or two Indian parties—"

"None of that," broke in Norton, understanding that ominous flame in the man's eye. "We're after Blacknose, not after scalps. Just impress that on your mind and save further trouble. If you give me your help in this thing, there'll be no Indian hunting."

THE big man turned his slow gaze to Norton's face, and for a moment the Louisianian expected trouble. Red Hugh stared at him; Norton met the look firmly, resolved not to compromise this matter, much as he needed the man's help and advice. At length Red Hugh nodded, reluctantly.

"I like you, Norton," he said, his grim visage softening strangely. "You're a man. You're like another Norton I once knew—well, best not to speak of that. Now as to hunting this Blacknose gang: we are more like to find them on the Indiana side. If aught went wrong with their plans, they could escape to the Indian country, or else lay the blame for their crimes on the Shawnees. There are several bands of Miamis along there, also. It may well be that through some Indians we can get trace of the gang, if naught else serves."

Upon this, they made ready to set forth at dawn. Norton discarded his own battered powder-horn for the fine red-streaked one which the assassin Tobin had formerly carried—an act which was destined to bring dire results upon himself before the game was played out. He forgot the fact that this red-streaked horn was distinguished by its very oddness and beauty.

With the dawn they set forth for the blazed cottonwood and the Ohio, carrying their rifles and a quarter of venison. Upon reaching the bluff over the river, Red Hugh turned abruptly aside and led Norton down to the wooded banks, where he presently fished out an Indian birch canoe and paddles from a clump of dense bushes. Two canoes were paddling upstream along the opposite shore, and when these were past, they put their craft in the water and started for Blue River.

The river hills ran close to the stream on each side, and except for the little group of cabins under the high, rocky cliff opposite them the banks were unsettled as far as Blue River. Norton paddled easily, drinking in fresh strength with the sun-bright morning air, and could scarce realize their journey was nearly done when Red Hugh pointed to Blue River ahead. They had passed Indian Creek and two

islands without sight of other river-craft, and now held in to the Kentucky shore.

"Colonel Boone's brother, Squire, began that settlement,"—and Red Hugh pointed across to the clustering cabins opposite. "Now if you can see any signs of a tavern over here, you beat me."

In truth, Norton gazed at the Kentucky settlement which they were approaching, and his heart sank. Ayres must have made some mistake—yet the schoolmaster had been very explicit in his directions. The settlement consisted of two cabins, one of them fast falling to ruin; a few tobacco-drying sheds; a small section of cleared land; and a half-naked woman staring hard at them. Two or three entirely naked children appeared as they paddled in, and as the slatternly woman raised her voice, a still more slatternly man came slouching from the tobacco-sheds, rifle in hand. There was no sign of any road or ferry, and this was most certainly no tavern. Norton landed with some dismay.

"Is this the Kentucky Blue River settlement?" he inquired of the suspicious man—a loose-jawed, fever smitten person who lacked all interest in life.

"I reckon they call it that, stranger. Who be ye?"

"We're looking for Dodd's Tavern," returned Norton quietly. "If you can tell—"

"Eh? Dodd's Tavern? Well, by gum!" The man stared at him, then turned to the woman behind him. "Go git that gal."

The woman went to the house. Red Hugh drew up his canoe and joined Norton, and together they waited for what was evidently to happen. The woman reappeared from the cabin, nodded, and fell to staring. A moment later Kitty Grigg emerged, and came forward with a glad, eager little cry at sight of Norton.

"Captain Norton! Oh, I'm so glad you've come—I had almost given you up!"

"You!" Norton grasped her hand, thunder-struck. "Why, girl—what does this mean? How came you here?"

"By boat," she laughed. "And I have news from Mr. Ayres."

## CHAPTER IX

**U**TTERLY astounded as he was at sight of Kathleen Grigg, and even more so by Ayres' having chosen such a messenger, Norton drew her out of earshot of the curious settlers to the canoe, and introduced Red Hugh. The latter stared at the girl, then stretched forth a huge hand and touched the flame of her red-gold hair with trembling fingers, awe in his whole face.

"Kitty Grigg!" he muttered thickly, as the half-frightened girl shrank back to Norton's arm. "Kitty Grigg! Yet she has the face of my own Mary—oh, God in heaven!"

Abruptly, he turned his back upon them and stood leaning on his rifle, his shoulders shaking. Norton realized swiftly that the old man had found some resemblance in her to that wife whom he had lost in such tragic fashion, and in quick pity he gave the girl a warning look and hastened to change the current of Red Hugh's thoughts.

"But Kitty—how on earth came Ayres to send you, of all people?" he cried in half anger, half wonder. "He knew there was danger in it—"

"Listen, please," she broke in, her hand on his arm and her eyes searching his face hungrily. "After you left me, that day, I saw Colonel Boone and told him what you had said. He knew nothing about the pin, but he said to trust you and—and I do. Then Father went off on a month's hunt, so I was going to visit with Mistress Zach Taylor had not Mr. Ayres and Mr. Audubon come to see me—"

"Audubon? When was this?" queried Norton, frowning.

"Four days since—directly he returned after leaving you with *him*," —and she nodded toward Red Hugh, flushing slightly as she did so. "Mr. Audubon related all that had happened to you and him, but as he was going away with Mr. Ayres they were not sure whom to send here until they thought of me. You see, I would not

be suspected or watched, and there was a skiff all ready to—"

"But—then you must know—" Norton broke off suddenly, staring into her level gray eyes, wondering if she had been told who Blacknose really was. She looked steadily at him, read his thought, and her face went pale.

"Yes," she nodded quietly. "Mr. Audubon told me all about it. I do not quite believe it can be possible, despite what you and Mr. Audubon heard. You see, sir, Mr. Duval has exerted some influence over my fa—"

"Over Abel Grigg, you mean," interrupted Norton gravely. He was all the more astonished that she had come on this mission, knowing what she did.

"Over—him," she went on, avoiding the issue. "But he's not bad at heart, really! And I came here partly to ask you to help him—I mean, if you find there is a gang of pirates, don't be too harsh with him until he is proven guilty—"

"I promise you that, sweet Kitty," smiled Norton. Then of a sudden the warmth died out of his brown eyes, and his face went hard. "Perhaps you were not told how he agreed to sell you to Duval, eh?"

"Yes," she almost whispered. "I—I—oh, I do not know what to think or say! But never mind that now, Mr. Norton; Mr. Ayres said that you were to return to Louisville at once—"

"You just said he and Audubon were going away?" broke in the puzzled Norton.

"They'll be back when you get there. Mr. Ayres has a plan about some boat, and has gone up-river to get some men he can trust. The riverman who was murdered had two brothers—"

"Hold on," laughed Norton. "How can I go back when everyone thinks I committed that murder? Straighten me out little by little, Kitty!"

"Nobody thinks you did it. Mr. Ayres found that the knife with which the man was murdered belonged to some one else, and also established the fact that you had been outside the tavern all the while. So that is all right. The owner of the knife escaped in a canoe."

"And I'll wager his name was Tobin," exclaimed Norton quickly. She looked at him, surprised.

"What—how did you know that?"

"Because I met Mr. Tobin myself." Norton smiled grimly and glanced at his powder-horn. "Well, that's a relief, Kitty! Now, how about getting back?"

"I came down in a skiff that was going to Henderson," she explained. "That was day before yesterday, and the skiff was to start back this morning and stop for me. Mr. Ayres knew there was no tavern here, but that was why he used the name, in case of suspicion."

"So—I am beginning to understand! This Mr. Ayres is a sly fox, eh?"

Norton whistled softly. In asking for Dodd's Tavern he had merely made use of a pass-word which was known to the vacuous-eyed settler, and had thus precluded any possibility of mistake.

"Wait here, Kitty," he said, and crossed to Red Hugh. The latter swung about, showing his usual grim, searching expression. "You heard it all, Hugh?"

"Yes." The big man nodded.

"Well, I fancy that Ayres is going to load up a boat and use it as a lure," went on Norton in a low voice. "It may well be Brookfield's horse-boat, of which we heard Duval and Grigg speaking, and which will leave Louisville in two or three weeks. Hold on!" And he turned to the watching girl again. "What did you say about Ayres going away to raise some men?"

"I'm not quite sure myself," she answered, "but I gathered that he was going for that purpose—he spoke about some men whose relatives had disappeared with the vanished boats—"

"That's it, then," said Norton quickly. "He'll get a few men he can rely upon implicitly and stow them aboard the boat. Then, when Blacknose attacks, he'll find what he hadn't bargained for, Hugh! Now will you come back to Louisville? That skiff ought to be along in an hour or two, if she left Henderson this morning—"

"No," broke in Red Hugh decisively. "You stay here and take Madam Grigg back, Norton. I'll scout through the woods for a bit, then will pick up your boat at Henderson when she comes down. You'll be aboard her?"

Norton assented with a nod.

"Good. If there's no sign of me at Henderson, I'll signal you from Diamond Island, just below—be sure and take the left-hand channel, for I'll be on the Kentucky side. Brookfield's boat, eh? All right—I'll watch out for you."

**W**ITH a final look at Kitty Grigg, Red Hugh touched his cap and went to the canoe with Norton. The latter took out his rifle and equipment; then Red Hugh stepped into the craft and shoved off. A wave of the hand, and he paddled off upstream in the direction whence they had come that morning. Norton stood watching him out of sight, a most unwelcome feeling of loneliness stealing upon him; despite the man's glum silences and blood-thirsty pursuit, he had a strange fascination for Norton.

"Who is that man? Is he the—the Red Hugh of whom Mr. Audubon spoke?"

The Louisianian turned, and smiled into the girl's wondering gray eyes.

"I doubt if there be two of that name, Kitty! Aye, he's the man, and an odd one. Come—let's sit on the bank over here where we can watch the river. I trust your skiff will return as she promised, for a night in this place would be little to my liking."

"Oh, they're kindly folk enough, but terribly poor," she returned, as Norton led her down the bank under the shade of a clump of cottonwood. "And such wretched, happy, dirty little babies! I wish I could do something for them."

He watched her, fascinated by her fresh beauty, wondering anew how this pearl of womanhood came to be fixed in the squat cabin of Abel Grigg. For a space they sat in silence; she gazed out over the river, hands clasped in her lap, while Norton filled his pipe and smoked, feeling suddenly content with all things.

It was coming out all right, he felt, despite the failure to trail Grigg down and trap the whole gang. Of the relation between Grigg and the girl beside him, he never bothered, being perfectly convinced in his own mind that she was another man's daughter. He remembered the promise he had given her, but the deeper memory of that verbal bill of sale had impressed him with a hatred and contempt for both Grigg and Duval, which nothing would eradicate from his mind.

He recalled the vow he had taken upon that golden eagle, and perhaps the thought leaped to Kathleen's mind, for she turned with a sudden little laugh.

"Oh, I forgot! Have you still got that gold eagle pin?"

"Yes." Norton put his hand to his breast. "Why?"

He could not understand the half-smile that lay in her eyes as she looked at him. Knowing that he was puzzled, she laughed again.

"Haven't you looked at it since that day?"

"No—but I will now."

He reached inside his shirt and unfastened the pin. As the sunlight fell on it, he frowned slightly; the broken enamel on its face did not seem—suddenly he turned it over, and read the initials "H. E. M."

"By thunder!" he exclaimed, looking up at the laughing girl. "I handed you the wrong pin, eh? It was a mistake, Kathleen—"

She nodded. "Yes. I discovered it after you had gone, so when I came I brought this one of yours with me."

Norton looked at the pin she held out, recognizing it for his own. Yet he made no move to take it. Much as it meant to him, being his only memorial from the father he could not remember, he only looked at it and admired the slim beauty of the palm on which it lay. Hers was not the hand of a backwoods woman, he thought.

"Listen, Kitty," he said slowly. "Just as soon as I've cleared up this Blacknose affair here, I'm going to Cincinnati and find out who the owner of this pin of yours really was. A number of the Cincinnati are there or in

the neighborhood, and they will have records of the Order. Let me keep your eagle until then, and you keep mine as an earnest that I will return yours."

He found her face suddenly grave.

"I do not want to lose it," she said quietly. "It means a good deal to me, after what you have said—"

"Nor do I want to lose mine," he broke in, smiling. "Oh, you are not so easily rid of me, Kitty! I will find your true name for you, and that's a promise; until then, I will keep your eagle and do you keep mine in pledge of my return. Not that you need the pledge, since it would be a far harder matter to keep away from your eyes—"

"Fie, sir!" And she interrupted merrily enough. "And how many pledges have you left behind in Louisiana?"

"Two," returned Norton, so that for a moment her face became as serious as his own. "One to my friend Davy Crockett, in shape of my finest rifle; and one to the traders who sent me hither, in shape of a promise that I would wipe out Blacknose. Tell me, Kitty, do you wish to marry Charles Duval?"

"Do you think I wish it?" And she inspected him with half-frightened eyes.

"Well,"—Norton shifted his rifle uneasily,—"he is a person of note, is a gentleman of family—and is able to buy you with money."

"So much might be said for the Indian Tecumthe," she returned, flushing at the brutality of his last words. "No, I shall not marry him."

"Bravely said," nodded Norton, and felt tremendously relieved. Of course, he told himself, his only interest lay in saving this helpless girl from two scoundrels. "Well, even if Abel Grigg swears you're under age—"

"There's the skiff coming!" she cried quickly. "Just crossing over."

**N**ORTON glanced up. Perhaps a mile down the river and with her eight sweeps bringing her slowly across in a long slant for the Kentucky side, was a large boat. There was no hurry, he calculated, for she would require a

good fifteen or twenty minutes to head over across the swift current of the Ohio—

*“—then you take this horse and rejoin the boys. I’ll get back in that boat.”*

The cold, commanding words rang out clearly from somewhere behind and above. Norton stiffened; with one quick motion he unstopped his powder-horn and poured some black grains into the pan of his rifle, as it lay across his knees.

“The durned spy must ha’ lit out,” came the growl of Abel Grigg’s voice. “Tobin aint showed up, neither.”

The Louisianian glanced swiftly at Kathleen; she was staring at him wide-eyed, her face ghastly in its sudden pallor. He knew that she must have realized instantly what had occurred—Duval, on his way home from Henderson, had met Grigg and intended to turn over his horse to the backwoodsman and catch this skiff back to Louisville. Cursing the mischance of fate which had led to such a happening, and thinking only of keeping the girl unseen, Norton leaned forward and whispered, with a gesture toward the trees:

“I’ll back them into the woods. Get under those trees, and when the boat comes get aboard.”

“No,” she returned, with a shake of the head. “Why should I be afraid?”

Reading determination in her eyes, Norton cursed again, silently, and leaped up. Discovery was certain; his only chance now lay in holding up the two men and surprising some confession from them. With Audubon as sole witness, he could hardly hope to force Duval into court; but with Kathleen’s testimony and that of the settlers, there was a bare chance. His rifle ready, he left the girl and sprang up the bank.

A curious scene greeted him, and one which showed that Elisha Ayres had not selected this settler’s cabin by any vagary. The squalid woman and babies had vanished; the settler himself sat in the doorway of his shack with his rifle ostentatiously in hand; paying no heed to him, Duval and Grigg were standing near the landing, the latter holding the horse’s bridle in one hand,

his rifle in the other. Duval had a pair of pistols in his belt.

“Hands up, gentlemen!” commanded Norton sharply. “Drop that rifle, Blacknose!”

As Norton leveled his weapon, the settler in the doorway rose also, watching the other two. Duval, whirling with one terrible convulsion of his features, looked into Norton’s rifle and forced the look from his face; Grigg obeyed the command with a snarl, his powerful, hook-nosed face grimacing in surprise and consternation.

“Why—sir! What is the meaning of this, Mr. Norton?”

Duval’s expression of astonishment was an excellent counterfeit. His virile, dark, thin-lipped face showed only blank surprise, but this did not deceive Norton.

“You’re a pretty pair of scoundrels!” he said grimly. “Your game’s up, Duval, so no need to play innocent. Grigg, you’re known for Blacknose. I think you’ll both go to Louisville on that boat, but you’ll go bound.”

He saw Grigg’s eyes widen and his jaw fall in astonishment, and needed not the step behind him to know that Kathleen had come up. Duval, however, maintained his cold poise.

“You are making a grievous mistake, Captain Norton,” he returned softly. “You must either be out of your senses or—”

“So?” chuckled Norton easily. “You remember how you and Blacknose there paused on your way to Henderson a few days ago, and held a conversation just before you parted company? There were witnesses to that conversation, my friend.”

Grigg went livid, and his bushy, grizzled beard quivered as he stared at Norton. Duval, however, showed no sign of emotion beyond a tightening of his lips; his dark eyes glittered ominously, and the cruel curve of his nostrils deepened. In that moment Norton knew that he had lost his play, and would get nothing out of this man. Grigg opened his mouth to speak, but Duval shut him up sharply.

“I said, sir, that you were mistaken,” returned the lawyer coldly. “The tenor of that conversation must have been

misunderstood by you. Madam Grigg, your servant."

He bowed slightly to the girl. With an inward groan, Norton lowered his rifle. If he brought the matter to an issue, he knew well that he would fail; neither Duval nor Grigg had mentioned Blacknose by name, and the conversation was incriminating only by inference. And inference counted for nothing in the Kentucky courts.

"Duval, I'm going to get you." And Norton suppressed the rage within him, his voice as cold and level as that of the lawyer. "You're the man behind this Blacknose gang, and Grigg there is Blacknose. I know that much, and I'm going to prove it some day."

"You will have far to travel before that day, sir," returned Duval with a thinly veiled sneer.

"Perhaps." And Norton smiled a little as their eyes clinched. "Not as far, however, as the road your friend Tobin has already traveled."

The shot told. Duval's eyes narrowed suddenly; then a hoarse cry broke from Grigg, who pointed at Norton's waist.

"Look thar! The cuss has got Tobin's horn—"

"What is that to us?" Duval whirled on him, with so terrible a face that Grigg fell back. "What is Tobin to us, you fool? Do you know him?"

"No," stammered Grigg, giving Norton a furious look. "No, I don't know him."

The Louisianian smiled in contempt. Duval had outguessed him shrewdly, and he would now get no evidence out of either man.

"Captain Norton,"—Duval turned to him with a smooth smile,—"I trust you perceive your mistake."

"Yes," returned Norton quietly, giving the man a hard look. "You're smarter than I thought, Duval. But you'll swing yet—mark that!"

The lawyer made no reply, beyond a cold sneer. A glance showed Norton that the settler's rifle had vanished, and knowing that Duval would not dare shoot him down with the approaching boat so near, he lowered his own rifle and stood leaning on it. Grigg, however, stepped forward with an oath.

"I got a word to say here," he cried savagely, glaring past Norton at the girl. "What you doin' here, Kitty? You and him was settin' under the bank makin' love, eh? What you doin' here?"

Norton turned with a helpless gesture. The girl did not heed him, but looked at Grigg, pale but calm.

"Be careful what you say,"—and her voice trembled a little. "I came here with a message for Mr. Norton. Further than that, it is no business of yours."

"Hey! No business o' mine, aint it?" shot out Grigg, his gaunt head flung forward until with his keen-hooked nose he looked uncommonly like the bird of prey that he was. "Looky here, gal, don't you talk to your ol' dad like that! Now you're here, you'll come along o' me into the woods fer a spell—"

The girl drew herself up angrily. "You're no father of mine, Abel Grigg," she cried out, and Norton could not but admire the proud spirit of her. "I know that now, and you've no authority over me!"

**G**RIGG stood as though paralyzed. Duval stared at the girl for a moment, then turned and whispered a few low words to his companion. Norton would have given much to know what they were, but their effect was evident.

With a complete change of manner, Grigg forced the anger from his face and spoke in a low, wheedling voice which yet had a ring of sincerity in it.

"Looky here, Kitty! You aint meanin' that—"

"I mean what I say," she flashed back at him. "I know you're not my father, and so does Captain Norton. That's enough."

Grigg flung Norton one malignant glance.

"Well, gal," he said slowly, "that's true. I aint your dad."

"Who am I, then?" demanded Kathleen swiftly.

"I dunno." The backwoodsman shook his head, and Norton could not but believe he spoke the truth. "I found ye nigh on twenty year back, Kitty, in a Injun camp. Wyandots, they was,

an' I bought ye fer a new horn o' powder an' a gun. That thar's God's truth, gal. They wouldn't say nothin' 'bout ye. Now I've told, gal, you wont go back on the ol' man? Come 'long into the woods a spell—"

"I think not," broke in Norton drily. "Grigg, we know all about how you want to sell Kitty to this skunk of a Duval. She'll have nothing more to do with you. That's flat."

"You've been an' set her up to this, hey?" snarled Grigg suddenly, turning on the Louisianian. "All right! I'll make ye pay afore I'm done with ye!"

Duval gave the angry man a look, and again Grigg flung off his rage swiftly.

"Kitty, wont ye go with me?" he said slowly, picking up his rifle.

"No."

Duval stood aside, watching, a shadowy sneer on his powerful features. A glance at the river showed Norton the skiff some three hundred yards away and slowly approaching the landing. Grigg, leaning on his rifle and clawing his grizzled beard, looked at the girl with a sudden sadness in his deep eyes.

"Kitty," he said very slowly, the harsh timbre of his voice accentuating his words and lending them sincerity, "I've brought ye up as best I could. When the ol' woman died ten year back, it was you helped to bury her. 'Member that? Ye allus called me Dad, didn't ye? I've done right by ye, gal, accordin' to my lights. Aint I give ye the best I could? Aint I paid ol' Elisha Ayres to give ye learnin'? You aint lacked fer nothin', Kitty, even if I am poor."

Norton, listening, forbore to interfere. It occurred to him that Grigg was making a desperate fight for a valuable piece of property, yet there was truth in what the man said. And Kathleen knew it. Struggle sat in her face.

"Kitty, gal," went on Grigg with renewed earnestness, "I aint askin' much of ye. I've allus give ye the best I had, aint I? Now, looky here. Fur's anyone knows, you're my daughter an' I could force ye any ways I wanted to. But I don't. I love ye, gal, an' all I want is fer you to stick by me

a bit longer. I'm gettin' old, Kitty, an' aint as well able to take care o' myself as I used to be. If you're mixed up with that spy feller, Kitty, ye've done me a mighty bad turn, but I aint carin' fer that. Now aint you a-goin' to come along o' me, little gal? You aint a-goin' to leave the ol' man, be ye?"

"What do you want of me?" Sorely shaken, the girl looked at him. "Why shouldn't I go back home, then?"

"Because I need ye, gal," returned Grigg earnestly. "I'd 'a' brung ye afore, only I didn't know as I'd need ye. They's a camp down-river a piece, where I aim to set out quite a spell, an' I want ye to cook an' take care o' things fer us. Kitty, don't go back on me after I done brought ye up all them years! Even if ye don't love me, don't ye reckon ye owe me somethin'? I've took good care on ye, gal—"

Terribly pale, the girl turned to Norton. He read the weariness of her eyes, and started to speak, but she stopped him:

"No—he's right, Mr. Norton. I owe him some duty, though it will never go so far as marrying that man." And she flashed Duval one contemptuous glance. "Good-by, Mr. Norton—and God bless you!"

Norton bowed over her hand, bringing it to his lips. The touch thrilled him, and for a long moment he looked down into her gray eyes, not trusting himself to speak.

"Good-by, for the present," he said huskily, his finely-chiseled face very tender. "And remember—I shall see you again."

With no more words she turned to Grigg, who helped her to the saddle of Duval's horse, and they started away. Norton gazed after them, feeling the girl's high character grip at his heartstrings; then he turned at a hail from the river landing.

"Hey, you fellers! Who's fer Louisville?"

"All right!" replied the Louisianian. He looked at Duval, and his eyes flamed out like a sword. "Duval," he said softly, "you're a yellow dog! You've tried murder and failed; now play your last card and do it soon, or you're gone!"

Immobile, his face set as though carven in stone, Duval gazed at him. Then his strong white teeth flashed out in a slow smile:

"If you wish to make your last will and testament, Captain Norton, anyone in Louisville can direct you to my office. Sir, your servant!"

And with a bow he passed down to the waiting boat. Norton followed, smiling a little, his heart sore within him for Kitty Grigg.

"But, by gad, it's in the open now!" he thought. "Duval is smart, but his craft has sprung a leak—and the tide will swamp him whether I live or die!"

## CHAPTER X

**T**HE trip to Louisville was uneventful, yet significant. As Norton went aboard the boat, the captain touched his arm and whispered.

"Captain Norton?"

"Yes?"

"The lady—"

"Does not return with us, sir."

The captain stepped back and signed to his men. Of these there were ten—all big, bearded men who kept silent for the whole trip, though Duval tried to converse with them more than once. Nor did any address Norton after he was aboard. Save for the captain's orders, the trip was made in silence.

When they were rowing past the bluff behind which Red Hugh dwelt, Norton searched the woods in vain for any sign of his friend, and caught Duval's eye roving over the bluff as well. Buck Creek and Salt River were passed without stoppage, and when Norton offered to pay his passage, he was informed that it had been paid; Duval, a little later, was taxed a dollar, which he paid promptly. At length Sullivan's ferry swept by, and Shippingsport hove in sight ahead.

Norton knew nothing of what had been going on in his absence, but there were a large number of craft, both keel and flat boats, in the Louisville harbor, while loading of freight was proceeding busily. The skiff rowed in through the vessels to a wharf, and Norton saw

a small figure in scarlet breeches and fustian greatcoat waiting for their landing. He leaped out with a cry of joy, and greeted Elisha Ayres with a strong grip of the hand. The little schoolmaster straightened his greasy wig, and turned to meet Duval with a low bow.

"Your servant, Mr. Duval!" he said, in his dry, precise manner.

The lawyer bowed slightly, fastened his cold gaze on the pinched, twinkling-eyed face of Ayres, and passed on without speaking. With a chuckle, Ayres passed his arm under Norton's and turned.

"Come, Mr. Norton. Do not talk, if you please."

In no little wonder, Norton accommodated his step to that of the other, and they walked through the little town toward Louisville. Ayres placed no ban of silence upon his own tongue, however; he chattered volubly, pointed out the various objects of interest, and paused at the top of the hill to turn Norton toward the harbor.

"Just to our right, Mr. Norton, is the Berthoud rope-walk—one of the finest, I may say, in the United States. There is Mr. Berthoud's residence just beyond us. Now from here we get a truly remarkable view of the shipping; you will observe that a half-dozen keels are being laden for New Orleans, under command of Commodore Peters. The outside craft is the gunboat of Captain Nevitt, which carries a small cannon. To the left you will see Captain Brookfield's horse-boat—a most ingenious contrivance, sir."

At length Norton caught the drift of all this volubility, and gazed at the "horse-boat" with no little interest. It was a large craft of forty tons, with an ungainly gallery on the upper deck. On this, as Ayres pointed out, six or seven horses worked a treadmill which in turn worked the large side-paddles, over each gunwale. The boat was a decided novelty, and as Brookfield had broken a number of paddles on his trip up-river, she would be delayed from joining the fleet under Peters and Nevitt, which was leaving in two days.

When Norton had finished his inspection, Ayres turned him toward the city

again and they proceeded on their way. Duval had disappeared. Mindful of the rapidity with which things had happened to him on his previous visit, Norton kept a watchful eye on the passers-by; he had an uneasy sense of being watched, and perceived that an unduly large proportion of the men in sight were roughly dressed but excellently armed. It seemed to him that Duval must have filled the town with his own men, and things began to loom up darkly before him.

"These, sir, are the hanging gardens of Mr. Buttet,"—and Ayres paused as they reached the lower end of town, speaking in his usual oratorical style and with a sweep of his hand toward the handsome brick house to their left. "From here we gain an excellent view of the river—one of the finest views in the United States, I may say, sir. Yonder you perceive Jeffersonville in Indiana; a little to the left, the magnificent falls of the Ohio. Beyond this, Clarksville and the Silver Creek hills, with the forests and Rock Island completing the panorama. And just ahead of us, sir, an interesting episode is about to be enacted, if I mistake not."

**N**ORTON, who was paying little heed to the view but much to what passed around him, loosened his knife in its sheath; the "interesting episode," he concluded swiftly, would be enacted by something better than fists. Lounging on the board walk a dozen yards ahead, and eyeing him with insolent and provocative glances, were two huge rivermen. Both were idly whittling at small sticks, and Norton had no doubt of their intent.

Fastening his eyes on the pair and already angered by their insolent looks, he flung off Ayres' restraining hand and stepped forward. Then, however, something very odd took place.

Swinging around the corner at which the two rivermen stood, came three tow-clad farmers with a snatch of drunken song. One of them lurched heavily against the nearer riverman, who shoved him away with a snarling curse.

"Who—who you shovin'?" demanded the farmer thickly.

"Git out, ye drunken fool," snapped the big riverman angrily, his eye still on Norton. "Move on—we aint got time to spend on ye."

"Whoop-ee!"—and the farmer gave vent to a wild howl of rage. "Hurray fer Jefferson! Damn the Democrats! Shove me, will ye? I'll learn ye! I'm a cross betwixt a streak o' chain-lightnin' and a bearcat! I was sired by a thunderbolt an' riz by an alligator an' I eats rattlers fer breakfast—whoop-ee!"

With which peroration he gave the riverman no chance for the usual exchange of personal history, but with an astonishingly accurate blow for a drunken man landed his right on the riverman's jaw. His two companions instantly fell upon the second riverman and with a whirlwind of blows and dust and flashing knives and yells all five drove out into the street and left the sidewalk clear.

"Come, sir,"—and Norton felt Ayres pluck his arm. "They will lodge the two men in jail, but we must not be detained as witnesses."

In a flash the real meaning of the scene broke upon the Louisianian, and with a grunt he strode off beside Ayres. Something most amazing must have happened in the city of Louisville, he thought. A week previously, mention of Blacknose had been enough to get a man his death; now, two members of the mysterious gang were openly assaulted in the streets! His last view of the combat, through the gathering crowd, showed one of the farmers perched on the body of a riverman and industriously gouging for the eyes of his enemy in true border fashion.

Five minutes later Norton found himself led toward a good-sized brick house which stood back from the street amid spacious gardens. This, announced Ayres, belonged to Mr. Tarascon, a prominent merchant, who expected Norton as his guest. Comprehending dimly that the schoolmaster must have moved with tremendous activity in his absence, the Louisianian strode up the steps to be greeted quietly by a small, elderly Frenchman—no other than the owner of the place. He was unmarried, it appeared, and when Norton ad-

dressed him in his own tongue, he cried effusively that the house no longer belonged to him but to his honored guest. Moreover, the words were quite sincere.

The afternoon being practically over, Tarascon and Ayres accompanied Norton to his room—a spacious bed-room on the ground floor, and there left him with a darkey to attend his personal wants, and a great variety of clothes to choose from. With a sigh of relief, Norton bathed and discarded his buckskin for a plum-colored suit; he was a gentleman once more in place of a woods rover, and when he inspected the cravat which the grinning darkey had adjusted, he could scarce believe that at daybreak he had been sitting in a canoe with an acknowledged Indian-slayer, rifle in hand.

The day was far from done, however. When he was dressed, the negro led him through a dark corridor to two rooms blazing with candles: one a dining-room of gigantic size, the other an equally large music-room. Still blinking at the lights, Norton found his hand gripped by Audubon and then perceived that he had come into a gathering of men.

"Gentlemen, Captain John Norton!" announced Mr. Tarascon, and turned, smiling. "Perhaps you had best introduce our friends piecemeal, Mr. Audubon!"

A dozen men were present—Colonel Taylor, Rosier, Ayres, and others of the Louisville merchants to whom Audubon introduced the Louisianian. Colonel Boone had returned home to Missouri, while Norton found that his friend Zach Taylor had been ordered to Vincennes to join General Harrison; barely had he been made acquainted with all there, however, when Colonel Taylor rose and with a gesture obtained silence.

"Mr. Norton,"—and it was easy to see that the old border fighter felt bitterly the shame of his words—"when you were here last, this town was in a peculiar state, sir. As you are only too well aware, the very name of Blacknose spread terror; men were murdered and property destroyed almost with impunity; the secrecy of this gang

of river-pirates and its thorough organization seemed to hold us all spell-bound. I acknowledge it with shame, sir. Then, with your coming, all this was changed."

As Colonel Dick paused, Norton felt himself the center of attention. He was himself too interested in what was coming to heed this, however, and merely nodded.

"You had barely arrived, Mr. Norton, when an attempt was made upon your life; a few hours later you were accused of a dastardly murder and only the quick wit of Mr. Ayres threw the pursuers from your track. We had given you up for lost, sir, when Mr. Audubon returned to town and at once communicated with Mr. Ayres. The result, you see here."

"I fancy I have seen the results before this," smiled Norton drily, and told of the encounter he had witnessed in town. A quick nod passed around.

"We can trust every man here," declared Audubon quietly but impressively. "The grounds of this house are guarded by armed men, Norton—"

"But how do you know *they* can all be trusted?" demanded the Louisianian keenly.

"Because, sir," spoke up Ayres, "Mr. Audubon and I enlisted them personally. We went up-river and carefully selected only those who had lost brothers or sons or fathers with the boats which have vanished down the river. Every man of us here has sustained heavy losses in property from the same cause. In short, sir, we have raised a company of Regulators with which to exterminate this pestilent Blacknose gang."

NORTON whistled to himself, eying the energetic little schoolmaster in some admiration as the whole thing broke over his mind. So, then, they were fighting secrecy with secrecy, organization with organization!

Now he understood a good deal which had mystified him—the words of Kitty Grigg, the odd silence of his boatmen, the manner in which the two bellicose rivermen had been disposed of. Ayres had been swift and clever, also; by enlisting only the relatives of the

men who had disappeared with their boats, during the past two years, all possibility of treachery was removed and the "Regulators" were certain to be animated by a live hatred of Duval—but did they know of Duval yet? Norton flung a quick glance around and found all waiting for him to speak.

"How many here know who Black-nose is, Audubon?"

The words were like a shock; Norton needed no other answer to his question than the startled, questioning look which ran over the faces in a flash.

"Only Ayres," returned the bird-lover gravely. "It is a thing we cannot prove definitely, and it would be much better to destroy the whole gang at one blow. We will lay our suspicions before these friends of ours to-night, and take council."

While Audubon was speaking, a white-haired negro flung back the curtains which shut off the dining-room, and now announced dinner. Mr. Tarascon rose.

"Then—you have ascertained something definite, Mr. Norton?"

"Yes. I may say that we have ascertained everything."

In a startled silence all grouped themselves about the long table, Norton sitting between Tarascon and Ayres. Then, while the deaf, silent negro slaves waited upon them and the long dinner was discussed, Norton and Audubon related what they had overheard on the bluff near the blazed cottonwood, the Louisianian adding the conversation between Grigg and Duval that same morning.

Being wealthy and very hospitable in a land then noted for its inhospitality, Mr. Tarascon had provided his best wines for the occasion, both of French and Spanish. In consequence, certain honest merchants who were more accustomed to home-distilled corn liquor drank not wisely but too well of the rarer vintage; and no sooner had the two friends finished their tale than the table leaped into wild uproar.

For this, Norton was by no means sorry. The issue came squarely forward: Was it possible that Charles Duval could be in alliance with such a gang of thieves and pirates? To many

of those present it was hard of credence; and one estimable old merchant, who wore a high black stock, a red peruke, and a coat cut in the fashion of the nineties, arose and pounded the table in vinous indignation.

"Gentlemen, I refuse to believe this monstrous concoction!" he roared fervidly. "I have known Charles Duval for ten years, and I knew his father before him. Our friend and esteemed neighbor Henry Clay, now a member of Congress, knows him—"

"Yes, Clay knows him!" broke in a loud laugh from some one. "Clay knocked him down in front of the courthouse at Lexington last summer—"

"I refuse to believe it!" continued he of the black stock. "This charge is not proven, my friends. I will go and bring Charles Duval himself to deny it to your face—"

And shaking his fist, the angry old merchant shoved back his chair and started for the door. Norton would have sprung up to check him, but was restrained by Audubon's hand; the others glanced at one another in wondering fear, bewildered. Were the merchant to carry out his purpose, ruin was certain to fall upon them; yet Tarascon only sat at the head of the table and smiled as he sipped his wine. And, as the merchant flung open the door, it was seen to be guarded by a tall tow-clad man and barred by a rifle.

"Sir—Mr. Tarascon—what means this!" sputtered the merchant, turning.

"It means, sir, that my cellars are wide and my caution is wider," returned the host with only a veiled threat. He smiled very politely, but his eyes were keen as he glanced at the men who lined the table.

"Gentlemen," he went on quietly, "you can readily understand that whether Mr. Norton and Mr. Audubon are correct or not in their suspicions, no word of what we are about must come to Mr. Duval. Each man of you here to-night is a gentleman; before you leave this house, you pass me your words to that effect. Else, you do not leave. It is very simple. We are going

to stamp out this damnable river piracy, and I promise you that every justice shall be done Mr. Duval. Sir, pray return to your seat. Boy, fetch that Oporto I had from New Orleans last fall."

Norton, watching, perceived that he had fallen among men of weight. Tarascon was obeyed by the angry merchant, amid a grave silence, and Colonel Taylor was the first to pledge his word to secrecy. One by one the others followed suit, after which Elisha Ayres rose, pledged Norton's health in his grandiloquent manner, and fell to discussing the plan which he had already elaborated with Audubon.

This plan of action needed cooperation by the merchants there gathered, and it was based upon Norton's own idea. Brookfield's horse-boat was to be chartered and laden with a particularly valuable cargo, in which lading each of the merchants should risk an equal share. Brookfield himself was a man above suspicion, already enrolled in Ayres' "Regulators," and willing to risk his craft in the venture.

The boat would be another three weeks in lading, or perhaps less. Thus ample time would be given Blacknose in which to learn of its rich cargo and prepare an ambuscade. At Henderson the boat would secretly pick up twenty of the "Regulators," who would stow themselves below-decks in readiness for an attack.

Norton was to ship openly as a passenger, spreading abroad the report that his visit to Louisville had been barren of results, and in the meantime he was to remain as the guest of Tarascon in Louisville. Ayres drily assured him that he would be well guarded. With her rich cargo, the boat would be almost certain to be attacked; all that was necessary was for a prisoner or two to be made, in which case they would turn State's evidence and the rest of the gang could be hunted down readily enough.

"Once we ascertain definitely who Blacknose is," said Audubon, "we cut off the whole affair. Personally, I have no doubt of the matter; but to those of you who cannot believe Duval guilty, I would say—wait. This whole matter

must be conducted with the greatest secrecy; let no hint of it get to your slaves, for the gang no doubt has many of our slaves in its pay."

"It's a good plan," stated Norton thoughtfully, frowning. "Almost too good, my friends. We must not overplay our hand—do not say too much about the rich cargo, for example. Duval, or Blacknose, is no fool! The thing seems all cut and dried, and that is why I fear—well, wait and see! When the time comes, we can show no mercy; that gang is pitiless, more savage than the redskins, and from the moment Brookfield's boat casts off her moorings at Shippingsport it becomes a war to the knife. Well, gentlemen,"—and with a smile he rose, glass in hand,—"for the rest of this evening let us cast care aside, and so allow me to propose a toast to the gentleman whose wig sets awry over a very excellent set of brains—Mr. Elisha Ayres, gentlemen!"

And the toast was drunk standing, while the little schoolmaster wriggled in huge delight and tried to straighten his greasy wig. None the less, Norton remained thoughtful that evening—for he could not forget the girl with golden hair whose hand had come to his lips that day, and whose gage he wore inside his shirt.

## CHAPTER XI

AS NORTON had thought, Mr. Elisha Ayres had formulated a plan which was almost too good. During the week following the meeting at Tarascon's house, he found that what appeared excellent by candle-light looked somewhat full of shreds and patches by the cold light of day.

The Regulators, to be sure, were unobtrusive but efficient, numbering twenty, and neither the Tarascon house nor Norton himself were ever unguarded. No more attempts were made upon Norton; yet, the day after that dinner-party, a brawl took place in the Steuben Arms in which one of the Regulators and a settler from down near the Wabash managed to kill each other. The settler seemed unknown in the town, which was a significant fact.

"Public sentiment is rising, sir," observed Audubon on hearing of it from Ayres, as they walked with Norton in the Tarascon gardens next day. "I would imagine that Duval is caught napping. Most of his men are down-river with Grigg, beyond a doubt, and while he must be perfectly aware of something going on, he is helpless. Further, he is engaged in court at Lexington."

During that idle week Norton might have gone to Cincinnati had not Brookfield been expecting to get away soon. The lading of his boat and the repair of her paddles had gone forward faster than had been looked for, and now the riverman hoped in all confidence to be off before the following week was up. His crew consisted of six men only, and he could trust but two of them.

"Set the departure for next Saturday, then," commanded Norton, as he and Ayres and Audubon consulted with Brookfield on the Monday. "Give our friend Duval time to make his preparations, for we must make sure of all. On Friday send the Regulators down the river on horseback so that they can pass Henderson before daybreak and pick us up near Diamond Island."

On the table was a chart of the Ohio, and Audubon broke in, placing his finger on the Wabash settlement.

"You mind the settler who was slain last week? He came from this settlement, and must have been one of Duval's men. There is a clue for us; besides, Grigg and Duval agreed to waylay the boat near the Wabash."

The others nodded soberly.

"Mr. Norton's idea is very good," said Ayres. "Captain Brookfield, set your departure for the Saturday morning. It is only a hundred miles to Henderson by trail, and we will send out the Regulators Friday; they will pick you up here at Diamond Island, twelve miles below Henderson, on the Kentucky shore beyond the plantation of Mr. Alvis."

To this Brookfield agreed. He would reach the island sometime on Sunday, and the Regulators would thus have plenty of time to make the journey by land, avoiding Henderson itself. So, with all plans fully settled, there was naught to do save to wait and watch.

Captain Brookfield announced his departure and rushed his lading, and with that the situation began to tighten up. Duval, having been engaged in court at Lexington for two days, returned to town on Wednesday; and Norton saw that with his return the lawyer had taken swift warning of some sort.

The plot was known to a dozen citizens at most, and the little border town remained as quiet and sleepy as ever; but beneath the surface there was a furious boiling of the pot. Since the double killing at the Steuben Arms, the Regulators had been forbidden the tavern. Now, however, Duval openly made the place his headquarters. He had a plantation a few miles up-river, it seemed, but stopped at the tavern when in town. And on the Wednesday, Norton found the trap ready laid for his bait.

**H**E HAD been riding below the falls with Audubon, and on their return they rode past the Steuben Arms. As they jogged along, Norton saw a negro step into the tavern courtyard and loose a bird from a small wicker cage. At the action, he caught his friend's arms swiftly.

"That bird—watch it! What is it?"

Audubon whistled, and watched the bird as it circled up to pick its course, and finally shot off to the westward. He took out his pocket-compass, inspected it, then quietly beckoned Norton to ride on.

"Southwest by west and a half west," he returned, a flush of excitement on his high cheeks. "A carrier pigeon for the Wabash, Norton! Now ends all mystery, and the stage-players can no more fool the audience!"

"By gad!" breathed Norton softly, his brown eyes flaming out at Audubon. "He uses carrier pigeons, eh? Then Duval must be concocting his plan against the horse-boat with Grigg and the gang—and if we could but bring down one of those pigeons we could nip him like a flea!"

"Good," nodded the other. "Let us come out to-morrow morning, with that little double-barreled gun of mine. The birds will not fly too high, I think."

So it came about that Norton went back to his woods garments with the next morning. Tarascon's slaves had greased his old buckskins, so that the stiffness was gone from them; and Norton donned them and his fine moccasins with a feeling of joy. At breakfast he confided to Tarascon what his mission was.

"If we bring down a bird and find a message," he concluded, "we had best jail Duval at once."

The other nodded quietly, his dark eyes sparkling.

"One of my slaves informed me this morning," he returned, "that Duval was preparing for a journey—though I had said nothing to any of my slaves. But trust the darkies to know what's afoot!"

"It's a poor sword that has not two edges," said Norton, frowning.

"Certainly—that is just what we risk, Mr. Norton." And Tarascon departed gloomily to his business.

Norton rode out, met Audubon and Ayres, and the three wended west of town with rifles ready. All that day their watching proved vain, however, for no pigeon passed overhead save for a flock of wild birds. This was on the Thursday, and the horse-boat was to sail on the Saturday.

With the next morning all three were out again, and still came no result. The Regulators left Louisville that morning—twenty of them, all mounted and armed, with instructions to meet the boat at Diamond Island, twelve miles below Henderson. All day the three friends watched from the river-side, but no pigeon appeared, and with the evening Norton gave up all hope of thus cornering Duval.

**A**YRES and Audubon returned to the Tarascon house for dinner. During the meal, their host was summoned outside and returned, leading a badly-frightened slave.

"News, my friends!" cried Tarascon eagerly. "This boy is one of the hostlers at the Steuben Arms, and I have paid him to keep an eye on Duval—"

"It's a poor sword that hasn't two edges," broke in Norton glumly.

"Confound it, cease your croaking!" exclaimed Audubon gaily. "Out with the news, Tarascon! Don't heed him."

Tarascon smiled and settled into his seat, while the negro waited, rolling his eyes in fright until the merchant tossed him a dollar.

"Now, boy, you say Mr. Duval is leaving to-morrow?"

"Yas, suh. He done got three hosses waitin' fo' him."

"Making ready for a quick trip, eh?" said Ayres. The merchant nodded.

"Have you overheard anything about his plans, boy?"

"Yas, suh. Ah done heard him talkin' wif a man. He reckoned they was gwine to beat Cap'n Brookfield's boat to Henderson, suh."

"Two of them, eh? Anything more?"

"No, suh."

Upon this, Tarascon dismissed the slave, and the four friends discussed the news. They finally reached the conclusion that Duval intended to meet the pirates and take part in the attack on the horse-boat, after which he would doubtless flee the country, as he must know that there was something afoot.

"So much the better," cried Audubon gaily. "Success to the Regulators!"

"All very well," retorted Norton. "But I don't like this slave business. What we can do, Duval can do."

**H**IS forebodings were drowned in Oporto, however. Next morning the four again gathered at breakfast, after which all mounted and rode through town toward Shippingsport to see Norton off. It was early, and few people were astir, for Brookfield was making a swift trip to Henderson and wanted to make the most of the day. As they passed the Steuben Arms, Norton sent a casual glance at the place; then he reined in suddenly.

His quick eye had caught sight of a negro just emerging on the courtyard, a wicker cage in his hand. With a sudden thrill of excitement, he spurred from the road and clattered down on the startled slave. The cage held a pigeon.

"Give me that bird, boy," he said, leaning over.

"Dishyer bird b'longs to Mr. Duval, suh,"—and the darkey drew back. The other three had followed Norton, however, and hemmed in the slave so that his escape to the doorway behind was cut off.

"Watch him, Audubon!" cried Norton.

Without further parley he leaned down and grasped the cage from the shrinking negro. Opening it eagerly, he found a tiny slip of paper under the bird's wing, and carefully loosened it.

A glance around showed him three saddled horses to one side, and he knew they had been just in time. Then, unfolding the paper, he read the message written thereon. It was unsigned.

A. G.—

Meet me as planned. B's boat leaves to-day. Have arranged all satisfactorily. Norton goes with boat.

Silently he passed the note to Ayres, and the others crowded together over it, while the negro watched in affright. Ayres looked up.

"It is Duval's hand," he said, his voice quivering with excitement. "What's to be done?"

"Seize him," said Norton curtly. "Mr. Tarascon, will you go on to the port and tell Brookfield that I will meet him at Diamond Island instead of going with him from here? Ayres, there is no court in session now?"

"No," returned the schoolmaster. "What would you do?"

"Take care of Duval, then ride to Henderson and catch the boat," snapped Norton, as the plan of action took rapid shape in his brain. "Gentlemen, we must bring out our charges in public and lay Duval by the heels, thus cutting off the head of the gang. Ayres, do you hasten and collect our friends and others at the courthouse, in the courtroom. Audubon and I will fetch Duval. Off with you, now!"

There was a moment of startled silence as all four realized that now indeed the crisis had come. Then Tarascon wheeled his horse, Ayres followed suit, and the two swept out of the

courtyard at a gallop. Norton and Audubon dismounted.

"Take us to the chambers of Mr. Duval, boy."

The negro obeyed, trembling with fear, and the two men followed him through the tavern to Duval's room, there dismissing him. In response to their knock, the lawyer himself, plainly astonished, opened the door. He was dressed for a journey, with pistols at his belt, and Norton surveyed him with a grim smile.

"Mr. Duval, some time ago you professed me your services did I desire to draw up my will. That time has come, and as I can find no other lawyer and am in some haste, I beg of you to serve me."

Duval was puzzled. He looked into Norton's grim eyes, then at Audubon, and one hand rested on the pistol at his side.

"Do you jest, sir?" he asked coldly.

"I do not jest with you," returned Norton. Then the hatred within him burst all bounds, and he suddenly flung up his rifle. "Curse you, Duval, we've got you! Out of there!"

His flint was up, and Duval knew better than to resist. He came out into the passage, coldly insolent.

"This time you have gone too far, Mr. Norton. I follow you, but you shall—"

"You do not follow—you go before," snarled Norton. "Guide him, Audubon. I'll keep him covered."

In Norton's heart was wild triumph. No sooner had they left the tavern than a crowd began to assemble; while Audubon went on with Duval, the Louisianian took their horses in hand and followed, his rifle covering the lawyer ahead.

Ayres had already stirred the town into wild excitement, and now Norton perceived a fresh danger as the crowd lagged on their heels. Were it made public that Duval was none other than Blacknose, the man would be mobbed instantly, and this must be prevented at all costs. He was relieved to see Tarascon, returning from the port, break through the wondering crowd and clatter to his side.

"Ride on," he said swiftly to the mer-

chant. "Station guards at the courthouse doors. This affair must not be taken out of our hands. Allow only prominent citizens in the courtroom—ah, there is Colonel Taylor!"

Taylor, it appeared, had ridden into town to see Norton off, and joined them in some wonder at the scene as Tarascon departed. It was well he did, for the crowd, seeing that Norton held Duval a prisoner, was uttering threats and gathering courage to rescue the supposed victim of an assault.

The presence of Taylor held them quiet, and so the procession came to the courthouse. Duval must have known that his time had come, but he walked very proudly, without a word. Men were streaming into the courthouse, and at the door stood Tarascon, Ayres, and two men with rifles who pressed back the crowd. Two more appeared to take charge of Duval, though in some bewilderment.

Entering the courtroom itself, Norton strode to the judge's bench and faced the assemblage, his friends beside him. Duval was held at the opposite side of the room. To his surprise, Norton found the crowd very quiet, very grave, almost to fear. One and all were citizens of weight and prominence.

QUIETLY, the Louisianian addressed them and charged Duval with being the mysterious Blacknose, relating all his former evidence and finally reading out the note. After one startled gasp, the men facing him sat quietly and listened while Audubon and Ayres sustained the charges.

Through it all Duval stood immobile, until at length Norton looked at him and asked if he had anything to say. Then the lawyer drew himself up arrogantly.

"Gentlemen,"—and the deep timbre of his voice rang out proudly as all faces turned to him,—“do you not perceive how ridiculous is this charge? Need I say more?”

To his amazement, Norton found that the words met with silence—a silence partly of wonder, partly of doubt. Duval was very calm, very powerful, holding the assemblage by

the sheer force of his personality and will. Then a man leaped to his feet.

"Confound it, sir," he cried at Duval, "explain that note! Explain why—"

"I—explain?" broke in Duval ringing. "Guilty men explain; I do not! Have you not seen that this Mr. Norton hates and fears me? Did not his bitterness ring through every word he spoke? My friends, I have lived among you all my life; some of you are my clients and know me well. If you can think that I would thus deal with you, then I wash my hands of you, and my blood be on your heads!"

Dismayed though he was, Norton could not but admire the keen spirit of the man. Duval knew he was lost, yet was making a desperate fight—for what? A word of explanation and the crowd would have been at his throat; instead, he defied them and they doubted everything.

A wild storm of voices arose, and as Tarascon began to quiet it for a hearing, Norton saw Duval take a slow backward step. The lawyer's hands were on his pistols, and in a flash Norton caught the man's intent.

"Stop him!" he shouted, but the words were lost.

Quick as a cat, Duval had seized the right moment. Whirling on the two men who guarded him, he sent one staggering with his fist; the other he shot through the body. As the roar of the pistol crashed out and the doorway was hidden by smoke, Norton leaped forward.

Fighting his way through the maddened crowd of cursing, shouting men, he won to the door and sprang through the corridor to the outer doorway, Audubon at his heels. Too late! He caught another pistol-shot and saw Duval galloping away down the street like mad.

Norton flung up his rifle and fired from the steps, over the heads of the shouting crowd who were scattering in alarm. Duval's steed gave a leap, but the lawyer pressed him onward; the next instant a surge of men swept up and the mob met those crowding out from the courthouse.

"Blacknose! Duval is Blacknose!"

A wild, savage yell shrilled up at the

words. At the same instant Norton felt Audubon's hand on his arm.

"Out the back way!" said the bird-lover excitedly. "We will get horses and after him. Ayres has gone for the steeds. Quickly!"

And cursing all things in his bitterness, Norton turned and fought clear of the crowd.

## CHAPTER XII

**W**ITHIN a short half-hour of Duval's dramatic—and tragic—escape from the courthouse, Norton and Audubon were at the head of a dozen well-mounted men, led horses with them, and they left Louisville at a gallop along the post road.

Duval, it was learned, had gained the Steuben Arms and had then galloped off with his three horses, one other man with him—a riverman who was evidently of the gang.

Behind, the town was in a ferment, but Norton galloped along in grim silence. In his party were Ayres, Tarascon, and Colonel Dick Taylor; all had steeds of the best, and all were driven by the same flame of rage which burned in Norton's heart.

Yet not the same. Norton knew they must catch Duval before Henderson was reached, in order that the gang might have no warning; but he was thinking more of Kitty Grigg than of the gang itself. Did Duval get away, he would doubtless carry out the attack on the horse-boat, and the gang would then scatter with their loot. At least, such would be the intention, for so far as Norton knew, Duval was ignorant of the plot to trap the gang; nothing had been said of it at the courthouse.

The fourteen men galloped along the post road toward Sullivan's ferry, and there was no sparing of horseflesh that morning. Norton set a terrific pace, and with a thunder of hoofs they swept into the little settlement at the ferry and found Sullivan himself.

"Two men and three horses—which way?"

"Henderson road, twenty minutes since," shouted Sullivan. "What's the matter?"

"Blacknose! Duval is Blacknose!"

With the yell, Norton dug in his moccasined heels and once more they galloped away, leaving the ferryman staring after them in wild surmise. The lawyer had a good start, and his horses were of the best.

With the thought of Kitty Grigg pounding at his heart in time with the thunder of hoofs behind, Norton rode on like a madman. Did Duval escape, the girl would be in his power.

"He shall not escape," vowed Norton inwardly. "Faster!"

And again he urged his mount to fresh efforts, his led horse pounding at his side. Behind, the fourteen were strung out along the uneven, blazed trail in frantic pursuit.

They were following a "trace" which struck southwest to avoid the windings of the river, for it was thus that their quarry had gone. The road was not worthy the name, yet was the shortest route to Henderson.

"Hold up, man—hold up!" came the voice of Audubon. "You'll kill our steeds at this rate!"

"When they die, your led horses remain," flung back Norton, and dug in his heels once more. His beast was white with foam already, but held to its steady gallop; all the horses were finely bred, out of the best blue-grass country around Louisville, and could be depended on till the last.

Without slacking the mad gait, Norton drew in his second horse; flinging his leg over the saddle, he changed seats successfully. It was a splendid bit of horsemanship, but his followers could not emulate it.

"Hold up, Norton!" roared Taylor. "Wait for us to change—"

"I'm after Duval," he retorted, and looked around. "Let the rest wait!"

Half the fourteen were already drawing rein, preparing to change their mounts; Audubon alone swung to his spare horse at full gallop, and pounded on with a ringing laugh.

Five minutes later Norton saw a man standing in the road ahead, and drew in slightly. The man was a settler, watching them in staring wonder.

"Anyone passed?" flung out Norton, pulling up.

"Two men—three horses, fifteen minutes since," came the answer. "What's gwine on—"

"After them!" shouted Norton, and loosened his reins.

Mile after mile wound past. They were in the full wilderness now, the "trace" being nothing but a rudely blazed trail winding amid girdled trees and short stumps. Settlers were scarce and the road was little traveled, but as Norton whipped into a branch and leaned down, he could see hoof-marks in the soil beneath him, and the sight lent him fresh eagerness.

A yell and a crash from behind made him twist about in the saddle. Two of his men had smashed together and gone down in a mad heap; another plunged full into them; the rest leaped clear. It required skill to follow that road at full speed, but Norton never slackened.

Ever at his flank rode Audubon, rifle on saddle, while Ayres and Taylor followed next. Tarascon had fallen behind; looking back after a little, Norton saw the merchant's horse falling, and sent back a wild laugh.

*"Sauve qui peut! After them!"*

Twenty miles on their way, and still ten men rode with Norton as he topped a crest and swung down toward a dipping bowl of bottom-land, strewn with canebrakes. Even as he glimpsed the danger, Audubon shouted.

"Warc, Norton! They've fired the canes!"

**A** LOW drift of smoke was rising from the road below where it struck through a patch of canes. Norton saw it, but sent his horse onward in grim resolve. The fire was newly started; five minutes later and they must have gone around through the swamps.

His staring-eyed horse never faltered beneath his hand, but went driving at the smoke-veil. The led beast tried to tug free and all but tore the Louisianian from his saddle, but he dragged savagely on the reins and all went well. One horrible choking moment, and they were through; on the rising ground beyond, he drew up and again changed saddles.

Ayres and Audubon followed, then Colonel Taylor, whose spare beast had broken away. Four more came through, but as a puff of wind lifted the smoke Norton could see the rest vainly trying to drive their maddened steeds at the fire. He laughed a little.

"After them! Duval can't last at this pace!"

Ten minutes later Taylor's horse foundered and the old border fighter fell behind, swearing volubly. Now there were but six men after Norton, and a little later they perceived how desperate was Duval's plight when they came upon a dying horse in the road, still saddled.

"After them!" shouted Norton again.

Duval and his companion had but three horses at the start, and had killed one of those; with luck, the chase would now be short. Norton's steeds were both white with foam, trembling as they pounded onward, but there was good distance in them yet, and his changes kept them fairly freshened.

Still the miles thundered behind them and now there were but five men at his heels, for one had gone down. Audubon shouted out, as they dipped down toward another canebrake.

"Five miles more and we get fresh horses! There's a tavern where they keep changes—"

His words were drowned in a scream from one of the men close behind. Up from the canebreak a hundred yards ahead drifted a little fleck of white; in the road lay a struggling horse.

"Run to earth!" yelled Norton, never looking back at the man who dragged in his stirrup, shot through the heart. "On them!"

He knew his mistake the next moment, however. Duval was not run to earth yet; it was his companion whose horse had gone down, and who had thus tempted fate. Norton went into the canes with a wild leap; he plunged on the riverman before the latter could reload.

The riverman, a tall, bearded scoundrel, flashed up a pistol at Norton and the bullet flew through his hair. The Louisianian rode him down; the horse stumbled at the impact, and Norton

went over the brute's head into the muck. Rising, he heard a rifle bang out and caught his steed's bridle over the relaxing body of the riverman. Ayres lowered his rifle, white-faced.

"No hurt," cried Norton. "After him!"

Remounting, he caught his other horse and pounded on, his sole thought a savage desire to get at Duval. Besides Audubon and Ayres, but two others were left; one of these was mired a mile farther on, and they swept away from him before he could change beasts.

Good though the horses were, they were staggering terribly. The Louisianian was wild with impotent rage; he knew well that Duval would secure a fresh mount at the tavern ahead, and would get the best. With a frenzy of curses he drove on his steed, let his spare horse drop behind, saw Ayres pull up with a cry of despair, and thundered on over the last mile, hoping against hope.

And all in vain. The tavern was a low building set in a clearing, barns and tobacco sheds behind, and just beyond was a clump of settlers' cabins. As they came in sight of the place, still a half-mile distant, Norton had plain sight of a figure riding from the tavern at full gallop. With a groan he turned a drawn face to Audubon.

"How far to Henderson?"

"Fifty miles—we have come half-way, and the day is dying."

With a start, Norton perceived that the afternoon was indeed well forward. While the reeling horses galloped on, he turned to the bird-lover and directed him to secure fresh beasts.

"We'll get food and eat it later," —and he nodded toward the remaining man, a Scotch farmer from above Louisville. The latter grunted, and so they swept up to the squalid tavern.

Its proprietor, an open-mouthed, staring person, met their quick demands with a slow shake of the head, watching them slip to the ground. Before he could reply to them, Norton had shoved him aside with an impatient oath and strode on into the tavern, the Scotch farmer at his heels.

In the kitchens out behind the main

building they found negro slaves at work, and amid frightened screams Norton seized what food was in sight. Flinging down a dollar in payment, Norton led the way back.

Negroes were already leading out half a dozen horses from a near-by pasture while Audubon pacified the tavern-keeper with a gold-piece. In five minutes the saddles were transferred, and the three set out at a breakneck gallop on their new mounts, eating as they rode.

**T**HE difference in horses was instantly apparent to Norton. Although he urged the beasts relentlessly, when darkness fell they had caught no further glimpse of Duval. Even his desperate frenzy was forced to give way before the gathering shadows.

"Hold up or you'll be brained," cried Audubon as a bough nearly took Norton out of the saddle. "This is rank madness, man!"

The Louisianian refused to listen, but pressed on. Five minutes later his horse went down in a mudhole, its leg broken, while he himself received a nasty fall against a stump.

Sobered by the pain and the shaking-up, he shot the poor beast and mounted his spare steed, riding on at a slower pace and in gloomy silence. For an hour the three proceeded more slowly, until a glimmering against the horizon announced the rising moon.

"Duval is in the same boat," observed Audubon. "We can be sure that he'll keep the trail, for it's his only hope."

Norton did not reply. Duval must keep to the "trace" indeed; unless he passed Henderson ahead of them he was lost. His only hope lay in meeting his own gang or else in getting down the river ahead of his pursuers by means of a boat or canoe.

When the moon came up at length, Norton renewed the chase at a gallop, and the freshened horses responded nobly to his urgings. It was sheer madness to go sweeping through the dark woods at that pace, but Norton was far past caring.

"Kitty Grigg! Kitty Grigg!"

The name pounded through his heart with the pound of the hoofs on the

dew-wet turf. He was just changing saddles at midnight, when the Scotchman drew up alongside, spent.

"Take my fresh horse, Mr. Norton. This beastie o' mine is done, and I'll be done too in another hour."

Norton nodded, and with a word to Audubon rode on. Out of all the fourteen who had thundered out of Louisville, he and his friend alone were left. To judge from his own stiffened and wearied body, Audubon must be made of iron to stand the pace.

With three led horses, they did not spare the brutes while the moonlight lasted, one of the mounts foundering an hour later. At last the moon died into the darkness preceding dawn, and with only the horses they rode left to them, they drew up for a brief rest.

"We must be hard on Henderson," said Norton shortly, lighting his pipe, for he would not sleep.

"Ten miles from there, I think," responded Audubon. "There's a fork in the trail somewhere ahead. One trace goes to Henderson; the other proceeds to the river near Diamond Island, I believe."

WITH the first gleam of gray in the sky, they were up and off; and now as the daylight increased, Norton again urged the poor steeds to the utmost.

An hour after dawn Audubon halted him with a shout, and just beyond them he perceived that the trail bent around to the north, a fainter trail continuing from it to the left and west. He pulled up and dismounted stiffly.

"By gad! Audubon, which trail for Henderson?"

"The northern."

"Then we've got him! He's gone on to strike the river, and here are the marks where the Regulators turned off to Henderson yesterday!"

Norton leaped into his saddle and his jaded steed again took up the road. The other horse was spent, however. A mile farther on, and Norton turned at a cry to see Audubon go down.

"I'm done!" shouted Audubon, scrambling to his feet. "On, Norton! Good luck!"

For a bare instant the Louisianian

hesitated, then dug in his heels and sent his sobbing beast ahead, his face grim. Everything now depended on him alone.

It was Sunday morning, he knew, and he wondered if there were any church-bells in Henderson. His horse was staggering now, and he had to watch closely lest he be sent headlong into the trees.

The Regulators had arrived at Henderson yesterday, according to the trail. No doubt they had passed through town or avoided it, going on along the river bank to Diamond Island, where there was a large plantation. Then, with the miles slipping behind, Norton caught a gleam of water ahead and greeted it with a hoarse shout. The Ohio!

His beast coughed, straddled out, and sagged down. Norton slipped to the ground, rifle in hand, and with stiffened, stumbling feet ran forward, pouring a fresh priming in the pan as he ran. Where were the Regulators? Where was Duval? Where was Red Hugh? Had the wilderness trail swallowed them all?

Gasping and sobbing for breath, he followed the faint track to the water's edge, broke out from the last trees, and found himself on the river's brink. Then he uttered a groan of dismay and sank down, panting. Far down the stream, with a single man paddling furiously, was a canoe; as he looked, it swept around the lower end of the island and vanished.

Duval had escaped.

SLOWLY Norton pulled himself together. Twenty feet away was a horse, gasping out its life beside the river; Duval must have known where a canoe lay cached. From where he was, Norton had an excellent view of Diamond Island and the river.

He was a mile below the ferry and the upper end of the island, which was diamond-shaped. Henderson lay twelve miles up-river. The island, partly timbered and partly under cultivation, was four miles in length, and the stream in front of Norton was a quarter of a mile in width.

Suddenly, staggering a little, he sprang to his feet. Up the river he had

made out a shape impossible to mistake; Brookfield's horse-boat was floating down the swift current, keeping close to the Kentucky shore, and it was a scant half-mile above—he had come just in the nick of time, then!

Norton remembered that the boat was to have started from Henderson that morning, and also that Red Hugh had promised to meet it near the head of Diamond Island. Was he aboard, then, with the Regulators?

Norton watched the ungainly craft as it came down. He saw sweeps put out and knew that he had been observed, for the craft slowly forged in toward him. Brookfield was standing in the bow, and beside him was a tall figure which Norton recognized with a thrill of wild relief. Red Hugh had kept his word!

Slowly the craft neared the bank, and Norton waded out through the shallows to meet her. At length he came near enough to grip the hand of Red Hugh and so clambered up over the rail as the crew pushed the boat out again. For a moment he sat helpless, weak and unstrung, looking around. He saw the six men of the crew, but there was no sign of the Regulators.

"All is well?" he asked hoarsely as Brookfield strode over and helped him to his feet. "Have the Regulators come aboard?"

"All is well—but what mean you about the Regulators?" queried the other, in seeming surprise.

"Eh?" Norton stared at him, tottering at the knees and clutching at Red Hugh for support. "Are you crazed? They were to have met you at the island—"

"Your pardon, sir, but I have Mr. Ayres' writing otherwise,"—and Brookfield hastily produced a folded paper. Norton took it, still a-stare, trying to pull himself together and meet the situation.

"By gad, sir, one of us must be mad, then!" he broke out, and turned on Red Hugh. "What's all this, Hugh? Where did you get aboard?"

"A mile upstream, by the ferry."

"For God's sake, sir," broke in the captain, terrible fear on his counte-

nance. "Read that note which Ayres sent me at Henderson!"

"He sent you none," cried Norton wildly, and opened the paper. He saw the same writing which he had seen in the note taken from the carrier-pigeon—the writing of Charles Duval, though the note was signed by another name:

Captain Brookfield.

Sir:—The plans are changed. The Regulators will not come aboard your boat but will follow after in a skiff. Do you proceed and leave all to me.

ELISHA AYRES.

Norton looked up, and all things were in a haze before his eyes. Dimly he realized that there had been awful treachery somewhere; dimly he remembered how he had warned Tarascon against the slaves. He tried to speak, but only a hoarse murmur came from his lips.

Duval had tricked them—tricked them! He had known their plot all along and had set a counterplot with devilish ingenuity; this note must have been waiting at Henderson for a day or two—

With a terrible effort to warn Brookfield, Norton screamed out something and fell in a heap as his knees gave way. The strain and the shock had mastered him, and he lay senseless on the deck while the others stared, ignorant of what had chanced, and the horse-boat swept on downstream.

### CHAPTER XIII

A TRICKLE of whisky through his lips brought Norton back to his senses. A terrible lassitude had come upon him, but he shook it off with an effort and sat up in the arms of Red Hugh.

Brookfield was standing watching him, biting at his mustache in anxiety. Behind them Diamond Island was fast slipping into the distance, while the boat's crew was watching Norton from afar, curiously. He looked out at the three-mile stretch of wide river, saw the clustered settlements which lined the banks on the opposite shore, and then—remembered.

"That letter was forged," he said slowly, striving to force himself into coherent calm. Brookfield jumped at the word.

"Forged—impossible!" he returned swiftly. "Why, Mr. Norton, I met two of the Regulators at Henderson last night, and they themselves said they had been recalled by Mr. Ayres and yourself—"

"Duper!" murmured Norton, and compressed his lips. Duval had sent another note to the Regulators, then! Had probably sent it days ahead!

The whole thing now lay plain before his mind. Cunning as a fox, Duval had known of their scheme almost from the first, beyond a doubt. Thinking that Norton would embark on the boat as originally planned, he had forged the letter from Ayres, together with another to the Regulators. Thus Norton and the richly-laden craft together would come into the hands of Grigg and the gang. Naturally, he could not have foreseen what had happened at the last moment.

Carefully and slowly, Norton told the other two what had taken place in Louisville, of that terrible ride, and lastly of how Duval must have tricked them all around. When he had finished, Red Hugh was plucking thoughtfully at his beard while Brookfield was staring at him in alarmed dismay. For this, Norton did not quite see the reason.

"It is not yet too late to repair matters, even though our plans have gone awry," he stated, as new hope began to creep through him. He got to his feet, shakily. After all, there was no great hurry. Thank heaven, he had been able to meet Brookfield and so warn him in time!

"How—repair matters?" frowned the captain.

"Why, 'tis simple enough,"—and Norton essayed a faint smile. "We'll merely get back against the current to Henderson and take the Regulators aboard—"

"Think you I carry horses on my down voyage?" asked Brookfield, the veins in his stolid face standing out under his stress of emotion as he spoke. "Man, to get back is impossible! With

only nine of us aboard in all, we could never row this craft upstream, and I have no horses to work the machinery."

Norton nodded, grasping the point, and looked out across the bulwark. They were now some seven miles below Diamond Island, and another island was in sight ahead. There seemed to be few settlements below.

"Well, then, we had best tie up at the first settlement which we reach, Captain Brookfield. There we can either take some extra men aboard to serve in place of the Regulators, or else you can tie up and wait till I can get back to Henderson for our own men—"

"That would take too long," broke in Red Hugh, speaking almost for the first time. "True, we might take some extra men aboard, but we know not whom we can trust down here. And Duval is ahead of us, eh?"

Norton nodded. Duval had probably crossed over to the Indiana shore, for they had caught no sign of him. At this juncture the sadly bewildered Brookfield left them, to take charge of the island passage, and the Louisianian despatched Red Hugh in search of food and drink.

While he was making a hearty meal which put new strength and life into his jaded body, Brookfield rejoined the two of them, and all discussed the situation, which began to assume rather alarming proportions.

Norton's suggestion was the most conservative. By tying up at one of the settlements they could take men aboard, and might find trustworthy men who could be initiated into the whole plot. Red Hugh, however, who had seemed to awaken thoroughly to the affair, now made a counter proposal.

"Gentlemen, we are by no means cowards, I believe," he said, his deep-set gray eyes flaming a little as he spoke. "We are not so far from the Wabash at present. How about it, sir?"

Brookfield nodded gravely. "Some twenty miles, for Slim Island is just ahead. Why?"

"Well, it seems to me that from what

Captain Norton says," went on Red Hugh calmly, "all escape is cut off to Duval in the rear. He cannot well return to Louisville but must go on to Louisiana if he is to get away—and he must do so before this boat or others get down the river to give warning of him. And since it is most like that his gang has their camp somewhere near the Wabash, the militia would speedily make an end of him now that the secret of Blacknose is known."

"True enough," assented Norton. "Though he might also escape by way of Vincennes and Detroit to Canada. But what next?"

"Why should we not continue as we first planned?" said Red Hugh deliberately. "We will pass the Wabash by nightfall, so let us continue without pausing to tie up to-night, and if we run past Duval, so much the better. We can give warning of him at the lower settlements; at Fort Massac—"

"And from Fort Massac we can quarter back with men to find him," broke in Norton hastily.

"But what if he attacks us on the way?" argued the worried Brookfield. "He will know that we bear news of him, after all that has chanced behind us. He will not easily allow us to escape to bear this news down-river and so cut off all his chances—"

"Let him attack!" said Red Hugh boldly. "Not all of your crew are traitors, and Mr. Norton and I can keep good watch! Those dogs have only dared to destroy in the dark; one shot, and they will turn tail—"

"I doubt it," interrupted Norton drily. "Duval is no coward." He said no more for a little, but looked over the water with a frown.

SOMEWHERE in that wilderness was Kitty Grigg, and practically in the power of Duval. Up to a certain extent, he believed Abel Grigg would protect her; but that protection would not go far with such a man as Duval. At thought of how he had failed in his task, of how he had been outwitted and snared and duped, he groaned inwardly. A great weariness closed in upon him, and he turned haggard eyes on the two men beside him.

"Settle it as you will," he said slowly. "I care not, gentlemen; I must have sleep. Whatever decision you reach, I will agree to it. Now show me a place to sleep in peace, Brookfield."

The anxious-eyed riverman nodded and led him forward to a cabin, where Norton turned in on a bunk and was asleep instantly.

While he rested, the other two discussed the situation for an hour or more. Brookfield was in dread anxiety for his ship and cargo, bitterly regretting that he had ever entered upon the venture. Red Hugh, in some contempt, stuck firmly to it that his plan was the best.

In the end, his insistence overbore the hesitation of the other, who helplessly consented to continue the voyage. After all, they were not far behind Duval, and there was a good chance that they might slip past down the river before the gang would expect them. Moreover, by not stopping they would not be so liable to attack as they would be if tied up over-night after the usual river fashion.

Of the six men who composed the crew, Brookfield could trust two of them, brothers, to the death; of the other four he was by no means so certain. Once the decision had been reached, Red Hugh instructed these two men to sleep on deck that night with their rifles ready to hand.

Toward sunset Norton was aroused, and came on deck to find that they were just approaching Wabash Island. They passed by the Indiana sound, and when darkness fell the Wabash itself lay behind them and Brookfield breathed more freely.

The Louisianian agreed to the proposed plan. Red Hugh took watch until mid-night, but as Norton no longer felt the need of sleep after his day-long slumber, he remained on deck with the hunter.

Brookfield himself slept little. He was exceedingly anxious for the safety of his craft, and after an hour of sweeping along through the pitch darkness, his over-wrought nerves went to pieces.

"Gentlemen," he broke out nervously, approaching Norton and Red Hugh as

they were smoking together in the bow, "I can stand this no longer! I beg of you, let us set in to the bank and be done with this strain! We need fear no attack here; we are just above Shawneetown, in a well-settled district, and not even Blacknose would take the chance of making an attack on us here."

Red Hugh was furiously angry, but Norton quieted him. He saw that the responsibility for ship and lading had quite unnerved Brookfield, and felt sorry for the man. Moreover, it looked very much as though Duval would never dare an attack in this well-settled district of the river.

That their plans were turned topsy-turvy mattered nothing to him. He was indifferent as to what course was adopted, and said so.

"If it will please you to seek the bank, then do it," he said quietly. "It seems there may be danger in whatever we do, so do you act as you think best in the matter, Captain Brookfield."

With obvious relief, the latter quickly routed out his men and set them at the sweeps, grumbling and cursing. Red Hugh went to his bunk in the cabin in huge disgust with everyone in general; Norton, however, remained on deck, determined to watch the night out at least.

The boat was fetched close in to the Indiana shore and after carefully sounding the channel, Brookfield at last tied her up to a huge jutting tree. Norton ascertained that they were three miles above Shawneetown, which was a large settlement of nearly thirty cabins, and that Brookfield's spirits had now bounded high above any thought of danger.

None the less, Norton stayed in the bow, one of the two trusted men agreeing to keep watch in the stern, for he would take no chances. The night was peaceful, warm and rippling; had it not been for Kitty Grigg, the Louisianian would have been more than content to pursue his journey to the south and let Duval be dealt with later. He had already resolved to leave the boat at Fort Massac; with Red Hugh, he could work back on a scout along the—

WETHER the horse-boat had been watched and followed, or whether her riding-light had betrayed her position, Norton never knew for certain. He was just filling his pipe afresh when all his dreams were shattered abruptly.

From the shadows aft beneath the horse-gallery there flitted a little sparkle of steel in the moonlight, and a knife thudded into the bulwark between his uplifted arm and his side.

Norton dropped his pipe with a crash, and fell back motionless, his hand on his rifle. Every sense was on the alert instantly, every fragment of woodcraft to the fore. From the shore he heard nothing except the soft ripple of waves, but there was a low murmur aft, and the sound of wood striking on wood, as though a boat had ground into the stern. The man on guard there, Norton concluded swiftly, must have been finished off by another knife.

Suddenly and softly, a man appeared crawling forward in the shadow of the port bulwark, watching his recumbent figure; Norton recognized one of the crew. Quietly he shifted his rifle as he lay, hot rage swelling within him. A moment later the man's body came in line with the sights, and Norton pulled trigger.

The roar of the shot blew the night quiet to shreds. The riverman gave one convulsive spring and dropped half across the bulwark, where he lay motionless. Norton leaped up with a shout of alarm.

"Brookfield! Hugh! On deck!"

Then he dropped behind a huge tobacco hogshead as another shot split the night and the bullet sang past his ear. From somewhere aft there came a wild confusion of voices, oaths, and the scuffle of feet. Norton feverishly reloaded, taking the pistol from his belt also. Beyond all doubt, Blacknose had struck.

The next moment, while he was still ramming his bullet home, a swarm of dark figures appeared rushing forward, along the port side of the deck. A shot and the roar of Brookfield's stentorian voice sounded from the stern. Norton caught up his pistol and discharging it into the mass of figures stopped them momentarily; he was answered by a

scattering fire which swept above him harmlessly.

Upon that, the whole craft leaped into a mad swirl of fighting, yelling men in utter confusion. Brookfield appeared on the horse-gallery up above the deck, his pistols in hand, and he fired down twice into the crowd. A dozen shots replied, and Norton saw him reel and go down.

With a rush, the assailants now came at him in the bow. By this time the Louisianian had re-primed, and without hesitation he flung up his long rifle and fired at short range.

He had gotten two of the pirates in line, and both went down with a yell; at the same instant there swelled up a wild war-whoop, and the tall figure of Red Hugh appeared in the moonlight. As his yell shrilled high, he fired into the group of men; instead of breaking before him, they closed on him instantly. Red Hugh's prediction was proving terribly false, Norton thought swiftly.

Somewhere the cold, terrible voice of Duval was directing the attack. Norton had no more chance to reload. Other dark figures came running forward, and a moment later Red Hugh on the foredeck and Norton in the bow were surrounded by a whirl of fighting men.

For a little, Norton almost believed that they would clear the ship unaided. Both were fighting with clubbed rifles, and the long six-foot guns made terrific weapons for such close work. The pirates must have emptied their own guns, for they fired no more shots, and there was no chance to reload; the battle had become hand to hand, savage in its brutality.

Twice Norton swept his gun-butt down full upon a man, and each time the pirate went down like an axed ox with his skull crushed; the Louisianian was now fighting for his life, and realized it thoroughly. A tomahawk struck him and fell to the deck with a clang, thrown unskillfully; Norton leaped forward and whirled his rifle on the thrower with all his strength.

As he did so, his foot slipped and he half fell; the rifle came down on a hogshead and shattered in his hands.

With one savage yell of exultation, the enemy closed in upon him.

THEN, out of the turmoil of blows and shouts and curses, rose the clear laugh of Norton as his foes drew back. He was on one knee, pressed against the bulwark, but he held knife and tomahawk in hand, and somewhere in the press before him he had caught sight of Duval. The man's face goaded him, and while his foes drew back a pace, Norton laughed again and leaped into the midst of them, striking savagely.

His weapons flashed and bit in the moonlight, and with a thrill he heard the war-whoop of Red Hugh rising again. His assailants were all masked save for Duval, whom he had not seen again; the next instant, however, he caught sight of Grigg coming at him.

There was no mistaking the man's size and figure, despite his mask and the black paint which covered his face and clotted his beard. From one side a clubbed rifle swung down on Norton; he warded it off, and seeing that the man was one of the treacherous crew-members, flung out his tomahawk. The keen edge bit into the man's brain and he went down. Then Grigg was leaping out.

Whirling, Norton ducked the knife-thrust. There was no chance to use his own weapon, and as he swung around he brought up his fist, closed on the knife-hilt, and drove it straight into Grigg's beard. All Norton's weight was behind the blow, and the big man went down with a single groan, caught full on the point of the chin and knocked senseless.

In the same moment, Norton realized that all was lost. A wild yell of triumph had quavered up, and now a solid mass of men came charging down on him. Red Hugh had been overcome at last. Then, as Norton drew back and faced the snarling ring of savage masks and weapons, the uproar quieted with unexpected suddenness to the cold voice of Duval.

"Quiet, boys!"

He stepped forth, unarmed, dominant, terrible. Norton, his chest heaving and with a wild riot of sheer hatred

surging high in his brain, watched the man as there fell deep silence—a silence broken only by the groaning of wounded men and the peaceful ripple of water.

"Surrender, Mr. Norton," said Duval calmly. "You—"

"Dog!" snarled Norton, mad with rage and with the pain of his wounds and bruises. "Yellow dog!"

And dropping his knife, he sprang out upon Duval, for there was no thought of surrender in his mind. A single yell of warning from the circle of men; then the two were fighting like madmen with their bare fists.

Try as he would, Norton found his blows blocked, while Duval's fists hammered home upon him terrifically. Slowly his rage cooled of its flaming fury, and with new caution he realized that this was no common adversary. He staggered into a clinch, desperate.

A moment more, and Norton felt savage joy as he began to drive his fists into Duval's face and felt himself slowly mastering the other. Back went Duval—and back again, with Norton sending in relentless blows, while the lawyer fought back in grim silence.

Then a sudden low growl swept the watching circle as Duval reeled and clutched out at the air. Too late, Norton saw a rifle thrust between his legs. He tripped, and as he did so three men flung themselves on him bodily.

At last he went to the deck—pummeled, covered with slight knife-wounds, but still fighting savagely. Little by little they pinned him down, drew hands and feet together, bound him fast.

Brookfield's horse-boat was captured.

#### CHAPTER XIV

**N**ORTON was badly battered. More than one knife had nicked his flesh, and Duval's fists had given him a badly cut lip and a bruised and bleeding face, but he was hurt in no vital place. Now, as he lay bound, for the first time he began to take coherent stock of the river-pirates.

Three of the boat-crew had been of the gang; the others, with Brookfield,

were dead. Two of the traitors had also fallen and with them five more of the gang; three others lay sorely wounded. Besides these, eight sound men remained, with Grigg and Duval. Red Hugh had been stunned, and for some reason both he and Norton were not knifed as they lay. Instead, they were lifted and carried down into one of the four large skiffs at the stern of the horse-boat.

With them were placed the three wounded men, and then the others fell to work under orders from Grigg, now recovered from Norton's blow.

The four skiffs were drawn up alongside, and the best of the cargo was rapidly transferred from the larger boat. Helpless, Norton watched operations; now that the work had been carried through, the men had removed their masks.

All appeared to be either woodsmen or settlers, men of the roughest and most brutal type on the border. From their snatches of talk he gathered that they had made a common settlement on the upper reaches of the Saline River. This was in a purely Indian country, where the last remnants of the once powerful Ohio tribes had gathered under protection of the still more powerful Shawnees.

"We'll git them thar Miamis on the rampage," observed one of the pirates at work above him, with a coarse laugh. "Ought to have one more high ol' time afore we split up, eh?"

"Got to use up that licker," growled another in assent. "What's the chief goin' to do with them two fellers?"

The answer, fortunately, was lost on Norton. It was just as well for his own peace of mind that he gained no inkling of Duval's plan till later.

With the best of Brookfield's rich cargo stowed away in the four skiffs, the eight sound men piled down into one of them; by grim irony that cargo which was to have served for a lure had now been taken by the intended victim, and Norton writhed in his bonds at the thought. The boat in which he lay, with Red Hugh and the wounded, was taken in tow with the other two; Grigg descended among the men and took charge, and last of all came Duval.

Even before he came, Norton saw why he had lingered, and what was intended.

As the four skiffs pulled out and drew away in a slow line, the horse-boat slowly drifted out into the stream, her lines severed. The moon had by this time gone down, but looking back, Norton saw a burst of flames from the boat. She drifted away with her load of dead, the fire rising high into a pyramid of flame and smoke above her ungainly shape.

Then they were passing out of the river by a narrow channel, and to his surprise the Louisianian found that this led into a good-sized lake, some ten miles across. The eight men who occupied the forward boat rowed steadily through the darkness, Grigg giving them low directions; there was a faint glare on the horizon, denoting the burning craft they had abandoned. After an hour or more of this progress, they drew in to a low shore ahead.

Norton was lifted and flung on shore, and as Red Hugh was sent after him, he saw that the latter had recovered consciousness. Then, while the cargoes were being transferred to wagons, Grigg and Duval engaged in a swift discussion as to the disposal of the wounded men.

"I wont have them around the camp at this juncture," came the cold tones of the lawyer. "When this business has been finished we'll have to separate and had best start here. Send two men with the wounded over to Kentucky in one boat, and sink the other three here as usual."

So two of the raiders rowed off with the three wounded men, these being unable to ride. The other boats were sunk under the shore-trees, and with their trail covered behind them, the raiders started. Norton and Red Hugh were lifted to a wagon, just as the gray dawn was breaking.

The Louisianian was too firmly bound to dream of getting free, and attempted no converse with his companion. Having fallen between two huge sacks of flax, he could see nothing and at last dropped into a troubled sleep, broken at short intervals by the jolting of the wagon.

Toward noon the first and only halt of the journey took place; and here occurred an incident which to Norton seemed slight enough at the time, but which was destined to have tremendous consequences later.

THE stop had been made near a rude cabin built beside a spring, and when Norton had been lifted out of the wagon, he saw that it was an Indian clearing. The redskin farmer and his squaw were being forced into cooking for the party, whom they seemed both to hate and fear, probably with good cause.

Red Hugh lay beside Norton on the ground, watching grimly, in silence. Indeed, the old man had said no word that morning, and in his silent watching and his motionless endurance Norton read a tacit menace of strength restrained. Duval sent the Indian squaw to feed the prisoners some corn-pone, refusing to loosen their bonds, while one of the men stood guard.

As the woman bent over them, Norton heard Red Hugh murmur something in the Indian tongue. The guard stopped him harshly, but the wrinkled squaw looked at Norton, then started at sight of his moccasins.

"Git to work," growled the guard, striking her roughly over the head. "You got a man o' your own, so don't make eyes at them fellers!"

This kindly pleasantry drew a roar of applause from the others, and after giving the prisoners a gourd of water each, the squaw retired, still watching Norton. A half-hour later the party had again taken up its way. Now, however, Red Hugh lay beside Norton on the wagon.

"I told that squaw to look at your moccasins," he whispered softly to the latter. "She looked to me like a Shawnee, though her husband was a Delaware. If she takes the hint and Tecumthe hears of this affair, I feel sorry for these devils when the Shawnees avenge you."

"Nonsense," returned Norton, laughing harshly. "You're away off the track, Hugh. Tecumthe will never bother his head over me, even if he hears of it. Our only hope is that

Audubon or Ayres will get after us in alarm with the Regulators, and will trace us."

"They wont trace this gang," returned the other. "Two of 'em are wiping out the tracks after us."

Neither of them said more, Norton relapsing into a troubled doze. Just as evening was drawing on, they came to the journey's end. And at last Norton found himself in the headquarters of the gang.

It was a settlement rather than a cache, consisting of a little cluster of buildings. Two of these were large sleeping cabins for the men, where a few slatternly women appeared at the doors with loud ribaldry. Another was a large kitchen and dining-room, with a lean-to where dwelt Grigg and his daughter. Norton felt his heart ache for the helpless girl.

Behind all, at the edge of a small stream which passed beyond the settlement, was a long, low building where the stolen goods were stored, as it appeared. Besides these, there were two outlying shacks where some of the men lived with Indian wives or worse; farther downstream was a corn-patch, with signs of cleared ground beyond along the banks of the stream.

The whole place was doubtless a year or two old, and bespoke thorough organization. Duval, who now seemed quite at home and absolutely in authority, was beyond doubt the organizer, for he seemed to rule the place with an iron hand. Norton and Red Hugh were carried into the big store-barn and left, unguarded but bound. The men at once fell to work fetching in the goods brought by cart, adding them to the quantities already laid up in the cache.

Norton was wondering what had become of Kitty Grigg when through the open doorway of the barn-like building, where barrels and casks and sacks were piled high around the walls and floor, came a dim shape against the dusk outside.

"Mr. Norton!" sounded the girl's voice, softly.

"Over here, Kitty," returned Norton cheerfully, and a moment later she was kneeling beside him, sobbing.

"Oh, what has happened?" she asked,

grief-smitten. "Duval is in Abel's room, and they're talking about me! I'm afraid—I don't know what they're planning to do, and it seems—"

"Have you been harmed, girl?" asked Red Hugh, and his voice was grim.

"No—but—Duval has sent for a circuit-rider from Vincennes, and means to marry me—soon—"

Norton perceived that all barriers were down between them, and that she no longer doubted concerning the identity of Abel Grigg with Blacknose. Quietly and without holding anything back, he told her of the attack on the boat, and all which had preceded it.

This was no time for tears, and under the influence of his steady, grave voice the girl calmed herself. Norton had taken her hand between his own bound ones, and gradually felt her regaining steadiness and poise.

"Can you get a knife and free us tonight?" he asked suddenly. "We could take horses and get away—"

"No," she returned hopelessly. "It would be no use. Abel"—and Norton noted that she no longer spoke of him as father,—"Abel keeps men on guard always, and he is usually on watch himself. We have two rooms in that lean-to behind the kitchen, and I cannot get out without his knowing—"

CAME the sound of steps and the glitter of light from the doorway behind her. With a low gasp of fright, the girl rose and fled to the far end of the place, where she crouched behind some piled kegs. Norton twisted about to see Grigg, Duval, and two men enter with lanterns.

Setting down their lights, the four grouped themselves comfortably on kegs around the two prisoners. Norton noted without grief that his fists had left the face of Duval badly marked, while the lawyer stared down at his captive in savage hatred. Red Hugh was completely disregarded, but Norton was soon to find that the old man had been taken alive for very definite reasons.

"Your race is done, Captain Norton," said Duval coldly. "I presume that you are now quite satisfied of your

folly? I hope to have a very pretty scene for you to-morrow night, when Madam Grigg and I will be united in holy matrimony—save the mark!"

The others joined in the laughter, as Duval kicked Norton roughly. The Louisianian did not reply.

"Well, let's hear about it, Cap," spoke up one of the evil-eyed men impatiently enough. "The boys want to split the stuff and be off, so if we're a-goin' to have any fun first—"

"You'll have your fun," broke in Duval easily. "Look at Mr. Norton's powder-horn and see if you recognize it."

The two leaned over Norton, pulling the red-streaked horn into view. A curse broke from them, and one of them kicked Norton again.

"Tobin's!" burst out the man vengefully. "Did the cuss git Tobin, Cap? That's why he aint showed up?"

"Exactly,"—and Duval smiled cruelly. "Tell the other boys about it. Now to-morrow the circuit-rider we sent Darby after last week will be in from the north. To-morrow night Miss Kitty and I will be married. One of you go over to the Miami village and bring 'em all over for a jamboree, squaws and all."

"We'll git the squaws all right," jeered one of the men.

"The next morning," continued Duval, "we'll divide the stuff and separate. Grigg, here, will take you and the bulk of the cache up to Vincennes, where you can sell it and scatter—and do it fast!"

"How 'bout you?" queried one of the men. Duval leered knowingly.

"My wife and I go to Detroit, and from there over the border. This country is too hot to hold me, boys, but you aren't known yet."

"Well, what about these two fellers?" demanded Grigg heavily, with a black look down at Norton. "Why not shoot 'em and have done? I don't aim to leave no spies to tell on me—"

"We'll have better fun than that." And Duval held up a lantern. "This fellow with the beard is Red Hugh, the Indian killer. Understand? After we've had our fun out of the Miamis, we'll give them back some of their

weapons and turn 'em loose on these two. There'll be a show worth seeing, eh?"

A cold thrill ran over Norton, while the others broke into wild applause of Duval's ingenuity. The Louisianian knew well what was intended. Like other settlers along the border, this gang of Duval's was accustomed to a certain form of "sport" at the expense of their redskin neighbors.

This took the form of gathering the Indians, taking away their weapons, and then plying them with whisky. At the proper moment they would be set to fighting, and the resultant encounter would often last for hours, without great danger to the combatants but with intense amusement to the watchers.

Now, however, Duval had injected another element into it. The name of Red Hugh seemed well known, and even Norton could guess what would happen when the drunken Miamis would be given their weapons and let loose upon their deadly enemy. It was a sure, amusing, and ingenious scheme to get rid of the two prisoners.

The two men went out, laughing, and Duval turned on Grigg.

"I have the papers made out for your signature, and we'll throw the fear of hell into that circuit-rider. You're sure Darby will get the right one—the loose-jawed, weak-mouthed one? If he got that blasted Quaker Dennis, we'd have a stiff time persuading him all was right. The girl will kick."

"Darby's wise enough to get the right feller," rejoined Grigg. "Whar's that five hundred ye promised me?"

"Here—come on outside." Duval rose, with a clink of coins. The two left the place, taking their lanterns with them.

**A**S THE girl came stealing back to his side, Norton felt like rebuking her for the feeling which had caused her to accompany Abel Grigg into the woods; then shame struck him, and pity, and love. For a moment he held her hand in silence; then she had pulled free and was gone, sobbing.

"Curse those devils!" muttered Red Hugh thickly.

Norton echoed the words, and after that there was silence.

Slowly the night dragged away between dozing and the pain of their bonds. Shortly after daylight one of the slatternly women came with food and water and fed them amid a stream of ribaldry and curses. Norton was glad when at length she departed and left them alone.

A guard was stationed at the door, but no speech passed between the two captives. Red Hugh stared up unblinking at the beams above, a wild ferocity gathered in his blood-stained face. Toward noon there was shouting and the thud of hoofs from outside, and Duval entered hastily with Abel Grigg. Norton rightly conjectured that the circuit-rider had arrived.

"Give him that far cabin," ordered the lawyer hurriedly and in a low voice. "Keep him quiet in there and don't let him suspect anything yet. I'll visit him later. He's a coward, from his face, and I'll fix him up right."

**A**T LAST that long day came to an end; as sunset darkened the barn-like structure, the camp awoke into activity. Hogsheads and casks and sacks were piled to the roof at the far end, where half a dozen whiskey kegs were also set out, ready to be broached later.

Around the walls were hung lanterns, while the center of the floor was cleared for the fun. Norton and Red Hugh, still fast bound, were placed on a pile of sacks near the door, in partial obscurity.

From the scattered talk of the men, Norton gathered that they intended carrying off some of the prettiest of the Miami squaws after the debauch; also, all seemed well with their projects and they were in high fettle, for the Miamis had arrived.

An hour later the lanterns were lighted and the gang assembled. Grigg brought in the angry and frightened Kitty, forcing her to a place not far from the two prisoners, he himself standing beside her. At sight of her white features, Norton tugged desperately but vainly at his bonds, raging.

In all there were fourteen of the

gang, and five women—most of them already half-drunk and all of them brutish in the extreme. The circuit-rider did not put in an appearance.

Now the Miamis were brought in, men at the door relieving them of their guns as they came, and Grigg shaking hands with the warriors in turn. Of these there were a score. Norton was rather surprised to find that the squaws, all enveloped in blankets from head to heel, numbered nearly twice as many as the braves. One or two of the gang attempted familiarities, but these Duval rebuked with an iron fist.

They were squalid red men enough, were these Miami warriors: liquor-sodden, shuffling, and debased in the extreme. One alone seemed of superior quality. He was a tall figure, blanket-swathed to the waist, who after his handshake with Grigg cast a swift glance around and then stood immobile not far from Norton's recumbent figure. Kitty watched in evident ignorance of what was going on; she was soon undeceived.

"Broach the kegs, boys!" shouted Duval suddenly, when the last of the Miamis had entered.

With a yell of delight the men sprang forward. In five minutes the six kegs were surrounded by a grunting, struggling mass of Miamis, the squaws standing to one side and eating strips of dried venison which the raiders handed out freely.

Norton and Red Hugh lay side by side on the sacks. Grigg stood with Kitty, a few feet distant, and between them was the tall Indian, his blanket drawn over his head. Grigg urged him to drink, but he refused with a guttural negation, meeting with no more importunity. Indeed, the whites were drinking with as much abandon as the warriors, save for Duval and Grigg alone.

A few moments later the warriors were shoved back from the kegs and their knives and tomahawks removed to the pile of rifles beside the door. Then one of the gang stepped in and by dint of some rough horse-play, highly amusing to his comrades, provoked two of the redmen into a rough and tumble fight.

Within five minutes the whole group of warriors was engaged in a frenzied scuffle, amid roars of laughter from the watchers. In their drunken awkwardness they did little damage, and every eye watched save that of Kitty; she had covered her face with her hands and stood trembling.

"Give 'em more licker!" roared Grigg suddenly, and rushed across the floor.

No sooner had he moved than the tall Indian took one swift step toward Norton. A knife flamed in his hand, and the startled Louisianian contracted shrikingly.

Then the knife had severed the cords at his ankles, and he looked into the face of Tecumthe.

"Be quiet!" warned the chief in English.

#### CHAPTER XV

**N**ORTON lay in paralyzed amazement while his wrists were freed, and Tecumthe turned to Red Hugh. The Indian, wasting no time on questions, seemed quite conversant with the whole situation.

"Be ready," he whispered rapidly. "Take the young woman from the door, when I strike!"

Red Hugh grunted, and Tecumthe once more assumed his negligent attitude as Grigg returned across the floor.

Norton's wild surge of astonished delight soon passed. The thick moccasins had protected his ankles to some extent, but his hands were for the moment useless, all circulation stopped by the tight thongs.

After all, Tecumthe could do little against this murderous gang by himself. How, then, did he intend to "strike?" Did he have a band of his warriors outside?

"It wasn't such a wild shot about those moccasins after all," came Red Hugh's chuckling whisper. "Looks like he's going to give us a chance to slip away. Work your arms a bit."

The Louisianian nodded, and very slowly perceived life creeping back into his numbed hands. Grigg and the rest were roaring at the antics of the drunk-

en, fighting Miamis; Duval, perched on a big hogshead at the far end of the room, was inciting them to further efforts.

Locked in pairs, the warriors were striking, kicking, rolling over the floor in a bestial encounter which left Norton shocked to the core; he had heard of these affairs often but had never seen one before.

Duval's men were plying them with liquor amid wild shouts of encouragement, and were fast growing drunk themselves; so far, however, they were too much interested in their amusement to bother the squaws, who stood lined up against the farther wall and grouped around the door.

Again Grigg's interest got the better of his prudence, and with a bellow he leaped out to join in the horse-play. Kitty, left alone, shrank past the tall figure of Tecumthe toward Norton, who put out his hand and gripped her arm.

"Quiet!" he said softly, as she turned with a startled exclamation. "Be ready to make for the door, Kitty."

Wide-eyed, she stared into his face for a moment, and under cover of her body Norton half rose to take the pistols which Tecumthe passed him. He put one into the hand of Red Hugh, then waited.

**T**HREE was not long to wait. With a sudden movement, Tecumthe flung the blanket from his splendid figure and stood forth in all the glory of his half-naked bronze, unpainted. His voice rang out like a clarion:

"Peace, dogs!"

Some of the Miamis ceased their scuffling; others continued: one startled oath passed around the line of white men as they saw him step forward. He made no pause, but raised a clenched fist.

"Dogs of white men!" And his clear voice seemed to hold even Duval transfixed. "Outcasts from your own race! Murderers! Why do you thus debase my red brethren, the Miamis? I know you—who you are and what you do in the Shawnee country. I know your crimes. I am going to show my white brethren that Tecumthe can punish murderers better than they!"

As the dread word *Tecumthe* passed through the hall, Duval leaped to his feet with a yell of warning. It was too late. The line of squaws flung off their blankets and stepped forth as warriors in all the glory of Shawnee war-paint, rifles in hand. From outside came one shrill war-whoop—and the interior of the building became an inferno as the first rifles roared out.

Awful as the thing was, Norton had no pity for Duval's gang. He leaped up, seized Kitty, and with Red Hugh at his side made for the doorway. Here a Shawnee halted them with leveled rifle, but after a look at Norton waved them on outside.

Kitty had fainted, mercifully.

The whole clearing seemed covered with yelling, whooping demons. As the three emerged, Norton saw that the kitchens had been fired, the flames lighting up the whole scene. An instant later, while Red Hugh was taking the feet of the senseless girl, Tecumthe himself joined them and led them across the clearing to one of the farther cabins.

Here, under guard of a stalwart warrior who went leaping off at sight of his chief, they found a trembling, terror-smitten circuit-rider who was too frightened to do more than grovel before the chief. Tecumthe kicked him away, and Norton lowered Kitty's body to the pallet in the corner.

Despite all he knew about this gang, despite their intentions, he felt himself somewhat a traitor to his own race. Red Hugh must have felt much the same thing, for he was standing glaring at the chief, his eyes terrible.

"It is not vengeance," said Tecumthe composedly, watching the low building with gloomy eye. "It is justice. A squaw met my men; they told me of one who wore my moccasins, in bonds. I knew of these white men, and I came in haste. That is all."

"It's not all," cried Norton with sudden remembrance. "There are women in that place—"

"Right!" broke out Red Hugh. "Tecumthe, we must have them, no matter what manner of women they are!"

"Go," said the chief, nodding. "My

men have seen your faces and you are safe."

Norton sprang out on the word, and the two men ran side by side to the building. At the doorway, the scene within was horrible; the place was filled with powder-smoke, one corner was afire from a bursted lantern, and from the door were pouring drunken Miamis, some of them still fighting together.

And through the fire and smoke white men and red were battling like madmen, with axe and knife and pistol and clubbed rifle. Norton well knew the danger he was in from both sides, but shoving through the crowded mass of Miamis he dashed within, Red Hugh at his heels.

In one corner were crouching the five terrified women, and as the Louisianian fought his way through the struggling, yelling groups, he saw a tall Shawnee tomahawk one of the drabbed figures.

With a yell of fury, he raised his pistol and fired; the warrior sprang high in his death-agony, and before he fell Norton was stripping him of knife and tomahawk. Then he turned, and with Red Hugh tried to get the four remaining women to the door.

They were terror-stricken, hysterical creatures, mad with fear and liquor and obscenity, but they were women. As Norton fought his way across the floor, he caught glimpses through the smoke of the combat which raged around him—glimpses which remained etched on his memory forever.

Grigg, with a huge axe, was standing back to back with Duval, fighting a way across the place amid a surging wave of the red men. A drunken, trampled Miami was striking right and left with a knife; screams and oaths and prayers rose high as the Shawnee steel bit deep, while over all shrilled the dread war-whoop, keen and terrible.

"God!" breathed Norton. "It's not a fight, but a massacre!"

How they did it he never knew, but between them, he and Red Hugh managed to get the shrieking women to the door and outside. The scene at the door was wild; pirates and Shawnees and drunken Miamis were all mingled

in a horrible struggling mass, trampling dead and wounded indiscriminately. And behind them all, the fire had seized on the whiskey kegs and was climbing high through the whole building.

Norton breathed a prayer of thanks that Kitty Grigg knew nothing of what was going on; by dint of ceaseless efforts he got the four women to the shack, at the door of which still stood Tecumthe. Driving them inside, where Kitty still lay motionless on the pallet, he jerked the weak-mouthed circuit-rider to his feet.

"Look after them, you," he snarled, and rejoined the chief and Red Hugh outside.

**F**ORTH from the long barn, whose farther end was now all afame, was pouring a rout of men, white and red intermixed, battling to the death. One of the rivermen started across the clearing, but a dozen bullets from the watching warriors caught him; the place seemed to vomit death and destruction. With a dark look Tecumthe, who had himself struck no blow, turned to Red Hugh.

"Bear witness, Captain Moore," he said sternly, "that we take neither scalps nor plunder! We make no war upon white men, but upon murderers—"

"Moore?" cried Norton suddenly. He caught Red Hugh by the arm and swung him around. "Is that your name—Hugh Moore? You're not the Captain Moore who left Cincinnati with my father—"

"God in heaven!" broke out Red Hugh hoarsely, gripping him and staring into his eyes. "Are you Charles Norton's son—*look out!*"

With a sudden movement, Norton was flung a dozen feet away.

Whether they had broken through the cordon of Indians or had escaped from some rear entrance of the burning building, Norton never found out; but Grigg and Duval, ax and tomahawk in hand, were leaping across the clearing, a string of Shawnees behind them.

Red Hugh's action was all that saved Norton from Duval's tomahawk, which sang over his head and thudded into

the building behind him. Duval himself followed it instantly, and gripped Norton as he was rising; while Grigg swung his ax at Norton from the side, to be grappled and flung back by Red Hugh.

Norton saw Tecumthe motion his warriors back, and then saw no more, for he was fighting with a madman. Duval seemed crazed, as he might well be; Norton had whipped out his knife but had no chance to use the weapon, for the other had gripped his wrists and was throwing all his iron strength into the desperate struggle.

All four of the fighting men crashed together and went down in a confused mass. The shock broke Duval's hold, and as they came up Norton drove with his knife. He felt the steel bite, but still Duval fought on, flinging himself forward bodily and bearing Norton down again.

Meantime, Grigg and Red Hugh were engaged in a mighty struggle, strength against strength, giant against giant. Reeling over the turf, the four men again came together in mad collision; as they did so, Norton sent his knife home for the second time, and now Duval fell away from him.

Barely had he done so when Red Hugh's pistol crashed out. Grigg had taken warning, and ducked, flinging his arms about Moore's waist. Directly behind him was Norton, and as the shot flamed out, the Louisianian flung his arms wide and toppled over the body of Duval.

Then, for the first time, Tecumthe leaped forward. Frenzied by what he had done, Red Hugh had beaten Grigg back with the pistol-butt, and Grigg flashed out his tomahawk to throw. Before his arm came up, Tecumthe had sprung between them like a thing of steel; his own knife flamed in the lurid glare, and Grigg collapsed.

Red Hugh stood for a moment, pistol in hand. There was a look of awful grief on his face, and without a word he knelt over Norton.

For a moment he felt the heart of the Louisianian, fumbled under the latter's shirt, and then held up a small gold eagle.

"Good God," he muttered slowly, as

he held the eagle up to the lurid light of the burning buildings. "What's this? What—"

For he had turned over the pin, and had read the letters graven on its under side. Slowly he tottered up, then looked at the uncomprehending Tecumthe, a terrible horror in his eyes

"Hugh Edward Moore—my own pin—I've killed him—"

And then, with a terrible cry, he fell upon Norton's body.

## CHAPTER XVI

NORTON awoke, with the strange and persistent idea that the face of Audubon was bending over him. It was nonsense, of course; he turned his head, and saw that he lay quite alone, opposite a doorway. The sun was warm and bright outside.

What of that horrible nightmare, that hell of death and madmen, of which he had dreamed? The very remembrance brought out the cold sweat on his brow; he lifted his hand, and found his head bandaged.

Yet, looking out that doorway, he slowly recalled what had happened on that night of horror, for he was gazing across the clearing where it had taken place. There was no doubt of it; a hundred yards away were the ruins of the burned building, the cache-barn; he himself, then, must be lying in that shack to which he had brought the women.

The place seemed deserted, however. There were no Indians in sight; no bodies strewed the clearing; everyone seemed to have vanished and left him alone in desolation. No—he was mistaken after all; a voice strangely like that of Audubon lifted faintly to him.

"—so do you see how he is, sir. I must look to the litter."

"Good heavens, am I mad?" thought Norton. He strained to sit up, but found himself too weak. An instant later a tall, stooping figure darkened the doorway and came to his side with a cry of joy.

For a moment Norton shrank away, not recognizing the man who had come to his knees beside the pallet. Yet—

it must be! The shaggy hair was trimmed, the shaggy matted beard was gone; but from the heavily lined face, the deep-set eyes of Red Hugh were looking at him.

"Man--man—we thought you never would come around!" And Red Hugh clasped his hand in a warm pressure.

"By gad, what has happened to you?" Norton essayed a feeble smile of wonder. Then like a stab memory came back to him; this was no other than Captain Hugh Moore, the same who had been his own father's friend and brother-officer!

"Quiet!" commanded Moore sharply, as Norton struggled to sit up in his high excitement.

"Tell me quickly—are you the same Moore—"

"Yes, lad, the same." Moore forced him back on the pallet, yet with tender hands. "Oh, lad, had I but known before! Why on earth did you not tell me your story, tell me—"

"How should I know who you were?"

"True,"—and the other nodded, his stern face very sad. "You said you came from New Orleans, too; I never dreamed of the truth until I had heard the tale from Kitty and Mr. Audubon—"

"For God's sake, tell me what has happened!" broke out Norton, unable to stand the suspense longer. "Is Audubon here?"

"Yes, Audubon came two days ago, bringing the Regulators—"

"How long have I been here?"

"It is three days since—since I shot you with my own hand," returned the other bitterly. "Oh, lad, when I owe everything in the world to you, to think that I myself—"

"Tush, you owe me nothing," interrupted Norton, bewildered. "Then the Regulators followed us after all?"

"Yes. Audubon met them at Henderson, read the forged note, and followed us in another boat. He was too late. They found Brookfield's craft burned to the edge and at length picked up the trail and came on. Tecumthe and his warriors had already departed—but let me show you something."

While Moore was still fumbling in his pocket, Audubon stepped into the shack. He gripped Norton's hand, and the two friends looked at each other for a moment, until Norton got out a low word.

"Thanks, my friend! I hoped you would come—"

"We did nothing," smiled Audubon gravely. "The work was done, and we could but bury the dead and care for the living. If he is able to be moved, Captain Moore, we had best start soon that we may reach the river by evening. The litter is ready."

Moore bent his head in a gesture of assent.

"Very well, bring the litter here to the door and we will start. Waken Kitty."

"Yes," added Norton eagerly. "Is she well?"

"Quite," laughed Audubon, and stepped from the door. "She has been nursing you."

With his departure, Moore stooped and placed something in Norton's hand. The Louisianian gazed at it with a thrill of remembrance. It was the golden eagle belonging to Kitty.

"Eh?" He looked up sharply. "Where got you this—"

"From your shirt, lad. Why, Norton—don't you see?"

"See?" repeated Norton, amazed. "What mean you?"

With a great laugh Red Hugh plunged to his knees and caught Norton's hand; the man seemed transformed with some mad joy too great for words. Half in fear, Norton drew back, and at this Moore only laughed out again.

"Oh, blind, blind!" he cried ringing. "And you knew that Kitty had been found among Indians, that this pin was hers—yet you never suspected it!"

## CHAPTER XVII

**T**WO riders were walking their horses along the Beargrass Creek Road, on the way to Colonel Taylor's farm. They drew rein at a bend, just beyond which was a fringe of trees and a dried mudhole.

"I brought you this road for a purpose, Kitty," said Norton gravely. "Do you remember the spot?"

She looked at him and nodded, and her look sent a little flame of happiness dancing into his brown eyes. He swung out of the saddle, and she slipped down into his arms, the movement loosening her red-gold hair until it flooded down about his hands.

"Oh, Kitty—Kitty!"

He looked into her eyes and could say no more for a moment. So they stood together, gazing each at the other, while the two horses moved away and began to crop the grass, unheeded.

Then Norton drew away from her, freed his hands, and soberly unclasped a golden eagle from his coat. He looked at it, then held it to her.

"Kitty—sweet Kitty—I brought you here, away from your father and our friends, here where we first met—there is something I must tell you—"

He faltered, and with a quick laugh she flung back her hair.

"Mr. Norton,"—and there was mimicry in her voice,—"I—I too have something to tell you!"

"Yes?" he said gravely, stiffening a little. "Yes?"

"Nay, but I would not take precedence of a soldier, sir!"

And she made him a laughing courtesy, perhaps to hide the great glory of womanhood that shone in her face.

"Then, my news is this," said Norton, lifting a tress of her hair to his lips. "A regiment of riflemen from Kentucky has been formed; trouble is brewing with England; there is trouble on the frontier. I have been offered the command of this regiment, Kitty. I ask you—will you take this emblem of all that is dearest to me, and take with it the heart of John Norton? A soldier's life and pay is not much to share—"

"Soldiers do not serve for pay," she said very steadily, and put her hand upon his, clutching the golden eagle of the Cincinnati between them. "Nor do women serve that they may share—oh, my dear! You have not yet told me the dearest thing of all—"

And so they told each other.



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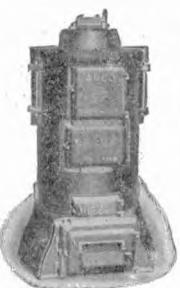
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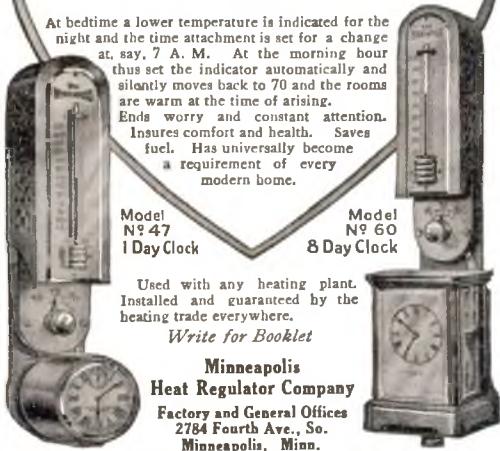
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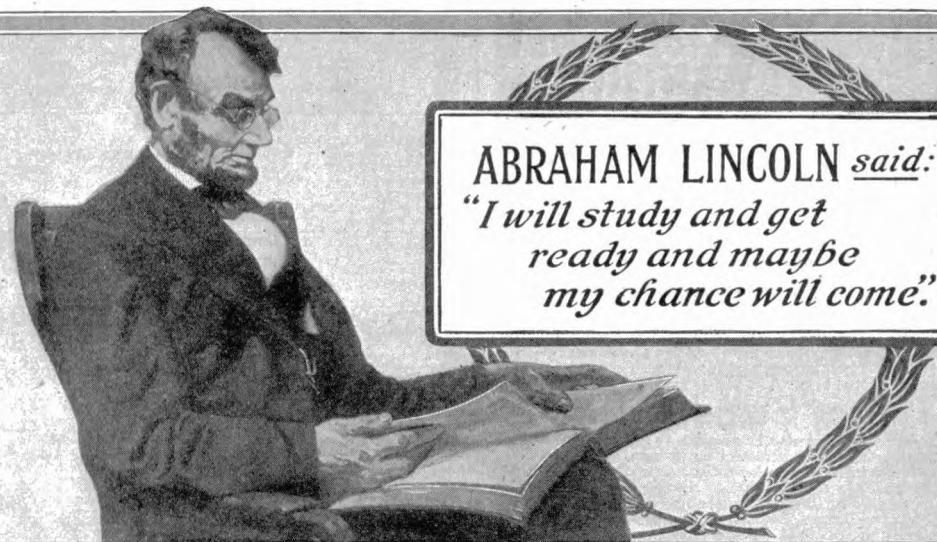
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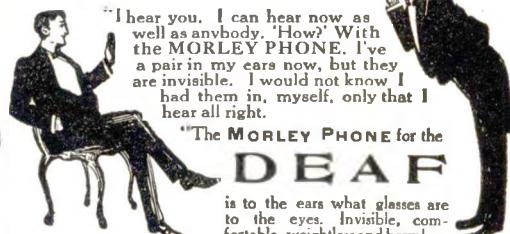
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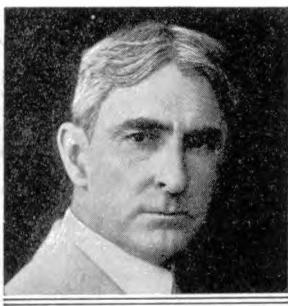
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## A Half Dozen Unusual Short Stories

What becomes of the matinee idol when his beauty begins to fade? That is the question behind "The Beauitfullest Boy in America," a short story which Walter Jones has written for the February issue of THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE. Mr. Jones writes only a few stories each year, and those few are of the finest quality. This is one of his best.



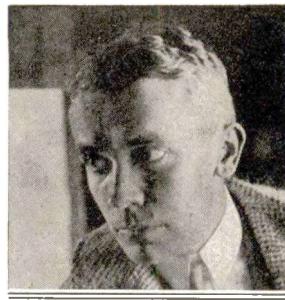
Walter Jones

"A Wife From Harmsworth Corners," by Katherine Hill, author of "For Fifty Thousand Dollars," is another of the unusual short stories in the February GREEN BOOK. And it is unusual, if ever a story was. Then there are "The Man Who Came Out of the Dark," by Cosmo Hamilton, author of "The Blindness of Virtue," and several others, each one different from the short stories you find in other magazines.

All these and many more big features in the  
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# in the Magazine World

"The Foolish Virgin" is just beginning as a serial in THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE. It is a story that will "get" you. It is far bigger work than "The Leopard's Spots," "The Clansman," or "The Victim," and each of those was the novel of its day. Therefore the demand for the February issue of THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE, which contains this splendid novel, will be great. Get your copy early.



Walter Tittle

## MOST REMARKABLE GENIUS



George M. Cohan  
to-day

This article by George M. Cohan is jammed with surprises—Cohan surprises. It takes you not only into the theater and up on the stage, but it takes you into the box-office as well. You see the theater from all of its angles—and through the eyes of the man who has made millions out of it, who is familiar with every one of its mysterious phases.

## News and Views of Famous Stage Folk

"My Theories of Comedy" is the title Rose Stahl, of "The Chorus Lady," "Maggie Pepper," and "A Perfect Lady" fame has selected for an article she has written for the February issue of THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE. It is an authoritative discussion which will give down-to-the-ground fact and opinion to anyone interested in the theater as an amusement or a profession.



Rose Stahl

Channing Pollock's review of the new plays—the only review by a man who writes successful plays himself; Louis V. De Foe's analysis of "Why Plays Succeed;" an article by Walker Whiteside; "The Dear Old Hands Across the Dear Old Sea," by Harris Merton Lyon, a strictly union philosopher; and a host of other stories and articles by and about the people of the stage—they are all in the February GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE.

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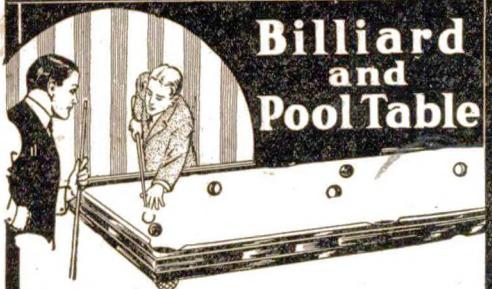
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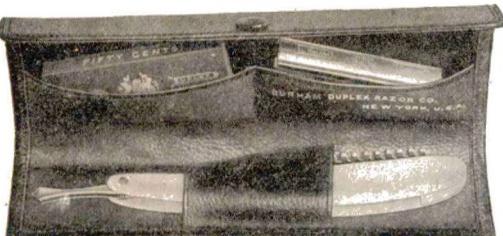


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