MAR., 1907 224 PAGES READING MATTER 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

And now Servia! Arthur W. Marchmont's new serial, "Stephanie of Servia," begins next month. It is thrilling, absorbing, realistic.

VOLUME VIII NUMBER 1

The Popular Magazine

MARCH 1907

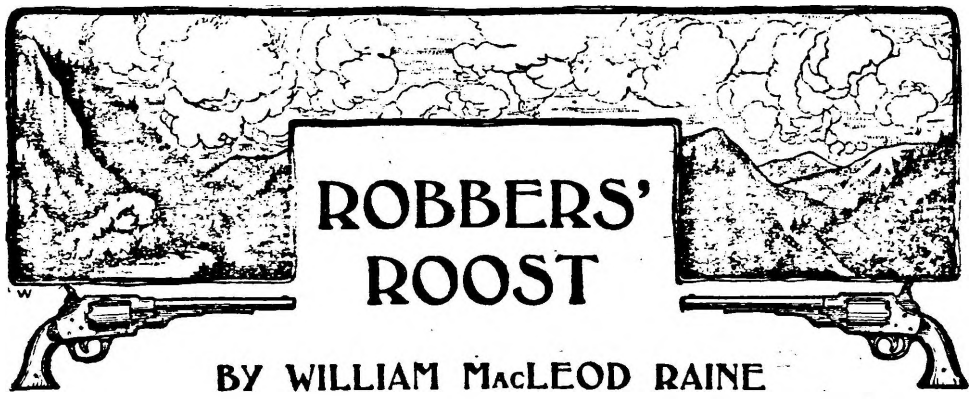
CONTENTS

Monthly Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $1.50 SINGLE COPIES 15 Cents

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. VIII. MARCH, 1907. No. 1.



ROBBERS' ROOST

BY WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

We do not think you can fail to be interested in this strong story of the West. Mr. Raine's characters are so vividly drawn that you seem to have known them at some time or another. It is a moot question whether you will be more interested in the dauntless sheriff, who clips the word "fear" from his dictionary, or in that strange anomaly, the college-bred outlaw, whose cruelty and chivalry race side by side. To complete the triangle there is a girl whose charm is irresistible.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

SHE had been aware of him from the moment of his spectacular entrance, though no slightest sign of interest manifested itself in her indolent, disdainful eyes. Indeed, his abundant and picturesque area was so vivid that it would have been difficult not to feel his presence anywhere, let alone on a journey so monotonous as this was proving to be.

It had been at a water-tank, near Socorro, that the Limited, churning furiously through red New Mexico in pursuit of a lost half-hour, jarred to a sudden halt that shook sleep from the drowsy eyes of bored passengers. Through the window of her Pullman the young woman in Section 3 had glimpsed a bevy of angry train officials eddying around a sturdy figure in the center, whose strong, lean head rose confidently above the press. There was the momentary whirl of a scuffle, out of the tangle of which shot a brakeman as if propelled from a catapult. The circle parted, brushed aside by a pair of lean shoulders, muscular and broad. Yet a few moments and the owner of the shoulders led down the aisle to the vacant section opposite her a procession whose tail was composed of protesting trainmen.

"You had no right to flag the train, Sheriff Collins, and you'll have to get

off; that's all there is to it," the conductor was explaining testily.

"Oh, that's all right," returned the offender easily, making himself at home in Section 4. "Tell the company to send in its bill. No use jawing about it."

"You'll have to get off, sir."

"That's right—at Tucson."

"No, sir. You'll have to get off here. I have no authority to let you ride."

"Didn't I hear you say the train was late? Don't you think you'd arrive earlier at the end of your run if your choo-choo got to puffing?"

"You'll have to get off, sir."

"I hate to disoblige," murmured the owner of the jingling spurs, the dusty corduroys, and the big, gray hat, putting his feet leisurely on the cushion in front of him. "But doesn't it occur to you that you are a man of one idea?"

"This is the Coast Limited. It doesn't stop for anybody—not even for the president of the road."

"You don't say! Well, I ce'tainly appreciate the honor you did me in stopping to take me on." His slight drawl was quite devoid of concern.

"But you had no right to flag the train. Can't you understand *anything?*" groaned the conductor.

"You explain it again to me, sonny. I'm surely thick in the haid," soothed the intruder, and listened with bland good-humor to the official's flow of protest.

"Well—well! Disrupted the whole transcontinental traffic, didn't I? And me so innocent, too. Now, this is how I figured it out. Here's me in a hurry to get to Tucson. Here comes your train a-foggin'—also and likewise hittin' the high spots for Tucson. Seemed like we ought to travel in company, and I was some dubious she'd forget to stop unless I flagged her. Wherefore, I aired my bandanna in the summer breeze."

"But you don't understand." The conductor began to explain anew as to a dull child. "It's against the law. You'll get into trouble."

"Put me in the calaboose, will they?"

"It's no joke."

"Well, it does seem to be worrying you," Mr. Collins conceded. "Don't mind me. Free your mind proper."

The conductor, glancing about nervously, noticed that passengers were smiling broadly. His official dignity was being chopped to mince-meat. Back came his harassed gaze to the imperturbable Collins with the brown, sunbaked face and the eyes blue and untroubled as an Arizona sky. Out of a holster attached to the sagging belt that circled the corduroy trousers above his hips gleamed the butt of a revolver. But in the last analysis the weapon of the occasion was purely a moral one. The situation was one not covered in the company's rule book, and in the absence of explicit orders the trainman felt himself unequal to that unwavering gaze and careless poise. Wherefore, he retreated, muttering threats of what the company would do.

"Now, if I had only known it was against the law. My thick haid's always roping trouble for me," the plainsman confided to the Pullman conductor, with twinkling eyes.

That official unbent. "Talking about thick heads, I'm glad my porter has one. If it weren't iron-plated and copper-riveted he'd be needing a doctor now, the way you stood him on it."

"No, did I? Ce'tainly an accident. The nigger must have been in my way as I climbed into the car. Took the kink out of his hair, you say? Here, Sam!" He tossed a bill to the porter, who was rolling affronted eyes at him. "Do you reckon this is big enough to plaster your injured feelings, boy?"

The white smile flashed at him by the porter was a receipt for indemnity paid in full.

Sheriff Collins' perception of his neighbor across the aisle was more frank in its interest than the girl's had been of him. The level, fearless gaze of the outdoors West looked at her unabashed, appreciating swiftly her points as they impinged themselves upon his admiration. The long, lithe lines of the slim, supple body, the languid grace missing hauteur only because that seemed scare worth while,

the unconscious pride of self that fails to be offensive only in a young woman so well equipped with good looks as this one indubitably was—the rider of the plains had appraised them all before his eyes dismissed her from his consideration and began a casual inspection of the passengers.

Inside of half an hour he had made himself persona grata to everybody in the car except his dark-eyed neighbor across the way. That this dispenser of smiles and cigars decided to leave her out in the distribution of his attentions perhaps spoke well for his discernment. Certainly responsiveness to the geniality of casual fellow passengers did not impress Mr. Collins as likely to be an outstanding quality in her. But with the drummer from Chicago, the young mining engineer going to Sonora, the two shy little English children just in front of him traveling to meet their father in California, he found intuitively common ground of interest. Even Major Meredith, the grim, gray-haired paymaster of the new road being run into Mexico as a feeder to the Transcontinental Pacific, relaxed at one of the plainsman's humorous tales.

It was after Collins had half-depopulated the car by leading the more jovial spirits back in search of liquid refreshments that an urbane clergyman, now of Boston but formerly of Pekin, Illinois, professedly much interested in the sheriff's touch-and-go manner as presumably a fine characteristic of the West, dropped into the vacant seat beside Major Meredith.

"And who might our energetic friend be?" he asked, with an ingratiating smile.

The young woman in front of them turned her head ever so slightly to listen.

"Val Collins is his name," said the major. "Sometimes called 'Bear-trap Collins.' He has always lived on the frontier. At least, I met him twelve years ago when he was riding mail between Aravaipa and Mesa. He was a boy then, certainly not over eighteen, but in a desperate fight he killed two men who tried to hold up the mail. Cow-puncher, stage-driver, miner, trapper, gambler, sheriff, rough rider, politician—he's past master at them all."

"And why the appellation of 'Bear-trap,' may I ask?" The smack of pulpit oratory was not often missing in the edifying discourse of the Reverend Peter Melancthon Ward.

"Well, sir, that's a story. He was trapping in the Tetons about five years ago thirty miles from the nearest ranch-house. One day, while he was setting a bear-trap, a slide of snow plunged down from the tree branches above and freed the spring, catching his hand between its jaws. With his feet and his other hand he tried to open that trap for four hours, without the slightest success. There was not one chance in a million of help from outside. In point of fact, Collins had not seen a human being for a month. There was only one thing to do, and he did it."

"And that was?"

"You probably noticed that he wears a glove over his left hand. The reason, sir, is that he has an artificial hand."

"You mean——" The Reverend Peter paused to lengthen his delicious thrill of horror.

"Yes, sir. That's just what I mean. He hacked his hand off at the wrist with his hunting-knife."

"Why, the man's a hero!" cried the clergyman, with unction.

Meredith flung him a disgusted look. "We don't go much on heroes in the army. He's game, if that's what you mean. Think I'll have a smoke, sir. Care to join me?"

But the Pekin-Bostonian preferred to stay and jot down in his note-book the story of the bear-trap, to be used later as a sermon illustration. This may have been the reason he did not catch the quick look that passed without the slightest flicker of the eyelids between Major Meredith and the young woman in Section 3. It was as if the old officer had wired her a message in some code the cipher of which was known only to them.

But the sheriff, returning at the head of his cohorts, caught it, and wondered

what meaning might lie back of that swift glance. Major Meredith and this dark-eyed beauty posed before others as strangers, yet between them lay some freemasonry of understanding to which he had not the key.

Collins did not know that the disdain in the eyes of Miss Wainwright—he had seen the name on her suit-case—gave way to horror when her glance fell on his gloved hand. She had a swift, shuddering vision of a grim-faced man, jaws set like a vise, hacking at his wrist with a hunting-knife. But the engaging impudence of his eye, the rollicking laughter in his voice shut out the picture instantly.

The young man resumed his seat, and Miss Wainwright her listless inspection of the flying stretches of brown desert. Dusk was beginning to fall, and the porter presently lit the lamps. Collins bought a magazine from the newsboy and relapsed into it, but before he was well adjusted to reading, the Limited pounded to a second unscheduled halt.

Instantly the magazine was thrown aside, and Collins' curly head thrust out of the window. Presently the head reappeared, simultaneously with the crack of a revolver, the first of a detonating fusillade.

"Another of your impatient citizens eager to utilize the unspeakable convenience of rapid transit," suggested the clergyman, with ponderous jocosity.

"No, sir; nothing so illegal," smiled the cattleman, a whimsical light in his daredevil eyes. He leaned forward and whispered a word to the little girl in front of him, who at once led her younger brother back to his section.

"I had hoped it would prove to be more diverting experience for a tenderfoot," condescended the gentleman of the cloth.

"It's ce'tainly a pleasure to be able to gratify you, sir. You'll be right pleased to know that it is a train hold-up." He waved his hand toward the door, and at the word, as if waiting for his cue, a masked man appeared at the end of the passage with a revolver in each hand.

CHAPTER II.

"Hands up!"

There was a ring of crisp menace in the sinister voice that was a spur to obedience. The unanimous show of hands voted "Aye" with a hasty precision that no amount of drill could have compassed.

It was a situation that might have made for laughter had there been spectators to appreciate. But of whatever amusement was to be had one of the victims seemed to hold a monopoly. Collins, his arm around the English children by way of comfort, offered a sardonic smile at the consternation his announcement and its fulfilment had created, but none of his fellow passengers were in the humor to respond.

The shock of an earthquake could not have blanched ruddy faces more surely. The Chicago drummer, fat and florid, had disappeared completely behind a buttress of the company's upholstery.

"God bless my soul!" gasped the Pekin-Bostonian, dropping his eyeglass and his accent at the same moment. The dismay in his face found a reflection all over the car. Miss Wainwright's hand clutched at her breast for an instant, and her color ebbed till her lips were ashen, but her neighbor across the aisle noticed that her eyes were steady and her figure tense.

"Scared stiff, but game," was his mental comment.

"Gents to the right and ladies to the left; line up against the walls; everybody waltz," called the man behind the guns, with grim humor.

The passengers fell into line as directed, Collins with the rest.

"You're calling this dance, son; it's your say-so, I guess," he conceded.

"Keep still, or I'll shoot you full of holes," growled the autocrat of the artillery.

"Why, sure! Ain't you the real thing in Jesse Jameses?" soothed the sheriff.

At the sound of Collins' voice, the masked man had started perceptibly, and his right hand had jumped for-

ward an inch or two to cover the speaker more definitely. Thereafter, no matter what else engaged his attention, the gleaming eyes behind the red bandanna never wandered for a moment from the big plainsman. He was taking no risks, for he remembered the saying current in Arizona, that after Collins' hardware got into action there was nothing left to do but plant the deceased and collect the insurance. He had personal reasons to know the fundamental accuracy of the colloquialism.

The train-conductor fussed up to the masked outlaw with a ludicrous attempt at authority. "You can't rob the passengers on this train. I'm not responsible for the express-car, but the coaches——"

A bullet grazed his ear and shattered a window on its way to the desert.

"Drift, you red-haired son of a Mexican!" ordered the man behind the red bandanna. "Git back to that seat real prompt."

The conductor drifted.

The minutes ticked themselves away in a tense strain marked by pounding hearts. The outlaw lounged on the arm of a seat, watching the sheriff alertly.

"Why doesn't the music begin?" volunteered Collins, by way of conversation, and quoted: "On with the dance. Let joy be unconfined."

A dull explosion answered his question. The bandits were blowing open the safe in the express-car with dynamite, pending which the looting of the passengers was at a standstill.

A second masked figure joined his companion at the end of the passage and held a hurried conversation with him. Fragments of their low-voiced talk came to Collins.

"Only a hundred thousand in the express-car. . . . Thirty thousand on the old man himself. . . . Where's the rest?" The irritation In the newcomer's voice was pronounced.

Collins slewed his head and raked the man with keen eyes that missed not a detail. He was certain that he had never seen the man before, yet he knew at once that the trim, wiry figure, so clean of build and so gallant of bearing, could belong only to Dolf Leroy, the most ruthless outlaw of the Southwest. It was written in his jaunty insolence, in the flashing eyes. He was a handsome fellow, white-toothed, black-haired, lithely tigerish, with masterful mouth and eyes of steel, so far as one might judge behind the white mask he wore. His hand was swarthy in hue, almost to the shade of a Mexican's. Alert, cruel, fearless from the head to the heel of him, he looked the very devil to lead an enterprise so lawless and so desperate as this. His vigilant eyes swept contemptuously up and down the car, rested for a moment on the young woman in Section 3, and came back to his partner.

"Bah! A flock of sheep—tamest bunch of spring lambs we ever struck. I'll send Scotty in to go through them. If anybody gets gay, drop him." And the outlaw turned on his heel. Another of the highwaymen took his place—a short, sturdy figure in the flannel shirt, spurs, and chaps of a cow-puncher.

"Come, Scotty, get a move on you," Collins implored. "This train's due at Tucson by eight o'clock. We're more than an hour late now. I'm holding down the job of sheriff in that same town, and I'm awful anxious to get a posse out after a bunch of train-robbers. So turn the wind, and go through the car on the jump. Help yourself to anything you find. Who steals my purse takes trash. 'Tis something, nothing. 'Twas mine; 'tis his. That's right, you'll find my roll in that left-hand pocket. I hate to have you take that gun, though. I meant to run you down with that same old Colt's reliable. Oh, well, just as you say. No, those kids get a free pass. They're going out to meet papa at Los Angeles, boys. See?"

Collins' running fire of comment had at least the effect of restoring the color to some cheeks that had been washed white and of snatching from the outlaws some portion of their sense of dominating the situation. But there was a veiled vigilance in his eyes that belied his easy carelessness.

"That lady across the aisle gets a pass, too, boys," continued the sheriff. "She's scared stiff now, and you won't bother her, if you're white men. Her watch and purse are on the seat. Take them, if you want them, and let it go at that."

Miss Mainwright listened to this dialogue silently. She stood before them cool and imperious and unwavering, but her face was bloodless and the pulse in her beautiful soft throat fluttered like a caged bird.

"Who's doing this job?" demanded one of the hold-ups, wheeling savagely on the impassive officer. "Did I say we were going to bother the lady? Who's doing this job, Mr. Sheriff?"

"You are. I'd hate to be messing the job like you—holding up the wrong train by mistake." This was a shot in the dark, but it seemed to hit the bull's-eye. "I wouldn't trust you boys to rob a hen-roost, the amateur way you go at it. When you get through, you'll all go to drinking like blue blotters. I know your kind—hell-bent to spend what you cash in, and every mother's son of you in the pen or with his toes turned up inside of a month."

"Who'll put us there?" gruffly demanded the walking arsenal.

Collins smiled at him with impudence superb. "I will—those of you that are left alive when you get through shooting each other in the back. Oh, I see your finish to a fare-you-well."

"Cheese it, or I'll bump you off." Scotty drove his gun into the sheriff's ribs.

"That's all right. You don't need to punctuate that remark. I line up with the sky-pilot and chew the cud of silence. I merely wanted to frame up to you how this thing's going to turn out. Don't come back at me and say I didn't warn you, Scotty?"

"You make my head ache—and my name ain't Scotty," snapped the bandit sourly, as he passed down the aisle with his sack, accumulating tribute as he went.

The red-kerchiefed robber whooped when they came to the car-conductor. "Dig up, Mr. Pullman. Go way down into your jeans. It's a right smart pleasure to divert the plunder of your bloated corporation back to the people. What! Only a hundred fifty-seven dollars. Oh, dig deeper, Mr. Rockefeller."

The drummer contributed to the sack eighty-seven dollars, a diamond ring, and a gold watch. His hands were trembling so that they played a tattoo on the sloping ceiling above him.

"What's the matter, Fatty? Got a chill?" inquired one of the robbers, as he deftly swept the plunder into the sack.

"For—God's sake—don't shoot. I have—a wife—and five children," he stammered, with chattering teeth.

"No race suicide for Fatty. But why-for do they let a sick man like you travel all by his lone?"

"I don't know—I—— Please turn that weapon another way."

"Plumb chuck full of malaria," soliloquized the owner of the weapon, playfully running its business end over the Chicago man's anatomy. "Here, Fatty. Load up with quinin and whisky. It's sure good for chills." Scotty gravely handed his victim back a dollar. "Write me if it cures you. Now, for the sky-pilot. No white chips on this plate, parson. It's a contribution to the needy heathen. You want to be generous. How much do you say?"

The man of the cloth reluctantly said eighty dollars thirty-five, and a silver-plated watch inherited from his fathers. The watch was declined, with thanks, the money accepted without.

The Pullman porter came into the car under compulsion of a revolver in the hand of the outlaw leader. His trembling finger pointed out the satchel and suit-case of Major Meredith, and under orders he carried out the baggage belonging to the retired army officer. Five minutes later three shots in rapid succession rang out in the still night air.

Scotty and his companion, who had apparently been waiting for the signal, retreated backward to the end of the car, still keeping the passengers covered. They flung rapidly two or three bullets through the roof, and, under

cover of the smoke, slipped out into the night. A moment later came the thud of galloping horses, more shots, and, when the patter of hoofs had died away—silence.

The sheriff was the first to break it. He thrust his brown hands deep into his pockets and laughed—laughed with the joyous, rollicking abandon of a tickled schoolboy.

"Hysterics?" ventured the mining engineer sympathetically.

Collins wiped his eyes. "Call 'em anything you like. What pleases me is that the reverend gentleman should have had this diverting experience so prompt after he was wishing for it." He turned, with concern, to the clergyman. "Satisfied, sir? Did our little entertainment please, or wasn't it up to the mark?"

But the transported native of Pekin was game. "I'm quite satisfied, if you are. I think the affair cost you a hundred dollars or so more than it did me."

"That's right," agreed the sheriff heartily. "But I don't grudge it—not a cent of it. The show was worth the price of admission."

The car-conductor had a broadside ready for him. "Seems to me you shot off your mouth more than you did that big gun of yours, Mr. Sheriff."

Collins laughed, and clapped him on the back. "That's right. I'm a regular phonograph when you wind me up." He did not think it necessary to explain that he had talked to make the outlaws talk, and that he had noted the quality of their voices so carefully that he would know them again among a thousand.

CHAPTER III.

The clanking car took up the rhythm of the rails as the delayed train plunged forward once more into the night. Again the clack of tongues, set free from fear, buzzed eagerly. The glow of the afterclap of danger was on them, and in the warm excitement each forgot the paralyzing fear that had but now padlocked his lips. Courage came back into flabby cheeks and red blood into hearts of water.

The sheriff, presuming on the new intimacy born of an exciting experience shared in common, stepped across the aisle, flung aside Miss Wainwright's impedimenta, and calmly seated himself beside her. She was a young woman capable of a hauteur chillier than ice to undue familiarity, but she did not choose at this moment to resent his assumption of a footing that had not existed an hour ago. Picturesque and unconventional conduct excuses itself when it is garbed in picturesque and engaging manners. She had, besides, other reasons for wanting to meet him, and they had to do with a sudden suspicion that flamed like tow in her brain. She had something for which to thank him—much more than he would be likely to guess, she thought—and she was wondering, with a surge of triumph, whether the irony of fate had not made his pretended consideration for her the means of his undoing.

"I am sorry you lost so much, Miss Wainwright," he told her.

"But, after all, I did not lose so much as you." Her dark, deep-pupiled eyes, long-lashed as Diana's, swept round to meet his coolly.

"That's a true word. My reputation has gone glimmering for fair, I guess." He laughed ruefully. "I shouldn't wonder, ma'am, when election time comes round, if the boys ain't likely to elect to private life the sheriff that lay down before a bunch of miscreants."

"Why did you do it?"

His humorous glance roamed round the car. "Now, I couldn't think it proper for me to shoot up this sumptuous palace on wheels. And wouldn't some casual passenger be likely to get his lights put out when the band began to play? Would you want that Boston church to be shy a preacher, ma'am?"

Her lips parted slightly in a curve of scorn. "I suppose you had your reasons for not interfering."

"Surely, ma'am. I hated to have them make a sieve of me."

"Were you afraid?"

"Most men are when Dolf Leroy's gang is on the war-path."

"Dolf Leroy?"

"That was Dolf who came in to see they were doing the job right. He's the worst desperado on the border—a sure enough bad proposition, I reckon. They say he's part Spanish and part Indian, but all p'isen. I don't know about that, for nobody knows who he really is. But the name is a byword in the country. People lower their voices when they speak of him and his night-riders."

"I see. And you were afraid of him?"

"Very much."

Her narrowed eyes looked over the strong lines of his lean face and were unconvinced. "I expect you found a better reason than that for not opposing them."

He turned to her with frank curiosity. "I'd like real well to have you put a name to it."

But he was instantly aware that her interest had been side-tracked. Major Meredith had entered the car, and was coming down the aisle. Plainer than words his eyes asked a question, and hers answered it.

The sheriff stopped him with a smiling query: "Hit hard, major?"

Meredith frowned. "The scoundrels took thirty thousand from me, and a hundred thousand from the express-car, I understand. Twenty thousand of it belonged to our road. I was expecting to pay off the men next Tuesday."

"Hope we'll be able to run them down for you," returned Collins cheerfully. "I suppose you lay it to Dolf Leroy's gang?"

"Of course. The work was too well done to leave any doubt of that." The major resumed his seat behind Miss Wainwright.

To that young woman the sheriff repeated his unanswered question in the form of a statement. "I'm waiting to learn that better reason, ma'am."

She was possessed of that spice of effrontery more to be desired than beauty. "Shall we say that you had no wish to injure your friends?"

"My friends?"

Her untender eyes mocked his astonishment. "Do I choose the wrong word?" she asked, with an audacity that was insolent in its aplomb. "Perhaps they are not your friends—these train-robbers? Perhaps they are mere casual acquaintances?"

His bold eyes studied with a new interest her superb, confident youth—the rolling waves of splendid Titian hair, the lovely, subtle eyes with the depths of shadowy pools in them, the alluring lines of long and supple loveliness. Certainly here was no sweet, ingenuous youth all prone to blushes, but the complex heir of that world-old wisdom the weaker sex has shaped to serve as a weapon against the strength that must be met with the wit of Mother Eve.

"You ce'tainly have a right vivid imagination, ma'am," he said dryly.

"You are quite sure you have never seen them before?" her velvet voice asked.

He laughed. "Well, no—I can't say I am."

"Aren't you quite sure you *have* seen them?"

Her eyes rested on him very steadily.

"You're smart as a whip, Miss Wainwright. I take off my hat to a young lady so clever. I guess you're right. About the identity of one of those masked gentlemen I'm pretty well satisfied."

She drew a long breath. "I thought so."

"Yes," he went on evenly, "I once earmarked him so that I'd know him again in case we met."

"I beg pardon. You—what?"

"Earmarked him. Figure of speech, ma'am. You may not have observed that the curly-headed person behind the guns was shy the forefinger of his right hand. We had a little difficulty once when he was resisting arrest, and it just happened that my gun fanned away his trigger-finger."

"They knew you—at least, two of them did."

"I've been pirootin' around this coun-

try boy and man for fifteen years. I ain't responsible for every yellow dog that knows me," he drawled.

"And I noticed that when you told them not to rob the children and not to touch me they did as you said."

"Hypnotism," he suggested, with a smile.

"So, not being a child, I put two and two together and draw an inference."

He seemed to be struggling with his mirth. "I see you do. Well, ma'am, I've been most everything since I hit the West, but this is the first time I've been taken for a train-robber."

"I didn't say that," she cried quickly.

"I think you mentioned an inference." The low laugh welled out of him and broke in his face. "I've been busy on one, too. It's a heap nearer the truth than yours, Miss—Meredith."

Her startled eyes and the swift movement of her hand toward her heart showed him how nearly he had struck home, how certainly he had shattered her cool indifference of manner.

He leaned forward, so close that even in the roar of the train his low whisper reached her. "Shall I tell you why the hold-ups didn't find more money on your father or in the express-car, Miss Meredith?"

She was shaken, so much so that her agitation trembled on her lips.

"Shall I tell you why your hand went to your breast when I first mentioned that the train was going to be held up, and again when your father's eyes were firing a mighty pointed question at you?"

"I don't know what you mean," she retorted, again mistress of herself.

Her gallant bearing compelled his admiration. The scornful eyes, the satirical lift of the nostrils, the erect, graceful figure, all flung a challenge at him. He called himself hard names for putting her on the rack, but the necessity to make her believe in him was strong within him.

"I noticed you went right chalky when I announced the hold-up, and I thought it was because you were scared. That was where I did you an injustice, ma'am, and you can call this an apology. You've got sand. If it hadn't been *for what you carry in the chamois skin hanging on the chain round your neck* you would have enjoyed every minute of the little entertainment. You're as game as they make them."

"May I ask how you arrived at this melodramatic conclusion?" she asked, her disdainful lip curling.

"By using my eyes and my ears, ma'am. I shouldn't have noticed your likeness to Major Meredith, perhaps, if I hadn't observed that there was a secret understanding between you. Now, whyfor should you be passing as strangers? I could guess one reason, and only one. There have twice been hold-ups of the paymaster on the Elkhorn branch. It was to avoid any more of these that Major Meredith was appointed to the position. He has made good up till now. But there have been rumors for months that he would be held up either before leaving the train or while he was crossing the desert. He didn't want to be seen taking the boodle from the express company at Tucson. He would rather have the impression get out that this was just a casual visit. It occurred to him to bring along some unsuspected party to help him out. The robbers would never expect to find the money on a woman. That's why the major brought his daughter with him. Doesn't it make you some uneasy to be carrying a hundred thousand in small bills sewed in your clothes and hung round your neck?"

She broke into musical laughter, natural and easy.

"I should think, ma'am, you'd crinkle more than a silk-lined lady sailing down a church aisle on Sunday."

A picture in the magazine she was toying with seemed to interest her.

"I expect that's the signal for 'Exit Collins.' I'll say good-by till next time, Miss Meredith."

"Oh, is there going to be a next time?" she asked, with elaborate carelessness.

"Several of them."

"Indeed!"

He took a note-book from his pocket and wrote.

"I ain't the son of a prophet, but I'm venturing a prediction," he explained.

She had nothing to say, and she said it eloquently.

"Concerning an investment in futurities I'm making," he continued.

Her magazine article seemed to be beginning well.

"It's a little guess about how this train-robbery is coming out. If you don't mind, I'll leave it with you." He tore the page out, put it in an empty envelope, sealed the flap, and handed it to her.

"Open it in two weeks, and see whether my guess is a good one."

The dusky lashes swept round indolently. "Suppose I were to open it to-night?"

"I'll risk it," smiled the blue eyes.

"On honor, am I?"

"That's it." He held out a big, brown hand.

"You're going to try to capture the robbers, are you?"

"I've been thinking that way."

"And I suppose you've promised yourself success."

"It's on the knees of chance, ma'am. I may get them. They may get me."

"But this prediction of yours?" She held up the sealed envelope.

"That's about another matter."

"But I don't understand. You said——" She gave him a chance to explain.

"It ain't meant you should. You'll understand plenty at the proper time."

He offered her his hand again. "Good-by—till next time."

The suède glove came forward, and was buried in his hand-shake.

He understood it to be an unvoiced apology of its owner for her suspicions, and his instinct was correct. For how could her doubts hold their ground when he had showed himself a sharer in her secret and a guardian of it? And how could anything sinister lie behind those frank, unwavering eyes or consist with that long, clean stride that was carrying him so splendidly to the smoking-compartment?

CHAPTER IV.

The experience of Collins had led him to expect that the saloons of southern Arizona would be a more likely field in which to search for the men he wanted than would the far, silent places of the deserts. He gave them a week to hide the treasure and to recover from the first fright of the inevitable fruitless pursuit along imagined trails.

At the expiration of that time he had the pleasure of ripping open a telegram marked "Epitaph," which read:

Eastern man says you don't want what is salable here.

Collins' keen eye cut out every other word, and garnered the wheat of the message:

"Man you want is here."

This was what his correspondent had written, and the sheriff boarded the first train for Epitaph.

Into the Gold Nugget Saloon that evening dropped Val Collins, big, blond, and jaunty. He looked far less the vigilant sheriff than the gregarious cow-puncher on a search for amusement. Del Hawkes, an old-time friend of his staging days, pounced on him and dragged him to the bar, whence his glance fell genially on the roulette-wheel and its devotees, wandered casually across the impassive poker and Mexican monte-players, took in the enthroned musicians, who were industriously murdering "La Paloma," and came to rest for barely an instant at a distant faro-table. In the curly-haired gambler facing the dealer he saw the man he had come seeking. Nor did he need to look for the hand with the missing finger to be sure it was York Neil.

But the man beside Neil, the black-haired, swarthy fellow from whose presence something at once formidable and gallant and sinister seemed to breathe—the very sight of him set Collins' heart to beating fast with a wild guess. Surely, here was a worthy figure on whom to fit the name and reputation of the notorious Dolf Leroy.

Yet the sheriff's eyes rested scarce

an instant before they went traveling again, for he wanted to show as yet no special interest in the object of his suspicions. The gathering was a motley one, picturesque in its diversity. For here had drifted not only the stranded derelicts of a frontier civilization, but selected types of all the turbid elements that go to make up its success. Mexican, millionaire, and miner brushed shoulders at the roulette-wheel. Chinaman and cow-puncher, Papago and plainsman, tourist and tailor, bucked the tiger side by side with a democracy found nowhere else in the world. The click of the wheel, the monotonous call of the croupier, the murmur of many voices in alien tongues, and the high-pitched jarring note of boisterous laughter, were all merged in a medley of confusion as picturesque as the scene itself.

"Business not anyways slack at the Nugget," ventured Collins, to the bartender.

"No, I don't know as 'tis. Nearly always somethin' doing in little old Epitaph," answered the public quencher of thirsts, polishing the glass top of the bar with a cloth.

"Playing with the lid off back there, ain't they?" The sheriff's nod indicated the distant faro-table.

"That's right, I guess. Only blue chips go."

"It's Dolf Leroy—that Mexican-looking fellow there," Hawkes explained. "A bad man with the gun, they say, too. Well, him and York Neil and Scotty Dailey blew in last night from their mine, up at Saguache. Gave it out he was going to break the bank, Leroy did. Backing that opinion usually comes high, but Leroy is about two thousand to the good, they say."

"Scotty Dailey? Don't think I know him."

"That shorthorn in chaps and a red bandanna is the gentleman; him that's playing the wheel so constant. You don't miss no world-beater when you don't know Scotty. He's Leroy's Man Friday. Understand they've struck it rich. Anyway, they're hitting high places while the mazuma lasts."

"I can't seem to locate their mine. What's its brand?"

"The Dalriada. Some other guy is in with them; Cork Reilly, I believe it is."

"Queer thing, luck; strikes about as unexpected as lightning. Have another, Del?"

"Don't care if I do, Val. It always makes me thirsty to see people I like. Anything new up Tucson way?"

The band had fallen on "Manzanilla," and was rending it with variations when Collins circled round to the wheel and began playing the red. He took a place beside the bow-legged vaquero with the red bandanna knotted loosely round his throat. For five minutes the cow-puncher attended strictly to his bets. Then he cursed softly, and asked Collins to exchange places with him.

"This place is my hoodoo. I can't win——" The sentence died in the man's throat, became an inarticulate gurgle of dismay.

He had looked up and met the steady eyes of the sheriff, and the surprise of it had driven the blood from his heart. A revolver thrust into his face could not have shaken him more than that serene smile.

Collins took him by the arm with a jovial laugh meant to cover their retreat, and led him into one of the curtained alcove rooms. As they entered he noticed out of the corner of his eye that Leroy and Neil were still intent on their game. Not for a moment, not even while the barkeeper was answering their call for liquor, did the sheriff release Scotty from the rigor of his eyes, and when the attendant drew the curtain behind him the officer let his smile take on a new meaning.

"What did I tell you, Scotty?"

"Prove it," defied Scotty. "Prove it—you can't prove it."

"What can't I prove?"

"Why, that I was in that——" Scotty stopped abruptly, and watched the smile broaden on the strong face opposite him. His dull brain had come to his rescue none too soon.

"Now, ain't it funny how people's thoughts get to running on the same

thing? Last time I met up with you there you was collecting a hundred dollars and keep-the-change cents from me, and now here you are spending it. It's ce'tainly curious how both of us are remembering that little séance in the Pullman car."

Scotty took refuge in a dogged silence. He was sweating fear.

"Yes, sir. It comes up right vivid before me. There was you a-trainin' your guns on me——"

"I wasn't," broke in Scotty, falling into the trap.

"That's right. How come I to make such a mistake? Of cou'se you carried the sack and Cork Reilly held the guns." The man cursed quietly, and relapsed into silence.

"Always buy your clothes in pairs?"

The sheriff's voice showed only a pleasant interest, but the outlaw's frightened eyes were puzzled at this sudden turn.

"Wearing a bandanna same color and pattern as you did the night of our jamboree on the Limited, I see. That's mightily careless of you, ain't it?"

Instinctively a shaking hand clutched at the kerchief. "It don't cut any ice because a hold-up wears a mask made out of stuff like this——"

"Did I say it was a mask he wore?" the gentle voice quizzed.

Scotty, beads of perspiration on his forehead, collapsed as to his defense. He fell back sullenly to his first position: "You can't prove anything."

"Can't I?" The sheriff's smile went out like a snuffed candle. Eyes and mouth were cold and hard as chiseled marble. He leaned forward far across the table, a confident, dominating assurance painted on his face. "Can't I? Don't you bank on that. I can prove all I need to, and your friends will prove the rest. They'll be falling all over themselves to tell what they know —and Mr. Dailey will be holding the sack again, while Leroy and the rest are slipping out."

The outlaw sprang to his feet, white to the lips.

"It's a damned lie. Leroy would never——" He stopped, again just in time to bite back the confession hovering on his lips. But he had told what Collins wanted to know.

The curtain parted, and a figure darkened the doorway—a slender little figure that moved on springs. Out of its sardonic, devil-may-care face gleamed malevolent eyes which rested for a moment on Dailey, before they came home to the sheriff.

"And what is it Leroy would never do?" a gibing voice demanded silkily.

CHAPTER V.

Collins did not lift a finger or move an eyelash, but with the first word a wary alertness ran through him and starched his figure to rigidity. He gathered himself together for what might come.

"Well, I am waiting. What is it Leroy would never do?" The voice carried a scoff with it, the implication that his very presence had stricken conspirators dumb.

Collins offered the explanation.

"Mr. Dailey was beginning a testimonial of your virtues just as you right happily arrived in time to hear it. Perhaps he will now proceed."

But Dailey had never a word left. His blunders had been crying ones, and his chief's menacing look had warned him what to expect. The courage oozed out of his heart, for he counted himself already a dead man.

"And who are you, my friend, that make so free with Dolf Leroy's name?" It was odd how every word of the drawling sentence contrived to carry a taunt and a threat with it, strange what a deadly menace the glittering eyes shot forth.

"My name is Collins."

"Sheriff of Pima County?"

"Yes."

The eyes of the men met like rapiers, as steady and as searching as cold steel. Each of them was appraising the rare quality of his opponent in this duel to the death that was before him.

"What are you doing here? Ain't Pima County your range?"

"I've been discussing with your

friend the late hold-up on the Pacific Transcontinental."

"Ah!" Leroy knew that the sheriff was serving notice on them of his purpose to run down the bandits. Swiftly his mind swept up the factors of the situation. Should he draw now and chance the result, or wait for a more certain ending? He decided to wait, moved by the consideration that even if he were victorious the lawyers were sure to draw out of the fat-brained Scotty the cause of the quarrel.

"Well, that don't interest me any, though I suppose you have to explain a heap how come they to hold you up and take your gun. I'll leave you and your jelly-fish Scotty to your gabfest. Then you better run back home to Tucson. We don't go much on visiting sheriffs here." He turned on his heel with an insolent laugh, and left the sheriff alone with Dailey.

The superb contempt of the man, his readiness to give the sheriff a chance to pump out of Dailey all he knew, served to warn Collins that his life was in imminent danger. On no hypothesis save one—that Leroy had already condemned them both to death in his mind—could he account for such rashness. And that the blow would fall soon, before he had time to confer with other officers, was a corollary to the first proposition.

"He'll surely kill me on sight," Scotty burst out.

"Yes, he'll kill you," agreed the sheriff, "unless you move first."

"Move, how?"

"Against him. Protect yourself by lining up with me. It's your only show on earth."

Dailey's eyes flashed. "Then, by thunder, I ain't taking it! I'm no coyote, to round on my pardners."

"I give it to you straight. He means murder."

Perspiration poured from the man's face. "I'll light out of the country."

The sheriff shook his head. "You'd never get away alive. Besides, I want you for holding up the Limited. The safest place for you is in jail, and that's where I'm going to put you. Drop that gun! Quick! That's right. Now, you and I are going out of this saloon by the back door. I'm going to walk beside you, and we're going to laugh and talk as if we were the best of friends, but my hand ain't straying any from the end of my gun. Get that, *amigo?* All right. Then we'll take a little *pasear.*"

As Collins and his prisoner reappeared in the main lobby of the Gold Nugget, a Mexican slipped out of the back door of the gambling-house. The sheriff called Hawkes aside.

"I want you to call a hack for me, Del. Bring it round to the back door, and arrange with the driver to whip up for the depot as soon as we get in. We ought to catch that 12:20 up-train. When the hack gets here just show up in the door. If you see Leroy or Neil hanging around the door, put your hand up to your tie. If the coast is clear, just move off to the bar and order something."

"Sure," said Hawkes, and was off at once, though just a thought unsteady from his frequent libations.

Both hands of the big clock on the wall pointed to twelve when Hawkes appeared again in the doorway at the rear of the Gold Nugget. With a wink at Collins, he made straight for the cocktail he thought he needed.

"Now," said the sheriff, and immediately he and Dailey passed through the back door.

Instantly two shots rang out. Collins lurched forward to the ground, drawing his revolver as he fell. Scotty, twisting from his grasp, ran in a crouch toward the alley along the shadow of the buildings. Shots spattered against the wall as his pursuers gave chase. When the Gold Nugget vomited from its rear door a rush of humanity eager to see the trouble, the noise of their footsteps was already dying in the distance.

Hawkes found his friend leaning against the back of the hack, his revolver smoking in his hand.

"For God's sake, Val!" screamed Hawkes. "Did they get you?"

"Punctured my leg. That's all. But I expect they'll get Dailey."

"How come you to go out when I signaled you to stay?"

"Signaled me to stay, why——"

Collins stopped, unwilling to blame his friend. He knew now that Hawkes, having mixed his drinks earlier in the evening, had mixed his signals later.

"Get me a horse, Del, and round up two or three of the boys. I've got to get after those fellows. They are the ones that held up the Limited last week. Find out for me what hotel they put up at here. I want their rooms searched. Send somebody round to the corrals, and let me know where they stabled their horses. If they left any papers or saddle-bags, get them for me."

Fifteen minutes later Collins was in the saddle ready for the chase, and only waiting for his volunteer posse to join him. They were just starting when a frightened Chinaman ran into the plaza with the news that there had been shooting just back of his laundry on the edge of town, and that a man had been killed.

When the sheriff reached the spot, he lowered himself from the saddle and limped over to the black mass huddled against the wall in the bright moonlight. He turned the riddled body over and looked down into the face of the dead man. It was that of the outlaw, Scotty Dailey. That the body had been thoroughly searched was evident, for all around him were scattered his belongings. Here an old letter and a sack of tobacco, its contents emptied on the ground. There his coat and vest, the linings of each of them ripped out and the pockets emptied. Even the boots and socks of the man had been removed, so thorough had been the search. Whatever the murderers had been looking for it was not money, since his purse, still fairly well lined with greenbacks, was found behind a cactus bush a few yards away.

"What in time were they after?" frowned Collins. "If it wasn't his money—and it sure wasn't—what was it? Guess I'll not follow Mr. Leroy just now till my leg is in better shape. Maybe I had better investigate a little bit round town first."

The body was taken back to the Gold Nugget and placed on a table, pending the arrival of the undertaker. It chanced that Collins, looking absently over the crowd, glimpsed a gray felt hat that looked familiar by reason of a frayed silver band round it. Underneath the hat was a Mexican, and him the sheriff ordered to step forward.

"Where did you get that hat, Manuel?"

"My name is José—José Archuleta," corrected the olive-hued one.

"I ain't worrying about your name, son. What I want to know is where you found that hat."

"In the alley off the plaza, señor."

"All right. Chuck it up here."

"Muy bien, señor." And the dusty hat was passed from hand to hand till it reached the sheriff.

Collins ripped off the silver band and tore out the sweat-pad. It was an off chance—one in a thousand—but worth trying none the less. And a moment later he knew it was the chance that won. For sewed to the inside of the discolored sweat-pad was a little strip of silk. With his knife he carefully removed the strip, and found between it and the leather a folded fragment of paper closely covered with writing. He carried this to the light, and made it out to be a memorandum of direction of some sort. Slowly he spelled out the poorly written words:

From Y. N. took Unowhat. Went twenty yards strate for big rock. Eight feet direckly west. Fifty yards in direcksion of suthern Antelope Peke. Then eighteen to nerest cotonwood. J. W. begins hear.

Collins read the scrawl twice before an inkling of its meaning came home to him. Then in a flash his brain was lighted. It was a memorandum of the place where Dailey's share of the plunder was buried.

His confederates had known that he had it, and had risked capture to make a thorough search for the paper. That they had not found it was due only to the fact that the murdered man had

lost his hat as he scurried down the streets before them.

CHAPTER VI.

While the doctor was probing for the bullet lodged in Collins' leg, Collins studied the memorandum found in Dailey's hat. He found it blind, disappointing work, for there was no clearly indicated starting-point. Bit by bit he took it:

From Y. N. took Unowhat.

This was clear enough, so far as it went. It could only mean that from York Neil the writer had taken the plunder to hide. But *where* did he take it? From what point? A starting-point must be found somewhere, or the memorandum was of no use. Probably only Neil could supply the needed information, now that Dailey was dead.

Went twenty yards strate for big rock. Eight feet direckly west. Fifty yards in direcksion of suthern Antelope Peke. Then eighteen to nerest cotonwood.

All this was plain enough, but the last sentence was the puzzler.

J. W. begins hear.

Was J. W. a person? If so, what did he begin? If Dailey had buried his plunder, what had J. W. left to do?

But *had* he buried it? Collins smiled. It was not likely he had handed it over to anybody else to hide for him. And yet——

He clapped his hand down on his knee. "By the jumping California frog, I've got it!" he told himself. "They hid the bulk of what they got from the Limited all together. Went out in a bunch to hide it. Blindfolded each other, and took turn about blinding up the trail. No one of them can go get the loot without the rest. When they want it, every one of these memoranda must be Johnny-on-the-spot before they can dig up the mazuma. No wonder Dolf Leroy searched so thorough for this bit of paper. I'll bet a stack of blue chips against Dolf's chance of heaven that he's the sorest train-robber right this moment that ever punctured a car-window."

Collins laughed softly, nor had the smile died out of his eyes when Hawkes came into the room with information to the point. He had made a round of the corrals, and discovered that the outlaws' horses had been put up at Jim Webster's place, a tumble-down feed-station on the edge of town.

"Jim didn't take kindly to my questions," Hawkes explained, "but after a little rock-me-to-sleep-mother talk I soothed him down some, and cut the trail of Dolf Leroy and his partners. The old man give me several specimens of langwidge unwashed and uncombed when I told him Dolf and York was outlaws and train-robbers. Didn't believe a word of it, he said. 'Twas just like the fool officers to jump an innocent party. I told Jim to keep his shirt on—he could turn his wolf loose when they framed up that he was in it. Well, sir! I plumb thought for a moment he was going to draw on me when I said that."

Collins' eyes narrowed to slits, as they always did when he was thinking intensely. Did Jim Webster's interest in Leroy have its source merely in their being birds of a feather, or was there a more direct community of lawlessness between them? He had known of the old man for years as a border-smuggler and a suspected horse-thief. Was he also a member of Dolf Leroy's murderous gang? Three men had joined in the chase of Dailey, but the tracks had told him that only two horses had galloped from the scene of the murder into the night. The inference left to draw was that a local accomplice had joined them in the chase of Scotty, and had slipped back home after the deed had been finished.

What more likely than that Webster had been this accomplice? He had been for years at outs with the law. He was—— "J. W. begins hear." Like a flash the ill-written scrawl jumped to

his sight. "J. W." was Jim Webster. What luck!

The doctor finished his work, and Collins tested his leg gingerly. "Del, I'm going over to have a little talk with the old man. Want to go along?"

"You bet I do, Val"—from Del Hawkes.

"You mustn't walk on that leg for a week or two yet, Mr. Collins," the doctor explained, shaking his head.

"That so, doctor? And it's nothing but a nice clean flesh-wound! Sho! I've a deal more confidence in you than that. Ready, Del?"

"It's at your risk, then, Mr. Collins."

"Sure." The sheriff smiled. "I'm *living* at my own risk, doctor. But I'd a heap rather be alive than daid, and take all the risk that's coming, too. But since you make a point of it, I'll do my walking on a bronco's back."

They found Mr. Webster just emerging from the stable with a saddle-pony when they rode into the corral. At a word from Collins, Hawkes took the precaution to close the corral gate.

The old man held a wary position on the farther side of his horse, the while he ripped out a raucous string of invectives.

"Real fluent, ain't he?" murmured Hawkes, as he began to circle round to flank the enemy.

"Stay right there, Del Hawkes. Move, you red-haided son of a brand blotter, and I'll pump holes in you!" A rifle leveled across the saddle emphasized his sentiments.

"Hospitable, ain't he?" grinned Hawkes, coming promptly to a halt.

Collins rode slowly forward, his hand on the butt of the revolver that still lay in its scabbard. The Winchester covered every step of his progress, but he neither hastened nor faltered, though he knew his life hung in the balance. If his steely blue eyes had released for one moment the wolfish ones of the old villain, if he had hesitated or hurried, he would have been shot through the head.

But the eyes of a brave man are the king of weapons. Webster's fingers itched at the trigger he had not the courage to pull. For such an unflawed nerve he knew himself no match.

"Keep back," he screamed. "Damn it, another step and I'll fire!"

But he did not fire, though Collins rode up to him, dismounted, and threw the end of the rifle carelessly from him.

"Don't be rash, old man. I've come here to put you under arrest for robbing the T. P. Limited, and I'm going to do it."

The indolent, contemptuous drawl, so free of even a suggestion of the strain the sheriff must have been under, completed his victory. The fellow lowered his rifle with a peevish oath.

"You're barkin' up the wrong tree, Val Collins."

"I guess not," retorted the sheriff easily. "Del, you better relieve Mr. Webster of his ballast. He ain't really fit to be trusted with a weapon, and him so excitable. That Winchester came awful near going off, my son. You don't want to be so careless when you're playing with firearms. It's a habit that's liable to get you into trouble."

Collins had not shaved death so closely without feeling a reaction of boyish gaiety at his adventure. It bubbled up in his talk like effervescing soda.

"Now we'll go into a committee of the whole, gentlemen, adjourn to the stable, and have a little game of 'Button, button, who's got the button?' You first, Mr. Webster. If you'll kindly shuck your coat and vest, we'll begin button-hunting."

They diligently searched the old miscreant without finding anything pertaining to "J. W. begins hear."

"He's bound to have it somewhere," asseverated Collins. "It don't stand to reason he was making his getaway without that paper. We got to be more thorough, Del."

Hawkes, under the direction of his friend, ripped out linings and tore away pockets from clothing. The saddle on the bronco and the saddle-blankets were also torn to pieces in vain.

Finally Hawkes scratched his poll and looked down on the wreckage. "I

hate to admit it, Val, but the old fox has got us beat; it ain't on his person."

"Not unless he's got it under his skin," agreed Collins, with a grin.

"Maybe he ate it. Think we better operate and find out?"

An idea hit the sheriff. He walked up to Webster and ordered him to open his mouth.

The jaws set like a vise.

Collins poked his revolver against the closed mouth. "Swear for us, old bird. Get a move on you."

The mouth opened, and Collins inserted two fingers. When he withdrew them they brought a set of false teeth. Under the plate was a tiny rubber bag that stuck to it. Inside the bag was a paper.

CHAPTER VII.

Velvet night had fallen over Arizona and blotted out all but the softer tones of color. A million stars looked down upon a land magically flooded with moonlight.

Even through her growing fear, the girl who wandered helplessly across washes and over rises was touched by the wonder-working spell; she felt its beauty as an added horror to the oppression of the heart that was beginning to rise to her throat in sobs. For she was lost, and had been almost from the moment, many hours before, when she had seen her pony disappear over the brow of the nearest hillock while she panted vainly in chase.

Worn out, she sank down on a sandy hillside, still fighting with her fears and the sense of desolation gripping at her. She had left the Circle Thirty-three Ranch blithely that morning, all the glory of the wonderful primeval day singing through her like champagne. Sunlight in a flood, miraculous, untempered, had been over the young earth, and the girl had ridden far, rejoicing in the youth that made life such a wild delight. She had dismounted to pick some poppies to take back to the ranch, and her pony, startled at a rattlesnake, had flung up its heels and fled. Since then she had tramped with aching, blistered feet, broiled by the fierce sun, her parched throat a lime-kiln. She had thought it would be better after nightfall, but with the evening had come a haunting fear of all this endless moonlit desert space.

Why didn't they look for her? Didn't they know she needed help? Would they leave her to die unfound? She broke down utterly, sobbing like a child and finding relief in self-pity at her situation.

And then, out of that moonlit sea of desert rose a voice, a clear, sweet tenor, swelling bravely with the very ecstasy of pathos.

It was the prison song from "Il Trovatore," and the desolation of its lifted appeal went to the heart like water to the roots of flowers.

> Ah! I have sigh'd to rest me
> Deep in the quiet grave.

The girl's sob caught in her breast, stilled with the awe of that heavenly music. So for an instant she waited before it was borne in on her that the voice was a human one, and that the heaven from which it descended was the hilltop above her.

A wild laugh, followed by an oath, cut the dying echoes of the song. She could hear the swish of a quirt falling again and again, and the sound of trampling hoofs thudding on the hard, sun-cracked ground. Startled, she sprang to her feet, and saw silhouetted against the sky-line a horse and his rider fighting for mastery.

The battle was superb while it lasted. The horse had been a famous outlaw, broken to the saddle by its owner out of the sheer passion for victory, but there were times when its savage strength rebelled at abject submission, and this was one of them. It swung itself skyward, and came down like a pile-driver, camel-backed, and without joints in the legs. Swiftly it rose again, lunging forward and whirling in the air, then jarred down at an angle. The brute did its malevolent best, a fury incarnate. But the rider was a match, and more than a match, for it. He sat the saddle like a Centaur, with

the perfect, unconscious grace of a born master, swaying in his seat as need was, and spurring the horse to a blinder fury.

Sudden as had been the start, no less sudden was the finish of the battle. The bronco, pounded to a stiff-legged standstill, trembled for a long minute like an aspen, and sank to a tame surrender, despite the sharp spurs roweling its bloody sides.

"Ah, my beauty. You've had enough, have you?" demanded the cruel, triumphant voice of the rider. "You would try that game, would you? I'll teach you."

"Stop spurring that horse, you bully."

The man stopped, in sheer amazement at this apparition which had leaped out of the ground almost at his feet. His wary glance circled the hills to make sure she was alone.

"Ce'tainly, ma'am. We're sure delighted to meet up with you. Ain't we, Two-step?"

For himself, he spoke the simple truth. He lived in his sensations, spurring himself to fresh ones as he had but just now been spurring his horse to sate the greed of conquest in him. And this high-spirited, gallant Diana—for her costume told him she had been riding—offered a rare fillip to his jaded appetite. The dusky, long-lashed eyes which always give a woman an effect of beauty, the splendid fling of head, and the piquant, finely cut features, with their unconscious tale of Brahmin caste, the long lines of the supple body, willowy and yet plump as a partridge—they went to his head like strong wine. Here was an adventure from the gods—a stubborn will to bend, the pride of a haughty young beauty to trail in the dust, her untamed heart to break if need be. The lust of the battle was on him already. She was a woman to dream about,

> "Sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
> Or Cytherea's breath,"

he told himself exultantly as he slid from his horse and stood bowing before her.

And he, for his part, was a taking enough picture of devil-may-care gallantry gone to seed. The touch of jaunty impudence in his humility, not less than the daring admiration of his handsome eyes and the easy, sinuous grace of his flexed muscles, labeled him what he was—a man bold and capable to do what he willed, and a villain every inch of him.

Said she, after that first clash of stormy eyes with bold, admiring ones:

"I am lost—from the Circle Thirty-three Ranch."

"Why, no, you're found," he corrected, white teeth flashing in a smile.

"My horse got away from me this morning. I've been"—there was a catch in her voice—"wandering ever since."

He whirled to his saddle, and had the canteen thongs unloosed in a moment. While she drank he rummaged from his saddle-bags some sandwiches of jerky and a flask of whisky. She ate the sandwiches, he the while watching her with amused sympathy in his swarthy countenance.

"You ain't half-bad at the chuck-wagon, Miss Meredith," he told her.

She stopped, the sandwich part way to her mouth. "I don't remember your face. I've met so many people since I came to the Circle Thirty-three. Still, I think I should remember you."

He immediately relieved of duty her quasi apology. "You haven't seen *my face* before," he laughed, and, though she puzzled over the double meaning that seemed to lurk behind his words and amuse him, she could not find the key to it. "But you're famous now, Miss Meredith, since the story got out of how you fooled Dolf Leroy's gang out of a hundred thousand dollars."

She frowned. It had annoyed her a good deal that the superintendent of construction on the Elkhorn branch had talked so much of her exploit that it had become common talk in Cattleland. No matter into what unfrequented cañon she rode, some silent cow-puncher would look at her with admiring eyes behind which she read a knowledge of the story. It was a

lonely, desolate country, full of the wide, deep silences of utter emptiness, yet there could not a foot fall but the word was bruited on the wings of the wind.

"Do you know where the Circle Thirty-three is?" she demanded.

He nodded.

"Can you take me home?"

"I surely can. But not to-night. You're done up for fair. We'll camp out, and in the mo'ning we'll hit the trail."

"Is it far?"

"Twenty-seven miles as the crow flies. You sit down on this blanket and watch me start a fire so quick your head will swim."

"I can't stay out alone all night; and my father will be anxious. Besides, I couldn't sleep outdoors."

"Now if I'd only thought to bring a load of lumber and some carpenters along—and a chaperon," he burlesqued, gathering broken mesquit and cottonwood branches.

She watched him uneasily. "Isn't there a ranch-house near?"

"You wouldn't call it near by the time we had reached it. What's to hinder your sleeping here? Isn't this room airy enough? And don't you like the system of lighting? 'Twas patented I disremember how many million years ago."

He soon had a cup of steaming coffee ready for her, and the heat of it made a new woman of her. She sat in the warm fire glow, and began to feel stealing over her a delightful reaction of languor.

"Since you know my name, isn't it fair that I should know yours?" she asked, a more amiable light in her untender eyes than he had yet seen.

"You may call me a shepherd of the desert, since I find the lamb that was lost."

"Then, Mr. Shepherd, I'm very glad to meet you," she said. "I don't remember when I was ever more glad to meet a stranger." And she added with a little laugh: "It's a pity I'm too sleepy to do my duty by you in a social way."

"We'll let that wait till to-morrow. You'll entertain me plenty then. I'll make your bunk up right away."

She was presently lying with her feet to the fire, rolled in his blankets and with his saddle for a pillow. But, though her eyes were heavy, her brain was still too active to permit her to get to sleep immediately. The experience was too near a one, the emotions of the day too vividly poignant, to lose their hold on her at once.

And this fascinating scamp, one moment flooding the moonlit desert with inspired snatches from the opera sung in the voice of an angel, and the next lashing out at his horse like a devil incarnate, was not to be dismissed with a thought. Who and what was he? How reconcile the man he seemed with the man he might have been? For every inflection of his voice, every motion of his person, proclaimed the strain of good blood gone wrong and trampled under foot of set, sardonic purpose, interpreted him as the fallen gentleman in a hell of his own choosing. Lounging on an elbow in the flickering shadows, so carelessly insouciant in every picturesque inch of him, he seemed to radiate the romance of the untamed frontier.

She fell asleep thinking of him, and when she awakened, his gay whistle was the first sound that fell on her ears. The morning was still very young, but the abundant desert light dismissed sleep summarily. She shook and brushed the wrinkles out of her skirt, and with her handkerchief attempted a dry wash. Already he had the coffee simmering on the fire when she came up noiselessly behind him.

But, though she thought her approach had been silent, his trained senses were apprised.

"Good mo'ning! How did you find your bedroom?" he asked, without turning from the bacon he was broiling on the end of a stick.

"Quite up to the specifications. I never slept better. But have you eyes in the back of your head?"

He laughed grimly. "I have to be all eyes and ears in my business."

"Is your business of a nature so sensitive?"

"As much so as stocks on Wall Street. And we haven't any ticker to warn us to get under cover. Do you take cream in your coffee, Miss Meredith?"

She looked round in surprise. "Cream?"

"We're in tin-can land, you know, and live on air-tights. I milk my cow with a can-opener. Let me recommend this quail on toast." He handed her a battered tin plate, and prepared to help her from the frying-pan.

"I suppose that is another name for pork?"

"No, really. I happened to bag a couple of hooters last night."

"You're a missionary of the good-foods movement. I shall name your mission St. Sherry's-in-the-Wilderness."

"Ah, Sherry's! That's since my time. I don't suppose I should know my way about in little old New York now."

She found him eager to pick up again the broken strands that had connected him with the big world from which she had just come. It had been long since she had enjoyed a talk more, for he expressed himself with wit and dexterity. But through her enjoyment ran a note of apprehension. He was for the moment a resurrected gentleman. But what would he be next? She had an insistent memory of a heavenly flood of music broken by a horrible discord of raucous oaths.

It was he that lingered over their breakfast, loath to make the first move to bring him back into realities; and it was she that had to suggest the need of setting out. But once on his feet, he saddled and packed swiftly, with a deftness born of experience.

"We'll have to ask Two-step to carry double to-day," he said, as he helped her to a place behind him.

Leroy let his horse take it easy, except when some impulse of mischief stirred him to break into a canter so as to make the girl put her arm round his waist for support. They stopped about noon by a stream in a cañon defile to lunch and rest the pony.

"I don't remember this place at all. Are we near home?" she asked.

"About five miles. I reckon you're right tired. It's an unhandy way to ride."

Every mile took them deeper into the mountains, through winding cañons and over unsuspected trails, and the girl's uneasiness increased with the wildness of the country.

"Are you *sure* we're going the right way? I don't think we can be," she suggested more than once.

"Dead sure," he answered the last time, letting Two-step turn into a blind draw opening from sheer cañon walls.

A hundred feet from the entrance they rode round a great slide of rock into a tiny valley containing a group of buildings.

He swung from the horse and offered a hand to help her dismount.

A reckless, unholy light burned in his daring eyes.

"Home at last, Miss Meredith. Let me offer you a thousand welcomes."

An icy hand seemed to clutch at her heart. "Home! What do you mean? This isn't the Circle Thirty-three."

"Not at all. The Circle Thirty-three is fifty miles from here. This is where I hang out—and you, for the present."

"But—I don't understand. How dare you bring me here?"

"The desire for your company, Miss Meredith, made of me a Lochinvar."

She saw, with a shiver, that the ribald eyes were mocking her.

"Take me back this instant—this instant," she commanded, but her imperious voice was not very sure of itself. "Take me home at once, you liar."

"I expect you don't quite understand," he explained, with gentle derision. "You're a prisoner of war, Miss Meredith."

"And who are you?" she faltered.

He bowed elaborately. "Dolf Leroy, train-robber, outlaw, and general bad man—very much at your service."

She sat rigid, her face ashen. "You coward, do you war on women?"

The change in him was instantaneous. It was as if two thousand years of civilization had been sponged out in an eye-beat. He stood before her a savage primeval, his tight-lipped smile cruel in its triumph. "Did I begin this fight? Didn't you undertake to make a fool of me by cheating me out of a hundred thousand dollars under my very nose? That was your hour. This, madam, is mine. If your friends want to see you again, they've got to raise that hundred thousand you stole from me. I'll teach you it isn't safe to laugh at Dolf Leroy."

The girl was afraid to the very marrow of her. But she would not show him her fear. She slipped from the horse and stood before him superbly defiant.

"You coward," she cried, with a contempt that stung.

"That's twice you've called me that." His eyes glittered savagely. "You'll crawl on your knees to me and ask pardon before I'm through with you. Don't forget that for a moment, you beautiful shrew. You're mine—to do with as I please. I'll break your spirit or I'll break your heart."

He turned on his heel and struck the palms of his hands together twice. A Mexican woman came running from one of the cabins. He flung a sentence or two in Spanish at her, and pointed to Miss Meredith. She asked a question, and he jabbed out a threat. The woman nodded her head, and motioned to the girl to follow her.

When Helen Meredith was alone in the room that was to serve as her prison she sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands in a despair that was utter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Helen Meredith had reason to be grateful at least for one thing. It was the fourth morning of her captivity, and she had been left quite to herself, except when the Mexican woman came to bring her meals and to let her out for her daily half-hour's sun-bath. She had spent much of her time reading, for, though the boxful of books she found in her room was a promiscuous one, it had a representative sprinkling of things worth while. Stevenson's "Letters," Tennyson's "Poems," an old copy of Montaigne's "Essays," a tattered Villon in the original, and Dumas' "Three Musketeers" she had unearthed from a pile of yellow-covered trash.

On the occasions of her daily promenade, she had noticed each afternoon a curly-haired young man in chaps lounging on the top of a big rock, apparently enjoying his after-dinner siesta. But when she had ventured once to the point where the rock-slide hemmed in the valley, he had come running after her so promptly that she could no longer doubt she was being closely watched.

"Better stay in the valley, ma'am; you might get lost right easily out there," he had suggested, indicating the outer world with a hand that was minus a forefinger.

But of the outlaw chief himself she had seen or heard nothing until the evening of the third night, when he had apparently arrived from a long journey full of the devil and bad whisky. She had heard him cursing the Mexican woman, and had been fearful lest he might come in to see her while he was in this mood. But the evening had passed in safety without a visit, and courage had come flowing back to her heart with the daylight.

She was aware that her reprieve was probably near its end, and was not suprised when it proved so. The Mexican attendant brought with her breakfast a note from him signed "Shepherd-of-the-Desert," asking permission to pay his respects. Miss Meredith divined that he was in his better mood, and penciled on his note, though not without fear, the permission she could hardly refuse.

But she was scarce prepared for the impudent air of jocund spring which he brought into her prison, the gay assumption of camaraderie so inconsistent with the facts. Yet, since safety lay in an avoidance of the tragic, she set herself to watch his mood.

At sight of the open Tennyson, he laughed and quoted:

"She only said, 'The day is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said."

"But, you see, he comes," he added. "What say, Mariana of the Robbers' Roost, to making a picnic day of it? We'll climb the Crags and lunch on the summit."

"The Crags?"

"That Matterhorn-shaped peak that begins at our back door. Are you for it?"

While this mood was uppermost in him she felt reasonably safe. It was a phase of him she certainly did not mean to discourage. Besides, she had a youthful confidence in her powers that she was loath to give up without an effort to find the accessible side of his ruthless heart.

"I'll try it; but you must help me when we come to the bad places," she said.

"Sure thing. It's a deal. You're a right game little gentleman, pardner."

"Thank you; but you had better save your compliments till I make good," she told him with the most piquant air of gaiety in the world.

They started on horseback, following a mountain trail that zigzagged across the foot-hills toward the Crags. He had unearthed somewhere a boy's saddle that suited her very well, and the pony she rode was one of the easiest she had ever mounted. At the end of an hour's ride they left the horses and began the ascent on foot. It was a stiff climb, growing steeper as they ascended, but Helen Meredith had not tramped over golf-links for nothing. She might grow leg-weary, but she would not cry "Enough." And he, on his part, showed the tactful consideration for the resources of her strength he had already taught her to expect from that other day's experience on the plains. It was a very rare hand of assistance that he offered her, but often he stopped to admire the beautiful view that stretched for many miles below them, in order that she might get a minute's breathing space.

Once he pointed out, far away on the horizon, a bright gleam that caught the sunlight like a heliograph.

"That's the roof of the Circle Thirty-three," he explained.

She drew a long breath, and flashed a stealthy look at him.

"I expect I'll see your father day after to-morrow. Got any message for him?"

In answer to her surprised exclamation, he added, with a laugh: "You're wondering why I'm going to see him. You see, I happen to hold a hostage he would be right glad to ransom, I reckon."

The girl pumped out a hesitating question: "Can you come to any agreement?"

He laughed. "Well, I guess yes. The old gentleman will be hitting the trail for Tucson to raise that hundred thousand after we've had our little talk."

"He can never raise the money in the world," she said quietly.

"I'll be right sorry to see the day he does," was his debonair answer, as he stroked his black mustache and smiled gallantly at her.

"I'm afraid I'll have to burden your hospitality forever and a day. You seem to value Mariana of the Robbers' Roost so highly that you set a prohibitive ransom."

He looked with half-shut, smoldering eyes at her slender exquisiteness, instinct with a vital charm at once well bred and gipsyish; and the veiled passion in his gaze told her that a ransom was not in his thoughts. He had made an offer, perhaps because his men had insisted on it, but he had of purpose made it an impossible one. Again she felt the chill of fear passing over her.

Deftly she guided the conversation back to less dangerous channels. In this the increasing difficulty of the climb assisted her, for, after they had begun the last ascent, sustained talk became impossible.

"See that trough above us near the summit! You'll have to hang on by your eyelashes, pardner." He always

burlesqued the word of comradeship a little to soften its familiarity.

"Dear me! Is it that bad?"

"It is so bad that at the top you have to jump for a grip and draw yourself up by your arms."

"And if one should miss?"

He shrugged. "Ah! that's a theological question. If the sky-pilots guess right, for you heaven, for me hell."

They negotiated the trough successfully to its uptilted end. She had a bad moment when he leaped for the rock rim above from the narrow ledge on which they stood. But he caught it, drew himself up without the least trouble, and turned to assist her. He sat down on the rock edge facing the abyss beneath them, and told her to lock her hands together above his left foot. Then slowly, inch by inch, he drew her up till with one of his hands he could catch her wrist. A moment later she was standing on his rigid toes, from which position she warily edged to safety above.

"Well done, little pardner. You're the first woman ever climbed the Crags." He offered a hand to celebrate the achievement.

"If I am, it is all due to you, big pardner. I could never have made that last bit alone."

They ate lunch merrily in the pleasant Arizona sunlight, and both of them seemed as free from care as a schoolboy on a holiday.

"It's good to be alive, isn't it?" he asked her after they had eaten, as he lay on the warm ground at her feet. "And what a life it is here! To be riding free, with your knees pressing a saddle, in the wind and the sun. There's something in a man to which the wide spaces call. I'd rather lie here in the sunbeat with you beside me than be a king. You remember that 'Last Ride' fellow Browning tells about. I reckon he's dead right. If a man could only capture his best moments and hold them forever, it would be heaven to the *n*th degree."

She studied her sublimated villain with that fascination his vagaries always excited in her. Was ever a more impossible combination put together than this sentimental scamp with the long record of evil?

"Say it," he laughed. "Whang it out! Ask anything you like, pardner."

Pluckily daring, she took him at his word. "I was only wondering at the different men I find in you. Before I have known you a dozen hours I discover in you the poet and the man of action, the schoolboy and the philosopher, the sentimentalist and the cynic, and—may I say it?—the gentleman and the blackguard. One feels a sense of loss. You should have specialized. You would have made such a good soldier, for instance. Pity you didn't go to West Point instead of Harvard."

"I didn't go to Harvard," he said quickly.

"Oh, was it Yale? Well, no matter. The point is that you missed your calling. You were born for a soldier; cavalry I should say. What an ornament to society you would have been if your energies had found the right vent! But they didn't find it—and you craved excitement, I suppose."

"Wherefore I am what I am. Please particularize.'"

"I can't, because I don't understand you. But I think this much is true, that you have set yourself against all laws of God and man. Yet you are not consistent, since you are better than your creed. You tell yourself there shall be no law for you but your own will, and you find there is something in you stronger than desire that makes you shrink at many things. You can kill in fair fight, but you can't knife a man in the back, can you?"

"I never have."

"You have a dreadfully perverted set of rules, but you play by them. That's why I know I'm safe with you, even when you are at your worst."

"Oh, you know you're safe, do you?"

"Of course I do. You were once a gentleman, and you can't forget it entirely. That's the weakness in your philosophy of total depravity."

"You speak with an assurance you don't always feel, I reckon. And I ex-

pect I wouldn't bank too much on those divinations of yours, if I were you." He rolled over so that he could face her more directly. "You've been mighty frank, Miss Meredith, and I take off my hat to your sand. Now I'm going to be frank awhile. You interest me. I never met a woman that interested me so much. But you do a heap more than interest me. No, you sit right there and listen. Your cheeky pluck and that insolent, indifferent beauty of yours made a hit with me the first minute I saw you that night. I swore I'd tame you, and that's why I brought you to Robbers' Roost. Your eye flashed a heap too haughty for me to give you the go-by. Mind you, I meant to be master. I meant to make you mine as much as this dog that licks my hand. That's as far as it went with me then, but before we reached here next day, I knew the thing cut deeper with me. I ain't saying that I love you because I'm a sweep, and it's just likely I don't know passion from love. But I'll tell you this—there hasn't been a waking moment since then I haven't been on fire to be with you. That's why I stayed away until I knew I wasn't so likely to slop over. But here, I'm doing it right this minute. I care more for you than I do for anything else on this earth. But that makes it worse for you. I never cared for anybody without bringing ruin on them. I broke my mother's heart and spoiled the life of the girl I was going to marry. That's the kind of scoundrel I am. Even if I could make you care enough to marry me—and I'm not such a fool as to dream it for a moment—I would drag you through hell after me."

The despair in his beautiful eyes spoke more impressively than his self-scorning words. She was touched in spite of herself. For there is an appeal about the engaging sinner that drums in a woman's head and calls to her heart. All good women are missionaries in the last analysis, and Miss Meredith was not an exception to her sex.

She leaned forward impetuously, a sweet, shy dignity in her manner. "Is it too late? Why not begin now? There is still a to-morrow, and it need not be the slave of yesterday. Life for all of us is full of mile-stones."

"And how shall I begin my new career of saintliness?" he asked, with bitter irony.

"The nearest duty. Take me back to my father. Begin a life of rigid honesty."

"Give you up now that I have found you! That is just the last thing I would do," he cried roughly. "No—no. The clock can't be turned back. I have sowed and I must reap."

He leaped to his feet. "Come! We must be going."

She rose sadly, for she knew the mood of regret for his wasted life had passed, and she had failed.

They descended the trough and reached the boulder-field that had marked the terminal of the glacier. At the farther edge of it the outlaw turned to point out to the girl a great splash of yellow on a mountainside fifteen miles away.

"You wouldn't think poppy flowers would do that, would you? But they do. There are millions and millions of them, and the whole mountain is golden from their glow."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a rock slipped under his foot, and he came down hard. He was up again in an instant, but Miss Meredith caught the sharp intake of his breath when he set foot to the ground.

"You've sprained your ankle," she cried.

"Afraid so. It's my own rotten carelessness." He limped forward a dozen steps, but he had to set his teeth to do it.

"Lean on me."

"I reckon I'll have to," he said grimly.

They covered a quarter of a mile, with many stops to rest the swollen ankle. Only by the irregularity of his breathing and the damp moisture on his forehead could she tell the agony he was enduring.

"It must be dreadful," she told him once.

"I've got to endure the grief, little pardner."

Again she said, when they had reached a wooded grove where live-oaks disputed with the cholla for the mastery: "Only two hundred yards more. I think I can bring your pony as far as the big cottonwood."

She noticed that he leaned heavier and heavier on her. However, when they reached the cottonwood he leaned no more, but pitched forward in a faint. The water-bottle was empty, but she ran down to where the ponies had been left, and presently came back with his canteen. She had been away perhaps twenty minutes, and when she came back he waved a hand airily at her.

"First time in my life that ever happened," he apologized gaily. "But why didn't you get on Jim and cut loose for the Circle Thirty-three while you had the chance?"

"I didn't think of it. Perhaps I shall next time."

"I shouldn't. You see, I'd follow you and bring you back. And if I didn't find you, there would be a lamb lost again in these hills."

"The sporting thing would be to take a chance."

"And leave me here alone? Well, I'm going to give you a show to take it." He handed her his revolver. "You may need this if you're going traveling."

"Are you telling me to go?" she asked, amazed.

"I'm telling you to do as you think best. You may take a hike or you may bring back Two-step to me. Suit yourself."

"I tell you plainly I sha'n't come back."

"And I'm sure you will."

"But I won't. The thing's absurd. Would you?"

"No, I shouldn't. But you will."

"I won't. Good-by." She held out her hand.

He shook his head, looking steadily at her. "What's the use? You'll be back in half an hour."

"Not I. Did you say I must keep the Antelope Peaks in a line to reach the Circle Thirty-three?"

"Yes, a little to the left. Don't be long, little pardner."

"I hate to leave you here. Perhaps I'll send a sheriff to take care of you."

"Better bring Two-step up to the south of that bunch of cottonwoods. It's not so steep that way."

"I'll mention it to the sheriff. I'm not coming myself."

She left him apparently obstinate in the conviction that she would return. In reality he was taking a gambler's chance, but it was of a part with the reckless spirit of the man that the risk appealed to him. It was plain he could not drag himself farther. Since he must let her go for the horse alone, he chose that she should go with her eyes open to his knowledge of the opportunity of escape.

But Helen Meredith had not the slightest intention of returning. She had found her chance, and she meant to make the most of it. As rapidly as her unaccustomed fingers would permit, she saddled and cinched her pony. She had not ridden a hundred yards before Two-step came crashing through the young cottonwood grove after her. Objecting to being left alone, he had broken the rein that tied him. The girl tried to recapture the horse in order that the outlaw might not be left entirely without means of reaching camp, but her efforts were unsuccessful. She had to give it up and resume her journey. Of course the men at Robbers' Roost would miss their chief and search for him. There could be no doubt but that they would find him. She bolstered up her assurance of this as she rode toward the Antelope Peaks, but her hope lacked buoyancy, because she doubted if they had any idea of where he had been going to spend the day.

She rode slower and slower, and finally came to a long halt for consideration. Vividly there rose before her a picture of the gallant rascal waiting grimly for death or rescue. She knew he would not blame her. He was too

game for that. But she could not leave a crippled man to die alone, even though he were her enemy. That was the goal to which her circling thoughts came always home, and with a sob she turned her horse's head. It was a piece of soft-headed folly, she confessed; but she could not help it.

And when an hour later she came on the bandit lying where she had left him, the sudden warmth that lit his dark face at sight of her and softened it amazingly was assurance enough to this impulsive girl that she had done right.

He reached for her hand, and gave it a firm pressure. "You're white clear through, pardner. I'll not forget it as long as I live."

"I tried to leave you. I rode two or three miles. But I found I couldn't do it," she confessed.

His eyes lit. "That settles it right now. You're going back to your father as fast as I can take you."

"Will your—friends let me go?"

"They won't know it, and when they find it out, what kicking they do will be done mostly in private."

He clambered to her pony, and she walked beside. She was tired, but she would not confess it, and she was nearer happy than she had been since her capture. For there is more joy over one sinner that repenteth than over the ninety and nine just which need no repentance.

Evening had fallen before they reached Robbers' Roost. It was beautifully still, except for the calling of the quails. The hazy violet outline of the mountains came to silhouette against the sky-line with a fine edge.

The man drew a deep breath when they came in sight of the pony corral back of the cabins. "I'll never forget to-day. I'm going to fence it in from all the yesterdays and to-morrows of life. You see, little pardner, it's the day I discovered the one woman I ever met that I could love for keeps. I'm not building on this. It's a cinch I lose, but I want you to remember that something's happened to me that makes me different somehow. It won't change my life. I've gone too far for that. But I'll know the difference, and you're not to forget that you've made even Dolf Leroy whiter for knowing you."

"I'll not forget," she said, brushing tears from her eyes.

York Neil answered his chief's call, and relieved him of his horse.

"You got a visitor in there," Neil said, with a grin and a jerk of his thumb toward the house. "Came blundering into the draw sorter accidental-like, but some curious. So I asked him if he wouldn't light and stay awhile. He thought it over, and figured he would."

"Who is it?" asked Leroy.

"You go and see. I ain't giving away what your Christmas presents are. I aim to let Santa surprise you a few."

Miss Meredith followed the outlaw chief into the house, and over his shoulder glimpsed two men. One of them was the Irishman, Cork Reilly, and he sat with a Winchester across his knees. The other had his back toward them, but he turned as they entered, and nodded casually to the outlaw. Helen's heart jumped to her throat when she saw it was Val Collins.

The two men looked at each other steadily in a long silence. Dolf Leroy was the first to speak.

"You damn fool." The swarthy face creased to an evil smile of contempt.

"I ce'tainly do seem to butt in considerable, Mr. Leroy," admitted Collins, with an answering smile.

Leroy's square jaw set like a vise. "It won't happen again, Mr. Sheriff."

"I'd hate to gamble on that heavy," returned Collins easily. Then he caught sight of the girl's white face, and rose to his feet with outstretched hand.

"Sit down," snapped out Reilly.

"Oh, that's all right. I'm shaking hands with the lady. Did you think I was inviting you to drill a hole in me, Mr. Reilly?"

CHAPTER IX.

"I thought we bumped you off down at Epitaph."

"Along with Scotty? Well, no. You

see, I'm a regular cat to kill, Mr. Leroy, and I couldn't conscientiously join the angels with so lame a story as a game laig to explain my coming," said Collins cheerfully.

"In that case——"

"Yes, I understand. You'd be willing to accommodate with a hole in the haid instead of one in the laig. But I'll not trouble you."

"What are you doing here? Didn't I warn you to attend to your own business and leave me alone?"

"Seems to me you did load me up with some good advice, but I plumb forgot to follow it."

Leroy cursed under his breath. "You came here at your own risk, then?"

"Well, I did and I didn't," corrected the sheriff easily. "I've got a five-thousand policy in the Southeastern Life Insurance Company, so I reckon it's some risk to them. And, by the way, it's a company I can recommend."

"Does it insure against suicide?" asked Leroy, his masked, smiling face veiling thinly a ruthless purpose.

"And against hanging. Let me strongly urge you to take out a policy at once," came the prompt retort.

"You think it necessary?"

"Quite. When you and York Neil and old man Webster made an end of Scotty, you threw ropes round your own necks. Any locoed tenderfoot would know that."

The sheriff's unflinching look met the outlaw's black frown serene and clear-eyed.

"And would he know that you had committed suicide when you ran this place down and came here?" asked Leroy, with silken cruelty.

"Well, he ought to know it. The fact is, Mr. Leroy, that it hadn't penetrated my think-tank that this was your hacienda when I came mavericking in."

"Just out riding for your health?"

"Not exactly. I was looking for Miss Meredith. I cut her trail about six miles from the Circle Thirty-three, and followed it where she wandered around. Four miles from the ranch she met somebody who camped there with her that night. I'm suspicioning now that somebody was Mr. Leroy."

"Four miles from the Circle Thirty-three?" burst from the girl's lips.

"About four miles, Miss Meredith. Did he tell you it was twenty-four? Next morning you rode pillion behind him, and the trail led directly away from the ranch toward the Galiuros. That didn't make me any easy in my mind. So I just jogged along and invited myself to the party. I arrived some late, but here I am, right-side up—and so hearty welcome that my friend, Cork, won't hear of my leaving at all. He don't do a thing but entertain me—never lets his attention wander. Oh, I'm the welcome guest, all right. No doubt about that."

Dolf Leroy turned to Helen Meredith. "I think you had better go to your room," he said gently.

"Oh, no, no; let me stay," she implored. "You would never—you would never——" The words died on her white lips, but the horror in her eyes finished the question.

He met her gaze fully, and answered her doggedly. "You're not in this, Miss Meredith. It's between him and me. I sha'n't allow even you to interfere."

"But—oh, it is horrible! Let me see you alone for two minutes."

He shook his head.

"You must! Please."

"What use?"

Her troubled gaze shifted to the strong, brown, sun-baked face of the man who had put himself in this deadly peril to save her. His keen, blue-gray eyes, very searching and steady, met hers with a courage she thought splendid, and her heart cried out passionately against the sacrifice.

"You shall not do it. Oh, pardner, let me talk it over with you."

"No."

"Have you forgotten already?—and you said you would always remember." She almost whispered it.

She had stung his consent at last. "Very well," he said, and opened the door to let her pass into the inner room.

But she noticed that his eyes were hard as jade.

"Don't you see that he came here to save me?" she cried, when they were alone. "Don't you see it was for me? He didn't come to spy out your place of hiding."

"I see that he has found it. If I let him go, he will bring back a posse to take us."

"You could ride across the line into Mexico."

"I could, but I won't."

"But why?"

"Because, Miss Meredith, the money we took from the express-car of the Limited is hidden here, and I don't know where it is; because the sun won't ever rise on a day when Val Collins will drive me out of Arizona."

"I don't know what you mean about the money, but you must let him go. You spoke of a service I had done you. This is my pay."

"To turn him loose to hunt us down?"

"He'll not trouble you if you let him go."

A sardonic smile touched his face. "A lot you know of him. He thinks it his duty to rid the earth of vermin like us. He'd never let up till he got us or we got him. Well, we've got him now, good and plenty. He took his chances, didn't he? It isn't as if he didn't know what he was up against. He'll tell you himself it's a square deal. He's game, and he won't squeal because we win, and he has to pay forfeit."

The girl wrung her hands despairingly.

"It's his life or mine—and not only mine, but my men's," continued the outlaw. "Would you turn a wolf loose from your sheep-pen to lead the pack to the kill?"

"But if he were to promise——"

"We're not talking about the ordinary man—he'd promise anything and lie to-morrow. But Sheriff Collins won't do it. If you think you can twist a promise out of him not to take advantage of what he has found out you're guessing wrong. When you think he's a quitter, just look at that cork hand of his, and remember how come he to get it. He'll take his medicine proper, but he'll never crawl."

"There must be some way," she cried desperately.

"Since you make a point of it, I'll give him his chance."

"You'll let him go?" The joy in her voice was tremulously plain.

He laughed, leaning carelessly against the mantel-shelf. But his narrowed eyes watched her vigilantly. "I didn't say I would let him go. What I said was that I'd give him a chance."

"How?"

"They say he's a dead shot. I'm a few with a gun myself. We'll ride down to the plains together, and find a good lonely spot suitable for a graveyard. Then one of us will ride away, and the other will stay, or perhaps both of us will stay."

She shuddered. "No—no—no. I won't have it."

"Afraid something might happen to me, pardner?" he asked, with a queer laugh.

"I won't have it."

"Afraid perhaps he might be the one left for the coyotes and the buzzards?"

She was white to the lips, but at his next words the blood came flaming back to her cheeks.

"Why don't you tell the truth? Why don't you say you love him, and be done with it? Say it, and I'll take him back to Tucson with you safe as if he were a baby."

She covered her face with her hands, but with two steps he had reached her and captured her hands.

"The truth," he demanded, and his eyes compelled.

"It is to save his life?"

He laughed harshly. "What a romantic coil! Yes—to save your lover's life."

She lifted her eyes to his bravely. "That you say is true. I love him."

Leroy bowed ironically. "I congratulate Mr. Collins, who is now quite safe so far as I am concerned. Meanwhile, lest he be jealous of your absence, shall we return now?"

Some word of sympathy for the reckless scamp trembled on her lips, but her instinct told her he would hold it insult added to injury, and she left her pity unvoiced.

"If you please."

But as he heeled away she laid a timid hand on his arm. He turned and looked grimly down at the working face, at the sweet, shy, pitiful eyes brimming with tears. She was pure woman now, all the caste pride dissolved in yearning pity.

"Oh, you lamb—you precious lamb," he groaned, and clicked his teeth shut on the poignant pain of his loss.

"I think you're splendid," she told him. "Oh, I know what you've done—that you are not good. I know you've wasted your life and lived with your hand against every man's. But I can't help all that. I look for the good in you, and I find it. Even in your sins you are not petty. You know how to rise to an opportunity."

This man of contradictions, forever the creature of his impulses, gave the lie to her last words by signally failing to rise to this one. He snatched her to him, and looked down hungry-eyed at her sweet beauty, as fresh and fragrant as the wild rose in the copse.

"Please," she cried, straining from him with shy, frightened eyes.

For answer he kissed her fiercely on the cheeks and eyes and mouth.

"The rest are his, but these are mine," he laughed mirthlessly.

Then, flinging her from him, he led the way into the next room.

CHAPTER X.

"If you're through explaining the mechanism of that Winchester to Sheriff Collins we'll reluctantly dispense with your presence, Mr. Reilly. We have arranged a temporary treaty of peace."

Reilly, a huge lout of a fellow with a lowering countenance, ventured to expostulate. "Ye want to be careful of him. He's quicker'n chain lightning."

His chief exploded with low-voiced fury. "When I ask your advice, give it, you fat-brained son of a brand blotter. Until then padlock that mouth of yours. *Vamos.*"

Reilly vanished, his face a picture of impotent malice, and Leroy continued:

"We're going to Tucson in the morning, Mr. Collins—at least, you and Miss Meredith are going there. I'm going part way. We've arranged a little deal all by our lones, subject to your approval. You get away without that hole in your head. Miss Meredith goes with you, and I get in return the papers you took off Scotty and Webster."

"You mean I am to give up the hunt?" asked Collins.

"Not at all. I'll be glad to death to see you blundering in again when Miss Meredith isn't here to beg you off. The point is that in exchange for your freedom and Miss Meredith's I get those papers you left in a safety-deposit vault in Tucson. It'll save me the trouble of sticking up the First National and winging a few indiscreet citizens of that burgh. Savvy?"

"That's all you ask?" demanded the surprised sheriff. "You don't want Webster freed?"

"No, I'm not worrying about Jim. You can't prove anything. It won't do him a bit of harm to lie by the heels for a few weeks. All I ask is to get those papers in my hand and a four-hour start before you begin the hunt. Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal, but I give it to you straight that I'll be after you as soon as the four hours are up," returned Collins promptly. "I don't know what magic Miss Meredith used. Still, I must compliment her on getting us out mighty easy."

But though the sheriff looked smilingly at Miss Meredith, that young woman, usually mistress of herself in all emergencies, did not lift her eyes to meet his. Indeed, he thought her strangely embarrassed. She was as flushed and tongue-tied as a country girl in unaccustomed company. She seemed another woman than the self-possessed young beauty he had met two weeks before on the Limited, but he found her shy abashment charming.

"I guess you thought you had come to the end of the passage, Mr. Collins," suggested the outlaw, with listless curiosity.

"I didn't know whether to order the flowers or not, but 'way down in my heart I was backing my luck," Collins told him.

"Of course it's understood that you are on parole until we separate," said Leroy curtly.

"Of course."

"Then we'll have supper at once, for we'll have to be on the road early." He clapped his hands together, and the Mexican woman appeared. Her master flung out a command or two in her own language.

"*Poco tiempo,*" she answered, and disappeared.

Leroy followed her to bathe his ankle in arnica and bind it up.

In a surprisingly short time the meal was ready, set out on a table white with Irish linen and winking with cut glass and silver.

"Mr. Leroy does not believe at all in doing when in Rome as the Romans do," Helen explained to Collins, in answer to his start of amazement. "He's a regular Aladdin. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to see electric lights come on next."

"One has to attempt sometimes to blot out the forsaken desert," said Leroy. "Try this cut of slow elk, Miss Meredith. I think you'll like it."

"Slow elk! What is that?" asked the girl, to make talk.

"Mr. Collins will tell you," smiled Leroy.

She turned to the sheriff, who first apologized, with a smile, to his host. "Slow elk, Miss Meredith, is veal that has been rustled. I expect Mr. Leroy has pressed a stray calf into our service."

"I see," she flashed. "Pressed veal."

The outlaw smiled at her ready wit, and took on himself the burden of further explanation. "And this particular slow elk comes from a ranch on the Aravaipa owned by Mr. Collins. York shot it up in the hills a day or two ago."

"Shouldn't have been straying so far from its range," suggested Collins, with a laugh. "But it's good veal, even if I say it that shouldn't."

"Thank you," burlesqued the bandit gravely, with such an ironic touch of convention that Helen smiled.

After dinner Leroy produced cigars, and with the permission of Miss Meredith the two men smoked while the conversation ran on a topic as impersonal as literature. A criticism of novels and plays written to illustrate the frontier was the line into which the discussion fell, and the girl from New York, listening with a vivid interest, was pleased to find that these two real men talked with point and a sense of dexterous turns. She felt a sort of proud proprietorship in their power, and wished that some of the tailors' models she had met in society, who held so good a conceit of themselves, might come under the spell of their strong, tolerant virility. Whatever the difference between them, it might be truly said of both that they had lived at first hand and come in touch closely with all the elemental realities. One of them was a romantic villain and the other an unromantic hero, but her pulsing emotions immorally condemned one no more than the other. This was the sheer delight to her esthetic sense of fitness, that strong men engaged in a finish fight could rise to so perfect a courtesy that an outsider could not have guessed the antagonism that ran between them enduring as life.

Leroy gave the signal for breaking up by looking at his watch. "Afraid I must say 'Lights out.' It's past eleven. We'll have to be up and on our way with the hooters. Sleep well, Miss Meredith. You don't need to worry about waking. I'll have you called in good time. *Buenos noches.*"

He held the door for her as she passed out; and, in passing, her eyes rose to meet his.

"*Buenos noches,* señor; don't forget to attend to that bad ankle," she said.

But both of them were thinking that the hurt from which he would suffer most was not his ankle.

It had been the day of Helen Meredith's life. Emotions and sensations, surging through her, had trodden on each other's heels. Womanlike, she welcomed the darkness to analyze and classify the turbid chaos of her mind. She had been swept into sympathy with an outlaw, to give him no worse name. She had offered him her friendship. Oh, she had pretended to herself it had been to cajole him into freeing her. She had partly believed it until the hour of her unwilling return to him, but she flung aside the pretext now with scorn. The man had fascinated her. That was the plain, unwelcome truth.

Surely, that had been bad enough, but worse was to follow. This discerning scamp had torn aside her veils of maiden reserve and exposed the secret fancy of her heart, unknown before even to herself. She had confessed love for this big-hearted sheriff and frontiersman. Here again she could plead an ulterior motive. To save his life any deception was permissible. Yes, but where lay the truth? With that insistent demand of the outlaw had rushed over her a sudden wave of joy. What could it mean unless it meant what she would not admit that it could mean? Why, the man was impossible. He was not of her class. She had scarce seen him three times. Her first meeting with him had been only two weeks ago. Two weeks ago——

A remembrance flashed through her that brought her from the bed in a barefoot search for matches. When the candle was relit she slipped a chamois-skin pouch from her neck and from it took a sealed envelope. It was the note in which the sheriff on the night of the train-robbery had written his prediction of how the matter would come out. She was to open the envelope in two weeks, and the two weeks were up to-night.

As she tore open the flap it came to her with one of her little flashing smiles that she could never have guessed under what circumstances she would read it. By the dim flame of a guttering candle, in a cotton nightgown borrowed from a Mexican menial, a prisoner of the very man who had robbed her and the recipient of a confession of love from him not six hours earlier! Surely here was a situation to beggar romance. But before she had finished reading the reality was still more unbelievable.

I have just met for the first time the woman I am going to marry if God is good to me. I am writing this because I want her to know it as soon as I decently can. Of course, I am not worthy of her, but then I don't know any man that is.

So the fact goes—I'm bound to marry her if there's nobody else in the way. This isn't conceit. It is a deep-seated certainty I can't get away from, and don't want to. When she reads this, she will think it a piece of foolish presumption. My hope is she will not always think so. Her lover,

VAL COLLINS.

Her swift-pulsing heart was behaving very queerly. It seemed to hang delightfully still, and then jump forward with odd little beats of joy. She caught a glimpse of her happy face, and blew out the light for shame, groping her way back to bed with the letter carefully guarded against crumpling by her hand.

Foolish presumption indeed. Why, he had only seen her once, and he said he would marry her with never a by-your-leave! Wasn't that what he had said? She had to strike another match to learn the lines that had not stuck word for word in her mind, and after that another match to get a picture of the scrawl to visualize in the dark.

How dared he take her for granted? But what a masterly way of wooing for the right man! What idiotic folly if he had been the wrong one! Was he, then, the right one? She questioned herself closely, but came to no more definite answer than this—that her heart went glad with a sweet joy to know he wanted to marry her.

She resolved to put him from her mind, and in this resolve she fell at last into smiling sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

When Helen Meredith looked back in after years upon the incidents connected with that ride to Tucson it was

always with a kind of glorified pride in her villain-hero. He had his moments, had this twentieth-century Villon, when he represented not unworthily the divinity in man; and this day held more than one of them. Since he was what he was, it also held as many of his black moods.

The start was delayed, owing to a cause Leroy had not foreseen. When York went, sleepy-eyed, to the corral to saddle the ponies, he found the bars into the pasture let down, and the whole *remuda* kicking up its heels in a paddock large as a good-sized city. The result was that it took two hours to run up the bunch of ponies and another half-hour to cut out, rope, and saddle the three that were wanted. Throughout the process Reilly sat on the fence and scowled.

Leroy, making an end of slapping on and cinching the last saddle, wheeled suddenly on the Irishman. "What's the matter, Reilly?"

"Was I saying anything was the matter?"

"You've been looking it right hard. Ain't you man enough to say it instead of playing dirty little three-for-a-cent tricks—like letting down the corral-bars?"

Reilly flung a look at Neil that plainly demanded support, and then descended with truculent defiance from the fence.

"Who says I let down the bars? You bet I am man enough to say what I think; and if ye think I ain't got the nerve——"

His master encouraged him with ironic derision. "That's right, Reilly. Who's afraid? Cough it up and show York you're game."

"By thunder, I *am* game. I've got a kick coming, sorr."

"Yes?" Leroy rolled and lit a cigarette, his black eyes fixed intently on the malcontent. "Well, register it on the jump. I've got to be off."

"That's the point." The curly-headed Neil had lounged up to his comrade's support. "*Why* have you got to be off? We don't savvy your game, cap."

"Perhaps you would like to be major-domo of this outfit, Neil?" scoffed his chief, eying him scornfully.

"No, sir. I ain't aimin' for no such thing. But we don't like the way things are shaping. What does all this here funny business mean, anyhow?" His thumb jerked toward Collins, already mounted and waiting for Leroy to join him. "Two days ago this world wasn't big enough to hold him and you. Well, I git the drop on him, and then you begin to cotton up to him right away. Big dinner last night—champagne corks popping, I hear. What I want to know is what it means. And here's this Miss Meredith. She's good for a big ransom, but I don't see it ambling our way. It looks darned funny."

"That's the ticket, York," derided Leroy. "Come again. Turn your wolf loose."

"Oh! I ain't afraid to say what I think."

"I see you're not. You should try stump-speaking, my friend. There's a field for you there."

"I'm asking you a question, Mr. Leroy."

"That's whatever," chipped in Reilly.

"Put a name to it."

"Well, I want to know what's the game, and where we come in."

"Think you're getting the double-cross?" asked Leroy pleasantly, his vigilant eyes covering them like a weapon.

"Now you're shouting. That's what I'd like right well to know. There *he* sits"—with another thumb-jerk at Collins—"and I'm a Chinese if he ain't carryin' them same two guns I took offen him, one on the train and one here the other day. I ain't sayin' it ain't all right, cap. But what I do say is—how about it?"

Leroy did some thinking out loud. "Of course I might tell you boys to go to the devil. That's my right, because you chose me to run this outfit without any advice from the rest of you. But you're such infants, I reckon I had better explain. You're always worrying those fat brains of yours with suspicions. After we stuck up the Limited

you couldn't trust me to take care of the swag. Reilly here had to cook up a fool scheme for us all to hide it blindfold together. I told you straight what would happen, and it did. When Scotty crossed the divide we were in a Jim Dandy of a hole. We had to have that paper of his to find the boodle. Then Webster gets caught, and coughs up his little recipe for helping to find hidden treasure. Who gets them both? Mr. Sheriff Collins, of course. Then he comes visiting us. Not being a fool, he leaves the documents behind in a safety-deposit vault. Unless I can fix up a deal with him, Mr. Reilly's wise play buncoes us and himself out of a hundred thousand dollars."

"Why don't you let him send for the papers first?"

"Because he won't do it. Threaten nothing! Collins ain't that kind of a hairpin. He'd tell us to shoot and be damned."

"So you've got it fixed with him?" demanded Neil.

"You've a head like a sheep, York," admired Leroy. "*You* don't need any brick-wall hints to hit you. As your think-tank has guessed, I have come to an understanding with Collins."

"But the gyurl—I allow the old major would come down with a right smart ransom."

"Wrong guess, York. I allow he would come down with a right smart posse and wipe us off the face of the earth. Collins tells me the major has sent for a couple of Apache trailers from the reservation. That means it's up to us to hike for Sonora. The only point is whether we take that buried money with us or leave it here. If I make a deal with Collins, we get it. If I don't, it's somebody else's gold-mine. Anything more the committee of investigation would like to know?" concluded Leroy, as his cold eyes raked them scornfully and came to rest on Reilly.

"Not for mine," said Neil, with an apologetic laugh. "I'm satisfied. I just wanted to know. And I guess Cork corroborates."

Reilly growled something under his breath, and turned to hulk away.

"One moment. You'll listen to *me*, now. You have taken the liberty to assume I was going to sell you out. I'll not stand that from any man alive. To-morrow night I'll get back from Tucson. We'll dig up the loot and divide it. And right then we quit company. You go your way and I go mine." And with that as a parting shot, Leroy turned on his heel and went direct to his horse.

Helen Meredith might have searched the West with a fine-tooth comb and not found elsewhere two such riders for an escort as fenced her that day. Physically they were a pair of superb animals, each perfect after his fashion. If the fair-haired giant, with his lean, broad shoulders and rippling flow of muscles, bulked more strikingly in a display of sheer strength, the sinewy, tigerish grace of the dark Apollo left nothing to be desired to the eye. Both of them had been brought up in the saddle, and each was fit to the minute for any emergency likely to appear.

But on this pleasant morning no test of their power seemed likely to arise, and she could study them at her ease without hindrance. She had never seen Leroy look more the vagabond enthroned. For dress, he wore the common equipment of Cattleland—jingling spurs, fringed chaps, leather cuffs, gray shirt, with kerchief knotted loosely at the neck, and revolver ready to his hand. But he carried them with an air, an inimitable grace, that marked him for a prince among his fellows. Something of the kind she hinted to him in jesting paradoxical fashion, making an attempt to win from his sardonic gloom one of his quick, flashing smiles.

He countered by telling her what he had heard York say to Reilly of her. "She's a princess, Cork," York had said. "Makes my Epitaph gyurl look like a chromo beside her. Somehow, when she looks at a fellow, he feels like a whitewashed nigger."

All of them laughed at that, but both Leroy and the sheriff tried to banter

her by insisting that they knew exactly what York meant.

"You can be very splendid when you want to give a man that whitewashed feeling; he isn't right sure whether he's on the map or not," reproached the train-robber.

She laughed in the slow, indolent way she had, taking the straw hat from her bronze head to catch better the faint breath of wind that was soughing across the plains.

"I didn't know I was so terrible. I don't think *you* ever had any awe of anybody, Mr. Leroy." Her soft cheek flushed in unexpected memory of that moment when he had brushed aside all her maiden reserves and ravished mad kisses from her. "And Mr. Collins is big enough to take care of himself," she added hastily, to banish the unwelcome recollection.

Collins, with his eyes on the light-shot waves of copper that crowned her vivid face, wondered whether he was or not. If she had been a woman to desire in the queenly, half-insolent indifference of manner with which she had first met him, how much more of charm lay in this piquant gaiety, in the warm sweetness of her softer and more pliant mood! It seemed to him she had the gift of comradeship to perfection.

They unsaddled and ate lunch in the shade of the live-oaks at El Dorado Springs, which used to be a much-frequented watering-hole in the days when Camp Grant thrived and mule-skinners freighted supplies in to feed Uncle Sam's pets. Six hours later they stopped again at a truck-farm on the edge of the Santa Cruz wash, six miles from Tucson.

It was while they were resaddling that Collins caught sight of a cloud of dust a mile or two away. He unslung his field-glasses, and looked long at the approaching dust-swirl. Presently he handed the binoculars to Leroy.

"Five of them; and that round-bellied Papago pony in front belongs to Sheriff Forbes, or I'm away wrong."

Leroy lowered the glasses, after a long, unflurried inspection. "Looks that way to me. Expect I'd better be burning the wind."

In a few sentences he and Collins arranged a meeting for next day up in the hills. He trailed his spurs through the dust toward Helen Meredith, and offered her his brown hand and wistful smile irresistible. "Good-by, little pardner. This is where you get quit of me for good."

"Oh, I hope not," she told him impulsively. "We must always be friends."

He laughed ruefully. "Your father wouldn't indorse those unwise sentiments, I reckon—and I'd hate to bet your husband would," he added audaciously, with a glance at Collins. "But I love to hear you say it, even though we never could be. You're a right game, stanch little pardner. I'll back that opinion with the lid off."

"You should be a good judge of those qualities. I'm only sorry you don't always use them in a good cause."

He swung himself to his saddle. "Good-by."

"Good-by—till we meet again."

"And that will be never. So long, sheriff. Tell Forbes I've got a particular engagement in the hills, but I'll be right glad to meet him when he comes."

He rode up the draw and disappeared over the brow of the hillock. She caught another glimpse of him a minute later on the summit of the hill beyond. He waved a hand at her, half-turning in his saddle as he rode.

Presently she lost him, but faintly the wind swept back to her that haunting snatch of the prison song she had heard from his lips once before.

> Ah, I have sigh'd to rest me
> Deep in the quiet grave.

CHAPTER XII.

To Sheriff Forbes, drifting into the draw a few minutes later with his posse, Collins was a well of misinformation literally true. Yes, he had followed Miss Meredith's trail into the hills and found her at a mountain ranch-house. She had been there a couple of days, and was about to set

out for the Circle Thirty-three with the owner of the place, when he arrived and volunteered to see her as far as Tucson.

"I reckon there ain't any use asking you if you seen anything of Dolf Leroy's outfit," said Forbes, a weather-beaten Westerner with a shrewd, wrinkled face.

"No, I reckon there's no use asking me that," returned Collins, with a laugh that deceptively seemed to include the older man in the joke.

"Old man Webster's pirootin' round the country somewhere. He broke jail last night and is making his getaway to the hills, I reckon."

"Jim Webster?"

"That's whoever. Well, I'll be moving. Glad you found the lady, Val. She don't look none played out from her little trek across the desert. Funny, ain't it, how she could have wandered that far and her afoot?"

The Arizona sun was setting in its accustomed blaze of splendor, when Val Collins and Helen Meredith put their horses again toward Tucson and the rainbow-hued west. In his contented eyes were reflected the sunshine and a serenity born of life in the wide, open spaces. They rode in silence for long, the gentle evening breeze blowing in soughs.

"Did you ever meet a man of such promises gone wrong so utterly? He might have been anything—and it has come to this, that he is hunted like a wild beast. I never saw anything so pitiful. I would give anything to save him."

He had no need to ask to whom she was referring. "Can't be done. Good qualities bulge out all over him, but they don't count for anything. 'Unstable as water.' That's what's the matter with him. He is the slave of his own whims. Hence he is only the splendid wreck of a man, full of all kinds of rich outcropping pay-ore that pinch out when you try to work them. They don't raise men gamer, but that only makes him a more dangerous foe to society. Same with his lovalty and his brilliancy. He's got a haid on him that works like they say old J. E. B. Stuart's did. He would run into a hundred traps, but somehow he always worked his men out of them. That's Leroy, too. If he had been an ordinary criminal he would have been rounded up years ago. It's his audacity, his iron nerve, his good horse-sense judgment that saves his skin. But he's ce'tainly up against it at last."

"You think Sheriff Forbes will capture him?"

He laughed. "I think it more likely he'll capture Forbes. But we know now where he hangs out, and who he is. He has always been a mystery till now. The mystery is solved, and unless he strikes out for Sonora, Leroy is as good as a dead man."

"A dead man?"

"Does he strike you as a man likely to be taken alive? I look to see a dramatic exit to the sound of cracking Winchesters."

"Yes, that would be like him," she confessed with a shudder. "I think he was made to lead a forlorn hope. Pity it won't be one worthy of the best in him."

"I guess he did have more moments set to music than most of us, and I'll bet, too, he had hidden away in him a list of 'Thou shalt nots.' I read a book once by a man named Stevenson that was sure virgin gold. He showed how every man, no matter how low he falls, has somewhere in him a light that burns, some rag of honor for which he is still fighting. I'd hate to have to judge Leroy. Some men, I reckon, have to buck against so much in themselves that even failure is a kind of success for them."

"Yet you will go out to hunt him down?" she said, marveling at the broad sympathy of the man.

"Sure I will. My official duty is to look out for society. If something in the machine breaks loose and goes to ripping things to pieces, the engineer has to stop the damage, even if he has to smash the rod that's causing the trouble."

The ponies dropped down again into the bed of the wash, and plowed across

through the heavy sand. After they had reached the solid road, Collins resumed conversation at a new point.

"It's two weeks and a day since I first met you, Miss Meredith," he said, apparently apropos of nothing.

She felt her blood begin to choke. "Indeed!"

"I gave you a letter to read when I was on the train."

"A letter!" she exclaimed, in well-affected surprise.

"Did you think it was a book of poems? No, ma'am, it was a letter. You were to read it in two weeks. Time was up last night. I reckon you read it."

"Could I read a letter I left at Tucson, when I was fifty miles away?" she smiled with sweet patronage.

"Not if you left it at Tucson," he assented, with an answering smile.

"Maybe I *did* lose it." She frowned, trying to remember.

"Then I'll have to tell you what was in it."

"Any time will do. I dare say it wasn't important."

"Then we'll say *this* time."

"Don't be stupid, Mr. Collins. I want to talk about our desert Villon."

"I said in that letter——"

She put her pony to a canter, and they galloped side by side in silence for half a mile. After she had slowed down to a walk, he continued placidly, as if oblivious of an interruption:

"I said in that letter that I had just met the young lady I was expecting to marry."

"Dear me, how interesting! Was she in the smoker?"

"No, she was in Section 3 of the Pullman."

"I wish I had happened to go into the other Pullman, but, of course, I couldn't know the young lady you were interested in was riding there."

"She wasn't."

"But you've just told me——"

"That I said in the letter you took so much trouble to lose that I expected to marry the young woman passing under the name of Miss Wainwright."

"Sir!"

"That I expected——"

"Really, I am not deaf, Mr. Collins."

"——expected to marry her, just as soon as she was willing."

"Oh, she is to be given a voice in the matter, is she?"

"Ce'tainly, ma'am."

"And when?"

"Well, I had been thinking now was a right good time."

"It can't be too soon for me," she flashed back, sweeping him with proud, indignant eyes.

"But I ain't so sure. I rather think I'd better wait."

"No, no! Let us have it done with once and for all."

He relapsed into a serene, abstracted silence.

"Aren't you going to speak?" she flamed.

"I've decided to wait."

"Well, *I* haven't. Ask me this minute, sir, to marry you."

"Ce'tainly, if you cayn't wait. Miss Meredith, will you——"

"No, sir, I won't—not if you were the last man on earth," she interrupted hotly, whipping herself into a genuine rage. "I never was so insulted in my life. It would be ridiculous if it weren't so—so outrageous. You *expect*, do you? And it isn't conceit, but a deep-seated certainty you can't get away from."

He had her fairly. "Then you *did* read the letter."

"Yes, sir, I read it—and for sheer, unmatched impudence I have never seen its like."

"Now, I wish you would tell me what you really think," he drawled.

Not being able, for reasons equestrian, to stamp her foot, she gave her bronco the spur.

When Collins again found conversation practicable, Tucson, a white adobe huddle in the moonlight, lay peacefully beneath them in the valley.

"It's a right quaint old town, and it's seen a heap of rough-and-tumble life in its day. If those old adobe bricks could tell stories, I expect they would put some of these romances out of business."

Miss Meredith's covert glance questioned suspiciously what this diversion might mean.

"It's an all-right business-town, too—the best in the territory," he continued patriotically. "She ain't so great as Douglas on ore or as Phœnix on lungers, but when it comes to the git-up-and-git hustle, she's there rounding up the trade from early morn till dine."

He was still expatiating in a monologue with grave enthusiasm on the town of his choice, when they came to the narrow adobe-lined streets which opened into the plaza. They drew rein at the porch of the San Augustine Hotel, remodeled from an old Spanish convent to serve the needs of the great American drummer.

"Some folks don't like it—call it adobe-town, and say it's full of greasers. Well, everybody to his taste, I say. Little old Tucson's good enough for me."

He helped her dismount, and then held out his big hand in farewell.

"I'll be saying good night, Miss Meredith. I reckon I'll see you again one of these days, maybe," he said genially, and trailed, with clanking spurs, back to his horse.

Miss Meredith, safely in her room, gave herself over to laughter sardonic till the tears ran.

"I forgot to ask him whether he loves me or Tucson more, and as one of the subjects seems to be closed, I'll probably never find out," she mourned.

Nevertheless, there was a queer little tug of pain at her heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Hope I don't intrude on the festivities."

Leroy smiled down ironically on the three flushed, startled faces that looked up at him. Suspicion was alive in every rustle of the men's clothes. It breathed from the lowering countenances. It itched at the fingers longing for the trigger. The unending terror of a bandit's life is that no man trusts his fellow. Hence one betrays another for fear of betrayal, or stabs him in the back to avoid it.

The outlaw chief had slipped into the room so silently that the first inkling they had of his presence was that gentle, insulting voice. Now, as he lounged easily before them, leg thrown over the back of a chair and thumbs sagging from his trouser pockets, they looked the picture of schoolboys caught by their master in a conspiracy. How long had he been there? How much had he heard? Full of suspicion and bad whisky as they were, his confident contempt still cowed the very men who were planning his destruction. A minute before they had been full of loud threats and boastings; now they could only search each other's faces sullenly for a cue.

"Celebrating Webster's return from captivity, I reckon. That's the proper ticket. I wonder if we couldn't afford to kill another of Collins' fatted calves."

Mr. Webster, not enjoying the derisive raillery, took a hand in the game. "I expect the boys hadn't better touch the sheriff's calves, now you and him are so thick."

"We're thick, are we?" Leroy's indolent eyes narrowed slightly as they rested on him.

"Ain't you? It sure seemed that way to me when I looked out of that mesquit wash just above Eldorado Springs and seen you and him eating together like brothers and laughing to beat the band. You was so clost to him I couldn't draw a bead on him without risking its hitting you."

"Laughing, were we? That must have been when he told me how funny you looked in the 'altogether' shedding false teeth and information about hidden treasure."

"Told you that, did he?" Mr. Webster incontinently dropped repartee as a weapon too subtle, and fell back on profanity.

"That's right pat to the minute, cap, what you say about the information he leaks," put in Neil. "How about that information? I'll be plumb tickled to death to know you're carrying it in your vest pocket."

"And if I'm not?"

"Then ye are a bigger fool than I had expected, sorr, to come back here at all," said the Irishman truculently.

"I begin to think so myself, Mr. Reilly. Why keep faith with a set of swine like you?"

"Are you giving it to us that you haven't got those papers?"

Leroy nodded, watching them with steady, alert eyes. He knew he stood on the edge of a volcano that might explode at any moment.

"What did I tell you?" Webster turned savagely to the other disaffected members of the gang. "Didn't I tell you he was selling us out?"

Somehow Dolf Leroy's revolver seemed to jump to his hand without a motion on his part. It lay loosely in his limp fingers, unaimed and undirected.

"Say that again, please."

Beneath the velvet of Leroy's voice ran a note more deadly than any threat could have been. It rang a bell for a silence in which the clock of death seemed to tick. But as the seconds fled Webster's courage oozed away. He dared not accept the invitation to reach for his weapon and try conclusions with this debonair young daredevil. He mumbled a retraction, and flung, with a curse, out of the room.

Leroy slipped the revolver back in his holster, and quoted, with a laugh:

> "To every coward safety,
> And afterward his evil hour."

"What's that?" demanded Neil. "I ain't no coward, even if Jim is. I don't knuckle under to any man. You got a right to ante up with some information. I want to know why you ain't got them papers you promised to bring back with you."

"That's the way to chirp, York. I haven't got them because Forbes blundered on us, and I had to take a *pasear* awful sudden. But I made an appointment to meet Collins to-morrow."

"And you think he'll keep it?" scoffed Neil.

"I know he will."

"You seem to know a heap about him," was the significant retort.

"Take care, York."

"I'm not Jim Webster, cap. I say what I think."

"And you think?" suggested Leroy gently.

"I don't know what to think yet. You're either a fool or a traitor, I don't know which. When I find out, you'll hear from me straight. Come on, Cork." And Neil vanished through the door.

An hour later there came a knock at Leroy's door. Neil answered his permission to enter, followed by the other pair of flushed beauties. To Dolf Leroy it was at once apparent with what Dutch courage they had been fortifying themselves to some resolve. It was characteristic of him, though he knew on how precarious a thread his life was hanging, that disgust at the foul breaths with which they were polluting the atmosphere was his first dominant emotion.

"I wish, Webster, next time you break prison you'd bring another brand of poison out to the boys. I can't go this stuff. Just remember that, will you?"

The outlaw chief's hard eye ran over the rebels and read them like a primer. They had come to depose him certainly, to kill him perhaps. Though this last he doubted. It wouldn't be like Neil to plan his murder, and it wouldn't be like the others to give him warning and meet him in the open. Warily he stood behind the table, watching their awkward embarrassment with easy assurance. Carefully he placed face downward on the table the Villon he had been reading, but he did it without lifting his eyes from them.

"You have business with me, I presume."

"That's what we have," cried Reilly valiantly, from the rear.

"Then suppose we come to it and get the room aired as soon as possible," Leroy said tartly.

"You're such a slap-up dude you'd ought to be a hotel clerk, cap. You're sure wasted out here. So we boys got

together and held a little election. Consequence is we—fact is we——"

Neil stuck, but Reilly came to his rescue.

"We elected York captain of this outfit."

"To fill the vacancy created by my resignation. Poor York! You're the sacrifice, are you? On the whole, I think you fellows have made a wise choice. York's game, and he won't squeal on you, which is more than I could say of Reilly or Jim. . . . But you want to watch out for a knife in the dark, York. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,' you know."

"We didn't come here to listen to a speech, cap, but to notify you we was dissatisfied, and wouldn't have you run the ranch any longer," explained Neil.

"In that event, having heard the report of the committee, if there's no further new business, I declare this meeting adjourned sine die. Kindly remove the perfume tubs, Captain Neil, at your earliest convenience."

The trio retreated ignominiously. They had come prepared to gloat over Leroy's discomfiture, and he had mocked them with that insolent ease of his that set their teeth in helpless rage.

But the deposed chief knew they had not struck their last blow. Throughout the night he could hear the low-voiced murmur of their plottings, and he knew that if the liquor held out long enough there would be sudden death at Robbers' Roost before twenty-four hours were up. He looked carefully to his rifle and his revolvers, testing several shells to make sure they had not been tampered with in his absence. After he had made all necessary preparations, he drew the blinds of his window and moved his easy chair from its customary place beside the fire. Also he was careful not to sit where any shadow would betray his position. Then back he went to his Villon, a revolver lying on the table within reach.

But the night passed without mishap, and with morning he ventured forth to his meeting with the sheriff. He might have slipped out from the back door of his cabin and gained the cañon, by circling, unobserved, up the draw and over the hogback, but he would not show by these precautions any fear of the cutthroats with whom he had to deal. As was his scrupulous custom, he shaved and took his morning bath before appearing outdoors. In all Arizona no trimmer, more graceful figure of jaunty recklessness could be seen than this one stepping lightly forth to knock at the bunk-house door behind which he knew were at least two men determined on his death by treachery.

Neil came to the door in answer to his knock, and within he could see the villainous faces and bloodshot eyes of the other two peering at him.

"Good mo'ning, Captain Neil. I'm on my way to keep that appointment I mentioned last night. I'd ce'tainly be glad to have you go along. Nothing like being on the spot to prevent double-crossing."

"I'm with you in the fling of a cow's tail. Come on, boys."

"I think not. You and I will go alone."

"Just as you say. Webster, I guess you better saddle Two-step and the Lazy B roan."

"I ain't saddling ponies for Mr. Leroy," returned Webster, with thick defiance.

Neil was across the room in two strides. "When I tell you to do a thing, jump! Get a move on you, and saddle those broncs."

"I don't know as——"

"Vamos!"

Webster sullenly slouched out.

"I see you make them jump," commented the former captain audibly, seating himself comfortably on a rock. "It's the only way you'll get along with them. See that they come to time or pump lead into them. You'll find there's no middle way."

Neil and Leroy had hardly passed beyond the rock-slide before the others, suspicion awake in their sodden brains, dodged after them on foot. For three miles they followed the broncos as the latter picked their way up the steep trail that led to the Dalriada Mine.

"If Mr. Collins is here, he's lying

almighty low," exclaimed Neil, as he swung from his pony at the foot of the bluff from the brow of which the gray dump of the mine straggled down like a Titan's beard.

"Right you are, Mr. Neil."

York whirled, revolver in hand, but the man who had risen from behind the big boulder beside the trail was resting both hands on the rock before him.

"You're alone, are you?" demanded York.

"I am."

"I don't like to misdoubt a gentleman's word, but I allow you'll pardon me if I keep my poppers handy."

"I understood I was to meet you alone, Mr. Leroy," said the sheriff quickly, his blue-gray eyes on the former chief.

"That was the agreement, Mr. Collins, but it seems the boys are on the anxious seat about these little socials of ours. They've embraced the notion that I'm selling them. I hated to have them harassed with doubts, so I invited the new majordomo of the ranch to come with me. Of cou'se, if you object——"

"I don't object in the least, but I want him to understand the agreement. I've got a posse waiting at Eldorado Springs, and as soon as I get back there we take the trail after you."

York grinned. "We'll be in Sonora then, Val. Think I'm going to wait and let you shoot off my other fingers?"

Collins fished from his vest pocket the papers he had taken from Scotty's hat and from Webster. "I think I'll be jogging along back to the springs. I reckon these are what you want."

Leroy took them from him and handed them to Neil. "Don't let us detain you any longer, Mr. Collins. I know you're awful busy these days."

The sheriff nodded a good day, cut down the hill on the slant, and disappeared in a mesquit thicket, from the other side of which he presently emerged astride a bay horse.

The two outlaws retraced their way to the foot of the hill and remounted their broncos.

"I want to say, cap, that I'm eating humble-pie in big chunks right this minute," said Neil shamefacedly, scratching his curly poll and looking apologetically at his former chief. "I might 'a' knowed you was straight as a string, all I've seen of you these last two years. If those coyotes say another word, cap——"

An exploding echo seemed to shake the mountain, and then another. Leroy swayed in the saddle, clutching at his side. He pitched forward, his arms round the horse's neck, and slid slowly to the ground.

Neil was off his horse in an instant, kneeling beside him. He lifted him in his arms and carried him behind a great outcropping boulder.

"It's that hound Collins," he muttered, as he propped the wounded man's head on his arm.

Leroy opened his eyes and smiled faintly. "Guess again, York."

"You don't mean——"

He nodded. "Right this time—Webster and Reilly. They shot to get us both."

Neil choked. "You ain't bad hurt, old man. Say you ain't bad hurt, Dolf."

"More than I can carry, York; shot through and through. I've been doubtful of Reilly for a long time."

"By the Lord, if I don't get the rattlesnakes for this!" swore Neil between his teeth. "Ain't there nothin' I can do for you, old pardner?"

In sharp succession four shots rang out. Neil grasped his rifle, leaning forward and crouching for cover. He turned a puzzled face toward Leroy. "I don't savvy. They ain't shooting at us."

"The sheriff," explained Leroy. "They forgot him, and he doubled back on them."

"I'll bet Val got one of them," cried Neil, his face lighting.

"He's got one—or he's quit living. That's a sure thing. Why don't you circle up on them from behind, York?"

"I hate to leave you, cap—and you so bad. Can't I do a thing for you?"

Leroy smiled faintly. "Not a thing.

I'll be right here when you get back, York."

The curly-headed young giant took Leroy's hand in his, gulping down a boyish sob. "I ain't been square with you, cap. I reckon after this—when you git well—I'll not be such a coyote any more."

The dying man's eyes were lit with a beautiful tenderness. "There's one thing you can do for me, York. . . . I'm out of the game, but I want you to make a new start. . . . I got you into this life, boy. Quit it, and live straight. There's nothing to it, York."

The cowboy-bandit choked. "Don't you worry about me, cap. I'm all right. I'd just as lief quit this deviltry, anyhow."

"I want you to promise, boy." A whimsical, half-cynical smile touched Leroy's eyes. "You see, after living like a devil for thirty years, I want to die like a Christian. Now, go, York."

After Neil had left him, Leroy's eyes closed. Faintly he heard two more shots echoing down the valley, but the meaning of them was already lost to his wandering mind.

When Collins and Neil returned from their grim work of justice, he was babbling feebly of childhood days back in the Kentucky homeland. The word oftenest on his lips was "Mother."

CHAPTER XIV.

Helen Meredith hesitated between the hotel parlor and their private one, but conceded enough to the unchaperoned West and her own desire, to decide in favor of the latter.

"You may send the gentleman in," she told the bell-boy, and when he had gone she deftly rearranged the cushions in the deep window-seats built in the recesses of the thick adobe wall.

She had vanished, however, before he appeared on the scene, and she allowed him to get seated before she sailed in from the next room. The young man, looking up at her with clear-eyed discernment, was instantly aware that the relation of intimacy existing between them had slipped back a few cogs. She was on guard, full armed with the evasions and complexities of her sex.

"This *is* a surprise, Mr. Collins," she smiled sweetly.

"And a pleasure?" he laughed.

"Of course. Did you come to see my father? I'm sorry. He's out."

"You needn't be sorry for me. I didn't come to see the major."

"How nice of you to say so! I have a hundred questions to ask you. About these rumors—are they true?"

"I don't know what the rumors are," he said, falling instantly grave. "You see, I reached town less than an hour ago, and I came to you at once—as soon as I could."

Her patrician manner disappeared for the moment. "That was good of you, knowing how anxious I must be to hear the facts ungarbled. Is it true that you have captured Mr. Leroy?"

She thought he looked at her with a sort of pity. "No, that is not true. You remember what we said of him—of how he might die?"

"He is dead—you killed him," she cried quickly, going the color of chalk.

"He is dead, but I did not kill him."

"Tell me," she commanded.

And he told her, beginning at the moment of his meeting with the outlaws at the Dalriada dump and continuing to the last moments of the tragedy. It touched her so nearly that she could not hear him through dry-eyed.

"And he spoke of me, you say?" she asked, after he had finished.

"Yes—when his mind cleared just at the last. He told me to tell you it was better so. He called you 'little pardner.'"

Presently Collins added: "If you don't mind my saying so, I think he was right. He was quite content to go—quite cheerful in his whimsical, gay way. If he had lived, there could have been no retracing of his steps. The tragedy would have been a greater one."

"Yes, I know that, but it hurts one to think it had to be—that all his splendid gifts and capabilities should end like this, and that we are forced to see

it is best. He might have done so much."

"And instead he became a miscreant. I reckon there was a lack in him somewhere."

"Yes, there was a great lack in him somewhere."

They were silent a minute or two before she asked whether he had recovered any of the money taken from the Limited.

"I think we got all that was left, and that was four-fifths of it. We found Reilly's memorandum in the heel of his boot, and Neil gave his up as soon as I mentioned it. Neil promised Leroy to try to lead a straight life after this, and I believe he will. He is only a wild cow-puncher gone wrong. Given the right environment, he should be all right."

"Couldn't you give him a place?"

He smiled. "Hardly. He is in Sonora now—slipped away while I was arranging to have Leroy buried. Strange how things work round, isn't it? Out of the five train-robbers that held up the Limited, only one left alive!"

"Father will want to thank you for recovering the money. It means a good deal to him."

"I had rather it meant a good deal to your father's daughter," he told her, and noticed at once the subtle stiffening of resistance in her will.

"Thank you."

Her voice, cool as the plashing of ice-water, might have daunted a less daring man. But this man had long since determined the manner of his wooing, and was not to be driven from it.

"Sho! I ain't going to run away and hide because you look like you don't know I'm in Arizona. What kind of a lover would I be if I broke for cover every time you flashed those dark eyes at me?"

"Mr. Collins——"

"My friends call me Val," he suggested, smiling.

"I was going to ask, Mr. Collins, if you come here to try to bully me," she retorted.

"You know a heap better than that, Miss Meredith. All your life you haven't done anything but trample on sissy boys. Now, I expect I'm not a sissy boy, but a fair imitation of a man, and I shouldn't wonder but you'd find me some too restless for a door-mat." His maimed hand happened to be resting on the back of a chair as he spoke, and the story of the maiming emphasized potently the truth of his claim.

"Don't you assume a good deal, Mr. Collins, when you imply that I have any desire to master you?"

"Not a bit," he assured her cheerfully. "Every woman wants to boss the man she's going to marry, but if she finds she can't, she's glad of it, because then she knows she's got a man."

"You are quite sure I am going to marry you?" she asked gently—too gently, he thought.

"I'm only reasonably sure," he informed her. "You see, I can't tell for certain whether your pride or your good sense is the stronger."

She caught a detached glimpse of the situation, and it made for laughter.

"That's right, I want you should enjoy it," he said placidly.

"I do. It's the most absurd proposal—I suppose you call it a proposal—that ever I heard."

"I expect you've heard a good many in your time."

"We'll not discuss that, if you please."

"I *am* more interested in this one," he agreed.

"Isn't it about time to begin on Tucson?"

"Not to-day, ma'am. There are going to be a lot of to-morrows for you and me, and Tucson will have to wait till then."

"Didn't I give you an answer last week?"

"You did, but I didn't take it. Now I'm ready for your sure-enough answer."

She leaned back among the cushions and mocked his confidence. "I've heard about the vanity of girls, but never in my experience have I met any so colossal as this masculine vanity now on exhibit. Do you really think, Mr. Col-

lins, that all you have to do to win a woman is to look impressive and tell her that you have decided to marry her?"

"Do I look as if I thought that?" he asked her.

"It is perfectly ridiculous—your absurd attitude of taking everything for granted. Well, it may be the Tucson custom, but where I come from it is not in vogue."

"No, I reckon not. Back there a boy persuades a girl he loves her by ruining her digestion with candy and all sorts of ice arrangements from a soda-fountain. But I'm uncivilized enough to assume you're a woman of sense, and not a spoiled schoolgirl."

"You *are* uncivilized." She leaned forward audaciously, chin in hand, her eyes sparkling. "Would you beat me when I didn't obey?"

He laughed, admiring her with lazy eyes. "Perhaps; but I'd love you while I did it."

"Oh, you would love me." She looked up under her long lashes, not as boldly as she would have liked, and her eyes fell before his ardent, possessive ones. "I didn't know that was in the compact you proposed. I don't think I have heard you mention it."

He came forward with three clean strides and sat down beside her, looking what he was, a man out of a thousand.

"That's my last trump, girl, and my biggest. Would I go throwing it away early in the game? I'm no desert poet, but I love you from that copper crown of yours to those suède shoes that tap the floor so impatient. I love you all the time, no matter what mood you're in—when you flash those angry eyes at me and when you laugh in that slow, understanding way nobody else on earth has the trick of. Makes no difference to me whether you are mad or glad, I enjoy you just the same. That's the reason why I'm going to make you love me."

"You can't do it," she said, speaking in a low voice, apparently to the tassel she was tearing to pieces.

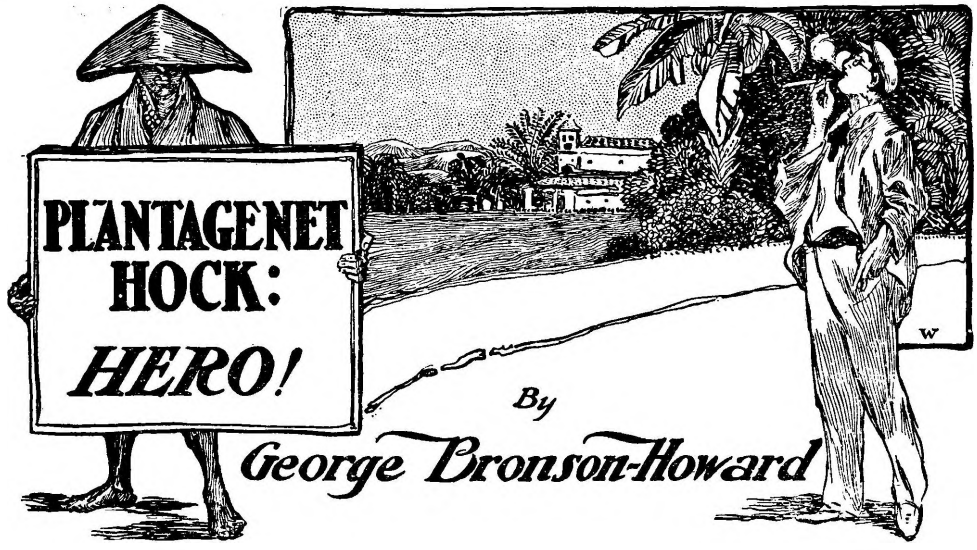
"Why not? I'll show you."

"But you can't—for a good reason."

"Name it."

"Because—I love you already." She burlesqued his drawl with a little, joyous laugh: "I reckon if you're so set on it, I'll have to marry you, Val Collins."

Then, as he caught her to him, her shy eyes fluttered up to meet his.



"A man ruthlessly pursued by the Spirit of Romance and forced into the most ridiculous adventures," is how the central figure in Mr. Bronson-Howard's new series describes himself. This modern D'Artagnan has no love for the heroic but becomes a hero in spite of himself. His experiences are unusually interesting, and while you smile at him you will pity this poor fellow who, no matter what part of the world he is in, can never escape the limelight.

I.—THE LADY OF LUZON

(A Complete Story)

IT has long been on my mind to do what I am about to do; but for just as long I have refrained because I shrank from again obtruding my personality upon the much-suffering public. You all know of me, Plantagenet Hock, the hero of more adventures than befell D'Artagnan. You no doubt have pictured me tall, slim, debonair, with fiery dark eyes—a hero of romance. Maidens have longed to meet me, men have hated the sound of my name because their own practical lives kept them from ever hoping to gain my standing as a reckless blade.

You have read my book, of course; everybody has — "The Flash of Swords." My royalties from that alone have been enough to keep me for the rest of my life. Therefore, being in a position to abjure my profession, I am at last ready to speak for myself, to tell you just what sort of a man I am, and to remove from my honest German name the stigma of romance.

For if there is one thing on earth I despise, it is that same romance. Now the secret is out. I was not meant for a hero—I was made one against my will. For a man of less than thirty, I have managed to mix myself up in more remarkable scrapes than any one on record—and I have examined the record thoroughly.

Did I say mix myself up? I did not mean it. What I should have said is that fate has managed to mix me up in them. By nature quiet and reflective in my moods, I have had action forced upon me. An utter disbeliever in romance, and one whose former staple jeer was at the romantic novel, I have gone through experiences which have been doubted by the chiefest of the neo-romancists. In some mysterious fashion, the Spirit of Romance has avenged itself upon me; and, for the last five or six years, I have been present at every adventure that has occurred within a radius of twenty-five miles.

I have rescued women from drowning, from fire, from under the wheels of an engine; have wrested away bottles of laudanum, and confiscated revolvers; have run to ground a notorious gang of counterfeiters, and held up a burglar of international repute. All these things happened before the events herein narrated. When fate first launched me on my adventurous career, I was a physical weakling. Forced to the realization that if such things were likely to happen I had best be prepared, I took up gymnasium work, which I loathed—and loathe still; also sports; also any form of physical exercise. But fate made it necessary for me to be as strong as a bull.

Infinitely do I prefer to remain at home with a volume of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, or others of their ilk, with near to hand a box of imported French candy. The reading of the iconoclasts and the munching of sweet things are the only pleasures in life to me. Yet fate has chosen to make a hero out of me, and spread my fame throughout the land.

Before proceeding with my true narration of certain events, the garbled version of which the public already knows, I will say a few words concerning my career up to the date of my going abroad.

My father was a native of Germany, by name Hock, who came to America, made a small competency from the wholesale delicatessen business, and retired at the age of fifty. He met my mother, the daughter of the landlady at whose house he resided. She was young and romantic; but nevertheless she married my father. When I was born, she deferred the christening for several weeks until she had chosen a suitable name for me. She chose that odious one that I bear—Plantagenet. She said it was a kingly name—I think it an asinine one.

My father died before I was in my teens; and my mother kept me at school until I had graduated at the City College of my native city. I was then eighteen, and she strained every nerve to get me into the naval academy at Annapolis. She succeeded; but I refused to be an officer and wear gold braid. My bent was a scholarly one. Seeing that she was determined, I resigned from the naval academy as soon as I came of age, and went to New York, thinking to take up journalism and become, in time, the editor of some solid, conservative sheet.

Fate again blocked me. My knowledge of things naval and military gave the city editor of the *Clarion* an excuse to put me at such work as maneuvers, encampments, man-of-war trails, torpedo tests. I acquitted myself to the best of my ability, thinking that such work must be done before I could aspire to an editorial position. But soon I found that I was regarded as too valuable a special writer to ever be put "on the desk." Railroad wrecks, big fires, riots, strikes, murders—these all came my way; and in the pursuance of my duty, opportunities were thrust upon me to save lives and risk my own. I did only what any normal man does under the circumstances—but there were so many circumstances. The *Clarion* took to featuring my stuff, and appending my name in print; then to featuring *me*. And so was founded the reputation from which I have never been able to rid myself.

In person I am small and slight, have tow-colored hair, and wear large, round steel-rimmed spectacles. I measure perhaps about five feet five—one inch below the average height of a man. Normally, I should be weak-chested

and thin-armed; but, through the cursed exercise I have been forced to take, I am rather full-chested, and have arms like a blacksmith. My clothes refuse to fit me, and I have a penchant for tan shoes, which I constantly wear, also a golf-cap in Scotch plaid. I have a fondness for tobacco in only one form—that of Pittsburg stogies, which my friends declare are unbearable to delicate olfactory nerves.

Now you know me for the first time, I hope you are disillusioned. That description doesn't sound much like a hero, does it?

And now, having got rid of the preliminaries, I shall begin the narration of each story concerning me which the *Clarion* has featured in such glowing colors. The first and most flagrant is their account of my adventures which had to do with Maria de Alguna, whom I call La Doña de Luzon.

II.

For a long time the government had been sending out neatly bound little reports in which was said in governmental, eighteen-hundred-dollar-a-year-clerical English, quite without commas, that the Philippines were entirely pacified. It also invited capital to invest there. They had corraled the Amalgamated Press correspondent at Manila by making him an official of something or the other with a large salary; and so, of course, the A. P. man's reports were quite in accordance with the statements made by the powers that be. But free-lance correspondents, and men who were not God-fearing and did not love the "great and good civil government," were irritating "his Fatness Who Sat in Manila" by sending to the States unauthorized and disquieting reports of mountain risings, wholesale arson, gun-running, and burning of public buildings. The editor of the *Clarion* wanted to know who was telling the truth, so one day he called yours truly into his office and made the following statement:

"Planty"—he called me that when he was pleased to be facetious—"Planty, there's a Pacific mail-boat leaves San Francisco on the 18th. I want you to take it and go to the Philippines, and find out what's doing——"

"Oh, hell!" I said, and meant it.

"Not hell," he corrected gently, meaning to be funny—"the Philippines. You're to find out if the government's lying or not."

"It is," I said sulkily. "It's always lying."

"You're to find out," repeated the editor. He's a very good editor; but when he puts on that gape-o'-grin look, he makes a silly mountain-goat look wise by comparison. "Maybe," he adds—"maybe you'll rescue some fair maiden from—Igorottes, or something." This very vaguely, and with the same foolish "Ain't I a funny awss?" sort of look.

"Look here, Mr. Beane," said I, hitting the desk good and hard. "I won't. I'll go to your fool Philippines and give you your stuff. But you've got to cut out that playing me up as a hero. I won't stand for it. I tell you I'm so sick and tired of it that if I saw a crocodile open his jaws to take a bite at some helpless she-creature, I'd let him. Yes, I would, even if I had a magazine rifle in my hand at the time."

This seemed to tickle him on the funny-bone; for he lets out a fool cackle that made me so infernally sore I went out of the office and let him have his jackass laugh out all to himself. I didn't want to rob him of any flavor in his old joke. Then I went home and began to pack.

I took that boat sailing on the 18th—the *Siberia*. Twenty-seven days later it landed me in Manila. I put up at the Oriente, and began to look around me.

The government was lying all right, I didn't have any doubt of that. After some talk with the local scribes, who were very eager to give me stories that a half-witted albino wouldn't have detected any truth in, I made up my mind that I'd better make tracks for those parts of the islands not quite so permeated with civilization and Swiss beer. Looking the matter over, I de-

cided to land on one of the southern islands—Panay for choice—and worm my way up-country. They told me in Manila that it was dangerous.

"What's dangerous?" I asked them. "Those little brown imitations of men? The only danger lies in letting them have a good opinion of themselves. If somebody kept a looking-glass under their noses long enough, they'd be perfectly harmless."

The boat for Iloilo left the next day; and I was making arrangements to take it, when word comes to my ears very cautiously, through a government clerk at headquarters, that there was a man's size insurrection just breaking out in northern Luzon. The clerk advised Luango as the best port to make for in order to see the fun; and when he left me, I got a banca and rowed all over the water-front, trying to find a boat that would take me to that tag end of creation. My Spanish isn't so awfully bad—they made us take it at the academy—and I finally found a lorcha that had a captain who was willing to accept my fifty pesos and me as a passenger. He said he was going to Luango. It was my first radical experience with mestizo mendacity.

I took along a bag, containing pajamas and some changes of linen, a nickel-plated can with patent top containing a gallon of ammonia, a nickel pistol with a rubber bulb, which, when pressed, ejected enough of ammonia to keep any bad man guessing his age and why he was born for some little while; lots of quinin and chlorodyn, and five pounds of candy—not to mention some two or three hundred sheets of "copy" paper and a supply of ink for my fountain pen. Thus equipped, I feared not insurrectos nor fevers nor cholera nor the great and good civil government.

When the captain of the lorcha showed me where I was to sleep, I decided in favor of the deck. The lack of air in that room might have been a recommendation to some, allied as it was with the smell of food being stewed in garlic; but, having the peculiar tastes of an American pig (for thus were we termed by our grateful little brown brothers), I did not regard it as an advantage.

The lorcha, twenty feet over all, with a five-foot beam, was captained by a Spanish half-breed, with four Tagal sailors and two Chinos. I came aboard very secretly, for I was not anxious that his Fatness' ears should receive tidings of my departure; and we sailed with the night tide.

Fortune has favored me somewhat with the stolidity of the Teutonic temperament; otherwise the discomforts I experienced on that filthy lorcha might have temporarily unsettled my mind. The heat of the tropical day—and I had three such days aboard—rendered it impossible for one to remain on deck with any degree of comfort; for the planking was about as desirable a seat as the top of a red-hot stove. The stench below was not conducive to what I should call elegant ease. The sun glared too much for one to read on deck; it was too dark to read below without adding the fumes of a kerosene-lamp to the combinations of smells, and increasing also the heat thereby. I was driven to incessant smoking of cigarillos and playing monte with the Spanish captain. The nights, out under the moon and stars, were the only pleasant features of the trip.

Three days; and then I was landed on a worm-eaten dock in the full glare of the noon sun. The port, the captain assured me, was Luango; and I was all too eager to get ashore to question his word. The vessel, after landing me, sagged off in the direction from which we came, their destination being, according to that same lying captain, a port that we had passed.

There were no white faces to welcome me—not even a customs inspector. A number of pop-eyed taos gathered around me, staring, as I sat on my bag and questioned them in Spanish. It appeared that they were not familiar with that tongue—very few of the up-country lower class are. Meanwhile, the sun was getting hotter.

I picked up my bag and started off along what looked like a path. Here

and there were little clearings on which were built nipa shacks of the poorest description. Not a decent house in sight. But it was quite evident there must be some overlord of the district, so I kept along the path, the pop-eyed taos following me with apparent aimlessness.

It was the usual tropical forest—palms, dragon-trees, ylang-ylangs. The usual parrots screamed—the usual monkeys chattered. The gorgeous colors of some orchids showed every now and then; and butterflies and mosquitoes were much in evidence.

And at last—a real house!

It was of the usual type built by the Spaniards—large, of white stone, having a center court, and with all its living-rooms on the second floor. It looked deserted.

Putting down my bag again, I sat upon it. The pop-eyed taos gathered around again, staring.

"Go away," I said, for their stare was getting on my nerves. "Go away —vamos!—get out."

They grinned at me, still staring. I waved my hands in the direction whence they came. They only nodded, pointing to the white house. Whereupon I arose and kicked the nearest one, good and hard. He burst out blubbering, and held the afflicted part. The others backed away. I pursued them with emphatic threats coupled with many movements of my feet. Exhausted, and wiping my face with a handkerchief, I sat down on my bag again, monarch of all I surveyed.

And at the same moment came a piercing scream from the rear of the house. It was a woman's scream. It filled me with vague uneasiness; and had it been possible, I would have perspired more profusely. For I had grown to fear women, through the misadventures that had come to me by reason of my association with them. I got up again, determined not to be involved in any new scrape.

The screams continued. Presently the chaparral parted to my right, and a girl in a loose silk robe came running toward me, her arms outstretched. Even at that moment I could not but frankly admit that she was, as some men reckon such things, charming; that she had what some people would call beautiful eyes; and that her bare arms were, according to the popular notion, rounded and shapely.

Straight for me she made. Just my luck. Those outstretched fingers gripped my shoulders; those eyes looked into mine.

"You have come," she sobbed in hysterical Spanish. "You have come to help me. Thank the dear God you have come to help me!"

III.

That's the way every one of them takes things for granted. They seem to think that all they have to do is rush up to a man, tell him they are in trouble, and then wait for him to pull them out. That's the way this girl did. She looked at me with those big eyes of hers, as though to say: "Now it's up to you, fair stranger. Get busy." Such assurance was perfectly maddening. I didn't know the girl. I didn't care a plugged Mexican peseta about her troubles. I was there to accomplish some work for my paper—legitimate work, having to do with the investigation of uprisings, etc., and including not at all the aiding of maidens in distress. I very gently disengaged her fingers from my white drill suit, and pushed her away from me.

"Madam," I said, and very coldly, too, speaking in my best, most formal Spanish. "Señorita, doña, or whatever you may be, you make a great mistake. I have not come to help you; and I haven't any intention of doing so."

Whereupon I started to walk away; but she was after me in a second, and caught me by what stands for the tails of a white jacket.

"You will not desert me. You will aid me. You are Americano; and they are very good to women. I know you will not desert me. You will help me."

"Señorita"—I guessed she was that —"you are greatly mistaken. I tell you

that I am not the kind of man you're looking for. I'm a plain newspaper reporter; and I've got work to do; and I can't stop to help you; and that's all there is to it. Positively all. *Adios.*"

She looked at me just a moment with those big eyes of hers—then they began to water; and she plumped herself down in the grass and wept. I was some yards from her at that moment; and if I'd had any sense I'd have gone on. But when a woman begins to blub, it makes me shaky on my pins, and I waver. I went back to her and begged her not to cry. I pointed out the futility of it.

"Look," I said. "I'm not the only man in the world. There must be a lot of Spanish gentlemen hereabouts who haven't got anything to do but play knight-errant. They'll be glad of the chance. If I see any, I'll tell 'em about you; and they'll come as quick as a shot. But don't cry. There isn't any sense in it. Indeed there isn't."

I patted her wavy, black hair, just as I would have patted a nice, sleek pussy-cat. It was an involuntary action. It meant nothing; but the next moment she had clasped my shoulders again.

"You will help me, you will, you will. I knew you would. You are Americano and brave. And good to poor women. You—— Ah, Santa Maria!"

Now you see! What was a man to do? I hadn't meant anything like that; but there wasn't the slightest use in trying to explain the fact to her. Besides, if I had pulled her arms away from my shoulders, she would have fallen down. She sobbed for some time; and I kept standing there like a silly wax-work, thinking a whole lot, but not thinking in the kind of language one would use to a first-class female of her description.

Then, all of a sudden, I got some sort of an uneasy premonition that something was happening that I didn't know anything about. I threw my eyes around sideways; and they lighted on a lemon-colored gentleman with a cute, spiky little mustache, twisted up so as to look very fierce, with hair cut *en brosse,* and little, greeny eyes that looked like lizards'. The gentleman's hands were small and elegantly kept; and one of them was holding a gun, which was pointed at me. I looked at him inquiringly, gently. I wasn't afraid of him, because I hadn't done anything to him.

Said I to the girl: "The gentleman with the heavy part has entered, and he says: 'Once aboard the lugger and the ge-yurl is mine.'" Only I said this in English; and she didn't understand it. Wouldn't have, probably, even if she did know English. The women of the Latin races are sadly lacking in humor. They have to be, for they play tragedy parts all the time.

"Maria!" said the lemon-colored gentleman.

I could feel the girl's heart throb against my fifth rib. She turned, still keeping hold of me, and looked the lemon-colored gentleman over. Did she give him a nasty look? You bet your grandmother's whiskers she did!

"Perro!" she said, to accompany the look. Any Ollendorff scholar will tell you that by this she intended to convey the impression that the gentleman was of canine ancestry.

But the lemon man did not favor her with a reply; instead, he favored me. He put one hand to the cute little mustache, gave it a fiercer twirl upward, advanced a step, and stuck the gun near enough for me to examine the workmanship thoroughly.

"Barbui!" he made remark.

Compliments were flying. The lemon-tinted gentleman evidently wished to be insulting. *"Barbui"* means "pig."

"Barbui!" he said again. *"Barbui Americano!"*

At least he had the nationality right.

"You're a good guesser," said I, smiling at him in a friendly sort of way. "I'm from Chicago."

"Ha!" said he, with a dry sort of cackle, which he meant to indicate mirth. "He admits it. He is swine. Swine unspeakable. He grunts, using his nose. He is a thing."

"What sort of a thing?" I demanded, quick to resent the indefinite.

"A thing unspeakable," he replied. Or rather that's the sense of it.

"Lay low," I advised him.

Then he turned to the girl. "Maria," said he, "leave this small man before I slay him. His blood is of no consequence, but for your sake I will not shed it. Come."

He held out his hand. The girl made a motion with her mouth to indicate the presence of something displeasing to her olfactory nerves. Then she spoke.

"You low dog!" she said. "You renegade! You half-caste! There is in you none of the blood of your Spanish father, only that of your mestiza mother. Do not dare to touch me again. Coward, knave, filthy cur!"

She made a motion of supreme disgust. The little lizardy eyes of the lemon man blinked. He showed a set of teeth, yellow enough for the "I don't" advertisement of a dentifrice. Also he came forward and grabbed me by the arm, loosening the girl's grasp.

"Go!" he said. "Little American pig! Go! Go if you value your miserable little life, which is of no consequence whatever to me!"

He pushed me. That was too much for even a genial philosopher to stand. The man was half-caste, and I was white. You can educate a good deal out of a man; but when a person of mixed blood uses force upon a white man, he's playing with nitroglycerin. Old man Trouble, watching over the situation, gives me a jolt, and I jump into the muddle with both feet.

"You listen to me," said I. "This lady has asked for my protection, and she's going to get it; and if you make another move in my direction, or touch me with your filthy paws, I'll knock your block off, you yellow Gugu, and don't you forget it."

He jumped back, showed his teeth, and fired his little gun. But those yellow men always fire at the sun. I believe they close their eyes when they shoot. At any rate, the bullet didn't come within miles of me; but my fist landed straight on the point of his nose, and the claret thus tapped spoiled the cute little mustache's glossy appearance. Incidentally, I caught hold of the hand that held the gun, and half-twisted it off. He yelled and dropped the gun, which I kicked into the bushes.

"Now stand up and take your medicine," I said.

But not he! With his gun gone, he wanted to run. You can't teach a man of color to fight with his fists. They don't understand it. They've got to have something in their hands; just as they're afraid to fight out in the open. He started to run, but I checked him with a jolt over the heart. He came at me then, cussing a blue streak, and champing his teeth together until he frothed at the mouth. No notion of science—slung his arms around like a batter with three men on bases and the score tied. It was a shame to take him up. Any Christian would have called it cruelty to animals; but I was good and mad, and I hit him every chance I got. I would have been willing to pay him a salary to act as a punching-bag. He was a hanged sight easier. You do have to watch for the pigskin to come back; but you didn't have to bother about him at all.

Presently I had time to pause and consider things, and, as I allowed my gaze to rest on the comatose yellow man, a feeling of great uneasiness took hold of me. I had made an enemy. I was alone in a hostile country.

"Now I have gone and done it," I groaned.

The girl's hands were around my neck this time. "My preserver," she wept. "My noble preserver. My strong, brave little man. You have preserved me, you have preserved me."

Just as suddenly she disengaged me. "They are returning," she said, listening intently. "They are returning. Now all is well. You will lead them. You will bring my father back to me. Ah, you are my angel that the good God has sent to me."

I did not explain to her that it was the captain of a very filthy lorcha who

was responsible for my being in this plight. There is no sense in being practical with a woman. This one was playing the leading lady in a first-class melodrama; and she was enjoying the part immensely. I did not know the game in which I was sitting; but I knew my ante was up, and I was going to take cards. There is no sense in welching after you've gotten into the play; so I stood there very quietly not saying anything, but making up for it by telling myself that the fool-killer was missing a lot of business by not dropping off at that watering-station.

New developments were at hand, all right, for around the corner comes a detachment of hayfoots, wearing their shirts outside their blue cotton drawers, and carrying guns. They had on rope sandals and grass-straw hats; and one of them sported a constabulary cap with a gold eagle. He was a little better sort than the others; and he had on pongee clothes and a celluloid collar, which had an enameled button in the front. He was so proud of the button that he refused to efface it by wearing a necktie.

There were about twenty-five of them, some quarter-breeds among them, but mostly the common or garden tao, the rice coolie. They shambled along toward us; and all of them took off their hats to the girl. The one with the constabulary gold eagle came up.

"Doña Maria," he said, speaking in Spanish, "we have pursued them, but it is of no avail. They possess the person of your august father; and we are desolate and desirous of death. May the wrath of Heaven descend upon us!"

Whereupon he beat his breast with his constabulary cap, and groaned three or four times.

She waved her hand in a magnificent manner. "You have done what your poor mentality allowed you, Manuel," she said. "But there stands the Señor Americano who has come to aid me. He will find these ladrones, will rescue my father, and will utterly destroy his enemies. See what he has done to Esteban——"

She pointed to the prostrate lemon-tinted one.

"With his hands he did it, this Señor Americano, none other. He is a man. He is strong, though little. Esteban took advantage of my helplessness while he stayed behind, pretending to protect me. He forgot he was mestiza and I a lady of Spain. The Señor Americano has justly punished him. Take him away and lock him in the cellar. And be prepared to march again when the Señor Americano has eaten. Away!"

The taos gathered about the lemon-tinted one, looking at him curiously, and at me, as though they fancied my diet was human flesh.

"They have little devils in each finger, these Americanos," muttered the one called Manuel, crossing himself several times. Then he kicked the prostrate Esteban and deliberately spat upon him, muttering something unprintable. He gave orders to some of his subordinates, meanwhile, to carry the inert body away. He himself preceded us to the court of the white house, bowing his way up the stone steps, and opening the door of the *comedor*.

"Tiffin—get—bymeby," he said slowly, and with the air of a turkey-cock.

"Now," said I to the girl, "what's doing?"

"Eh?" Her eyes rested upon me, and she smiled. She had very red lips and very white teeth. There should be a law passed preventing such women smiling on any man except the ones who are crazy about them.

"The Señor Americano is my good angel. I will tell him of my trouble, and he will succor me."

IV.

A woman tells a story upside down—the end first, the beginning second, and the middle where the finis ought to be—that is, any woman. But for complete roundaboutness commend me to a Spanish female. I listened patiently to Doña Maria for fully an hour and a

half, during which time, Manuel—who appeared to be the majordomo of the household—with the assistance of several of the hayfoots, served the tiffin. I don't remember what composed the meal; but I do know that I ate everything in sight, for the vile cookery aboard the lorcha had made me come near fasting for three days. As I drank my coffee and smoked some cigarettes she finished.

It appeared that her father, Don Cristoforo de Alguna, had been the governor of the province during Spanish times, besides owning vast estates all over the place. Don Cristoforo had a horror of banks, and he had been, since American occupation, gradually converting all of his property into gold. As soon as he had got rid of everything he owned in the Philippines he intended to return to his beloved Spain, and live the rest of his days as a Madrid boulevardier, present his daughter at court, and see her married to some man of rank.

But the fact that Don Cristoforo had much gold cached somewhere had gotten about. There had been many yellow gentlemen who had effected burglarious entrances into his casa with the intent of relieving him of the burden of the same; but the don was an artful dodger, and wherever he had hidden it, he had done his work well.

A few days before, the insurrection at Luango had broken out. The place where I had landed was not Luango, but a closed port, thirty miles below it; my captain had feared confiscation if he went into belligerent territory. The insurrectos needed money to buy arms from the German traders in Hongkong. They remembered Don Cristoforo. The night before, half a dozen of them had broken into the house, and torn things to pieces to find the hidden hoard. Failing, they pulled the don out of bed, and hustled him away to the tall timber. They left a note behind for Doña Maria, telling her that when her father coughed up, he would be released.

Doña Maria had summoned her house servants and plantation taos, put them under the command of Manuel, and sent them to do battle with the kidnapers. Esteban, the lemon-tinted gentleman, who was overseer, had remained behind to protect her. Seeing his opportunity, Esteban had made love to the lady; and when repulsed had threatened her. And thus matters had stood when I butted in.

Now, my job was to effect the release of the don.

She explained that frankly. She expected me to do it, all right, all right. There wasn't the slightest bit of use in arguing the thing with her. I saw that. I was up against it; and I cashed in.

"You will save him?"

"Can't help myself," said I.

I had been thinking over the matter while she talked; and it didn't look especially difficult. I wasn't much afraid of the Gugus potting me, for they were such rotten bad shots; and if I got Don Cristoforo away before he gave up his secret, I would save the United States a heap of trouble; for, without the money for arms, my friends the insurrectos would be in somewhat of a hole. Besides, it would be a good story for the paper.

The reason it didn't present any insuperable difficulties, was because I heard below in the patio the baying of two bloodhounds, which Maria told me had been used in the past to hunt runaway taos. Give a bloodhound the scent of anything a person has worn, and they'll stick to his trail until they've gotten him. I'd been on too many criminal hunts not to know that it was seldom they failed.

In the second place, it stood to reason that the hunt wouldn't be a long one, for it was a safe gamble that they weren't going to take the don very far away from his house if they expected to come back and get the swag. Therefore they would be liable to be within a radius of five or six miles; and with two bloodhounds and an ammonia-pistol to protect me, I wasn't taking any great risks.

I explained all this to Doña Maria. She beat her breast.

"Fool, idiot that I was not to think

of the hounds. They have been crying for him—*padre mio*. They will go to him on the wings of the wind. It is well. You will take a great force with you—all of my men—and overpower the ladrones. Ah! señor you have won my——"

This was my cue to break in. I didn't want her to get tender. "I won't take any force," said I. "Two bloodhounds are enough force for me. I'll go by myself, and if I don't bring your father back by nightfall, I'm a bum sleuth. Now, get together a bunch of your father's togs, and we'll let the pups have a smell; then get me a leash so's I can hold 'em in." The rest would be easy, I opined. I didn't want any yellow men with white livers along with my game. They might influence the dogs. I explained this carefully; but the only shot in my locker that was any good was my threatening to pull out altogether if I wasn't allowed to play the game my own way.

That settled her. We collected some of the don's glad rags and took them down to the pups. Fine, handsome young canines they were, I don't think! They had noses like wolves, teeth like sharks, and eyes all watery and red-rimmed; and the sort of looks they gave me are the kind a man gets drunk to forget. But I've got some sort of a way with animals—always had—and after I let them smell the clothes, and patted them discreetly on the back of their necks, I finally got up enough nerve to stroke them on the noses, just to show I trusted them. The bluff went. Finally I fed them some raw iguana meat; and gave orders to have them fastened together and the long chain given to me.

Meanwhile they led out my war-horse in the shape of an Arabian steed that—as I had cause to remember—Maria said "was possessed of a devil, but was as a lamb in the hands of a strong man." Of course that settled it. I had to ride him. So I climbed up into the rocking-chair Mexican saddle, and Manuel handed me the long steel chain that was attached to the hounds' collars. It had a round, bracelet sort of affair at the end, and I snapped this around my wrist—like the unqualified fool I was.

The whole population of the plantation came down to see me off; and, just before I started, Doña Maria fixed up a fine finale for the curtain of Act Two by throwing her arms around me again, and kissing me on the cheeks.

Then I let Messieurs the Bloodhounds get in their good work.

V.

There are a good many games I'd rather play than trailing somebody with a pair of bloodhounds. The beasts have no notion at all of beauty of repose. They hit the trail hot, and keep at it as if it were absolutely necessary to get there immediately or miss a train.

And there was I, astraddle a bucking horse, holding him in with one hand, and being nearly pulled off my balance on the other side by those hound-dogs straining at the steel chain I was fastened to. And they weren't particular about keeping to the path, either. They'd dart off into the thickest kind of undergrowth all of a sudden, and Mr. Caballo would put up his head and snort, and do a series of intricate bucks that would have been all right in the show-ring; but which didn't make much of a hit with me out there in that tropical forest. I swore at Doña Maria for making me take the blooming Rosinante, for it would have been a hanged sight easier to have followed those pups on foot.

Incidentally, with both hands thus engaged, the mosquitoes and flies had a lovely time with my face. I began to feel as if they'd crawled under my skin and were trying to get out. There wasn't any manner of use in shaking my head. They seemed to know I couldn't get at 'em, and took advantage of the fact; for if I'd let go of Mr. Horse for a second, he'd have bolted head over heels; and if I'd let go of Messieurs Pups, I'd 'a' had to ride like Tod Sloane on the last stretch to ever

catch up with them again. So you can figure it out for yourself that I wasn't enjoying the scenery much; and was doing considerable cussing at myself for ever getting landed in such a fix.

Every now and then, to vary the monotony, Mr. Horse would reach his head around and try to separate me from a portion of my leg; and every time he did it, to keep things lively for him, I kicked the stirrup up against his nose and gave him a brief lesson in astronomy. Whereupon, he would hump his back like a camel, and jump up with all four feet. That would lift me up so that you could have fired a twelve-pounder shot between me and the saddle. About this time the dogs would get busy and give an awful yank to the chain; and that would land me with my nose making investigations in the caballo's mane. Altogether, it was a fine, lively afternoon.

I was sore all over; and my wrists hurt so much that if some one had neatly dissected my hands at the moment, I wouldn't have felt it. And I was beginning to get that nasty, vacant feeling at the stomach that comes from being jolted up and down on a hard saddle.

During this time we had gone, counting our deviations from the path and back again, about seven miles—as the crow flies, about four. At this moment the pups struck the scent a little fresher, and they began to sprint like jackrabbits. Mr. Horse developed an inclination to stand still; and the dogs nearly yanked me out of the saddle.

I stuck those large rowels Maria had put on my heels into Mr. Horse's sides, and he changed his mind about staying still. He decided that he was running a race. He started to catch up with the dogs and beat them; and he succeeded. He got ahead of them, and the first thing I knew, I was dragging them along by the necks. They got busy then and developed a new set of legs, and started in to make Mr. Horse pay for trying to beat them. I won't forget that ride in a hurry.

As a starter, I lost my sun-helmet; and my head was left exposed to that cute little sun that has so much fun with men in the tropics.

To continue, the stirrup on the dog side, weakened by so much pressing, broke its leather and nearly unseated me. In trying to catch myself, I dropped the reins; and they fell loose in such a way that Mr. Horse got the bit between his teeth. No use in fooling with the reins after that. I couldn't get 'em, anyhow. I grabbed Mr. Horse's mane with my left hand and stuck my stirrupless heel square into his side to hold on. Then I shut my eyes and wondered what I'd hit when the crash came.

I began to speculate as to how long it would be before they found my body, and whether they'd recognize it when they did. To keep me alive to the situation, we'd strike a fallen tree every now and then, and Mr. Horse would jump about four feet in the air, and I'd feel as though I'd gone ballooning for a couple of seconds.

About this time it comes to my notice that there is a first-class young scrap going on somewhere; because I hear a lot of little pop-pop, pop-pops, like some kids blowing up paper-bags and breaking them. Also two or three times, something whizzes by me like a sick mosquito. I don't make any mistake as to what those sounds are; and I open my eyes to take a look.

Lo and behold! I see a lot of khaki uniforms and red-cotton handkerchiefs and Stetson hats with air-holes in 'em. Also I hear somebody give out a whoop resembling an Apache outcast, with the sapient counsel: "Give 'em hell, boys."

Incidentally my eyes take in the fact that there are a lot of Gugus running like the Old Harry, and chucking their guns and bandoliers away as they go.

I try to pull up my bucking steed; but—nothing doing! I do manage to get the reins in my hands; but the wall-eyed old son-of-a-gun has got the bit; and he doesn't mind the reins a little bit. On go Messieurs the Bloodhounds, noses to the ground, straight into the middle of the boys in khaki, tumbling over about fifty Gugus on the way. I think everybody stopped

bothering about everybody else; and they all stood still and tried to pot me. I thought I'd knocked over a beehive.

The chaps with the Stetson hats let out a string of cusses, and first thing you know, it's all over, and I'm out of the scrap, thundering down a road with two crazy dogs nosing along the ground like they were eating as they went, and following them a large-sized horse frothing at the mouth and galloping like he was carrying the good news from Ghent to Aix; with a small-sized specimen of a man embracing him like a brother and wondering which would hurt most—to fall off or stay on, and looking with the utmost indifference to going to Hades, feeling that after such an experience Monsieur Le Mephistopheles would have to store up his think-tank with new ideas if he wanted to make any impression on Plantagenet Hock, Esq.

We come to the end of the road. There is a spiked stone fence in the way. The dogs do a disappearing stunt over it. Something like a bolt of lightning seems to strike Mr. Horse and me about the same time. We land on the other side with most of me on the ground, but the sturdy left still holding on to the mane. I get dragged along by the knees until I'm quite sure they'll never interfere with the crease in my trousers any more; and then, all of a sudden, the pressure on the chain relaxes, and the horse sweeps on. The chain gives a sudden jerk, and the next minute I'm staring at the setting sun from a position of elegant ease on top of a thornbush.

I gave out a yell that would have startled a respectable community, and sat up painfully, watching Mr. Horse galloping away in the far distance. My attention is distracted from him by another jerk on the chain and a man letting out profuse appeals to all the saints in the calendar, aided and abetted in his disturbing of the peace by two large bloodhounds growling at him and making affectionate efforts to get him by the throat.

I got up. "Hello!" said I painfully, pulling in the dogs. "So you're the man we're after, are you?"

"No," said he eagerly. "No, señor, I am—I am——"

It became evident to me that the dogs would not have jerked me off the horse if they had not come to the end of the trail.

"I know you," said I. "I've been hunting you with these blankety-blank dogs for some time. They're on to you, all right. So I guess we'd better hike for the *casa,* don."

"No," says he, "no, no." He backed away and drew a large instrument of warfare from his pocket which looked to me like a pocket reproduction of an elephant-gun. He meant business, too. I didn't take any chances; and I let him have the squirt from the ammonia-pistol full smack right between the eyes. He gave one yelp, and fell over, rubbing his eyes with his hands like mad, and cursing me most fluently.

I was sorry to do it, very sorry, for the man was Doña Maria's father; but he evidently took me for an enemy, and wouldn't he have finished my business before I could have said "Knife," or any other equally irrelevant monosyllable? I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him up.

"Come on, now," said I.

He was weeping and crying like any little kid. I looked him over. He didn't much resemble any noble don to me, but had the appearance of being tarred with the same brush as my lemon-colored friend whom I had used as a punching-bag. I didn't have much to say. I knew I was doing my duty; and I also knew that the sooner I got him back to the house, the better it would be for all concerned; for I wasn't particularly keen to run into any more scraps that day. Truth to tell, I felt as though there was a little bit of rest coming to me.

So I let the dogs put their noses to the ground again and lead us back to Maria.

We got back much sooner than I expected. I guess I was so worked up with holding on to my ammonia-blinded don that I didn't stop to think much

about time. The dogs knew the way; and I let 'em lead me across a rice-paddy, over two or three fences, and into the forest again. I had to stick the young elephant-gun under my captive's nose every now and then to make him realize that a man who can walk and won't walk has got to be made walk; and every time he felt it nosing around him he bucked just as my faithful steed had.

Well, finally we broke through the jungle, and when the dogs saw the house again they started on a run, with me following them pulling my captive don. He couldn't see what was going on for the ammonia; and he kept up that whine all the time. We went into the patio at a clip; and I stuck out my wrist to Manuel, who, with a bunch of muchachos and taos, crowded around me.

"Here," said I. "Before you say another word get that thing undone."

He monkeyed with the wrist-bracelet and tore up my wrist some; but finally got it off and led those blooming beasts away. At the same moment, Doña Maria comes rushing down the stone steps and toward my captive.

"Here," says I shortly, for she stops suddenly, staring at the man as if he was some new specimen of the genus homo never previously brought to her attention. "Here, what's the matter with you? There's your father, and he's led me a lovely dance."

"Eh—what is that you say?" she screamed. "My father! *Madre de Dios! Santa Maria! Padre mio!* Father—*my* father! Father—ha! It is that you are *borracho.*"

"Look here!" I was good and sore now! Here was I with my wrists bleeding, feeling as though I'd swallowed a camel, with bruises all over me, all for her sake; and now she says that I am drunk. "Look here! This is a—deuce of a way to treat me after I've got your father."

"My father! Where? *That* my father! Maria! that is not my father."

It was too much for me. I keeled over right there in the court and called for a drink.

VI.

But I didn't lie there for more than three seconds by the stop-watch, for the minute I let go of my captive he made a jump as though to get away. Well, I was just about in the humor to hurt somebody, so I tackled him. But he was evidently getting a new set of wind and spirits, for he fought like a mad dog. It was a tussle; but his muscles didn't carry out the promise of his intentions, and pretty soon I had him down on his back taking the count. About the same moment I heard something outside that sounded mighty familiar to me.

"Fours right!"

My man made another wriggle, and I got him by the throat and shook the wind out of him. Something else had happened during this time, for now I heard:

"Halt!"

It was good American, all right. I let go my man's throat, sitting on him to keep him quiet, took off my spectacles, fished for a handkerchief, and wiped them off so I could see things. I saw 'em, all right.

First, a lean old Spaniard with a long, white goatee and mustache, barefooted and dressed in what looked like coffee-sacking, makes a quick sprint across to where my lady stands, and enfolds her.

"Padre mio!" I hear her sob. Then a bloodthirsty-looking pirate in khaki breeches and blue flannel shirt half-torn off his back, and a gun in one hand, comes and slaps me on the back.

"Who've you got there, Planty Hock, you old goggle-eyes?"

It was Jack Titherington, of the Eighteenth, who bunked with me during the army maneuvers of last year; and who I'd heard was in the Philippines.

"That's the game—you've got to guess," said I. "Jack, you toy-soldier, give me a drink, or I'll go off my nut."

He peers down at my man, and then lets out a yelp that you could hear for

some stretch of territory; then he looks again.

"It's Loperillo—it's Loperillo!" he almost wept, and he grabbed me around the neck, and did a dance with me all over the place. "The insurrection's ended, Planty, and you've done it. I'll see you get a gold medal from Congress for this."

Whereupon he favors me with the West Point "tiger."

"Give me that drink," said I.

Some time after, when I'd changed my clothes, taken a bath, and bound up my cuts and bruises, I told Jack the story; and he supplied the missing links necessary to make it a whole.

It seems that this Loperillo was the head of the whole insurrection; and it was by his orders the don was seized. When he got the don, he changed clothes with him, as his own were pretty well done for. That morning, three companies of the Eighteenth and three detachments of constabulary came up with the Loperillo crowd and gave them what-for. Loperillo, seeing the battle going against him, digs for the woods so that he can plan further doings to keep the great and good civil government in a stew. The troops capture Don Cristoforo along with the rest; and when he tells his sad story, the major commanding gives over half a company to Jack to see him safely home.

Meanwhile, the dogs' scent is fooled by the don's clothes, which Loperillo is wearing, and follows *his* trail as he makes for the tall timber; and I take him up under the impression that he is Maria's father.

And that's about all.

Now you have the true story of how I won the five-thousand-dollar reward offered by his Fatness for the capture of Loperillo; and my true experiences with the Lady of Luzon. That is just how it happened. There was no real romance in it; and it is with great pleasure that I thus give the lie to the exaggerated Sunday story about it published in the New York *Clarion*.

THE SAND-EATERS

EVERY creature, from a canary to an elephant, devours a certain amount of sand with its food. Man is the only exception to this rule, and, according to a well-known doctor, it is because of this exception he suffers countless ills.

If we ate small quantities of fine sand with every meal, says this doctor, we would never be troubled with indigestion. You may see every day how necessary it is to birds. They cannot live without it. Wild animals are the same. If they are confined in cages in which they cannot find any kind of gritty substance they lose their appetite, and soon become ill and miserable. All animals prefer to eat their food on the ground for this reason.

Put a plate of meat down for a dog, and you will at once see that he will take it from the plate and lay it on the ground, unless prevented. Its instincts tell it that a small quantity of gritty substance is beneficial. Fastidious man requires everything to be free from the slightest particle of grit, and until we recognize that it is necessary to perfect health we shall suffer from indigestion and other ills. The writer has for years insisted upon a small quantity of sand —silver sand—being mixed with the salt before it is placed on the table, and has recommended the idea to a number of friends. In every case it has been successful.

The Failure of Blue Pete

By George Randolph Chester

Besides the mere tangling of the threads of crime there are other difficulties that the detective has to face before he makes his capture. The call of humanity, for instance, is sometimes louder than the call of duty, and the detective is at a standstill while he wrestles with the problem. This is the case in Mr. Chester's fine story, which has a certain psychologic interest that will claim your attention.

THE man with the ugly blue scar on his face stopped, puzzled, as he gained the rise of the hill and found still another little hollow covered with dense underbrush confronting him, with another wooded hill, and probably another brush-tangled hollow beyond. He had completely lost the thin thread of gray smoke that had lured him on, and had even lost the direction of the railroad, which he had left but a scant half-hour before. He did not worry about this last, however, for the next train that passed would set him right, unless these tangled hills and hollows would divert the sound and lead him upon another wild-goose chase. Hot and tired, he sat down upon a moss-grown rock that jutted out of the hillside, and impatiently threw off his rusty hat.

Thus revealed, he was a typical "frowzy," a professional tramp with a week's growth of black stubble on his face, except where the ugly blue scar upon his left cheek—the mark that had given him the sobriquet of Blue Pete—sprawled its searing fingers. His cracked and shapeless shoes, his wrinkled and torn clothes, his faded blue hickory shirt, the red handkerchief knotted about his neck, all were dulled to one rusty red monotone through much contact with wind and sun and rain, with cinders and grime and hard travel.

To one who could look beneath scar and stubble and dust, however, the face was not without a certain strong masculine attractiveness. The blue eyes were wide and clear; the brown hair, though close-cropped, showed a slight tendency to wave; the nose was a perfect Roman; the jaw was firmly set; the chin was prominent, and was cleft in the center with a dimple; the lips, though firm, were curved and full, and were capable, with fleeting expression, of much sternness or much tenderness as the occasion might demand. Just now his sole expression was one of weariness and impatience; suddenly, however, his lips drew down to a straight, thin line, his jaw protruded, his eyes narrowed and became almost ferretlike in their keenness.

Just where the end of the opposite hill sloped down with a sharp foot at the joining of two hollows, he had seen, between the interstices of the underbrush, a stealthily moving figure, and, as it had cautiously passed little open spaces among the leaves, a glint of sunlight upon red hair had told him that there went the man he was after.

"Hello, there!" he suddenly called.

The slight movement among the leaves stopped, but no answer came, The man on the hilltop hesitated for a moment, and then plunged boldly

down toward the hollow. Half-way down the hill he stopped, and called again.

"Hey, there!" he cried.

Again there was no answer. Again he hesitated, and again he moved forward, now entering the line of underbrush. Suddenly a bullet whizzed by him, uncomfortably close, and a puff of smoke arose from the locality where he had seen the man. He crouched at once, and, under cover of the brush, moved sideways at least ten feet, to where he was better hidden.

"Hey, Red, don't shoot!" he yelled. "It's your old side kick, Blue Pete!"

There was silence for an instant, then a hoarse voice called:

"Stand up in the open!"

Without hesitation, Blue Pete stood up and moved out where the bushes were lower, taking off his hat and turning up his face to the sunlight. In an instant more there was a commotion among the bushes below, and a big, square-built man, as heavy as himself, came bursting out.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" exclaimed the man. "I near croaked you, didn't I?"

He came cordially up to meet Blue Pete, and when they were near enough, he held out his hand.

"I'm mighty nervous these days," he said. "They want me bad."

"So I read," observed Blue Pete. "That was a great escape you made. Where did you get the saws?"

"Oh, there's ways!" laughed Red. "When you get lagged, there'll be a visitor to see you, all right. I got mine in a banana. What you doin' out this way, anyhow?"

"They're after me, too," replied Blue Pete, "and I've been hiding out. Just now I'm after prog. I saw a trickle of smoke up this way from the track, and came up to hunt the place, and buy a loaf of punk, or whatever they'd sell me, but I couldn't find the house."

Red silently laughed.

"I should say nitsky!" he commented.

He turned and scrutinized his companion searchingly; then, apparently satisfied, he clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come on, old pal!" he offered. "I'll show it to you, although you're the first buddie of mine that ever saw this shack. I was just pullin' my freight for here myself, but I dassent stay long, either."

He struck down into the hollow again, and Blue Pete followed him curiously, speculating upon the lucky chances that had favored him in trailing this man, and upon the hard tussle he would have if Chicago Red—a yeggman with more than one notch upon his gun—should chance to suspect him.

It was reassuring to reflect on how many reasons Red had for confidence, even though the latter had once been jailed and in jeopardy of his neck through Blue Pete's planning, for the man with the scar, though having a carefully made newspaper reputation as a desperado himself, was only a sham yeggman, a police detective who made yeggs and tramp criminals his specialty, and who lived among them and invited their confidence.

Just the week before he had taken part in an ostensible safe burglary proposed by Red. They had been caught red-handed, as Detective Burton, alias Blue Pete, had planned. Blue Pete had been allowed to break away on the street corner and "escape," Red had been jailed, and Burton had collected his reward; but Red had broken jail, and for two days now the detective had been after him.

Red led the way through a confusing and devious network of hollows and hummocks, which Burton, after a time, made no attempt to fix upon his mind, busying himself instead with the puzzling problem of how to get Red again into the hands of the authorities, now that he had found him. Only half his task—and the easiest half at that—had been accomplished, but have him he would! On that he was determined. They were just topping a long, low ridge, when Red, all unsuspicious of what was passing in Burton's mind, turned suddenly upon him.

"Look here, pal," he said. "Cut out

all this yegg patter here. You don't know what a good thing I'm lettin' you in on. I got a home here; see?—an' no red-neck talk goes."

"Watch me," replied Burton. "I'll be a society Willie for fair."

He was not only keenly interested, but surprised at the change which came over Red as they ascended this rise. Something of his roughness, of his brutality, of his reckless viciousness seemed to have dropped away from him, and in a moment more the reason was made plain.

A few steps upward and they had gained the top, where before them lay a smiling little valley. Shut in by these wild, unproductive hills, it seemed a very paradise, not only to the one, but to both the tired wanderers. It was only a small place, but its richness made up for its lack of size.

In the center, where a cool stream raced underneath a little white springhouse, stood a cabin. It was built of logs, but it was spacious, and everything about it was spotlessly clean and orderly. In front was a garden ablaze with late summer flowers—cannas and fox-fire, dahlias and asters, petunias and verbenas.

Great flaming beds of geraniums and nasturtiums vied with each other in a mad riot of color, while a huge trumpet-vine clambered over the porch and the front of the house, nodding its gorgeous bells to every passing breeze.

At the rear of the house was a kitchen garden and a barn. Stretching back of this and up the slopes of the hills was a broad field of stubble, where, the crops of oats and wheat and barley and buckwheat removed, great golden pumpkins now lay ripening in the sun. In front of the house was a broad field of corn, waving and rustling in the afternoon breeze; and around all, the circle of green-topped ridges, with their leafy cover.

Peter Burton drew a deep sigh, and looked curiously at Red. It seemed to him as if it were a desecration for this man, or for himself, to descend upon this peaceful home like a blight and a stain from that soiled and bedraggled outside world of which he knew too much. Red caught his regretful glance.

"I always was an uneasy devil," he mumbled, conceding a shamefaced apology. "Come on! Danny has always got some late roastin' ears, and Sis will get us up a spread that will make you sore on city grub for the rest of your life."

He led the way down the slope, and plunged through the long rows of yellowing corn. Just as he emerged from the shelter, he flared his hands about his mouth and gave a loud "Halloa!"

Almost instantly, a slender but roundly built young woman, her brown arms bared to the elbows, and her head crowned with a halo of the most wonderful red hair that Burton had ever seen, appeared in the doorway.

Seeing Red, she gave a cry of welcome, and started to run down the garden path toward him. Noting that a stranger was emerging from the corn just after him, she checked herself for a moment, and then came on at a more subdued pace, though still swiftly. She took both Red's hands in hers and kissed him. Then she turned to the stranger with easy grace.

"My friend, Mr. Banks," said Red, with an attempt at offhand formality, and using the first name that came to his mind. "My sister Nellie, Mr. Banks!"

"Any friend of Will's is welcome, I am sure," she said, extending her hand with generous cordiality, and giving him a dazzling smile that disclosed two rows of the beautiful blue-white teeth that go so often with the milk-and-rose complexion of the Titian-haired.

If Detective Burton had felt his intense unworthiness as he looked down in the valley from the ridge above, he now felt it tenfold as he took the firm, slender hand in his, and held it awkwardly for a moment.

"Are you in the cattle business, too?" she went on, by way of making conversation and putting him more at ease.

Mr. Burton dared not risk an amused smile at Red, but gravely answered that he was in the same line of business as his friend. She frowned slightly, and

glanced uneasily from one to the other, inspecting their cinderworn clothes and their frowzy appearance without seeming to do so.

"It's such a rough business," she said, shaking her head, "and I wish that Will would get out of it, although it pays him so well."

"It didn't this time," Red informed her. "I've had a bad trip, and I say, Nell, I've got myself in bad."

"Oh, no!" she cried. "It seems to me that you never come home unless you are in trouble." And she glanced again uneasily from one to the other.

"We're both in it," said Red, "and, to tell you the truth, Nell, we can't stay only till midnight. They're after us. You see, we had some trouble with a cattle-buyer down in Chicago, and he drew a gun on us, so——"

"You didn't kill him!" she gasped, turning pale.

"Oh, no," Red glibly went on, "but we had to shoot him up pretty bad, and they're after us hot and heavy. He's got a lot of friends with money, you know, so you will have to dye my hair for me. They might be after me any minute now. They might even come here!"

The girl instantly dropped all traces of her distaste for the trouble he had been in.

"They'll never get you here," she declared, with a prompt decisiveness that made Blue Pete's heart leap with admiration. "If that's the case, we don't want to waste any time talking. Come right in the house and let's get to work."

Burton followed them into the cabin, very much at war with himself. He could not seem to like himself in his present capacity very well, and he was angry with himself for the feeling.

Miss Nellie introduced the stranger to her mother, a sweet-faced old lady, the red-gold of whose locks was merged to silver-gray, and who sat perpetually chained to an invalid's-chair.

As Burton took the lean, wrinkled hand in his, he felt once more that choking desire to tell them who he was and run away. He was angry with himself that his eyes moistened when he saw Mrs. Logan's arm slip around Red's shoulder while he knelt beside her chair, and saw the hand that had just clasped his own creep up to Red's brow and gently smoothe it, not caring for, or noticing, the dust that came off upon her snow-white hand.

A motherless child of about three, beautiful and auburn-haired like the rest of them, lay sleeping in a crib. Danny, her father, came in from the barn presently. He was a quiet, steady-looking young fellow of twenty-four or five, as much unlike his elder brother as could be.

He set basins of water for the men on a bench outside the kitchen door, and his greeting to Red was a cordial and affectionate one, though Burton fancied it tinged with a regretful disapproval.

The young woman, in the kitchen, was preparing a dinner for them. She was everywhere at once, out in the garden, in the cellar, down in the springhouse, back again to her cooking, and Burton's eyes followed her with always increasing interest. She was so strong, so graceful, so alive in every line and movement.

He glanced again and again from the features of the rough man at his side to those of the girl, as she passed to and fro. The resemblance between them was striking, in spite of the fact that his was a dissipated face and hers a refined one. It was as if they had been cast in the same fine mold, but that his had been swollen and distorted, and a curious reflection came to him that perhaps it was so with the two souls of them.

He had time to reflect now, that in the house he had seen magazines strewn here and there; that a little case had held a small but choice collection of books; that pictures, cheap prints but of good subjects, had been tastefully arranged upon the walls. He had noted, too, that a violin lay upon the center-table, with its bow beside it, as if it had been laid down hastily after recent use, and he wondered if hers

were the fingers that evoked the magic from its strings.

Shaved and washed and combed, and looking like different creatures, the two men did justice presently to the fine, hot dinner that the girl had made ready for them, and when they were about half-way through the meal she sat down with them, resting her bare elbows upon the table, and her chin upon her locked fingers.

Her presence made Burton uneasy, not alone that her comeliness moved him, but that he found her clear gaze fixed in speculative penetration upon him now and then.

When they had finished with their meal, she brought a towel and put it around Red's neck, then she took the bottle of dye that he gave her, and with a fine comb silently went through and through his crisp red curls, until they were a glossy black.

The change in the man was startling, but while she was making it she gravely pondered her brother's friend, without seeming to care whether he noted her keen scrutiny or not.

When finally her brother stood up, she turned him to the light and looked at him long and earnestly.

"I hate to see it, Will, honestly, I do," she said, and her lip quivered a bit. "I like you to be yourself. There's one thing I gain, though. You must go into your room and put on the good suit that I can never get you to wear. Put on a white shirt, and a collar and tie and cuffs. Put on your good shoes that are standing there ready polished for you, and change throughout. If it were not that the cause is so serious, I could be glad that you are compelled to disguise yourself in this way. You could be a handsome brother of mine if you would."

Red attempted a heavy wink at his "pal," but it was a failure. Like most strong men of his type, he was ashamed to express any of the better emotions that were sent to redeem him.

When he had gone to change his clothing, Burton went out and sat upon a rustic bench on the porch, looking out over the brilliant garden, across the field of waving corn, to the purple-veiled trees of the encircling hills beyond. He had never felt more ill at ease in his life, and it was when this feeling was strongest upon him that Red's sister came out to him. Leaning easily against one of the porch posts, she stood looking silently down upon him, until he felt himself reddening guiltily beneath her inspection.

"Do you mean any harm to my brother?" she asked abruptly.

He caught quickly for his self-poise.

"Why, what harm should I mean him?" he evasively replied.

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head, "but somehow I don't feel right about you."

Again she studied him with an entirely impersonal scrutiny that was more than embarrassing.

"What business did you say you are in?" she demanded.

"The same as your brother's—cattle-buying," he answered her, meeting her glance unflinchingly as he told the untruth. She shook her head, still unsatisfied.

"If you harm him, I shall remember it," she said presently. Then bursting out impetuously: "Oh, I wish Will would be different! I wish he would settle down! I wish he would have different friends!"

That last stung. He felt an almost unconquerable impulse to put himself right with this girl, to throw off all disguise, to purchase her good opinion in some way; but all that he could say was: "He might have worse friends than myself."

"I am sure that I know nothing to your discredit," she said more gently.

A cry from within the house took her away, to his great relief, and after a while there came out on to the porch, flushed and moist-eyed from sleep, the little girl he had seen lying in the crib. Burton had a sincere fondness for all children, a passion for beautiful children.

"Good afternoon, Miss Logan," he said, rising to his feet and, with his hand upon his breast, making a profound bow.

The child laughed heartily at his mock courtesy.

"Do it again," she demanded, and he gravely bowed once more with extravagant shakes of the head and ludicrous genuflections.

"Do it again," she ordered.

He did it again, and again and again.

"I'd rather tell you a story about a rabbit," he offered then, to escape further calisthenics.

"I got a rabbit," she informed him, and came over to lean against his knee.

She looked up into his face in wide-eyed judgment. This scrutiny he could bear with better fortitude than that of her aunt, for he knew that there was no guile in his heart that the child could fathom.

She clambered up into his lap, and touched the scar upon his face with gentle fingers.

"*Poor* man!" she said, with infinite compassion. "Did you get hurt?"

"Burned a little bit," he answered lightly. "But about that rabbit, now."

"Oh, yes!" agreed the child. "I got a rabbit."

By and by, when the young woman came upon the porch again, she found the little one cuddled into his arms, listening with rapt attention to the story of the wonderful rabbit, while the dog, a wise old collie, stood with his head resting contentedly upon the man's knee, having his silken ears stroked.

It was good to see, and for the first time since she had begun to study him she felt her suspicions vanish. If the child trusted him and the dog liked him, there could be no harm in the man. Really, now that she saw his profile, on the opposite side of his face from the scar, he was a splendid-looking fellow.

She looked, and looked again; then, unobserved, went away without having attracted any attention from the trio; and it was this picture that kept her from putting Red upon his guard against the friend who her clear intuition had at first told her was no friend.

Late that night they went away. She drew Red to one side and carried on a low, earnest conversation with him for a few moments, clinging about his neck and apparently pleading with him, and when she came to give her brother's friend good-by, her lashes were moist, and her voice was tremulous.

"I do wish you good luck," she said. "I hope that you get safely out of your troubles, and I leave to you the care of my brother. Please guard him the best you can."

Detective Burton relinquished her warm hand with more self-revilement than he had ever before heaped upon his own head.

"I'll guard him all right," he promised her, and, as he followed Red's lead through the long, crackling rows of corn, he cursed himself for having let that phrase of sinister double-meaning escape his lips.

He had never trapped a man under such disagreeable circumstances, and, if he could help himself, he resolved never again to penetrate any law-breaker's home life, never to sit at his own table with him and break his bread, and never to touch finger-tips with his women folk.

The white-haired old mother who had divided upon him, a traitor, the blessings that belonged to her son alone; the orphaned little girl who had kissed him so trustingly before she had been put to bed; the square young fellow, her father, who had stood sternly on guard for them all evening; and lastly, and most of all, this girl who had touched him as had no other woman in his life—all arose now to reproach him. He could not get rid of the image of Nellie Logan's face, so like and yet so unlike her brother's; he could not rid himself of that last warm clasp of her hand, of that last appealing glance from her eye, of that last tremulous tone of her voice.

As they emerged from the corn rows and turned into a by-pass to the railroad that Red knew, Burton shook his shoulders as one shakes off the snow of a wintry storm. Well, he must get down to business. Sentiment had no place in the tracking of criminals. By nature as well as by profession he was

a bloodhound, the born enemy of the malefactor.

It was his task just now—and a dangerous one it was—to track down and deliver over to justice the notorious yeggman, Chicago Red, and he meant to do it. He felt a return of his cold sternness with this determination, and became more at ease with himself as he trudged on after the dark figure before him, tracking, tracking, tracking relentlessly on in his very footsteps, not to leave him again until the law had once more fastened its iron shackles upon him. His brain was busy with plans of how to do this and still preserve his incognito.

Red, too, was pondering serious plans for the future. He had taken with him what ready money there was in the house, a couple of hundred dollars, enough to hide him for the present.

Strenuous experience had taught him that in breaking jail he had committed, in the eyes of the police department, the most heinous crime known to "practical" justice, and that they would expend more energy in tracing him down for having escaped than they would in hunting him for an original offense.

Thus absorbed, the two men had but little to say, even after they had gained the railroad. Silently they trudged down the track for four or five miles, until they came to a grade steep enough that they could be sure of mounting any passing train.

Red's plan was to go, disguised in his black hair and the mask of respectability, straight to Chicago, where his chances of hiding himself would be better than along the road or in any smaller town, and this suited Burton precisely. Chicago Red was plaiting his own noose.

The day had been hot, but the night had come on cool, and as soon as they stopped, the perspiration of their walk turned chilly upon them, so, as a matter of precaution, they stopped beneath a sheltering bank, and built a small fire to sit by while they waited for the train.

Wood was scarce, but they had plenty of time to gather it, and presently they had a little pile of it collected. Burton carried his matches in an oiled envelope in an inside pocket. He reached in for this, and, carefully extracting one match, replaced the envelope and stooped down to light the fire. In a few moments they had a small blaze going. Again they separated to find more wood.

Red was the first to return from this foraging, with a prize in the shape of some dry fence-rails. As he threw them down he saw a folded letter upon the ground, and idly picked it up. It had slipped from Burton's pocket when he had extracted the match-envelope. More through idle curiosity than anything else, Red opened it, but with the first line his perfunctory interest changed to a fierce absorption.

> MY DEAR BURTON: Drop the case you are on and get at once upon the track of William J. Logan, alias Chicago Red, who, as you have no doubt seen from the morning papers, broke jail last night. We must have him at all hazards, and I don't know of any one so likely to get him as the famous "Blue Pete."
>
> ROGER PIERCE, CHIEF OF POLICE.

In the tremendous rage that had flooded and overwhelmed his stunned faculties, Red had heard no sound, but, as he looked up, he saw Burton coming into the circle of light with an armful of wood. With a scream like that of a maddened beast, Red sprang straight into the air from his crouched sitting posture, and clutched for the throat of this most despised of all yeggland's enemies—a dested "fly cop."

The onslaught was a terrific one, and it caught Burton unprepared. The wood that he was carrying came down with a crash between them, as Red, clutching his fingers around the detective's throat, bore him to the ground.

They were both strong men; Red inspired by the fury of hate, and his enemy by the energy of desperation, made it a life-and-death conflict, with the detective at an almost overwhelming disadvantage.

In their silent struggle they rolled down the embankment until they lay at the edge of the very ties, but no con-

vulsive effort or change of position could loosen that deadly grip that Red had fastened upon the throat of the man who had once betrayed him, and now pursued and sought to betray him again.

There was not a sound made by either of them, except for the sharp expulsion of laboring breath, and for the groan of supreme effort that now and then came through clenched teeth. Both men could feel the veins in their necks and temples swelling hot, almost to bursting.

Tighter and tighter grew that vise-like grip upon the throat, and weaker and weaker Burton's struggles became. He was choking. Already he could feel his eyes straining and his tongue swelling, while in his lungs there came the sharp pain that is the cause of man's birth-scream and his death-cry, the beginning and the end. He felt that he was gone, that no human power could save him. He knew both the brutality and the implacability of his enemy, and he was helpless. Over those tense-held elbows he could barely reach with the tips of his knuckles to the back of Red's head, and with such blows he could do no more damage than with a wand of straw.

The darkness of the night was turning for him into the deeper blackness of that pit that knows no light, when his hand, in an unguided, outreaching convulsion, fell upon something cold and hard. For a moment he did not recognize it nor its possibilities. His wits were numbed in this extremity, but suddenly it flashed upon him—the greatness of this boon that had been sent to him in his desperate need. It was a coupling-pin, lying just under the rail and against one of the ties.

He clutched his already numbed fingers about it, he drew it toward him, with thankfulness he realized its weight, and with more caution and calculation than he had ever bent upon any one effort in his life he judged of what he must do. He knew that he could have but one attempt; failing that, the end would be certain and swift.

He lay supine for a moment; he ceased even the involuntary protest that his muscles, independently of his will, had exerted against this death. For one brief instant he was absolutely effortless, and Red, feeling the relaxation, thought with savage joy that the struggle was over.

Carefully Burton raised the heavy coupling-pin, carefully he poised it, and then, concentrating all his will, and throwing into the blow every ounce of strength that he possessed, he brought down his weapon with terrific force, its sharp head landing back of Red's ear with a sickening impact; then he lost consciousness.

When he awoke it was to a sensation of intolerable pain in his throat and lungs and eyes. At first these sensations, particularly the knife-sharp twinges in his throat with every breath, claimed his wondering attention, but presently he became aware of some heavy weight that lay against his left side. It seemed to oppress and render more intolerable that painful beating of his heart against his ribs.

He had been looking straight up into the sky without a knowledge of how he came to be there, almost without curiosity, in fact, but now he slowly raised his head. The effort was too painful at first, and he lay back again. This heavy weight upon his side, what was it? Again he raised his head, and surveyed the limp mass that held him down. With gradually returning mental grasp he made out the mass to be a man, and then, suddenly, he knew!

The memory of the fight and of what he had escaped electrified him into instant energy. He almost laughed in sheer delight at the ease with which he pulled himself out from under this inert thing, but, when he had arisen to his feet, he was surprised to find how weak he was, how his knees tottered and strove to bend under him, how his breath fluttered, and how flaccidly his arms seemed to hang.

He wanted a drink. A drink, a drink! No sooner had the want borne itself in upon his knowledge than it became an obsession with him. He must

die if he did not get it. Fortunately a little stream ran under a culvert a few rods down the track, and he tottered toward it. Twice he stumbled and fell. When he reached it, the first swallow of water that he took cut his throat like a barb, but, after he had defied this pain and had drunk long and deeply, he felt refreshed.

Obeying some dull instinct, he filled an old tin can that he found lying there, and carried the water back with him to where Red lay, distorted upon head and shoulder and hip and sprawled limbs, one arm bent backward from under him, just as Burton had left him.

Burton reached down and felt for the man's heart. A long, long time he knelt there, but he could detect no throb. He turned Red upon his back, being careful to straighten out the arm that lay underneath, then he bent his head and placed his ear to the man's breast. If there was the flutter of life there he could not detect it.

He took the water and dashed some of it in Red's face, placed some of it upon his lips, and, taking a handkerchief from the man's pocket, dipped it in the water and squeezed a few drops into the half-open mouth; then he began the respiration methods that are used for resuscitating drowning persons.

For fully a quarter of an hour, that seemed like an age, he toiled, and at last was rewarded. There was a flutter of the eyelids first, and Burton worked with more desperate energy than ever. He bathed the man's face anew, he put fresh water upon his tongue and upon his parched lips, he chafed and slapped the wrists, he pumped the arms up and down.

Now the beating of the heart was distinct, and Burton could almost have cried in his joy of restoring this mysterious thing called life again to earth —not because it was Chicago Red, but because it was life. Five minutes longer and the worker stopped his respiration methods to find that this thing that had been made in God's image was breathing heavily, and in a moment more, with a deep intake of breath and an outrushing half-sob, Red burst into a stream of hideous profanity.

The revulsion in Burton was complete and instantaneous. He had been almost in the attitude of an awed worshiper at the shrine of this vast mystery of existence, but now he must protect himself against the demon that he had invoked.

With great promptness he whirled Red upon his face and tied his hands behind his back with the handkerchief, wetting it anew so that the knots, in drying, would hold more securely; then he propped Red against the bank, and sat upon the rail to rest while he pondered the strange condition that had come upon him. All his attitude toward life and things that lived seemed to have had a severe displacement. Nothing was quite the same to him.

Red, slowly gathering his scattered wits and his weakened strength, sat up presently and glared at him, but said nothing.

Burton walked up to where the smoldering embers of the fire still remained, to get away from Red's eyes—not because he feared them, but because they disquieted him, interrupted his perplexing train of thought.

Stooping, he picked up the letter that Red had crumpled between his fingers, and at first he could not comprehend what it was, even when he saw the police department letter-head.

He could not understand that he had dropped his own letter, but when he read it and recognized it and knew that Red had pored over it, he had still another light upon the events of the night; it gave still another trend to his confused grasp of the relations of things.

Without knowing why he did it, he walked back down to the railroad to look again at Red. The yeggman was so much the center of his thoughts, the pivot about which revolved so many other whirling interests, that he had need to inspect him again, to fathom, if he could, what manner of man this might be. Twenty-four hours before he would have answered that query without a moment's hesitation, but now he did not know.

"You—you snitch!" snarled Red between his set teeth, and, stopping for a moment the twisting and writhing by which he had been endeavoring to free his hands from their bonds, he went on to upbraid Burton in the vilest terms that a mind schooled in vileness could conjure together.

"Oh, shut up!" Burton presently interrupted.

He had not been listening. He did not care what Red was saying, but the mere sound annoyed him. He was absorbed in other things of more moment, and did not want to be disturbed. When he came to sift it down, he found, curiously enough, that he bore, even after his narrow escape from death, no enmity toward Red. Rather he felt a certain sympathy for him, and, viewing the matter from the other man's standpoint, recognized quite well that, under the circumstances, he would have been filled with the same hate, with the same desire to kill.

He suddenly became aware, too, that through all the strange, new fields where his mind had wandered, there was always one face present in every scene. It was a face strangely like Red's and yet strangely unlike it, and it kept recurring to him with greater vividness, as he began to get things more clearly tabulated in his mind and set down in their new relations, one to the other.

He frowned as the procession of faces from the little valley cabin arose up one by one in his vision, to confront him with questioning eyes. Why should they intrude upon him? His duty lay plainly before him. His duty —yes—but the word did not seem quite the same to-day as yesterday. It was a word that had lost something of its potency—besides, Nellie Logan stood there beside it and asked him to choose.

He unconsciously closed his right hand and unclosed it as he thought of the clasp she had given him in parting. Even now he could almost seem to feel the warmth of her hand, to see her clear eyes, and to hear her voice asking his promise to be good to Will.

"Well, snitch!" Red broke in upon his meditations. "Now that you got me again, what you goin' to do about it? Back to the zebra clothes again for mine, eh?"

Burton sighed and awoke from his reverie.

"No," he said wearily.

THE IRISHMAN'S PLIGHT

A CHICAGO merchant, who is well known for his philanthropic spirit, was approached one day by an Irishman, formerly in his employ, who made a touching appeal for financial assistance. Said he:

"I trust, sor, that ye'll find it convanient to help a poor man whose house an' everything in it was burned down last week, sor."

The merchant, although he gives with a free hand, exercises considerable caution in his philanthropy, so he asked:

"Have you any papers, or certificates, to show that you have lost everything by fire, as you say?"

The Irishman scratched his head, as if bewildered. Finally he replied:

"I did have a certificate to that effect, sor, signed before a notary; but, unfortunately, sor, it was burned up with the rest of me effects!"

MESMERIC MYSTERIES

THE MYSTERY OF THE AMBASSADOR

(A Complete Novel)

I BELIEVE that there is far more in this case than appears on the surface of it, and I wish that you would take an interest in it, Williams," said Longley, the assistant district attorney. He and I had dined with Mr. Tommy Williams, and adjourned to the latter's studio for coffee, which our host was preparing in his own peculiar way.

"I'll take an interest in it, but not a part, Longley," he answered, grinning, and the red light reflected from the charcoal in the brazier under the coffee-pot gave to his face a peculiarly Mephistophelean expression. "The last time you jollied me into working for you I had a close squeak for being arrested and locked up as a thief, and had my studio turned into a stage for a suicide act. I think I prefer the peaceful byways of art to the strenuous paths of criminal investigation; but let's have the story."

"I don't know how strenuous this may be, and I am not even sure that it's a case for a criminal investigation in the ordinary sense, for it's a thing we can't go very far into without the consent of the very person whom we want to get at," answered Longley. "There are strange complications, involving questions of diplomatic privilege and international courtesy, which tie our hands and restrict investigation by the ordinary methods. You know that an ambassador is sacred, and not amenable to the laws of the country to which he is accredited. Even for murder he cannot be punished."

"Yes, I know that," answered Tommy, a little impatiently, "but what's that got to do with this case?"

"It has everything to do with it," said Longley, after he had taken a sip of his coffee and lighted a cigar. "I'll give you the full story of it, so far as I know it, and you will see for yourself. About two weeks ago, the Earl of Sobury, the British ambassador, called on the chief of police and asked for the arrest of a man who had been attempting to blackmail him. He handed a couple of threatening letters to the chief, gave a very accurate description of the man, and asked that he be arrested as quietly as possible, and expelled from the country as an undesirable alien. The chief expressed doubts as to being able to carry the thing through in this way, but Lord Sobury assured him that the man was a British subject with a criminal record, and that no question would be raised about his deportation. Naturally, the chief was anxious to oblige, but

the proposed proceeding was so unusual that he consulted me about it, to see what could legally be done. The ambassador was stopping at the Waldorf, and I called upon him and explained that there were only two courses open to us in dealing with the man, whose name he had given as Timothy O'Connel. We could arrest him for attempted blackmail, in which case the ambassador would have to voluntarily appear against him; or, if he would furnish us with a record of the man's criminal career in England, we could arrest him and hand him over to the Federal authorities, who would order his expulsion from the country if they were convinced that he had entered it illegally. You know that criminal immigrants are barred, and if one gets in and his past record is discovered within two years, he can be summarily deported by order of the Immigration Commissioners, even though he has done nothing in the United States."

"And of course both of the methods you suggested involved publicity," suggested Tommy.

"Yes, star-chamber methods don't go here," Longley assented. "I explained that to Lord Sobury, and he seemed very much put out about it. He said that it was purely a personal matter with him; that it had nothing to do with his official position, and that rather than incur any publicity he would withdraw the matter from the hands of the police. I suggested that I have O'Connel shadowed, and that possibly we could detect him in some other crime for which he could be put away without his lordship appearing in it in any way, but he strenuously objected to that, and said that he would manage the affair himself. He asked for the return of the letters, and seemed pretty mad about the whole matter, so I washed my hands of it, and advised the chief to do the same."

"I suppose it's what he would call a 'closed incident,'" said Tommy, grinning.

"That's exactly what he informed me, through his secretary," Longley said. "Circumstances made it necessary for me to open it up, but I have been unable to see his lordship, who is confined to his apartment at the Waldorf by a serious illness, since the interview of which I told you, when he said that he would manage the affair himself."

"What were you trying to butt in again for?" asked Tommy curiously.

"For just this reason," answered Longley impressively. "I had supposed that Lord Sobury intended to silence the blackmailer with money; but thirty-six hours after my interview with him, Timothy O'Connel, the man whom he had wished put quietly out of the way, *was found dead behind a bench on the Riverside Drive!*"

"Great Scott! this is getting interesting!" exclaimed Tommy, straightening up. "I suppose that if it were not for this same 'diplomatic privilege' which you spoke of, you would have had Lord Sobury behind the bars before this."

"Well, I'll hardly say that; but he would have been put through a course of sprouts in the cross-examination line," said Longley. "The strange part of it is that the embassy, by his order, has furnished us with every possible official assistance, and up to two days ago we had daily cable reports from Scotland Yard, the London police headquarters; but they have suddenly shut down, and notified us that they are sending a representative who will communicate with us through the embassy. It was accompanied by a strong request to avoid publicity as much as possible, and I have to-day received a long telegram from the secretary of state, asking me to handle the whole thing with kid gloves."

"Well, with the big-bugs all in it, it looks a promising little affair, so perhaps I'll come in on it," said Tommy condescendingly. "Let's have the details."

"There's another startling development which mixes everything up beautifully, but I'll come to that in due course," said Longley. "First, I'll go back to this man O'Connel. He had

been in this country about three months, coming immediately after he was released from Portland prison. About twelve years ago he was sentenced to penal servitude for life for complicity in some dynamite outrages; it was proven that he drove the cab which carried away a couple of Irishmen who made an attempt to blow up the Horse Guards. After serving twelve years, he was released on ticket-of-leave, which is a conditional pardon, similar to our parole, and rendered him liable to be reimprisoned if he did not behave. Now you know that these Irish 'patriots' are usually received with a brass band and welcomed by prominent citizens in carriages when they come to America; but O'Connel came to New York in a roundabout way. He slipped quietly away to Germany, and took passage from Hamburg under an assumed name.

"He lived quietly here, avoided—so far as we can discover—any intercourse with the Irish-American patriots, and seemed to be comfortably supplied with money. We know that he made one trip to Washington, and had an interview with Lord Sobury at the embassy; also, that the ambassador twice refused to see him when he came to New York. The day following my interview with Lord Sobury, O'Connel again called to see him, but was denied, and the hotel people were asked to eject the man if he came there again. The next morning he was found dead. Lord Sobury dined alone in his own apartment that night, and announced his intention of working over a lot of important papers during the evening with his private secretary, who had brought them over from Washington.

"Soon after they had started, one of the hotel servants brought a special-delivery letter to the ambassador, and I am told that he was very much agitated after he had read it. It was a miserable night, raw and rainy; but he told the servant to order a cab, and, excusing himself to the secretary, went out. That cab took him to the Riverside Drive, and left him in the pouring rain at the corner of One Hundred and Tenth Street. This much we know from the cabman and the hotel employees. Two hours later Lord Sobury returned to the hotel in another cab, drenched to the skin and looking tired and haggard. He went directly to his own apartment and tumbled into bed without ringing for his personal servant. The following morning physicians were called in, and it was announced that his lordship was suffering from a severe attack of influenza, which is hardly to be wondered at, considering his wetting and exposure of the night before."

"And which, incidentally, offers an excuse for his refusal to be interviewed," remarked Tommy. "I suppose that you have not been able to get hold of the letter which called him out?"

"I don't know whether I have or not," answered Longley doubtfully, "but I shall get to that part of the story in due time. Remember, this happened just twelve days ago. Now, the next morning after this excursion, one of the mounted police, at daybreak, found a man lying behind a bench within half a mile of where Lord Sobury had dismissed his cab. On examination he found that the man was dead, killed by a crushing blow on the temple. A heavy, loaded walking-stick lay near him, and in his hand was a dagger, stained with blood. There was no way to account for the blood-stained dagger, for the blow which had caused the man's death did not break the skin. The medical examination showed that he had been dead for several hours, but as the body was found near the edge of a broad stone sidewalk, it is not surprising that there were no footprints or other evidences of a struggle to be seen, in spite of the presence of the dagger."

"You remember the substance of the threatening letters, I suppose?" said Tommy interrogatively.

"Better than that," answered Longley, drawing an envelope from his pocket. "Of course, at Lord Sobury's request, I returned the originals to him,

but first I took press copies of them. Fortunately, they were written with copying-ink, and these copies are perfect."

He spread the thin tissue-paper of the first one over a sheet of white paper, and Tommy and I bent over it eagerly. It was fairly well written, and evidently the production of a man of some education.

If you are wise, you will heed the warning which I conveyed to you. The money means little to you, but the exposure would be disastrous. If you would continue to be "your lordship," you must pay for the honor.
T. O'C.

"That's the first one," said Longley. "On this second we could have jugged him, all right, for it is distinctly threatening." He spread it out in the same way, and we read:

This is the last word. If within fifteen days you do not pay me ten thousand pounds, the story will be told simultaneously in the English and American press. The papers will pay for it if you will not, and I have not spent twelve years in hell to throw away a chance. I know where he is, and you can imagine what will happen when the story is told. Speak up, "my lord," or I no longer hold my peace! T. O'C.

"Do you know this to be the man O'Connel's handwriting?" asked Tommy.

Longley nodded. "It is exactly like that we found in his lodgings and in some memoranda in his pockets," he said. "He does not appear to have been afraid that he would be prosecuted, so he undoubtedly had a story to tell."

"And it looks as if he had carried it with him," said Tommy thoughtfully. "On the face of it, there seems to be a fairly strong case against Lord Sobury."

"If he were only the Earl of Sobury and not the Ambassador from Great Britain, I imagine the warden of the Tombs would have had a representative of the British nobility as a guest before now," said Longley grimly. "Detective-sergeant Clancy has been aching to lay hands on the 'Sassenach tyrant,' and I only wish that I were at liberty to give him the word."

"How about the letter which called him out?" asked Tommy. "I believe you said you had some track of that."

"Yes, maybe I have," said Longley, taking another letter from his pocket. "If this is it, there is another murder, or, at least, a death to account for, and the two are connected. With the one murder it looks like a plain case against Lord Sobury; if we bring in the other, it makes the case the worst Chinese puzzle I was ever up against. Now read this."

He spread out a sheet of stained and discolored paper covered with writing in lead-pencil, which it required considerable effort to decipher.

I have discovered that O'Connel has turned bloodhound and has revealed to you the whole miserable story. Unfortunately, it is a true one, and this is not a voice from the grave. What I have suffered through all these horrible years you can never know, and I do not want that suffering to have been in vain. I shall never reappear, but to save disgrace I must see you. It is manifestly impossible for me to come to you, and you cannot come to me without exciting comment, but talk ogether we must. Come to the corner of Riverside Drive and One Hundred and Tenth Street to-night at ten and walk north on the west side. I will meet you, and we can talk without being seen, and arrange to silence the bloodhound. Don't fail me, Dick; I am trying to act for the best.

Tommy gave a whistle when he had finished reading it.

"This looks like the real thing!" he exclaimed. "Where did you get it?"

"It was taken from the pocket of a floater which was picked out of the North River at the Twenty-third Street ferry slip this morning," answered Longley. "The envelope which it was in had been addressed in ink, so that the writing was illegible, but the pencil writing was not affected."

"And the body—what was it like?" asked Tommy eagerly.

"Not much like anything human," answered Longley, with a shudder. "It had been several days in the water, and apparently pretty well battered about. This letter was found in the pocket of a white dress waistcoat which the man had worn. The body was ab-

solutely unrecognizable, and the doctors could not decide on the cause of death. The underclothing and linen were of the finest quality, and the names of the makers of both the shirt and waistcoat are decipherable from the tabs, which I have brought with me."

Tommy examined them carefully—the trade-mark of a celebrated Parisian haberdasher and the label of a no less famous London tailor. The writing on the label, which would have given the owner's name, had been washed away by the salt water.

"Any one missing whom these would point to?" asked Tommy sharply. "Most of our gilded youths patronize these people."

"Not a soul reported missing," answered Longley, "but they might point equally well to a foreigner. I might mention, incidentally, that the haberdasher and tailor are also patronized by the British ambassador."

"Who is not missing and is protected by diplomatic privilege from questioning," added Tommy.

"Yes, but that privilege doesn't extend to his valet; and Sergeant Clancy brought him to my office in short order," said Longley. "It was from the valet that I got this information."

"And anything else important?"

"About as much as I could get from a graven image," answered Longley irritably. " 'Oh, yus; 'is ludship gave 'is patronage to Charvet and Rapkin. Yus, to be sure, sir, these 'ere very same garments as I see were, per'aps, belonging to 'is ludship. I disposes of many clothes to second-'and men. Yus, sir; that's a perkisite, sir. Yus, sir; 'is ludship wore a w'ite westkit the night afore 'e was took ill, but not this one, sir. 'Ow could it 'ave been, w'en I found 'is clothes in the morning, sir; and a shocking state they was in, too, sir. Oh, yus, sir; I'm quite sure about the westkit, sir; it was that blessed wetting as made 'im ill, sir.' That's the extent of the information I got out of the valet; but I have examined too many witnesses not to know when one is playing straight, and that man was either lying or not telling all the truth."

"Did he get the third degree?" asked Tommy, grinning; and Longley swore.

"Damn it, Williams, we're not torturers! I don't know what you think we do to witnesses."

"I don't think; I *know*," answered Tommy dryly. "But this is a kid-glove affair, so I suppose that even valets are handled gently. Now, don't be stuffy, Longley, but tell me what you think about the whole business. Have you traced the ownership of the walking-stick?"

"No, that's another mystery; it does not belong to the ambassador, and no one remembers to have seen it in the possession of the murdered man. He could hardly have carried it that night, for his own umbrella was lying but a few feet from him, and a man doesn't carry both at the same time. But here is one more piece of documentary evidence, and then you have the entire case. It is a letter found in O'Connel's pocket, and it is in the same handwriting as the one found on the floater."

He read it aloud.

> We seem to be entirely at your mercy, but I hope that you will hold off until I can communicate with the other person. Until after that interview I can promise only one thing—that if you make the story public, I will kill you like the cur you are. You have nothing but your life to lose, and I have much to save, so I shall not hesitate. You can come to me to-morrow at ten, or, if you are not there, I shall lunch at the usual place.

"Great Scott! there's plenty of documentary evidence," exclaimed Tommy. "If the old French minister was right in claiming that he could hang a man on a line of his handwriting, you should be able to fill the Sing Sing death cells on these. Now, what's your theory?"

"Theory! I could build a hundred about this case, but they all have such a big hole in them that they won't hold water," said Longley hopelessly. "It looked like plain sailing until this floater was picked up. Lord Sobury was threatened with exposure of some musty old scandal about the family

ghost by this dynamiter. He knew that if he once started paying blackmail, the ancestral estates—which, by the way, are very large—would not suffice to satisfy the leech which had fastened on him; so he took a surer way to close the case, and acted on the theory that dead men tell no tales. That made everything satisfactory except the stick, which might be explained in a dozen different ways, and the dagger, which might be explained if we could make an examination of the sick man at the Waldorf.

"These two inanimate things pointed to a third person, but not conclusively, and I was rather glad of the immunity which the ambassador's position gave him; for I have mighty little sympathy with a dynamiter, and none at all with a blackmailer, and O'Connel's death was, to my thinking, a good riddance. I pretty nearly regarded it as a 'closed incident' myself, until that horrible relic of humanity in Lord Sobury's old clothes floated into the case this morning, but that knocks the theory silly. Now, you know as much as I do about it, and if you have any explanation to offer as to this third person, represented by the floater, I should be glad to hear it."

"I'm no magician," answered Tommy, wagging his head. "The obvious question occurs to me, though: Are you sure that it is the Earl of Sobury, the British ambassador, who is ill at the Waldorf?"

"Of course I am," answered Longley positively. "I haven't seen him myself, but his personal and official family are with him. That suspicion came to my mind, too; so strongly that I made sure. In the first place, he was seen by the hotel employees that night after the murder was committed, when he returned and went to his apartment. The night clerk, the hall-boys, the elevator man, and the floor clerk, all remarked him especially, for he was very pale, and his clothing was hardly respectable for a man of his position. In fact, the clerk told me that he thought the gentleman had been 'on the loose,' and had been rolled in the gutter. His valet, who has been in his service for twenty-five years, couldn't be fooled, and his private secretary was also with him. The next day his wife, the Countess of Sobury, the secretary of embassy, Mr. Laurence Steele, and the embassy physician came over from Washington, and practically the whole staff is quartered in New York now, waiting until he is well enough to be removed. There is no question of identity, and also no question of the genuineness of the illness, for half a dozen New York physicians have been called in consultation. I believe that as soon as he is well enough he will give me an interview; but the way Scotland Yard has shut down and the interference of the state department in a New York county criminal case rather puts my back up, and I'd like to get to the bottom of this business."

"The worst way to go about it is to lose your temper," remarked Tommy soothingly. "Now, to get to the bottom of this thing, two points must be cleared up—the identity of the third person must be established, and we must know the secret which O'Connel had to sell. If the third person was the floater, he must have been a dependent of Lord Sobury's, for he had on that gentleman's old clothes."

"I'm blame' sure that you'll never establish the identity of the floater, except from circumstantial evidence; and O'Connel has carried his secret with him, unless you can resurrect it by your magic." Longley was looking at Tommy suspiciously. He was entirely in the dark as to the means which the latter had employed to unravel the previous mysteries; and his unofficial "assistant" aggravatingly refused to enlighten him.

"Perhaps I had better use my magic to summon the family ghost," Tommy said, grinning. "I suppose they have such a thing?"

"I believe you could summon 'most anything you wanted," came the prompt retort. "The ghost would surely find the surroundings of this studio ghostly enough to make it feel

at home." Longley looked about at the weird furnishing and lighting of the great room. "I suppose there is one, although it isn't mentioned in Burke's 'Peerage,' which gives considerable space to the family."

"Give us the substance of it," said Tommy. "Perhaps we can find the ghost between the lines."

"Well, the earldom is one of the oldest in the peerage; the present incumbent, Richard, is the twenty-third Earl of Sobury, and has a string of other titles as well. He was the third son, and came into the title about ten years ago at his father's death. He entered the diplomatic service early, when he was only the Honorable Richard Collins, and had no prospect of coming into the title. The second son, George, an officer in the Life Guards, was shot or shot himself while grouse-shooting in Scotland, and a few months afterward the eldest son, who bore the courtesy title of Lord Mantrow, broke his neck in the hunting-field. That was about twenty years ago, and, of course, changed the prospects of the Honorable Richard tremendously, and insured his rapid promotion—which, by the way, his talents quite warranted—and at forty-five he is an ambassador, one of the most popular men in the service, and one of the ablest representatives ever sent here from England."

"But you haven't dug out the ghost yet," remarked Tommy.

Longley shook his head. "No, but with that ancestry there are probably several ghosts, for he seems to possess old houses scattered pretty much all over the United Kingdom. If the murder had been the other way round—if he had been found dead and O'Connel suspected—I should look for the motive in some echo of the Irish troubles of twenty years ago. The family has large Irish estates, and an Irish title or two, and the last earl was a strong Conservative, a bitter opponent of Gladstone's Home Rule measures, and one of the best hated men in the Emerald Isle."

"That looks like a lead worth following," said Tommy thoughtfully. "How much do you know of O'Connel's history previous to his imprisonment?"

"Mighty little," answered Longley irritably. "That's just where Scotland Yard has thrown us down. They were looking it up, at our request, and we had asked for a full cable report; but they suddenly shut up like clams, and cabled that their man, who is on the way, would supply all necessary information. They don't seem to have any idea of the value of time over there."

"Or they may appreciate the advantages of delay," suggested Tommy significantly. "Longley, there's a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere, and I shouldn't be surprised if there were international complications in this which will overshadow the murder of a ticket-of-leave man. There is one very suspicious circumstance which you seem to have overlooked. If O'Connel had been deported, to what country would he have been sent?"

"To his own country, of course."

"Naturally. Now, suppose that the English Government found it had made a mistake in releasing him; that he had not ceased to be dangerous, and it was best to jug him again; how could it get hold of him?"

"They would apply for extradition, I suppose; I should have to look that up."

"Well, admit that he could be legally extradited—which I doubt—how much chance would there be that this government, with its large Irish-American vote to be reckoned with, would give up an Irish dynamiter to the British Government?"

"About as much as that I shall be the next Earl of Sobury," admitted Longley. "But, failing that, I don't believe that England would ask her ambassador to murder him."

"No, hardly," answered Tommy, smiling. "But there are other ways, you know. He wouldn't have to be tried if they once got him to England; a simple revocation of his ticket-of-leave would send him to Portland for the rest of his life, and the English are not sentimentalists in dealing with

convicts. Once in there again, he would be literally dead to the world."

"Well, what has that to do with his murder in New York?" asked Longley.

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything," said Tommy. "Do you happen to know that there is an English gunboat, the *Redbreast,* anchored in the North River, above the man-o'-war anchorage?"

"You think they tried to kidnap him?" asked Longley incredulously.

"I don't know what to think just yet," answered Tommy quietly. "I mention that as a possibility, because the coincidence is peculiar. The English navy avoids this port; desertion is too easy, for one reason; and when one of their boats does come, it usually anchors in the lower bay. That theory might account for the walking-stick, the dagger, and also for the mysterious silence of Scotland Yard. At first, they would treat your inquiry as simply police routine and answer frankly, but a tip from the foreign office to keep their hands off would shut them up. Mind you, I don't think that the Earl of Sobury was privy to this; it is more probable that he got wind of what overenthusiastic secret service agents were up to, and hurriedly started out to prevent what might lead to serious international complications. There is all sorts of 'Hands Across the Sea' sentiment being worked up now, and such a thing leaking out might not only shatter it, but actually lead to war."

"But how about the letters?" objected Longley.

Tommy smiled. "My dear Longley, this is simply a wild theory of mine. If it has any foundation, there would be any number of people engaged in it. I believe that in any case the tragic ending was absolutely unexpected, but, having occurred, it was necessary to account for it, and consequently all of the letters are part of a common 'plant.' I'm a little hazy about the Irish troubles of twenty years ago, for at that time I was more interested in my first pair of long trousers than in politics; but I shall put in some time at the Astor Library, looking over the files of the English papers of that period. In the meantime, suppose you have inquiries made as to the presence of any extra British secret service men in New York. Keep me posted, and I'll give you any tip I get hold of. I advise you to keep that industrious officer, Clancy, busy, or he'll be yanking the ambassador out of bed and handcuffing him in spite of diplomatic immunity."

"I'll send him up with any news that I get, so you can keep your eye on him," answered Longley, laughing, as he put on his overcoat. "Good night and good luck to you."

"Tommy, what do you really think of it all?" I asked, when the lawyer had left.

Tommy laughed good-naturedly. "You're worse than Longley. You know how I work, and you want a solution before I have even hypnotized any one. I am as much in the dark as you are, but it will be a very simple thing to get at—when we strike the keystone. In every mystery which involves so many people—and there are apparently a bunch of 'em in this—they will, sooner or later, work at cross-purposes, and give the clue which will lead to the spider in the middle of the web. My impression is that we must catch the family ghost (unless the history of 'Downtrodden Ireland,' which I shall start at to-morrow, offers a plausible motive), and we shall do that if I have to haul the moldering remains of twenty-two belted earls out of their tombs to locate it."

II.

Mr. Tommy Williams for several succeeding days haunted the Astor Library, but we met daily for luncheon and dinner at the Waldorf. Tommy believed in hard work as the true basis of accomplishment in any undertaking, but he was also a believer in keeping his eyes and ears open for any stray piece of information which luck might throw in his way, and he was eagerly attentive to any news concerning the ambassador's condition which floated about. From all that we could learn

it was serious enough, and the bulletins of the physicians were not at all encouraging. Pneumonia had developed, and the attending physicians absolutely forbade any visitors, but we made the acquaintance of the secretaries and attachés, and soon knew more about the actual conditions in the sick-room than was published in the official bulletins. One point which particularly aroused Tommy's interest was confided to us by Mr. Laurence Steele, the embassy secretary.

"There were two documents of pressing importance which it was necessary for his excellency to sign to-day," he said, when we were dining together. "It was awfully rough on the chief to have to disturb him with official business, and any one will have to take the signatures on faith and my guaranty as a witness. He is very weak, and add to that the necessity for writing with his left hand, and the result is more like a fly-track than a signature."

"Is his right hand disabled?" asked Tommy solicitously. Knowing his voice and manner so well, I recognized the note of the hound on a hot scent under the assumed conventional interest.

"Yes, or rather not the hand, but the arm," answered the secretary. "That was the first effect of the exposure, I believe; neuralgia, or something of that kind, and the doctors have it rolled up in cotton and bandages until it is perfectly helpless. These papers to-day are the first he has attempted since he was taken ill, and a fine mess he made of them, poor old chap! This bit of fish isn't half-bad, is it? It has almost the flavor of our English sole."

"And I suppose, if you were writing that enthusiastic commendation, you would spell flavor with a 'u,' to further emphasize British superiority," answered Tommy, laughing, but I knew that he regarded the piece of information which the secretary had let slip as of the utmost importance.

"It looks as if the blood on the dagger might be accounted for," I suggested, as we left the hotel.

"I'd give a good deal to make a sketch of Lord Sobury's right arm with those bandages off," said Tommy. "Confound these new developments! They come just in time to upset nice little theories which I intended to elaborate, for I was beginning to think, in spite of the strong circumstantial evidence against him, that we could practically eliminate his lordship from any active part in the murder. I have been reading pretty steadily—among the rest, a very full report of O'Connel's trial. Longley was mistaken in one thing—O'Connel was not sentenced to life imprisonment. He and his two companions were sentenced to death; the other two were duly hanged, but O'Connel's sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life."

"On what grounds?" I asked.

Tommy laughed. "You know the old saying—'If England wanted to roast an Irishman, it could always find another Irishman to turn the spit!' There were no grounds given for the commutation, but it was generally supposed that O'Connel saved his neck by furnishing evidence which hanged his pals. The history of the whole terrorist campaign, which expressed itself in the dynamite outrages and the Phœnix Park murders, is marked by the treachery of informers. You may remember that Carey, who turned informer in the Phœnix Park case, where Lord Frederick Cavendish, chief secretary for Ireland, and his subordinate, Mr. Burke, were murdered, was given a free pardon and a large sum of money by the English Government. The authorities smuggled him on board a ship bound for South Africa with all possible secrecy; but before the ship reached the Cape he was shot by a fellow passenger—a man who had been on his trail since he left the door of the jail. Other informers mysteriously disappeared, and I had about determined that O'Connel was made away with by the same agencies, and that the ambassador's presence in the vicinity of the crime was purely accidental, until this new development, which may well mean a knife-wound, occurred to make me doubt it."

"Have you found any direct evidence which indicates that the Irish societies were after him?" I asked.

"No, nothing direct, but the circumstances all point to it. You know what a hullabaloo has been raised over the other 'martyrs' on their release from prison, and particularly on their arrival here. Now, this man sneaked away from the prison and went to Germany in disguise, and came from there to America under an assumed name. Clancy tells me that since the man has been in this country he has kept very close, rarely going out except at night, and has avoided mixing with people, especially his own countrymen. That looks as if he were fearful of being identified; and the quietness of the murder and the fact that the body was not plundered made me suspicious that he got what was coming to him, and which he no doubt richly deserved."

"But what about the letters which mixed the ambassador up in it so thoroughly?" I asked.

Tommy walked on in silence, and vouchsafed no reply until after we had reached the studio and he had prepared particularly strong coffee. "By Jove! I believe I am beginning to see daylight, and I haven't got to give up my theory entirely, after all!" he exclaimed, after he had taken a cup. "Decent coffee—not the poison of the restaurants—always makes me think more clearly. I am suspicious that the whole thing is a carefully prepared scheme to wipe out an informer, ruin Lord Sobury—the son of the man whom all Ireland hated because he tried to make them pay rents on his estates—and incidentally to cast a slur upon the British *corps diplomatique* and nobility."

"Isn't that rather a big order—a good many birds to kill with one stone?" I asked incredulously.

Tommy gave a very positive shake of his head. "Just see how it works out!" he exclaimed. "O'Connel—if our inference is true and he was an informer—was doomed to inevitable and violent death. Suppose he were offered a chance to prove that he had not been disloyal by performing some glorious and dangerous service for the cause—wouldn't he jump at it? Members of these societies are recruited from all classes, and have all sorts of queer information at their disposal, so it is quite possible that they fixed up the whole blackmailing game as a pretext. Say that they had decided on the murder of Lord Sobury by O'Connel, but by some chance their scheme miscarried—either O'Connel weakened and tried to sell them out and was killed by one of his companions, or, better still for their purposes, was killed by the ambassador in self-defense. There was a scandal ready-made for them; all sorts of insinuations about motives would appear in the press, and, although Lord Sobury would escape arrest, his career would be irretrievably ruined, for England cannot permit a man with a shade of suspicion against him to remain in the service."

"But what was there to prevent his making a very plain statement of the whole affair?" I asked skeptically, for the theory seemed very far-fetched to me.

"That's what he would have done, if he had been caught at the scene of the murder; but remember that he got safely back to the hotel without discovery, and probably with nothing more serious than a knife-wound in the arm. Had you been in his place, had you either killed a man or been present at a murder which you suspected that enemies would try to fasten on you, what would you have done?"

"I think that I should have tried to obliterate myself," I answered.

"Exactly!" said Tommy triumphantly. "That is just what his lordship did after that murder, and it is what any sensible man who knows the damnable effects of circumstantial evidence would have done. The police went on the theory that, secure in his diplomatic privilege from all punishment—they only look on imprisonment or the death penalty as punishment in such a case, and do not consider what even a breath of suspicion would mean to a man in his position—he called a passing cab and got home as quickly as possible.

The police had been devoting their energies to trying to locate the driver who picked up a fare in that neighborhood that night. They had neglected the very obvious duty of inquiring on the other side of Central Park, but when I suggested it, an hour's inquiry found the driver on one of the cabs in front of the Netherland Hotel. Lord Sobury walked through Central Park and caught a cab on upper Fifth Avenue —certainly not the procedure of a man with nothing on his conscience, for it was blustering and pouring rain, and he was not dressed for such a promenade."

"Your system of 'put yourself in his place' certainly works out a plausible theory, so far," I admitted. "Can you fit the floater into it in any way?"

"It's difficult, but perhaps we can before we get through with the inquiry," answered Tommy, and there was just a little trace of doubt in his voice. "Fortunately, the possibility of substitution is so remote that it disposes of one question. If I thought that there was the slightest chance that the sick man at the Waldorf is an impostor, I should be strongly tempted to believe that the body is that of Lord Sobury. The clothing was undoubtedly his at one time, and, from the official report of the doctors, you will see that it might be his body. The man was about his age, height, and weight. But if human evidence is to be relied upon, the Earl of Sobury is alive at the Waldorf, for it would be impossible for an impostor to pass successfully with so many people, who know the ambassador intimately, in attendance. That leaves the question of the clothing on the body to be accounted for; but it is natural to suppose that men plotting against him would try to have a spy in his household, and those articles could be easily come by. How he managed to get killed in the mix-up is another mysterious point, but it is natural that the body should go to the river. They would want O'Connel to be found, so his body was left in a conspicuous place. The habits of criminals are largely formed by their environment, and the first thing a New York crook thinks of when he wants to dispose of incriminating evidence, either a weapon or the body of a victim, is to get it to one of the rivers. He has been brought up between them, and has learned that they don't betray him. There is just one other possibility, which would seem too far-fetched to be credible if the history of the Irish secret societies did not contain so many facts which are stranger than any fiction. That is, that they had planned to substitute another body for that of the ambassador."

"What in the world would be the object in such a wild proceeding, which would double the chance of discovery?" I asked scornfully, for Tommy seemed to be theory mad.

"Just this," he answered, his serenity not a bit ruffled. "The murder of the British ambassador on the Riverside Drive would give him all the sympathy of the public. The finding of a body which could be identified as his in a disreputable resort, after the public had been worked up by ten days of 'mysterious disappearance' extras would discredit him and his people in this country. Now, stranger things have happened than that they should have prepared a body to be found under just such conditions. It would be very simple, if they planted it before any suspicions were aroused, and then the real body could be thrown into the river after the murder. But if the plan miscarried and the ambassador escaped, as he did, the dummy would have to be disposed of, and the river would be the natural depository for that. You know that you can get a body for a not over-thick wad of bills any day you want it in New York."

"Tommy, you are getting dotty!" I said. "That is a pipe-dream, and not worthy of you."

"I tell you that it is quite within the range of possibilities," he maintained. "But I am not wedded to that explanation. The floater may have been killed in the scrimmage and thrown in to get rid of him, but it seems as if they would have tried to carry away the body of

one of their own men. Putting all that aside, I think there are certain things which we can assume from the circumstantial evidence. First, that Lord Sobury either killed O'Connel or was present when some one else did. Also, that in the scrimmage he received a knife-wound, which is being concealed as neuralgia of his right arm. Further, that the floater, alive or dead, was connected with the case in some way which we have yet to discover. Frequenting the Waldorf has not been altogether unproductive of results, so we shall have the chef reserve our table until further notice, and I'll meet you there at luncheon-time to-morrow."

III.

The physicians announced a marked change for the better in the condition of the ambassador, and the secretaries and attachés were correspondingly cheerful. The bulletin guardedly announced that "if no unlooked-for complications develop, his excellency will be well on the road to recovery in a few days." Details of pulse, respiration, and temperature were given, but not one word about the disabled arm, and Tommy grinned at me significantly after we had read it.

"There at the corner table is a more convincing proof of the improvement in the ambassador's condition than the bulletin offers," he said. "The secretary of state was allowed to see him for a few minutes this morning, and now he is lunching with Lady Sobury. This is the first time that she has ventured from their private apartment since she arrived from Washington." I looked over and saw a very handsome woman, very English in her attire and hair-dressing, tall of figure, and aristocratic of profile. "Looks like one of the kind who should always wear her coronet," commented Tommy. "If she knows his lordship's secret, there's no danger of her telling it. Women with those thin, straight lips always know enough to keep 'em shut, but I'm going to have a try at her luncheon companion."

"The secretary of state?" I asked.

Tommy nodded. "I have been in correspondence with him for some time; not officially, but in reference to some old pictures which he wishes to have restored. It will be a ticklish job, and he will have to import some one to do it for him or send them abroad. He is to call upon me to see about it this afternoon, and I shall try to get under his skin a bit about this murder mystery."

"I am afraid that you will find so old and skilful a diplomat too much for you, Tommy," I said, smiling at his self-confidence, but he did not seem to share my fears.

"He is supposed to have introduced a new element into diplomacy, you know," he answered. "The habit of stating frankly what you want, and sticking to it until you get it."

"And you are going at him on that principle, taking a leaf from his own book?"

"Exactly; but come along and see for yourself," said Tommy, laughing. "He is to be there at four, and we shall have an interestng hour, in any case."

The secretary was indeed an interesting man. In my newspaper career I had met him occasionally, a fact which he at once recalled when Tommy presented me, for he had a marvelous memory for faces. They discussed the question of the restoration of the pictures at great length, Tommy going into the technical methods and finally giving him the names and adresses of two or three experts who would be able to do the work. After admiring several of the art objects in the studio, he thanked him, and started to make his adieus, but Tommy interrupted him.

"Mr. Secretary, I don't want to ask embarrassing questions, but I have been given full discretion by the district attorney's office to make certain inquiries regarding the murder of a man named O'Connel. Among other papers connected with the case, I find an urgent request from you to preserve the greatest secrecy regarding discoveries which might have any international bearing

or significance. May I ask your reasons for making such a request?"

"First, may I ask if you are officially connected with the police in any way, Mr. Williams?" asked the secretary, a look of surprise on his face as he glanced from Tommy to the luxurious furnishings of the studio.

"No, not even unofficially; as you know, I am an artist by profession, but I have been very much interested in several cases which my friend Mr. Longley has told me about, and we have worked over them together. He has supplied me with full particulars about this one, and has asked me to do certain work connected with it."

"And you have discovered that the motive for the murder may be found in the scheming of certain persons who are hostile to a friendly power, I presume," said the secretary guardedly; and Tommy smiled.

"Mr. Secretary, you seem to be asking for information rather than giving it. If I don't answer you, it is only because I do not know; I have discovered absolutely nothing. The more deeply we go into the case, the more mysterious it seems; but you might be giving me the very greatest assistance if you would answer my question. I assure you that I shall endeavor to shield every one connected with the case, except those actually guilty."

The secretary hesitated for a moment, twirling his eye-glasses in his fingers, his face very thoughtful.

"I shall tell you, Mr. Williams," he said finally. "I am able to use my own discretion in the matter, for I did not make that request in my official capacity, nor was the information which induced me to make it transmitted officially to me. I believe it is one of those cases where perfect frankness will, as usual, serve the best purpose. Personally, I am not in the least interested in the matter, nor has it been brought before my department in any way. I acted upon a cablegram from a man very high in the councils of the English Government. He is also a very warm personal friend of mine, and his communication was not official. Those messages are always transmitted through the embassy, but this was a personal appeal, addressed to me at my residence. He asked me to exert my personal influence to keep the investigation of the O'Connel murder quiet, and stated that the victim was an ex-convict, a dynamiter, and a thorough rascal. He further said that the exploitation of it in the press might lead to unpleasant consequences, and that he was sending a confidential messenger who would make the fullest explanations. The only steps I have taken in the matter are the sending of that telegram and a hint to such editors as I thought would oblige me. The messenger has not yet arrived, he will probably land to-morrow; but naturally I drew my own conclusions. Lord Sobury was ill, and I did not see him until to-day, and I avoided any subject which might bother him in the very brief interview which we had."

"Your call to-day was not official, then—not connected with this case?" asked Tommy.

"That's rather a leading question, is it not, Mr. Williams?" answered the secretary, laughing. "There happens to be no reason why I should be mysterious about it, however. My call was purely a friendly one. Aside from any official relationship, I have known Lord Sobury for a great many years; we have met in many parts of the world, and are warm, personal friends."

"You found him much better, did you not?" asked Tommy.

The secretary nodded. "Much better than I expected to, I am happy to say. These official medical bulletins are always puzzling and a trifle terrifying to a layman, and I feared to find him almost at death's door; but except for the natural weakness, he is quite his old self."

"So there's the final nail in the coffin of the theory of substitution," remarked Tommy, after the secretary had left. "The identification of the secretary of state is convincing; so, as we know that Lord Sobury is alive, we know that that is not his mortal remains at the morgue. The main ques-

tion to decide now is who that floater was, and as I hear the footsteps of our intelligent friend Clancy, I hope that he is bringing us news that the police have identified the body."

The detective-sergeant, bristling with importance, came in while Tommy was speaking.

"Sure, we've got a report av a missin' man that may be th' floater," he said. "Listen to this, now!" He read the contents of a conventional police "missing blank," the general description fitting almost any middle-aged man who had no marked peculiarity.

"Well, Clancy, from that elaborate description, I think it might be either you or Lord Sobury who is missing, and yet, you don't look in the least alike," said Tommy, smiling, when he finished.

"Me look like a bloody Sassenach tyrant!" exclaimed Clancy hotly. "Th' divil a bit, sir, praise be to th' saints!"

"No one could possibly mistake you, even in disguise, Clancy," said Tommy soothingly. "Now, let's have the story about the missing man."

"Sure, it's little we know about him," admitted Clancy. "Two weeks he was here that we know of, roomin' on Forty-first Street. Th' night O'Connel was murdered he went out in th' rain, an' th' divil a trace has his landlady seen av him nor his money since. He left a lot av traps in his room, an' today she reported his absence to th' polis, an' gave us this description. Th' doctors say it might be th' floater, an' then again it might not be. But we know this, sir—a man that answers O'Connel's description called on him th' mornin' av the murder, an' th' divil's own ruction they had, by all accounts. The missin' boarder, named Smith, no less, finally trun him into th' street."

"And the luggage—does that throw no light on his identity?" asked Tommy eagerly.

"There's not a scrap av writin', sir, an' I've been through it wid a micriscoop. There was this blank paper on his table, but no pen nor ink." He handed Tommy a few sheets of notepaper, and so great was his faith in his powers that I knew he half-expected to see writing appear on them under his manipulation.

Tommy carefully compared them with the letters found on O'Connel and the floater.

"By Jove, this is important!" he exclaimed. "This paper is exactly the same as that of the two letters—ruling, water-mark, and all. Give me the address of that lodging-house, Clancy." He hastily made a note of it and slipped it, together with several photographs of celebrities which he took from a cabinet, into his pocket.

"Now, Clancy, my compliments to Mr. Longley, and ask him to put every available man to work on tracing this missing lodger; his origin, his habits, and all that he can find out about him. I am going to get a better description from the landlady, and perhaps I can give you a sketch of him. Get hold of that man for me, and I'll guarantee that the mystery will be solved in short order."

"An' do I make th' arrest?" asked Clancy eagerly, his hand slipping furtively to his pocket.

"Yes, if there is one to be made," answered Tommy, laughing. "You'd better have an extra small sized pair of handcuffs ready, Clancy."

"It's a woman, then, is it, sir? Sure I never cuff them, if they're annyway reasonable, sir."

"Perhaps it's a skeleton, Clancy; one of the kind old families keep in dark closets; but run along, now, and tell the hall-boy to call a cab for me. Come on, old chap."

Fifteen minutes later we stopped in front of a very ordinary lodging-house on West Forty-first Street. The landlady, a motherly-looking German woman, admitted us, but her welcoming smile faded when she discovered that we were not applicants for lodgings. She told us, in voluble but broken English, all that she knew about her late lodger, and showed us the things he had left.

Tommy went over the garments carefully, especially the shirts.

"I don't find any of our friend's cast-

offs here, and the missing man evidently was not trying to skip a board-bill, for these things are worth a dozen times what he was likely to be owing," he said, when he had finished. "Now for a try at identification."

He referred to the police slip, and asked the woman, feature by feature, to amplify it, but at the end the result was far from satisfactory, and he took the photographs from his pocket.

"Will you kindly look these over, and tell me if any one of them reminds you of your lodger, Mrs. Kurtz?" he asked, and she carefully adjusted her spectacles and took them from him. She passed over a half-dozen of them rapidly, and then held one up with a cry of astonishment.

"*Gott in Himmel!* vere you found him?" she exclaimed. "Dot vas Mr. Schmid, *ganz gewiss!*"

Tommy looked at her with a grim smile on his face, and when I glanced over her shoulder I found that she had identified as that of her missing lodger the photograph of the British ambassador!

"I wonder what kind of a puzzle Longley would call this now?" said Tommy, as we drove away, after he had elicited a history of the quarrel with O'Connel and a full account of the lodger's habits, which, from the narrative of Mrs. Kurtz, seemed to have been very irregular. "Is there a third man at all, or has his lordship been up to little games on the side? If Lord Sobury was the temporary lodger, engaging that room under an assumed name for his own peculiar purposes, there is really no missing man, and the lodger and the floater can't be identical. If luck would only throw something tangible in our way, instead of furnishing new clues which only tangle us up more, I should be devoutly thankful. I can't even find any one to hypnotize, for no one turns up whom we can suspect of having any knowledge of the case. Well, think this over until dinner-time, and I'll meet you in an hour from now in the café."

Tommy left me in front of my own place, and, after dressing, I started to keep my appointment with him, but found him at the Thirty-fourth Street entrance in earnest conversation with an elderly woman whose soft brogue betrayed her nationality. Tommy put her carefully in a hansom, and gave the driver his orders.

"Sure an' I'm more than grateful to ye, sor," I heard her say. "I'll not fail ye, sor; God willin', I'll be there this blessed night."

"This is my cab, Mrs. O'Connel; it will wait for you until you get comfortably settled, and then bring you to my house at nine," answered Tommy kindly, and, after the cab had driven off, he turned to me with an expression of triumph on his face.

"One of the old family servants come to nurse his lordship, and turned down by Laurence Steele, who has a bunch of newly arrived compatriots on his hands," he said. "I took her under my wing, sent her to a comfortable boarding-house, and she is to come to my studio this evening to hear about the ambassador. Now, we shall have a comfortable dinner, and then use persuasion, cajolery, or hypnotism in an effort to resurrect the family ghost and solve this most puzzling of mysteries."

IV.

Mr. Laurence Steele was in earnest conversation with an impressive-looking Englishman at a neighboring table, and Tommy told me that the newcomer had landed from a Cunarder late in the afternoon. Mrs. O'Connel had also been a passenger on that steamer, and had come directly to the Waldorf, demanding immediate admission to the ambassador on the plea that she was an old family servant, and had been his nurse in infancy. Steele had been the buffer to keep her out of the private apartment, which was as well supplied as a hospital with a full corps of trained nurses and orderlies, and Tommy had arrived at the hotel just in time to hear her voluble protestations at the secretary's abrupt refusal to disturb the ambassador by sending up her name before morning.

"It looked like one of those fortuitous chances to acquire information which sometimes fall in the way of an observant man, so I followed her to the door and spoke to her," he concluded. "She's an independent and resourceful old party, but she is a stranger in this country and was grateful for the suggestions as to lodgings which I made to her. I told her that I would give her the latest news about Lord Sobury if she would come to the studio this evening, and I shall, too; but in return I hope to get considerable information about his early history, and see if we can't find out the secret that O'Connel had to sell."

"Is there any relationship between her and the murdered man?" I asked.

"Possibly; that's another thing I want to find out. I suppose that O'Connels are as thick in Ireland as Jacksons and Washingtons in the colored quarter," answered Tommy, smiling. "Anyway, it's the first hopeful thing that's come into the case. I wonder who the Johnny is with Steele; from the way the whole staff gathered about to greet him, I imagine he's a big gun."

Mrs. O'Connel did not disappoint us, and she gave a little gasp of astonishment and dropped a very substantial alpaca umbrella on the floor when she was ushered into the mysteriously lighted studio. She refused Tommy's offer of coffee, but was easily persuaded to take a "cup o' tay," although the appearance of Duck Sing, who served it, evidently reawakened misgivings in her mind as to the respectability of the place.

"I am glad to be able to tell you that Lord Sobury is much better, Mrs. O'Connel," said Tommy, after she had regained her equanimity and was comfortably seated. "The doctors say that he may be moved to Washington in a day or two, if he gets no setback. Did he send for you to nurse him?"

"Sure an' he knew that wasn't nicissary," she answered. "As soon as iver I heard he was sick, 'twas meself as knew he'd want ould Bridget as nursed him whin he was a baby to luk afther him, instead av th' hussies av nurses at foive guineas a wake and all their airs an' frills, to bother him."

"You were Lord Sobury's nurse, then?" asked Tommy.

"Indade an' I was, an' in his sarvice fer many a year," she said proudly. "Th' two childer at wanst was too much fer her leddyship, who was but a wee slip av a thing herself; an' me own boy Tim bein' but a wake in th' wurruld, they brought me from th' lodge to th' castle. Her leddyship she nussed Mr. G'arge, him as was afterward kilt in Scotland, an' Mr. Richard, him as is now me lord, was given to me. As like as two peas they waz, but Mr. Richard waz th' foinest intoirely."

Tommy's expression changed as he listened to the garrulous old woman, and when she paused for breath he got up quickly, and eagerly consulted a copy of the "Peerage." He closed the book with a vicious snap, and resumed his seat.

"Mr. George and Mr. Richard were twins, then, were they, Mrs. O'Connel?" he asked.

"Sure an' they waz, an' as foine a pair av lads as wan c'u'd wish to see. Just a half-hour bechune thim; but it's a big difference 'twould have made to my Mr. Richard if Mr. G'arge hadn't been kilt wid his own gun. That made me own boy, Mr. Richard, th' heir afther Lord Mantrow bruk his neck, an' whin th' ould earl died 'twas him as got th' title an' th' estates. An' a foine t'ing it waz fer him an' fer the family, too, sor; fer he was not a woild man to play ducks an' dhrakes wid th' money, like Mr. G'arge."

"Was Mr. George a black sheep, Mrs. O'Connel?" asked Tommy; but the old woman's garrulity suddenly ceased. The loyalty of the old servant to the family which had cared for her and pensioned her sealed her lips, and Tommy did not press for an answer.

"You must be tired after your voyage and this busy day, Mrs. O'Connel," he said kindly, but I knew what his manner implied as he stood in front of her, looking fixedly into her eyes. "Rest

yourself here a bit; take forty winks, and it will freshen you up so that you can tell me all about Lord Sobury's babyhood. Sleep, Mrs. O'Connel; close your eyes and sleep; sleep soundly, sleep dreamlessly, sleep fearlessly; sleep, sleep, sleep!"

His long, white hands were passing rapidly over her head, his eyes looked directly into hers, and his Mephistophelean face drew closer and closer as her eyelids gradually closed, and with a sigh of weariness she dropped into a deep slumber.

Tommy stroked her forehead gently until he was assured that she was completely under his control, and then turned to me with an expression of triumph.

"By Jove, I believe we're on the trail of the family ghost now!" he exclaimed. "Haven't we all been precious fools to overlook this twin business?"

"Is it noted in the 'Peerage'?" I asked.

Tommy brought the book. "Of course it is—see here!" Tommy brought back the book and read: "'George Edward Beauchamp, born May 23, 1860; died August 13, 1881. Richard Charles Patrick Stanley, born May 23, 1860.' It doesn't mention 'twins'; but the dates speak for themselves, and just because it was so obvious both Longley and I overlooked the fact that the years were identical. That's the reason so many common affairs become mysteries; the obvious explanation is overlooked in trying to find something hidden. I haven't figured the full significance of this yet; but when I get through with this old woman we shall put our facts together. It seems to offer all sorts of chances for the romantic changing of children in the cradle and the sort of thing that delights the melodramatist's heart."

Even in the hypnotic trance Mrs. O'Connel was inclined to garrulity, and Tommy had his work cut out, not to obtain information, but to keep her from expatiating at great length on side issues concerning her own and Lord Sobury's family which would have occupied half the night in telling. Before he commenced his questioning he solemnly assured her that he meant no harm to any one she cared for, and once assured of this, her answers resembled the babbling brook, and threatened to run on forever. Her eyes were closed, her face impassive, and although she revealed nothing very startling, after a half-hour's examination Tommy was satisfied that he knew all that she could impart which would be of value in his investigation.

"Now, Mrs. O'Connel, you will sleep for five minutes, and then awaken naturally," he said, when he had finished questioning her. "You will not remember that you have answered any questions in your sleep, but after the cab has taken you back to your lodgings you will remain there quietly and not make any attempt to see Lord Sobury nor to go out until I send for you."

The Irishwoman slumbered peacefully for the prescribed time, and then awakened with a start, and made profuse apologies for having so far forgotten herself as to doze. Tommy cut her short and escorted her to the waiting cab; and when he returned to the studio he was accompanied by Longley, whom he had met on the street.

"I hope that you have made more progress than I have," said the assistant district attorney irritably, as he threw himself into a chair. "The Scotland Yard man arrived to-day, and if he is a fair specimen of the English detective, I don't wonder that they rely on informers to get convictions over there. Clancy's an ornament to his profession by comparison."

"Could he give you no information of value?" asked Tommy.

Longley laughed contemptuously. "I don't know whether he could or not; but I know that he wouldn't until he was able to interview the ambassador. The infernal bullhead has O'Connel's full record, but he won't give it up without Lord Sobury's permission, because he claims it might displease some of the big-bugs over there, and that it would not be of the slightest value to us."

"Don't worry about it, Longley," said

Tommy quietly. "I know more than Scotland Yard does about him."

Longley gave a start of surprise, and looked at Tommy incredulously. "I wish that you would tell me what sort of magic you use to get information," he said. "Half the Mulberry Street force has been on this thing for days, and they haven't got at anything as important as that."

"This was the simplest kind of magic —just plain luck," answered Tommy, laughing. "I ran across the woman who nursed Lord Sobury, and who has been with his family for years; and I have had her under examination here this evening. She also happens to be the mother of Timothy O'Connel, so I have learned a good deal of his history."

Tommy stopped to pour himself a drink, and, after lighting a cigarette, seated himself comfortably.

"Here's the substance of what I learned from her," he continued. "The present Lord Sobury was a twin brother, younger by half an hour than George, the second son, who was killed in Scotland. We both overlooked that in the 'Peerage,' although it is there in plain print. George, who went into the Guards, was a reckless young fellow, a sort of 'Ouida' hero, who lived way beyond his means, and after squandering what money he had inherited, was helped out more than once by his father, who paid his debts. At the time of his death, in a shooting accident in Scotland, he was very much involved, but everything would have been arranged, as he was engaged to be married to Lady Sara Relew, a very wealthy woman. The family fortune was not a large one, for while they owned enormous estates, these estates were unproductive, and yielded little surplus income; which is probably one reason why the late earl was so harsh with his Irish tenants. Lady Sara afterward married the present Earl of Sobury, when a second accident, the death of Lord Mantrow, the eldest son, made him the heir. Timothy O'Connel, the son of the nurse I mentioned, was just a week older than the twins, and became the personal servant of the Honorable George Collins, the second son. After the death of the Honorable George, O'Connel seems to have drifted to the bad, got mixed up with the dynamiters, with the result that we know of. His mother is still ignorant of his death, but she did know that he had got hold of some discreditable secret about Lord Sobury and had come to America to blackmail him. Under pretense of coming to nurse Lord Sobury in his illness, she hurried over to try and prevent her son from doing mischief, arriving on the same ship with your detective and a mysterious Englishman, who is at the Waldorf and whom I believe to be considerable of a personage. There you are—that's the whole story. Now, what do you make of it?"

"I don't see that it has any new significance, except that it indicates that the blackmailer had a family secret, rather than a political one, to dispose of," said Longley slowly. "That seems to upset your theory that the murder had any connection with the Irish societies. Have you formed any new theory as a result of it?"

"I have passed the stage of theories," said Tommy positively. "I can't tell you what I think, but I don't as yet exclude the Irish societies. His secret may have had some connection with their work, in which Lord Sobury, as a young man, or some one of his family, was implicated. I feel that I am right on the threshold of discovery, and that some simple little thing which we have probably had in front of us all the time would be the key to open the door. Have the police discovered anything about the missing man?"

"Yes—that he went under the name of Smith, and not a blessed thing more!" answered Longley hopelessly. "He seems to have been a mysterious person during his short residence in that house—away from his lodgings a great deal, and very irregular in his hours. We are not a bit wiser as to his identity nor as to the identity of the floater."

"Well, I'll give you one more point

to puzzle over," said Tommy, grinning. "His landlady positively identified—picked it out from a half-dozen others—a photograph of the ambassador as that of the missing lodger. Now, don't mix me up with theories; go home and dream over it, if you like; but leave me to think this over by myself. Luncheon at one to-morrow, as usual, old chap!"

V.

Mr. Laurence Steele, his face and manner exhibiting an unusual perturbation for a diplomat, greeted Tommy warmly when we strolled into the Waldorf for luncheon.

"By Jove, but I'm glad to see you!" he said. "I have sent three times to your shop this morning, but you were not at home."

"No, I neglected my regular trade for the pursuit of literature for a few hours," answered Tommy dryly. "I have been working all the morning at the Astor Library. What can I do for you?"

"You can help me out of the deuce of a scrape, if you will tell me where to find a woman named Bridget O'Connel," answered the secretary. "She came bothering to see the chief yesterday afternoon, but I was busy with a man from the foreign office who had just arrived, and so I sent her away. She was to come back this morning, but she has not put in an appearance, and when I happened to mention her name to the ambassador, both he and Lady Sobury were in a great state about it."

"And you think I have eloped with her?" asked Tommy, smiling.

"No, hardly that, having seen the lady's face," answered the secretary seriously. "The carriage man told me that he thought she was the woman whom he saw you put into a hansom, and I am hoping he was right. I haven't seen the chief so much put out about anything in many a day."

"If you'll give me five minutes to write a note, I'll set his mind at rest," answered Tommy; and he went to a writing-desk, coming back in a few moments with a letter addressed to the ambassador in his hand. "This may seem a queer performance to you, Mr. Steele," he said gravely, as he handed it to him, "but there are many strange things happening nowadays. I shall ask you to deliver this into Lord Sobury's own hands, and to bring me his reply. It is not at all a trivial thing, and it will relieve you of any further anxiety about Mrs. O'Connel's whereabouts."

The secretary turned the letter over in his hand hesitatingly. "Why, really, Mr. Williams, I don't see——"

"No, I don't suppose you do," interrupted Tommy, "but I shall ask you to deliver this letter, and I can't make any explanation. We are lunching here, so he can send the answer to our table." To end any further discussion, Tommy took my arm and marched me away, leaving Steele with an expression of perplexity on his face as he examined the superscription on the envelope.

"Don't bother me with questions, old chap," said Tommy, as we took our seats at the table. "I have just made a bluff, and I can't tell you anything until I see whether I am called or not. Order the luncheon, will you?"

I had never seen Tommy laboring under greater excitement, but he gave no evidence of it when, a short time after, Steele came to our table.

"His lordship wishes me to present his compliments, and to say that he will meet your wishes in the matter, Mr. Williams," he said formally, and rather curtly refused Tommy's invitation to join us at luncheon.

"Well, my bluff wasn't called!" exclaimed Tommy triumphantly, when he had left us. "The Earl of Sobury will honor my studio with a visit at nine this evening."

"What! Why, Tommy, the man isn't able to leave his bed!" I exclaimed.

He looked at me with a very aggravating grin on his Mephistophelean face. "That is what is generally believed, but his lordship and I think differently," he answered. "I can assure

you that he will be there, and we shall have quite a distinguished gathering."

"Will you tell me what you have been up to this morning?" I asked, in bewilderment.

"I have been studying the London *Times* for the year 1881," he answered. "Very interesting reading, I can assure you, old chap. I even went to the trouble of copying a couple of paragraphs from it; here they are."

He passed over two sheets of paper, and I read the first one eagerly. It was an account of the death of the Honorable George Collins.

DISTRESSING ACCIDENT ON A SCOTCH GROUSE MOOR.

News has just been received of the death of the Honorable George Collins, as the result of a shooting accident in Scotland. The young gentleman, who was an ensign in the First Life Guards and second son of the Earl of Sobury, had left Sobury Castle early in the morning, and, a very severe storm coming on shortly afterward, the shooting was abandoned for the day by the other guests at the castle. The storm was of great severity and continued for forty-eight hours, but no anxiety was felt at Mr. Collins not returning, for it was believed that he had sought shelter at one of the neighboring houses. On the third day his body was found about two miles from the castle, the head shattered by the shot from both barrels of his own gun. It is thought that Mr. Collins met his death through the accidental discharge of his gun while climbing out of a deep gully in which the body was found. It will be remembered that Mr. Collins was the owner of Silvertip, the favorite for the Derby, which was beaten only by a head in a most exciting finish. A marriage between Mr. Collins and Lady Sara Relew, only daughter of his .Grace, the Duke of Richlands, had been arranged, and was to have taken place next month.

When I had finished reading I glanced at Tommy, and he motioned to me to read the second paragraph.

"It may have no bearing on the matter, but Lord Sobury's acceptance of my invitation makes me believe that it has," he said.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A BOOK-MAKER.

It has been reported to the police that John Soloman, the well-known book-maker, has mysteriously disappeared. He was last seen about three weeks ago, when he announced that he was going to Scotland for a couple of days on private business. Since that time nothing has been heard of him, and his friends have therefore appealed to the police. Although very young and a comparatively newcomer on the turf, Soloman has been extremely fortunate, and no cause can be assigned for a voluntary disappearance. All of his betting obligations had been met punctually, and he is known to have cleared a fortune over the defeat of Silvertip in the Derby, as he persistently offered the highest odds obtainable against the favorite.

"Well, do you see the connection?" asked Tommy, when I handed it back to him.

"You think that George Collins did away with him?" I asked, in astonishment.

Tommy nodded. "That's exactly what I think, and, furthermore, that Lord Sobury knows it, and that Timothy O'Connel knew it; which fact led to the Irishman's death. In my note to the sick man up-stairs I stated that the mystery of John Soloman's death would be explained at my studio this evening, and that I believed he would be interested in it. I also informed him that the secretary of state would be there; so that sets his mind at rest on the subject of blackmail. If he had sent back word for me to go to the devil, it would have involved another forty-eight hours of work, but the eventual result would have been the same. As he has accepted, the case is practically finished, and I am a loafer until nine to-night; so let's hear 'Tristan und Isolde' at the matinée this afternoon."

I knew that Tommy was not entirely frank with me; that his love of a dramatic dénouement, with himself in the lime-light in the center of the stage, made him withhold his most important discoveries or deductions until the climax. But I also knew that it was useless to question him. So we went to the opera and discussed indifferent topics through dinner and until we arrived at the studio. Clancy awaited us there, an expression of hopeful expectancy on his face, for Tommy had sent him word to be present, and he fully expected an order to arrest the murderer of O'Connel.

"You're cast for an outside part to-night, Clancy," said Tommy, grinning at him. "I expect a number of guests, and after they arrive I want you to stand in the hallway, and prevent others from coming in, and be ready to arrest any one I tell you to, if it comes to that. If any one tries to make a quick get-away, hold on to him on general principles, and be sure you don't let a family skeleton get past you."

"Sure, Mr. Williams, it's yourself that's th' great hand fer kiddin'," Clancy protested. His expression had changed to one of great disappointment when he found that he was not to be present at the session, but he knew that Tommy's word was law, and resignedly took his station in the hallway. The first arrival to pass under his sharp scrutiny was the secretary of state, who looked at Tommy questioningly as they shook hands.

"I am very sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Secretary, but this matter of the O'Connel murder has assumed very grave proportions, and I knew that your presence here to-night might save a great deal of future embarrassment. I expect Lord Sobury in a few minutes."

"Is Lord Sobury able to be out?" asked the secretary, in surprise.

Tommy smiled grimly. "Perhaps his illness was largely 'diplomatic' in character," he suggested. "In any case, he has made an unexpected recovery, and I assure you that he will be here, whether he will or no."

"My dear Mr. Williams, I trust that you have not forgotten that diplomatic privilege makes an ambassador above our law, and that anything in the nature of an arrest might lead to very serious complications!" exclaimed the secretary, in dismay.

Tommy laughed reassuringly. "Yes, I know about that, but I think Lord Sobury will come voluntarily. You know Longley, I believe, Mr. Secretary."

The two men shook hands, and when, a moment later, Lord Sobury, accompanied by the Englishman we had seen at the Waldorf, arrived, Tommy signaled to Clancy that the party was complete. The newcomer was introduced as Lord Treator, under secretary of state for foreign affairs, and Tommy at once proceeded to business.

"Gentlemen, I have asked you to come here to clear up the mystery surrounding the death of one Timothy O'Connel, who was murdered in this city about three weeks since," he said gravely. "Whether it will lead to the punishment of a guilty man, or whether, after hearing the solution of the matter, it will be hushed up, will rest upon your decision; but it is only fair that the truth shall be known to prevent the possible accusation of some innocent person and a grave miscarriage of justice in the future. Lord Sobury, do you wish to make any statement?"

"I am here not to speak, but to listen," answered his lordship quietly. "I would remind you, however, that I have been ill, and I trust that this unpleasant business can be speedily terminated."

"We should get to the end of it more quickly if you spoke now, as you must inevitably do later," answered Tommy confidently. "Undoubtedly I ought to warn you that anything you may say can be used against you, but I believe that there will be no disposition nor necessity to make open use of it. I also warn you that an officer is in waiting, and unless you do speak very plainly he will take you to police headquarters to-night when you leave here, and to-morrow you will be committed to the Tombs on the charge of murder."

The secretary of state gave an exclamation of surprise. "Mr. Williams, I must again remind you——"

"Yes, I know, Mr. Secretary," interrupted Tommy unceremoniously. "You would say that an ambassador is sacred from arrest. I understand that perfectly, but that does not apply in this case. The post of British ambassador to the United States is vacant, through the death of the last incumbent, whose remains were fished out of the North River and are now at the morgue, and this man is no more entitled to immunity than I am."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed the secretary, jumping up. "Do you mean to assert that our eyes deceive us, and that this is not Lord Sobury?"

"Yes and no," answered Tommy coolly. "Your eyes do deceive you, and still he is Lord Sobury. But this is George, Earl of Sobury; not the Honorable Richard Collins who was accredited as ambassador under the title of earl, to which he never had any right. This is his elder twin brother, supposed to have been killed more than twenty years ago. If you have any doubts, ask his lordship to discard that utterly useless sling in which a perfectly sound right arm is supported, and give you a sample of the ambassador's handwriting, with which you are undoubtedly familiar."

Lord Sobury's face was ghastly, and I mixed a stiff brandy-and-soda, which he took from me with a trembling hand. His companion, Lord Treator, his face as impassive as if it were carved from wood, looked at Tommy attentively for a moment, and then gave a little gesture of defeat.

"We admit that Mr. Williams is correct in that last statement," he said quietly. "About the accusation of murder we have nothing to say, but we are quite prepared to listen."

"I'll say all that's necessary, never fear," said Tommy sharply. "Not only about this accusation, but a previous one which it will be necessary to go into, because it supplies the motive for all this masquerading in life and death. Perhaps this last case was one of self-defense, but the murder of John Soloman in Scotland in the year 1881 was, I believe, committed by George Collins in a fit of passion. This is largely guess on my part, but I think that Lord Sobury will bear me out, after he has reflected a bit. So here is the story. This young man, at the time with no prospect of succeeding to the title or estates, as his elder brother was alive, lived as if he were a multimillionaire, and in consequence became heavily involved in debt. One of his largest and most pressing creditors was a bookmaker named John Soloman, to whom he owed a large sum as a result of the defeat of his horse, Silvertip, in the Derby. This creditor followed him to Scotland and was foolish enough to threaten a hot-headed young man on a lonely moor, and as a result received the contents of both barrels of a shotgun in his face at a pointblank range. Then, overcome by remorse and fear, the murderer cast about for a means of escape. The shot had utterly destroyed the dead man's face, and in figure and build the victim and the murderer were not dissimilar, so he exchanged clothing with the man he had shot down, and fled the country. Do you wish to add anything to this or to correct me, my lord?"

Lord Sobury, under the stimulus of the brandy, had regained his color, but his voice was tremulous when he spoke.

"The story is substantially correct," he admitted. "I killed him, but it was under great provocation, and not because he threatened me about money matters. I had lost tremendously on the defeat of the horse, as had many of my friends, whom I had assured that it would win, and when he taunted me with being a fool and acknowledged that he had bribed my jockey to lose the race which Silvertip could easily have won, I started to give him the thrashing he deserved; but he drew a pistol, and, in a fit of passion, I raised my gun and fired both barrels into his mocking face."

"Thank you," said Tommy. "Perhaps it will be easier for you if I tell the rest?"

Lord Sobury looked at him gratefully and nodded assent; and Tommy continued:

"No question of the identity was raised; the Honorable George Collins was officially dead, and I have no doubt he would never have come to life if a blackmailer named O'Connel, who had been his valet and with whose subsequent career and manner of death you are all familiar, had not got hold of the secret and attempted to extort money from the late ambassador. As any sensible man of the world would do, the ambassador defied him, and,

not believing the story, was only anxious to avoid raking up a sad incident which had been practically forgotten. His brother, however, knew that the story was susceptible of proof, and decided to see the ambassador.

"Fearing to excite remark by the strong likeness which existed between them, he asked for an interview at an isolated place. Just what happened that stormy night on the Riverside Drive, no one but Lord Sobury can tell us; but I believe that there was a scrimmage; that O'Connel stabbed the ambassador, and was in turn killed by Lord Sobury, who again resorted to substitution, this time coming to life in his brother's place. The body of the ambassador was stripped of its outer clothing and thrown into the river. The real Lord Sobury then went to the Waldorf in his dead brother's place.

"He became a very sick and secluded man until he should have time to summon powerful friends from England to his assistance. O'Connel's letters with 'your lordship' and 'my lord' in quotation marks made me suspicious of substitution from the first, but it was almost impossible to believe that Lady Sobury and the valet could be deceived, until I learned that the brothers were twins, and bore a striking resemblance to each other."

Longley and the secretary of state were dumb with astonishment, but Lord Sobury had gradually recovered his self-possession.

"They were not deceived—they were loyal," he said calmly. "I had no intention of carrying on this deception, except before the general public, and at once sent as much of the story as possible to England. You are right in your deductions, Mr. Williams; O'Connel followed me to the Riverside Drive, and after my brother joined me, he approached us. My brother defied him, for he had insisted upon my making myself known, trusting to our family interest to get that awful affair on the grouse moor hushed up or smoothed over. The Irishman saw that he could make nothing out of his secret, and before I could stop him stabbed my brother. Then he came at me, but I struck him with a loaded stick, and he fell dead at my feet. The rest of the story you know; I have tried to save disgrace to my family and a scandal which would discredit my country. It is for you, gentlemen, to say what shall be done to me. I have killed two men; one a blackleg and a swindler, the other a dynamiter, blackmailer, and murderer. As for myself, if I am not arrested I shall again disappear from the world, and my brother's son will come in for the title."

"Mr. Longley, it rests with you," said Tommy gravely.

The lawyer looked exceedingly uncomfortable. "I have no desire to persecute, and I don't see that it is my duty to prosecute in this case," he said, after a few moments of hesitation. "We never indict a man without evidence enough to make conviction reasonably certain, and I think that Lord Sobury's plea of self-defense would undoubtedly gain his acquittal. With the other case I have nothing to do, and I presume that he will immediately return to England to answer for it. On Lord Treator's assurance that we shall receive a duly attested account of the whole affair to file for future use, if it is necessary, I shall interpose no objection to that departure."

The secretary of state was visibly relieved, and Lord Treator shook Longley's hand with as much feeling as he was capable of showing.

"You shall have it, Mr. Longley, and another assurance. When you ask for it, Scotland Yard will never again refuse information."

Lord Sobury stood up, and looked at each of us in turn.

"You have tempered justice with mercy, gentlemen, and I thank you," he said gravely. "Punishment I can't escape; I carry it in my own breast; but God grant that no one of you who has been merciful to me may ever be asked to resign place and power, give up the woman you love, and become a nameless wanderer on the earth for a lifetime, to atone for the mad work of an instant of blind passion."

The Infernal Feminine

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Rowdy of the 'Cross L,'" "Chip of the 'Flying U,'" Etc.

In which is shown the predilection which the boys of the "Flying U" ranch had for the weaker sex and how they lost their heads over the sudden appearance of a very startling beauty

"WHERE'S Pink at?" It was Cal, coming into the bunk-house late, who put the question to the Happy Family as a whole.

"Where he's always at, lately—and that's up at the White House getting his fingers doctored." Jack Bates rolled over upon his side and reached for his cigarette-book. "Them fingers uh his takes more fixing than a broken leg. For half a dollar I'd burn *my* fingers with a rope, and get into the game. And *he's* the lad that's got no use for girls!"

"Doctor Cecil's all right, you bet. Yuh can't blame Pink for needing treatment bad—especially when he's got a bunch uh gratitude coming for rescuing her from that old cow. I'd absorb all the gratitude she was a mind to hand out, myself. But a fellow with a rep like Pink's got——"

"Cadwolloper's in love," stated Weary calmly.

Pink, opening the door at that instant, heard the remark and came in upon them stormily. His hand was freshly and scientifically bandaged in clean, white linen, and his yellow curls were brushed into shiny rings, and his gray hat perched upon them at a jaunty angle.

"I'd like to know where yuh got the papers for saying that," he cried belligerently to Weary. "When I'm in love, I'll let yuh know."

"Love," smiled Weary placidly, "speaks right up for itself. Yuh don't need to tell us, Cadwolloper; we aren't impolite enough to ask for embarrassing details. Yuh got all the symptoms, and that's all we need to go by."

"Symptoms uh what?" Pink glared around at them. "Can't a man get his hand done up without being woozy over the girl that does it? Yuh don't know a darn thing about it. Yuh just set down here and chin like a bunch uh darn old granny-gossips. If yuh just had some knittin'-work and check aprons on you'd be complete. And who do yuh think I'm in love with—since you're so blame wise? The Countess?"

"By golly, no!" blurted Slim jealously. "Mis' Bixby ain't wastin' no time on yeller-haired kids; she'd *spank* yuh if yuh went foolin' around *her*."

Weary looked at the others and shook his head commiseratingly.

"Cadwolloper's sure got the symptoms," he said sadly. "It's only a matter uh time, now. Yuh know how it worked on Chip; had the Little Doctor pull him through with a twisted ankle, and—it was all off with the big cowpuncher. A rope-burn ain't quite so serious, but, mama! it'll do the business, all right—especially when a man's done the heroic act *getting* them slight disablements. When he's saved the girl from an angry bossy cow, and burnt his fingers doing it, why, it's quite sufficient. How's the fingers coming on, Cadwolloper? They're sure getting good care."

"None uh your damn business!" snapped Pink.

"It always does make 'em irritable," mused Weary. "Yuh remember Chip

was right on the fight, when the malady first commenced working in his blood. Yuh couldn't point your finger toward him without getting cussed. It's like measles——" Weary dodged in time, and looked at Pink reproachfully. "I'm sure surprised at yuh, Cadwolloper. It's getting plumb serious, when yuh turn on your best friends that way."

"What the whole bunch uh yuh needs," Pink retorted loftily, "is to pace along up to the house and get your *heads* poulticed. The sooner some uh your curious ideas are drawed out, the healthier it'll be for yuh. Well, darn yuh!" Pink turned truculently upon Irish Mallory, who was a newcomer and Weary's cousin and second self—so far as looks went. "What's eating you? Yuh sound like a jug uh whisky when Slim's applied to the little end."

"Nothing—but it sure amuses me to watch a man that's got his."

"Watch out, or you'll get yours, and get it sudden," threatened Pink sullenly.

The Family laughed. Pink stood just five feet six inches in his riding-boots, and Irish towered over him to the slim, muscular height of six feet two inches—also in his riding-boots. He could have carried Pink about in his arms like a baby, and he had a fighting reputation almost equal to Pink's.

"Oh, you fellows make me plumb sick," Pink cried above the laughter.

"Better go up and get Doctor Cecil to give yuh something for it, by golly!" advised Slim solemnly.

That from Slim went beyond Pink's endurance. A white streak began to show plainly around his mouth and nostrils, and his eyes were so deep a purple that they looked quite black in the lamplight. He could not fight the whole Family, much as he would like to do so, but he could hint darkly at vengeance.

"This'll be about enough on the subject uh love," he said, in his clear treble. "Every darn one uh you has had your dose of it—and you'll likely get another. Cal's got a girl he's plumb batty over, and Weary's schoolma'am is about the only thing that ever happened; Happy Jack's got it virulent, and Slim's like a sick yearling when the Countess is around. Jack Bates is taking absent-treatment for his, and Irish—well, if Irish ain't had an attack lately, he likely will. I hope I may be there to see it, for he'll sure have it bad. So far as I'm concerned, I've been vaccinated, and it worked fine. I ain't got the ailment, and there ain't any use in you fellows getting excited over it; there's nothing to it, I tell yuh. But it don't drop here. You've said a lot, and before I'm through with yuh, you'll swallow every darn word—and here's hoping they don't set easy in your digestive apparatus. It's all right now—but mind what I tell you; you've sure got it coming!"

Some one started the applause, and the others took it up derisively. Irish uncoiled himself and passed his hat around solemnly, and took up an assorted collection of burnt matches, cigarette-stubs, and the like, and presented it gravely to Pink. Pink accepted the offering without a word, deposited it in an empty tobacco-sack, and grinned.

"All right—I'll take this up to Doctor Cecil, so she can hand it back to you—some time."

"Aw, go on!" Irish looked a bit startled. "Don't be a fool."

"So help me Josephine, this goes to Doctor Cecil; and when you get yours, she'll return the offering! Oh, I'll fix you a-plenty!" Pink turned and darted out before they could stop him, and when they craned necks out of the door, they saw him heading straight up the hill to the White House.

"He won't dare," Irish tried to assure himself by saying.

"Yes, he will—the little devil," said Jack Bates gloomily. "He'll tell her every word we said."

"On second thoughts," Weary remarked meditatively, breaking a match-stub in his fingers and casting the pieces far from him, "I take it all back. Cadwolloper ain't in love."

The second coming of Doctor Cecil Granthum to the ranch had been the

precursor of some agitation in the Happy Family. Some of them rather resented her coming, as likely to break into their accustomed life of happy-go-lucky unconventionality. The Little Doctor they were used to and looked upon quite as one of themselves—especially since she became "Mrs. Chip." The Countess was "part of the scenery," as Weary said. Other women might come for a day or two, and no one minded. But Doctor Cecil was out to remain indefinitely, and she was the sort of girl one can't ignore.

She was a head taller than the Little Doctor, and she had a fluffy pompadour that always had stray wisps breaking from their moorings and blowing about; she had big, blue eyes that saw a lot they weren't intended to see, and a way of saying things that made one uncomfortably aware that she knew all one's weaknesses. Those whom she had met before—Weary, Cal, and Happy Jack, Slim and Jack Bates—she ordered about and bullied. Pink and Irish Mallory she stood off and studied quite openly.

For these reasons they stood a bit in awe of Doctor Cecil Granthum, and the bare threat from Pink to tell her what they had been saying was disquieting to the Happy Family. That Pink, after rescuing the energetic young woman from an irate cow, should quite openly show his liking for her, was bad enough; that he should traitorously repeat their remarks concerning that liking was worse. The Happy Family took an attitude of guarded defiance, and wondered if Pink really would tell her.

For a week their behavior was circumspect in the extreme, and their manner toward Pink nothing short of placating; after which peace hovered over the Flying U bunk-house, and the Happy Family breathed freer. Pink, evidently, did not hold any grudge against them.

They put heads together amicably and began to discuss costumes for the Thanksgiving masquerade ball in Dry Lake. They were all going, and they intended to add a good bit to the spectacle, and to the excitement as well—for it was rumored that Benton had wakened from her lethargy, and was boastfully preparing to send a delegation that could teach Dry Lake things about costumes and fine dancing. Dry Lake, it may be remarked, was not enthusiastic over being taught things by Fort Benton, or any other place. Dry Lake was a self-sufficient little place, and jealous of its dignity.

"I'm going as an Injun squaw," said Happy Jack, with the air of one suddenly inspired. "I betche nobody'll know *me!*"

"Yuh want to disguise them feet, then," Irish Mallory remarked caustically. "They ain't easy forgot."

"Irish and me had better tog up alike," spoke up Weary hastily, to head off any warlike reply from Happy Jack. "We'll sure keep 'em guessing some. What you going to wear, Cadwolloper?"

"I'm going as a Chink. I've got the proper build, and when yuh see me hully-hully chop-chopee through the crowd, yuh can't tell it from the real thing."

"Well, you fellows can tip your hands, if yuh want to," said Jack Bates, "but me, I don't tell what I'm aiming to look like."

"Chip says the Little Doctor's got a catalogue uh costumes up to the house, and we can club together and rent anything we like. Run up and borrow it, Pink. This thing has got to be put through right." Cal stared round at them with big, earnest, blue eyes.

"Well, but I bid for the Chink; yuh don't want to forget that," warned Pink, and departed on the errand.

When he returned, they hunched close together, and light hair mingled with brown the while they debated earnestly the merits of pictured costumes.

Pink clung steadfastly to the idea of being a Chinaman, selected the rig, and marked it with a very black cross.

Happy Jack wavered uncertainly between an "Injun squaw" and Satan—until Weary and Irish settled the matter by announcing that they would both

be devils; whereupon Happy sighed and marked the squaw for himself.

It was late that night when they slept, and then a few of them dreamed strange things. The next night they went again critically over the catalogue, confirmed their choice, and went up in a body to ask the Little Doctor to send for the things, and to make sure she did not mix the order. They measured one another solemnly with the Little Doctor's tape, and swore her to secrecy —although that was superfluous; they knew they could trust Mrs. Chip.

Then they waited impatiently, and talked of little else. The costumes came, and they were up till three o'clock in the morning, trying them on and practising fancy steps and guying one another as only the Happy Family can do.

Weary was proud of his rig—a blue devil, it was, and appropriate because of its contrast with his disposition. Irish was a yellow devil, and Pink made the most adorable Chink one could imagine. Happy Jack perspired over his squaw costume, and Jack Bates tucked a mysterious bundle under his pillow; he was still resolutely refraining from "tipping his hand"; and the Happy Family, beyond coaxing a bit, let him alone, too much interested in their own affairs to be overcurious. Slim's rig was blatantly Dutch.

So it was for two nights, and then came disaster to Pink. In the night they heard him swearing softly between groans, and in the morning found him with a rampant toothache, which not even the skill of the two doctors up at the house could dispel. The bunk-house reeked with the odor of drugs, and Pink's temper was something to avoid rousing.

"Yuh got to git it stopped before to-morrow night," reminded Happy Jack dolefully, "or there'll be one Chink missing at the dance."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Pink, his voice muffled in his pillow.

The reek of drugs grew more pronounced as Pink's efforts to stop the pain redoubled. The Happy Family advised having the Little Doctor pull the offending tooth, and Pink swore at them for answer. On the morning of the dance, his cheek was swollen perceptibly under the silk neckerchief he used for a bandage, and Happy Jack croaked commiseratingly. It was all off, he reminded Pink often; he could not go to the dance, and he was out just five dollars, for he'd have to pay for the Chinese costume just the same.

Pink threw things at Happy Jack and nursed his face in his hands, and was not cheerful company. The Happy Family was sympathetic, and Weary even offered to stay at home to keep him company. Pink remarked that the tooth was all the company he wanted, and that he'd be darn glad when they were gone, so he could be let alone. As for the dance, he would be glad when it was over so they'd quit yapping about it; he was sick of hearing about blue devils and squaw togs, and seeing Jack Bates feel under his pillow every two minutes. He wished they'd pull out and leave him alone. And as for the Chink clothes, he told Happy Jack caustically that he needn't worry over that five dollars; it didn't come out of *his* wages.

So they wrapped their costumes carefully and departed for Dry Lake, and left Pink to the questionable comfort of an empty bunk-house and a cheek twice its natural size. They were very sorry, but there was nothing that they could do for him; so they put his woes rapidly behind them, and when they reached Dry Lake and the atmosphere of mystery and preparation, forgot him utterly.

Irish Mallory, standing beside Weary near the door, ran his eye appraisingly along the benches that lined the wall. Not having a "girl" of his own, he was free and anxious to choose the best. He glanced the second time at a tall, dignified college girl whom he guessed to be Doctor Cecil Granthum, and at the Little Doctor in a star-spangled domino beside her.

He would like very much to dance with Doctor Cecil, only that she al-

ways seemed to be studying him impersonally, as a new species of trouble-germ, or something—he did not quite know what. He sighed and looked farther.

Ten feet beyond, a lithe, gay-clad figure stood fingering a gaudily beribboned tambourine and tapping the floor impatiently with the toe of one high-heeled, red slipper. Irish had once upon a time heard "Carmen" sung, and he recognized intuitively that this piquant, gipsyish figure was none other than the mischievous *Carmen* herself. She turned her head idly, caught his glance upon her, and flirted her tambourine coyly. Irish nudged Weary, and asked who she was.

"Can't read her brand from here," the blue devil answered. "But I take her to be one uh the Benton crowd. Mama, she's sure a peacherine."

The next minute Irish was making his way toward her, the lust of possession in his eyes. They swung off together in a two-step, and Irish felt that luck was with him; the lithe young *Carmen* not only bewitched the eye—she danced distractingly. He began to feel glad that the Benton crowd had come among them.

Cal Emmett saw them whirl by, and stared after them curiously. Jack Bates promised himself the next dance with the Spanish-looking girl with the tambourine jingling when she moved, and with the white arms loaded with quaint bracelets, and the spangly things in her long, black hair.

They flocked around Irish and his partner in a way to turn a girl's head with vanity, but the girl only laughed at them wickedly and tapped them reprovingly with the tambourine when they crowded too close, and recklessly promised dances to them all. Irish frowned behind his mask, and asked them, in a whisper, where were their papers for butting in, and why didn't they go dance with their partners.

Happy Jack lumbered up and stared at the dazzling center of the circle, and was sorry that he had elected to be a squaw. Squaws may scarce hope to win much notice from feminine dancers. Then Slim came by, stopped to see what was going on, and lingered, fascinated by the saucy challenge in the bright eye of *Carmen*. He quite forgot that he had intended asking the Countess for the next quadrille, and stared dumbly, till Irish almost dragged her away to dance again.

After that, one would think that the Happy Family owned this strange beauty from Benton. Others might crave the pleasure of a dance with her, but they never experienced it. Jack Bates captured her for a waltz, and surendered her reluctantly to Irish for another two-step. Cal Emmett almost fought for a quadrille, and Slim begged abjectly for any dance she was willing to give him. Even Chip came up and danced a schottische with her, and Weary tried hard enough to get a number, but was always a half-second too late.

Word was passed indignantly around among the faithful that the Happy Family had traitorously ignored the tacit boycott, and had gone over in a body to the Benton crowd. Dry Lake had meant to snub the Benton faction, and leave them to dance with one another or be wallflowers, as they chose. Dry Lake did not approve the imbecile attitude of the Happy Family.

Even the Little Doctor was left for second choice, and Doctor Cecil had only one dance with each—barring Irish, who never went near her. He was frankly and unmistakably infatuated with the girl of the tambourine, and he seemed not to care how many knew it.

Then, between dances, she slipped away into the ladies' dressing-room, and from there Irish lost sight of her for a time. The "squaw" came up and beckoned mysteriously to the yellow devil.

"Say, yuh want t' watch out for that red-and-yeller girl uh your'n," he warned in an undertone. "I seen her slip outdoors, and Bert Rogers says he seen her hitting the bottle cached at the corner uh the steps. I knowed she was pretty fly—the way she was throwin' goo-goo eyes at me."

"If she made eyes at you," the yellow devil retorted cuttingly, "it shows she ain't fly—she's just plain crazy! I guess yuh hit that bottle once too often yourself."

"Aw, gwan!" adjured the squaw, in Happy's well-known tone of general refutation. "I ain't been near it. I knowed all the time that Benton crowd was pretty tough, and if that red-slipper peach uh yours ain't a sport——"

"That's about all from you," grated Irish, in a voice that made Happy back precipitately. Irish had not been with the Happy Family long, but, nevertheless, he was known to be unsafe when he spoke like that.

Irish waited near the dressing-room door, and when the girl appeared he claimed her defiantly in the very face of Happy, who hung around to watch. The girl's eyes danced more bewitchingly than before, and when they stood in the quadrille waiting for the music, she caught the hand of Irish and danced a few steps with an abandon that was irresistible—and shocking. At least, Dry Lake was shocked; Dry Lake was not in tolerant mood where any from Benton were concerned, and masked faces turned toward the daring young *Carmen* woodenly, and then turned haughtily away. Irish felt himself grow hot behind the sinister face of Satan, but he held his head high and pressed the hand of the girl quite openly and shamelessly.

When they saluted their partners, *Carmen* swept him an elaborate and conspicuous curtsy, and swung off in the dance with her abandon in no wise abated. Irish, however he might attempt to hide the fact from himself, caught more than once a familiar odor on her breath—an odor which the Unwritten Law makes permissible only to the masculine sex. He was worried, but stanch.

The next dance was an "Oxford minuet"—a dance with possibilities, but which is danced discreetly by the young women of Dry Lake, who choose to ignore the possibilities. *Carmen,* dancing with Cal Emmett, was not discreet; neither did she ignore the possibilities. In the cross-steps, her red slippers went high—oh, very high. To be plain, she kicked. And her tambourine kept rollicky, intoxicating time with her toes. Cal Emmett, feeling the eyes of his Len Adams upon him, perspired guiltily behind his mask. Dry Lake—or all of it that witnessed the performance — went beyond being merely shocked; it was horrified.

Weary and Chip gravitated together as by common consent, and Happy Jack and Slim joined them anxiously. The dance was ended, and the dancers were ranged along the wall, with a space between themselves and *Carmen,* flirting her tambourine shamelessly and humming under her breath a little tune.

"We can't stay in such company as *that,*" Chip announced, in a tone of finality. "You fellows can do as you like—but I'm going to take Dell and Cecil home."

"If she keeps up that gait, they'll *all* go," said Weary. "My schoolma'am don't stay, anyhow."

"By golly, neither will the Countess!" said Slim.

"What's the committee thinking about?" Chip demanded. "If it was me, she'd go—and go quick."

"Say, I've been trying to square myself with Len Adams," complained Cal, coming up. "She sure turned me down hard. Darn that little rip, she might uh made a show uh herself with somebody else; she sure has queered me with Len!"

"Well, let's round up our women and pull out," suggested Chip. "The committee isn't going to do anything about it, from the looks."

They trooped off to find their partners, and not one of them but remembered guiltily their eagerness of an hour before to dance with the brazen young person in the red slippers. They hoped the girls had not noticed.

"You've been dancing with her yourself," the Little Doctor told Chip calmly, when he announced his decision. "You seemed very anxious for the pleasure; so, if she's good enough for all you fellows to dance with, it sure-

ly won't hurt us to stay in the same hall with her. *We* haven't sought her acquaintance."

"But she's been drinking," protested Chip, a bit staggered by the attack. "There's no telling what she'll do next. Nobody knew, at first, but what she was all right. You can't stay with a —a person of that caliber."

"I'm not staying with her," said the Little Doctor tartly. "No, you boys were almost ready to fight each other over dancing with her, not an hour ago; she can't be much worse now than she was then. She isn't hurting *us* any—and you needn't dance with her unless you want to. Cecil and I are going to *stay*."

To prove it, the Little Doctor went off to waltz with Bert Rogers, and left Chip staring after her indignantly.

The schoolma'am, when she discovered that the Little Doctor would not go, elected also to remain; and Len Adams, not being in a mood to speak to Cal Emmett on any subject, was therefore unapproachable. Slim tried the Countess, but she did not want to go unless Dell went.

The Happy Family gathered in the corner by the water-bucket and discussed the situation gloomily, the while they watched the offending red slippers flash in and out among the crowd, and called one another's attention to the shameless way she was leaning upon the shoulder of Irish. They did not quite know what to do. The squaw came up, when the dance was over, and announced something with mournful relish.

"She's gone out ag'in," he said. "I seen her taking a sneak, with a big cloak on. But them red slippers give her away. Let's go and keep cases. I betche she's got a bottle of her own somewheres."

They filed unostentatiously to the door, opened it, and went out under the stars. At first they could see nothing but shafts of dim light where the window-shades failed to fit closely, with black shadows between. They moved cautiously, and no one spoke.

Then, over against the coal-shed, they caught glimpse of a tiny glow—the glow of a cigarette—and of a slim figure muffled in a dark cloak.

"It's her, all right," whispered Jack Bates. "She's smoking. Now, what do yuh think uh that for a dance supposed to be respectable? If she didn't come straight from a Benton dive——"

The figure caught sight of them evidently. The cigarette was thrown hurriedly away, and she fled swiftly back to the hall. As she ran, she flung back a shrill, derisive epithet: "Rubber, rubberneck!" over her shoulder. The Happy Family, stung by the insult, gave chase, though they had not the slightest idea of catching her.

"By golly," said Slim, when they reached the door, "I'm glad Pink ain't here! We'd never hear the last of it."

"Aw, yuh needn't worry—he'll hear about it, all right; I betche somebody'll tell him," mourned Happy, adjusting his mask before he went in, and pulling the black braids of his wig carefully over his shoulders. Happy imagined that he looked a veritable Pocahontas in the rig, and was correspondingly fastidious.

"Mama, we sure did act kinda mellow over her, along at first," sighed Weary penitently. "It's most too good to keep, and I'm liable to tell Cadwolloper myself. It'll kinda make it up to him for missing the show."

"Well, I'm going to have a talk with that fool of a floor-manager," declared Chip. "Seeing our women won't go, *she's* got to. This isn't any dance-hall affair, and her absence will be appreciated a lot."

"Yeah, that's what," assented Cal moodily. He was thinking of the figure he had cut in the Oxford minuet, and of Len Adams.

"By golly, when I swung her last time in a quadrille, she *hugged* me, by golly!" confessed Slim, with his hand on the knob. From within came the shuffle of dancing feet and the twang of guitar, the tinkle of mandolin, and the wail of violin. And, above all, came the jangle of tambourine as the cause of their worry danced down to that end of the hall.

They went in, and Chip, looking an austere monk in black domino belted loosely around his middle with a huge, silken cord, headed determinately for the floor-manager.

But the floor-manager happened to be Jake Dowty; and Jake Dowty happened to have a strong dislike for any and all members of the Happy Family. Also he had a large idea of his own importance as floor-manager.

He received Chip's complaint with chilling neutrality. It was a public dance, he said, and a masquerade, at that. He wasn't expected to know who everybody was, or whether they walked in good sassiety. As for him, he hadn't seen nothing wrong going on. If Chip —in effect, if not in so many words— didn't like the company he was in, why, there were no strings on him; he could leave.

Chip marched back and reported the conversation almost verbatim, and there was indignation in the region of the water-bucket. The Happy Family knew less than before just what to do about it.

Dry Lake, they believed, would side with them and against the erring and impenitent *Carmen*. Still, they were not running the dance, and they had no authority to interfere and say who should participate and who should not.

The only rational thing was, as Dowty had said, to leave if they did not like the company they were in. But they could scarcely leave without the ladies, and the ladies evidently intended to remain.

Chip thought of going again to reason with his Little Doctor; but, knowing his Little Doctor as he did, he realized the futility of further persuasion. She had told him she was going to stay—and it required no effort to imagine that she would do so. And so long as she stayed it were useless to ask the others to go. They were all —the Little Doctor, the schoolma'am, Len Adams, the Countess, and Doctor Cecil—dancing, and they all appeared to be enjoying themselves very much.

While the Happy Family stood and debated, the girl with the tambourine whirled up in the arms of Irish—Irish still loyal to his first infatuation, and still defiant of the Happy Family's opinion. *Carmen* swung her tambourine impudently in the very face of Chip as she passed, and brought it down none too lightly upon the brown, indignant head of Weary.

"Rubbernecks!" she jeered insolently, as she passed.

But Weary was roused at last; and Weary, once roused, was not to be passed by without notice. He reached a long arm and caught Irish by an elbow, and spun the two back facing the Happy Family. From sheer surprise they stopped, and other dancers whirled giddily past. Weary still kept his hold on the arm of Irish, and Irish, his eyes gleaming warningly through his mask, stood quietly and waited.

"Rubbernecks aren't the worst kind of people in the world," drawled Weary. "Girls that forget to be what the Lord meant them to be is a heap worse, if yuh ask me. And when that kind of a female strays in where she isn't expected or wanted, the best thing she can do is to stray out again—and she can't go too soon. I don't believe yuh want to unmask before the crowd, miss, and it's getting close to midnight. It's a beautiful night outside."

The girl shook back her black, jewel-spangled hair, and, lifting her tambourine, jingled it close under the irate chin of Weary. "Don't you love me any more? Can't you think of any of the nice things you said when we danced together? I dance like thistledown, you know, and you could go on forever. *Is* it a nice night outside? Come, then—we'll go and see." She caught Weary by the arm and pulled gently.

"It strikes me you've been out once too often," he said, standing firm. His voice was a bit sad and reproachful; Weary had all a cow-puncher's reverence for a good woman, and to see one here among the others who was not good struck him as pitiful.

"You just now told me to go," she reminded, still clinging.

"Look here," interposed Irish, husky

with anger at them all. "She's in the right. A while back yuh was crazy to be nice to her. Yuh danced with her every chance yuh got, and felt sore because yuh couldn't dance oftener. And I tell yuh right now, she's going to stay if she wants to; and you fellows'll treat her as a lady should be treated, or by thunder you'll answer to me for every insult yuh give her. Come, little girl, we'll get out uh this righteous bunch."

"*Masks off!*" shouted the caller. "Midnight. Everybody unmask where yuh stand!"

The Happy Family gave no heed to the command. They were waiting to gather breath for the next move in the peculiar struggle in which they found themselves involved.

"Did you hear? Masks off! I want to see my *friends*." There was scornful emphasis upon the last word, as the girl, with a saucy tinkle of her beribboned tambourine, reached up a white arm and deftly removed the black velvet mask she wore.

The Happy Family gasped and went back against the wall.

"Pink—you little devil!" It was Cal Emmett, and his eyes were bulging.

"Mama mine! It's Cadwolloper!" Weary gulped, and grabbed Pink affectionately by the shoulder. "Say, how about that tooth?"

"Gum properly applied makes a dandy swelling in the jaw," grinned Pink, jingling the tambourine. "You're a hot bunch, ain't yuh? Think uh the sickening goo-goo slush you've been pouring into my ears all evening! Ain't yuh ashamed uh yourselves? I guess we're about even now!"

"Mr. Mallory, I believe this belongs to you," said a calm, clear voice at the elbow of Irish.

Irish turned stupefiedly, and received into his outstretched palm a small tobacco-sack half-filled with a varied assortment of burnt matches and cigarette-stubs.

The Happy Family stared after the straight, retreating form of Doctor Cecil, and gulped their chagrin.

"Cadwolloper, yuh little devil, yuh told her!"

"Sure!"

Pink turned to Irish, still staring down at the token in his hand. "Come on—take your girl away from this righteous bunch," he pleaded in the voice of *Carmen*.

Irish looked down at him, and swore softly through clenched teeth.

IN THE NAME OF CHARITY

NEARLY all the giddy youth of the neighborhood attended the charity bazaar, and one by one they drifted to a stall where a tiny, shapely, scented, gray kid glove reposed on a satin cushion. Attached to the cushion was a notice written in a delicate feminine hand, which ran:

"The owner of this glove will, at 7:30 this evening, be pleased to kiss any person who purchases a twenty-five cent ticket beforehand."

Tickets were purchased by the score, and at 7:30 a long row of sheepish, not to say doggish, young bloods, assembled outside the stall.

Then, punctual to the moment, old Tom Porson, the local pork-butcher, who weighs two hundred and twenty pounds, and is almost as beautiful as a side of bacon, stepped to the front of the stall.

"Now, young gents," he said, in his best "Buy, buy, buy," tones, "this 'ere glove belongs to me. I bought it this morning. Now, I'm ready for you. Come on! Don't be bashful! One at a time!"

But nobody came on.

The Man of Secrets

By William Le Queux

Author of "Secrets of the Foreign Office," "The Tickencote Treasure," Etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERY OF A NIGHT'S ADVENTURE.

"EXPOSURE means to me a fate worse than death," she had written. What could it mean?

Mrs. Percival divined by my face the gravity of the communication, and, rising quickly to her feet, she placed her hand tenderly upon my shoulder, asking:

"What is it, Mr. Greenwood? May I not know?"

For answer I handed her the note. She read it through quickly, then gave vent to a loud cry of dismay, realizing that Burton Blair's daughter had actually fled. That she held the man Dawson in fear was plain. She dreaded that her own secret, whatever it was, must now be exposed, and had, it seemed, fled rather than again face me. But why? What could her secret possibly be that she was so ashamed that she was bent upon hiding herself?

Mrs. Percival summoned the coachman, Crump, who had driven his young mistress to Euston, and questioned him.

"Miss Mabel ordered the coupé just before eleven, ma'am," the man said, saluting. "She only took her small dressing-bag with her, but last night she sent away a big trunk by Carter Patterson—full of old clothing, so she told her maid. I drove her to Euston Station, where she alighted and went into the booking-hall. She kept me waiting about five minutes, when she brought a porter, who took her bag, and she then gave me the letter addressed to Mr. Greenwood to give to you. I drove home then, ma'am."

"She went to the north, evidently," I remarked, when Crump had left and the door had closed behind him. "It looks as though her flight was premeditated. She sent away her things last night."

I was thinking of that arrogant young stable-worker, Hales, and wondering if his renewed threats had really caused her to keep another tryst with him. If so, it was exceedingly dangerous.

"We must find her," said Mrs. Percival resolutely. "Ah!" she sighed, "I really don't know what will happen, for the house is now in possession of this odious man Dawson and his daughter, and the man is a most uncouth, ill-bred fellow. He addresses the servants with an easy familiarity, just as though they were his equals; and just now he actually complimented one of the housemaids upon her good looks! Terrible, Mr. Greenwood, terrible!" exclaimed the widow, greatly shocked. "Most disgraceful show of ill-breeding! I certainly cannot remain here, now Mabel has thought fit to leave without even consulting me. Lady Rainham called this afternoon, but, of course, I had to be 'not at home.' What can I tell people in these distressing circumstances?"

I saw how scandalized was the estimable old chaperon, for she was nothing if not a straightforward widow, whose very life depended upon rigorous etiquette and the traditions of her honorable family. Cordial and affable to her equals, yet she was most frigid and unbending to all inferiors, cultivating a habit of staring at them

---

This story began in the October issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer.

through her square eye-glass rimmed with gold, and surveying them as though they were surprising creatures of a different flesh and blood. It was this latter idiosyncrasy which always annoyed Mabel, who held the very womanly creed that one should be kind and pleasant to inferiors and cold only to enemies. Nevertheless, under Mrs. Percival's protective wing and active tuition, Mabel herself had gone into the best circle of society whose doors are ever open to the daughter of the millionaire, and had established a reputation as one of the most charming débutantes of her season.

For a quarter of an hour, while Reggie was engaged with Dawson *père et fille*, I took counsel with the widow, endeavoring to form some idea of where Mabel had concealed herself. Mrs. Percival's idea was that she would reveal her whereabouts ere long, but, knowing her firmness of character as well as I did, I held a different opinion. Her letter was that of a woman who had made a resolve and meant at all hazards to keep it. She feared to meet me, and for that reason would, no doubt, conceal her identity. She had a separate account at Coutts' in her own name, therefore she would not be compelled to reveal her whereabouts through want of funds.

Ford, the dead man's secretary, a tall, clean-shaven, athletic man of thirty, put his head into the room, but, finding us talking, at once withdrew. Mrs. Percival had already questioned him, she said, but he was entirely unaware of Mabel's destination.

The man Dawson had now usurped Ford's position in the household, and the latter, full of resentment, was on the constant watch and as full of suspicion as we all were.

Reggie rejoined me presently, saying: "That fellow is absolutely a bounder of the very first water. Actually invited me to have a whisky-and-soda—in Blair's house, too! He's treating Mabel's flight as a huge joke, saying that she'll be back quickly enough, and adding that she can't afford to be away long, and that he'll bring her back the very instant he desires her presence here. In fact, the fellow talks just as though she were as wax in his hands, and as if he can do anything he pleases with her."

"He can ruin her financially, that's certain," I remarked, sighing. "But read this, old chap," handing him her strangely worded letter.

"Good heavens!" he gasped, when he glanced at it, "she's in deadly terror of those people, that's very certain. It's to avoid them and you that she's escaped—to Liverpool and America, perhaps. Remember she's been a great traveler all her youth, and, therefore, knows her way about."

"We must find her, Reggie," I declared decisively.

"But the worst of it is that she's bent on avoiding you," he said. "She has some distinct reason for this, it seems."

"A reason known only to herself," I remarked pensively. "It is surely a contretemps that now, just at the moment when we have gained the truth of the cardinal's secret which brought Blair his fortune, Mabel should voluntarily disappear in this manner. Recollect all we have at stake. We know not who are our friends or who our enemies. We ought both to go out to Italy and discover the spot indicated in that cipher record, or others will probably forestall us, and we may then be too late."

He agreed that, the record being bequeathed to me, I ought to take immediate steps to establish my claim to it. We could not disguise from ourselves the fact that Dawson, as Blair's partner and participator of his enormous wealth, must be well aware of the secret, and that he had already, most probably, taken steps to conceal the truth from myself, the rightful owner. He was a power to be reckoned with—a sinister person, possessed of the wiliest cunning and the most devilish ingenuity in the art of subterfuge. Report everywhere gave him that character. He possessed the cold, calm manner of the man who has lived by his wits, and it seemed that in this affair his ingenuity, sharpened by a life of ad-

venture, was to be pitted against my own.

Mabel's sudden resolution and disappearance were maddening. The mystery of her letter, too, was inscrutable. If she were really dreading lest some undesirable fact might be exposed, then she ought to have trusted me sufficiently to take me entirely into her confidence. I loved her, although I had never declared my passion; therefore, ignorant of the truth, she had treated me as I had desired, as a sincere friend. Yet, why had she not sought my aid? Women are such strange creatures, I reflected. Perhaps she loved that fellow, after all!

A fevered, anxious week went by, and Mabel made no sign. One night I left Reggie at the Devonshire about half-past eleven, and walked the damp, foggy London streets until the roar of traffic died away, the cabs crawled and grew infrequent, and the damp, muddy pavements were given over to the tramping constable and the shivering outcast. In the thick mist I wandered onward, thinking deeply, yet more and more mystified at the remarkable chain of circumstances which seemed hour by hour to become more entangled.

On and on I had wandered, heedless of where my footsteps carried me, passing along Knightsbridge, skirting the park and Kensington Gardens, and was just passing the corner of the Earl's Court Road when some fortunate circumstance awakened me from my deep reverie, and I became conscious for the first time that I was being followed. Yes, there distinctly was a footstep behind me, hurrying when I hurried, slackening when I slackened. I crossed the road, and before the long high wall of Holland Park I halted and turned. My pursuer came on a few paces, but drew up suddenly, and I could only distinguish against the glimmer of the street-lamp through the London fog a figure long and distorted by the bewildering mist. The latter was not sufficiently dense to prevent me finding my way, for I knew that part of London well. Nevertheless, to be followed so persistently at such an hour was not very pleasant. I was suspicious that some tramp or thief who had passed me by and found me oblivious to my surroundings had turned and followed me with evil intent.

Forward I went again, but as soon as I had done so the light, even tread, almost an echo of my own, came on steadily behind me. I had heard weird stories of madmen who haunt the London streets at night and who follow unsuspecting foot-passengers aimlessly. It is one of the forms of insanity well known to specialists.

Again I recrossed the road, passing through Edward's Square and out into Earl's Court Road, thus retracing my steps back toward the High Street, but the mysterious man still followed me so persistently that in the mist, which in that part had grown thicker until it obscured the street-lamps, I confess I experienced some uneasiness.

Presently, however, just as I was turning the corner into Lexham Gardens at a point where the fog had obscured everything, I felt a sudden rush, and at the same instant experienced a sharp, stinging sensation behind the right shoulder. The shock was such a severe one that I cried out, turning next instant upon my assailant; but so agile was he that, ere I could face him, he had eluded me and escaped.

I heard his receding footsteps—for he was running away down the Earl's Court Road—and shouted for the police. But there was no response. The pain in my shoulder became excruciating. The unknown man had struck me with a knife, and blood was flowing, for I felt it damp and sticky upon my hand.

Again I shouted "Police! Police!" until at last I heard an answering voice in the mist and walked in its direction. After several further shouts, I discovered the constable, and to him related my strange experience.

He held his bull's-eye close to my back and said:

"Yes, there's no doubt, sir, you've been stabbed! What kind of a man was he?"

"I never saw him," was my lame re-

ply. "He always kept at a distance from me, and only approached at a point where it was too dark to distinguish his features."

"I've seen no one, except a clergyman, whom I met a moment ago passing in Earl's Court Road—at least, he wore a broad-brimmed hat, like a clergyman. I didn't see his face."

"A clergyman!" I gasped. "Do you think it could have been a Roman Catholic priest?" For my thoughts were at that moment of Fra Antonio, who was evidently the guardian of the cardinal's secret.

"Ah! I'm sure I couldn't tell. I couldn't see his features. I only noted his hat."

"I feel very faint," I said, as a sickening dizziness crept over me. "I wish you'd get me a cab. I think I had better go straight home to Great Russell Street."

"That's a long way. Hadn't you better let me phone for an ambulance and send you to the West London Hospital first?" the policeman suggested.

"No," I decided. "I'll go home and call my own doctor."

Then I sat upon a door-step at the end of Lexham Gardens and waited while the constable went in search of a hansom in the Old Brompton Road.

Had I been attacked by some homicidal maniac who had followed me all that distance, or had I narrowly escaped being the victim of foul assassination? To me the latter theory seemed decidedly the most feasible. There was a strong motive for my death. Blair had bequeathed the great secret to me, and I had now learned the cipher of the cards.

This fact had probably become known to our enemies, and hence their dastardly attempt.

Such a contingency, however, was a startling one, for if it had become known that I had really deciphered the record, then our enemies would most certainly take steps in Italy to prevent us discovering the secret of that spot on the banks of the wild and winding Serchio.

At last the cab came, and I got in, and, with my silk muffler placed at my back to stanch the blood, drove slowly on through the fog at little more than foot's-pace.

Almost as soon as I entered the hansom I felt my head swimming and a strange sensation of numbness creeping up my legs. A curious nausea seized me, too, and, although I had fortunately been able to stop the flow of blood, which tended to prove that the wound was not such a serious one, after all, my hands felt strangely cramped, and in my jaws was a curious pain very much like the commencement of an attack of neuralgia.

I felt terribly ill. The cabman, informed by the constable of my injury, opened the trap-door in the roof to inquire after me, but I could scarcely articulate a reply. If the wound was only a superficial one it certainly had a strange effect upon me.

Of the many misty lights at Hyde Park Corner I have a distinct recollection, but after that my senses seemed bewildered by the fog and the pain I suffered, and I recollect nothing more until, when I opened my eyes painfully again, I found myself in my own bed, the daylight shining in at the window and Reggie and our old friend Tom Walker, surgeon, of Queen Anne Street, standing beside me watching me with a serious gravity that struck me at the moment as rather humorous.

Nevertheless, I must admit that there was very little humor in the situation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHICH IS IN MANY WAYS AMAZING.

Walker was puzzled, distinctly puzzled. He had, I found, strapped up my wound during my unconsciousness, after probing it and injecting various antiseptics, I suppose. He had also called in consultation Sir Charles Hoare, the very distinguished surgeon of Charing Cross Hospital, and both of them had been greatly puzzled over my symptoms.

When, an hour later, I was sufficiently recovered to be able to talk, Walker held my wrist and asked me how it all happened.

After I had explained as well as I could, he said:

"Well, my dear fellow, I can only say you've been about as near to death as any man I've ever attended. It was just a case of touch-and-go with you. When Seton first called me and I saw you, I feared that it was all up. Your wound is quite a small one, superficial only, and yet your collapsed condition has been most extraordinary, and there are certain symptoms so mysterious that they have puzzled both Sir Charles and myself."

"What did the fellow use?" I asked.

"Not an ordinary knife, certainly. It was evidently a long, thin-bladed dagger—a stiletto, most probably. I found outside the wound upon the cloth of your overcoat some grease, like animal fat. I am having a portion of it analyzed, and do you know what I expect to find in it?"

"No. What?"

"Poison," was his reply. "Sir Charles agrees with me in the theory that you were struck with one of those small, antique poniards with perforated blades, used so frequently in Italy in the fifteenth century."

"In Italy!" I cried, the very name of that country arousing within me suspicion of an attempt upon me by Dawson or by his close friend, the monk of Lucca.

"Yes. Sir Charles, who, as you probably know, possesses a large collection of ancient arms, tells me that in medieval Florence they used to impregnate animal fat with some very potent poison, and then rub it upon the perforated blade. On striking a victim, the act of withdrawing the blade from the wound left a portion of the envenomed grease within, which, of course, produced a fatal effect."

"But you surely don't anticipate that I'm poisoned!" I gasped.

"Certainly you are poisoned. Your wound would neither account for your long insensibility, nor for the strange, livid marks upon your body. Look at the backs of your hands!"

I looked as he directed, and was horrified to find upon each, small, dark, copper-colored marks, which also covered my wrists and arms.

"Don't be too alarmed, Greenwood," the good-humored doctor laughed; "you've turned the corner, and you're not going to die yet. You've had a narrow squeak of it, and certainly the weapon with which you were struck was as deadly as any that could be devised, but fortunately you had a thick overcoat on, besides other heavy clothing, all of which removed the greater part of the venomous substance before it could enter the flesh. And a lucky thing it was for you, I can tell you. Had you been attacked like this in summer, you'd have stood no chance."

"But who did it?" I exclaimed, bewildered, my eyes riveted upon those ugly marks upon my skin, the evidence that some deadly poison was at work within my system.

"Somebody who owed you a first-class grudge, I should fancy," laughed the surgeon, who had been my friend for many years, and who used sometimes to come out hunting with the Fitzwilliams. "But cheer up, old chap, you'll have to live on milk and beef tea for a day or two, have your wound dressed, and keep very quiet, and you'll soon be bobbing about again."

"That's all very well," I replied impatiently, "but I've got a host of things to do, some private matters to attend to."

"Then you'll have to let them slide for a day or two, that's very certain."

"Yes," urged Reggie, "you must really keep quiet, Gilbert. I'm only thankful that it isn't so serious as we at first expected. When the cabman brought you home and Glave tore out for Walker, I really thought you'd die before he arrived. I couldn't feel any palpitation of your heart, and you were cold as ice."

"I wonder who was the brute who struck me!" I cried.

"What's the use of wondering, so

long as you get better quickly?" Reggie suggested philosophically.

We, of course, told Walker nothing of our curious quest, for the present regarding the affair as strictly confidential. Therefore he treated my injury lightly, declaring that I should quickly recover by the exercise of a little patience.

After he had left, shortly before midday, Reggie sat at my bedside and gravely discussed the situation. The two most pressing points at that moment were first to discover the whereabouts of my well-beloved, and secondly to go out to Italy and investigate the cardinal's secret.

The days passed, long, weary, gloomy days of early spring, during which I tossed in bed impatient and helpless. I longed to be up and active, but Walker forbade it. He brought me books and papers instead, and enjoined quiet and perfect rest. Although Reggie and I still had our little hunting-box down at Helpstone, not since Blair's death had we been down there. Besides, the season in the lace trade was an unusually busy one, and Reggie now seemed tied to his counting-house more than ever.

So I was left alone the greater part of the day with Glave to attend to my wants, and with one or two male friends who now and then looked in to smoke and chat.

Thus passed the month of March, my progress being much slower than Walker had at first anticipated. On analysis, a very dangerous irritant poison had been discoverd mixed with the grease, and it appeared that I had absorbed more of it into my system than was at first believed—hence my tardy recovery.

Mrs. Percival, who at our urgent request still remained at Grosvenor Square, visited me sometimes, bringing me fruit and flowers from the hothouses at Mayvill, but she had nothing to report concerning Mabel. The latter had disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed her. Mrs. Percival was anxious to leave Blair's house, now that it was occupied by the usurpers, but we had cajoled her into remaining in order to keep some check upon the movements of the man Dawson and his daughter.

Ford had been so exasperated at the man's manner that on the fifth day of the new régime he had remonstrated, whereupon Dawson had calmly placed a year's wages in bank-notes in an envelope, and at once dispensed with his further services, as of course he had intended to do all along.

The confidential secretary was, however, assisting us, and at that moment was making every inquiry possible to ascertain the whereabouts of his young mistress.

"The house is absolutely topsy-turvy," declared Mrs. Percival one day, as she sat with me. "The servants are in revolt, and poor Noble, the housekeeper, is having a most terrible time. Carter and eight of the other servants gave notice yesterday. This person, Dawson, represents the very acme of bad manners and bad breeding, yet I overheard him remarking to his daughter two days ago that he actually contemplated entering Parliament! Ah! what would poor Mabel say, if she knew? The girl, Dolly, has established herself in Mabel's boudoir, and is about to have it redecorated in daffodil yellow, to suit her complexion, I believe; while as for finances, it seems, from what Mr. Leighton says, that poor Mr. Blair's fortune must go entirely through the fellow's hands."

"It's a shame—an abominable shame!" I cried angrily. "We know that the man is an adventurer, and yet we are utterly powerless," I added bitterly.

"Poor Mabel!" sighed the widow, who was really much devoted to her. "Do you know, Mr. Greenwood," she said, with a sudden air of confidence, "I have thought more than once since her father's death that she is in possession of the truth of the strange connection between her father and this unscrupulous man who has been given such power over her and hers. Indeed, she has confessed to me as much. And

I believe that, if she would but tell us the truth, we might be able to get rid of this terrible incubus. Why doesn't she do it—to save herself?"

"Because she is now in fear of him," I answered, in a hard, despairing voice. "She holds some secret of which she lives in terror. That, I believe, accounts for the sudden manner in which she has left her own roof and disappeared. She has left the fellow in undisputed possession of everything."

I had not forgotten Dawson's arrogance and self-confidence on the night he had first called upon us.

"But now, Mr. Greenwood, will you please excuse me for what I am going to say?" asked Mrs. Percival, settling her skirts after a brief pause and looking straight into my face. "Perhaps I have no right to enter into your more private matters in this manner, but I trust you will forgive me when you reflect that I am only speaking on the poor girl's behalf."

"Well?" I inquired, somewhat surprised at her sudden change of manner. Usually she was haughty and frigid in the extreme, a scathing critic who had the names of everybody's cousins, aunts, and nephews at her fingers' ends.

"The fact is this," she went on. "You might, I feel confident, induce her to tell us the truth. You are the only person who possesses any influence with her, now that her father is dead; and—permit me to say so—I know that she entertains a very strong regard for you."

"Yes," I remarked, unable to restrain a sigh, "we are friends—good friends."

"More," declared Mrs. Percival. "Mabel loves you."

"Loves me!" I cried, starting up and supporting myself upon one elbow. "No, I think you must be mistaken. She regards me more as a brother than a lover, and she has, I think, learned, ever since the first day we met in such romantic conditions, to regard me in the light of a protector. No," I added, "there are certain barriers that must prevent her loving me—the difference of our ages, of position, and all that."

"There you are entirely mistaken," said the widow, quite frankly. "I happen to know that the very reason why her father left his secret to you was in order that you might profit by its knowledge as he had done, and because he foresaw the direction of Mabel's affections."

"How do you know this, Mrs. Percival?" I demanded, half-inclined to doubt her.

"Because Mr. Blair, before making his will, took me into his confidence and asked me frankly whether his daughter had ever mentioned you in such a manner as to cause me to suspect. I told him the truth, of course, just as I have now told you. Mabel loves you—loves you very dearly."

"Then for the legacy left me by poor Blair, I am, in a great measure, indebted to you?" I remarked, adding a word of thanks, and pondering deeply over the revelation she had just made.

"I only did what was my duty to you both," was her response. "She loves you, as I say, and therefore, by a little persuasion, you could, I feel convinced, induce her to tell us the truth concerning this man Dawson. She has fled, it is true, but more in fear of what you may think of her when her secret is out, than of the man himself. Recollect," she added, "Mabel is passionately fond of you, she has confessed it to me many times, but for some extraordinary reason which remains a mystery she is endeavoring to repress her affection. She fears, I think, that on your part there is only friendship—that you are too confirmed a bachelor to regard her with any thoughts of affection."

"Oh, Mrs. Percival!" I cried, with a sudden outpouring. "I confess to you that I have loved Mabel all along—I love her now, fondly, passionately. She has misjudged me. It is I who have been foolishly at fault, for I have been blind. I have never read her heart's secret."

"Then she must know this at once," was the elderly woman's sympathetic answer. "We must discover her, at all costs, and tell her. There must be a

reunion, and she, on her part, must confess to you. I know too well how deeply she loves you. I know how she admires you, and how, in the secrecy of her room, she has, time after time, wept long and bitterly because she believed you were cold and blind to the passion of her true, pure heart."

But how? The whereabouts of my well-beloved was unknown. She had disappeared completely, in order, it seemed, to escape some terrible revelation which she knew must be made sooner or later.

In the days that followed, while I lay still weak and helpless, both Ford and Reggie were active in their inquiries, but all in vain. I called in the solicitor, Leighton, in consultation, but he could devise no plan other than to advertise; yet to do so was, we agreed, scarcely fair to her.

Curiously enough, the dark-faced young woman, Dorothy Dawson, otherwise Dolly, also betrayed the keenest anxiety for Mabel's welfare. Her mother was Italian, and she spoke English with a slight accent, having always, she said, lived in Italy. Indeed, she called upon me once to express her regret at my illness, and I found that she really improved on acquaintance. Her apparent coarseness was only on account of her mixed nationality, and, although she was a shrewd young person possessed of all the subtle Italian cunning, Reggie, I think, found her a bright and amusing companion.

All my thoughts were, however, of my sweet, lost love, and of that arrogant fellow who, by his threats and taunts, held her so irresistibly and secretly in his power.

Why had she fled in terror from me, and why had such a dastardly and ingenious attempt been made to kill me?

I had solved the secret of the cipher only to be plunged still deeper into the mazes of doubt, despair, and mystery; for what the closed book of the future held for me was, as you will see, truly startling and bewildering.

The truth when revealed was hard, solid fact; and yet so strange and amazing was it that it staggered all belief.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONTAINS A TERRIBLE DISCLOSURE.

Many long and dreary weeks had passed before I had sufficiently recovered to leave the house, and, accompanied by Reggie, take my first drive.

It was mid-April, the weather was still cold, and gay London had not yet returned from wintering in Monte Carlo, Cairo, or Rome. Each year the society swallows—those people who fly south with the first chill day of autumn—return to town later, and each London season appears to be more protracted than before.

We drove down Piccadilly to Hyde Park Corner, and then, turning along Constitution Hill, drove along the Mall. Here a great desire seized me to rest for a brief while and enjoy the air in St. James' Park; therefore we alighted, paid the cabman, and, leaning upon Reggie's arm, I strolled slowly along the graveled walks until we found a convenient seat. The glories of St. James' Park, even on an April day, are a joy forever to the true Londoners. I often wonder that so few people take advantage of them. The wondrous trees, the delicious sheet of water, all the beauties of English rural scenery, and then the sense that all around you are great palaces and the departments and offices in which the government of the empire is carried on—in other words, that commingling of silence at the core of feverish and tumultuous life outside—all these make St. James' Park one of the loveliest retreats in England.

These things Reggie and I repeated to each other, and then, under the soothing influence of the surroundings, there came musings and reminiscences, and the long silences which come between friends and are the best symbols of their complete accord of feeling and opinion.

While we were thus seated, I became conscious of the fact that we were in the spot above all others where one was certain to see pass, at that time of day, most of the prominent political figures of the hour on their way to

their various departments, or to Parliament, where the sitting was just commencing. A cabinet minister, two Liberal peers, a Conservative whip, and an under-secretary passed in rapid succession away in the direction of Storey's Gate.

Reggie, who took a great interest in politics, and had often occupied a seat in the strangers' gallery, was pointing out to me the politicians who passed, but my thoughts were elsewhere—with my lost love. Now that Mrs. Percival had revealed to me the truth of Mabel's affection, I saw how foolish I had been in making pretense of a coldness toward her that was the very opposite to the feeling which really existed in my heart. I had been a fool, and had now to suffer.

During the weeks I had been confined to my room I had obtained a quantity of books, and discovered certain facts concerning the late cardinal who had divulged the secret—whatever it was—in return for his release. It appeared that Andrea Sannini was a native of Perugia, who became archbishop of Bologna, and was afterward given the cardinal's hat. A great favorite of Pius IX., he was employed by him upon many delicate missions to the various powers. As a diplomatist he proved himself possessed of remarkable acumen, therefore the Pope appointed him treasurer-general, as well as director of the world-famous museums and galleries of the Vatican. He was, it appeared, one of the most powerful and distinguished figures in the College of Cardinals, and became extremely prominent for the part he played on the occasion of the entry of the Italian troops into the Eternal City in 1870, while on the death of Pius IX., eight years later, he was believed to be designated as his successor, although on election the choice fell upon his colleague, the late Cardinal Pecci, who became Leo XIII.

I was reflecting upon these facts which I had established after a good deal of heavy reading, when Reggie suddenly cried in a low voice:

"Look! there's Dawson's daughter!"

I glanced quickly in the direction indicated, and saw, crossing the bridge that spanned the lake and approaching in our direction, a well-dressed feminine figure in a smart jacket and neat toque, accompanied by a tall, thin, elderly man in black.

Dolly Dawson was walking at his side leisurely, chatting and laughing, while he ever and anon bent toward her, making some remarks. As he raised his head to glance across the water, I saw that above his overcoat showed a clerical collar, with a tiny piece of Roman purple. The man was evidently a canon, or other dignitary, of the Catholic Church.

He was about fifty-five, gray-haired, clean-shaven, and wore a silk hat of a somewhat ecclesiastical shape; a rather pleasant-looking man, in spite of his thin, sensitive lips and pale, ascetic face.

In an instant it struck me that they had met clandestinely, and were sauntering there in order to avoid passible recognition. The priest appeared to be treating her with studied politeness, and as I watched him, I surmised from his slight gesticulations as he spoke that he was a foreigner.

I pointed out the fact to Reggie, who said:

"We must watch them, old chap. They mustn't see us here. I only hope they'll turn off the other way."

For a moment we followed them with our eyes, fearing that, having crossed the bridge, they would turn in our direction, but fortunately they did not, but turned off to the right along the shore of the lake.

"If he really is an Italian then he may have come specially from Italy to have an interview with her," I remarked. For ever since I had met the monk Antonio there had seemed some curious connection between the secret of the dead cardinal and the Church of Rome.

"We must try to find out," declared Reggie. "You mustn't remain here. It's getting too cold for you," he added, springing to his feet. "I'll follow them while you return home."

"No," I said. "I'll walk with you for a bit. I'm interested in the little game." Rising also, I linked my arm in his and went forward by the aid of my stick.

They were walking side by side in earnest conversation. I could tell by the priest's quick gesticulations, the way in which he first waved his closed fingers, and then raised his open hand and touched his left forearm, that he was speaking of some secret and the possessor of it who had disappeared. If one knows the Italian well, one can follow, in a sense, the topic of conversation by the gestures, each one having its particular signification.

Hurrying as well as I could, we gradually gained upon them, for presently they slackened their pace, while the priest spoke earnestly, as though persuading the daughter of the ex-boatswain of the *Annie Curtis* to act in some way he was directing.

She seemed silent, thoughtful, and undecided. Once she shrugged her shoulders, and half-turned from him as though in defiance, when in a moment the wily cleric became all smiles and apologies. They were talking in Italian without a doubt, so that passers-by might not understand their conversation. The priest's clothes, too, I noticed, were of a distinctly foreign cut, and he wore low shoes, the bright steel buckles of which he had evidently taken off.

As they had come across the bridge she had been laughing merrily at some quaint remark of her companion's, but now it appeared as though all her gaiety had died out, and she had realized the true object of the stranger's mission. The path they had taken led straight across to the Horse Guards' Parade, and, feeling a few moments later that my weakness would not allow me to walk farther, I was compelled to turn back toward the York Column steps, leaving Reggie to make what observations he could.

I returned home thoroughly exhausted and very cold. Even my big frieze overcoat, which I used for driving when down at Helpstone, did not keep out the biting wind. So I sat over the fire for fully a couple of hours until my friend at last returned.

"I've followed them everywhere," he explained, throwing himself into an armchair opposite me. "He's evidently threatening her, and she is afraid of him. When they got to the Horse Guards they turned back along Birdcage Walk and then across Green Park. Afterward he drove her in a cab to one of Fuller's shops in Regent Street. The old priest seems mortally afraid of being recognized. Before he left Green Park he turned up the collar of his overcoat so as to hide that piece of purple at his collar."

"Did you discover his name?"

"I followed him to the Savoy, where he is staying. He has given his name as Monsignor Galli, of Rimini."

There our information ended. It, however, was sufficient to show that the ecclesiastic was in London with some distinct purpose, probably to induce the "Ceco's" daughter to give him certain information which he earnestly desired, and which he intended to obtain by reason of certain knowledge which he possessed.

The days passed with gloom and rain, and Bloomsbury presented its most cheerless aspect. No trace could I discover of my lost love, and no further fact concerning the white-haired monsignor. The latter had, it appeared, left the Savoy on the following evening, returning, in all probability, to the Continent, but whether successful in his mission or no we were in complete ignorance.

Dolly Dawson, with whom Reggie had struck up a kind of pleasant friendship, more for the purpose of being able to observe and question her than anything else, called upon us on the day following to inquire after me and hear whether we had learned anything regarding Mabel's whereabouts. Her father, she told us, was absent from London for a few days, and she was about to leave for Brighton, in order to visit an aunt.

Was it possible that Dawson, having learned of my solution of the cipher,

had returned to Italy in order to secure the cardinal's secret from us? I longed hour by hour for strength to travel out to that spot beside the Serchio, but was held to those narrow rooms by my terrible weakness.

Four long and dreary weeks passed, until the middle of May, when I had gathered sufficient strength to walk out alone, and take short strolls in Oxford Street and its vicinity. Burton Blair's will had been proved, and Leighton, who visited us several times, told us of the recklessness with which the man Dawson was dealing with the estate. That the adventurer was in secret communication with Mabel was proved by the fact that certain checks signed by her had passed through his hands into the bank, yet, strangely enough, he declared entire ignorance of her whereabouts.

One day at noon, after Dawson had returned to Grosvenor Square, Carter, the footman, was ushered in by Glave.

I saw by his face that the man was excited, and scarcely had he been shown into my room before he exclaimed, saluting respectfully:

"I've found out Miss Mabel's address, sir! Ever since she's been gone I've kept my eyes on the letters sent to post, just as Mr. Ford suggested that I should, but Mr. Dawson never wrote to her until this morning, when, by accident I think, he sent a letter to the post addressed to her, among a number of others which he gave to the page-boy. She's at the Mill House, Church Enstone, near Chipping Norton."

In quick delight I sprang to my feet. I thanked him, ordered Glave to give him a drink, and left London by the half-past one train for Oxfordshire.

Just before five o'clock I discovered the Mill House, a gray, old-fashioned place standing back behind a high box-hedge from the village street at Church Enstone, on the highroad from Aylesbury to Stratford. Before the house was a tiny lawn, bright with tulip borders and sweet-smelling narcissi.

A buxom waiting-maid opened the door and ushered me into a small, low, old-fashioned room, where I surprised my love crouched in a big armchair, reading.

"Why, Mr. Greenwood!" she gasped, springing to her feet, pale and breathless. "You!"

"Yes," I said, when the girl had closed the door, and we were alone. "I have found you at last, Mabel—at last!" And, advancing, I took both her small hands tenderly in mine. Then, carried away by the ecstasy of the moment, I looked straight into her eyes, saying: "You have tried to escape me, but to-day I have found you again. I have come, Mabel, to confess openly to you, to tell you something—to tell you, dearest, that—well, that I love you!"

"Love me!" she cried, dismayed, starting back, and putting me from her with both her small, white hands. "No! no!" she wailed. "You must not—you cannot love me. It is impossible!"

"Why?" I demanded quickly. "I have loved you ever since that first night when we met. Surely you must long ago have detected the secret of my heart."

"Yes," she faltered, "I have. But, alas! it is too late—too late!"

"Too late!" I exclaimed. "Why?"

She was silent. Her face had suddenly whitened, and I saw that she was trembling from head to foot.

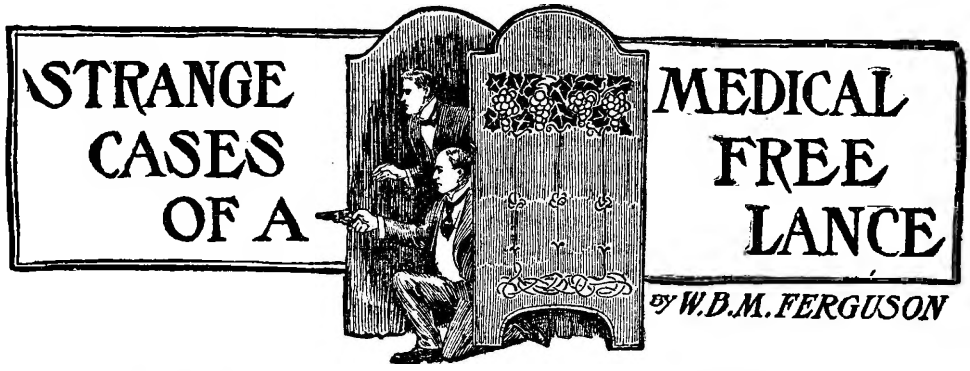
"Why?" I demanded again, my eyes fixed upon her.

"Because," she at last answered slowly, in a tremulous voice so low that I could scarce distinguish the fatal words she uttered—"because I am already married!"

"Married!" I gasped, standing rigid. "And your husband—his name?"

"Cannot you guess?" she asked. "The man you have already seen—Herbert Hales." Her eyes were cast down from me as though in shame, while her chin sank upon her panting breast.

TO BE CONTINUED.



III.—THE CASE OF THE VEGETABLE RABIES

(*A Complete Story*)

SINCE the amalgamation of "the Law" and "Medicine," represented by Doctor Tiberius W. Tinkle and myself, I had often sought to have my eccentric friend hang out his shingle in our bachelor quarters. Not that he was in any need of funds, but I hoped by getting him interested in some immediate resident patients to wean him from his deplorable penchant for straying off at uncertain intervals and for prolonged periods in search of experience, his hobby being, as I have hitherto intimated, to view life's drama from the wrong side of the curtain.

This morbid burrowing for sordid fact has even led him into playing such menial rôles as butler, waiter, etc., and, in fact, grew to such proportions that I came to fearsomely scrutinize every stray pedler and street-cleaner, fully prepared to recognize my eccentric friend in either of those highly unimaginative rôles. It was only after an arduous assault on Tinkle's moral fiber and an appeal for the respectable that I induced him, for appearances' sake, to grace the legitimate branch of his profession.

"I'll hang out my name, if you want, Little One," he capitulated grudgingly, at last, "but I'm offering up myself as a martyr to your shamelessly weak truckling to the conventionalities. What if I *am* always on the roam? There's more fun to be found as a free-lance than probing some stout party's liver or prescribing sugar and water for a highly romantic female with an imaginary complaint. My geometrical proportions are not suited for that. In the immortal words of Patrick Henry, give me liberty, or give me—one of those infernal cigars you're smoking, Little One."

"Try a week's probation," I urged. "Aside from all else, I'm sure there is as much interest in the legitimate as the vaudeville."

"Very well," he agreed resignedly, waving his scissorlike legs in profound despair. "I'll be respectable for one week. But only one week, mind you, and if an interesting case doesn't turn up within that time, I'll hit the vaudeville, as you term it, again."

"Agreed," I said. And thus it came about that my friend hung out a conventional medical sign and sat down to be severely respectable and miserable. And the first night of his probation brought his initial patient. To my mind the case was most unpromising from the standpoint of interest, but it subsequently developed into our third remarkable adventure, and I deem it worthy a place in these chronicles. They came together as Tinkle, resigned to his fate, was revengefully torturing

me with one of his diabolical performances on the flute, which in moments of enthusiasm he refers to as his "God-given instrument of sweet melody." One of our visitors was tall, cherubic-looking, and eminently fat; the other, a little, dried-up specimen with soulful brown eyes and a sympathetic smile. The large man had his right hand carelessly wrapped in a handkerchief. He was as miserly of words as his companion was generous.

"Pardon us for disturbing you at this late hour," said the smaller man as Tinkle reluctantly terminated his solo, "but, being after eleven o'clock, no drug-stores are open. We saw your sign in the window, and so here we are."

"What is the matter?" asked my friend ungraciously.

The eminently fat man blandly waved his bandaged hand.

"Mere trifle. Playing with my friend's dog. Friend paring his nails with knife. Knife drops and strikes dog. Dog evinces his displeasure by biting me. Mere scratch. Friend unnecessarily hysterical. Insists on my having it cauterized. Willing to oblige him for the sake of peace." For one seemingly so prosperous, the fat man was strangely miserly with his definite articles and personal pronouns.

Tinkle, in silence, examined the hand. "When did this happen?" he asked casually, reaching for the caustic.

"Half an hour ago," explained the smaller man. "I'm sorry. I own the dog, and feel, in a measure, responsible. I insist on my friend having the wound cauterized. You see, I have a horror of hydrophobia." He shuddered nervously.

"Mere nonsense, Julian," expostulated the other blandly.

"How old is the animal?" pursued Tinkle conversationally.

"Bull bitch. Year and a half. Mere scratch." Thus the miser of words.

"Quite an ordinary affair," agreed Tinkle, replacing the caustic. "You'll be all right."

"But I'm afraid of hydrophobia," ran on Julian nervously. "Are you sure there is no danger, doctor?"

"Oh, well"—Tinkle looked supremely bored—"of course, a dog-bite always lays itself open to suspicion. But I'm sure there will be no bad effects in this case."

"If it had only been cauterized at the time," persisted the nervous Julian. "I trust sincerely it will turn out as you say."

"Very much obliged," added the other. "What is your fee, doctor?"

My friend waved his hand impatiently.

"Oh, very kind of you, I'm sure," added the big man in an unexpected burst of language. "Much obliged. Permit my and my friend's card. Room together. Look you up if I'm ever troubled with more than a mere scratch. Good night."

"Such is your legitimate, Boyd," deplored Tinkle dolefully, as the door closed behind our visitors. "Dog-bites, stout parties' livers, highly romantic females' imaginary complaints. Dull, dull; fearfully and wonderfully dull."

"Perhaps the next case will be better," I encouraged hopefully. "Perhaps our cherubic friend—I see by his card his name is Mr. John C. Wate—will have more than a mere scratch. Or perhaps Mr. Julian Cadoza, his friend, will be taken with nervous paralysis. He looks as if he would. Queer combination."

"I foresee a delightfully exciting week," said Tinkle abysmally. "O for the vaudeville!"

I thought we had seen the first and last of the initial patient, but we had not.

Three nights later, on returning from our usual ramble, we discovered Mr. John Wate in our library.

"Hello!" said Tinkle, in surprise. "More than a mere scratch this time, eh?"

"No; same old scratch," returned Wate briefly, arising and immediately reseating himself. "I'm afraid, doctor," he continued, as if contemplating some unfathomed joy, "that I'm going

to have hydrophobia. I'm—I'm sure of it."

Despite the man's impervious exterior. I caught a tremor in his voice and a curious, frightened gleam in his eye.

"Indeed," commented Tinkle quietly. "What are the symptoms?"

"Exceedingly nervous. Restless. Dryness in the throat. Voice changes—there it goes now," bit off Wate fearsomely, as his voice slid the scale and came to rest on a hoarse guttural.

"How do you know those are the symptoms?" asked Tinkle, unmoved.

"My friend Cadoza says they are. He's nearly crazy with fear. Can't get over being his dog that bit me. *Are* those the symptoms, doctor?" he asked sharply, leaning tensely forward, his hands twisting nervously.

"I may as well be frank," said my friend, a puzzled frown between his eyes. "They undoubtedly are. I don't quite understand it." He stared at Wate abstractedly.

The cherubic-looking man sat mountainously in his chair staring straight into the fire. In a curious way he appealed to me strongly. He looked like a great overgrown schoolboy; as simple, as unaffected. As I watched him, a tear slowly worked its way down his fleshy, quivering face. He wiped it absently away.

"I was to be married next week," he blurted out suddenly, his lips twitching. "Hydrophobia—God help me!"

"See here," exclaimed Tinkle roughly. "You haven't hydrophobia, nor will you have hydrophobia, unless you scare yourself into it with concentration. What drug have you been taking?" he asked sharply.

"None."

"None?" echoed Tinkle, looking him steadily in the eye. "Come, that's nonsense. Not—belladonna?"

"Nothing," replied Wate testily. "This hydrophobia fear has got on my nerves. When a fellow's going to be married anything upsets him. I—I felt so queer and my friend was so frightened I thought I'd come and see you. Are you *sure* there is no danger?" he finished pleadingly. "I'd rather die any way but that. A dog! Ugh! And then there is my sweetheart, gentlemen," he added simply, striving to cloak his fear with dignity.

In silence Tinkle went to his laboratory. When he returned he mixed a dose of something out of a small vial. "That will fix your symptoms," he said shortly. "You know what it is?"

"No," replied Wate, fixing his childish, innocent eyes on my friend's long, grim face.

Tinkle laughed, and shrugged his shoulders half-contemptuously.

"Well, drink it off. You haven't hydrophobia—nor will have, Mr. Wate. Good night," he added pointedly.

When the cherubic patient had stalked gloomily out, I turned to my friend with some heat. "The vaudeville has ruined you, Tinkle. You are not even ordinarily polite to your patients. It costs nothing to at least be gracious."

"So, Little One?" he returned dryly, immersing himself in the evening paper. "Well, I have no patience—you can take it as a joke if you want to—no patience with either fools or—liars."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what is the use of a man coming here and telling me he never touches drugs, when he was actually suffering from an overdose of belladonna. How do I know? How do you know you're living, Boyd? The pupils of his eyes were nearly out on his cheeks. Only one drug will do that."

"Then you think he is a drug fiend?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Perhaps," said Tinkle irritably. "I know these fools who toy with poisons, and then have spasms and lie themselves black in the face when they take an overdose."

I saw that something was troubling Tinkle, and so I merely contented myself with observing that Wate had seemed to me very simple and genuine, and very much in earnest. "And how about those hydrophobia symptoms?" I concluded.

"I don't know," ruminated my friend, testily laying down his paper. "Atropin

is the active principle in belladonna, or deadly nightshade, as it is generally known by. A most peculiar drug, Boyd. I'm not prepared what to say regarding Wate's case. At present, I'm waiting for a motive to turn up, Little One. If there's no motive, our cherubic friend is a drug fiend and—liar. If there is a motive—well, he isn't. I think, though, you may be right, after all, about the legitimate proving as strange as the vaudeville. Regarding hydrophobia, when one has been bitten, it can be superinduced by concentration—fear. This is only in the case of the patient being of a highly strung, nervous temperament. Now, our cherubic friend couldn't be moved with a derrick. Again, if the dog is a pup, as in this instance, and has but lately eaten, then his fangs are young and cleansed from poison, so there is little, if any, danger."

"But you said Wate undoubtedly had the initial symptoms," I persisted.

"Did I?" he asked laconically. "And I also say that instead of Wate being a drug fiend, he might have merely tried to commit suicide at leisure only to repent in haste. Also, I could say many other things. But don't mind them, Little One. Even geniuses may be wrong—sometimes," he finished, with great modesty.

"And in the meantime the man may die," I expostulated, with heat. Tinkle's highly imaginative mysteries irritate me.

"He may—and he may not," said my friend equably. "But not without my being present, I think. Witnesses are sometimes quite necessary, Little One."

During the succeeding days, despite the call of the law, I found occasion to think a great deal of John Wate. He began to haunt me. I could not get from my mind his boyish face, as it strove to sponge out encroaching fear. His simple phrase: "And then there is my sweetheart, gentlemen," still rang in my ears. I, too, have a strange horror of hydrophobia, and I thoroughly appreciated how Wate must feel. He had no right to marry so long as there was the faintest fear of the poisonous excretions in his blood. Owing to the fact that the rabies might manifest itself at a most unexpected time, long after the patient had been affected, no time limit could be set for his immunity.

I earnestly hoped that Wate's fears had proven groundless, and from his silence I gathered hopefully that such was the case. If I had been in Tinkle's place, I would have set my fears at rest by visiting his initial patient, but I have learned long since not to interfere with my eccentric friend. That Tinkle made no move I argued was a good sign.

It was the third night, dating from his second visit, that we again heard of Wate. The telephone-bell began to chatter violently. Tinkle answered. When he rang off, the face he turned to me held a peculiarly exultant look; like that of a soldier long with the reserve, who has at last heard the call to go into action.

"Come, Boyd, get your kimono," he cried sharply, "and swing me over that bag, will you? That was our friend Julian on the wire. He's scared to pieces. Wate's in bed with preliminary rabies."

"I *knew* you were wrong in your diagnosis," I could not keep from saying as we hurried out.

John Wate and his sympathetic friend Julian Cadoza had a small bachelor apartment but a few blocks northwest of Tinkle's and mine—therefore we were but a few minutes in reaching it. It was on the ground floor, and, to our surprise, a tall girl with steady, gray eyes, the composure of which her quivering lips and haggard face refuted, opened the door to our ring. She was costumed for the street, and apparently had arrived but a few minutes before ourselves.

"Oh, you're the doctor!" she exclaimed eagerly, in a low voice, as we entered, intuition directing her query at Tinkle. "My name is Edith Penfield," she ran on nervously, "and I'm engaged to Mr. Wate. We were to be married next week. I live in Philadelphia, Mr. Wate's home——"

"I understand," broke in Tinkle quietly. "You came on here thinking

something was wrong with your fiancé?"

"Yes, yes. His last letter was so strange—full of vague allusions to his having no right—oh, I cannot explain it all! Some dreadful thing seemed to be hovering over him which he would not divulge. He did not answer my last letter. I *felt* something terrible had happened. It was no time to think of conventionalities, so I caught the next train here. And it's even worse than I supposed. Mr. Cadoza says it's hydrophobia, doctor. Oh, won't you please do everything you can? You shall, you must."

"Oh, we'll save him, all right," said Tinkle kindly. "There, don't go to pieces, Miss Penfield, after being so brave. Didn't his friend Mr. Cadoza let you know of Mr. Wate's condition?"

The girl was crying softly. "No," she said unsteadily. "He says Mr. Wate asked him not to. Mr. Cadoza is hardly himself. He is very much unnerved. He has been up all the time with him. He was about to telephone you when I arrived."

Just then Julian Cadoza himself entered the room. "Won't you come in at once?" he asked hurriedly, after a perfunctory greeting. "As I feared, the wound wasn't cauterized in time. Curse that dog—I've had her shot! I'm afraid this is serious, doctor." His hands were twitching excitedly. "I can never forgive myself," he added tremulously.

"It's not your fault," said the girl wearily.

"Thank you," exclaimed Cadoza, darting a quick look at her. "God knows how I deplore the whole affair! As you are aware, Miss Edith, Jack is an old and tried friend of mine."

"You and Miss Penfield are also old friends?" suggested Tinkle. He, like myself, had noticed the use of the familiar "Miss Edith."

"Yes," replied the man, while the girl nervously twisted her handkerchief, a flush flashing over her cheek.

"Kindly remain here, Miss Penfield," commanded Tinkle, turning to her. "Mr. Wate doesn't know of your presence? So much the better. Any excitement is injurious, and the patient, in such cases—is not a pretty sight."

The girl shuddered, and turned heavily to a chair.

"Come, Boyd, if you care, you may as well be with me," said my friend. "Will you kindly direct us, Mr. Cadoza?"

We left Miss Penfield staring with hard, dry eyes out of the window. She was fighting desperately with her newborn sorrow. She made a brave fight.

Our cherubic friend, in a set of brilliant pajamas, lay, or, rather, tossed in bed. His fair hair was tousled, his face flushed, and his voice, when he greeted us, deep and harsh.

"Still the same old scratch," he muttered. "When do I commence to bark and froth at the mouth, doctor?" he asked, with a ghastly, cynical humor.

"Bring me a glass of water," ordered Tinkle curtly, after a cursory inspection of his patient. An old, gray-haired housekeeper, shaking with fright, entered with the glass.

Tinkle poured some of the stuff from the same vial he had used on Wate's second visit to him.

"Drink it," he ordered.

He eyed Wate narrowly as he drained the glass. Then he sat down by the bed and commenced to chat in the absurd, eccentric way he sometimes affects.

"Is there any hope?" asked Cadoza nervously.

"If he lives eight hours—yes."

"Eight hours? Why, I thought hydrophobia——"

"You know as much medicine as I do," laughed my friend good-naturedly. "Where did you study—India?"

"I know nothing of medicine," replied Cadoza coldly. "If you refer to my looks, my father was a high-caste Hindu. But this is all entirely beside the question," he added haughtily. He walked from the room as Tinkle merely laughed.

"Cadoza's sensitive regarding his birth, though I see no reason why he

should be," said Wate restlessly. "A good and true friend."

Tinkle ignored the subject by asking Wate when he ate last.

"I had a cup of beef tea just before you came. Do you know, doctor," ran on Wate feverishly, "my memory's been failing me strangely of late. At times I thought I was going insane. You won't let my fiancée know of my condition?" he pleaded excitedly.

"I promise not to," replied my friend, for once unusually truthful.

As we watched beside the bedside of John Wate his condition rapidly grew worse. He tossed about, muttering now incoherently. He began to rave of Miss Penfield; of his courtship days, of how she must not be worried by his condition. Then he was fighting off the bull bitch. A red rash broke out on his fair skin. For a time the muttered ramblings died away or struggled for birth on his quivering lips.

Tinkle arose and locked the door, one eye still watchfully guarding his patient.

"Is it hydrophobia?" I whispered.

"Hydrophobia—*no!*" exploded Tinkle bitterly. "Much worse. Does hydrophobia take water?"

"Look!" I cried tensely, pointing to the bed.

Wate had jerked himself to an upright position. He was moving his arms rhythmically back and forth, as if rowing.

"The crisis," muttered Tinkle. He jumped up and forced a strong dose from the vial down Wate's throat.

Anxious minutes followed. Finally, with a convulsive shudder, Wate flung himself back on the pillows. His eyes closed. Tinkle gave a sigh of relief.

"There's a good chance for recovery. I almost got here too late."

"For Heaven's sake what is it?" I asked, all in a sweat. "You say it's not hydrophobia. Is it—attempted suicide?"

"No," said Tinkle shortly. "Attempted—murder."

I could only seek explanation with my eyes.

"It's atropin poisoning," added my friend tersely. "See how the pupils of his eyes are still distended! The symptoms are very like those of hydrophobia. It is associated with rhythmical motions of the arms and legs. Pilocarpin, itself a poisonous alkaloid, is the only antidote. No, the only hydrophobia Wate is suffering from is—vegetable rabies: atropin poisoning."

"And—who gave it to him?" I asked breathlessly.

"I think his sympathetic friend Julian Cadoza. No, don't begin to fuss now. Listen to my reasoning. We know Cadoza and Miss Penfield are old friends. I have seen how he looks at her. I think he loves her, and is determined to get Wate out of the way. I think it a carefully planned job on his part. He prompted his dog to bite Wate. He instilled the fear of hydrophobia in him. He induced him to have the wound cauterized, and, finally, medical attendance. He knew the danger of a post-mortem examination, and with a doctor a witness of the death, such an examination would not be necessary. Now, atropin will do what no other drug will do—impair the mental faculties without destroying life. I believe Cadoza tried to make Wate insane, but, growing impatient at the time involved, and with Wate's impending marriage staring him in the face, he hit on this diabolical and unsuspicious method. I may add that the Hindus, by centuries of practise, can handle atropin with a subtle and deadly skill. It is the acknowledged poison of India. Now, that's what I think, Boyd. You can think what you like."

"It's too horrible to believe," I said, my mind refusing to grasp the truth Tinkle was trying to force home on me.

"We'll see," said my friend dryly. He looked carefully at Wate. "At any rate, Wate will recover."

For perhaps half an hour we remained by the bed, Tinkle unmoved, I chewing the cud of my friend's words and finding them horribly unpalatable. But there was no gainsaying that Tinkle had reason behind his accusation. There was not a weak link in his chain of evidence.

A hurried but subdued knock sounded at the door, and Tinkle opened it.

It was Julian Cadoza. "Will he live?" he whispered tremulously, darting a hurried glance at the bed. "Miss Penfield can no longer restrain herself. She begged me to——"

"Mr. Wate will live," interrupted Tinkle shortly. "Come, Boyd, we will let him sleep. It is what he most requires."

In silence we repaired to the drawing-room, where the old housekeeper had just brought a cup of tea to Miss Penfield, who appeared a nervous wreck. "Thank God," she whispered fervently, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of thankfulness as my friend gave his verdict. And, with tears in his eyes, little Mr. Cadoza echoed the expression of gratitude to the Almighty. To me he seemed as greatly moved as Miss Penfield, and I thought that assuredly either Julian Cadoza was a most accomplished actor and consummate villain, or that Tiberius W. Tinkle was violently insane.

"Yes, Mr. Wate is safely out of the woods," added Tinkle. "I hope there will be no further danger." He carefully avoided Cadoza's soft, brown eyes.

"I'm so glad I don't know what to say or do," cried the girl, with a hysterical little laugh. "I had always thought there was no cure for hydrophobia."

"It seems there is," I commented, trying not to look at Tinkle. I was busy wondering what his next move would be. He was chatting easily with Cadoza, as if suspicion of any kind was farthest from his thoughts. A few minutes later he said abruptly: "Mr. Cadoza, might I trouble you to get a cup of beef tea from the housekeeper? It will pull Mr. Wate together."

"Certainly," responded the other, with alacrity. He gave the order, and shortly afterward the old housekeeper entered with a small tray and the steaming cup. "Thank you," said Tinkle, tasting, with a spoon, the strength of the beef tea. Then, to my surprise, he calmly locked the door and placed his back against it, his eyes cold and cynical. "Kindly put the tray on the table," he ordered the housekeeper, whose dark, wooden-looking face was barren of any expression. I felt excitement rising in my throat. "Now," added my friend calmly, "you will oblige me, Mr. Cadoza, by stepping up and drinking that cup of beef tea."

Cadoza's eyes opened slowly, until they reached their limit of expansion.

"I don't understand——" he began, in a puzzled tone. "It was for Mr. Wate, you said——"

"And now I say it's for you. Drink it," cut in Tinkle, still quietly.

But now his eyes were dangerous.

"Is this a joke?" added the other, an angry spot commencing to burn in his sallow cheek. Miss Penfield and the old housekeeper were wide-eyed, their faces blanched.

"Am I to force it down your throat, Mr. Cadoza?" asked Tinkle suavely.

But, however polite his words, there was no mistaking the menace in his whole attitude.

As if in order to save a grossly unpleasant situation, Cadoza laughed lightly. "A lady is present," he said, his eyes narrowing; "and, though I think you both absurd and rude, I will comply with your request. You can apologize later." There was something both jaunty and courteously contemptuous in his manner as he stepped to the table and raised the cup to his lips.

And then, before I saw the dawning disappointment in Tinkle's eyes fully born, a wild cry rang through the room, and with a fierce spring the old housekeeper had flung herself on her master, and the cup was dashed in fragments to the floor. Then she fell on her knees, clutching wildly at Cadoza's legs, her gray hair tumbling down as her forehead beat the floor in abject supplication.

"Riah, Riah, what does this mean?" cried Cadoza sharply. "Am I insane?" he asked wildly of Tinkle. "Or are you?"

Miss Penfield was watching the

strange tableau with horror-stricken eyes.

"What does this mean, Riah?" reiterated Cadoza, striving to raise his old servant.

A wonderful change was slowly taking place in Tinkle's manner and face as he watched Cadoza's attitude. "It means," he answered for the other, "that Mr. Wate has been poisoned by atropin instead of being a victim of hydrophobia; and that, hearing that he was recovering, a final dose was decided upon. That beef tea was full of it, as I suspected it would be when I asked for it. Now, you will agree with me, Mr. Cadoza, that the potential murderer or murderers must rest with you and the housekeeper. We will remain in this room until I find out who is responsible for this dastardly crime."

"You mean that you accuse me of—of——" he stuttered, his voice full of tears, his face white and quivering.

Miss Penfield unexpectedly came excitedly to his rescue. "A great mistake," she cried hotly. "Mr. Cadoza? Never! You do not know——"

"It was I, Riah; I, Riah," broke in a high, wailing voice. It was the old housekeeper, still beating her dishevelled head on the floor, still clutching wildly at Cadoza's elusive legs.

"You!" cried her master, astonishment lost in his overpowering passion. "You——" He changed to a liquid, sibilant tongue, which I surmised to be Hindustani, pouring out invectives on the old gray head. Once I thought him about to beat her into the floor. When at length he stopped, through sheer lack of breath, Riah, the housekeeper, jabbered away in her native tongue, her fierce black eyes flaming, her bony arms making wild gesticulations.

"Go!" said Cadoza sternly, pointing to the door.

Riah scrambled to her feet, glanced at his implacable face, and then with bowed head shuffled from the room.

"Gentlemen," began Cadoza, his voice quivering, "I regret that I have been the unwitting cause of this horrible affair. Riah is my old nurse—was my father's nurse in India. She loves me. When her race loves or hates it is to the death. A crime committed for the object of their affections is not reckoned a crime. That is their creed."

He glanced at Miss Penfield, and a flush slowly spread over his cheek. He raised his head proudly. "Once—I loved Miss Penfield," he said simply. "I count it an honor that I now have her mere friendship. But Miss Penfield loves a better man—my friend John Wate. My happiness is in their happiness. Riah has confessed that she attempted to kill my friend, for, once out of the way, she thought Miss Penfield would marry me." He laughed harshly. "She does not understand. She acted according to her instincts. Love for me was the motive, atropin, her country's drug, the agent."

He looked steadily at Tinkle. "If you knew how much I care for Miss Penfield, and my friend John Wate," he said simply, "you would never have accused me as you have. I am to be best man at the wedding."

Tinkle held out his hand in silence, and Cadoza grasped it, no trace of enmity in his bearing. "You can deal with Riah as you think best," said my friend. "The present verdict is"—turning to Miss Penfield—"that you are to be congratulated both as regards your fiancé's recovery and in the possession of a true friend. I frankly own to a horrible mistake," he added simply, "and I'm glad that it was only a mistake. I was right as regards motive—love—and the agent—atropin—but I was wrong as regards the principal. I looked for an elaborate plot where none existed. I was merely a spectator, and had no peep behind the scenes. And now, Miss Penfield, you can go in and see your fiancé. Your wedding will cry finis to this happily ended drama—the Vegetable Rabies."

Slinky Bill

By Martin A. Flavin

Author of "The Little White Box," Etc.

A very amusing history of a little affair that began in an act of kindness and ended in sulfurous language. Some of the characters appeared in Mr. Flavin's former story, "The Little White Box," and we think you will be glad to renew acquaintance with them

THREE days before the wedding Jimmy came to me with a troubled expression and a letter. The letter said:

'DEAR JIMMY: I wish you would stop in at the Caledonian Safety Deposit Company some time to-morrow and bring out the contents of our box—Grace's jewelry and mine. Come out to Wykempsie on the six-fifty, and I will have Jessop meet you at the train.

I hate to trouble you with this matter, but Mr. Hunter is confined to the house with a cold, and I am so busy that I simply cannot spare the time to go to the city. Of course sending one of the servants is out of the question.

You can show this note to Mr. Field of the Caledonian; he will recognize my signature, and I have also written to him personally, so you will have no difficulty in obtaining the valuables.

Expecting then to see you to-morrow evening, I will close, my dear boy, with fondest regards from

ALICE EDGEWORTH HUNTER.

P. S.—Grace sends love.

With the deepest attention I perused this very polite little epistle; and, having done so, folded it neatly, returned it to the envelope, and resumed my breakfast. I even affected nonchalance, and, calling the waiter, said to him:

"James, another pot of coffee and some more toast, if you please." Then I picked up the *Herald* and turned to the stock report. After a time I mildly observed that Golwanda Preferred had fallen off six points.

"Well?" snapped Jimmy.

"Well," I replied, "I have a few dollars secreted in Golwanda as you very well know, since I bought it on your tip. I should at least expect you to be sympathetic about it and not yell at me in that vulgar, plebeian fashion. Really, Jimmy, people are beginning to talk about the way you deport yourself. Why, no later than last night I heard——"

"Now, what the devil has all this gibberish got to do with my letter?" He said this so loudly and so aggressively that old man Channing turned clear around in his chair to look, and I took another tack at once. That is one of the chief beauties of Jimmy's character: when he can't get what he wants he just howls for it until directly people are falling over each other to get it for him if only to be rid of the noise.

"My dear fellow," I replied, in a tone of deep contrition, "permit me to assure you that had I known you desired my opinion or my advice or even an expression of interest, I should have——"

"Oh, cut that rot," Jimmy interrupted brutally. "The question is, what am I to do?"

"Do?" I paused and seemingly turned the matter over in my mind. "Do? Why, I see nothing difficult in this delightful little problem. The rudiments of domestic science should dispose of this case in a jiffy. Do? Why, what would you do but obey the feminine mandates so delicately couched in this tender missive?"

And I indicated the envelope with a

wave of my hand and becoming gravity.

"But I can't," said Jimmy.

With difficulty I restrained a shudder, and replied:

"In which case, propriety suggests that you send the lady your heartfelt regrets. Explain to her that it is impossible; give any excellent reasons which your fertile imagination may bring forth. Allude to your approaching condition of servitude as if you enjoyed the idea, but recall the fact of its futurity. Emphasize this. Say that after the fifteenth of the month you expect to fetch and carry for various members of the family during the balance of your natural life; but that prior to that date you must respectfully beg to——"

At this point Jimmy again interrupted. He said:

"You doddering old imbecile, do you want to drive me mad? I am going to pilot the *Cormorant* in the regatta today; I ought to be at the yacht-club now, and I can't possibly get back before five-thirty. The Caledonian closes at three, so that obviously I can't go after the jewels. See?"

I saw. Yes, wholly and entirely I saw; but, notwithstanding this fact, I preserved a calm demeanor.

"I sincerely hope," I apologized, "that you will pardon my denseness; but what on earth has all this got to do with me? Why am I apostrophized so unfeelingly? Why do you direct the arrows of your chagrin against my innocent bosom? What have I got to do with it?"

"Good," said Jimmy approvingly. "Why didn't you say that in the first place? All you have to do is to take this letter and an empty suit-case down to the Caledonian some time before three o'clock. Bring the stuff back here and I will meet you at a quarter to six. At which hour we will dine at my expense—see?"

"I won't do it," I said feebly.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Jimmy. And I did.

Promptly at noon I resurrected an old moth-eaten suit-case from the baggage-room, and repaired gaily down Broadway to The Cork and Bottle for lunch.

When I arrived there was nobody at our table but Lester Maxwell, eating by his watch and alternating his gulps with sections of the *Evening Lyre*. Lester is one of those unfortunate human beings who cannot rest. Of course in his capacity of city editor of the *Hypochondriac* he does have to do some pretty tall hustling; but at the same time he puts on a lot of it.

"Hello!" he vociferated, in his customary stentorian tones as soon as I hove in sight. "Come on, old man, sit down. Try the sweetbreads. They're bully to-day. Seen the *Lyre?* Scooped us; scooped us bad; a scare-head column and two cuts. Oh, blame that Sheldon, anyhow!" He stopped to breathe, and I expressed my sympathy.

Lester is eternally scooping somebody or being scooped by somebody else. It has even ceased to be a joke. When the *Hypochondriac* is victorious he thumps himself in the chest and says: "That fellow Smith"—or Jones, or Brown, as the case may be—"is pretty slick; pretty slick, sir. But I'm a match for him. He can't get ahead of me."

On the other hand, when the *Hypo* comes out of the little end of the horn he "blames" Sheldon. I don't know just what Sheldon's position on the paper may be, but I'd hate like Sam Hill to hold it.

"Here it is," bellowed Lester, getting his second wind and pounding the offending sheet with great violence. "Here it is as big as life: *'Slinky Bill Out Again. Paroled from Sing Sing.'* What do you think of that, eh? What do you think?"

I ventured to inquire whether Slinky Bill was a prominent character.

"Prominent? What? Man alive! Never heard of Slinky Bill, cracksman, safe-blower, murderer? Never heard of the Gates case? No? Well, where have you been? Listen! This is how it happened. Old Ben Gates comes down-town to get his wife's jewels out

of the safe-deposit vault. Puts 'em in a little valise: diamonds, pearls, rubies, sunbursts, tiaras—a half a peck, or I'll eat 'em; gets on an up-town car; off at Fifty-ninth Street. Slinky Bill right behind him all the way; broad daylight; crowds of people on the street; doesn't feaze Slinky. Catches the old gent on the corner, cuts his throat as clean as a whistle, and slides with the graft. Caught him two years afterward in Monte Carlo living like a prince; brought him back; tried him, and sent him up for life; pardoned; out last night. Seven years ago it happened, seven years to a day, and I bet a hat he celebrated the anniversary by slitting another windpipe. Regular brute, degenerate of the lowest type, don't care any more for human life than this table. Can't see why they let him out. Politics, I guess. Well, I've got to fly. There's the paper with his picture on the front page. If you meet him, dodge. Ta-ta, old chap, so-long." And he went.

I had been contemplating ordering an English mutton-chop for my noon repast, but I suddenly found myself without an appetite. Several people looked at me curiously, and the head waiter came over to inquire if I was ill. I couldn't very well explain the situation to a waiter, not even a head waiter; so I said I had just received bad news from home. The head waiter was very sorry to hear this, and recommended a high-ball, which suggestion struck me as being well advised.

After a while I mustered sufficient courage to pick up the *Evening Lyre* and examine Slinky's countenance. According to the esteemed contemporary of the *Hypochondriac,* Slinky Bill was not a handsome man. The artist had displayed him to advantage in a broad-brimmed, black slouch-hat, and had concealed most of his face behind a ferocious-looking black mustache.

While I was studying the physiognomy of this most audacious villain, and ruminating on the uncertainty of life, Tommy Graydon and Dick Fenton sailed in arm in arm. They said they were glad to perceive that I was going away for a rest, because I looked frightfully run down, and I really ought to take better care of myself. Of course they naturally presumed that I was going out of town on account of the suit-case being in plain sight, and I didn't undeceive them.

Later on Channing and Harris blew in, and immediately became so thoroughly engrossed in a baseball argument that they failed to remark anything unusual in my appearance. Under the circumstances this seemed nothing short of inhuman, and I said:

"Hear about Slinky Bill?"

"Yes," replied Channing. "What of it?"

"Oh, nothing." I passed it off airily. "Think he'll reform?"

"Not in a million years. Probably murder some one before night. Just another example of the efficiency of this rotten municipality. Play golf this afternoon, Fenton?"

I dropped the subject.

They finished their respective lunches and departed. I tried to persuade Harris to spend the afternoon with me; but he said he couldn't, because he had to go to a funeral at three o'clock. I told him I thought I could offer him the same inducement to remain; but I wouldn't guarantee it, so he left.

In the absence of congenial spirits, The Cork and Bottle began to pall on me, so I took the suit-case and strolled out upon Broadway. And there, as luck would have it, the first person I ran into was Parsons, our club steward, on his way back from market. I never was so glad to see a man in my life, and before he had a chance to say a word, I had him cornered in a convenient dispensary, and was pouring out the whole gruesome story.

Parsons said it was fierce; said it was dangerous enough packing valuables around town any time, but with that soulless devil lying in wait for you just around the corner—well, he didn't see how I dared to risk it. The idea seemed to grow on him, and by and by he said it was almost too terrible to think about. I agreed with him, but I couldn't help it.

It was now two o'clock, and the Caledonian closed at three. I explained this to Parsons, and in an ebullition of heroism he said he would walk a couple of blocks with me, which generous offer I accepted without undue hesitation, and we started.

Owing to the fact that we stopped at several places en route, we did not reach the Caledonian until ten minutes to three. But be that as it may, eventually we got there.

I sent in my card to Mr. Field, and he descended from a sort of gilded bird-cage on an iron shelf, and greeted us. He was a very courteous man, but not affable. He did not seem to be impressed with our appearance, and conversation languished.

In order to keep things moving, we asked him if he had ever heard of Slinky Bill, to which he replied that he had not, but would like to; so we told him.

We said, in conclusion, that so far as we, personally, were concerned, we should like to see any Slinky Bill tall enough or broad enough to interfere with our free-born rights as American citizens; that we were extremely anxious to encounter the villain; and that if by any good fortune we should be permitted to do so, society would be forever rid of the notorious Slinky. Just at the moment we really felt that way about it.

Mr. Field did not manifest much interest in our narrative, and, in fact, rather cast a damper over our spirits by remarking in a reproving way that matters of that kind should be relegated to the proper authorities. Then he went back behind the bars and emerged in a few minutes with the suit-case, all wafered up with little red seals till it looked like a Chinese lantern at a church fair.

The formalities of the transfer having at length been complied with, we shook hands all around, to show that there was no hard feeling, and sallied forth in quest of adventure, which, if it is not anticipating my story, I may safely say we experienced no difficulty in locating.

Slinky Bill was standing at the door waiting for us. His broad-brimmed, black slouch-hat was pulled well down over his eyes; his mustache bristled with even more than its pictured ferocity; his attitude was one of greed and daring. I could almost imagine him smacking his lips like unto some famished epicure before whose eyes suddenly appeared a banquet.

Instantly we faced about and retraced our steps. We didn't speak; we were petrified. At the top of the stairs under the marble portico we paused; we had to—the door was locked.

After we had hammered on it for some five or ten minutes, a dignified old gentleman with gold spectacles opened it about three inches on a chain. He begged to inform us that the bank closed at three o'clock. We said we knew it; said we were most awfully sorry to disturb him, but—and we explained the situation.

The venerable old fossil repeated his previous statement.

"Great heavens!" we cried. "Do you want us to be assassinated?"

And that antiquated old barbarian actually had the effrontery to close the door in our faces.

There we were, and there was Slinky Bill; we could just see the top of his hat sticking out from behind a post. Obviously we couldn't retreat, neither could we go ahead; so we held a joint debate.

Parsons said that the correct thing to do was to throw Slinky off the scent. He explained that in his childhood he had often played a game called "Run, Sheep, Run," in which the object is to keep from being caught, not so much by speed as by subterfuge. He said that he had become very proficient in that particular line, and for me to leave everything to him. For a minute or two he would occupy himself in thought; and suiting his actions to his words, he assumed an attitude such as is often seen in the statues of dead statesmen and poets.

After a while he came out of his trance and said:

"I have it. We will walk boldly

down the steps. Then we will separate. That will puzzle him to death. You go in one direction and I in another. How does that strike you?"

That struck me all right, and we were preparing to descend, when it suddenly flashed across my mind that we couldn't both carry the suit-case. Here was an unlooked-for predicament, and I inquired very gently how we should manage it.

"Oh, that's all right," Parsons replied carelessly. "You can carry the stuff. We won't have any argument about that, eh? Ha-ha!"

But this generosity on Parsons' part did not appeal to me, and I objected; also the longer I thought about it the harder I objected.

Finally I suggested that we settle the troublesome question by drawing lots, whereupon Parsons became very irritable. He said that the jewels did not belong to him, and that while he was willing to take any kind of a fighting chance with Slinky Bill, at the same time he was blamed if he would stand responsible for a trunk-load of diamonds.

I solemnly absolved him from all responsibility; but he very artfully pointed out that, inasmuch as the goods did not belong to me, I had no legal right to consign them to anybody else.

I tried to explain that the present situation was without precedent in the annals of legal jurisprudence, and therefore open to argument, but Parsons refused to be convinced; so at length I gave it up, and evolved a stupendous plan.

"Look here," I said. "I've got it. We will go into a store and buy another suit-case. Fix it up just like this, see? All you have to do is to carry the empty one, and Slinky will lose his mind trying to decide which one of us to shadow."

Parsons didn't enthuse over this the way I had expected, but he said that if I would excuse him for a minute he would think it over. I excused him, and he thought.

After a while he said with great gloom that it would not do. When pressed for a reason, he said that the idea lacked originality. We debated this point for upward of half an hour, but in the end it came to nothing.

Finally Parsons remembered that he had a friend who kept a saloon about three blocks away. He said that this friend had formerly been a prize-fighter, and that his protection was worth a whole regiment of soldiers. He advised me to stay where I was while he ran around the corner after the reformed pugilist.

I said we would both go. I had a sort of indefinite suspicion that if Parsons started off alone something would happen that would render it inconvenient for him to return.

Well, to cut a long story short, we both went. We slid down the stairs as quickly as we could, and, without lingering to look around, struck out bravely for the dispensary of Parson's friend.

We never looked behind us all the way, so we couldn't say positively whether or no Slinky was in pursuit, though I would have laid even money that he was.

The establishment of Parson's friend proved to be a cozy and altogether desirable retreat; and, as the attendant informed us that the boss had gone to Brooklyn on business, but would probably be back in the course of an hour or so, we decided to wait.

With this idea in mind, we effectually barricaded ourselves in a dark corner behind a heavy mahogany table. Also, in order that we might not be taken unawares if the worst came to the worst, we laid in a large stock of supplies, enough, we figured, to stand off a protracted siege.

The siege did not come, neither did Parson's friend; but half-past five did, almost before we knew it. The question now arose as to how we were to get out, and we were deeply engaged in a heated controversy touching this matter, when, on glancing up, I encountered the stern and not altogether approving eye of Doc Adams.

It developed that the doc had been out making a round of professionl calls,

and that he had quite accidentally fallen upon our hiding-place while on his way back to the club. He said that his electric runabout was at the door, and he would be glad to take one of us home, but he could not possibly make room for two.

I said that I would walk, and Parsons and the suit-case could ride. Parsons declared just as firmly that he would walk and I should ride. To this I finally assented, but drew the line at the suit-case, which I felt sure would overload the machine and do some irreparable damage. I explained to Adams that as long as Parsons needed exercise, he might just as well carry the grip.

"Nonsense," said doc. "Come on, if you're going." And he grabbed the grip and started for the street, which was just what I had been praying for with all my soul.

While I was climbing into the machine I took occasion to look about me, and not without an apprehensive shudder perceived the stalwart and forbidding figure of Slinky Bill slouching behind a telegraph-post. Parsons, who had come out to the sidewalk with us, saw him, too, and immediately became so flustered that he couldn't speak. The next instant we were whirling down the street, and Slinky Bill was standing on the corner cussing his cruel fate.

It was five minutes to six when I reached the club, and therefore, without changing my clothes or even washing my hands, I rushed straight into the café. Jimmy was sitting at his favorite table in the lime-light, with one chair propped up awaiting my arrival, and a soup-tureen in front of him.

"Good old boy," he chortled, as I sneaked across the room. "Fine old tabby—why didn't you stay out all night?" And this from the man for whose friendship I had braved a violent death.

"I thought, maybe, you had soaked the goods and gone abroad," he continued maliciously. "You and Parsons —intoxicated young reprobates, quarreling in the open street like a couple of fishwives and running foot-races on Broadway. Oh, people saw you, all right—lots of people!"

This was not what might be called cheerful intelligence, and I began rapidly to lose my temper. I flung the suit-case on the floor, and I flung myself into a chair.

"I'll tell you what," I said, with great heat. "I'll tell you what, young man, the next time you want a basket of trouble carted around town, do it yourself—and get your own throat slit from ear to ear. And be d——d to gratitude, too, for there isn't any such thing in the world — understand?" Having vented my just indignation in the above manner, I applied myself heartily and exclusively to my dinner.

Notwithstanding sundry and profuse hints from my whilom friend that all would be forgiven if I would condescend to explain my last mysterious speech, I steadfastly preserved a chilling silence until the dessert was on the table, when, the cockles of my heart being sufficiently warmed to permit of articulation, I consented to speak, and forthwith disclosed the entire conspiracy in all its ghastly details.

At first Jimmy was deeply interested. He examined the picture of Slinky Bill, which I still carried in my pocket, and commented favorably on my actions; but when I got to the place where I had sailed gloriously away from the habitat of Parsons' friend, leaving Slinky to chew the cud of his bitter chagrin alone, he burst suddenly into a howl of laughter, declaring that Parsons and I were two of a kind, and that we had gone to sleep somewhere and dreamed the whole thing. He said we ought to have a nurse, and altogether made himself as utterly objectionable as he could.

Not content with this, he went down to the billiard-room, and retailed my story to his friends, adding on a detail here and there which had escaped my attention, until the last man who heard it would have taken his oath that Parsons and I had both had the D. T.'s, and had been chased down Broadway by a pink crocodile with seven tails.

Very shortly the reading-room became too warm for comfort; so I carried my book out into the lobby and hid behind a pillar. Thither came Jimmy fifteen minutes before train-time with the suit-case and a broad grin, inclined to be slightly repentant, but not wishing to admit it, and therefore jocularly unendurable.

"I've a cab at the door, old man; want to ride down to the station?"

I turned a page, and looked absent-mindedly through him.

"Oh, well, can't help it if you're sore. Awfully sorry, though. Ta-ta." And he started. However, he didn't open the door, because, just as he was preparing to do so, somebody in a violent hurry did it for him from the outside. In fact, so violent was this person's haste, and so mad his career, that without so much as saying "By your leave," he upset Jimmy and the suit-case into a confused heap on the floor, and proceeded on his way without even looking behind him.

It was Parsons — frantic, terror-stricken, livid. When he saw me he came straightway and cast himself upon my neck. "Take him away," he begged. "Oh, please take him away. I've been everywhere, and I can't get rid of him."

Very gently I endeavored to detach myself from the situation.

Jimmy had picked himself up and was looking on anxiously.

"Jimmy," I said, "I beg your pardon. You were right and I was wrong. He has got 'em; got 'em bad."

By this time Parsons had got his second wind, and launched into a tale of woe designed to raise the hair of an ordinary man quite off his head. In conclusion, he swore by Mars, Apollo, and the seven green-eyed dragons that Slinky Bill was at that very moment within sight of the door, and he suggested that if Jimmy didn't believe it he could go outside and look.

Jimmy didn't go, but he grabbed me by the arm and brokenly entreated me to tell him what to do.

I smiled pityingly. "My dear fellow," I said, "don't be alarmed; it's just one of his ordinary delusions. There isn't any Slinky Bill; really, there isn't. Calm yourself, like a good chap."

Then he groveled. Oh, mentally and physically did he grovel.

"I apologize," he shrieked. "I didn't mean a word I said. Only help me out of this scrape, and I'll square it up to-morrow if I live."

Who could resist such an appeal? Not I. I said I would help, and I did —variously.

To begin with, we held a council of war, the result of which was a unanimous decision that somebody ought to do something, though what should be done and who should do it were points which we inadvertently overlooked. While these latter matters were being debated, a brilliant thought penetrated my brain and illumined the whole situation. We would send for Jones— —Jones, the detective; daredevil Jones.

In two minutes this idea had grown upon me until I was wildly enthusiastic. In three minutes I was at the telephone talking to the central station.

"Is Detective Jones there?"

He was, and he answered, whereupon I explained.

"I will be with you," said Jones, "in nine minutes. Be patient, and do nothing to excite suspicion. Should you be attacked before I arrive, barricade the doors and defend yourself; but at all hazards hold your position."

I hung up the receiver with a light heart, for I knew that in precisely nine minutes the invincible Jones would be with us.

When I returned to the lobby, I found that Parsons and Jimmy had been down in the basement getting a scuttle of coal, which they explained they were about to carry up to the roof, with the intention of bombarding Slinky from that vantage-point.

I deterred them. I said that I had got something better than coal, better than a twelve-inch gun, and I named my thunderbolt.

At once a deep gloom settled down upon Parsons, and presently he said that his wife was sick, and he thought he had better go home. We tried our

best to dissuade him, but it was no use, and he went.

At exactly five minutes before seven Jones arrived. There was no thrilling clang of an iron gong; no clatter of madly dashing hoofs; no rumbling of the official vehicle locally known as the "hurry-up wagon"—none of these portentous sounds heralded his approach. Gently the ponderous door swung open, and, looking up, we were confronted by the superbly passionless face of Jones, the detective.

Simultaneously we rose to our feet and greeted him—greeted him with an effusion manifestly unaffected. Then we told him.

Throughout the recital he maintained a calm and dignified demeanor, expressing neither incredulity nor surprise, and regarding us with a chiseled expression of superiority which seemed to say, "I am Jones. It is my mission to succor the distressed." This expression did not irritate us; on the contrary, it inspired us with joy, and for a little while we almost felt gay about it.

When we had concluded our story, we suggested that Jones proceed at once to Slinky Bill, and, having arrested him by due process of the law, hale him hence to his just incarceration; whereat Jones smiled a solemn, pitying smile.

"What for?" he said.

"What for?" we echoed dumbly. "What for? Ye gods! Was this fierce and savage slayer to walk, unmolested, the streets of the metropolis? Were we to suffer our unfortunate throats to be slit from ear to ear without one hand being raised to save us? Was justice blind? Was—was——"

Jones dismissed our tirade with a wave of his hand.

"What has this man done?" he said.

We paused, stupefied. What had he done? Great fish-hooks! What had he not done? Had he not pursued us for hours with malice intent and bloody motives? Was he not even then lurking in the shadow of our egress to execute his nefarious designs upon our wretched bodies? *What had he done?* We shuddered.

Jones motioned for silence, and after a moment of reflection gave utterance to the following sentiments:

"Is it a crime to walk the streets? Is it a crime to stand before your door? Is it a crime to have been a criminal? No, a thousand times no. *What has this man done?*"

We argued, we pleaded, we cajoled; we said: "Look here. Suppose we are robbed and murdered, what good will it do us to have Slinky punished? If you can't pinch him, all right; we concede that point; but at least be a good fellow and take him away."

Jones was adamant. The law, he said, permitted of no deviation. The rules of his profession were as inexorable as a surgeon's knife; and, having undertaken our case, which he begged us to remember he had only done at our own solicitation, he was determined to carry it through to the bitter end.

At once the slumbering genius of the man leaped into action. He got a time-card from the rack, and announced that we would leave for Wykempsie at seven-forty-five. With the gesture of a Roman emperor he ordered two cabs. Had he deemed it advisable, I make no doubt he would have ordered two hundred.

"But the suit-case," Jimmy objected. "We can't take the suit-case. If Parsons hadn't gone home, we might have locked it up in the safe."

Jones turned with the same pitying smile upon his lips.

"Parsons," he said, "is in the custody of an officer at the next corner. I met him hurrying from the scene, and arrested him on suspicion. He will go with us. As for the suit-case—its presence is essential to the success of our scheme. Slinky Bill must be persuaded to attack you. The rest is simple."

When the import of this last speech burst upon us we were frantic. We suffered all the anguish of lost souls. In vain did we plead and weep and pray; our lamentations rolled off Jones like the water from a duck's back. In fact, he actually had the nerve to say that we ought to feel grateful to him

for allowing us to take part in the forthcoming tragedy. We might just as well have shrieked our protests to the four winds of heaven for all the good they did. As a last resort, we offered to make Slinky a present of the jewels, together with our watches and what change we had in our pockets; but our offer was spurned.

When all was ready we received our instructions, short and snappy, without the waste of a single word. "At the door are three cabs; one white horse, one bay, one black. Take the bay. At the corner Parsons will join you. Buy your tickets at the depot, and get into the last coach. Speak to no one. Get off at Wykempsie. Under no circumstances take a rig—walk. Rest assured before you reach your destination you will be attacked. Fear nothing, and remember that Jones is behind you."

Before this onslaught of verbal thunderbolts our remaining faculties deserted us. We had not a word to say, nor indeed the breath with which to say it; and without further ado we grabbed the suit-case and departed.

As we passed hurriedly down the steps and across the sidewalk, we caught one fleeting glimpse of Slinky Bill. His face was drawn, and, as we looked, a spasm of gluttony seemed to pass over it. We did not linger to observe his movements, but, accelerating our pace to a gallop, dove wildly into the waiting cab, which immediately drove rapidly away.

At the corner it stopped with a lurch, and Parsons got in. When I say "got in," I speak advisedly—rather, he was propelled. He slammed over against Jimmy, who promptly slammed him over against me, whence he finally settled down into a scowling wedge between us.

After a while he began to talk; and the way he smoked up the English language was terrible.

He said he hoped the devil would fly away with Jones, and that Slinky Bill would get the rest of us. He said his wife and three children were dangerously ill in bed with the whooping-cough, and that things had come to a pretty pass when a respectable, hard-working married man couldn't walk the street without being kidnaped by a numskull with a brass star and hauled away on a wild-goose chase to his death.

We tried to pacify him, and acted as if we really believed his wife was sick, though we knew all the time that he didn't even have a wife. We told him not to worry, because things were certainly a heap better than they might have been, and, anyway, to keep up his courage, because we felt sure that the worst was yet to come.

By and by Jimmy took a squint back, and reported that the white horse was running second by about eight lengths, with the black riding easy, a good third. He said it reminded him of a parade, whereupon Parsons opened up and said it reminded him of a funeral with three corpses. This remark annoyed us, and we told Parsons if he didn't have anything pleasant to say, to keep his mouth shut.

Every now and then Jimmy would lean out and make observations, and sometimes Slinky was ahead, and sometimes Jones. Of course we couldn't be sure which was which; but we had about decided that Jones was behind the black horse. Anyhow, they seesawed back and forth like a couple of selling-platers in a "fixed" race, until, Jimmy's sporting-blood being aroused to a fever pitch, he proceeded to make a book on them. He ran it like this:

"In three minutes," he said, "Jones will be ahead." And he laid seven to five against the field. But neither Parsons nor I would venture a cent, despite his fluent entreaties to "come on and be game"; so he was finally reduced to the point of playing mind bets against himself, which ridiculous occupation kept him perfectly happy until we reached the depot. I never saw a man so easily amused.

When we got out of the cab we perceived that the white horse was scarce a hundred yards away; and that the black was bringing up the rear by a good city block. This trifling observa-

tion did not tempt us to linger; so we bought our tickets as quickly as we could, and made directly for the train.

On the way we mentioned to Parsons, out of the goodness of our hearts, that if he was seeking an opportunity to escape, he would probably never find a better; whereat that peculiar being expressed much indignation, and accused us not only of black ingratitude, but further, of attempting to foist him off upon Slinky Bill as a substitute.

This unjust accusation led to an argument, and by the time we had climbed aboard the rear coach nobody was on speaking terms with anybody else. We each selected a separate seat, as far apart as was consistent with the size of the car; and Jimmy, out of sheer meanness, immediately curled up and went to sleep.

I was sharing my section with the suit-case. Why, I can't say, but there it was, and the sight of the confounded thing acted like a rip-saw on my already ruffled temper. I crammed it into the parcel-rack, and, throwing myself back in my seat, made up my mind to doze, and be just as blamed indifferent to the situation as Jimmy was.

But for some reason or other I couldn't seem to strike the right combination, and before we were a mile on our journey, I was about as wretchedly uncomfortable and nervous as I have ever been in my life.

My feet got to itching in six different places. First I put them on the seat in front of me, then I hoisted them on to the window-sill; finally I jammed them around the foot-rest, and tried to twist them off. Incidentally, I scraped the calf of my leg along a red-hot steam-pipe, with the result that I at once forgot all about my feet.

As a sort of counter-irritant, my hat fell off the hook, and the brim landed nicely in my left eye. This caused me to forget my leg for a while, which was probably a mercy. During the intervals when I was not suffering from one or all of the above-recorded misfortunes, my system was permeated with thick blasts of sulfur smoke. Altogether I was happy—oh, very happy!

In due course of time the conductor came along and said something about tickets. At the particular moment I was engaged with a combination of leg, eye, and smoke, and I fear my reply was not quite as courteous as it might have been.

At any rate, the conductor acted as if he were displeased. He proceeded on a few steps and tackled Parsons, who told him in an unnecessarily loud tone of voice to go to a place which, according to popular theory, presents few attractive features to the tourist.

The blue-coated gentleman waxed very savage at this remark, but, so far from complying with the request contained in it, he stalked across the car and proceeded to shake Jimmy into a faint semblance of consciousness.

When Jimmy had gaped and stretched, and asked what o'clock it was, and how far we had come, and how far we had to go, he at length condescended to include the conductor in a far-off, blank stare, and, realizing after several forcible reminders that something was expected of him, began to go through his pockets in an absent-minded way.

When he had completed the circuit he began over again, to make sure he hadn't missed any. He hauled into view quite a miscellaneous collection of toilet articles and cigars, but nothing that in the most remote degree resembled a railroad-ticket.

"I'm afraid," he explained mildly, "I'm really very much afraid that I have mislaid them."

At this the conductor's complexion changed suddenly from scarlet to purple, and the pent-up wrath which had been simmering within him for some time boiled over.

"I sized you up for a bunch of dead beats," he bullied, including Parsons and myself in the general allegation. I think he was pleased with his own powers of intuition; for he forbore to abuse us. He pulled the bell-rope, and when the train had come to a full stop, asked us whether we would get off without a disturbance, or whether he should call the brakeman to throw us

off. We begged him not to go to any trouble on our account, and, as there was no reason for further parley, took the suit-case and departed.

The train had stopped just wherever it had happened to be at the moment, absolutely without regard for our comfort or convenience. We noticed this as soon as we alighted, because there wasn't a sign of habitation or anything else in sight; just black, dismal-looking night all around, with a suggestion of blacker blackness off to the right—probably woods or a corn-field.

According to the almanac, the moon was scheduled to put in an appearance some time during the evening, but it must have been delayed in transit. At any rate, it was conspicuous by its absence. In a word, the landscape was depressing, very depressing.

By the time we had made the above observations the train was beginning to move, and our fellow passengers, who had enjoyed our dramatic eviction to the limit, were reluctantly withdrawing their heads from view. At this moment I said to Jimmy with as much sarcasm as I could muster:

"Well, I suppose now you're satisfied."

"You dummy!" he replied. "I've got the tickets. Didn't you want to be rid of Slinky Bill? He's on that train; in the smoker; and he'll have to do some pretty tall hustling to get us now."

No sooner had he finished the aforesaid remarkable speech than suddenly a furious commotion burst out upon the still, night air. A man appeared on the platform of our departing coach, and with a frenzied shriek sprang out into the night. After him came another.

We didn't wait to see who they were, or to ascertain why they tempted destruction by leaping madly from a flying train. We knew, and we lit out immediately.

In common with most members of its species, this particular railroad was located on the summit of an embankment; and, although none of us was conversant with the construction of railways, we nevertheless succeeded in finding the foot of that embankment in an incredibly short space of time.

There was a ditch at the bottom, containing the sediment of a recent rain. We found that, too.

Also in our zeal we discovered a barbed-wire fence, and it was barbed—oh, altogether and completely was it barbed. Having dampened my garments in the ditch, I now found the fence a convenient place to hang a large section of my trousers.

Notwithstanding this obstruction we were only momentarily delayed, and, having gained the open—if, indeed, such a misnomer can be properly used to designate a corn-field in full bloom—we proceeded at top speed in Indian file, with Parsons heading the procession.

I brought up the rear with the suit-case. I don't know why I should have been continuously saddled with the hideous thing; and at the time I forgot to think about it at all. I recall, however, that I hung onto it with a life-or-death grip, which the ditch and the barbed-wire fence alike failed to sever.

Reader, if you have never experienced the delights of running at full speed through an unknown corn-field in total darkness, there is a treat in store for you. I know of no more thrilling pastime. Every now and then, to vary the monotony of our flight, we fell down.

Parsons was always the cause of these little incidents. He had never been a boy on a farm, and I make no doubt he would have found his way through a South African jungle with quite as much ease as he did through that wretched corn-field.

Every time he stepped out of the furrow he went down; and every time he went down, Jimmy and I and the suit-case piled up in a heap on top of him. It sounded like a corn-husker in full blast—all but the language. Also we could hear Slinky flattening out the rich and verdant meadows; and once I thought it was Jones, but I wasn't hanging around listening.

After a while we hit another fence, and the balance of my raiment vanished. We came out in a farmyard and disturbed the farmer's dog. We knew we had disturbed him, by the way he acted. He took a nip at me, and then trotted on a few paces, and got acquainted with Jimmy.

After this he noticed he was missing something, and lit out after Parsons. But Parsons had a first-rate handicap, and he made the best of it. In fact, he ran so fast and stepped so high that he cleanly hurdled a neat stone coping that any blind man would have known was a well-curb, and, having performed this acrobatic feat, gave utterance to one piercing shriek, and disappeared from the face of the earth. As for the dog, that amazed canine, finding himself baffled of his prey in the above supernatural manner, promptly put his tail between his legs and fled back to the fence in terror.

It was no very difficult matter for us to locate Parsons, because after he got his wind he yelled continuously. We made what haste we could, and, leaning over the edge, asked him if he was drowning. To which he replied that he didn't think so; but he wasn't sure.

It was one of those old-fashioned wells with a bucket and windlass, and he was sitting in the bucket; so of course he was perfectly safe; indeed, much safer than we were.

He knew this, too, because he begged us to save ourselves and leave him to his fate. He said not to delay an instant on his account, and even though he lost his life in the waters of the pit, yet would he know that we were preserved, and he would die happy.

This line of talk didn't sink in very deep; we were lonesome; we needed Parsons, and we must have him. Also there was need of speed; for we could hear our pursuers arguing with the dog.

Without an instant's hesitation we grabbed the windlass, and began winding up the bucket. This action gave Parsons the alternative of coming up gracefully or remaining in the well without anything to stand on. It is quite superfluous to observe that he elected to stick with the bucket.

As soon as the blame thing cleared the water it commenced to get heavy, and it took on weight with every inch it rose. Pretty soon it was all we could do to turn the handle over, and within three feet of the top we played out altogether.

Meanwhile Parsons was violently protesting against being saved, and lamenting his hard fate in a rasping tenor. We begged him to shut up, and threatened to cut the rope if he didn't. As an afterthought, we told him that if we did, we would throw the suitcase in on top of him for company.

At this he promptly changed his tune; entreating us quite as frantically to pull him out. But we couldn't. No, sir, we couldn't any more budge the thing than if it had been a thousand tons of brick. In fact, it took every ounce of strength we had to hold it where it was.

And now at this very moment, the crucial, psychological instant of our several careers, when our destinies swung in the narrow balance between salvation and destruction—I say it was at this very moment that the unwelcome orb of night decided to put in a tardy appearance, and, sailing out from behind a bank of clouds, it disclosed to view the full horror of our position.

Slinky Bill was almost upon us, and he was eating up the intervening space with a pair of seven-league boots. There was no mistaking the broad, squat figure nor the black slouch-hat; we would have known him among a million.

At first glance, his shape seemed to be almost exorbitantly gross, but as our vision cleared we made out that he was carrying a large, bulky object under either arm. When the moonlight broke he was headed a point or so to the right of us, but he changed his course at once, and, giving forth a blood-curdling war-whoop, charged straight at us.

What could we do? We let go of the windlass, and Parsons went back

to the deep with a splash that might have been heard for half a mile. Then by a simultaneous impulse we leaped to the parapet, with the suit-case between us, and, without pausing for any farewell speeches, proceeded after the bucket. We found it without any trouble, also the water, which was bitterly cold and very wet.

Parsons had the only reasonably comfortable location in the vicinity, and he brutally refused to give up an inch of his advantage. He said that we could hang on the edge of the bucket if we were a mind to, but he refused to support the suit-case, lest the added weight should break the rope.

He was very sulky about our intrusion, and remarked that things had come to a pretty pass when a man couldn't obtain privacy at the bottom of a well.

We took what we could get in a meek and humble spirit, and the next moment Slinky Bill's ferocious beard was bristling at the brink, and his ferret-eyes were exploring our retreat.

It was then that we perceived that the bulky objects which we had observed him to be carrying were no less personages than the invincible Jones and the quarrelsome dog. The former he hung over the coping, whence it dangled limply to and fro; and the latter he swung by the tail over our unhappy heads. Neither Jones nor the dog offered the slightest resistance to these ignominies, and, in fact, seemed quite resigned to their fates.

When the scoundrel desperado had disposed of his luggage in the above-described manner, and had regained some of the wind which he had expended in his recent chase, he leaned over the edge and prepared to wreak his vengeance. At least that's what we thought he was going to do.

We rather expected he might cut the rope and drown us like a trio of sick kittens; we had considered how it would feel to have boulders rolled in upon our heads and be scrunched to death in this revolting fashion; we would not have been surprised had he leaped into our midst, knife in hand, and slit our respective throats from ear to ear—but he did none of these things. On the contrary, he regarded us with a puzzled expression, and said at length in a rich, mellow brogue:

"'Tis all safe now, byes. Oi have him toight and fast." And he indicated the limp body of our preserver with a resounding thump. "Shure Oi surmoised from the very first the rascal was after the jew-e-l-s, bad cess to 'im! 'Twill be a long day befure he tries it again. Come out now before yez catch your death of colds."

We struggled against our wavering reasons, and pinched our flesh to drive away the dream. What was this talk? Who was this man? Could it be? Was it possible? We gasped and gurgled like men bereft.

"Who are you?" we cried at last. "Who are you?"

"Who am Oi?" the cyclops repeated stupidly. "Why, who shud Oi be? Shure me name is Muldoon, an' Oi'm a daytactive at the bank. The boss sez to me sez he: 'Muldoon, stay wid those young fellers, and don't lose sight uf 'em fer a minute,' and Oi done it. Begorra, Oi done it; but never again! It's too swift a pace fer me."

ON THE OUTER REEF

By T. JENKINS HAINS
Author of "The Arrow," "The Black Barque," Etc.

It is a large canvas that Mr. Hains paints upon, but every detail of the picture is painted faithfully. That is why his tales of the sea are so vivid, so real. In this story he has set in striking contrast two vastly different classes of society—the wealthy yacht-owner and the heartless professional "wrecker" of the Florida keys.

(A Complete Novel)

MRS. DUNN sat under the awning stretched over the quarter-deck of the yacht *Sayonara* lying in the stream, off the government coal-dock, at Key West. It was winter, but the air was warm, and white linen duck was the most comfortable clothing. Even the six men who composed the crew of the trim little schooner showed nothing but white in their garments, save the black silk ties knotted rakishly, drawing together their wide sailor-collars. Phenix Dunn was a broker, a gambler in the productions of others, and because of this he was wealthy. He had bought and sold certain commodities known as stocks, and they had proved profitable—so profitable that he had decided to take a few months away from the excitement of the game and buy a yacht and cruise.

Mrs. Dunn was something of a beauty. That is, many men thought so. Some women differed in opinions, especially those women whom she counted as her friends. Anyhow, she possessed a dashing air, a figure beyond criticism, and clothes that made Phenix say many bad words when the bills came in. Also she had a disposition of which the gentle side had not been overdeveloped. She was not quarrelsome. Far from it. She had plenty of tact and ability, but the absence of children and household cares had given her more time than necessary for the contemplation of self, and this had not been satisfying. She worked it off by dint of much outdoor exercise.

Dunn joined her at the taffrail and flung himself into a chair with a show of wrath. Something had gone wrong, as it always does upon yachts of any size where the owner is not used to the sea or its peculiar people.

"The steward is gone, the cook is going, and here we are a thousand miles from anywhere at all—anywhere at all, I say; and the commandant of the yard will be aboard to-morrow with not less than twenty officers and their wives. What'll we do about it?" he rapped out.

"Why do you ask me?—I'm not good at riddles," answered his wife lazily.

"Well, we've got to take on a couple of blacks—niggers they call 'em here—and I don't like the idea of it. I've

no use for 'em. What I want is Japanese servants. Japanese are good. Good fighters make good servants. You don't want a servant to think, and a good fighter never thinks. If he did he would see something else besides glory in walking up to a man with a gun. The Japs do that—and they are good servants. I don't want any of these black people aboard this vessel."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," grumbled Dunn, "but when in doubt, take a drink—I'll go and get one."

While he was below, a dingy-looking vessel came slowly in the northwest channel. She was a heavily built sloop, and upon her deck lounged a rather numerous crew. They were picturesque, half-clothed in nondescript rags, their bare arms and shoulders seeming impervious to the rays of the torrid sunshine, for along the Florida reef, even in winter, the sun is burning.

The craft dropped anchor about twenty fathoms astern of the yacht, and when Dunn came from below, bringing with him an odor of gin and bitters, the crew of the sloop regarded him silently.

"Hello, a wrecker!" exclaimed Dunn.

His sailing-master had come to the taffrail and was gazing at the stranger, while Mrs. Dunn, careless of nautical neighbors, read her magazine.

"Yes, seems like one of the wreckers," said Captain Smart; "an ugly-looking crew, for a fact. They say these spongers divide their time between wrecking and smuggling. Not that either's bad if indulged in moderately, but they are apt to get loose after a while and do queer things."

"There ought to be plenty of good in a wrecker, if he plied his trade right—ought to save lives and property," said Dunn. "Let's have a look through the glass."

The men of the wrecking-sloop gazed back insolently at the yachtsman, and a giant black man among them rose up, placed his fingers in line, and applied the thumb of one hand to his big, flat nose, wiggling his huge digits in derision.

"That fellow is a corker," said Dunn, watching the wrecker good-humoredly.

"He's a big one, all right," assented Smart, "and I reckon they don't like us looking so hard at 'em."

"Lower a boat and send over for that fellow—I want him," said Dunn.

The captain looked at him for a moment. "I go ashore for Miss Marion Harsha in a few minutes," he said. "Mrs. Dunn gave the order. If you say so, I'll let the gig go for the wrecker afterward—go myself in her."

The yacht skipper was about forty, and slightly grizzled, his tanned face lined from work and exposure in more than one hard-run merchant vessel. But he made a rather good-looking yacht captain when dressed in his blue broadcloth coat with gold-braided cuffs, white duck trousers, and white canvas shoes. His cap bore the flag of Mr. Dunn upon its front, and was the only badge of dependence about him.

"All right, go ahead when you're ready; I'm in no hurry," said the owner. "Only I want to see that big nigger who was insolent enough to poke his fingers at me. Seems like he'd make a good man aboard here—steward, maybe, or even cook, if he knows how to do the work. They say these Southern darkies know how to cook like a French chef—and maybe his wife takes in washing. Get him, bring him in—there's some one waving on the dock now."

"Bring the gig to the starboard gangway," ordered Smart; and two men swung into her from the boom-end and dropped her aft. In a moment the captain was on his way to the dock.

Miss Harsha was young, stout, pug-nosed, and short-haired, but she dressed well and swung her parasol daintily as she walked down the dock end beside a uniformed marine officer from the yard. At the landing-steps the officer assisted her into the gig, talking so interestedly that she failed to notice the yacht captain until he took her hand and helped her into the cushions in the stern-sheets. She suddenly dropped

his hand, started, and stared at him a moment.

"You—you—what are you doing here?" she stammered.

"I'm to bring you aboard—Mrs. Dunn's orders," said Smart.

"Er—yes, I suppose so. Oh, good-by, Major Simson, we'll see you to-morrow; you must come aboard, you know. Nice little boat—so different from a ship, and Miss Jennings will be there. Good-by."

The officer bowed low, waved his helmet, and started back as the small boat pulled away.

"I thought you were still aboard the liner—the *Ampersand*," said Miss Harsha casually, as she edged away to give the captain room to steer.

"No, I left the next voyage. I was taught that a ship's officer was not in the class I supposed him to be."

"Please don't," interrupted the girl. "You know, or ought to know, the difference between a common sailor—a mate of a transatlantic steamer—and a naval officer. I hoped to spare your feelings, but you would not listen to me. I am the daughter of a naval officer. You are very little different from Mr. Dunn's butler, socially speaking. You wear his livery——"

"A very pretty uniform it is," suggested the skipper, interrupting and smiling complacently at her.

"You must pardon me if I hurt your feelings, but it seems necessary for me to make myself plainly understood——"

"Oh, I understand you thoroughly," said Captain Smart gently. "You are away above me—high up. I know I'm only a sailor. So was my father. But I'm not a bit ashamed of it. I work for my living. I have no kind Uncle Sam to provide for me that I may loaf about in white duck and seek diversion among the fairer sex. You'll excuse me if I cannot hold a poorer opinion of myself than I do of many of those who wear the country's livery and draw pay for it. They are mostly good fellows—but there are others."

"But you won't understand. It isn't that. It's the—well, we won't discuss it any further. I know you are too much of a man to make me uncomfortable aboard the yacht. If you do, I shall have to speak to Mr. Dunn."

Captain Smart chuckled softly. He seemed to enjoy the situation very much, but he said no more, for the men rowing were beginning to listen to the conversation. He swung the boat alongside with precision, and assisted the girl up the companion.

Aboard the wrecker the crew watched these proceedings with interest. The big mate bit off a piece of tobacco and settled himself comfortably in the sun upon the deck with his head just above the rail.

"Here comes the boat for us," grinned Captain Sanders, poking his head out of the cuddy. The rest grinned silently in turn.

Captain Smart came alongside, and the big mate rose to a sitting position at the rail, squirting a stream of tobacco over the side, barely missing the gig.

"Mr. Dunn, the owner of the *Sayonara*, would like to see you aboard the schooner," said Smart, addressing the black.

"What fur?" growled the giant.

"Oh, he has some business, I suppose—will you come?"

Sanders winked at his mate, and a Dutchman named Heldron nudged him in the ribs.

"Sho', I'll come," said the mate.

"Me, too," said Sanders, winking hard at the rest. "I'm the captain of the wreckin'-sloop *Seahorse*, an' it's no more'n proper for me to pay my respect to his nibs. This here little black boy"—pointing to the black giant—"is my first officer. They calls him Bahama Bill. He's a bad man to call out o' his name."

Bahama Bill frowned and his ugly face leered for a moment at the crew on deck. Then he swung easily over the side and dropped with a crash into the small boat. Some of the men sniggered, but Sanders gave them a look and followed.

"Shove off," said Smart, and in a moment the gig was heading for the yacht.

Upon the deck of the schooner the

captain and mate of the *Seahorse* seemed slightly out of place, but Bahama Bill swaggered aft with an air that had little retirement or modesty about it, and his skipper followed behind him.

The giant mate was much amused by the immaculate decks, the new rigging, and, above all, the spotless clothes of the crew. He knew a good ship, and this toy, this playship of the rich Northerner was much to his liking, for the *Sayonara* was strongly built and had much valuable material in her building.

Dunn was sitting under the awning aft when the visitors were announced. Sanders, hat in hand, stood awkwardly smiling and smirking at the ladies, but his mate cocked his cap over his ear and leered savagely at the owner.

"You sent fur us, cap—an' here we is," said he.

Dunn had been watching them for several seconds.

"Yes, yes, my good man, I wanted to see you," he said. "Do you know of any one who wants a job cooking aboard here? I heard there were some good sea-cooks knocking about these keys, perhaps you're one—what?"

"Does I look like a cook?" said Bahama Bill, staring at him.

"Most certainly not, but appearances are sometimes deceptive. Maybe you know of one—what?"

"I does," said Bill.

"Can you get him aboard here today?" asked Dunn.

"I cayn't—nussur. I cayn't."

"Why not? I'll give good pay—fifty dollars. Steady job, if they make good."

"Well, de onliest good cook I knows is 'Scrappy Jule,' dey calls her——"

"Oh, no, she won't do; we don't want any disrep——"

"She's my wife," went on Bill, with a smoothness in his tone that made his captain smile broader than ever, "an' don't reckon she'll come abo'd no boat onless hit's me dat takes her."

"Perhaps she'll do some washing for us, then?"

Bill stared at the yachtsman for nearly a minute, and the smile died away from Sanders' face.

"Look here, yo' white man, did yo' send fur us to come ober heah to listen to a lot ob nonsense?" said Bill solemnly. "What yo' takes me fur, anyhow? We comes ober to take a drink an' pass de time o' day like ship's officer, an' yo' begins wid a lot o' foolishness 'bout cooks an' washerwomen. What yo' reckon I am?"

"Good heavens! Captain Smart, come here a minute," called Mr. Dunn, while the two ladies who were near enough to hear the last part of the conversation sat staring at the wreckers in amazement.

"Take these men forward and give 'em liquor," said Dunn, as his skipper came aft, "and then send them back aboard their craft. They won't suit us."

"You men come with me," said Smart, motioning to Sanders and Bahama Bill. His tone was quiet, but there was no mistaking its meaning. He had seen enough of them, and would put them back aboard their craft. He had known from the first that it was a mistake to have brought them. They were a rough, independent type who respected no one, a type that had furnished the worst class of buccaneers and pirates some generations before. The West Indies had been infested with them for years, and these wreckers, the descendants of the wild seamen of the Spanish Main, were not the kind of men for a yacht.

Bahama Bill glared sourily at the men forward as he made his way to the gangway followed by Sanders.

"I don't drink with no such po' white men as yo'," said the giant. "Yo' kin put me back abo'd the *Seahorse*—sorry I came."

"I'll take a pull afore I go," put in Sanders. "Bring out yer pizen an' let's have a try at it. I seen more onsociable fellers than your owner—but I can't quite call to mind jest where."

"You ought to know yachtsmen, captain," said Smart. "There's a difference between them and seamen. I'll drink with you, if you don't mind."

"Naw, yer needn't. I don't want nothin' more to do with yer—see? I drinks alone."

Smart took a bottle of liquor from the boy, who had brought it from the cabin and poured a tumblerful, handing it to Sanders.

"Drink, and make your get-away," he said.

Sanders tossed off the glassful, and looked hard at him.

"I'll go when I git good an' ready," he said. "Don't give me none o' your slack, or I'll take it out o' yer." Then he flung the dregs of the liquor into Smart's face.

The sting of the fiery stuff blinded the captain for an instant, but it also angered him enough to do a foolish thing. He brought the bottle down upon the wrecker's head and stretched him upon the deck. The next instant he was seized by the giant black man and flung like a coil of rope into the scuppers.

"Don't make no rough-house, or you'll be sorry. Put us abo'd the *Seahorse*," said the big mate.

Dunn had rushed for the cabin at the first signs of a fracas, and now came forward with a rifle held in readiness.

Smart saw that any further strain would result in bloodshed, and he was used to handling men. With strong self-control he sprang to his feet and held up his hand to Dunn. Then he called for the boat in a natural tone, and the men who had witnessed the trouble obeyed.

The yacht's deck was not the place for an affair of force. Captain Smart knew it at once and deplored his action. In a second he could precipitate a fight that would be fatal to at least one or more men, for Dunn was an excellent shot and exceedingly quick. The mate of the *Seahorse* cared as little for the rifle as for a cane, if he once broke loose. Even Sanders would not hesitate to face any kind of weapon. The two wreckers were ushered over the side and rowed back to their craft.

Bahama Bill was sullenly silent all the afternoon. Something, an indefinable something of refinement, of an air above what he had been used to, had kept him from an outbreak aboard the yacht. He had many times gone forth on the beach and made rough-house for the sport of it, handling half a dozen tough longshoremen, armed and unarmed. On the *Sayonara* the presence of the ladies had kept him in check. He could not quite understand it. Sanders had less control of himself, and growled out vengeance during the hours of daylight. When it grew dark he took his mate to one side.

"When the tide turns we'll rake her—hey?" he said.

"I dunno—I cayn't quite make up my mind," said Bill.

"Feared?"—with a sneer.

"Feared o' what?" asked the black man.

"Oh, I dunno. I reckon the captain, or the owner—hey?"

Bahama Bill spat disdainfully over the side into the dark water where the phosphorus shone in the ripples. He sat for an hour upon the rail, and the rest of the crew watched him, for they knew pretty well what was coming.

After supper the big mate went on deck. Heldron brought him a hook, a powerful instrument with a long tooth that would reach well into the seams of a vessel and pull out any calking that might be there. Sanders took out a fine, steel bar, a regular jimmy, and joined them. The rest of the crew remained below and played checkers or cards, making no comment whatever.

The giant mate took the bar and hook and slid gently over the side, and the next instant they saw a thin line of fire, his wake, leading toward the yacht.

Aboard the yacht the incident of the afternoon was almost forgotten. Miss Harsha played the piano and Mrs. Dunn sang sea songs, while Dunn smoked and applauded alternately. The men were all below, and only Smart and his mate, a tall Yankee sailor from Maine, sat on deck, for the air was chill.

"Looks like we'll have a bit o' weath-

er coming along soon," said the mate to Smart; "heavy bank makin' to th' north'ard."

The captain smoked in silence. He thought of the scene on deck that day, and he felt more than ever that Miss Harsha had reason to feel displeased at his attentions. He remembered the nights upon the liner when he had taken the girl for walks against the rules of the company, the usual ending of such affairs, and the cold-blooded manner in which she had sent him off. He was occupied intensely with his thoughts and keenly disgusted. In the dark water alongside a large fish seemed to make considerable disturbance and attracted his attention. He went to the rail and looked over, and instantly the creature, whatever it was, sank below the surface. Then he went back and smoked.

Bahama Bill, the wrecker, had reached the yacht and had started to work her seams about three strakes below the water-line. It was his business to drag out the oakum and spread the seam, leaving nothing but a bare thread to keep the water from coming into the hull.

It was an old game, but new to the vicinity and victims. When the vessel filled and sank, which she would surely do if not docked at once, the wreckers would be on hand to claim their salvage. As this would amount to about one-third the value of the yacht, it would be worth while. Even if the marks of bar and hook were discovered, no one, unless an expert in the methods of the reefers, would suspect what had caused the trouble. No one could possibly give any testimony of any value against the wreckers.

They would board her boldly at just the right moment, and, knowing her condition, would have no rivals on hand. Her salvage would ease the pain of the insults they had received at the hands of her owner. He wouldn't drink with them—what? He would wish he had drunk many bottles before they were through with him, the rich bum. Who was he to put on airs to them?

The giant black diver had raked the seam and then swung his weight upon the bar. The two-inch planking of the small vessel gave to his tremendous strength. His head, a foot beneath the surface, kept him out of sight while he worked, but he had to raise it clear every little while to breathe. At these times he turned his eyes upward and tried to pierce the gloom, letting just his nose come out, and drawing breath ready for instant disappearance should any one be looking over the side.

It was desperate work, toiling there in the tideway, and, in spite of his power, he found that he must rest after the first seam had been raked to the bends. He jammed the bar fast in a seam and clung to it, lying at full-length and letting his body float with the current.

The night was quite still and very dark. The bank of cloud in the north told of a heavy wind approaching, the uncomfortable norther which sweeps at periods over the reef during the winter months. The water, however, was always warm; the close proximity of the Gulf Stream kept it near the temperature of eighty all through the year. While he rested, he was aware of a movement in the sea near him, and he sniffed the air uneasily. The smell of a shark was plain in his nostrils.

To lie quietly in the sea at night with a shark in the vicinity was to invite almost certain destruction. To thresh about aimlessly would surely attract attention from the deck above, and bring death in the shape of a rifle-bullet, or, worse yet, a boat, which would catch him before he could gain the *Seahorse*. He left the bar in the *Sayonara's* side, and, grasping the hook, swam strongly to the bobstay.

Silently the mighty black hauled himself clear of the water, just as a long shadow, darker than the surrounding sea passed beneath him, leaving a long line of fire to mark its passage. He had cleared with about a second to spare. The sea-monster passed on down the tide toward the open ocean, but Bahama Bill waited before slipping back again to his task.

In a short time he worked the next seam; then, taking the thin cotton line he had fast about him as a belt, he unwound it, pulled the last of the calking oakum out, and replaced it quickly with the line the entire length of the destroyed seam, leaving the ends clear to be jerked forth at a moment's notice. It would at once let a stream of water into the hull of the yacht which would test her pumps to their fullest capacity, and where he had worked there was hardly a trace of violence. A few augur-holes would have accomplished the end more readily, but they would remain as telltale evidence. The starting of a seam and butts could not be proven against such careful work.

At the right minute the wreckers would pull the cord, and then it would be—stand by the pumps or run her ashore. All they would have to do now would be to follow her about the reef until she arrived at a spot conveniently far from a tugboat or dry dock, follow her like a shark until, wounded and unable to keep the sea, they would fall upon her the instant her crew and owner would leave her, or call for help.

Bahama Bill had just put the finishing touches upon his excellent work, and was resting, preparatory to swimming back to the *Seahorse*, where he knew Sanders and the rest were awaiting his arrival with some impatience. He had his bar jammed in a seam, and was hanging upon it, when the mate of the *Sayonara* happened to peer over the side.

The wrecker saw him just in time, and sank from view. In doing so he made a slight disturbance in the sea, and the phosphorus flared and trailed from him, giving him the long shape beneath the surface common to a fish of about his length.

"I reckon I'll take a whack at them fellers swimmin' around us," said the sailor to Smart, "seems to me there might be a barracuda, or jew-fish, loafing about. I'm going to get the harpoon."

Bill, instead of making good his getaway, at this moment, hung easily onto his resting-place and poked his head clear about the time the mate had ceased speaking. Seeing that the head over the rail had gone, the wrecker started to pull his bar clear, and had just shoved off from the yacht's side, when the mate arrived with the iron.

The long Yankee had been accustomed to spearing sword-fish upon his native coast in summer, and he hesitated not an instant, but hurled the iron at the form below him. As he did so Bill saw the movement and gave a mighty shoot ahead. It saved his life by a fraction of a second, but the iron struck him fair upon the ankle and passed through between his heel-cord, or tendon, and the bone. He was hung as securely as a quarter of beef upon a hook.

"I got him," yelled the mate. "Lend me a hand, Captain Smart."

"Killed him outright," said the captain. "He makes no flurry for a heavy fish. Must have struck his back-bone."

They put their weight upon the line, and it came in easily, hauling as though a log were fastened to the iron. And in the meantime Bahama Bill was whirling over, trying to think of some way to cut clear.

Still holding to his bar, the giant wrecker came swashing alongside the yacht, making a lot of foam and fire, which completely hid his identity. By good luck the men above him stopped hauling just when his great weight began to put a heavy strain upon the line.

Captain Smart, not wishing to trust the thin runner, went for a heavy line to make a bowline to slip over the fish's tail and heave him aboard shipshape. Bill jammed the jimmy into a seam and worked it far enough in to get a strong hold. His head was half-submerged, but he held on while the strain upon the harpoon lifted his leg clear of the sea. His leg was numbed from the wound, and when they slipped the bowline down upon it he knew there was no use of further resistance.

The pain was intense when they put the line to a tackle, and he gave up. Throwing the bar clear to make away with the last evidence of his work, he

let them haul him feet foremost into the air and hang him dangling over the rail.

"A nigger, by all that's holy!" exclaimed the long mate. "Now, how in the name did——"

"The mate of the wrecker," said Smart, slacking the giant down upon the deck and gazing at him. "Hooked in the ankle, all right and seamanlike. Is he drowned?"

"Naw, I ain't drowned," said Bill, staggering to his feet, the iron from the harpoon still transfixing his leg. "Yo' put a stopper on that barb, and pull that iron out. Cayn't a man take a swim without you fellows huntin' him like a bloody fish?"

The mate offered his apologies, somewhat tinged with humor, for the mistake, and, being entirely without suspicion, went below to get a stiff drink for his victim. The giant black stood gazing down at the yacht captain for a moment, and as the wound did not bleed to any extent, he refused to have any further fuss made over it.

"Aren't you afraid of sharks—to be swimming about this harbor in the night?" asked Smart.

"No, I ain't scared o' much," said Bill, "an' I takes it all in good part, yo' ketchin' me the way yo' did. I don't mind the little hole in mah laig, but I do mind hein' h'isted up feet fo'most. I don't allow no liberties wid me body, 'n' ef yo' had dun it a purpose, I sho' would have tu wake yo' up some—but I takes no offense."

The long mate appeared with the liquor, and the wrecker drank it down.

"Ah'm goin' now," said Bill, and without further ado he made a plunge over the rail and was gone. A faint trail of fire showed his rapid progress toward the *Seahorse*, and his captors were left alone again on deck.

"That was something strange—what?" said the mate.

"'Twas a bit out of the ordinary," said Smart, thinking of the strangeness of the scene, the dark night, the disturbed water, and the sudden appearance of a giant negro hauled on deck feet foremost by a bowline run over a whale-iron. "You better keep an anchor-watch to-night. Some of those fellows might steal half our brasswork before morning. I'm going to turn in. Good night."

II.

In the brisk wind of the failing norther, the *Sayonara* hoisted her snowy canvas. The mainsail, taut as a board and white as the coral-beach, stood with luff cutting the wind and leach cracking gently while the boom-tackles held it like a hound in leash. The foresail was run up, and the word was passed aft that the ship was ready.

Mr. Dunn stood near the companion and chatted to Miss Harsha, while Mrs. Dunn entertained two marine officers from the yard with tales of the yacht. The reception aboard the day before had been a success, and these remaining guests were to spend a week cruising to the northward as far as Boca Grande.

Dunn was a keen fisherman, and would try for tarpon, the giant herring of the reef.

"I tell you, Miss Marion," said he, "it's a great sport. It takes skill to land one of those fellows, skill to hook him, skill to play him, and skill to kill 'em—are you a good fisherman?"

Miss Marion, pug-nosed, fat, and not entirely good-natured, thought a moment. Not upon fish, but concerning certain officers she had known lately.

"I—er—I really don't quite know, you know. I never tried it. It must be something grand. It appeals to me, the idea of fishing. It must be awfully exciting when you've hooked him." And her eyes roved just for a moment in the direction of Mrs. Dunn and her friends.

"She's hove short, sir," said Smart, coming near. "Shall we break her out and let her go? The tide is just right, and the wind a close reach up the Hawk's Channel."

"Er—yes. I don't know. Well, yes, let her go. What's the odds?" murmured Dunn, losing interest suddenly. "You'll excuse me, Miss Marion." And he went down the companionway.

"When in doubt, take a drink," he repeated to himself. "Maybe I'll run into some people who think of something besides their—their——" but he left the sentence unfinished as he drank off a dram of gin and lime-juice. Dunn was a bit of a sport at bottom, and his wife's friends were not—not of the kind he was used to. It was hard to run a yacht as big as his schooner for the amusement of silly women, and even more silly men.

Captain Smart hove up his anchor, hoisted both jib and staysail, and while the trim little ship broke off to port, the white-ducked crew neatly catted her hook and stretched up her topsails, sending out a big balloon forward which bellied out and sent her racing through the northwest passage.

It was a beautiful day, and the sun shining upon the white hull made a very pretty picture of the fabric rushing through a whitening path upon the blue water. The solid-silver trophies in the saloon were made fast in their places, for the vessel was leaning heavily away from the breeze, and Dunn locked his little buffet and came on deck to join his guests.

The men of the *Seahorse* watched the yacht until she was hull-down to the northward, her canvas alone marking the spot of her whereabouts, which was changing at the rate of ten knots an hour. But they were in no particular hurry to follow.

Sanders had found out where she was bound, and it was not until late in the afternoon, when the sun was setting, that the *Seahorse* hoisted her dirty mainsail. Then she stood away for Cuba, passing out by the Sand Key Light into the Gulf Stream.

When darkness fell she was shortened down and allowed to drift along slowly with the current, which took her many miles before the following day.

In the morning the *Sayonara* stood in through the pass of Boca Grande. It is here that the tarpon, the giant herring of the south sea, makes his entrance to the shallow waters of the Florida reef. Dunn lost no time engaging guides and preparing for the kill. In the waters of the reef one does not catch fish; he kills them. A tarpon is not usually eaten, and is caught solely for the excitement of the fight. Nearly all the great game fish are equally unpalatable, therefore the sportsman has long ceased to speak of his catch, which in other waters is useful, and generally brought home for food.

The small boats were gotten overboard, and the party, made up in pairs with a guide to each, headed into the pass. Boats from the floating hotel back among the keys joined them, and during the forenoon the fish struck.

Dunn managed to land two huge fellows, but the boat containing Miss Harsha and the major of marines caught nothing. If there was an attempted killing, it was only witnessed by the guide, and he, being a discreet "Conch," had the good taste to remain silent forever afterward.

Late in the evening, after the fish had stopped striking, the party sat upon the deck of the *Sayonara* enjoying the soft air of the semitropical sea. Far away to the southward the sail of a single vessel rose above the sapphire rim of the horizon. The air was warm, and felt almost oppressive. There was evidently going to be a change in the weather, and Smart noticed it at once.

"The glass has fallen considerable since morning," said he to Dunn, "and the pass is not the best anchorage in the world. I don't exactly like the idea of lying so far off."

"We'll stay as long as the fish bite," said Dunn. "Now that I've gotten here you'll not scare me away until there's something happened. Give her plenty of scope and let her ride it out, if it blows. A bit of motion will do the party good, shake 'em up and put some sense into them. Stay where you are."

"All right, sir," said Captain Smart. "I don't want to cut out the sport, but if I know anything of the weather by signs, it'll sure blow some before this time to-morrow. The warm weather may make the fish come in, but it means something back of it. It's too late in

the season for such warm air up here, or it's too early. We'll catch it from the southeast, and we'll have a nasty sea where we are lying."

"Let her blow," said Dunn, "but when in doubt, take a drink." He went below.

"I do so wish we would have a terrible storm—then you could have a chance to show how superior a U. S. marine officer is in an emergency," said Miss Harsha, smiling up at the major, who had noticed the threatened weather and had heard part of the conversation between Dunn and his captain.

The major leered at her. He was trying to think how a pug-nose and freckles would inspire him at the psychological moment. It seemed to cause him an effort, for he spoke wearily in reply.

"You remember what we did at Guantanamo?" he said.

"Yes, but I have heard of nothing else since the Spanish War," said the girl sweetly. "You surely have something else in the record of your excellent corps, for I know personal bravery exists everywhere in it. I love heroes —men who can do things. It's foolish, no doubt, but, then, most women are foolish. What use would your beautiful uniform be to us if we were not?"

The major gazed out over the darkening sea and watched the tiny speck of white where the single sail rose above the horizon. He was tired and thirsty, and he had seen Dunn go below.

"We are to have a fish-dinner—I must go and get out of these fish-killing togs," said Miss Harsha, and she left him to follow his inclinations.

The night was dark and quiet, the sea murmuring distantly under the black pall which crept up from the southward. The glass fell lower, and Smart ranged twenty fathoms of cable to let out when the wind struck. He also got his heavy anchor ready to let go, with sixty more, and made ready with hemp-stoppers to take the strain off the bitts when she surged.

There were only four fathoms of water in the part of the pass where they lay, and with a great scope to both anchors he felt certain that he could hold on unless some accident happened.

The sea would not break where he lay, on account of the formation of the reef beyond, and if he could get all his line out before she started to drag, he could hold her without great danger, although she would do some lively jumping if it blew heavy. A man on watch would report the first change for the worse.

By midnight all was silent aboard. The anchor-light burned brightly, and its rays fell upon the form of the man upon the forecastle, who nodded drowsily. The calm continued, and the great flame from the lighthouse at the pass sent long streaks into the darkness.

Coming along with the flood tide and just going fast enough to keep steering-way upon her, a small vessel headed into the pass, burning no lights and heading close to where the *Sayonara* lay. At her helm a giant negro sprawled, and upon her deck several men lay in attitudes of great ease.

"She lays still, like mit a ghost," said Heldron, peering at the yacht.

"Good graft," said Sam, straining his eyes to catch every detail.

"I reckon we'll git to work on her," said Sanders. "Lower down those jibs and slack the anchor away easy when I luff her under the lee o' that p'int yander. How is it, Bill? Do you feel like swimming to-night?"

Bahama Bill, the mate of the wrecker, growled out an assent. His leg was sore from his experience with the iron in the hands of the *Sayonara's* mate, and his feelings were exceedingly ruffled from certain personal affronts he had endured from the yacht's owner. Could he cook? Could his wife, the renowned Julia, wash? Well, he would ask a few questions, some day after settling his account with the yacht —maybe.

At present the cotton line he had placed in the opened seam was ready to haul out. Then he would witness some work upon that yacht's deck. There would be something doing.

He grinned as he thought of the trim white duck clothes. How they would look after twenty-four hours' work at the pumps! Even the yacht's captain, who seemed to be something of a sailor in spite of his wonderful rig, would have something to do besides sitting about like a well-dressed monkey. And as for those officers, the guests of Dunn—well, he had already had dealings with them, and once spent the night in the "cooler" for ruffling a couple of their Jap messmen.

"Yo' kin lower down the starbo'd boat when we lets go," said Bahama Bill; "'n' I wants one o' you fellers to drap to lor'ard toe pick me up, fer I'll be comin' mighty fast—see?"

Sam understood, and a few minutes later the *Seahorse* had hooked the reef close in the shelter of the key and about a mile distant from the yacht. Her mainsail was left standing, in case of sudden need. They could lower it any minute after the job was done. If anything happened they could stand out in less time than it takes to tell of it, for the head-sails were all ready to hoist and the anchor just holding. Six strokes upon the brakes, and she would go clear. Then, with everything drawing, she would stand through the pass.

The mate dropped into the small boat, and Sam rowed him rapidly ahead of the yacht. He would drop overboard and drift and swim quickly down with the current, while the small boat would circle around at a great distance and out of sight to pick him up after he had finished and drifted astern.

Swimming strongly with a deep breast-stroke which made no foam or noise, Bill slipped through the black sea like a fish. In a short time he gained the anchor-chain, which strained out ahead with the force of the tide upon the hull.

Resting for a few moments and listening to make sure the man on deck had not seen him, he let himself drift along the vessel's side until he reached the end of his line. This he pulled out of the seam and let go.

It opened her for a length of thirty feet—a thin, nasty leak, which would be hard to find and impossible to stop without docking. It was the work of an expert wrecker, and he grinned to himself as he let the current take him away.

Not a mark had he made upon the beautiful, white hull, and yet she was even now filling rapidly through seams which had been carefully calked.

Of course, if the weather remained calm enough for them to work a small boat alongside and study her bilge a couple of feet below the water, they would come upon the seam. But the weather was not going to remain calm very long. He knew it would be blowing hard before daybreak, before there would be any light to see her smooth side below the water where the green of her copper paint had hardly been disturbed.

He had passed his knife along the seam after the line was removed, and it was open. His work was done.

Sam picked him up half a mile astern, and they rowed silently back aboard the *Seahorse*. All the others had turned in, and they did likewise, after lowering down the mainsail and paying out enough cable to hold the vessel should it blow before they awoke. The small boat was towed astern, for they were well back behind the key, and quite sheltered.

In the still hours of the early morning Captain Smart was awakened by the unusual sound of water washing about in the yacht's bilge. He roused himself and listened. The first note of the rising wind droned through the rigging, and the man on watch came to his door to call him. In a moment he was on deck.

The night was still dark, although it was nearly four o'clock. The wind had come from the southeast, and it was freshening every moment. The hands were called, and the cable given to the anchor while the heavy bower was dropped, that she might set back upon them both.

There was plenty of room, and she brought up nicely, riding easily to the fast-increasing sea. She was heading it, and, therefore, had not begun to

plunge enough to wake the party aft. But every moment the whistling snore aloft told of what was coming.

After seeing that his ship was snug and safe for the time being, Smart went below to get into his oilskins. It had not yet started to rain, but it was coming, and he would not have time to leave the deck if anything went wrong.

While he sat upon his bunk-edge he again heard the washing sound from below. It came loud and insistent, not to be confounded with the wash from the sea outside. At that moment the mate came into his room.

"What's the matter below, sir?" he asked. "Sounds like we've got water in her. Shall I try the pumps?"

"Well, if we do, it will frighten every one. It's going to blow a regular snorter. There can't be any water in her—she's tight as a bottle. You might sound her, but don't let any one see you do it."

Before Smart had buttoned on his sou'wester, the mate came below again. He had a naturally long face and seemed solemn even in his most happy moment. Now he pulled a face as long as a rope-yarn.

"Four feet of water in her, sir," he said, and he looked at Smart as though that officer had said something to hurt him.

Smart gazed at him for a moment in perplexity. He saw his mate was sober. He was too good a sailor to come aft with any silly story. He knew there was something wrong, and he sprang up the companion.

In the rush of the wind on deck all sounds from below were, of course, silenced. The droning roar in the rigging as squall after squall tore past made it evident that it was beginning to blow some. Forms appeared aft, and Dunn came staggering along the rail to the mainmast followed by his male guests.

"Will she hold on all right?" called Dunn to his captain, who now stood at the pump-well with the sounding-line in his hand. It was too dark for the owner to notice the skipper's movements, but Smart put the line out of sight.

"Oh, yes, she'll hold, all right," bawled the captain. "You better go below for a bit, or else put on your rain-clothes; it's going to wet up here soon."

The men stood near the mast for a few moments, and, seeing that nothing unusual was taking place, began edging aft again. A spurt of rain sent them down the cabin companion, and Smart dropped his line into the well. It showed a depth of four and a half feet of water below, or just up to the cabin floor.

Something must be done at once. All hands were called to the pumps, and the clank of the brakes warned the owner that all was not well. He came on deck with his guests, and as they were now in their rain-clothes, Smart requested them to get busy. He would need all the men he could get to keep her clear.

Daylight dawned upon a wild sea to the eastward. The reef roared in a deep thunder, but the heaviest sea was shut off from them. Streaming scud fled past above them with the gale, and the mastheads seemed to pierce a gray sky, which hurled itself to the northward at a terrific rate.

The sea that struck the *Sayonara* was short, and had a great velocity, but it was not high enough to make her plunge bows under. She rode it with short jerks and leaps, smashing into it and sending a storm of flying water as high as her crosstrees. This the wind hurled aft and away in a heavy shower.

She was holding to one hundred fathoms on one, and seventy fathoms upon her largest anchor, and as the sea was shallow where she lay, the taut chains stretched right out ahead, like two stiff bars of metal.

"How did it happen—what is it?" Dunn kept asking; but his skipper could give no response. All he knew was that she was filling fast, so fast that they could just keep her about even with the leak. It was three hours before it showed less than four feet of water below, and by that time the men were getting tired.

Smart told off the watches, and sent one below for a rest while the makeshift cook tried to get all hands some coffee. They were going to have plenty of work cut out for them, and they needed all the rest and refreshment they could get.

With only one watch at the pumps the water began to gain slowly upon them, and by noon it was as high as ever again. The yacht plunged heavily under this extra weight, and Smart gave her every link he had aboard, afterward putting heavy stoppers upon both cables to take the strain of the setback from the bitts.

He had done all he could, and now waited with anxious eye upon the glass, hoping for the shift which he knew must soon come. If he could hang on for another twelve hours, he felt certain he would ride the gale down safely; then—well, then it was up to Dunn to say whether to risk a run to Key West or beach her. Just now the sea was too heavy to think of going to leeward anywhere. She would go to pieces on the reef.

Smart crouched under the lee of the foremast, watching men and anchors alternately. Dunn joined him.

"The women are getting a bit nervous, Smart," said the owner. "There's no danger as long as she holds, is there?"

"Not a bit," was the short answer. He was thinking how much easier it would have been if Dunn had allowed him to make a good anchorage before the blow began.

"Well, I'll go below and tell 'em—when in doubt take a drink—come!" And his two guests followed him.

All that wild day the *Sayonara* tugged and plunged at the end of her cable, the water gaining slowly in her bilge; and when the darkness with all its terrors came on, the men began to have some misgivings as to what the yacht would do.

Just as the wild night darkened the storm-torn sea, Smart wiped the ends of his glasses to get them free from the flying salt water and spume. He then took a last look around to see if anything was in sight. Only the lighthouse showed above the waste of reef and white water to the westward. Not a sign of humanity. Not a thing else from which to expect human sympathy.

Suddenly he noticed something like a mast rising from behind the end of the key. Yes, it was a single vessel, snug and close in behind the shelter. He could not make out her hull, or he would have at once recognized the *Seahorse,* victor over many a hard-fought battle with the elements of the Florida reef, now lying snug and safe as a house with her crew below. He was not aware of it, but a pair of eyes were at that moment gazing fixedly at his vessel, peering out of a dirty porthole.

Bahama Bill had never ceased to watch the yacht from the first drone of the storm, and all the night the giant mate had kept watch upon the tiny star of his anchor-light as it rose and fell with each plunge.

As the night wore on and the water had not gained sufficiently to make it necessary to call all hands, Smart went below for the first time and took a good meal, eating heartily of everything, and washing down the food with two large cups of coffee.

It was now nearly midnight, and the glass showed signs of rising. The squalls were of less violence, and the captain hoped now to weather it out safely before putting his ship upon the beach to get at the leak.

While he ate he was aware of a sudden shock. The *Sayonara* seemed to shift her nose from dead into the sea, and then a peculiar trembling of the hull told him of that thing all shipmasters dread. At the same instant the rush of feet sounded upon the deck, and the mate poked his head into the hatchway.

"Starboard anchor's gone, sir—she's dragging back unto the reef inside the light——"

"Get the foresail on her—all hands!" roared Smart, tearing up the ladder.

The *Sayonara* had carried too heavy a load. She was too deep with the water in her, and had at last parted her

steel cable to starboard. The other anchor was not heavy enough to hold her with the extra tons of water below; she had broken it clear, and was dragging it back—back upon the coral bank, where she would soon be a wreck if she struck.

One instant told Smart what he must do. He was too far in to try to get to sea, and, even if he were not, he could not drive the half-sunken vessel up against that sea and wind. To do so would be certain destruction, for there would be no chance to keep the leak under. He must run her in and beach her where it would be least dangerous.

In the blackness of midnight he might make a mistake and hit a bad spot, but it was the only chance. If he could get her far enough in behind the key to make a lee upon the bank beyond, he might save her—at least save all hands. There was little room to work her, but she was a stanch ship.

"Cut the chain—break it with an ax!" he bawled. And the men sprang to obey.

The thunder of the close-reefed foresail brought Dunn from below, but as he was no use forward he wisely remained aft. His two guests stood near him. A feminine form appeared in the companionway.

Smart was at the wheel, rolling it hard over to break the yacht off and fill away the foresail, but he caught the words:

"Oh, isn't it grand? A real storm! Oh, major, this is what you're used to. I know you will bring us out of it all right. No, I don't need a wrap, my dear Mrs. Dunn. Splendid!".

The *Sayonara* filled away, the chain was broken, and the dragging anchor left behind. With the wind upon her quarter, she tore away through the night, leaving a white path astern.

Smart strained his eyes for the edge of the bank behind the lower key. It was the most sheltered spot, but even in a sheltered spot to leeward there would be a mighty sea breaking, with the wind blowing with hurricane force. He would do the best he could.

The whole uselessness of the affair lay upon him, and he swore, muttering at the folly of his owner. A little shelter and the yacht would have ridden down anything as long as she would float. The leak would not have mattered so much had they been in out of that heavy sea that made her surge so heavily upon her cables. He could have kept it under easily enough, but now he was running the vessel to her end to save those aboard.

The light of the Boca Grande Pass showed him the direction of the reef. The surrounding blackness showed nothing. He must make his landing by the bearing of the lighthouse, and trusting that his distance would be run right.

A heavy squall snored over him, and the straining bit of foresail responded to the furious rush, heeling the *Sayonara* down to her deck. All about them the water was snow-white with the sweep of the wind. He heard a call from forward, and saw his mate running aft at full speed. A heavier sea lifted the yacht, heeled her to leeward; then there was a tremendous shock.

A wild burst of sea tore over the yacht, the following sea had broken against her side as she stopped in her run. The water was blinding, but Smart could feel her swing up, and off from the wind. The wheel was suddenly whirled out of his hands, and with a crash the *Sayonara* set her heel again into the coral of the reef.

"Get below, every one," roared Smart, and the struggling Dunn, with the major, who had been washed to leeward, fought their way back to the companion.

Smart shoved them roughly down and followed, closing the hatchway after him. It was the only way. To remain on deck while the sea broke over her would be to invite almost certain death. Again and again the yacht rose and crashed down upon the coral bank beneath, the smashing crash of her rending timbers making a deafening noise to those confined in her. It was like being within a drum while it was being beaten by a mighty stick.

If they could remain below until the

vessel drove well up on the bank, it would be well. If the filling hold drove them on deck they would have to face a whirling sea, which was breaking in a wild smother clear across the wreck. Smart watched the water rising above the cabin floor, and waited.

Forward, the mate had got the crew below and closed all hatches. It would be some time before she filled full enough to drive them on deck, and all the time the stanch little craft was driving higher and higher up the bank into shallow water.

Smart took a look at the glass. It was rising. There would be three more hours of inky darkness, and he hoped the little ship would last it out. In the morning it would break clear, and there would be good weather, a splendid chance to save not only the people aboard the vessel, but much of her valuable fittings.

Dunn tried to calm the fears of his guests. The major, white and ghastly in the light of the cabin lamp, tried to put on an air of unconcern. His companion tried to joke with Miss Harsha, but even that young woman seemed to feel that the storm was entirely too real, the end not quite in sight.

"When in doubt, take a drink," suggested the owner, and proceeded to fill three glasses. A sudden rise and smash of the yacht flung the glasses to leeward, where they shivered into fragments upon the cabin deck. Dunn saved his whisky only by hanging onto it with one hand, while he clung to the buffet with the other.

The water rose rapidly in the cabin. It was over the floor two feet deep by three o'clock, and the mate came through the bulkhead door and announced that the yacht had stove amidships, and was hanging upon a point of coral, which prevented her from driving farther in.

As near as he could make out, there was still seven feet of water alongside to leeward, the vessel now lying almost broadside to the sea, which broke heavily over her. She had been drawing twelve feet, and had driven up five feet, resting upon her starboard bilge, except when she lifted with the sea. Something must be done, for the water would be too deep below to remain there much longer. It would be at least five feet deep in the cabin, and would swash about enough to drown any one.

The roar of the wind was growing rapidly less, but the crash of the seas prevented Smart from noting it definitely. He waited and watched the rising flood. O for a little daylight, to see where he had struck! Was there a chance to make a landing? To put off in that smother in the small boats without knowing where he would bring up was too disagreeable to contemplate until the last moment.

The water gained steadily, and the women became panicky. The major no longer jested, and Dunn was not in doubt. He had stopped drinking, for the peril of the night was upon him now in earnest.

Smart, with the mate, made his way on deck, closing the hatchway after them. They crawled along the weather-rail and gained the waist, where the whale-boat was snugly stowed under the shelter of the rail to leeward. The water broke over them constantly, but the wind was going down, and Smart decided to make ready to try to effect a landing.

The whale-boat was in perfect order, and it would hold all hands, but he decided that half of the crew should make the first attempt, in order to see if there was any place to make the beach. They could bring her back for the rest, and if they failed, there was the gig; it would hold the women and the rest of the crew.

When they had the boat over the side, it was all they could do in the darkness to keep it from smashing back with the back-wash of the sea. The mate managed to get four men into her, and sprang in himself. Smart went aft and brought Dunn and some of the others, the major staying with Mrs. Dunn and Miss Harsha. Ten men left the *Sayonara,* and were instantly swallowed up in the gloom. Then Smart

went back below to await the mate's return.

In the meantime the water below had risen so high that even the transoms upon which the refugees perched were several inches under, and at each surge it went all over them, roaring and washing about. The cabin lamp was extinguished, and the black darkness which ensued lent terror to the turmoil in that little cabin.

An hour passed, and no boat came back. It looked ominous. The mate would surely come back if he could. He was evidently lost or unable to pull up against the heavy wind and sea. There was no use waiting any longer. The water was still rising below, and the women must be taken ashore if it were possible.

Smart got the rest of the watch to work upon the gig, and by superhuman efforts they finally swung her to leeward, and held her clear of the side. Miss Harsha was lowered into her, and then Mrs. Dunn. The latter seemed perfectly at ease, and scorned the assistance of the major, who gallantly offered to go with her. The noise of the roaring water precluded any attempt at conversation, and the darkness made all cling close to the rail in a bunch, each helping the other as best they could.

After all hands had jumped in, Smart followed, and gave the order to shove clear, and, with the hope of striking the bank in a safe spot, he headed out from under the lee of the wreck. The gray dawn of early morning was breaking upon the scene, and the wind was falling rapidly. It looked as though there would be no great trouble making the land. But the sea was very heavy.

From under the lee of the wrecked yacht a giant roller, which had failed to burst upon the outer reef, foamed in a huge smother, and swept down upon the small boat. Smart had kept her head to the sea, and was allowing her to drift back very slowly, so that in case he saw a bad place he could pull out and away without turning around. The surge struck her and filled her half-full, but she rose again and rode safely. Men bailed for dear life.

In the growing light Smart saw the rise of the bank to leeward, and the sea falling heavily upon it. It was a most dangerous surf for a small boat. He stopped his craft, and lay heading the sea for half an hour, waiting for a chance to run in, and in the meantime the dawn came to reveal the desolate coral bank.

Smart stood up and looked about him. Not a sign of the whale-boat showed anywhere. His own craft was taking the sea heavily, and kept every one not rowing busy bailing. He saw it was no use waiting any longer, and began to go back into the surf.

Steering with one of the oars, he managed to keep the craft's head to the sea until they were in less than six feet of water. The bank being flat for nearly a mile to leeward of the yacht, the seas rolled foaming across it. He was within a quarter of a mile of the dry reef, which showed in the growing light, when a rolling sea caught the small boat and swerved her head a bit.

The next instant the steering-oar broke, and before the men rowing could swing her straight to the sea, she took the following one broadside and rolled over in the smother.

Smart had a vision of floundering men, women, and boat. The seas broke over his head and blinded him, strangled him, and seemed to hold him under. It was all white water, rolling foam, and it was almost impossible to breathe in it.

Then the sense of the danger dawned upon him with renewed force, and he struggled to where the dress of Miss Harsha showed upon the surface. He seized her, and dragged her to the upturned boat.

The major was already holding on to the keel, assisted by two men. Mrs. Dunn swam easily alongside, and grasped a line thrown her. The painter was passed along the keel and made fast to a ring-bolt aft. Then all hands held fast to this line, and waited for the sea to wash them in.

After an hour of struggling it be-

came apparent that the boat was not nearing the shallow water fast enough. The tide was ebbing, and setting her out to the deep water; carrying her to the heavy sea, where it would soon be impossible to live.

"If you will take Miss Harsha, major," said Smart, "you will be able to make a landing. Take two men with you, and swim her ashore before it's too late."

"I think I'll stay by the boat," said the major.

The girl was half-fainting.

"It's my duty to stay by the boat, Mrs. Dunn," said Smart, "but unless some one takes Miss Marion in, we'll lose her. I'm going to try for it."

Taking the ablest man to help him, Smart fastened a couple of the oars together, for an aid to float, and then started the struggle in through the surf.

It was a long, desperate fight through the broken water over the flat coral bank. Sometimes they would be able to touch the bottom, and then were swept from their feet again by the sea. Sometimes they would be gaining, and then the current, sweeping strongly out, would set them offshore until the fight seemed hopeless.

With the girl's head resting upon his shoulder, and the oars under his arms, Smart kept the struggle up. The sailor helped him, and finally they managed to get into water shoal enough to stand. Then they were aware of forms approaching along the shore, and they recognized the mate and his men who had gone in the whale-boat. In a few minutes willing hands dragged them to the dry land.

The mate's boat had been stove in, and this had kept him from coming back. He had made a successful landing, but had failed to notice the other until a few minutes before he had sighted Smart in the breakers.

A glimpse of sunlight shot through the flying scud. The wind was slacking up and the sea going down very fast. The key they were upon was separated from the one with the light by a broad sheet of water. They were unable to reach any help from there.

While they gazed at the speck of the upturned boat, Smart rubbed the wrists of the fainting girl, and endeavored to revive her.

The mate spoke up. "Seems like I see a boat coming around the key to the s'uthard," he said.

From the masthead of the *Seahorse*, Bahama Bill had seen the accident to the gig, and he was coming into the surf with a heavy boat, manned by a full crew of men who knew the reef. They watched him, and saw him pick up the survivors of the accident, one by one, and then row slowly in to where the rest of the yachting-party stood.

In a short time all were landed safely, and by the time they looked about them they were aware of the wrecking-sloop getting under way and running to leeward from her shelter. She rounded up to windward of the *Sayonara*, and dropped both anchors, paying out cable until she was close to the wreck. Then she signaled to the giant black, and he stood ready to take passengers aboard.

Dunn came forward and began to thank him for his heroism, but the black man looked over his head, and just the faintest flicker of a sneer seemed to show upon his ugly face.

"Yo' think I make a good cook, eh?" he asked, with a leer. "I don't believe yo' need no washin' done fer a day er two. Git inter that boat wid de rest, an' thank me fer takin' yo', yo' gin-drinkin', whisky-swillin', good-fer-nothin' white man." And Dunn did as he was bidden.

Aboard the *Seahorse* they were made as comfortable as possible. That afternoon, when the sea went down and the wind sank to a gentle breeze, the entire party were taken to the light-house in the pass, and arrangements were made to send them to Key West. The major was extremely cool and formal in his manner to all, but Mrs. Dunn cheered them the best she could.

Miss Marion Harsha paid some attention to Captain Smart, more than is usual to a yacht captain; but Smart appeared tired and unresponsive.

"You saved my life," said the girl indulgently, when they were alone at the lighthouse. "You saved me from a very disagreeable death—and I shall never be able to repay you. The major acted abominably. Won't you forget what I said at Key West?"

"Most certainly," said Smart, "but not what you meant. I was a fool—and paid the penalty. I'll go back to the liner to-morrow. There's a great difference between the way we've lived. It could never be forgotten. I forgive you with all my heart, and if you'll allow me, I'll kiss you good-by."

The next day Smart and his owner—owner no longer, for his vessel was too badly wrecked to save—rowed out to get what personal belongings they wanted before starting for Key West. Upon the deck of the *Sayonara* stood the giant mate of the *Seahorse*.

"What yo' want abo'd here?" asked the black man, as they came alongside.

"What d' you mean?" asked Dunn smartly.

"Well, this here wessel was abandoned—left by her crew—an' I be here to take charge," drawled the black. "Yo' cayn't take nothin' away from her without my permission. Ef yo' want to make a deal wid the skipper, he's abo'd de *Seahorse*. We generally claims two-third salvage. Yo' kin make de deal wid him—see?"

Dunn didn't see, but Smart finally convinced him of the truth. It was humiliating, but there was no help for it—it was the law.

"Right fine ship, cap'n," leered Bahama Bill to Smart, after things were settled; "seems a shame to have to wrack her. Wouldn't yo' like a job as cook 'till yo' git another berth?"

ONE PERFORMANCE ONLY

A WELL-KNOWN society entertainer had been engaged to give a performance at a country house. The hostess had "risen," and was of snobbish instincts. She left instructions that the entertainer was to dine with the servants. The butler, who knew better, apologized; but the entertainer was not easily disconcerted.

"Well, now, my good friends," said he, after he had dined well, "if we have all finished, and you are all agreeable, I will give you my little show."

The servants were delighted, and though there was no piano, the entertainer managed very well for half an hour without it. At ten o'clock a message came down asking Mr. Dash if he would kindly come into the drawing-room. He went, and found the company waiting.

"We are quite ready, Mr. Dash," said the hostess.

"Ready for what?" he demanded.

"Why, for your entertainment, to be sure," was the answer.

"But I have given it already," explained the entertainer; "and my engagement was for one performance only."

"Given it! Where? When?"

"Down-stairs; an hour ago."

"But this is nonsense," exclaimed the hostess.

"It seemed to me somewhat extraordinary," was the steady reply; "but it has always been my privilege to dine with the company I am asked to entertain. I took it you had arranged for a little treat for the servants."

Then he left to catch his train.

A Son of the Plains

By Arthur Paterson

Author of "A Man of His Word," "The King's Agent," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The opening scene is a sheep-camp on the Santa Fé trail. Two men are in camp: one Nat Worsley, the camp-master, a young fellow of twenty-two; the other, his old herder, Sebastian Bean, a powerfully built man of fifty-five. A rider dashes into camp and begs food and shelter. He tells a tragic story of how Arapahoe Indians attacked his party, carried off two girls—Bel and Maizie Shelford, who were traveling to New Mexico to join their father—and massacred twenty-five of his companions. Nat goes on the trail of the Arapahoes, and, disguised as an Indian, effects the escape of the captives. Concealing them among his stores in his wagon, he starts across the plains, determined to accompany the girls to New Mexico. At Seckersburg Nat trades his sheep and engages seats for himself and the two girls in the stage for Chico Springs. On the way he learns that the stage is to be held up by Sandy Rathlee's road-agents with the connivance of the driver. To circumvent the plan the driver is overpowered, and Jeff Collingwood, one of the passengers, takes the reins. At Clinter's Ford the stage is surrounded, but Collingwood drives ahead, while Nat and Tam Sanderson, a fellow passenger, pick off the outlaws. They cross the ford safely, but discover that one of the mules has been stabbed and is dying in the shafts.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORDS OF A WISE MAN.

THERE was no more said after this for a long time. Jeff set himself to the task of husbanding the strength of his team, while Nat and Tam held a consultation about the plans of defense if the worst came and the coach broke down.

Everything depended now on the wounded mule. The moon had risen, and the men on the coach, being more or less under cover, had not much to fear from the enemy as long as they could keep going. If, on the other hand, they came to a standstill, the road-agents would fall upon them like a pack of wolves.

Mile after mile went by, and there was no change visible in the mare. The enemy were not far behind now, but they kept their distance. The experience they had gained at the ford did not encourage unnecessary exposure.

"The brute who stabbed her is one of them, you may depend," said Jeff. "He knows where he struck, and they are waiting for her to drop."

Half an hour passed. Ten miles had been covered, but there were ten more to come. The road, which had been level so far, was now beginning to rise, and the work of the mules was harder. Jeff kept his eyes anxiously on the mare, but breathed freely, for she went, if anything, more vigorously than before, and seemed to make nothing of the hill.

"The worst bit is here," he said to Nat. "Once we top this rise the way is easy and smooth, and they will only have to *go*. If she can stand this pull —if she only can!"

Slowly the time passed on, but the mule's strength held. Jeff's trouble was to keep the rest of the team up to her pace. The poor beasts were weary and inclined to flag, and whip and hand and voice had to be used unsparingly. It was hard work. The perspiration streamed down Jeff's face, and he be-

came so hoarse that he could hardly make himself heard, but his energy triumphed, and the pace held.

The crest of the hill was close at hand. It was very steep here, and the road was full of loose stones. Twice the leaders stumbled, and the off-shafter once, but the mare never winced or failed. At last the top was reached, and the strain was over.

The men felt no relief, however, for, behind, the smiting of the hoofs upon the road grew louder; and now, at last, the mule was giving way. She limped a little, and at intervals shuddered so convulsively that her harness shook. When this happened she would almost come to a standstill, but immediately afterward gathered herself together with an effort and dashed forward as fast if not faster than before. Her breath, now coming in deep sobs, told how near the end must be.

Another mile passed, and still the road-agents held back, and still the mule ran on. The end was coming fast. The sobbing breaths were now accompanied by an ominous rattle in the throat, and the blood poured from her nostrils in a stream. Now from behind there came two rifle-shots; the men were closing in.

The mule seemed to hear the sound. Her head, which had been drooping lower and lower, was suddenly raised with a defiant snort, her pace quickened, so that it was all the rest of the team could do to keep up with her. For a minute even the enemy were outdistanced and fell behind. Then the end came.

With a cry, human in its anguish, she staggered and nearly fell. By a great struggle she recovered herself, and sprang forward a few more paces, just preventing an overturn of the coach; then her hind quarters sank under her, and she fell on her side—dead.

Without a word Jeff leaped to the ground and threw his reins away—the mules being glad enough to stand—and drawing his revolver ran to the coach door. Nat was there, and they stood side by side. Above them lay Tam, the shotgun in his hand and a rifle by his side. He was to form the reserve.

The enemy charged up with a yell. But before they reached the coach, before the defenders had fired a shot, the trampling of many horses was heard, and from the front came a voice deep as a growl of thunder:

"Road-agents, by the Lord! Right and left, boys! Fire on every one who moves! Quick, or they'll slip away! S'help us all, what luck! it's the gang of Sandy Rathlee."

The road-agents had fallen into the lion's jaws. The owner of the stentorian voice was Dave Calderon, the sheriff of Las Animas County; and with him were a score of sheriff's officers. Resistance was out of the question. Two escaped—Sandy Rathlee and the man who stabbed the mule. The rest surrendered at discretion.

Mr. Calderon was a man of swift action. With his own hands he wounded one road-agent and shot the horse of another. Then he sprang off his horse and opened the coach door.

"How are we here? Glad to see you standing fire, boys. Let *me* pass, though, I guess. Ah—ha! Womenfolk—beg pardon—ladies." Off came his hat, and he bowed like a Spanish grandee. "A prisoner, by George! What—Dick! Well, I'm—beg pardon, ladies—blessed! Bad—bad—bad. Boys" —to the men outside—"lend a hand here. Ladies and gentlemen, step out, please. No danger. Allow me, ma'am. Now, good dog, don't get hurt by biting me."

All this in a breath, and then, bareheaded, he handed Maizie and Bel from the coach, beaming upon them more like a jovial Santa Claus than the grim police officer he was. But when he saw their faces under the coach-lamp he started.

"What's this? Ain't I speaking to Maizie and Bel Shelford, of Chico Springs? I thought my eyes weren't going back on me yet. You don't recollect me, I see. How should ye? You was both little tots when I saw you last. If the world don't run round fast —when I see you grown-up women!

But you are not hurt anyways, or robbed? Tell me that!"

He had taken Maizie's hand in his right and Bel's in his left, and was shaking them both heartily.

In reply to their assurances that they were safe, and in full possession of all their belongings, he shook hands again, and, in the transport of his feelings, seemed about to kiss them. He refrained, on second thoughts, and laughed instead. Then seeing that others wished to speak to him he became the sheriff again at once.

"Are you boys passengers? Had a tight time, I guess. I'll want to hear all about this. But we must get into town first. Who ran the coach through after Dick was tied up—you?"

He spoke to Nat.

"No."

"Who, then?"

"The man who is hitching up now."

The sheriff turned on his heel and went to Jeff, who was readjusting harness as coolly as if the coach belonged to him.

"Your name, young man?"

The tone was sharp and official, and Jeff looked up with a frown without answering. He met a bronzed, eagle face, and answered almost in spite of himself:

"Jefferson Collingwood."

The sheriff's eyes softened.

"Jefferson Collingwood—you are a brave man."

Jeff shook his head.

"You ran the stage through, I hear——"

"Do you believe all you hear?"

"Not likely."

"Then don't believe that."

Jeff unhooked one of the coach-lamps and held it close to the ground.

"It was this mule, not me. She was struck, as you see, at the ford. In mortal agony she ran fifteen miles without whip or rein, until death stopped her here. We have all done our best, but that would have served us little. This beast saved us. I tell you, if I can ever find the man who drew her life-blood I will kill him, though it be ten years hence. That I solemnly swear."

While Jeff was speaking, the sheriff looked at him, with his head on one side like an inquiring bird. When he had finished, the old man grunted, whether in sympathy or contempt it would be hard to say, gave him a huge slap on the back, and left him as abruptly as he came.

Great was the excitement in the town of Las Animas when the coach, with its escort of sheriff's officers and their prisoners, arrived an hour later. A man had been sent on by the sheriff; and every comfort, and a warm welcome, awaited the belated travelers. The girls retired at once, worn out with the fatigues of the day, but Nat and Jeff, from whom the sheriff gathered all the details of the attempted robbery did not get to bed until nearly sunrise the next morning. As a consequenc they slept well into the afternoon and found they could not go farther west until the following day.

They spent the evening together, and a very memorable evening it was to at least one of the party. Jeff, to whom, in spite of his emphatic disclaimers, the rest considered they owed their safety, was made much of by every one, and continued to make the most of his opportunities.

Sheriff Calderon was with them part of the time, and while he talked about old days with Maizie, and Nat listened, Jeff conversed with Bel to his heart's content. Bel had known Mr. Collingwood little more than twenty-four hours; yet she treated him like an old friend, and chattered away about her life in St. Louis, her friends, and her thoughts in general; listened with bright sympathy to some of his experiences, and questioned him in her sweetest tones about himself, until Jeff's heart and pulse were bounding with rapture and—such is the vanity of first love—even with hope.

The day before he had been in love with a vision of womanhood which seemed as far away as the stars, to-day he loved one whose eyes appeared to grow brighter when she heard his voice; to whom he told reminiscences no living soul had ever heard him speak

about before, and who, best of all, told him about herself as freely as if she felt he had a right to know what her life had been.

When, at last, the evening had flown, and Jeff was left to think alone, he found himself almost giddy with happiness. Sleep was out of the question. He walked outside the town to the top of a bluff which overlooked it to the north, and there he sat smoking for hours.

At first he lived over again the delight of their long talk together, but by and by he began to think of the future, and his mood changed. She was going to-morrow, while he was bound by contract to Tam Sanderson's brother to remain here for at least two months.

What might not happen in two months? There were hundreds of men in New Mexico who would go wild, as he had done, at the sight of her face. Could he speak before they parted?

For a moment so audacious was this man, and so strong his passion, that he hesitated, while his eyes glowed and his breath came thick and short; but common sense came to the rescue, and he sneered bitterly at the impulse and frightened it away. Then another fear tortured him. Nat Worsley, that quiet, grim little sheepman, was he not a rival, and, if so, could there be a more dangerous one? True, this evening he had not obtruded himself in the least, and Bel had talked as if he did not exist. But he was a man of great self-control, and, besides, could afford to bide his time. While Bel—after all, might she not be amusing herself with Jefferson Collingwood?

Such thoughts as these were ill companions at night for a man with overwrought nerves, and when Jeff determined to torment himself no more, and retired to bed, his dreams were worse than his reflections, and he rose at dawn haggard and weary.

The hotel was all astir, for the coach started early. Jeff found the girls in the porch standing with Nat to watch the sun rise. They greeted him cordially, but Jeff fancied that there was a suggestion of reserve in Bel's manner, and he noticed that she addressed herself to Nat immediately afterward rather pointedly, and continued to talk to him until breakfast was ready, never even looking in Jeff's direction.

Never had a strong and hearty young man so little appetite as Jeff that morning. The bread seemed to choke him, the beefsteak to be made of wood. It would have been altogether a very silent meal, for a reflection of his mood seemed to oppress the rest, had not Mr. Calderon joined them and enlivened them by giving harrowing accounts of the primitive arrangements of sheep-ranches in general, and Mr. Dan Shelford's in particular, and rousing Bel's indignation by prophesying that she would not endure it for a week.

Breakfast over, the girls retired to finish their packing, while the young men, accompanied by the sheriff, strolled round to see the horses of the stage put in. Up to the moment of the girls' departure, Mr. Calderon chatted and joked in the most cheerful manner. But when they left, his face became grave, and he was as silent as Nat himself.

The horses were hitched, the coach ready, and John Forster, shortest and grumpiest of stage-drivers, snapped out: "Them as want to go climb in—I wait for none."

This was a gentle hint to the girls, who were taking messages from the sheriff for their father.

He shook hands with both of them.

"Good-by, good-by, little gells—for little you are to me—remember what I say now. Where you're going, folk is one thing or the other. Either they will go through fire for you, or they are worse than snakes. The prairie is a very nice place to walk or ride in if you have a good friend at your side, but it has queer ways if gells goes alone. Don't forget that. Good-by and bless ye both. You, Nat, *take care of them*. Adios—adios!"

He shook hands again, having done so an unnecessary number of times already. Forster's red face was nearly purple with impatience. This made the leave-taking with Jeff very short. He

had several things which he intended to say, one of which had been to announce his intention of paying a visit to Chico Springs in the winter. But when the moment came he was so nervous that he could not say anything at all, and only gave Bel's hand a squeeze, which made it ache for some hours afterward, and muttered a gruff farewell.

Then the coach started with a jerk and rattle, and departed in a cloud of dust.

A sense of irritation, a stupid, helpless misery descended upon Jeff as the stage disappeared. It was over! These people, known only for two days, were now gone to a far-off country, never to cross his path again, though one had become so dear to him.

What a fool he had been! She care? It was a feverish dream. He felt glad that he had not offered to go and see them. Why should they care ever to see him again? He would get to work and drive the whole thing out of his mind.

Jeff was a man of action. He seldom thought about anything more than once before he did it. In half an hour after the coach departed he was inspecting a bunch of horses for sale; and before noon he had made his purchase and was at the ranch of Tam's brother, ready to start on the round-up at an hour's notice.

He found Tam's brother in trouble. One of his children had just fallen ill. The sickness did not appear to be very serious, but there had been fever about that summer, and as illness of any kind is always dreaded in proportion to the rarity of its occurrence, a doctor was needed. Jeff, whose condition of mind just then was one of intense restlessness, offered to drive back to Las Animas, and, as he was the best whip on the ranch, his offer was eagerly accepted.

Arriving again at Las Animas, he found that the doctor was out, but had left word that he would be back in half an hour.

Jeff hitched his horse to a post, and waited. It was a hot afternoon, and he strolled into the bar of the hotel for a drink. The sheriff was there, and, rather to Jeff's surprise, shook hands with warmth.

"I had you in my mind, young man, that precise moment. Strange you should be here. What will you take? My drink?"

Jeff took lager-beer, the sheriff something stronger. They did not stay long. The restlessness Jeff felt so strongly seemed to torment the sheriff also, and they walked up and down before the doctor's house.

For a time they paced in silence, but at a turn of the sidewalk their eyes met, and each saw a look in the other's face which struck him as peculiar.

The sheriff was the first to speak. He accompanied his words by an action very rare with him—laying his hand on the young man's shoulder and calling him by his Christian name.

"What's on your mind, Jefferson?"

At any other time, and from any other man, Jeff would have keenly resented such a question. But there was a gnawing hunger for sympathy in his heart, and in the touch of the old man's hand and in the tone of his voice there was a gentleness, almost tenderness, which soothed Jeff's sore spirit. He hung his head and turned his face away.

"Not much that is worth telling. I am a fool, like many more."

He stopped and cleared his throat.

"And why?"

Jeff straightened himself, and looked his questioner in the face. His mouth was hard and his words bitter, but they were belied by a pitiful sadness in the eyes.

"Some one has gone south to-day whom I shall never see again, and my heart has gone with her. Now you have it all."

He turned away when he had finished speaking, and made as though he were going back to the hotel. But the sheriff's grasp on his shoulder tightened, and they walked on in silence again for a space. The only reply made by Calderon to Jeff's confession was a sigh of sympathy, but it was

better than many words. At last the old man began in a low, earnest tone:

"I guessed this, Jefferson. It came to me as early as yesterday evening. I thought to myself, thinks I—Dave Calderon, you are a hard old case. It's five-and-thirty years since your heart beat for a woman—yet you ain't too old nor too blind nor too deaf to mistake the marks of that feeling. There's a fire in his eyes—I was thinking of you—there's a tone in his voice when he speaks to that little girl, which goes straight to your heart, tough as you are, as the ball of a Colt six-shooter. Those were my ideas, Jefferson, last night. And then I watched you. Don't rar' and get mad with the old man for spyin'. I've that to say before I'm through which will explain all. I say I watched you. You didn't go to bed. You prowled off to think, and you didn't turn in till past midnight. I timed it by my watch. Then, this morning, she talked to the sheepman, and your face was like a lamp with the light snuffed out. Poor lad! your road is rough. I ain't too old to forget that either, remember."

He paused, and gave another sympathetic sigh, and they took a turn of the sidewalk again. Then he went on in a different tone, watching Jeff closely out of the corner of his eyes:

"But the world's big. And she—good as she is—ain't the first woman you've seen in your life, and may be not the last. How's that?"

Jeff's only reply to this was to withdraw his shoulder somewhat sharply from the hand laid upon it.

"I can't speak from experience."

The sheriff clapped his hand where it had been more firmly than before.

"Don't fling away now. I was but trying ye. Not but what I hope you'll be free-hearted before long. I know you ain't now, and don't want to be. You ain't that kind of man. And now I'm coming to business. For I ain't wasting your time here, nor my own, though it looks like it. Do you know the country they"—with a wave of his hand to the south—"are bound for: Calumet County, New Mexico?"

"Not at all."

"Well, then, I'll tell ye—for I do know it, being sheriff there five years, up to a matter of three months ago. Jefferson Collingwood, it's just——" Here the good sheriff uttered that word of four letters which men of his class invariably use when under pressure of great excitement.

"If Dan Shelford—I have known him twenty years—were not the cussedest, obstinatest old prairie badger as ever grew sheep, he'd have dug his own grave and shot himself into it before he ever sent for those daughters of his. Calumet County, New Mexico, once one of the quietest settlements on the eastern slope of the Rockies, is at this present speaking the most God-forsaken place we have in the Union. Times will mend—they always do in a free country—but they'll mend only in one way—by the ranchmen rising and quietly cleaning out the towns, or one or two of them, and hanging a few score of the cursed dead beats and scum of the world they've allowed to collect there. You know a bit, perhaps, what such places are. No man's life is worth a shake when he's honest, and no woman is safe at all unless she can kill at sight, and likes doing it. Or unless"—here the sheriff spoke slowly and with emphasis—"she's well guarded by those who know how to fight.

"Now, all this is bad enough, but there's more to come. In this county of Calumet, sheepmen and cattlemen have pretty near come to blows. That is, they would have if the sheepmen were not too weak to do any fighting. As it is, they are moving out. But Dan Shelford is not one of these. I know the man, and I'll bet my best horse against a yellow dog that he'll stick on his ranch like a balky mule, and let them blow his old shanty into the air before he will move an inch. And the worst of it all is that the cattlemen, curse them!—you're one, I suppose, but I can't help facts—the cattlemen of Calumet are so bitter that they allow the low-down crowds from the towns to make hay of sheepmen.

Of course this knocks away any kind of show from the sheepmen for standing straight at all, and if it weren't for Ezekiel Mixer, storekeeper of the station, Chico Springs, old Dan would have been roasted out before now. When his daughters get there, and the rowdies get to hear of it, I would not guarantee anything."

The sheriff paused here, and glanced sharply at his companion. Jeff did not speak, but his lips were pressed tightly together, and his brows knit, as if he were turning over some difficult problem in his mind. Dave Calderon was quite satisfied with the effect his words had produced.

"That's the position," he went on, "and the worst side of it. The other side is—Nat Worsley, who is gone to Calumet to stay, if I know anything of men, and who'll do all that lies in him to keep things even; and the man I spoke of, Zeke Mixer, a kind of card the cattlemen and the bull-whackers know mighty little about; and that's all. Two men, and the few they can pick up, against what you may call an army, and those two little daisies to be defended agin' it. It's enough to touch the heart of a bear, and old Dan ought to have ten years in the penitentiary—that's my opinion."

Another pause, and for some minutes no sound but the tramp of the two men on the sidewalk; then at last Jeff spoke, and the old sheriff held his breath.

"The way you put it—there will be danger—danger every day for—for those two girls, while they are in New Mexico. Is that so?"

"You've struck it. That *is* so."

"And"—speaking very slowly—"if I gave up my contract and went down, do you think things would be safer for them?"

"I do."

"But I am not a sheepman."

"You are square and honest, and if you spoke truth awhile back, there don't live a man who'll touch those girls while you have a finger left to press a trigger. That's why I spoke. But don't mistake me—this is a free country, and no man need step into fire for the asking. Take it or leave it; I'd not blame you if you held back."

"I—take it, then."

Calderon stopped short in his tramp and looked hard at Jeff for nearly a minute without speaking. Then he laid both his hands upon his shoulders.

"Lad, I must be fair, and put all down. If aught I've said has made you think, 'I'll go, for mebbe she'll turn to me, after all'—if that's what moves ye, put the whole idea away. It ain't fair, neither for you nor for her. I ain't meant that. Of course it isn't for any one to speak of other folks' business, and that little Comanche—Nat, as they call him—is close as he kin stick. But he saved her from the Arapahoes, and for four weeks afterward she has had him to talk to, and him only, all day long. But there's more than that. It's hard to tell ye, and, God forgive me, I didn't mean to tell ye, because I wanted you to go south so bad, and feared it would put you off. But I will tell you now.

"Between the room I slept in last night and the breakfast-room, there's but a thin slab of wood. I heard voices this morning, and, though it's my business to hear all I can and say naught, I'll repeat to you the words that came, for it's life and death, maybe.

"One voice says—Maizie's:

"'He thought a great deal of it. You scarcely spoke to Nat, and Mr. Collingwood never took his eyes from your face all the evening.'

"'Nonsense,' said Bel, very quick. 'Why, we have only spoken to one another about twice. I don't know him a bit. How could he think I preferred his society to Nat's? Nat was talking to Mr. Calderon. I am sure you are mistaken.'

"'I'm telling you of what I saw,' rejoins Maizie, in that firm little voice of hers. 'If you feel so about him, you *must* be different when he comes in the morning, or you may do a great wrong. He's a good man.'

"Just then the door opened some-

where, and there was no more of it. Now—I have told you all."

Jeff took one of the sheriff's hands and pressed it.

"Thank you. It's—it's all right. I had an idea when I saw her this morning it was all over; now I know. I am nothing to her—nothing at all."

"And what will you do?"

"Go south—to-morrow."

CHAPTER VIII.

NAT'S REWARD.

How far Bel was conscious of the impression she had made upon Jeff Collingwood it is not easy to say—she hardly knew herself. But all that day she was unusually silent and thoughtful, and had not recovered her usual cheerfulness by the time she reached Chico Springs two weeks later.

There was more than one reason for this. From the day they crossed "the divide" and entered upon the desolate scenery of New Mexico—with its ill-shaped, flat-topped mountains, and monotonous, billowlike, rolling prairie-land, interspersed with gray tracts of sage-brush and patches of black, grassless soil seamed with white deposits of alkali, as dead and bare as a desert of Africa—the girls noticed that Nat's manner and bearing changed, and he became as reserved and taciturn as on the first day of their acquaintance, two months ago.

This change had not come all at once, and when they compared notes the night before the last day of their journey, they found that they entirely disagreed as to the time when it began. Bel declared that Nat had never been the same since Maizie had refused to ride on the top of the coach the day the road-agents appeared, while Maizie was positive that she had not noticed any depression in Nat's spirits until they left Las Animas.

At breakfast on the last morning, they tried hard to bring him round, but in vain. He answered their questions gently, and was more than usually attentive to their comfort; but accompanying every word and action was an indefinable something in tone and bearing which conveyed, at least to Maizie's mind, a clear intimation that as soon as Chico Springs was reached, and they were under their father's care, he would leave them. But Bel, when Maizie prophesied this, would not listen.

"Of course he will come to the ranch, and stay awhile," she said. "Father will insist upon it. Perhaps he feels nervous at what people may say, for you know how he hates being thanked for anything. That is it, depend upon it. We must give father a hint, somehow, not to say too much at first. But how awkward that this has come now! Do you see that he has put on his horrid old clothes this morning? I do want to tell him that he should dress nicely to-day. But I daren't. Don't you think you could, Maizie, dear?"

But Maizie refused, with what Bel thought unnecessary emphasis, and they then mounted to their places on the coach and drove away.

Chico Springs Station, a straggling group of log and adobe houses, came in sight at noon. With a great clatter of wheels and cracking of whip, the stage crossed a sweep of sandy waste, rattled over a wooden bridge which spanned the Chapparal River—a muddy rivulet with high banks—and at a brisk canter dashed into the station, and pulled up before its principal building, Simpson's saloon.

Simpson's saloon, or "Simpson's"—as the natives of the soil called it—was a structure of three stories. The lowest was dug out of the ground, and used for kitchen and larder; the next, of adobe, was painted black, with yellow stripes; the next, of frame, a dirty white; while covering the whole was a shingle roof—a costly luxury in those days, and which the proud possessor had colored blue, painting his name across it in the largest of gold letters. As a monstrosity of ugliness, Simpson's was worth going many miles to see; but Chico Springs was proud of it.

In common with most houses of its class, Simpson's received its visitors on

the second floor by a long flight of steps, at the top of which a "porch," or covered balcony, was built, where the greater part of the inhabitants of the station lounged when the day was warm.

On this balcony, when the coach rattled up, stood a man who examined the vehicle with evident interest, nodding his head and grunting when he saw the faces of the passengers. This was Mr. Dan Shelford. He was a person of small stature and shrunken appearance; his clothes, of brown canvas, were new, and much too big for him. His hat, very broad in the brim, was pulled over his eyes; and those on the coach could only see the tip of a sharp nose, a long chin, and thin, clean-shaven lips, which habitually exposed rather prominent front teeth with a nervous contraction like a fixed smile. His face was wrinkled and weather-beaten and as hard as a flint.

The hardness vanished, however, when Mr. Shelford trotted down the saloon steps; and Latham Moore, the driver of the mail, and a truthful man, was heard afterward to declare that he saw a tear on the old man's cheek when his daughters kissed him, and not even the withering scorn and incredulity of all Shelford's most intimate friends could drive this idea out of Latham's head. Be this as it may, it is certain that Dan Shelford showed as much emotion as he was capable of, though we are bound to admit that it was very soon over, and the tone in which he spoke immediately afterward was as harsh and matter of fact as if his children had been away ten days instead of ten years.

"So—ye're come. It is good to see you, but I'd no notion it would have cost so much. Who's this?"

He had spied Nat, who, having alighted on the other side of the coach to be out of the way, now appeared with the girls' trunk on his shoulder.

"Nat Worsley, father," said Maizie, with a brightness in her eyes and a color in her face that made her almost beautiful for the moment; "the friend who saved our lives."

"I remember. How d'ye do, Mr. Worsley? Glad to make your acquaintance. You and me will have a word before we get away from town. See, little gells, guess you had better trot over to Mixer's store—you remember Ezekiel Mixer, who gave you candy in the old times? Well, he reckons he has some now. There he stands, waiting. Go to him while we put your trunk in the wagon."

All this was spoken in the tone of one who always had his own way and must have it now. The girls obeyed instinctively, and were soon absorbed in contemplation of the Mixer family.

Nat, with a slight contraction of the lips, followed Dan Shelford in another direction, and presently dumped his burden into a lumber-wagon drawn by two fat mules.

"Waal, Mr. Worsley," said the little man, looking at his companion out of the corner of his eyes like a magpie about to peck, "I guess now you'll not mind a drink. Come to the saloon."

They went thither, Nat, so far, not having spoken a word. His silence, however, did not seem to embarrass Mr. Shelford in the least.

Drinks were ordered, tasted, and then Dan, eying Nat under his hat-brim more like a magpie than ever, began to ask questions sharply.

"Come to Chico Springs to stay, I presume, have ye?"

"No, sir."

"No? Where is your location?"

There was something in the way this was said that made Nat, though not naturally a quick-tempered man, tingle all over. His face at once became the quintessence of impenetrability.

"Where sheep pay best."

"And where's that?"

"You might tell me, perhaps."

Dan cast a sharp look at the speaker, and shook his head. "That's not my business, young man. But I am concerned to know where your ranch lies—if you have one—so's I may tell how far you brought my gells. That's my meaning."

"I have no ranch now."

"Sold out?"

"Yes."

Dan Shelford looked suspicious.

"What price?"

"More than I expected, but not more than I deserved."

The old stockman looked at Nat sharply again, but Nat's face might, as far as expression went, be compared to a piece of wood.

Mr. Shelford drummed his fingers on the counter, and, for the first time, looked uncomfortable. He sipped his liquor and choked; took another sip to recover himself, cleared his throat, and delivered his soul in a breath.

"Nat Worsley, you took my daughters out of the Arapahoe camp, boarded 'em as well as you could, and brought them safe to Seckersburg, and now you have seen them through to me. This has cost you trouble and time, and for good work a man should get fair pay. I'm poor—leastways, not rich. But if you will set down your price on paper, I'll put it before my girl, Maizie, who has a head for figures and knows the circumstances. And if what she says is reasonable, I'll pay you before I leave town to-day."

If a thunderbolt had fallen through the shingle roof of Simpson's and descended on Nat's head, it could not have been a greater shock to his system than Mr. Shelford's proposal. All the experience of men he had gathered in his wandering life had not prepared him for this. It was well that the glassware of Simpson's was strong, or the tumbler in Nat's hand would have been crushed into small pieces. He managed to set it down somehow, and then, without answering, bundled himself into the open air. Dan Shelford followed him, peering up at his face, eager and suspicious.

Opposite to the saloon, with only a broad road between, was Mixer's store, and Nat, looking across, saw Maizie in the porch, shading her eyes with her hand, as if waiting for some one. A sudden idea struck Nat, and the face which Dan Shelford tried to read became harder than before.

"The notion of payment, sir," Nat said slowly, "is queer. Is it your own?"

Dan winced. He was anxious to stand well with Nat, to whom he was genuinely grateful; and to his mind payment in money was the only kind of gratitude worthy of the name, yet Dan was a strictly truthful man.

"Well, it was—and it was not," he stammered. "I had it in my mind from the time that cowboy brought the first letters from my gells. But it got clenched in when Maizie's note came from Seckersburg. So I cannot say the idee were all my own. Other folk kind of saw it more strongly than me, but it was in my head all the time. Now, friend, say—what price?"

It was a long time before Nat answered, and then his reply was not at all what Dan expected. He stood for some minutes grasping the railing of the balcony with hands which trembled strangely, his face rigid and colorless, as if he were in great pain.

Meanwhile within the store Bel was recounting to Mr. Mixer the episode in the Arapahoe camp. While she talked, she caressed Shep, who loved her, next to his master, more than any person in the world, and had followed her into the store. In the middle of the story, which Bel told exceedingly well, Shep became uneasy. Bel laughed.

"Nat is not far off. I must hurry."

But no Nat came. Suddenly Shep barked, leaped free from Bel's caressing hand, and stood in the middle of the room on tiptoe. Bel stopped speaking, and every one looked at the dog. Now, faintly, but heard by all, came a long, peculiar whistle. The next moment the window was darkened, there was a fearful crash, and Shep disappeared, carrying the whole of a pane of plate glass with him.

With an exclamation of astonishment, both Maizie and Bel made a quick movement toward the door. It was opened before they reached it, and their father came in alone. He looked flushed and uncomfortable, but in his eyes there was a sort of subdued twinkle of relief and satisfaction.

"Where's Nat?" Bel cried, Maizie saying nothing.

Mr. Shelford coughed, and tried to be jocose. "Where he feels like being, my dears, I s'pose. *He's* all right. At present speaking, I reckon he's a mile or more on the road to Santa Fé. What's the matter? It ain't my fault. You don't think I sent him away? He just bolted. No man can say why. I did the best I could do—asked him to name his price for all he had done for you."

The girls looked at him in unutterable dismay.

"You offered him money!" said Maizie, with whitening lips. "Our friend—our brother almost—father!"

Mr. Shelford tried to look virtuously indignant.

"Waal! It was your own letters that gave me the idea."

"You told him that?"

Maizie spoke so sharply that Dan jumped. But he tried to brave it out.

"I did so—I was bound to, for he asked me."

"What did he say then?"

Maizie's eyes were dangerous now.

"I can't well remember. Not much. Something about having made a mistake, and been on a wrong track; and then he went off. He looked that ugly! I *never* saw an uglier pair of eyes. I was glad when he did go. But there ain't anything to argue about. He's gone, and there's an end. I came to say it's time to go. You get ready, gells, while I hitch up. We have a good few miles to drive."

These last words Mr. Shelford uttered very rapidly—beating a retreat before reply was possible. He was, in truth, glad to escape. Perhaps it was well he was able to do so.

CHAPTER IX.

THUNDER IN THE AIR.

The drive from Chico Springs to Shelford's ranch, a matter of ten miles, was one of the most uncomfortable hours Dan Shelford ever spent in his life. He had been really eager to see his daughters, and had made many sacrifices for them; while they, on their part, had written long letters full of affectionate anticipation, which had warmed and softened the old man's heart in a manner no one but the Ezekiel Mixer, before mentioned, would have conceived possible. And now, instead of the two blithe girls Dan had dreamed of, recognizing the old landmarks and asking questions about old friends—cheering the dull countryside with their merry voices and high spirits—there were two silent young women, who seated themselves in the wagon as though it were a prison-van, gazed down the road to Santa Fé with their hearts in their eyes, and preserved toward himself, their own father, a demeanor of grave reproach, if not of open offense.

But when at length the old home came in sight, the girls began to take some interest in their surroundings. Alas! all was changed. The house which, when they last saw it, seemed to them a palace fit for the President, was now only a small, mean-looking log hut, a spot of dark-brown on a great expanse of prairie—bare as a billiard-table from the tread of thousands of sheep, and unrelieved by a tree or bush of any kind.

The greatest shock of all, however, came when they arrived there. A condition of things then became apparent truly appalling to a woman's eye. Rubbish and litter of the most unsightly description were strewn in every direction. Here were some scores of empty tomato cans, there an astonishing variety of old kettles and two bottomless coffee-pots; while everywhere were bones, principally of sheep, scattered as thickly as pebbles on the seashore.

In ranches where several men "batch" together, it is the custom to throw into space everything that is not wanted, and convert the surrounding prairie into a sort of universal dust-bin—with very unpleasant results. To the girls the whole place looked more fit for rats and pigs to dwell in than human beings, and Bel, who was in a very irritable and touchy state of mind,

had it on the tip of her tongue to say so, if given the opportunity. A glance at the door and porch, however, was more reassuring. These were swept and clean, and as the wagon drew up, a woman with a fresh, kindly face bustled out and waved her apron with a cheery welcome.

This was Mrs. Ezekiel Mixer, to whom, as the girls soon discovered, they owed more than she would ever allow them to thank her for.

We have said that Dan Shelford meant well. His intentions of "fixin' up" for his "gells" were excellent as far as they went, but then they did not go far. It was lucky that he had to come to the Mixers to buy the "few duds" which, in his opinion, girls would need.

Still more fortunate was it that when he was ordering two quilts, two pairs of sheets, two straw mattresses, and a few other articles, all of the cheapest and coarsest kind, that Mrs. Mixer grasped the situation; and when she did so, that good woman, one of the most courageous and resolute souls in the United States, left her work—even allowing her bread to burn—to question Dan closely about the whole business. His replies made her shudder.

Now, it was a serious thing for any one, more especially for any man, to make Mrs. Mixer shudder. Sooner or later he paid dearly for the achievement. In Dan's case, Mrs. Mixer announced in her blandest tones that what he said was very interesting, and if he had no objection, she would be pleased to visit his ranch and give him her opinion. It was now Dan's turn to shudder. But he was helpless.

The very next day Mrs. Mixer came for a few hours and looked round. The day after she came again with a wagon full of things, including a bed for herself; and for a week Dan did nothing but draw water, cut fire-wood, burn moldy household effects, and cart new furniture from Chico Springs under orders! The result was that the internal arrangements of the ranch were made fairly habitable. The condition of things outside, Mrs. Mixer, as a frontierswoman, considered an unimportant detail.

A comely woman she was, five-and-thirty years old, fresh-colored as a girl of twenty, tall as a man, with broad shoulders and a deep voice.

As the wagon stopped she grasped the girls by the hands, and swung them to the ground as if they had been babies, talking all the time.

"Welcome, welcome to you both. Which is Maizie and which Bel? Ah, I see without telling. Well, dears, I have had time to peek things a bit, and make the old shanty some better than it was, but there's heaps wants doing. Now, friend Dan"—turning sharply round, and altering her tone—"quick with your team. Dinner only wants dishing up. Don't forget what I told you about the mare's back. And tell José if he don't dress more respectable now, you'll look for a herder who does. And mind you ask Miguel if he scarified that snake-bitten ewe this morning, and—but that will do at present. Hurry up, I say, and get yourself washed. These travelers will be hungry."

When the girls had fairly turned their backs upon the rubbish and looked round the interior of Shelford's ranch, they felt comforted. The furniture and fittings were of the homeliest description, but cleanliness, tidiness, and housewifery completeness reigned here.

After showing the girls their room, Mrs. Mixer "dished up," and talked all the time as fast as her tongue could move.

"You will have times, girls, queer times. I dunno whether you come with ideas of getting fun and frolics"—here she looked at Bel—"and gaddin' round 'scursioning and buggy-riding with the boys. If so, take my word, you'd better not unpack, but just naterally go back East by the next stage. But if you've come to see that the old man lives a decent life instead of pigging all his days like a Mexican, and you mean to *work*, then I can talk to ye. What do you know already? Cooking? Ah, ha!—Miss Bel tosses her head a little bit. I'd better climb

down and take a back seat, then. But, remember, we don't have stores round the corner, nor neighbors next door, nor a doctor over the way. Nor do we get helps, who'll flop and scrub all they're worth while we play the pianny and crimp our hair. Not for any price that your dad is likely to offer will you get any kind of help better than a Mexican boy who will steal more than he'll save. So, work you will have, young ladies—hard work. But, mind one thing—make the men work all you know! Whether he is a visitor or a Mexican, or your father himself, never let a man on the ranch have a chance even tc light a pipe while a chore is left undone. Out West here, a great part of a woman's comfort depends on the way she makes her men fly round. There! Supper's on the table, and your father only just come in to clean himself. If that ain't like a man! While he's in the kitchen, come into the sleeping-room I've fixed up for myself, and look at a present I have for you."

Mrs. Mixer now spoke in a lower tone, and accompanied her words by several nods and winks. The girls followed her, smiling, into a bare little room, quite unfurnished except for a few articles of rough furniture and a roll of blankets and three sheepskins—which Mrs. Mixer proudly exhibited as her "beddin'"*—and a wooden box. Out of this box Mrs. Mixer took a leather case. She was now very grave, and spoke in impressive tones.

"Don't be frightened, dears, by what I bring out. This air will not agree with your constitutions if things scare you easily. Awhile ago you was young ladies living in the East. I remember your good aunt, who brought you up since your mother's death. She would have everything just *so*. And her husband had money, and your lives have been easy and tender and quiet. They will hardly be so now. Those pretty white hands must grow hard and strong. Until then—remember, never go out alone on horseback or afoot with any living man, unless my husband, who *knows*, says it is all square. And now see here what I have for ye—to make you strong. There's my present. They are the best Zeke ever sells."

She opened the case and handed each girl a revolver.

At this moment Dan, washed and in want of supper, found his way into the room.

"Hello—shooting-irons! Take care, Bel, my daughter! There—there—keep the muzzle to the ground. Is this safe, Mrs. Mixer, do you think? I never could abide pistols. Such onlikely things, too, for gells—don't you think?"

At this hint, Mrs. Mixer's eyes resumed an expression which Dan did not like.

"There's truth in what you say, Dan Shelford. And where men can protect the women of their family, pistols ain't for girls. But where they cannot, it is different. If one of these girls was to say, 'Shall I be safe living in this lonely ranch, my father away a great part of his time, *without* firearms?' I should answer, 'No!' and I should like—I would very much like—to hear any man contradict me, especially the man who is most responsible."

But Dan had already retired to the kitchen. Mrs. Mixer turned to the girls.

"My dears, tell me what you think yourselves."

They were talking to one another and did not hear her, and Mrs. Mixer's keen eyes saw a suspicion of tears in Maizie's eyes as Bel said:

"Why, it is exactly the same pattern and size of the one he gave you, Maizie. How curious! Is yours in the trunk?"

"I always carry it. He made me promise."

And then, to Mrs. Mixer's unbounded astonishment, Maizie produced from a pocket in her dress a revolver larger than the one in her hand.

"Can you use that, my dear?"

"A little."

*In 1873 women of Mrs. Mixer's type liked to show that they could live in frontier simplicity; it was not usual, otherwise, even then, for ladies to have such primitive sleeping accommodation.

"A little, indeed!" struck in Bel. "Mrs. Mixer, she is a splendid shot. Nat, who can shoot better than any man I ever heard of, taught her most carefully. I always shut my eyes just before it goes off—I cannot help it, and I suppose that rather spoils my aim—but Maizie never shuts her eyes."

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Mixer, smiling, "if I don't have to climb down now! I forgot what frontierswomen you were—trained by experienced hands. Well, let's find your father, and have supper. I am going to be here a little spell to see you settled in. Maizie shall teach *me* to shoot! My word!"

Mrs. Mixer stayed two weeks. Her husband came down before the end of the first week, and threatened to return in twenty-four hours with a lasso, and take her home by force; but she told him she would not be cheated out of a holiday, after being married to him five years. And then they had a long talk together, after which he went home without further protest.

That evening Mrs. Mixer caught Dan Shelford over his pipe after supper, and had an interview with closed doors, which the girls thought would never end. The next day she announced to the girls that it was settled that the ranch was not a safe place for them to live in, that their father had given his consent to their going to stay at Chico Springs for the next few months, until the country was in a better state—and that to Chico Springs they would return with her forthwith.

Mrs. Mixer was a clever woman, with a kind heart and the best intentions. But for all that she made mistakes sometimes, and it was not long before she discovered that she had made one now. Bel, it was true, said she would go if her father really wished it, but Maizie met the proposal with a quiet but determined negative.

"I came out to be with father," she said simply. "I knew from the first that life would be different from St. Louis. And I have guessed lately that we might be in danger. You tell me, dear Mrs. Mixer, no more than this. It is very kind of you to ask us to come to you, and I am very glad Bel is going, but I shall not leave father. I am quite prepared to take the risk—I intend to take it, thank you. I am quite sure father wants me."

"And I will stay with her," cried Bel, with heightened color. "Maizie shall not be here alone—that I am quite determined about."

Mrs. Mixer, however, was not to be easily beaten. She went all over the ground again, and with Maizie's assistance reduced Bel to submission; but she could do no more, and, after talking until she nearly lost her voice, and making Dan's life a misery to him, she departed with Bel, and left Maizie to follow her own devices.

The first few days after Mrs. Mixer's departure brought great rest to Maizie, and she slept better than she had done for weeks. Now, at last, in the sunny September afternoons, when her household work was done, she could quietly think out the hopes and disappointments of which her life had been rather full lately, examine them impartially, and understand their true meaning without feeling that Mrs. Mixer's eyes were always watching her, and without being constantly interrupted by that good woman's busy tongue.

At times she was restless, and caught herself wondering whether Nat would not walk in some day with Shep at his heels, as if nothing had happened. It was impossible to believe that she would never see him again. Now that he was not with her, all that his devotion and care really meant seemed to become clear. He was in love with Bel—that Maizie never doubted for an instant—and loved her with a depth and force to which they had both been blind until it was too late.

How easy, now, to understand that reticence and reserve of his on those last days. In his humility and in his pride he was afraid lest he should seem to make some claim upon Bel by his great services. Therefore, as they drew nearer to their friends, so he became more nervous and diffident, and when as a culminating point their fa-

ther so bitterly misunderstood him by offering him money, he fled altogether.

Poor Nat, and poor Bel! But here Maizie stopped, and fell into a different train of thought. She loved her sister dearly. Yet somehow, of late, she had become less blind to certain faults or weaknesses of character, of which, before they left St. Louis, she had not been conscious. Did Bel love Nat? She liked him; she was, in a way, fond of him; but love, such as Nat wished for—did the child know what it meant? This doubt saddened Maizie. Nat would come back—he could not help it. Probably he would come to her, Maizie, as a sister, and it would rest with her to bring about a meeting with Bel at the right time and in the right way. This could be done easily; but if Bel did not care——

Two weeks went by, uneventful weeks for Maizie. No one came to disturb her, and none of the dangers at which Mrs. Mixer had darkly hinted ever showed themselves at all. All day long the girl was alone except at meals, and when her father was with her there was not much said. Yet she had the satisfaction of seeing that he looked better, was more cheerful, ate his food with a better appetite, and, at times, talked of old days and of his business, as if it were a relief to have her sympathy and companionship.

But this quiet time was not to last much longer. One day, when Maizie was sweeping out the kitchen in the middle of the morning, she heard a soft footstep, and José, her father's foreman herder, inquired for "the señor" with a certain abruptness she did not quite like. He went away immediately with the politest of bows when she told him the time Dan was to come home, but all day long she felt nervous and uncomfortable, and was more relieved than she would have avowed to any one when the old wagon rattled in at last.

She noticed that her father fumed and muttered to himself when he heard of José's visit. They had supper as usual, but before the things were cleared away a sharp tap came at the door, and all the Mexicans, José at their head, trooped into the room and stood twirling their hats, like schoolboys who had broken rules. A fine, stalwart set they were—a family of brothers.

The man least embarrassed was José himself. He looked his master straight in the face, and spoke out boldly.

"Señor, we bring bad news. We are all here—Maximo from his camp in the Mesa Grande, Juan from Rio Salvadore, and me and Miguel and Ilario. If we had not come we should not be alive. Vacheros Texano, many in number, have spoken with pistols in our faces. They said: 'This country is for cattle and not sheep. Any man who herds sheep on the ranges here shall die.' Then they said they spoke from their masters, and that you knew all, and that before many days are over you will be——"

He pulled up abruptly, glanced at Maizie, and ended his sentence by whispering something in his master's ear.

Dan did not speak for a moment. He glared at the men with so fierce an expression that they kept an apprehensive eye upon the movements of his right hand. At last he snarled out:

"Is this all? No wonder cowboys despise you. You do not ask for pistols or rifles to kill these devils. You only run away."

The men now began to scowl in their turn, and José rejoined quickly:

"You are a brave man, señor. So brave that you have not even a shotgun in your house. How then could we ask for arms? And if we did, would you spend one dollar to save our lives? No—you would let your poor herders die like dogs. Our lives are not worth money to you, so they are of no value. Why should we fight for you? No. You must find other men. To-morrow my brothers will take the sheep out for the last time, while you go to Chico Springs and get the money that is owing for our service. It is this that I wish to tell you—we herd for you only one more day."

He put on his hat and stalked out, followed by his brothers, who saluted Maizie, but took no notice of Dan.

When the door closed, Maizie looked anxiously at her father. He was still frowning. Now he stamped his foot, and made use of expressions which nearly sent Maizie out of the room. Then he began to walk up and down talking partly to himself and partly to her.

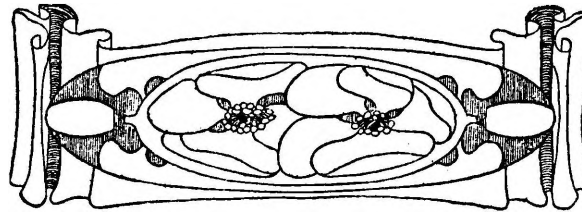
"I shall go to Zeke Mixer. These boys shall be arrested for breaking contract, if it costs me all. It means ruin if they leave me. Nine thousand sheep —I can't herd nine thousand, and the cowboys will scare every Mexican I can pick up, as they have done these."

"But, father, would they not threaten your life if you did go out?"

"Threaten? They have been at that game for months. I am not afraid of their bluster. A man does not live twenty-five years on the frontier to tremble at these young bull-whackers. Now you go to bed, child. We'll fix things to-morrow. Zeke Mixer can do it, some way, and it'll save herders' wages. Not a cent will they get. The worst is to think of those sheep eating up the grass all around this range, when they might be in camp. *Curse* the white-livered greasers!"

He sank back into his chair with a groan, and when Maizie, after an interval, passed into the kitchen, she saw him crouched before the stove with haggard face, muttering incoherently to himself, and she went to bed with a heavy heart, the word "ruin" ringing in her brain.

TO BE CONTINUED.



THE KING AND THE TAR

THE manager of a third-rate theatrical touring company was desperate. At the critical moment the baggage man, who undertook the walking-on parts, was missing, and there was none to take his place. The small town was searched for an understudy, and at last an ex-seaman, who was glad of any berth, was unearthed. The manager told him he would give him a handsome salary provided that in time he acquitted himself satisfactorily in the part in question. He had one line to say.

Thus encouraged, the hopeful tar rehearsed his one line until he was word perfect.

He had been at sea in terrible gales, but had never known fear till in armor clad he stood at the "wings" and waited for his cue. How his heart beat and how terribly nervous he was when he faced the footlights! His throat went dry and his voice seemed to fail him. But he made a supreme effort, and stammered out:

"Me lord—me king! me cap'n—I mean me liege! Methought I saw an army on yonder hill."

"Liar!" thundered the king, affecting a terrible passion and giving full vent to his acting powers.

This completely unnerved the tar.

"Shiver me timbers, cap'n!" he remonstrated, "that's wot the lubber told me to tell 'ee!"

The Po Taut Tsi

By Charles Kroth Moser

Author of "The Man Without a Soul," "The Game and the Lady," Etc.

Only one who has known and studied the Chinaman at close range could write such stories as Mr. Moser has given us from time to time in the "Popular." In this present story—one of the best he has done—the humanness of the Celestial is abundantly apparent

IN the beginning, Mouar-Sian, slipping through the river-reeds at dusk, stepped upon a tiny form lying in a nest of dried grasses at the water's cozy edge. It set up a whimpering little cry as her foot touched it, and Mouar-Sian's heart hurt her so that she picked up the child in her arms. It was but yesterday, at sunset, that old Ah Gwan had beaten her because she bore him no sons.

"Poor abandoned one!" cried Mouar-Sian, holding the naked yellow body close to her breast. "Soon—for the tides flood now—great Hoang-Ho would have smacked his lips over thee, and thou wouldst have been no more. And thou a man-child! Would that the gods had sent thee to me."

The youngster squirmed in her arms, and Mouar-Sian felt a joy akin to motherhood.

"And why should I not?" she mused suddenly, then trembled in every limb at the thought of her audacity. For some priest had put the baby there, that its flesh might appease the hunger of Hoang-Ho, the river-god, and that the floods might be abated so that millet and rice could grow in the fields again.

Already over the villages hung dense palls of greasy smoke from the burning ghats which devoured the bodies of the famine-stricken people. Did she dare take him out of the very mouth of the god? And then there was Ah Gwan, her old and bitter husband! What would he say to another mouth to find fish for—and that mouth not one of his own?

But in the end, the sad-hearted young wife kept the infant, and took it with her to the house-boat of her fisher-husband. Old Ah Gwan scolded and beat her, but Mouar-Sian loved the little outcast, and nursed it. She called it Mah Noon, her first-born.

A year later, Mouar-Sian astonished her husband and delighted his uttermost heart by presenting him with a son of his own.

For three days the house-boat in which they lived was crowded with guests, and there were feasting, much drinking of samshu, and many presents—for the rice and the millet were a full crop this year, and the river-god's wrath had long since gone down. Ah Gwan would now have had his wife throw their "first-born" to the fishes under the muddy, yellow waters, but Mouar-Sian could not be persuaded. His had been the first baby lips to press warm against her cheek. She would not give him up. But she called her real son Tsung Fan, or Gift of the Gods. And when the little Tsung was fourteen moons old, she took them both to the old charm-maker, the fetich doctor who also could tattoo ships on the arms of sailors, and butterflies on the shoulders of the ladies of the high-born.

"Mark thou them," ordered Mouar-Sian, "each with the same serpent, but divide him; one-half to each. To this

one"—indicating the younger child—"give the head; for he is the son of my flesh, and shall come first. But let Mah Noon, being older and the stronger, be marked with the body, for he shall serve the head. Yet the two shall be one, and both my sons."

So the body of a serpent with orange-and-purple scales was coiled over the heart of Mah Noon, and the head of green with eyes dripping blood etched upon Tsung Fan. So Mah Noon was sworn, without his knowledge, to serve his brother, to honor his caste.

But boys, even in China, care little for caste. Mah Noon and Tsung Fan grew up together as chums. They dived and swam the yellow Hoang-Ho like water-rats, fished, frog-baited, and dug shells, flew kites together, and lived like other boyish chums, until it came time to go to the old beagle-eyed schoolmaster to learn the seventeen thousand and ninety moralities of Confucius, and the ten thousand characters that make up the Chinese scholar's education. Then old Ah Gwan separated them.

"Thou art a coolie's brat," he said to Mah Noon, "and thou canst earn thy *chow* (food) by gutting fish. But this, my son, the Heaven-sent Tsung Fan, shall sit at the feet of the masters, and learn all the wisdom of men. And he shall become a mighty mandarin—perchance of the order of the red button—and who knows but the Son of Heaven (the emperor) may make him a great one of the earth? Get thee gone, dog, to the fish-traps!"

Mah Noon went to the fish-traps, and each day waded the filthy river waist-deep in his search for the family's food, while Tsung Fan put on large glasses with rims of stag-horn, and squatted on his hams with many other youths before the beagle-eyed old disciple of the great teacher.

But the friendship of the two boys was not broken. Day by day their hearts knitted together more closely, though they saw but little of each other because of their different tasks. At last, when they were both in the neighborhood of sixteen years of age, old Ah Gwan began to go to the village of nights seeking out a wife for Tsung Fan. The old nakoda, too, the match-maker of the village, was put on the trail for maidens eligible for the hand of so accomplished a young man. And it so happened that the choice of the nakoda fell upon Kouar-Din, daughter of the village arms-maker.

Now Kouar-Din was the one secret between the chums. They had slipped away from the boat once at twilight, and gone to a pool hidden in the sedge and the rush-grass to find frogs. But they found Kouar-Din there before them; she and her maidens bathing in the cool, clear depths, which the river soiled only at flood times. And the two lads had slipped away undiscovered—for it would have been a great shame to Kouar-Din, and brought disgrace on the house of the arms-maker. But since that twilight evening, when the early moon had shot a copper gleam over Kouar-Din's saffron beauty, Mah Noon and Tsung Fan had desired her with all the fresh young ardor of their boyish hearts. It was a thing not even to be spoken of between them.

Only the longing of Mah Noon for her seemed like the prayer of the hopeless. Always he seemed to see her—her image, her dream-spirit, floating away before him, elusive, light as fairy odors. Always, as he breasted the muggy waters, she was with him, dancing before him; restless and as unattainable as the bubbles floating on the curling lips of the river, the lips that were kissed by the wind into ripples; her image as elusive as the bubbles that broke when one touched them.

Mah Noon, alone, knew that he loved Kouar-Din, and that she was not for him. Her father would have set the village dogs biting at the outcast's heels had he known.

The day that Tsung Fan, lolling with him in the sampan that rode the lazy, lapping ripples lightly as the sunbeams, said to him bashfully: "There is a maiden in the village whose soul is breaking in pieces for love of me," Mah Noon laughed banteringly.

"How knowest thou, strutting pigeon?" he asked.

"My father told me so."

"And who is this simple jade that grieves for an owl-eyed gudgeon, Pomposity?" Mah Noon loved to fling good-natured taunts at his scholar-chum.

"Kouar-Din—her mother hath sent the nakoda," Tsung Fan admitted rather sheepishly.

Mah Noon said nothing more. They fished on through the lazy afternoon, and when they reached the house-boat, Mouar-Sian, the gentle mother, bade them both make ready for the first night of the nuptial feast. And later, when it was dark and the fiddles were screaming and the tom-toms pounding, Mouar-Sian missed her "first-born" from the revelers. There came a dull splash of waters from under the house-boat's bows, and he was gone.

Far down the stream, the river-pirates, the Hun Hutzes of the lower coast, picked up a boy swimming on his back. They dragged him into their junk, whose dirty, lateen sails were already bellying to the breeze that would send them plundering down the river.

"Why are you here?" they asked him.

"I will go with you," he answered.

"And your name?"

He was thoughful. "Call me Dzin-Bi," he said. Which, being translated, means "Death from longing." But when they came to strip him, they found a tattoo-mark—a serpent coiled and headless—on his breast.

Tsung Fan, becoming shortly two hundred and four moons old (seventeen years), he took Kouar-Din to wife, and in time became, indeed, a mandarin of the order of the red button. The Son of Heaven honored his greatness by exalting his family, and bestowing upon him three names—to wit, Tsung-Fan-Zan.

A gray fog had drifted in from the sea, and the city lay buried under it as under a vast wet blanket. The street-lamps were choked with it, the trees and the houses dripped with its dampness, all sounds were muffled in its impenetrable folds. From beyond the Golden Gate came only the sullen booming of breakers to disturb the silence of the night, or occasionally the near-by grating of car-wheels as the cables twisted and harshly sang over the steep-pitched hills. San Francisco slept—all save Chinatown, which never sleeps.

Deep in the bowels of a rambling old house on the outskirts of the Chinese quarter a dozen men sprawled about a room lighted by two candles. The walls, the ceiling, and the floor were of earth, but straw mats littered the floor, and rude, wooden bunks filled with straw were built, three deep, around the walls. Opium-pipes, trays, lamps, and cans of *yenshee* littered the bunks, but none of the men were smoking. They sprawled on the straw mats, idly rolling cigarettes of the white pigs' tobacco—there was business afoot to-night, and a man might need a clear eye and a steady hand.

All the men lay with their sandals beside them, their cues unrolled, their blouses thrown aside on the floor. Some played aimlessly with little fan-tan blocks; others smoked their cigarettes in absolute silence. The faces of all were seamed with evil—hard, inscrutable, callous. They looked like the demons they were.

Suddenly a door opened, and a little, old man came in. He wore a round, black cap, a wisp of thin beard trailing from his chin, and a dirty tunic reaching to his knees. In his hand he carried a black, wooden box with a silken bag of the same color sewed into it. The mouth of the bag was drawn together with a cord.

"Euh!" he said, with a squeak. "The illustrious council hath decided. The vile enemy of the Hip Sing tong must fall. Come ye, now, and let fate choose which of your knives shall drink his blood!"

The sprawling men raised themselves to a squatting posture. The old man with his black box passed before them without a word being uttered. As

he paused, each man put his hand into the mouth of the bag and drew forth a little object, which he concealed in his palm. Then he with the black box stood in their midst and clapped his hands together. Their palms flew open.

"*He* has drawn the white bean!" the old man squeaked, pointing to one. "The white bean! Out with ye, slaves, mongrels!"

Out of the door all the villainous crew filed silently, save only the wizened old man and him who had drawn the white bean. When they were gone and the door bolted, the two remaining squatted together on the mat. The old man pulled from the bosom of his tunic a leathern bag, and it rattled in his hand with a sound like metal pieces clinking together.

"Thou art *po taut tsi* (messenger of fate) for us of the Hip Sing tong," he squeaked to the other. "These two hundred yen are thine now—and three hundred more if ye do your work well. Know ye the man?"

The highbinder flung away the stub of his cigarette indifferently. He shook his head. "Whose throat now awaits my fangs, my father?" he asked. The old man lowered his voice.

"The consul-general of Kwang-Su, our exalted emperor, the Son of Heaven," the ancient one breathed, "he hath broken the power of the Hip Sings, and his blood must pay the price. You are the avenger of the insulted. Do you dare? Or shall we send a toothless old woman to rend him with her nails?" The old man grinned maliciously, and the highbinder bit his lips at the taunt.

"Nay, father," he said, as he rolled another cigarette. "I shall love the task as a young man loves his first-born son. My fangs shall drink deep in the fountains of his blood. . . . Before the fisher-folk blow their horns for dawn, my father, I will bring the Hip Sings a piece of his heart."

He slipped his feet into the sandals, strapped a great revolver to his wrist, and hung a slender knife between his shoulder-blades. Then he put on his blouse and his hat, flung away the cigarette, and went out.

In the big, bare building that was called the consulate, all the windows were dark except one of four small panes on the first floor. Here, in a little room in the rear, with an alley and a pair of steps leading to it from the garden—as well as a trap-door that led to the basement—sat the Chinese consul-general at his desk. It was his private den, and on many nights his study-lamp sent its gleams through the window.

The consul-general was a busy man. Especially since the terrible tong war, in which the Hip Sings and the Sam Yups had tried to annihilate each other, as well as a few interfering policemen. The consul-general, eager to do justice, had taken sides with the Sam Yups in the war, and through his efforts four of their enemies had been turned over to the white pigs' police. He knew he did this at the risk of his life; he knew well how dangerous were the Hip Sings. It is a courageous thing to fight a Chinese secret society—even with the Son of Heaven backing your fight.

Now the Chinese consul-general sat peering over important papers in the case. He was a pleasant-looking man, middle-aged, suave, and placid, with great stag-horn goggles astride his nose and streaks of gray in his cue. As he sat at his desk, over his ink-tablets and brushes, no thought of apprehension came to him. Why should it?—he was safe in the consulate! Three men guarded the front entrance, and three more patrolled the garden in the rear. Only his faithful body-servant, Chen Yang, slept in the basement—but who in all Chinatown, except the household, knew of that trap-door? No one. He was safe.

He buried himself in his papers, lost himself in speculation, let the warmth from the open grate lull him into a state of drowsy preoccupation. He began to nod, fingered the papers, nodded—nodded again——

He started up to see a man in a blue blouse and soft hat sitting before the

grate calmly puffing a cigarette. The man was looking him over, with dark, solemn, inscrutable eyes. For one long minute they sat staring at each other, the consul as calm as the intruder. He understood perfectly.

"You have come, then," said the consul. "The messenger of—fate?"

The figure in the blue blouse smiled faintly.

"Yea, Tsung-Fan-Zan. Greetings. I have come to kill you."

The consul leaned back in his chair and yawned. There was a bell on his desk, but he made no attempt to reach it. His eye had noted at one glance the bulging of his visitor's left sleeve at the forearm. There was also a blade somewhere, he knew; a blade that he should soon feel—between his ribs, perhaps. Well—what of it? Why care?

"There's only one thing I'd like to know," he said indifferently. "How did you get here—and no sound?"

The highbinder smiled again.

"It is my trade," he said. "I have cut many men's throats. . . . Your dog of a slave is still sleeping in the basement."

There was something in the man's voice familiar to the consul, a tang of the low provinces where he had been born; the look in the eyes was haunting, familiar, so close that it barely eluded him. The rest of the face was strange, the personality foreign, but——

"Have I ever known you, messenger?" the consul asked, as if puzzled.

"Nay, master. But I have known you. You are the consul. Who has not heard of you—the illustrious Tsung-Fan-Zan?"

The consul looked at him a long time. This man—was he so abandoned to the trade of blood-letting? The consul knew the character of his people well. And yet—might not a man shrink, fear to kill the emperor's representative?

"You know me, *po taut tsi?* Yet come to kill me?"

The highbinder's face was impassive as ice. "I drew the white bean, master."

There was but left, then, bribes, money, power. A position—for his family, at least! The consul offered them. . . . The assassin blandly reached his hand in under his shoulder-blades.

"You forget, honorable one. I come from the Hip Sings. . . . Can money breathe life into a dead man's ashes? Can power make his tongue wag again? I drew the white bean, master. It is your death-warrant—or mine."

The consul sat placidly drumming his fingers against the desk. His call-bell stood at his fingers' tips, useless. To summon help!—what aid could it bring to a man with his throat cut? He moved his shoulders in a whimsical, Asiatic shrug.

"Is there, then, *po taut tsi,* no other way?"

The *po taut tsi's* slit-cut, yellow eyes opened wide, affecting the surprise of ingenuousness; he smiled his velvety, bland smile. "We, O master, are called the messengers of fate. Fate!—when a man's time comes can he elude it, dodge under its nose as a hare when the hounds press hot?"

There was still the familiar tang in his voice, the elusive yet almost remembered light in the yellow eyes; the consul meditated upon them. He could not place the man. He gave a little hiss of resignation. Why defy the inevitable?

"One favor, messenger—a rite—to put on the white robe of death—that I may pass undefiled into the shades of my illustrious fathers." The *po taut tsi's* face quivered, as if it felt a pain.

"Thou shalt have thy wish, Tsung-Fan-Zan."

The consul struck his bell two smart raps; he noticed the hand of the highbinder fumbling with the bulge in his sleeve. But a little boy entered the room, a sleepy little moon-flower on a stem of purple silk, with a pigtail trailing red floss behind him.

"Communicate to thy enchanting mistress, little lightfoot, that I desire the white robe. She shall bring it hither."

The boy kotowed and disappeared. A deep silence fell in the room, and the still quivering face of the *po taut tsi* was the only movement. A woman came in, carrying a white gown of silk; she fell at the consul's feet.

"My lord——" her voice broke, and she sobbed silently. She laid the white robe on his knees. She asked no questions—it was her lord's command.

The consul lifted her up, putting his two hands under her cheeks. "Weep not, my Kouar-Din. Fate hath come. . . . I hear even now the priests chanting the song of the Golden Rose in the ears of my soul. Bring now to me, Kouar-Din, beloved of my heart, our two sons."

The highbinder raised up from his chair. "Nay, Tsung-Fan-Zan, and thou woman, ye shall not. There is no more time. Go back to thy fatherless brats, woman!"

Kouar-Din and the consul exchanged one look of farewell, and she turned to go. The *po taut tsi* took two steps forward, silently lifted the hem of her trailing robe from the floor. He touched his lips to it.

Kouar-Din did not know it. The consul saw, and stood speechless with his anger and bewilderment. The *po taut tsi* walked back to his chair, and reached his hand around to the knife lying between his shoulder-blades. His breath seemed to come in little, quick pants. He turned and made a significant motion to the consul.

Tsung-Fan-Zan slowly, calmly put on the white robe. He stood up, bowed his head, folded his hands.

"Come," he said. "Assassin, strike!" He closed his eyes, awaiting the blow. He heard the man's movement behind him.

"Yea—brother—I strike!" Something fell heavily on the floor at his feet. He opened his eyes. . . . The *po taut tsi* lay there convulsively clutching at the knife-hilt in his breast.

The consul knelt on the floor beside him. "Why hast thou done this, messenger?" he exclaimed.

The other was past speech. His convulsive, clutching fingers tore open the tunic above his heart. . . . Kouar-Din, weeping in the hall, heard a loud cry of grief from her husband's death-chamber.

Frenzied, she rushed in. Tsung-Fan-Zan, her husband, sat on the floor beside the body of the *po taut tsi*. He was rocking to and fro, wringing his hands, crying out his grief. Kouar-Din saw the knife sticking in the wound—a tiny serpent, orange and purple-hued, seemingly coiled around the blade.

"Why mournest thou, lord?" the woman exclaimed. "This *po taut tsi!* —he was but a dog."

The Fortunes of Geoff

By K. and Hesketh Prichard
Authors of "Don Q.," "Roving Hearts," Etc.

VI.—FROM SAVAGE FINGERS

THE torrid heat of midday hung almost visible in the bare, dirty room where Geoffrey Heronhaye sat waiting for the man in the hammock to regain consciousness. Through the open window space he could see, beyond the tall masts of the shipping in the harbor, vivid islands set in the tropic blue of Port-au-Prince Bay; nameless odors, distilled from the stunted, dusty trees and the garbage of the roadway, invaded the air, while from the anteroom leading to the stair-head came the cries of negro poker-players.

Suddenly above the babble of the street rose a voice of thunder:

"*Vive* Tiresias Sam! *Vive* the President of Haiti!"

The man on the hammock stirred, and Geoff, rising, looked down at the figure beneath the mosquito-net, and at the maimed foot, which was wrapped in a grotesque bandage of blue calico.

"Félise, Félise!" the man muttered wearily. "Ah, my brain burns!"

Geoff laid a handkerchief wet with water across the hot brows. The man opened his eyes, and sense came slowly back into them as he stared at Geoff.

"You are good, monsieur," he whispered, then added: "My brain burns!"

"The sun," said Geoff. "What else can a white man expect, monsieur; especially one who rode with fever already upon him through the heat of yesterday afternoon?"

"Yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes, you have been unconscious for twenty hours."

"Ah, monsieur, I thought I was case-hardened. I ought to be, for I have been in this country two months."

He closed his eyes in exhaustion, and the thought came to Geoff that never had he seen a more pathetic figure. By all the outward signs this frail-looking old Frenchman should have lain upon a bed of state in the carven southward-opening chambers of some château of France, not upon these foul pillows in the top story of the hotel of Baptiste in the capital of the Black Republic.

Geoff himself had been thrown into the man's company quite by accident. He had come from New York to Haiti to make certain collections for a dealer in natural-history specimens. Fate had directed his steps to the alleged hostelry of Baptiste; and chance, in the unprepossessing guise of a waiter with a scarred eye, had led him to this bedroom, where, after the manner of the country, he was expected to sling his hammock in a vacant corner. All night long the old Frenchman had been partially delirious, and Geoff had given him such care as he could.

"In the night—I remember, now. Your kind hands, monsieur."

The words were lost in the bellow of the street patriot: "*Vive* Tiresias Sam! *Vive le père de son peuple! Vive* Haiti!" The iteration rolled up, and a pitying smile came to the sick man's face.

"Hear that poor creature!" he said. "He must be a political suspect, and this is his method of advertising a pretended loyalty. Without doubt they will imprison him before night. Poor dog! he bays at the stars."

He lay silent for a few moments, but all the time his eyes dwelt on the big, gaunt Englishman in the threadbare suit, who renewed the cool bandage with gentle, sun-browned hands.

"I do not know why you come to Haiti," he said at last. "Perhaps you travel for your pleasure."

"I am not rich," answered Geoff, with a smile, "nor am I in Haiti for pleasure."

"Your confidence? I do not ask it. Ah, no, monsieur; but forgive a man old enough to be your father if he errs. Imagine, for the moment, money to be your target. It is possible that I may be able to find the range for you." The old man spoke with a half-appealing courtesy.

"This is excellent hearing," said Geoff. "For the job I have on hand of collecting moths and butterflies does not promise much."

"You are a stranger; but, monsieur, I carry a gift, an instinct. I see the soul. You are a man of honor."

"Shall we say, honest—so far, anyhow?" Geoff replied half-mockingly.

"I understand you; though, forgive me, the English are hard to understand. But you are honorable; ah, yes! Then listen. First, you will be so good as to see that none listen to us behind the jalousies."

Half the wooden wall was composed of slats, for in Haiti the luxury of a free current of air overrides any prejudice in the matter of privacy. Geoff pulled himself up on his arms and looked over the top of the partition into the next apartment. It was empty.

"Lean near to me. Here they call me Monsieur Lebrun, but let me assure you through that"—the old Frenchman pointed to his bandaged foot—"runs some of the best blood of France. You will not believe it, perhaps. You cannot realize that a D'Estrier should herd with negroes in this vile place. Yet there is good reason. I have played for a stake, a great stake, monsieur."

"Do not tell me more than is necessary," put in Geoff.

"But you must hear. You know the history of this country? Yes? Is it not curious to think that a hundred years ago these disfigured buildings looked down upon a French colony, peopled with historic names? Among them, the D'Estriers held high heads. Their plantations spread half-across the plains of the Artibonite; their ships sailed out of Havre with silks, pictures, and rare wines, and back again laden with coffee, logwood, and mahogany. Then arrived the fatal epoch when your nation and mine were clasped together in a death-struggle. At the signal of that distant war the slaves rose and overwhelmed the land."

Geoff nodded, and the flush of excitement deepened in the high-couraged old face of Monsieur D'Estrier as he continued.

"My ancestors had always been good masters, but none remembered that in their favor when 'Mon Désir'—their plantation—was wrecked. It was, I must tell you, a great life which the old colonists led here in Haiti, a brilliant social life hardly less splendid than that of Versailles. It is from the time of one of these festivities that my story dates itself. The brother of Napoleon was in the island. Music and dancing ran far into the night. At that ball the beautiful Adrienne D'Estrier wore many of the family jewels, among them a coronet of rubies which had been an heirloom since the days of Henri of Navarre. That same night the wave of revolt broke over 'Mon Désir,' when almost all of white blood were massacred. One of our own ships was in harbor, and the master, Captain Freycou, a Jerseyman, by a courageous ruse, got safe to sea, carrying with him two survivors, Camille D'Estrier and another, who cut their way to the coast. Before they escaped these two buried the jewel-case of the dead Adrienne in the forest of 'Mon Désir.' You follow me, monsieur?"

"Perfectly."

"I am the direct descendant of that Camille D'Estrier. From time to time members of my family have had the idea of returning to Haiti to regain the jewels. One, indeed, made the voyage twenty years ago, Desmoulins D'Estri-

er, an eccentric fellow, who failed in his attempt, and never after could be persuaded to speak of his adventure. But we are not as you English, who love travel for its own sake; besides, the D'Estriers, although never rich, have had enough for their wants, and a little more—until lately."

He broke off and lay panting upon his pillows.

The young Englishman looked up gravely. "I see," he said.

"You have honest eyes. I will continue. All my life I have lived at my château of Barthold in Picardy, but we have had losses like the others, this way, that way, every way—great losses. For myself, I do not greatly care. A very little contents me. A little wine, a little tobacco, my flowers—it is enough. But I have a daughter." At the word the old Frenchman's voice shifted to a softer key. "She grew up before I knew it, monsieur, and while I was attending to the little duties that please an old man. Less than a year ago things were well with me, when I entered into a marriage contract for my Félise; in it the amount of her dowry was, of course, stipulated. The marriage approached, and I discovered the frightful fact that I possessed not money sufficient to make good my word—I, Arnald D'Estrier!"

"Ah!"

D'Estrier raised himself feebly and stared in Geoff's face.

"Monsieur is himself of the nobility; he comprehend?" He fell back. "It was even worse, monsieur, because for Félise it was not a marriage of convenience. She had known Henri, the Vicomte Lerault, all her life. They loved. I told him of the failure of my affairs, also this story of my family which I have recounted to you. He urged me to think no more of the dowry, but I pointed out to him how ill such a course would accord with my honor. Then he vowed to accompany me to Haiti. In the end we came."

"Why, yes, it was inevitable," said Geoff thoughtfully.

"Three months ago we landed in Port-au-Prince, calling ourselves by plebeian names, for the buried fortune of the D'Estriers has always been a subject of surpassing interest to the black rulers of this island. But, alas! our departure had been noticed by the Haitian legation in Paris, and the news of it arrived before we did. We had not been there five days when we were arrested, first one, then the other, and cast into prison upon some absurd charge. Our persons and our baggage were searched, but we carried the secret in our brains. For a week we suffered in prison. *Mon Dieu!* what a week! Then our chargé d'affaires demanded our release."

"You did not tell your chargé d'affaires your story."

The count waved a thin hand, and resumed his whispered narration.

"For what purpose, monsieur? If he aided us to recover our inheritance, the government would certainly confiscate it. No, no, it was a business to be achieved by our own efforts."

"Did you visit 'Mon Désir'?"

"We never reached it, for from the moment of leaving the prison we were shadowed by agents of the government. We affected to be farmers who desired a good farm to produce guinea-grass. We pushed out into the plain; alas, we could neither walk nor ride a kilometer but the forest, which walls in the road, would yield up some spy! At length we formulated a plan; but I was unable to aid in its execution. Fever seized me, the chigoes pierced into my feet, ulceration followed"—he indicated the blue bandage—"I was obliged to come back here, while Henri remained to carry out the plan alone."

"How long ago was that?" asked Geoff.

Before D'Estrier could reply, a patter of bare feet in the street below was followed by a renewed roar from the suspect:

"*Vive* Tiresias Sam!"

He choked, and then his voice broke into an incoherence of supplication. A negro laughed raucously. There was the sound of a thud and a groan. Geoff leaned from the window just in time

to see half a dozen blue-capped policemen dragging the prisoner up the street. There was blood in the roadway, and the bamboo clubs of the law were still banging casually on the inert body.

The old Frenchman laughed mirthlessly in his hammock.

"You have seen, monsieur, the mercy extended to prisoners in Haiti. But, to continue. 'Mon Désir' is situated in the hills far beyond Thomazeau. Probably since my ancestors perished there no white man has visited the place. Twenty days ago Henri and I camped in the woods to nurse my foot, giving out that we were on our way back to Port-au-Prince. There I parted from my son, who rode back toward 'Mon Désir.'"

"And since then what news have you had of him?"

"None. I waited at Thomazeau for many days. Had all been well, he must have returned. I am the prey of frightful anxieties, for Henri is already to me a son, and at Barthold my daughter waits. Can I take her this news, monsieur, for it is a terrible place—the interior? It is a dark stage on which the curtain dropped a hundred years ago, and from behind it come only echoes and shadows. Henri has passed into those dim hills, which ache and shimmer in the heat. Dare you to follow him, to find out at the least the fate that has fallen upon him? I will describe to you the spot in which Camille D'Estrier hid the jewels, but I do not ask you to search for them—only to save Henri, my beloved Henri! Should you find the treasure also, the third part of it shall be yours. Will you go?"

Geoff Heronhaye considered. He had his own reasons for desiring money just then, and beyond the money there was a quality of high courage, of unquenched spirit in the old man which appealed to him.

"I will go," he said.

D'Estrier put out a shaking hand to the lapel of the young man's coat, and, drawing him down, kissed him on the cheek. Then rapidly he whispered his secret.

Later, Geoff, the man of few words, sauntered forth into the evening street. He walked down the center of it, avoiding the open drain. Negroes, basking in the shade of broken piazzas, sent their outrageous voices after him. *"Blanc!"* they shouted. *"Blanc!"*

But the hostility of race went no further for the moment. Individuals in frock coats and with curled goatee beards, wearing enameled straw hats—pink was the fashion in Haiti that year—stared at the gaunt, striding white man.

Geoff's mind was far away from the littered streets and from the hot, blue hills backing the prospect. He carried a letter in his breast pocket that was more to him than all the jewels of the D'Estriers, and on which his desperate soul fed. It told him of the girl artist in New York whom he loved. It told him of her happiness. She had sold a picture! She was encouraged! And Geoff (the buyer under an alias) flushed to read. He was no longer working for himself, and this flung a new, fierce interest into his struggle for money. And it was not for a few thousand francs more or less that he was going forth upon his dangerous errand, but in order that he might become the possessor of some of the pictures—with their heart-breaking, inadequate price—that the young artist far away in New York was offering to an unappreciative world.

Few men have been obliged to be content with a more meager equipment for an expedition than that which Geoff permitted himself to purchase. A lean, red, country pony, for which he had been in treaty earlier in the day, he now finally bought from its owner, who kept a dried-fish store near the quay.

Half an hour afterward, with his provisions and naturalist's outfit packed on the animal's back, he led it through the market-place under the arch of Hippolyte, toward the open country.

Curious citizens watched him, surprised that he did not mount the already burdened pony. They shouted criticisms of him to each other. Even a general in a uniform of green and

gold was good enough to add the weight of his opinion to the popular contempt.

But Geoff heeded none of these things, and shortly the large wooden buildings of the city gave place to the palm-thatched mud huts of its outskirts. Time slipped away, and ever as he went forward the forests seemed to close in behind him. Through the day the heat haze ringed him in, and at night thousands of fireflies swam through the densities or hung in the meshes of Spanish moss. It was Geoff's first experience of a tropical journey. The sun beat upon him with open palm. The hush of the woods stifled him. Nature flung a hundred obstacles in his way. As long as he remained in touch with Haitian humanity, he was followed and watched not only by a string of naked children, but by every man and woman in the vicinity, while he patiently collected, preserved, and packed his specimens.

So he passed on his way, sleeping in the deep woods during the fervor of the midday sun, traveling in cooler hours. Sometimes there came to him glimpses of the life he had turned his back upon in England. It was June now, and England had new-risen from her bath of spring rain and dew. The speckled trout were ambushing under the weeds in Yattalis stream where the clear, cold mantle of the night fell over Herefordshire. But here darkness brought no refreshing, and day but a swelter of heat. The lassitude, the homesickness of the tropics were gaining on him, and Kingsley's words rang often in his thoughts:

> And fresher flowers shall grow out of our graves, sir, than out of yours, in that bare north churchyard there beyond the weary, weary, weary sea.

Time seemed to have no meaning, no existence out in these steaming woods, yet at the last, as often happens, he came upon the aim of his journey quite suddenly.

He had made a long march, and had entered upon the domain once called "Mon Désir." He was leading his mule, and had emerged from the forest at the hour when the fireflies burn white before their sheen is slain by the light of day. Dawn and the stars were together in the sky as he reached an isolated group of huts bunched together inside a broken-down stockade. Most of the trees near-by had been hacked and killed, but tamarinds and the ever-encroaching forest-growth showed green about it. Smoke like black cottonwood rose lazily from the enclosure, and as Geoff approached he saw the usual squat, four-legged roof, under which a couple of black girls sat roasting coffee-beans. In the foreground, on a crazy bench, crouched a figure which fixed his attention with a shock.

It was that of a young man, naked but for a torn coat, which he wore as a loin-cloth. He was incredibly dirty, but there was no mistaking the color of his skin. He sat gnawing at a banana-peel and whimpering.

Geoff hastened up to speak to the girls, but as soon as they caught sight of him they ran into a wood of tamarinds and disappeared. The unappeasable curiosity of the negro is one of his most salient characteristics, and the silent flight of the girls gave food for thought. Geoff lit his pipe and sat down beside the imbecile on the bench.

Taking a stick of chocolate from his provisions, he held it out. The creature clutched at it and devoured it in a second, then began to play a few listless antics and dumbly beg for more.

Geoff stared at him. From his bare shoulders the skin was peeling away in patches. He was clearly unused to this mode of life. His beard was half-grown, but in spite of the bleared eyes and fallen mouth, this creature was certainly the man whose photograph Geoff carried in his pocket.

"Monsieur, you are the Vicomte De Lerault," said Geoff softly. He had some faint hope that this fair-haired being was acting a part.

At sound of his voice the other resumed his dreadful antics.

"What is your name?" Geoff made a second effort.

But the young man's answer was a witless gaze.

Geoff took out a second stick of chocolate and repeated his question.

The loose lips came together on an indistinct word.

"Bijou," he said, and his jaw dropped again.

Geoff tried hard to rouse his attention, but he had dipped back into vacuity. Yet this was indubitably Lerault, or, rather, Lerault's body; but the mind—that was the awful part of it—the mind was gone! What had happened to the man? Illness? Hardly. Sunstroke? No, for that presupposed fever. In bodily health, despite his gauntness and dirt, the young Frenchman was well. What had happened to the man?

Although the buffets of life had added a fine edge to his courage, Geoff never made a secret of the fact that the time of waiting, seated beside this newmade idiot, was one of the most trying half-hours of his life.

A huge dragon-fly came skimming on gauzy wings from the forest. The sun sent up orange streamers to the zenith. Hordes of sand-flies, more virulent than mosquitoes, hummed their obstinate way through the hothouse air. Bijou was scratching his shoulders, and Geoff was sending out cloud upon cloud of tobacco smoke, when the long tongues of the tamarind leaves outside the stockade began to sway in the windless morning, and presently two negroes swaggered across the dust toward him. At their coming Bijou scrambled away into the hut.

"Morning, *blanc*," said one of them, speaking, to Geoff's surprise, in English. He was a middle-aged fellow, decked in the clothes that Geoff suspected had once been Lerault's. A sneering smile gripped his thick lips, and he wagged a scanty beard with every word.

"Good morning. Are these your huts?"

"Yes, *blanc*, my houses. I educated gentleman, same as you. I General Squadro, General of Place and of Commune."

Geoff could have cursed his luck. Of all kinds and varieties of man, this was the very last he could have wished to meet with here. He knew that the wilder parts of Haiti were governed by generals, such as this fellow proclaimed himself to be. He knew also that in their hands rested the supreme power. It was bitterly unfortunate. His presence brought new difficulty into Lerault's affair.

"You speak English, general. You have traveled?" said Geoff.

"Oah, yes. Cuba, Jamaica, Paris. But why you heah?"

Geoff drew his passport from his pocket, and the other knitted his brows as he examined it upside down.

"You can read there that I am a collector of zoological specimens. I am come in the interests of science." Geoff knew that long words have their value in Haiti.

Squadro regarded him with a lowering look of suspicion; then, turning to his companion, said a few words in a low voice. That unsavory-looking individual was clothed in something of stale red, something of discolored yellow; he was old, with a large face, but the flesh had fallen from it, leaving it wrinkled, sinewy, and evil. As he listened, his red-rimmed eyes blinked sourly at the white man.

Geoff caught a glint of beads which hung round his scraggy neck. "Your friend is a *papaloi*," he said abruptly.

Squadro whisked round. "High priest, *blanc*, of native religion," he answered suavely. "Very clever pusson."

"Quite so. Can your people let me have coffee-beans and food?"

The uninterested change of subject somehow put Squadro at a disadvantage. He wanted to continue the conversation on his own lines, but suddenly thought better of it, and busied himself instead in issuing orders, so that presently the young Englishman was seated on a mat of water-reeds eating sticky seed-cakes and drinking the superlative coffee every Haitian seems to know how to prepare. Squadro sat beside him talking volubly, but never for an instant relaxing his watch on the grave features of his visitor.

A squalid population of nine or ten people had collected, and by and by Bijou crept out to prowl round the group, making timid noises in appeal for the scraps and leavings which the negroes threw to him. The degradation of his attitudes made Geoff feel physically sick. Geoff ate in silence, sure that Squadro could not long suppress a desire to discover how he regarded the curious fact of finding a white man living under such conditions in a remote part of Haiti. And in this he judged rightly.

"See dat Bijou, *blanc?*" said Squadro, at length.

Geoff glanced up carelessly. "Yes, I tried to make him talk."

The general showed his disparate yellow teeth in a forced guffaw.

"You notice him. Him freak! Dat his sistah, black girl making coffee."

"Indeed!" said Geoff, rising. "I'll have a sleep now." Then he added: "And in the evening I will hunt for moths by the lake which I saw in the valley."

But when Geoff lay down on the shady side of one of the huts, it was not for sleep, but to wrestle with the problem that the morning had brought him. He was far from being deceived by Squadro's explanation, for, even without the evidence of the photograph he carried, Geoff knew that the imbecile was no negro. What horrid circumstances had rent away his intelligence? Had the excitement of treasure-hunting turned his brain?

As Geoff lay with half-closed eyes he was aware that his every movement was watched most jealously. Lizards green and sand-colored issued from every crack and cranny. The sun, a molten globe, swam across its daily path. An ax echoed in the shining forest. Once Lerault appeared, playing feebly with a gourd. Of these things Geoff was dimly conscious, but behind them towered the shadow of something monstrous, an idea that struck his courage cold.

And, indeed, imagination cannot conjure up a position more dreadful than was his. An hour's thought had solved the secret of Lerault's condition. All the facts pointed to the same conclusion. He had been poisoned with one of those subtle poisons, of which the formula is passed down from father to son among the priests of the Macajuel.

Geoff, in the might of his strength, shuddered as he watched Lerault laughing and posturing, begging for food. Would that be his fate also? Would he, too, lost to human dignity, cut such antics in the sun?

With the thought came a desire to escape at all costs. Had it been merely a question of the treasure, he would, or so he told himself at the moment, have yielded to the voice of his fear. But he could not desert Lerault—Lerault whose only hope he made. So Geoff obeyed the call of color and stayed; but he was never quite the same man afterward.

But why had they destroyed Lerault's reason? Perhaps he had found the treasure. Yes, that must be it. Lerault had doubtless found the treasure, and Squadro had known of his success and attempted to kill him. Perhaps they had given him too small a dose of the poison—but then how easy to have finished the work with a second! Yet, on further thought, why should they? Their victim was harmless, his brain wrecked, and he offered such amusement as their squalid fancies loved.

With such imaginings Geoff passed the sun-smitten hours, and he was still deep in them when a sudden shuffling of feet aroused him. He opened his eyes. Four soldiers, their black faces in vivid contrast with their sky-blue kepis, were covering him with their rifles from over the top of the stockade.

At the same moment Squadro crashed out of the foliage, the *papaloi* behind him.

"I desire to speak with yo' in private —as man of education, different from those others." Squadro waved his black fingers toward the huts.

"Right," said Geoff. "Get ahead!"

"First, I want inform you dis very

clever doctah." Squadro pointed to the priest.

"Quite."

"Doctah clever like him could cure poo' Bijou."

"That would be very kind. But just as a matter of curiosity, what is Bijou's disease?"

"Oah, disease of de country. There are many such sicknesses heah, of which yo' poo' white doctahs know nothing."

"Yes, the doctor who gives the disease can often cure it—in this country. Pah! Get to the point! You poisoned this man with some obscure poison. Laigi-aigi, perhaps. I've heard of it. In small doses it does not kill at once. A man with it in his system may live two years, but it drugs the memory and the reason. So much I know. I am waiting for the rest."

"Bijou have secret of burying-place of French money, same as you. He no tell."

"Ah!"

"Den old priest here give laigi-aigi, weaken him will."

A light broke in upon Geoff.

"And he gave him too much, so that he forgot everything."

Squadro nodded sullenly.

"You villains!"

"No! You come try steal Haitian money. *You* villains."

Geoff was sorely tempted, but the three soldiers in the sky-blue kepis still kept their muskets leveled.

"What next?" said Geoff.

"You tell where French money hidden."

"And if I don't?"

"Laigi-aigi you, too."

Geoff shuddered.

"Make up your mind quick, *blanc*," said Squadro, standing back out of the line of fire.

So Geoff was left alone with his thoughts. The scene around him was etched in upon his consciousness. The lizards had gone to their holes; the sun, dull-red as heated iron, was falling among the tree tops, and for a moment seemed to rest among the palms; the four soldiers still held him under threat of their rifles.

Rapidly he passed the situation in review, and made his decision. The treasure must be sacrificed; Lerault, if it were possible, cured. He had no faith in Squadro. Once the secret had passed from him, he knew that the negro would tolerate no inconvenient witnesses.

Geoff did not wait for Squadro's return; the moment his decision was taken he shouted his name. Squadro approached, and Geoff, as was his custom, did not wait or pause.

"My mind is made up," he said. "Listen carefully to my terms."

"You no in position make terms."

"No? That is just where you make your error. You have not the secret of where this 'French money,' as you call it, is hidden. On certain conditions I will tell you. If you don't like my conditions, say so, and we will try another way."

"I listening."

"First you must cure Monsieur De Lerault."

"When you have told we cure him."

"No, you don't hear till he is cured. Next you promise to let us both go free. Don't be a fool, Squadro, I mean what I say, and I am not to be frightened by threats. There is only one way by which you will see your precious 'French money,' and that is by doing just as I say. Another fact it is rather important for you to know. If I am not back safe in Port-au-Prince within fourteen days from now, Monsieur D'Estrier will inform the Haitian Government of the matter of the treasure. They have been anxious to find it for years . . . and I wonder where you and your friend the *papaloi* will come in then? Now, yes or no?"

"Oah, have it your way," snarled Squadro. "The cure will take two days."

The retransformation of Bijou into Henri de Lerault began that very evening. Probably it was all done by the simple agency of an antidote, but this the *papaloi* would never have acknowledged. Baths of crushed leaves and a poultice of bark upon the forehead figured among his elaborate prescriptions.

Through it all Geoff remained with Lerault in one of the huts, and for those forty-eight hours he lived on fruit. Coffee or the sticky seed-cakes of the country he would not touch, for he was obsessed by a fear of poison. Twelve hours after the cure began Lerault slept for a day and a half.

During this time Geoff watched beside him. He had heard much of the poisons which form the stock-in-trade of the voodoo priests of Haiti, and, although he never doubted their power to kill, of their power to cure he felt a little skeptical. So it was with both relief and thanksgiving he saw Lerault at last awake, and knew by the first words spoken that he was talking to a sane man once more.

"Who are you?" Lerault's tone was weak and his eyes still dazed.

"I was sent by Monsieur D'Estrier to your help."

Lerault propped himself upon his elbow in excitement. "Is it safe? Is the treasure safe?" he whispered, panting.

Geoff saw that what he was about to be done must be done without the young man's knowledge, lest the shock of loss should overtax his weakened brain.

"You have been very ill," said Geoff. "Leave it to me to do the best I can. Try to gain as much strength as you can, for you will need it, if we make our escape to-night."

So now a new complication arose, for it became at once plain that the young Frenchman would never agree to the bargain which Geoff had made. He was possessed by the thought of the treasure, and Geoff was afraid that when he heard that it was never to be his, his wits, weakened and shaken by poison and by antidote, would collapse. What was to be done must be done without his knowledge.

Night shut down purple and full of stars. All about the stockade innumerable crickets chimed their minor songs, and from the reeds beside the lake a choir of frogs tuned up in wooden voices. The negroes shut themselves up in their huts. Geoff outside, rolled in his waterproof blanket, for the dew was heavy, awaited the hour when Squadro should call him to fulfil his promise.

The hours passed, and the chattering of voices never ceased; if silence fell upon one palm-thatch, gabble at once broke out under another. At length, deep in the small hours, Squadro and the *papaloi* came to Geoff, who rose, and the three stole away along a trail into the forest. Haiti is the land of spies, and evidently Squadro and his companion desired no inconvenient witnesses.

"Take me to the ruins of the old plantation," said Geoff.

The cool smell of the water came to them on the night air; branches brushed their faces; the noise of the talking in the huts died away, and at length they reached the knee-high ruins of "Mon Désir." The rest was easy, merely a matter of a couple of cross-bearings, and then Geoff was able to point out the place where they must dig. A centiped crawled away out of the lantern-light as the negroes began their excavations. Geoff stood still. His heart was sore, indeed, that this should be the end of all his labors, this enriching of the two savages who clawed at the earth. But there was no use in repining, and presently when the *papaloi* lifted a large, round, earthen urn from the ground his pulses began to quicken, also.

The negroes gave cries of delight as they tore away the lid and exposed the dull gleam of precious metals. Then they sat down in the lantern-light and began to make a division. "Heah a writing," said Squadro, at last. "You read him out, *blanc*."

Geoff took the paper idly and held it to the lantern glow.

"Who write him?" demanded Squadro.

"The man who buried the jewels, I suppose," said Geoff, in a dull voice. "As to what he says, he seems merely to be wishing luck to any of his descendants who may find them."

"Ha—ha! *Blanc* no find dem!"

Geoff thrust the paper into the flame

of the lantern and lit his pipe with it. The negroes fell to their division again. The centiped crawled slowly back across the light.

Geoff thought it an excellent opportunity to dash away into the forest. He was not followed. Neither Squadro nor the *papaloi* trusted one another sufficiently to give chase. Ten minutes later Geoff was explaining to an unwilling Lerault the immediate necessity for flight. Into the long story of their journey back to Port-au-Prince it is not necessary for us to go.

The coaster which was to cary D'Estrier, Lerault, and Geoffrey Heronhaye round to Jacmel, where they expected to catch the Royal Mail for Jamaica, had already drawn abreast of Gonaive Island, and the town of Port-au-Prince was sinking out of sight into the heat haze. The three adventurers sitting upon the stern-board of the boat talked together.

D'Estrier waved his hand toward the dark mountains of the coast.

"Ah, the terrible country!" said he. "I am glad that I shall never see it again except in dreams. We have failed. I cannot fulfil the marriage settlement of my daughter."

"On the contrary," broke in Lerault, "you have fulfilled it."

"Henri!"

"Certainly. Monsieur De Heronhaye"—he indicated Geoff—"paid away the treasure in order to ransom me from madness. The least I can do is to waive my claim upon the settlement which you would have paid with that same money. Is not that so?" He turned to Geoff.

"When I was at 'Mon Désir'——" began Geoff.

"Come, monsieur," broke in D'Estrier, "you promised that when we left Haitian soil you would tell us all the facts of your adventure at 'Mon Désir.'"

"Yes, yes, tell us the story," added Lerault.

So Geoff told it, much as it is written here. When he came to the account of how Squadro and the *papaloi* found the treasure his hearers groaned in spirit.

"But," continued Geoff, "there is something to add. As I tell you they asked me to read the paper. I took it carelessly enough, but when I saw the signature it was all I could do to catch back an exclamation. The writing was signed by Desmoulin D'Estrier!"

"My ancestor who attempted the quest twenty years ago. Impossible! He never reached the place."

"It appears that he did reach it, else how could he bury the writing?"

"But why did he not take the treasure? Why did he leave it? Was he disturbed or——" One excited question followed another.

"He does not say."

"What can you mean, monsieur?"

Geoff's next question took his hearers by surprise.

"Have you at your château in Picardy a curious cabinet of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ornamented with carved medallions of ivory?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"Merely this. Desmoulin D'Estrier succeeded in his quest, but in carrying it out he was unfortunate enough to shed blood, and this preyed upon his mind. So, although he took the jewels, he could not bring himself to make any use of them or even, such was the strange nature of the man, to allow his descendants to profit without again undertaking the pilgrimage to Haiti. The paper which the negroes asked me to read directed the seeker to return to the château Barthold, in Picardy, and to search in the roof of the ebony cabinet."

The old Frenchman gave a cry of delight and surprise.

"Is it possible? So all the time that which we went among these dreadful peoples to seek was within a few feet of us. Ah, Henri! Ah, Félise! But you, monsieur, how shall I thank you? How shall I? This proves——"

Geoff laughed.

"I think it proves that you never know your luck till the very last card is turned," said he.

In the Cause of Freedom

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "The Eternal Snare," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACTING UNDER ORDERS.

IT was now quite clear my scheme had gone wrong. Either Volna had been prevented from coming to meet me; or, having come, had been scared away by the mob, or had given me up.

If she had returned home, she was already in Bremenhof's power; and the sooner I knew of it the better. On the other hand, if she was not there, and he or his men were, I could confront him with the proof of his double-dealing.

"I don't see why we shouldn't adopt the suggestion," I said indifferently. "If Colonel Bremenhof has ordered me to be shadowed, I may as well know why. We'll go there."

"This way, then," he replied, adding, after a pause: "I trust you won't misunderstand my position, Mr. Anstruther."

"Why are you so anxious about it?"

"You have been so badly treated by the department, for one thing; and, of course, as a fellow member of the Fraternity, I am bound to help you all I can. But you don't seem to trust me."

"How did you know Colonel Bremenhof was at this address—the Place of St. John?"

"He sent me word this morning." He told the lie very plausibly and without the slightest hesitation.

"You know his affairs pretty closely—what do you suppose he is doing there?"

"I should know well enough, but, you see, I haven't been either at headquarters or at his house since last night, when I left to see you at the Hotel Vladimir."

"I should find it easier to believe you if I had not myself sent the address to him this morning, at a time which made it impossible for him to have communicated it to you."

"He has a hundred secret sources of information. He must have known this long before?"

"Why?"

He spread out his hand. "How otherwise could he have sent it to me?"

"If he did send it," I retorted dryly.

He stopped abruptly, as though an idea had just occurred to him. "Wait! Wait! How did you send it to him?"

"By my servant, Felsen."

"Then, that is it!" he cried. "I suspected that fellow. It was he who told me the address, declaring the chief had sent the message by him. He is a traitor, that servant of yours. The scoundrel!" He was quite hot in his indignation.

"But you said he was a suspect," I reminded him.

"I wished to warn you. I told you he talked. I wish I had spoken more plainly. But you are so quick, I thought you would understand."

"I am beginning to now," I replied, as we hurried on.

As we reached the Place of St. John, the noise of a great tumult reached us from the direction in which we had seen the strikers marching—the subdued roar of thousands of hoarse voices, fol-

This series began in the September issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer.

lowed first by some desultory shots and then by the rattle of musketry firing.

The people about us paused, and then began to run in the direction of the sound.

"It has begun," said Burski. "The troops are stationed by the government buildings, and the strikers have come in conflict with them."

It was to the accompaniment of this ominous music of revolt that we approached the house. A small force of police were gathered before it, and I scanned the windows eagerly for some sign of Volna's presence. I saw nothing.

There was a short delay before we were admitted. Burski drew aside two of the men; and during the short discussion curious looks were cast at me.

In the end, way was made for us, and we were allowed to pass.

The moment we were inside Burski said: "We must wait here." Another man who was in the passage placed himself by my side.

It looked very much as though I had walked into a trap and was once more under arrest.

I glanced at Burski. "What does this mean?"

For answer he shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands, as though he was as perplexed as I. "Simply the orders, that's all."

CHAPTER XXV.

NO. 17, THE PLACE OF ST. JOHN.

We stood silent for perhaps a minute, and I strained my ears for the sound of voices in the rooms near. Not so much as a whisper was to be heard.

Presently the stairs creaked above, and I saw a woman, tear-stained and troubled-looking, peering cautiously down at us.

"What are you doing there? Come down," said Burski quickly.

I gussed that she was Volna's old nurse, and that she had been listening above-stairs. She came down, her eyes full of alarm.

"In which room are they?" I asked sharply.

"The back——" she began, pointing to a door, when Burski stopped her.

"Silence," he interposed.

But I had the information I needed, and sprang past him and ran up the stairs. "You must not go up, Mr. Anstruther," he cried.

"Why not? I am no prisoner."

Before he could prevent me, I had reached the door and entered the room, Burski at my heels, to find Volna in a condition of mingled defiance and distress, and Bremenhof pacing the floor angrily.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried.

"That is exactly what I have come to see," said I.

Volna got up. "Is it true, Mr. Anstruther, that you sent this address to Colonel Bremenhof?"

"Should this man remain to hear what has to be said?" I asked Bremenhof, pointing to Burski.

He found the question an awkward one. Unwilling to let Burski overhear the conversation, and yet equally unwilling to remain without some protection, he was at a loss what to do.

"Take the key of the door with you, Burski, and remain within call," he said, after a pause.

I waited until we three were alone, and then answered Volna's question: "It is possible that Colonel Bremenhof obtained the address through me. How *did* you get it, sir?"

But Volna would not wait for him to answer. "He has told me more than once that in consideration of his allowing you to leave the country, you betrayed my address to him."

I turned to Bremenhof. "Do you repeat that now in my presence?"

"You have no right to come blustering here," he said.

"Do you repeat that story of my treachery now in my presence? Come. Dare you?"

"Don't think to intimidate me."

"I thought you would not dare. Now, will you tell Miss Drakona what really passed last night; or shall I?"

"These matters cannot be gone into now. You must both come to the department, and the whole thing shall be——" I put my back against the door, and he took alarm instantly. He broke off and said quickly: "My men are here."

"You will not call them yet, Colonel Bremenhof," I said very deliberately.

"Do you presume to threaten me?"

"This is a personal matter between Miss Drakona, yourself, and me. You have slandered me to her, and your official position cannot and shall not—understand, *shall not*—prevent your giving an explanation."

"I'll soon see about that."

"Don't call your men. I warn you!" And I put my hand to my pocket, as though I had a weapon concealed. I had none; but he was not a difficult person to bluff, and my look was steady enough to frighten him.

"Mr. Anstruther!" exclaimed Volna, in alarm.

"This matter must be set straight, Miss Drakona." My tone was as firm to her as it had been to him; and this served to complete his discomfiture. "Now, Colonel Bremenhof, I am waiting."

He sat down, and was as troubled and fidgety as a schoolboy waiting for a whipping. His eyes were everywhere in the room, his lips moved nervously, and his fingers played with his beard. But he said nothing.

"I will help you to start. You gave me your word last night that Madame Drakona should be released to-day; that you would place the evidence against her in my hands at your house to-night; and that all charges against this lady should be withdrawn. Is that true?"

"Yes; that is what I have explained," he muttered.

"The express object, as I told you plainly, was that Miss Drakona should be a perfectly free agent to marry my friend, Count Ladislas Tuleski, or not as she chose."

"I have said that, too, in effect."

"In effect!" cried Volna contemptuously. And she added hotly:

"The one condition you imposed was that I should leave the country, and to that I agreed."

"That is only your way of putting it," he said, beginning to gather courage as the minutes passed.

Turning to Volna, I went on:

"I wrote as much to you this morning, Miss Drakona, and gave the letter to my servant, Felsen, to bring to you. Have you received it?"

"Colonel Bremenhof has given it to me, Mr. Anstruther."

"Turned letter-carrier, eh?" said I dryly.

"The explanation of my possession of it is perfectly simple. Your servant was arrested by one of my men this morning; and when he was searched, the letter was found upon him. I deemed it best to bring it here myself."

"And to add that I betrayed the address to you?"

"Your man told me that you had instructed him to bring it to me. Of course he may have lied. But how was I to know that?"

His air of blameless innocence, as palpably false as his explanation, was laughable; but it was my cue at the moment to accept both.

"There is only one thing that really matters," I declared. "Are you prepared to keep your word to release Madame Drakona, to give up the evidence against her, and to certify officially that there is no charge against Miss Drakona here?"

His start of anger and the vicious look he shot at me showed that he appreciated the tight corner in which this put him. He was hesitating how to answer, when, unfortunately, Volna's indignation would not be restrained.

"If you are satisfied with the explanation, Mr. Anstruther, I am not. Colonel Bremenhof's charge against you was of deliberate, not involuntary, betrayal—that it was part of your pledge to him."

I raised my hand in protest; but it was too late. He saw his chance, and took it at once cunningly. He rose and said: "If I am already judged, noth-

ing more can be done here. Burski!" he called in a loud, ringing voice.

I stepped from the door, and Burski and the second man entered.

"You called, colonel?"

"We are going to the offices of the department. Let the Englishman be searched. He has a weapon."

Burski drew his revolver and turned to me.

"No, you are mistaken. I know what you thought. See!" and I turned my pocket inside out. "I don't resist."

Resistance being useless, it was just as well to make a virtue of offering none.

"You threatened me," said Bremenhof.

"Is that the charge against me?"

"The charge will be explained in proper time," he snapped.

"And I will see that the explanation is proper, too."

"Silence!" he cried

Now that his men were present, his natural instincts as an official bully reasserted themselves.

It was an ugly development of the situation; and my chagrin was the more bitter because only my own blind self-confidence had brought it about.

Volna blamed herself, however, setting it all down to her last angry interposition. "I am so sorry," she said to me. "This is my fault."

"Not a bit of it. He meant to do it in any case. You only made it a little easier for him to show his hand. The real blame is mine, as I will explain to you."

"The explanation will have to wait," sneered Bremenhof. "You have many other things to explain first. See that a carriage is brought, Burski, for Miss Drakona to go with me. You will take the Englishman. Take him away now."

Volna gave a cry of distress, and was coming toward me, when Bremenhof pushed between us.

"You must not speak to the prisoner," he said bluntly.

"Come, Mr. Anstruther," said Burski.

"You need have no fear on my account, Miss Drakona," I assured her, as I went out with Burski.

"What's the reason for this?" Burski asked, as we stood a moment on the landing, after he had sent his companion for the carriage.

"It means that for the moment you have outplayed me—for the moment, that's all."

"Can I help you?"

I looked at him steadily. "Yes, by dropping your pretense."

"You wrong me, friend. I can still help you to escape. I can get you out of the city, if you will."

"Colonel Bremenhof's orders, eh? No, thank you; not again. I am just as anxious to be a prisoner now as he is to get me out of the city."

"He means mischief for you. I told you last night."

"You told me many lies last night, and acted others. And I have had quite enough of them, and of you. Now, go ahead, and do as he told you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "If you get to headquarters it will be too late," he said.

At that moment his comrade came running up. "If the prisoners are to be taken, Burski, you'd better come. There's a crowd of the strikers close by."

Burski looked at me sharply.

I smiled. "May be a bit awkward for you, eh?"

We went down to the front door.

"Is the carriage there yet?" asked Burski.

"Just driven up," was the reply.

The clamor of a crowd outside reached our ears. I put out my hand to open the door, and Burski stopped me. He was looking very anxious. "Call the chief," he said hurriedly.

The man sprang up the stairs.

Burski and I were left alone.

The clamor outside increased, and some one knocked at the door.

"Why don't you open the door? If you are in earnest about helping me to escape, let me call in the crowd."

Instead of replying, he drew his revolver.

The knock was repeated, and a voice

called: "Burski, Stragoff; either of you. Quick, man, quick, if you're coming."

The noise of the crowd was growing every moment, and my guard's perplexity grew with it.

The door of the room above us was opened, and Bremenhof called: "Burski, Burski. Are you there?"

Attracted by the call, his eyes left me a moment. The next I had his revolver hand in mine, and, having the advantage of the surprise, wrenched the weapon away from him.

He called out, and Bremenhof and the second man came running down.

The noise without showed that the crowd were close to the house. I threw the door wide open.

Two men were on the door-step, and fell back at the sight of the weapon in my hand.

The crowd were close at hand, streaming past the corner of the Place of St. John.

I fired two shots in the air. At the sound the crowd turned and faced toward me.

"The police are here. Rescue! Rescue!" I shouted with all the strength of my lungs.

A loud roar of angry shouts answered me, and a number of men, breaking from the crowd, came pouring toward the house.

The police agents outside darted away like hares.

At the same instant Burski and the others seized me; and, after a short, fierce struggle, I was dragged back inside, and the door was slammed just as the first comers from the mob reached the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

The tables were turned now, and, as the mob howled and clamored and hammered at the door, a braver man than Bremenhof might well have lost his nerve.

He was pale, and trembled, partly with anger, but more with terror, as he stared at me in doubt what I would do next.

The chances of the struggle had left me nearest the door; and, as I had retained possession of Burski's revolver, I had command of the situation.

"You won't let them in," he said, as the hammering at the door increased in violence, and the crowd yelled for it to be opened. "They'll tear us to pieces, if you do. For God's sake!"

"You are willing to keep your word now, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes, in everything—everything," he replied eagerly.

Then Burski, who was as cool and collected as his chief was agitated, made a move the purpose of which I was to see later. He whispered to his companions, and Bremenhof hurried back up the staircase, and the other man ran away to the back of the house.

"Now, Mr. Anstruther, we must face this out together. What are you going to do?"

Those outside were battering at the door with a violence that threatened to break it down every moment. A heavy stone was hurled through the small glass light above it, and a loud cheer greeted the smash.

I turned and threw the door open, and then his object was made plain.

As I opened it, he sent up a great shout.

"Help! help!" he called, in ringing, stentorian tones. "Thank God you have come, friends. The rest of the cursed police have bolted, but I've kept this one from escaping. My fellow prisoners are up-stairs."

It was a clever ruse; and in an instant a dozen hands shot out eagerly to grab me. I sprang back, and Burski tried to block my retreat; but I thrust him away and reached the stairs.

"Stop. This is a trick," I shouted. "That is the police agent. I am an Englishman. It was I who fired the shots just now and called for help."

A babel of oaths and confused cries greeted this; and the men in front halted a moment in hesitation.

Burski saw the hesitation. "He lies, like the police dog he is, to save his

skin," he called. "Look at the weapon in his hand. Some of you will know the police pattern."

A yell of execration followed this cunning stroke, as the crowd threatened me.

"I took it from him," I said, but I was not believed; and a rush was made at me again.

To stop this I backed up the narrow stairway and leveled the weapon at them. Those in front flinched and hung back at the sight of it.

"Do you want any further proof," cried Burski. "Is there any leader of the Fraternity here? I can soon convince him." His cool audacity was wonderful.

A cry was raised for some one; and a pause followed, while a newcomer elbowed his way to Burski. A shout greeted his coming, and all eyes were upon the two as they interchanged a few words in low tones. What passed I do not know, probably some secret sign was given; and it sufficed.

"This man is one of us," was the verdict; and at the decision a deafening yell of rage and curses broke out as the mob turned to me again.

"Police spy! Liar! Dog! Down with him!"

"Hear me!" I shouted; but my voice was drowned in the curses of the mob.

Another rush was made at me, to be stopped again by the leveled revolver.

Then the newcomer held up his hand.

"If you are a friend, give up your weapon."

"Clear the house of all except yourself and one or two more and I will. I can convince you."

"Do you want to walk into a police trap, friend?" asked Burski, with a sneer. He had the crowd with him now, and they echoed the sneer with a laugh.

But the leader was a persistent fellow in his way. "How many are in the house?" he asked Burski.

The latter shrugged his shoulders. "There were plenty just now; enough to treat me pretty roughly; and I'm no bantling."

"There are no police in the house except that man and one other; he knows that," I declared.

The leader turned to the crowd and tried to reason with them; but it was useless. Not a man would leave the house. Some began to murmur and growl at him for his interference; and the yells and cries against me redoubled in violence.

Then for awhile things went all wrong with me. One of the fellows in the hallway picked up a mat, and, with a raucous laugh and an oath, flung it at me. It hit me full in the face; and a burst of laughter and wild cheering followed.

Instantly another man rushed up the stairs and caught me by the legs. Down I went backward; my weapon flew out of my hand, and in an instant I was hauled down the stairs, feet first, into the seething mass of infuriated men; grabbed here, thrust there, beaten, kicked, and hustled all ways at once, to the accompaniment of such screeching and yelling as I hope I may never hear again; at least under similar conditions.

Matters would have been much worse with me, indeed, but for one stroke of luck. One of the crowd, a grimy, fat, vile-smelling creature, in his eagerness to get a kick at my head, fell asprawl over me as I lay against the wall; I grabbed him tight and hung on to him, using his fat carcas as a shield until his piercing screams for help let his friends see what was happening.

The attack ceased while they dragged him free. I managed to scramble to my feet at the same time, and with my back to the wall I used my fists right and left upon the front rank of hot, straining, sweating, staring faces in a desperate effort to win a way back to the stairs.

Against such numbers I could gain no more than a moment's respite, however. But it proved enough.

A revolver-shot rang out from the stairway and drew all eyes that way.

It was Volna.

Running from the room above, she had seen my pistol on the stairs, and her quick wits had suggested to her the

means of stopping the tumult. She had discharged it over the heads of the crowd and had thus gained a hearing.

Her lovely face flushed and her eyes alight with indignation, she used the moment of astonishment to dash right into the midst of the crowd and reach my side.

"Shame, men, shame!" she cried. "Would you tear your friends to pieces? I am one of the prisoners and this is the other."

The fickleness of a mob is a proverb. Her plucky act succeeded where all arguments and inducements would have failed. The crowd swung over to her side and cheered her lustily.

Burski was quick to appreciate the probable results to him; and I saw him begin to edge his way to the door to escape.

"Stop that man!" I called, pointing to him.

In an instant his path was blocked; and I hoped that he was going to have a taste of the treatment of which he had secured such a full meal for me.

He would have had it surely enough but for an interruption from outside.

The luck had turned right in our favor. Three or four men shouldered their way into the house, and in their midst I saw my friend Ladislas. He was known to many of the crowd, who made way for him, with a loud cheer.

In a few words I made the situation clear to him, and added that Bremenhof was in the room above, and that if the crowd got wind of it in their present temper, they would tear him to pieces.

He succeeded ultimately in inducing the people to leave the house; and, putting Burski in charge of three men, Ladislas, Volna, and I went up to Bremenhof.

He was in a condition of desperate terror, and, as we entered, started up and stared at us wide-eyed, trembling, and abject.

"You are in no danger, Colonel Bremenhof," said Ladislas. "They shall take my life before I will see you harmed."

"Not quite so fast as that, Ladislas," I declared. "Colonel Bremenhof knew what his man, Burski, intended in setting the crowd on me, and I have a reckoning to settle."

The hunted expression in his eyes, which had been calmed somewhat by my friend's words, returned as he asked: "What do you mean?"

"You shall know that in a moment. First understand that the mob are still outside—their blood is up. They have just been cheated of one victim, myself, handed over to them in your stead by the cunning of your man, and with your connivance. I have but to open the door and speak your name to them: and what they did to me will be a trifle to what they'll do to you."

"Anstruther!" protested Ladislas.

"This is my matter, man. Leave it to me, please. If you'd been down under that mob's feet, you'd feel as I do. Now, you!" Bremenhof cowered again as I turned to him. "Listen to me! Even when I was in danger of my life, I kept secret the fact that you were here in the house; and saved your life—out of no regard for you, believe me; for I swear that if you refuse to do exactly what I tell you now, I will drag you down with my own hands and pitch you into the midst of the rabble."

"What do you want?"

"But little more than you promised me last night—Madame Drakona's release at once, and the delivery of the evidence you hold against her; an official statement that there is no charge of any kind against her daughter here; and a definite written admission of the part you have taken throughout this. You'll play no more tricks on me."

"Yes, I agree. I'll do it the instant I get to the department."

"Thank you. I know how you keep such pledges. You will write the order for Madame Drakona's release here at once and will send it by Burski, your trusted servant, with orders to conduct her to a place we'll settle."

"But at such a time difficulties may be raised and——"

"Yes or no, quick! As for the difficulties, you'll remain in our hands until you have found how to get over them.

Burski was clever enough to get me into trouble a few minutes since. Now you can use his cleverness to get you out of trouble."

"Yes. Let me see him."

"One word. You are earning your life; understand that. Attempt any treachery and——" I left the sentence unfinished.

"I'll do it," he agreed. "Anything. Anything."

Volna fetched some writing materials, and while Bremenhof wrote the order, I conferred with Ladislas and settled the details of the plan.

We dared not stay longer in that house, because the police would soon be back in great force to Bremenhof's rescue; and Ladislas named a place to which we could take him. But we could not have Madame Drakona brought to the same place, because Burski would in that event take the police with her.

We arranged, therefore, that Madame Drakona should be taken to her own house.

Moreover, as the kernel of everything was to prevent Volna's arrest, she could not go home to receive her mother; but that difficulty the telephone solved for us.

We decided to wait at the place to which Ladislas would take us until a telephone message from the Drakonas' house assured us that Madame Drakona was there and alone.

When the order was ready I fetched Burski. Bremenhof gave him his instructions, and I said enough to convince them both that Bremenhof's safety depended entirely upon their keeping faith with us.

Ladislas then explained matters to the leaders of the mob. The crowd had meanwhile decreased in numbers, and those who remained were induced to disperse.

A carriage was brought, and we four started, leaving Burski in charge of a couple of the men who had come with Ladislas, to be despatched on his errand as soon as our carriage was out of sight.

We had done well so far; but there was still much to do. A slight check to the plans at any moment might mean the ruin of everything. If the luck lasted, we should win, and only complete success could justify the desperate move I had taken.

Would the luck last?

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PLAN PROSPERS.

If Bremenhof had been less of a coward, such a plan as ours would have been absolutely impossible. But the sight of the mob's fury had so saturated him with fear that it left him bereft of the power to make even a show at resistance.

I did my utmost to play on that terror. During the short ride, I sat opposite to him, holding in full sight the revolver which had already done us such conspicuous service; and when we reached our destination I linked my left arm in his as I walked him into the house, taking care that he should see I still held the weapon ready for use.

What I should really have done had he made an effort to escape I don't know: but I am sure I had convinced him that I should shoot. That fear of me made him my slave. He watched my every gesture, started nervously when I looked at him, and flinched whenever I spoke.

As soon as we were in the house I set him to work to write the official declaration that he had investigated the charges against Volna, and had found them unfounded; and then the full statement of the part he had played throughout.

Volna meanwhile called up the servant at their house, and, having ascertained that no police were in possession there, told the girl how to call us up the instant that Madame Drakona should reach home.

There was nothing more to be done but to wait for that message. I left Volna and Ladislas together, and remained with Bremenhof.

The extent to which he was subject to my influence during the hours in

that house was remarkable—to me quite unaccountable indeed. He was as docile as though I had possessed hypnotic power and had used it to subdue him.

With the revolver always carefully in hand, I sat and stared at him steadily, sternly, continuously in one long, tense, dead silence. I concentrated all my thoughts upon the one essential object, to force the conviction upon him that death would be the instant penalty of resistance to my will.

Twice only was the silence broken—once, when he showed me what he had written and I ordered an alteration; and once at the close, when I asked him how he was going to get for me the evidence against Madame Drakona.

This was the one thing in which I could not see the way. I must have it before the spell of fear I had cast upon him was broken; and yet I knew, from what Burski had told me on the previous night, the difficulties which were in the way.

What Bremenhof said now confirmed this, and he was so panic-saturated that I believed he was past lying. He professed himself as anxious as I was to solve the difficulty.

The problem was this: The papers were in the safe in his library, and there was a man on guard over it; Bremenhof had the key with him; and he had given the most absolute order that no one should even enter the room in his absence.

If I went to the house myself with the key and a written authority from him, it was in the highest degree unlikely that, being unknown, I should be allowed to get to the safe. It was very likely, indeed, that on such a day of tumult I should fall under suspicion, and be promptly placed under arrest.

Volna was known to the servants, and was thus less likely to fail; but I was loath for her to run the risk. Burski might be back at the house, and he knew enough of the matter now to understand that her arrest would checkmate our whole scheme.

Bremenhof protested that if I would let him go, he would give up the papers. "I pledge you my solemn word of honor," he whined. "I'll take any oath you please, do anything you ask."

"To whom can you give the papers?"

"Come with me, I will give them to you."

"Thank you. I know how you keep faith. I don't walk open-eyed into another of your traps."

"I'll send them to you, then."

"Yes—by a strong body of police with orders to take me back with them. I know the risk I've run now in bringing you here, and have no fancy for a march across the plains. You must find some other means. Otherwise, I shall hand you over to the strikers to be held until we are out of this cursed country."

"For God's sake!" he cried, nerve-racked and abject at the thought. And after that I resumed the silent watch which he found so trying an ordeal.

After a time Volna came in.

"My mother is free, Mr. Anstruther. She is at home; the agent, Burski, took her there, and no police are left in the house."

"You see, I have kept faith," said Bremenhof eagerly.

"I see that you couldn't help it, that's all."

"On my honor I will do all I have promised."

"When the devil's sick he makes an earnest penitent."

"I renounce all claim to this lady's hand."

"What the wolf said when he was in the trap."

"And what do you mean to do, then?" he cried, tossing up his hands.

"I mean to have that evidence. I will adopt your own suggestion and go to your house with you."

"Mr. Anstruther!" protested Volna.

"Leave this to me, please," I said.

"I pledge my honor you will run no risk," declared Bremenhof.

Volna's lip curled at this mention of honor. "You will not trust him!" she cried. "You cannot. You must not."

"Let me speak to you," I said.

Volna and I went outside, leaving the door ajar, so that I could watch Bremenhof.

"I can trust myself in this if not him," I began. "Let your mother leave the house for some place where she will be safe until you can join her. You must both remain in hiding, prepared to leave the city the instant we can get you away."

"But you?" she interposed.

"I shall come to no great harm. We have taken a risk with Bremenhof to-day; but with the proofs against your mother in our hands and with the papers he has signed here to-day, my friends can put up a fight on my account which, even if he dares to face it, will get me out without much trouble."

"You must not run this risk," she protested.

"I have put the worst that can happen, even if he breaks faith and arrests me; but I have him so frightened, I don't believe he will dare to attempt any tricks. I have a way to keep him scared, too. Where is Ladislas? I want him to get a sleigh with a driver who can be relied on in an emergency."

"I don't like it. We have no right to ask anything of this kind of you."

"You must do what I ask, please."

"No, no. I would rather run the risk of arrest myself."

"That would do no good now. He has all this against me."

"You can leave the city. Besides, if I agree to do what he——"

"We shall quarrel if you say that again; and I hope we are too good friends for that."

She placed her hand on my arm and looked earnestly in my eyes. "You don't know how this tries me."

"It is for Ladislas' sake," I said steadily.

She bit her lip and dropped her eyes. "I would rather anything than this," she murmured hesitatingly. There was a pause full of embarrassment to me; then, rather to my surprise, she looked up with a smile. "I had forgotten. I agree," she said.

Her sudden change of manner puzzled me.

She saw my surprise. "You have convinced me; that is all. I had forgotten."

"Forgotten what?"

"It is never too late to——" She paused.

"To what?"

"To remember what I can still do," she replied cryptically. "I will tell Ladislas about the sleigh." And she smiled again and left me.

I returned to Bremenhof.

"I have sent for a sleigh to take us to your house. You have given me your word that I shall be safe——"

"I swear it," he cried eagerly.

"I am going to trust to it, but not without taking a precaution on my own account. My liberty will be in your hands while I am in your house; and you had better know that I would rather lose my life than be sent to your cursed mines in Siberia. Get that clearly into your mind."

"I swear to you——"

"Never mind about any more swearing. You know by this time that I mean what I say. And I mean this: I know the risk I have run to-day, and rather than let your men make me a prisoner I will blow my brains out! Unlike you, I am not afraid of death. Mark this well, then: I shall not die alone!"

I paused, and added with all the tense fierceness I could put into my tone and manner:

"If you give me the slightest cause to suspect treachery, even to *suspect* it, mark you, that instant will be your last in life. From the moment we leave this house to that when I leave yours with the papers in my possession, I shall be at your side, this barrel against your ribs, and my finger on the trigger. Try to trick me, and, by the God that made us both, I swear I'll shoot you like a dog!"

He sighed; the sweat of fear clustered thick on his gray-white forehead; and he sank back in his chair.

He was so drunk with fear that he was past speech. He looked up once or twice, as if to speak, and his blanched lips moved; but the moment his eyes met mine he faltered, trembled, and

looked down, his tongue refusing to frame the words.

Presently Ladislas came in.

"I wish to speak to Colonel Bremenhof," he said.

"Not now, Ladislas," I said.

I would not have the effect of my threat lessened by any distracting thoughts.

"I wish to make him understand we have done all we can to prevent violence in the city."

"Go away, please. I have given him all I want him to understand for the present. Let me know when we are to start."

Greatly wondering, my friend yielded and left us alone again.

With intentional ostentation I looked to the loading of my revolver. Bremenhof watched me furtively; and each time I looked up from the task he shrank and drooped his head.

At last Ladislas called that the sleigh was waiting. "The driver has his orders," he whispered; "and will bring you to us afterward."

"Come," I said to Bremenhof, as I rose.

"You are wronging me, Mr. Anstruther," he stammered, as he got up unsteadily.

"I can apologize afterward," said I dryly.

As we were leaving the house, Volna stood waiting for us, and would have spoken to me; but I would not leave Bremenhof's side.

I was wearing a long cloak, and as Bremenhof and I crossed the pavement to the sleigh, I pressed close to him and let him feel my weapon against his body.

He started and caught his breath in fear. The strain had told on him. He staggered in his walk, and his face wore the gray look of one on the verge of death.

So long as I could keep him in that mood I was safe enough.

We got into the sleigh in silence, and had barely turned out of the street when a body of troops came in sight riding in our direction.

"This will test your sincerity," I said. "As well now as later. Remember my oath."

At a sign from the leader our driver drew to one side and pulled up.

I thrust the barrel of the pistol hard against Bremenhof's side. The officer recognized him, and, with a salute, halted his men.

"We are in a hurry and cannot delay," I whispered.

Bremenhof returned the salute and waved his hand for the troops to pass.

The officer ordered his men to make room for the sleigh, and we dashed on at a high speed.

"Good," I said, suppressing a sigh of relief. "You have learned your lesson, I see."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLIGHT.

The meeting with the troops proved to be an invaluable incident.

There had been a tense moment when the question whether Bremenhof would attempt treachery still hung in the balance, a moment more thrilling than any I had ever known in my life.

With his lame and craven submission, however, a change seemed to come in everything. That I could compel him to cross the city in broad daylight when hundreds of his police and soldiers were swarming everywhere, and so frighten him as to prevent him raising an alarm, had seemed in anticipation little more than the merest forlorn hope.

But when at the first test he had yielded abjectly, my confidence was so strengthened and my domination over him so confirmed that the thing became almost simple and commonplace.

We met other bodies of police and military as we dashed over the snow to the merry peal of our sleigh-bells, but not once was there even the threat of trouble.

It was rather as though we were making a tour of inspection together, jointly interested in the police and military preparations for coping with the excited populace.

We passed many evidences of the

popular unrest. But Ladislas had apparently given the driver very shrewd instructions as to his route, for not once did we drive through a street where any actual disturbance was in progress.

More than once we saw conflicts going on between the troops or the police and the mob, but always from a safe distance. More than once, too, we passed where trouble had broken out. Wrecked houses and workshops told of the anger of the people, and grim patches of blood-stained snow testified that the troops were not in the city for nothing.

Here and there we passed strikers whose limping walk, bandaged limbs, or bleeding faces bore evidence of recent fighting; and we drove rapidly past more than one small group gathered pale-faced and sorrowful about a figure stretched at length on the snow. These things told their own tale.

Twice Bremenhof was recognized, and howls and shouts and bitter curses were hurled at us. Once we were followed, stones were thrown, and even a couple of shots fired after us; but the swiftness of our horses quickly carried us out of danger.

I could not help speculating upon what the crowd would have said and done had they known the grim cause which had brought us two together upon that strange ride.

We reached his house in safety, and as the driver reined up his panting horses, I braced myself for the final trial of nerves.

"Remember my oath," I whispered, as together we mounted the steps side by side.

My fear was that as soon as he found himself once more in the midst of his men, his courage would return sufficiently for him to at least put up some show of fight.

Had he done so, he must have beaten me. Despite my oath and all my fiercely spoken threats, I had no intention of shooting him. It was all just bluff on my part; but I had acted well enough to prevent his having any suspicion of this. He was convinced that I was in grim, deadly earnest, and that his life hung on a thread, and he was poltroon enough to buy it at any cost.

The proceedings in the house were very brief.

He went straight to the library and sent the man on guard out of the room. He was as anxious to be relieved from the menacing barrel of my revolver as I was to get the papers and be off.

In silence he opened the safe, and, after a hurried search, found the papers and offered them to me. They made a somewhat bulky package.

"Show me," I said.

He opened the package and held each while I ran my eye over it; and then folded them together in the portfolio and handed it to me.

"One thing more. A written authority from you to me in open terms. Just write: 'The bearer is acting by my authority. Signed and sealed officially.'"

Without hesitation he obeyed, and wrote what I wanted.

"You will accompany me to the sleigh," I said, as I pocketed the paper.

We left the room together arm in arm just as we had entered it, passed the men in the hall, and down the steps to the sleigh.

Then I saw trouble.

Some distance up the street a patrol of mounted police was riding toward us at the walk, and in an instant I perceived the danger this meant for me.

So did Bremenhof. The sight seemed to rouse his long dormant courage. He pushed me away from him, jumped back, and called loudly for help.

The police came running out from his house, the patrol pricked up their horses; and as I sprang into the sleigh the street seemed suddenly alive with men.

My driver knew his business, however. The horses he had were spirited and full of blood, and in a moment we were rattling along at full speed, the bells jingling furiously, the driver shouting lusty warnings, and the sleigh jumping and jolting so that I had to grip tight to save myself from being thrown out.

The patrol pulled up to speak with

Bremenhof, and, as we dashed round a corner, I saw him mount one of the horses and come clattering after us, leading the rest in hot pursuit.

But we had a good start by that time, and my driver, guiding his team with rare skill and judgment, made a dozen quick turns through short streets. This prevented our pursuers from spurring their animals to the gallop, kept them in doubt as the direction we had taken, and thus minimized their advantage of saddle over harness.

To that maneuver was due our success in evading immediate capture.

Doubtful of ultimate success in such a chase, however, I proposed to the driver to pull up and let me get away on foot.

"The count is close by," he replied, to my great surprise; and after we had raced along in this fashion for some ten minutes, I saw Volna and Ladislas waiting at a corner. The driver pulled up, and they jumped in.

"Sergius was to look for us here," said Ladislas, in explanation. "What has happened?"

I told him briefly as we continued the flight.

"We shall get away," he said confidently. "Sergius knows his work. He has not his equal in Warsaw."

Volna was very calm, but the glances she kept casting behind bore witness to her anxiety.

"I hope you are right," I replied to Ladislas; "but you should not have come."

"Were we likely to desert you, Mr. Anstruther?" asked Volna.

"You could do no good, and the risk is too great."

"We had to know what happened to you. I could not rest."

I understood then the meaning of her former words. It was never too late for her last desperate sacrifice, should our plan go wrong. "The risk is too serious," I repeated.

It was churlish to reproach them for an act which sprang from a chivalrous regard for my safety; but they had made a grave mistake. They had rendered my escape much more difficult.

Had I been alone I could have left the sleigh and made off on foot. The crowd in some of the streets was thick enough for me to have lost myself among them, and so to have got away unnoticed. But with three of us together the case was different. There was nothing for it but to remain in the sleigh and trust to the driver's skill to save us.

Presently the good fortune which had befriended me changed. Turning into one of the side streets, we found the roadway partially blocked by some heavy drays. We had to pull up, and moments, precious to us beyond count, were lost as we waited for room to be made for us to squeeze through.

The street was a long one without a turning, and before we reached the end of it, Volna, who was looking back, gave a cry of dismay.

"They are in sight," she said.

We saw Bremenhof and three or four men spurring after us at full speed.

Ladislas called to Sergius, who lashed his horses and redoubled his efforts to make up for some of the time we had lost.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Madame Drakona. Three miles out on the Smolna road."

Sergius began his tactics of sharp turns again, swinging round corner after corner at a reckless speed. But beyond proving his great skill as a daring whip, he did little good.

Bremenhof began to gain fast upon us, and at length came within pistol-range.

He called to us to surrender, and when we paid no heed, his men fired at us. Volna winced and shrank at the shots; but we were not hit, and held on grimly.

It could not last much longer, however. Just when things were looking bad enough from behind, a big dray heavily laden came lumbering toward us, blocking the whole street.

"We may as well give it up," said Ladislas.

But Sergius saw a desperate chance, and took it. The heavy vehicle was making for a narrow side street. To

wait until it had turned would have brought Bremenhof upon us, and the leading horses of the wagon were actually turning into the side street when Sergius, with wonderful skill, and at the risk of all our lives, swung round into the opening.

Our horses and sleigh cannoned against the leaders, the sleigh gave a dangerous lurch, was thrown upon the one roller, all but toppled over, and then righted.

It was touch and go; but the luck was ours, and on we went.

We even gained a little by the mishap, for our pursuers, being unable to check their horses in time, were carried past the street opening, while the heavy dray blocked the road and delayed them.

But the advantage was too slight to hold out hope of escape.

"We must leave the sleigh and take our chance on foot," I said.

Ladislas called an order to the driver, and when we had traversed half the length of the street and Bremenhof and his men had just passed the dray, Sergius pulled his animals on their haunches at the mouth of an alley, waited while we jumped to the ground, and then dashed away again at the same reckless speed.

"We can get through here to the Street of St. Gregory, and may find shelter," said Ladislas, leading the way through the alley in a last desperate dash for freedom.

Then again fortune did us an ill turn. Half-way through the place Volna caught her foot and fell. She was up again in a moment, but limped badly. She had twisted her ankle in the fall.

Ladislas and I put each an arm under hers, and in this way made such haste as we could.

But the delay served to bring our pursuers close upon us: they came running at top speed, making three yards to our one.

Again capture seemed inevitable. Then, recalling the incident of earlier in the day at the house in the Place of St. John, I repeated it.

I fired my revolver in the air. "The police! The police!" I shouted. "A rescue! A rescue!"

It served us in good stead. The noise brought men and women rushing in alarm and curiosity from the houses on both sides of the alley, while many others ran in from the street beyond. Seeing our plight, they cheered us, and swarmed between Bremenhof's party and us, blocking and hampering them so that we reached the end in safety.

The outlet to the alley was a narrow archway. Room was made for us to pass, and we gained the street while our pursuers were struggling and fighting to force their way through the crowd after us.

But again the respite seemed only to mock us.

We ran out, only to find ourselves on the skirts of an ugly tumult. A short distance to our left, down the Street of St. Gregory, a fight was in progress between a considerable body of police and a crowd of strikers; and just as we emerged from the alley the police were getting the upper hand, and the strikers began to waver.

Some one raised the cry that a large body of police were coming through the alley, and the crowd, afraid of being caught between two fires, gave way and came streaming toward us, followed by the police.

At that juncture Bremenhof and his men succeeded in reaching the street, and joined in the vigorous attack upon the crowd.

The situation was again critically perilous for us.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE STREET OF ST. GREGORY.

The luck seemed to be dead against us. Volna could scarcely put her foot to the ground, and, although she struggled gamely to continue the flight, Ladislas and I were all but carrying her.

The crowd went streaming past us, as we could make only the slowest progress; and as no vehicle of any sort was in sight, capture appeared inevitable.

Volna perceived this, and begged us to leave her. "It will be far better for me to be arrested alone than for all three to be taken; and, you see, it is hopeless now that the three can escape."

"I am not going," said Ladislas.

"Mr. Anstruther, you have the proofs that will free my mother. If you will escape and destroy them, she will be safe. Please go."

It was a shrewd plea.

I took out the papers and held them toward Ladislas. "You go. I can trust my friends to get me out of any mess."

"No; to-day's business with Bremenhof is too serious for that," he answered. "Besides, this is my affair. Go, Robert. It is sheer madness for you to remain. You can do no good."

And Volna added:

"If my mother is safe, Mr. Anstruther, I do not care. For her sake as well as your own, get those papers away."

I glanced round and saw that Bremenhof was fast forcing his way to us through the scattering crowd.

"We may get a sleigh or a carriage at the end of the street here," I said. Without more ado, I picked Volna up in my arms and ran up the street with her.

The crowd cheered us lustily. Some one recognized Ladislas, rallied the flying crowds, and succeeded in forming them again when we had passed.

Perceiving this, and recognizing that we might in this way escape even at the last moment, Bremenhof, hoping to awe the crowd, ordered the police to draw their revolvers. At first the people fell back, but encouraged by the cries of the man who had constituted himself the leader, they formed again, and answered the order to clear the way with yells and shouts of defiance.

Losing his head, Bremenhof told his men to fire. A ragged volley of pistol-shots followed, and two men fell.

There was an instant's solemn hush; and then rose such a wild, fierce yell of rage and fury from the mob that the police drew back in suspense.

The two parties stood facing one another for a breathing space. Then some one threw a heavy stone and struck one of the police in the face. Two of his comrades near him fired in return. A volley of stones came from the crowd, and a wild and desperate conflict was waged over the bodies of the fallen men.

People came running to the scene from all directions. Many of them were armed with clubs, hatchets, crowbars, and such weapons as could be snatched up in a hurry.

Some carried revolvers; and, as we stood awhile, unable for the press of the people to get forward, a fierce hand-to-hand fight was waged.

Hard blows were given on either side, shots were exchanged, and blood flowed freely, until the police were beaten back in their turn and had to fly.

The mob whooped and yelled savagely over their victory, and pressed forward hot and eager to wreak their anger upon the flying men.

The triumph was short-lived, however. Into the street from the end for which we were making swung a large force of troops to the rescue of the police.

I drew Volna back into the doorway of a house as they passed at the double; and the fight broke out again, this time with the advantage all against the strikers.

Men fell fast, and the crowd scattered and made for cover in the houses on either side of the street.

Escape for us was now impossible for the time, for the fight raged close to the door of the house where we had sheltered.

In the thick of the conflict, at some distance from us, I could see Bremenhof. If he had been a coward while we two had been alone and he believed death to be close to him, he was no coward now.

He was not like the same man. Passion, or the company of his men, gave him courage. He was everywhere, directing his forces and exposing himself fearlessly where the fighting was hottest; and always seeking to press forward as though in pursuit of us.

Fresh tactics were next adopted by

the crowd. Men who had fled from the street appeared at the open windows of the houses and fired on the police and troops from this vantage. Many shots told; and to save themselves from this form of attack, the troops began to enter the houses and search for the armed men.

And all this time the press and throng of police and strikers made escape for us impossible.

After a time the training of the troops and police told: the crowd in the streets lessened; many prisoners were taken, most of them with marks of the conflict; and the noise of the conflict began to die down.

But not for long.

The news that fighting was in progress had spread far and wide, and a body of strikers who had been parading the main street near were attracted to the scene.

The police in their turn found themselves caught between two hostile mobs; and the flame of fight which had almost flickered down flared up again more luridly and vigorously than ever.

The prisoners were torn from the grasp of their captors in the moment of surprise, and hurried past us to the rear of the fighters.

The troops were still strong enough, however, to make the fight even; and after the first moment of surprise, their discipline told. They formed in lines facing up and down the street, and settled down with grim resolve for the deadly work before them.

Then came a loud cry: "A barricade! A barricade!"

In little more than a minute a couple of heavy wagons were trundled out from a side street, and turned over close to where we three were waiting.

Out from the houses appeared a heterogeneous collection of furniture—bedsteads, mattresses, couches, chests of drawers, shop counters, chairs, tables. Anything and everything that lay to hand was seized and brought out.

Behind this impromptu rampart, armed men crouched, mad with long pent passion, and eager to wreak vengeance upon their enemies.

Meanwhile Ladislas had viewed the scene with fast-mounting distress and agitation. The deliberateness of these last preparations for the fight seemed to appal him. The sight of this harvest of violence, sprung from the seeds of his own revolutionary theorizing, wrung his heart. Dreaming of victory by peaceful means, the horror of this bloodshed and carnage goaded him to despair. His suffering was acute.

Heedless of his own safety, he rushed hither and thither among those who were leading the mob, dissuading them from violence and urging them to abandon their resistance.

Half a dozen times when he had dashed out to press his plea of non-resistance, it almost became necessary to drag him back into safety.

The lull that came when the barricade was forming gave him a fresh opportunity. In vain I told him that nothing could stay the fight, now that the smoldering wrath of years of wrong had flamed into the mad fury of the moment, and when the wild passions of both sides had been roused.

Volna joined her voice to mine and urged him. But in his frenzy of emotional remorse, he paid no heed to us.

"Don't you see that all this horror is the result of what I in my blindness have been doing?" he cried. "The thought of it is torment and the sight of it hell. Would you have me skulk here to save my skin when an effort now may stop further bloodshed?"

With that he rushed out.

He went first among the strikers, and we saw him advising, arguing, urging, pleading, commanding in turn, to no effect.

Those whom he addressed listened to him at first with a measure of patience, but afterward with shrugs, sullen looks, intolerant gestures, and, at last, with stubborn, angry resentment at his interference, or jeers and flouts, according to their humor.

And all this time the preparations were not stayed a second, but hurried forward with feverish haste and vengeful lust of fight.

At length, I saw him thrust aside

roughly, almost savagely, by one burly fellow who had been building the barricade, and now stood gripping a heavy iron crowbar and wiping the sweat from his brow.

This act served as a cue for the rest. Ladislas was passed from hand to hand, and pushed, with jibes and oaths, from the center of the barricade to the pavement.

For an instant he tried a last appeal to the men about him; but their only reply was a jeering laugh, half contemptuous, half angry, but wholly indifferent to every word he uttered.

Just then a loud command from the officer in charge of the troops was given, and the soldiers advanced a few paces and leveled their guns.

In a moment Ladislas had climbed over the barricade and rushed forward into the space between the troops and the mob. He ran forward with uplifted hand.

"For the love of Heaven, peace!" he cried to the officer, his voice clear and strong above the din. "No more blood must be shed."

For an instant a silence fell upon both sides, and all eyes were fixed upon him.

The next a single shot was fired from among the ranks of the troops.

Ladislas' uplifted hand dropped. He staggered, and turned toward the mob, so that all saw by the red mark on his white broad forehead where the bullet had struck him, and fell, huddled up, in the road.

It was the signal for the fight to break loose. A wild, deep groan of execration leaped from every throat behind the barricade, followed by shouts and cries of defiance. His fall at the hands of the troops had raised him to the place of a martyr. Those who had been quick to jeer him, now shrieked and yelled for vengeance upon his murderers.

Surely an irony of fate that he who had given his life in the cause of peace should by his death have loosed the wildest passion for blood.

A ghastly scene followed. As the soldiers charged the barricade, the mob offered a stubborn and desperate resistance. Many of them were shot down, but there were others ready to take their places. Time after time the troops reached and mounted the barricade, only to be driven back.

Once they carried it, and commenced to charge the crowd behind, but they were outnumbered. The mob hurled them back, and pursued them even across the barricade, inflicting serious loss.

I seized that moment to run out and recover the body of my poor friend. I found it; and as I was carrying it out of the press of the tumult, the troops rallied, and the tide of the fight came surging back past me.

The chances of the struggle brought Bremenhof close. He saw me, and with a cry of anger rushed to seize me.

Some of the mob had seen my effort to get Ladislas away. One of them had stayed to help, and he was thus close at hand when the attempt was made to capture me. Thinking that the intention was to prevent my carrying Ladislas away, he pressed forward, and, with a savage oath, thrust his revolver right in Bremenhof's face and fired.

This act proved the turning-point in the fight.

Fierce shouts of exultation went up as Bremenhof was recognized. The strikers halted, rallied, re-formed, and then renewed the attack upon the troops with irresistible vigor, driving them back helter-skelter in all directions.

The mob had won; but at a cost which had yet to be counted. Nor did they stay to count it. The street resounded with whoops and yells of victory.

Flushed with excitement, the men were like children in their delight. They shook hands one with another, and laughed and sang and shouted, and even danced in sheer glee.

They had beaten the troops; had sent them scurrying like frightened hares to cover; they had carried the cause of the people to triumph; they had spilled the blood of the oppressor; and the taste of it made them drunk with the joy of new-found power and strength.

Some one started the Polish national

air. The strain was caught up and echoed by a thousand deep-toned, tuneful voices that left an impression to be remembered to one's dying hour.

A crowd came round me as I stood by the two dead bodies.

Bremenhof's corpse was kicked and cursed and spat upon till I sickened at the sight.

The body of Ladislas was lifted and borne away, with the care and honor due a martyr, to the strains of the national air. The revolution had begun in terrible earnestness; and that day's fight was its baptism of blood.

As the men bore Ladislas away, I went back to Volna to tell her the grim news and get her away to a place of safety.

CHAPTER XXX.

AFTER THE STORM.

The death of Colonel Bremenhof caused a profound sensation; and the most varied and contradictory reports were circulated about it.

The authorities branded it assassination, and threatened the most rigorous punishment of those whom they deemed the murderers.

The members of the Fraternity were charged with responsibility for it; and were declared to have laid a deep and far-reaching plot to destroy him as one of the chief executive leaders of the government.

The strikers were jubilant over the event. He had fallen in fair fight, they alleged, when leading the police and soldiers to attack peaceful citizens; and his death was hailed as triumph and encouragement to their cause.

In fact, almost every conceivable reason was given—except the truth.

There were a few who looked a little deeper for the cause; and among these was my old friend, General von Eckerstein.

Three days after the outbreak of the riots I called to bid him good-by, and I found him deeply impressed and full of interested speculation about the matter.

"What beats me, Bob, is what business he had to get into the thick of a street fight," he said. "He must have been mad. From what I have heard, his whole conduct that day was more than eccentric."

"Wasn't it his duty, then?" I asked casually.

"Duty? What! To go out and fight the mob? What do you suppose the ordinary police and soldiers are for?"

"He must have had some private motive, then."

He turned on me like a flash. "What do you mean? Do you know anything?"

"No, nothing officially."

"Good heavens! where have you been the last few days?"

"I told you just now that I returned to the city this midday, to see the last of my poor friend Ladislas. He was buried about the same time as Bremenhof. Ladislas' funeral was not nearly so imposing a ceremony, but there was vastly more genuine grief."

"Oh, nobody liked Bremenhof as a man; but that so high an official should have fallen in such a way! But you—where were you on Monday?"

"I stayed at the Vladimir on Sunday night, and left Warsaw on Monday evening."

"And all that day?" he asked, with a very sharp look.

"Oh, I was moving about in different parts of the city."

"Did you see that fight in the Street of St. Gregory?"

"Yes, among other things."

"Do you mean you know what took Bremenhof there?"

I nodded. "He was after me, as a matter of fact. It's a pretty bad tangle, but if you haven't got your official ears open, I'll tell you." I told him enough to make the matter clear.

"And after that you dare to show your face in Warsaw? Are you mad, boy?"

"There's no daring about it, because there's no risk. There was only one man who knew me in the affair, the police spy, Burski; and he has come into his own, right enough. He was playing spy at a meeting of the strikers on Tuesday night; and one of the men

who was in the house at the Place of St. John recognized him. He was a fellow of resource and iron nerve, and tried to brazen it out that he was a Fraternity man. But he failed."

"You mean?"

"They lynched him then and there."

"The infernal villains!"

"If it comes to that, Bremenhof, who was buried to-day with full military honors, wasn't much to boast of."

"If you're going to turn revolutionary you'd better get out of the city and be off home. Luck like yours won't last, boy."

"I'm going. I've done nothing except checkmate a scoundrel. Given the same circumstances, I'd try it again."

He looked at me with a half-whimsical smile. "Where is she, Bob?"

"Not so far from Warsaw as I hope she soon will be, general."

"You got her out of the city, then?"

"Oh, yes, without much difficulty. When the crowd got the upper hand in the street fight it was easy for us to get away. I drove with her to the place where Madame Drakona had been sent. Then I hurried to the Vladimir and put on the police uniform which Burski had brought me. That, coupled with the special authority I got out of Bremenhof and helped by a blunt discourteous official manner, made things easy. I could have taken a train-load of women out of Warsaw. Two were a mere detail."

"Do you understand the fearful risk you've run?"

"One doesn't always stop to consider that. Things have to be done, and one does them first and thinks afterward. Besides, I had a good object."

"What do you mean?" he asked very curtly.

I smiled. "It was in the cause of freedom."

"In the cause of fiddlesticks. What's Poland's freedom to you, that you should risk your life for it?"

"Nothing."

He started and his eyes brightened meaningly.

"Oh, I see! The freedom of the girl, eh?"

"Isn't it a good enough cause for me?"

"I suppose you think so," he said dryly. "Are you in a fit state now to take an old diplomat's advice?"

"Yes; if I agree with it, of course."

"Oh, of course. Well, it's this: Get out of Warsaw and out of Russia, and stay out."

"Haven't I come to bid you good-by? Give me credit for something. I'm going by the next train."

"Where?"

I laughed. "I like the rural districts of Poland. I'm going first to Solden. Do you know the neighborhood?"

"Solden? What is the name of—— Oh! is she there?"

I nodded. "At Kervatje, a few miles' drive from there."

"But the police of Solden know you both. They brought you here."

"There is nothing against either of us now. Bremenhof's death has made all the difference. The evidence against Madame Drakona has been destroyed, and the charge against her daughter was never made officially. There's no one now to make it."

"Arrests are being made wholesale, boy, with or without charges, in consequence of his death. Where are the brother and sister?"

"I don't know, and I daren't make any inquiries?"

"Oh, there *is* something you daren't do, then? I don't like the thing, Bob, and that's the truth. Look here, I'm going through to Berlin to-morrow; stay here till then and travel with me. I shall know you're out of mischief, then."

"I should like it, but—well, the fact is, you see, I sha'n't be traveling alone."

He laughed dryly. "As bad as that, eh?"

"Yes, if you call it bad. I don't."

"Are your papers in order? Your passports?"

I shook my head. "My own is, but not the rest."

"How do you want it worded?" he asked, with another grin.

"Oh, the usual way, whatever that is," I said a little sheepishly.

"Robert Anstruther and——"

"Laugh away. Can you help me?"

"Give it me. Even I don't know how a man carries his mother-in-law on his own passport."

"It is a bit awkward; but I don't want a hitch now."

"Look here, boy, I'll stretch a point for you. I'll go by way of Cracow and will pick you up at Solden to-morrow. I'm traveling special, and you shall all go through in my car."

Scarcely waiting to listen to my thanks, he hurried me off to the station, sending his secretary with me to make sure that no difficulties were raised about my departure.

At Solden I found Volna in a sleigh waiting for me. Her face lighted, and she welcomed me with a glad smile.

"You wonder to see me; but I was so anxious I could not stay at Kervatje."

"I have very little news."

"Do you think it was only the news?"

"What else?"

"Bob!"

"You're getting quite used to that name now."

"Peggy had to learn it, you see."

"And Volna?"

"Volna felt like rushing off to Warsaw when that train was so late," she replied earnestly.

"I like that answer; but there was no cause for anxiety, I'm glad to say. Our troubles are over. To-morrow afternoon we shall be in Cracow."

"I had a brother once who used to say that," she said, with a laugh and a glance.

"Are you sorry you've lost him?"

She answered by slipping her hand into my arm and nestling a little closer to me. We sat for a time in the sympathetic silence of mutual happiness and perfect understanding, listening to the rhythmic music of the sleigh-bells as the three horses glided rapidly over the snow.

Then I told her of my old friend's promise to see us safely to Cracow in his car.

"Will there be any one else there?"

"I don't know. Some of his staff, perhaps."

"It will be a little trying," she said, with a show of dismay.

"Why?"

"As if you didn't know. Think of the ordeal for me."

"You've faced much worse things bravely enough. Besides, you won't be alone. You'll have your——"

"Bob!" she interposed quickly, with a lovely blush.

"Your mother with you. Mayn't I say that?"

"You were not going to say that."

"What was I going to say?" I demanded, but she only laughed.

"There's the way to Cracow; do you recognize it?" she cried quickly, as we reached the forked roads of which Father Ambrose had told us.

"That's the way a brother and sister went; but this one to-morrow a man and his wife."

In one thing Volna was wrong. It was no ordeal that awaited her on the journey with the general to Cracow.

At her first glance he fell before her; and by the time we reached Cracow he was almost as much in love with her as I was.

During the journey he showed such tact, too. He devoted most of his time to Volna's mother. Having told her he had learned that Katrinka and Paul had left Warsaw and gone to Vienna, he kept her talking most of the time in one corner of the car, while Volna and I were alone in another.

When we parted at Cracow he took Volna's two hands, and smiled as he said tenderly, and very earnestly: "I can understand Bob now that I've seen you. You were just made to be loved as I know he loves you, my dear."

And to me, drawing me aside: "I told you yesterday your luck wouldn't last, boy. I take that back. I pray Heaven it may; and that you may always be worthy of it. Good-by, boy."

THE END.

A Deal in Horse-flesh

By George C. Jenks

In this very amusing little story Mr. Jenks draws a clever picture of a suburbanite who becomes possessed of the idea that the sweetest of all sounds are the crack of the whip and the cheery call, "Gid-ap!"

SIDNEY came to us in the gloaming.

Seen in the half-light, as he was led through the side gate and along the curved roadway skirting the lawn to the stable in the rear, he appeared to have many weird angularities and a tail that had been cruelly snagged by barbed-wire fences. His general color was that of a rusty stove—bay, his former owner called it. He was slightly pigeon-toed, and he wore things like small boxing-gloves attached to his hind ankles which rub-a-dubbed rhythmically as he ambled along. I learned afterward that Sidney "interfered."

"There 'e is—fifteen 'ands 'igh, sound in wind an' limb, an' a hexcellent combination of blood, bone, an' haction," said the youth from the livery-stable, halting Sidney under an apple-tree and looking at him with ostentatious admiration.

"Oh, he's eating the grapes, and he's trampling on my nasturtiums," wailed the Real Boss, as she gingerly approached Sidney's head. "What makes him reach for the grape-vine?"

"We halways feed 'im grapes when we can get 'em," explained the horse-wise livery-stable youth. "They tone 'im up. Hother times we gives 'im hoats an' bran an' hoil-meal an' corn-'usks."

"None of those viands are very fattening, are they?" I observed, as I glanced at Sidney's ribs. "And why does he crook that leg and cross one foot over the other?"

"Well, yer see, 'e 'as on new shoes. We've 'ad 'im out to pasture for six months, without any shoes on 'im. You know 'ow it is yourself when you are breaking in a new pair of shoes. But 'e'll be all right to-morrow. You 'ave a fine 'orse there, sir—a fine fambly 'orse. You might give 'im two quarts of hoats an' a mouthful of 'ay after you've bedded 'im down. Don't give 'im no water for 'alf an hour."

The Real Boss and I listened to these expert instructions reverently. Then the youth put the end of Sidney's tie-rope into my hand, accepted a tip with easy grace, and slouched out of the gateway with the air of a lad who was glad to get a tiresome job off his hands, I thought.

"Well, here he is," I remarked, with a gaiety which I am afraid was somewhat forced, as soon as the Real Boss, Sidney, and I were left to ourselves. "How do you like him?"

"*Snaw-aw-aw-aw-awp!*" blurted Sidney, with an explosion between a sneeze and a cough, as he shook himself all over. Then he regarded me with an expression of exasperating amiability that showed me the whites of his eyes and made his mouth seem nearly a foot wide.

"Sakes! How he frightened me!" cried the Real Boss, from the other side of the lawn. "Do you think he's sick?"

"Why, no. What made you run away? That was only his play. All horses do that when they find themselves in a strange place."

The Real Boss accepted this explanation with pathetic trustfulness, and I proceeded to put Sidney to bed.

It was a task not without its discouragements, for Sidney jumped back suddenly when I tried to lead him into the stable, jerking the tie-rope from my hand and cutting my fingers painfully. Then he danced a few steps in the nasturtium bed and darted toward the gateway at a gallop. Fortunately, he ran into a low-hanging clothes-line, which caught him across the throat until I reached him.

I had bought Sidney because the Real Boss wanted him. As soon as we decided to move into the country she pointed out that we must have a horse —a nice, quiet, affectionate creature, that she could drive to the station to meet me every evening. It would save me the walk when I arrived, tired out, after a long, toilsome day in sweltering New York.

The picture she drew was a pleasing one. How luxurious it would be to step from the train into one's own carriage, with nothing to do but to loll back in the cushioned seat, caressed by the soft air, and watching the shimmering shadows of the overarching trees, while a handsome young woman, in summery foulards and chiffons, skilfully piloted the dashing rig homeward!

Of course the rig *would* be dashing, and equally of course the Real Boss is a handsome young woman.

So far, good. Then came a crumpled rose-leaf. I suggested that, as we could not afford to keep a coachman, perhaps it would fatigue me nearly as much to put the horse away in his stable every evening as if I had negotiated the fifteen minutes' walk from the station.

"Why, that will be recreation for you," was the astonished response. "Think how charming it will be to have your own horse, who will know you and whinny with delight, as you take him his oats and hay, and his—er—whatever else he eats! Why, he will follow you about like a cat when he gets used to you."

"I never knew a cat to follow me about," I submitted. "There is one advantage a cat has over a horse, however. A cat washes herself, without troubling her owner. If we have a horse, I suppose I shall have to curry him, and rub him down, and clean his hoofs regularly. I believe that sort of thing is done every day."

"Twice a day. I know papa's horses were always rubbed down thoroughly both morning and evening."

"Yes, but papa didn't do it himself," I could not help saying. "He always had one or two husky stablemen about the place."

"Well, we cannot afford to keep a man. Besides, it will do you good. You have been looking pale and worn of late. Attending to a horse will give you just the kind of healthful exercise you need."

Perhaps I looked doubtful, for the Real Boss added, with a bare suspicion of acidity: "If you won't do it, I will do it myself."

I had nothing to say to this. Of course I recognized it as only a slight ebullition of feminine annoyance, and I trust I know my book better than to argue with the Real Boss when she has made up her mind.

The end of it all was that she had her way, and a week later, with the aid of the local liveryman, I had paid one hundred and twenty-five dollars for a "handsome combination bay horse, nine years old, fifteen hands, sound, kind, and true, broke to saddle or harness, absolutely fearless of all sights and sounds, especially suited for lady to drive," etc.

He was a serviceable horse, I was told. He had been the property of a house painter, and had been accustomed to drawing a light wagon, usually loaded with a ladder or two and a regiment of pots of paint. There were stains of paint upon him here and there when we got him.

The animal was called "Sidney," and the liveryman unblushingly declared that he would sit up, with his forefeet in the air, and "beg" for an apple, when addressed by his name in a certain tone.

That was not the only thing the liv-

eryman told me about Sidney that I never could verify.

I had been approached by a neighbor who had a phaeton and harness for sale, and I agreed to buy his phaeton and harness for ninety-five dollars.

Meanwhile, Sidney was having shoes fitted to him and being otherwise made presentable, under the personal supervision of the liveryman. That obliging individual had caused to be sent to us a bale of hay, a sack of oats, numerous trusses of straw, oilmeal in a paper bag, bran in a barrel, and a wagonload of corn-husks, together with a bill from the feed store for nineteen dollars, forty-six cents.

The neighbor who had sold us the carriage and harness also offered us his stable equipment. I bought it in a lump. It included a feed-cutter, a "jack," and a frowsy-looking lot of brushes, currycombs, sponges, and bottles containing mysterious liquids, mostly of the appearance of water, but each having a villainous, distinctive odor of its own.

These were all stowed away in the stable, outside of the loose box destined for the horse, so that by the time Sidney came to us we were ready to make him feel at home.

But to return to Sidney with his neck in the clothes-line.

I led him gently away from the nasturtiums and patted his neck for a few moments, to compose his nerves—and my own. Then I tried him again at the stables. He jerked his head up and showed me the whites of his eyes. But I was firm. Even if he was willing to stay out all night, I did not feel inclined to stay with him just to keep him company.

Apparently he was afraid that the top of the doorway would come down and crack him over the head, but such fears were absurd, as I told him in his ear in as soothing accents as I could command.

The Real Boss, from a safe distance, was offering advice and encouragement. "I think he will go in if you lead him gently," she suggested.

I did not answer, for I was busy. Sidney was shaking his head savagely and occasionally lashing out with his hind feet.

I pulled hard at the tie-rope, but it did not budge Sidney. Planting his four feet firmly on the ground, he hung back in a most determined manner, waving his wispy tail defiantly.

"Very well, you brute! Stay out! I will tie you to a tree and leave you," I hissed.

That settled it. Sidney lowered his head and darted into the stable so hurriedly that the rope was snatched from my hand, and before I had recovered myself, his nose was in the manger, and he was eating oats with an emotional haste that suggested his having had nothing since an early and very frugal breakfast.

In half an hour I lugged a pail of spring water from the pump, a hundred yards away, and held it up for Sidney to drink. He was waiting for me. He bored his nose into the water with an abrupt violence that would have knocked the pail from my hand had it not been resting upon the edge of the manger. As it was, he only spilled a quart of water over my clothes.

"How thirsty he was, poor fellow! Don't you enjoy making him comfortable?" chirped the Real Boss, from the doorway; but I was dumb.

It was a tiresome task getting the straw spread neatly in the box, with Sidney doddering about and planting his big feet just where I wanted to work. Getting him to bed occupied me until long after dark. Then, having emerged from the family tepidarium, in which I had spent more than an hour in efforts to remove at least some of the stable odors, I found myself at last gazing thoughtfully from our bedroom window by moonlight at Sidney's stronghold, securely fastened with an iron bar and an unpickable patent padlock which might have come from the Bastile.

I had a troubled dream. I thought the house was on fire, and some men were throwing the furniture downstairs with a succession of deafening bumps, while other men were kicking

with hobnailed shoes at the front and back doors.

I was up at six, and, with some difficulty, unfastened the big padlock and flung open the stable door. One glance into the loose box, and I shrieked an exclamation of amazement that brought the Real Boss, all in white, to the window.

Sidney was gone!

The clean straw I had so carefully spread out the night before was kicked into a great, ill-smelling heap at one side, and there were marks of teeth on the wooden manger, but—no Sidney! He could not have come through the doorway, for the padlock evidently had not been tampered with.

I was trying to remember whether the door of the box, which was opposite the stable door, about three feet back, had been open when I entered, when I saw two curious brown flags wig-wagging above the wall of the box on the left.

"Snaw-aw-aw-aw-awp!"

That was Sidney's voice, and in a moment I found that the wig-wagging signals were Sidney's ears. How he had ever squeezed himself into the narrow passage between the box and the outer wall of the stable is still his own secret. By actual measurement, it was two feet six inches wide. At the end of this narrow passage was a ladder leading to the loft, where the oats and hay were bestowed.

Evidently Sidney had had an insane notion that he could climb the ladder and enjoy an illegitimate feast. It was his frantic efforts to get up to the loft which had made me dream about furniture being hurled down-stairs.

"Where is Sidney?" came piteously from the bedroom window.

"He's all right," I replied cheerfully. "Looks well this morning. He has scraped off some of those spots of paint somehow."

"How clever of him! I wonder how he did it."

I could have told her, as I looked at the wretched creature wedged against the rough boards, but I didn't.

I pride myself on my prompt action and resourcefulness. Sidney must be got out before the Real Boss came down. It was out of the question for me to squeeze by the side of him to his head, and I did not care to crawl under him, with those big feet moving so restlessly. Yet, the only way to extricate him would be to get to his head and back him out. Clearly, the solution of the situation was to go inside the box and reach over the partition.

"Get back, there, Sidney," I coaxed, as I stood upon an upturned pail and tapped him on the nose with the back of a currycomb.

Sidney obeyed. He jumped back suddenly, bringing up against the wall with a force which shook the building from floor to weather-vane. But he did not get out.

As I have said, there was only a three-foot space between the end of the box and the outer wall of the stable, and Sidney would have to round a sharp corner before he could be released. He had worked himself in somehow, but to get him out was beyond me.

"Snaw-aw-aw-aw-awp!"

Sidney was snorting at intervals, and looking at me weakly over his shoulder. His expression was so idiotically helpless that I could have thrashed him with all the pleasure in life.

Fortunately the Real Boss was dressing, and I knew she was good for an hour. I dreaded her suggestions.

Ah, here was Maggie—the hired girl!

"Phwat's the throuble wid him?"

I recognized real sympathy in Maggie's tones, and it seemed to me there was encouragement as well. I silently pointed to Sidney.

"Phwat's he doin' in there?"

"Waiting for me to pull down the stable, so that he can walk away," I replied bitterly.

"Can't he git out?"

"It seems not."

"Ah-h, sure, now, an' didn't me own brither-in-law, me sisther Nora's husband, be th' same token, hov jist th' same botheration wid a horse av his own at wan toime!"

"Did he? How did he get the animal out?"

"Pulled him out, av coorse."

"Yes, but how?"

"Aisy."

"Show me."

"Oi wull."

I may as well confess now that Maggie took charge of the engineering operations necessary for Sidney's release. First she brought a coil of clothes-line, then a long step-ladder, and lastly a small Malacca cane from the hall-rack.

"Put thot horse-blanket onter him, an' double it across his loins," commanded Maggie.

Her orders were given with military brevity. I obeyed like a corporal. The blanket properly adjusted, I passed the clothes-line, doubled, around Sidney, holding the slack in my hands. The rope was just in front of his hind legs, and the thicknesses of blanket would prevent the line cutting him. It was all workmanlike and encouraging.

"Stiddy th' laddher."

Maggie had planted the step-ladder in front of the stable door, and as I put my hand to the ladder she went up nimbly to the little doorway above, through which it was designed to throw hay and other things into the loft without going through the stable. The door was unfastened, and Maggie pulled it open. Through the opening she went on her hands and knees, while I moved the step-ladder away. An instant later down she came through the trap-door inside, on the ladder, in front of Sidney's face.

"Aisy, darlint—aisy!" to Sidney. Then, to me: "Now, sorr, whin Oi fan him back ye must pull—har-rd!"

Maggie "fanned" with the Malacca cane, and Sidney reared and plunged and kicked.

"What is it?" cried the Real Boss, from her window. But I could not see her from inside the stable, and I could not have explained at that juncture, anyhow.

"Pull!" commanded the general, on the ladder.

"I *am* pulling!"

"Thin, pull ag'in; Now's th' toime!"

I tugged at the rope with all my strength, slowly but surely steering Sidney around the corner as he backed.

"He's comin'," yelled Maggie, wild with excitement. "Kape on pullin', an' th' saints help yez!"

Sidney *came* at last.

Perhaps Maggie's pious adjuration helped. There was a mighty convulsion of his whole frame, an explosive whirl of hoofs and ears, and, as I leaped nimbly aside, away went Sidney over the lawn, with the clothes-line dangling and the blanket falling off.

Maggie was still clinging to the ladder when I brought Sidney back in triumph, after a short but earnest chase over the lawn and flower-beds.

"Begorra! Oi wuz thinkin' the divil moight come back roight t' the same place ag'in, so Oi wuz," explained Maggie, as she rescued her clothes-line and went quietly to her kitchen to prepare breakfast.

At that moment the Real Boss came smiling across the lawn to look at Sidney. She found him in his box, watching me as I went up the ladder to bring him his matutinal oats.

We did not drive Sidney to the station that morning. By the time he had been fed, watered, and rubbed down, there was no time to harness him; at least, not time for me to do it.

I called at the livery-stable on my way to the train, and engaged the boy to go to our house and harness Sidney.

"See that everything is right before Mrs. White gets into the phaeton," I said. "I don't want her killed, you know," I added, with ghastly playfulness.

"I 'opes as 'ow she won't be. But, jiminy crikey! you 'as to be jolly careful with a frisky hanimal like this 'ere Sidney."

It was all well enough for this lout to launch his clumsy irony at me; but suppose something *were* to happen? What if Sidney *should* become unmanageable, with that poor little white-faced girl in the phaeton, alone, helpless, and ready to faint? I brooded

over it in the train, and could not get it out of my mind when I reached the office.

As the day wore on I became horribly nervous. I bought every edition of the evening papers, which, in accordance with their cheerful custom, came out hourly after 9 A. M. As each paper came into my hands, I glanced at it hurriedly for a sensational story —with a scare-head, perhaps in red ink —describing graphically a runaway in a New Jersey village, wherein a beautiful young woman clung frantically to the reins, as the light carriage swayed to and fro, while the maddened animal——

It was no use—I could not bear it. I must go home and see for myself. Sidney had a record of 2:26, and who could say what he might not do when he found himself in the hands of a mere woman? Horses soon know whether they have their master behind them or not, I reflected, and Sidney was a particularly intelligent creature.

What relief it was to me, as I alighted from the train, to see the Real Boss quietly driving toward the station, with Sidney apparently in a half-doze, how can I say?

"Why, Sherman, how glad I am that I came this way! I did not expect you until the 5:47, and this is only the 4:20. But I thought I might as well see who was on the train, as I was down this way. Jump in!"

Sidney started off on a lope, and—stopped in front of the toughest saloon in town.

"Go on, Sidney," I commanded, touching his ears with the whip.

Sidney shook his head obstinately, and stood still.

"He has been stopping at all the saloons, and I have had *such* trouble to make him go past," said the little woman at my side piteously. "And at that saloon near the baseball-grounds he took me right under the shed where men tie their horses while they are drinking, and a big, red-faced man, whose breath smelled of lemons and things, had to back Sidney out from between an ice-wagon and one of those little spidery carts with big wheels, a narrow board for a seat, and a sort of bag for the driver's feet——"

"A sulky?"

"Yes, I suppose so. With me sitting there, feeling that embarrassed, you can't think! And then he looked at Sidney and threw his card into my lap, saying we should be glad to have it before long."

We got Sidney under way, and had been driving half an hour, going into the country, where the saloons seemed not to be familiar to Sidney. We intended to go much farther, but all at once our horse stopped, and, with his head more on one side than ever, shivered violently. I urged him to go on, but the only movement he would make was to shiver a little harder.

"Take the reins, while I look at him." But my voice trembled, in spite of myself.

By the time I had reached his head he had ceased shaking, but the look he gave me told me that he had a few more convulsions up his sleeve, as it were, and as I pulled at his bridle he wobbled.

"Poor fellow! He is weak. I think we should turn around and go home," suggested the Real Boss.

Now, I will not swear that Sidney actually winked with one eye, but most certainly his mouth broadened into what looked like a smile, and if ever a horse conveyed impish triumph in the expression of his face, Sidney was that horse at that moment.

"I am afraid he may fall down before we get home," I murmured dubiously, as I got into the phaeton.

Sidney answered my gentle tug on the off-rein by swinging around in as pretty a curve as ever I saw, and the next moment he was trotting toward home with a freer and faster gait than any with which he had favored us hitherto. There was no shivering, no wobbling. He was as chipper as a robin on a June morning.

"Do you think he pretended to be sick because he wanted to go home?" asked the Real Boss.

"Looks like it."

"What intelligence horses have! I think Sidney is as sensible as a man."

"He ought to have been a politician," I grunted. I began to suspect Sidney's honesty of purpose.

It was not until we were nearly home that we noticed an unevenness in Sidney's steps. He did not shiver, but by the time we reached our gate he was decidedly lame. The trouble was with one of his forefeet, apparently.

But I locked him up in the stable, assuring the Real Boss that he would be "all right in the morning."

One glance at him next morning as he came hobbling toward me in his stall told me that he was not "all right." He could hardly use his near forefoot at all. I fed him, and found that his appetite was still normal—or, rather, abnormal.

"Doctor Jukes, Veterinary Surgeon," was on a card lying in the bottom of the phaeton. I picked up the bit of pasteboard mechanically, as I pondered over Sidney's condition.

It was the card thrown into the carriage by the red-faced man, the afternoon before.

"By George! that fellow must have known what he was talking about when he said we should be glad to have his card before long," I muttered.

I knew where his office was. I had noticed it down by the station. I would just run down there and ask him to come up, without saying anything to the Real Boss. She would know soon enough.

"Why, sure I'll go," said Doctor Jukes heartily. "I knew yesterday, when I seen the missus driving, that you would want me, or some other vet, inside of twenty-four hours. Why, that plug of yours is knee-sprung, and I ain't sure he isn't spavined. He's down in front pretty badly."

"I understood he was sound," I said, as soon as I could swallow Juke's offhand reference to the Real Boss as "the missus."

"'Course you did," was his cheerful response. "People as don't know horses always understand that—till some wise guy comes along and makes 'em understand something else. However, I'll go right now and look at him. Get in my trap, and I'll drive you up."

I took my seat in Jukes' runabout, and was compelled to listen to a disquisition on the unparalleled excellence of the horse I then sat behind, and, by inference, the inferiority of Sidney.

"When you buy a horse, always examine him close," said Jukes, in an insufferably patronizing way. "Get all your friends to examine him. Ask the pastor of your church to take a squint at him. Call in the policeman on your block, the boys from the engine-house, the liveryman, the groceryman, the station-agent, the mayor, and a judge of the supreme court. Let them all take a good long look at him, and write or telephone their opinions after thinking it over for a week. Then—when you have all the advice you can get—follow your own judgment. See? You'll be pretty sure to be stuck, anyhow."

We had reached our destination now—for Jukes' horse certainly was a goer—and I winced as I saw how closely we shaved the gate-post with the wheels on my side as we turned into the curved driveway.

"Mornin', ma'am!" shouted Jukes jovially, to the Real Boss, who was standing in front of the stable, robed in a pink morning-gown and an air of extreme hauteur. "Glad to see you again. You are looking like a peach this morning. This country air agrees with our American girls, I tell you. His nibs here tells me there is something wrong with the horse. Too bad! Well, we shall have to try and fix it. Don't feel bad. P'raps we can pull him through."

Doctor Jukes had plenty to say. He went into the stable and punched Sidney in the ribs. Had I done that, the brute would have kicked me. When Jukes did it Sidney only looked at him calmly, and seemed to say: "Howdy, doc?"

I am persuaded that horse knew Jukes for a vet as soon as he entered.

Then Jukes went to Sidney's head,

and they seemed to be whispering to each other.

"It's his shoulder!" proclaimed Jukes. "See here."

He pinched Sidney in an extremely tender spot, and that intelligent animal tried to splinter a beam overhead with his heels.

"Who-oa, ginger!" remonstrated Jukes, as he stroked Sidney's nose. Then, turning to me: "I'll tell you. There is only one cure for this horse, and I ain't certain as it will be a cure at that——"

"Can you do it so that I can drive him this afternoon?" broke in the Real Boss.

"Lord love you, ma'am! You won't be able to drive this horse for three months, at least."

"*What!*"

The Real Boss and I shrieked this exclamation in unison.

"Surest thing you know. What has to be done is to take off his shoes and turn him out to pasture. Let him stay in grass for the rest of the summer."

"But he has been without shoes for six months."

"In pasture?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. M'm—M'm! I—thought—so!"

"Why?"

It was the Real Boss asking the question.

"Bless your innocent heart! Because this here horse is sweenyed. That's what's the matter with him."

"Do you think the liveryman knew it?" I put in.

"Perhaps not. He was only representing the owner, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Then, most likely he *didn't* know. But, if I was you, I'd try to sell this animal as soon as you can get a customer. I'll tell you what to do. Haw! haw!" (Jukes had a disgustingly coarse laugh.) "Sell him back to that painter."

"I paid a hundred and twenty-five dollars for Sidney."

"Did you? You need a guardeen——"

"Sir!" interrupted the Real Boss.

"For the horse," went on Jukes, turning his red face smilingly toward her. You could not disconcert that man.

"Do you think the painter would give me back what I paid for him?"

"Not unless he's a very easy painter. However, I'll see what I can do. If you want me to take charge of the horse, I will put him in my ten-acre meadow now. The longer he stays here, the worse he'll get."

I glanced at the Real Boss, and saw tears in her eyes. I knew what a wrench it would be to her to give up those glorious drives on which she had set her heart. But there was no help for it. She could not drive an animal with only three legs, and the wisest course was to let Doctor Jukes take him away.

As Sidney hobbled along the driveway behind Jukes' runabout, he looked over his shoulder, and I felt sure, this time, that he winked at me. The procession stopped at the gateway for an instant, and it was then that Sidney wafted to us a last farewell:

"*Snaw-aw-aw-awp!*"

A month later the Real Boss and I stood looking over a gate at Sidney, with Doctor Jukes by our side. Sidney was lazily nibbling grass, and, as he switched his disreputable tail at the flies, he ogled me from the corner of his sly old eye.

"How happy he looks!" murmured the Real Boss sympathetically.

"He *is* happy, ma'am. I wanted you to see how peaceful he was, here in the clover, under the shade of the sheltering palms—I mean elms. It would be cruel to disturb him, don't you think?"

I looked inquiringly at Jukes.

"You see, it's this way, ma'am," he went on, ignoring me. "Here's a horse with a sweeny——"

"A what?" I demanded.

"A sweeny. It's a wasting of the shoulder muscles—an incurable complaint. Sweeny, or swinney, whichever you like."

I did not like either, but did not say so.

Jukes continued: "So long as he has no shoes on he is free from pain. But when you fasten iron plates to his poor hoofs, with two-inch spikes tearing into the sensitive——"

The Real Boss shuddered, and she laid her hand supplicatingly upon his arm.

"Well, I don't want to wring your tender feelings, ma'am; but, as a medical man——"

"Wow!" I howled internally.

"I can only say that this here horse should be kept on soft ground, where he will not require shoes. I know a man—a vegetable gardener—who wants a horse to walk up and down between the rows of celery, cabbages, and such like."

"What for?" I asked.

Jukes crushed me with a scornful glance, as he snapped:

"I am not a vegetable gardener, but I have seen horses doing that sort of work, with a light cultivator behind them. That is all I know. This gardener has made me an offer which I advise you to take."

"How much will he give?" I asked in desperation.

"Twenty-five dollars," was his instant response.

"But——" I began.

"I know. You paid *more* than twenty-five dollars for Sidney. But that is all he is worth to-day. You are lucky to get rid of him at all. A horse with a sweeny comes under the head of damaged goods, you know. Will you take the twenty-five?"

"Yes, Sherman. We will take it."

It is not in me to dispute the Real Boss when she speaks with determination, and I told Doctor Jukes we would accept the pitiful offer.

"Snaw - aw - aw - awp!" commented Sidney.

With businesslike alacrity, Doctor Jukes drew a fountain pen and scribbled on a leaf from a note-book he carried:

Received of Doctor Otis Jukes, in full of all demands for bay gelding, "Sidney," twenty-five dollars.

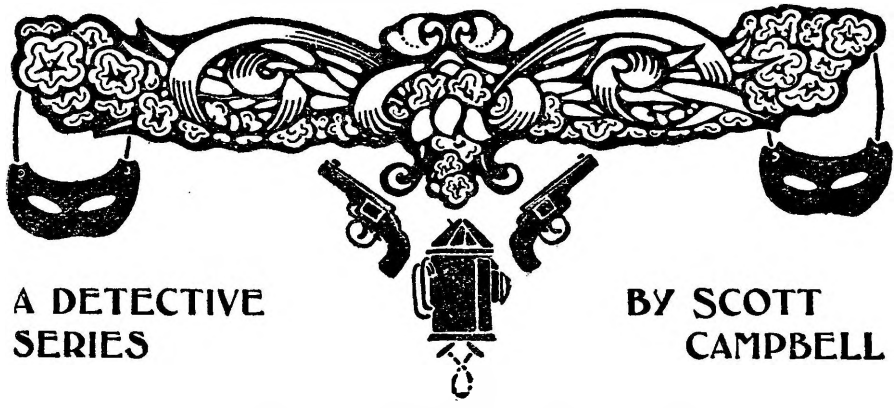
"Sign that," was his brief mandate, as he handed me the pen and rested the paper on top of the gate.

I obeyed, and, also to be businesslike, held out my hand for the money. Jukes scrutinized my signature, and carefully placed the receipt in his pocketbook.

Then he took out another paper, which he handed to me with the blandest of smiles.

It was a receipted bill for twenty-five dollars, for professional services rendered to Sidney.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd



A DETECTIVE SERIES

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL

XIV.—THE SLAYING OF SLEUGER

IT was five o'clock in the afternoon when Mr. Felix Boyd met Consul Holden bolting up the superb main stairway of the Hotel Cecil, with an exhibition of haste and excitement most remarkable in the man himself, and by no means in accord with the dignity one quite naturally expects in an American consul-general stationed in London.

"Well, well, Holden, what's amiss?" Boyd exclaimed, when they nearly collided on the landing at the turn of the stairway. "Are you after a doctor, a thief, or a——"

"I'm after an American detective—none other than yourself!" Holden breathlessly replied, with a look of relief. "Thank God I find you so quickly. Don't wait for anything. I have a cab at the door, and will explain on the way. We must not lose a moment."

Boyd already was hastening with him down the stairs. Clearly something extraordinary had happened. The perturbation of this man, his nervous trembling, his impetuous remarks, the anxiety reflected in his strong, intellectual face, now destitute of color—no ordinary matter could have so shaken the habitual repose and inherent dignity of Mr. Ebenezer Holden, one of America's brightest legal lights, and for three years accorded one of the most remunerative appointments in the United States consular service.

"The driver has his instructions," he hurriedly said, as he pushed Boyd into a motor-cab waiting opposite the Strand exit from the Cecil. "We yet may arrive in time for you to accomplish something."

"Arrive where?" inquired Boyd curiously. "Calm yourself, Mr. Holden, and state the trouble. I infer that a crime has been committed, since you require my services."

"Yes, yes, that is just it," Holden replied, as he sank quite exhausted upon the seat beside his companion. "I'm calm enough, Boyd, now that I've found you. I wanted you, above all men, knowing you so well, and of what you are capable. It is most fortunate for me, I think, that you are in London. I have no great faith in the discernment and acumen of some of the Scotland Yard inspectors, and I fear that this affair may prove most serious."

"What is the nature of it?" asked Boyd. "State the bare facts as briefly as possible, since time is of value."

"I am informed of only one fact—I depend upon you to ferret out the others," Holden quickly replied. "A

murder has been committed in Cole's Private Hotel, in Berkeley Square. My nephew is suspected of having done the deed, and is under arrest."

"When was the crime committed?" asked Boyd.

"Less than an hour ago."

"What have you learned about it?"

"Only what my nephew, Leslie Kirk, could state by telephone," Holden hastened to explain. "He was arrested, soon after the crime was discovered by Inspector Wildman, of Scotland Yard, who then was making an investigation. He was allowed to communicate with me, and stated——"

"One moment," Boyd interposed. "Was Wildman acquainted with Mr. Kirk?"

"Yes."

"Did he know he was your cousin?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"Leslie was allowed to state only that a man had been found murdered in his rooms, and that he had been arrested upon arriving there a little later. I don't know who the dead man is, nor upon what evidence my nephew is held. I know only that he is in a devil of a mess, or he would not have appealed to me. I hastened to find you, Mr. Boyd, knowing that you still were in London, and I was on the way to your rooms when I met you on the stairs."

"You have not visited the scene of the crime?"

"Not yet. I wished to make sure, if possible, of landing you upon the scene before the evidence could be seriously disturbed. I think you may discover facts that would escape the notice of any ordinary detective. Not believing Leslie Kirk capable of so heinous a crime as murder, I hope you will do all you can to save his neck, to say nothing of saving our family honor."

"I certainly will try to do so," Boyd gravely rejoined. "Now, tell me: You said your nephew would not have appealed to you unless he was in a bad mess. What did you imply by that?"

The lawyer shrugged his broad shoulders and frowned significantly.

"That may be briefly explained," he replied, as the cab threaded its way through the stream of vehicles in Piccadilly. "Leslie Kirk has not been a model young man. At home, Boyd, we should call him very fast. He has an inordinate fondness for pleasure, for sporting events, for the races, for wine, woman, and song—you know the kind of man."

"Yes, I think I know," said Boyd dryly. "I judge, however, that you think him above anything of a criminal nature."

"Yes, I am sure of that," Holden quickly declared. "I don't think that Kirk has the slightest streak of the crook. He has follies enough, God knows, but I am sure he is above any deliberate knavery. I have helped him in a financial way several times, and I have censured him—without very much success, I will admit."

"How old is Leslie Kirk?" asked Boyd.

"About twenty-five."

"Married?"

"No."

"Does he live at Cole's Hotel?"

"Yes, yes, the scapegoat," Holden censoriously admitted. "You must understand, Mr. Boyd, that my oldest sister married Mr. Hartley Kirk, the wine merchant of Cockspur Street. He is an Englishman, but he then was living in New York. They came to London back in the eighties, and have lived here ever since. Leslie is the youngest of their nine children, all the rest of whom are very sedate and religiously inclined."

"He makes up for all the rest, I take it," remarked Boyd.

"He was pretty wild while at Cambridge, yet he wasn't a bad student. I succeeded in getting him a position as assistant cashier with Fenno & Co., the note-brokers of Lombard Street, a position which he has filled acceptably for nearly three years."

"Despite his lax morals, eh?" queried Boyd, with an odd smile.

"Oh, he has ability enough, I'll admit, if he'd only apply himself," said Holden. "But to revert to your ques-

tion. The family made it so unpleasant for Leslie at home, constantly protesting against his wild habits and rakish associates, that he bolted the paternal roof four weeks ago and established himself at Cole's Hotel."

"Many a young man has done the like," said Boyd. "Are there any other facts worth mentioning?"

"There is one to which I can only briefly refer, for we are nearing our destination," Holden earnestly rejoined. "Yet it is a fact which, possibly more than any other, led me to appeal so hurriedly to you. I refer to the recent robbery in the house where Kirk is employed."

"I know nothing about it," said Boyd. "State the particulars."

"It occurred about three weeks ago, while the cashier and two of the clerks were out to lunch. Leslie and the bookkeeper, a man named Ralston, were the only persons in the office, though one of the firm was in his private room, the door of which was closed. Ralston was busy at his desk, and at one adjoining Leslie had just made up the daily bank deposit. The desks were side by side, near the office counter, which is surmounted with a high, brass grating."

"Continue," nodded Boyd. "I follow you."

"The bank-book, containing a quantity of checks, was lying on Leslie's desk, and upon it was a bundle of banknotes of large denomination, amounting in all to nearly a thousand pounds. The firm had done a large business that morning, it being the first of the month. Leslie had just secured the bundle of cash with two rubber bands, when a man entered and approached the counter."

"A stranger?"

"Yes. Yet it was supposed he called on business, for he had in his hand what appeared to be a note or check. Upon reaching the counter, however, he quickly drew a revolver, covering both Kirk and Ralston, and warned them to be quiet or they would be instantly shot. Leslie then was commanded to hand the package of banknotes through the window of the grating.

"He hesitated, and since has stoutly maintained that he saw the man's finger begin to press the trigger of the revolver, and he felt that a longer refusal would cost him his life."

"He passed out the money, did he?"

"Yes. Ralston corroborated Leslie's statements and protested that he would have done the same. As the thief backed toward the door, however, Leslie gave the alarm and started in pursuit. He was obliged to pass around the end of the grating, and the delay enabled the rascal to reach the street and make good his escape."

"Is he still at large?"

"Yes."

"Is his identity known?"

"The police, who have been hot on his trail and are reasonably sure that he has not left London, are convinced that the man was Karl Sleuger, a desperate and exceedingly daring thief, who had gained a reputation for rascality in Germany. The affair startled all London, for while such a thing is not uncommon in the far West, an open hold-up like this hasn't occurred in this city for years."

"Yes, old London Town must sure have been worked up," chuckled Boyd. And he continued more seriously: "English justice is a much more certain thing than the brand we get on the other side, and a man who brandishes shooting-irons in public offices is pretty likely to be caught and sent to Portland Prison for the rest of his natural life."

"That's why London was so startled over the affair. This man Sleuger—if Sleuger it was—is a new thing in the experience of Scotland Yard. In his operations on the Continent he has stopped at nothing to gain his ends."

"Yes, I've heard of him," Boyd acquiesced. "He's as bold and bad as they make them, if reports sent to me from Germany are reliable. The job you mention was quite in line with his desperate style of work, and, doubtless, the Scotland Yard inspectors are right as to his identity."

"Every avenue of escape from London has been constantly watched," Holden gravely added. "Inspector Wildman is convinced, as I have said, that the scoundrel still is hiding in this city. A speedy departure is imperative to his safety, however, for the police are now making a rigorous and sytematic search of every——"

"I care nothing about that," Boyd again interrupted. "The circumstances indicate that Sleuger may have known that the note-brokers do a large business on the first of the month, when settlements are made, and so timed his rascally exploit as to secure considerable plunder. What occasioned your remark just now that this robbery was the incident that chiefly led you to appeal to me so hurriedly?"

"My reason will be obvious, Mr. Boyd, when I tell you that, despite the continued confidence which his employers have in him, some of the Scotland Yard inspectors have commented unfavorably upon the readiness with which Leslie Kirk gave Sleuger the money."

"Yes, I see," murmured Boyd. "They suspect Kirk of having been in league with him."

"They do not openly admit it, yet I have been told that such a suspicion exists," Holden gravely replied. "Not knowing in how far the local inspectors may be influenced by it, providing that Leslie now is as seriously involved as I fear, I wanted you to reach the scene of the crime as quickly as possible, both because of your shrewdness and the fact that you will make, if permitted, an entirely unbiased investigation."

"Yes, yes, surely," Boyd thoughtfully nodded. "You think the police may be prejudiced against Kirk."

"Very possibly."

"I know Inspector Wildman very well. I think he will allow me to view the evidence. If he should decline to do so, we at least may learn from your precious nephew, whose sowing of wild oats has brought him to such a pass, just what circumstances have occasioned his arrest and why he——"

"There is no time for more, Boyd," Holden nervously interupted. "Here is the house."

Cole's Private Hotel, before which the cab had stopped, was an ancient yet very aristocratic-looking house of four stories, with a court at one end of the building leading to a side entrance, also providing a short cut by that way to a neighboring back street. At the front door of the house, which opened directly off the sidewalk and into an entry adjoining the hotel office, a policeman was standing; while the groups of people gathered near-by, gazing with morbid curiosity at the windows and doors, indicated that the news of the crime had leaked out.

Though the officer at first was inclined to oppose their entrance, a few words from Holden brought a change of front, and he led Boyd into the house and up the stairs.

"Leslie has a parlor, bedroom, and bath on the second floor," said he. "I hope we may find him there and the evidence undisturbed."

"Much may depend upon the latter," remarked Boyd. "That must be his door at which the policeman is standing. I think a word with Wildman, if he still is here, will serve our purpose."

A question addressed to the officer elicited the desired information, and, in response to a message sent into the room, the burly figure and florid face of the chief inspector presently appeared at the door.

"Ah, it is you, Mr. Holden," he said, with grave cordiality. "You have brought Felix Boyd with you—I should have expected no less. You Americans seem to have faith only in your own. Glad to see you, Boyd. Come in, both of you. There has been a brutal crime committed here, yet it has one redeeming feature."

"What feature, Wildman?" asked the consul, while the three still paused in the corridor.

"The victim is a knave, of whom the community is well rid, even through the agency of an assassin."

"Have you identified him?"

"Yes. He is none other than the notorious thief for whom we have been searching for nearly a month."

"Not—not——"

"Yes, yes, the same," growled Wildman, rightly reading the white face of the American consul, whose voice seemed to have died in his throat. "None other than Karl Sleuger."

Mr. Felix Boyd turned rather more grave, and his brows knit closer as he followed Inspector Wildman into the room.

II.

The sun of the April afternoon still shone above the housetops, and the room which Felix Boyd entered was very well lighted by its two windows, the shades of which had been raised as high as possible, and the lace curtains drawn aside and secured. It was quite a commodious and tolerably well-furnished parlor, with a figured plush set, a single large easy chair, a table covered with books and papers, a few paintings on the wall, and several ornaments and some bric-à-brac on the mantel, which was above a broad, open fireplace, the base of which was a huge gray flagstone set into the floor.

The door of an adjoining bedroom was closed. The only living occupant of the room when the three men entered it was a subordinate detective, named Coburn.

Though Boyd heard the conversation that ensued during the next few minutes, he did not at once take part in it, his attention being chiefly given to sundry articles obviously having a bearing on the crime, and to viewing the victim of it.

The dead man was lying flat on his back, with his arms extended and his fractured head on the flagstone of the fireplace. Boyd quickly observed a few minor details, however; the man's muscular build, his broad shoulders, his dark, short hair and smoothly shaven features, and his suit of plain woolen. Even in death the face of this man wore a look of viciousness.

On the flagstone near him a heavy iron poker was lying, obviously the weapon with which the man had been slain.

Tossed upon the sofa was a gray overcoat, the right sleeve and front of which were splashed with blood; also a pair of cuffs, the edge of one of which also bore the same crimson stain. On the table was a black, stiff hat, somewhat worn and dusty, presumably that of the dead man.

Boyd took in these various features of the scene in a very few moments, meantime listening to the remarks of his companions.

"Where is Kirk?" was Holden's first question upon entering. "I hope you have not sent him to the station."

The face of the chief inspector indicated that he had permitted this innovation upon his customary work in such cases only because of Holden's position in London and the fact that he was related to the suspected man. He jerked his thumb toward the bedroom, and replied quite bluntly:

"He's in there, sir, in charge of an officer. Stop a moment, Mr. Holden."

The latter turned back from the bedroom door, to which he quickly had started.

"Well?" he said inquiringly.

"Before you open that door, Mr. Holden, I have a few words to say about this crime and the circumstantial evidence involving your nephew. I have no wish to give him any the worst of it, mind you, and I warn you that anything he says here may be used against him."

"I am aware of that, Mr. Wildman."

"I am inclined to do you a favor, that's all, and it's best for you and for Leslie Kirk that you should know what he's up against before you invite any statements from him. He refused to open his mouth about this affair until you should arrive, and I decided to let him send for you. You had better know the bare facts of the case, as I see them, that you may use your own judgment about letting him make any statements at this time."

"This is very good of you, and I appreciate it," Holden said more calmly. "What are the facts?"

"The crime was discovered about four o'clock by one of the chambermaids, who thought she heard a disturbance here, and who came into the room a little later after vainly knocking. I happened to be passing the house with Coburn here at that moment, and we heard the girl's cries of alarm. We at once took possession of these rooms, and I since have made a partial investigation."

"And an arrest."

"Which the circumstances entirely warrant."

"Are they so incriminatory?"

"You may judge for yourself, Mr. Holden. We found the body of this man lying as you see it. He appeared to have been dead about fifteen minutes. I at once recognized him to be Karl Sleuger, the German thief."

"Go on," said Holden.

"While making an examination of his body," continued Wildman, "I found in his vest pocket this ordinary visiting-card. It bears the printed name and former address of Leslie Kirk. In one corner of it is written with a pen the name of this hotel and the number of this room. Kirk has admitted that the writing is his, and that he has so inscribed all of his old cards, instead of having new ones printed. It is obvious that Sleuger came by appointment, the card having been given to him by Leslie Kirk, by whom Sleuger's visit was probably expected."

Though outwardly composed, it was plain that Holden keenly appreciated the point just made, as well as the network of evidence in which young Kirk might be involved.

"I will admit that the finding of the card in Sleuger's pocket reasonably invites the interpretation you give it," he gravely rejoined.

Mr. Felix Boyd, who now was an attentive listener, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and fell to studying the floor.

"It is known that Kirk entered the house about half-past three and came up to his room," continued Wildman. "He was seen by two persons in the office and by one of the chambermaids. Whether Sleuger then was here or whether he arrived a little later is not known. I have not been able to find any person who saw him enter. It is obvious, however, that both he and Kirk were here just before four o'clock. What occurred that led up to the crime is open to conjecture. I have my own views about that, Mr. Holden, as you may infer."

"Do you object to stating them?"

"Not at all," Wildman bluntly rejoined. "Since the recent robbery in which Leslie Kirk figured, I have had him carefully shadowed. There was a bare possibility that he was a confederate of Sleuger, and I am not one to ignore so slender a thread. If right, I knew that sooner or later I should catch the two men in company. Only yesterday this espionage was discontinued, and I now regret that it was not maintained through to-day."

"What do you now suspect?"

"I think that Sleuger came here to meet Leslie Kirk, possibly for the purpose of dividing their plunder, or to execute some agreement made before the robbery. I believe that they could not agree, and that an altercation followed, ending with this man's death. Sleuger was a desperate, hot-headed fellow, and if provoked he would not have shrunk from attacking your nephew. Very possibly Kirk killed him in self-defense, or——"

"One moment, Mr. Wildman, if you please," Holden huskily interrupted. "Your theory appears too reasonable for me to contest it at present. Are there any other circumstances involving Leslie Kirk?"

"There are his cuffs and overcoat, both soiled with blood. We found them in a closet in the next room, though Kirk was absent when we entered. I have not learned where he went after the crime, nor just how long he had been absent. If Sleuger brought the stolen money here for division, Kirk may have gone out to conceal it before reporting the fatality, or to invent some plausible story that would justify the murder. He has refused to state

where he went, or why he left his room."

"Yet he returned," said Holden significantly.

Inspector Wildman shrugged his broad shoulders and again shook his head.

"You must not bank heavily on that, though it appears to be in his favor," said he. "As a matter of fact, I had excluded all persons from the adjoining corridor, and the door of this room was closed. Kirk may not have known that the crime had been discovered, and possibly he was returning to take steps to square himself. At all events, he came hurrying into the room about ten minutes after I arrived. The moment he saw me, however, he uttered an oath and attempted to bolt from the house."

"Is it possible!"

"Luckily Coburn was too quick for him and overtook him in the corridor," Wildman gravely added. "Kirk put up a nasty fight for a minute, but was finally subdued, and I have held him here till you should arrive. That's how the matter stands, Mr. Holden. If there is any way to save Leslie Kirk's neck, I shall be glad of it. For my own part, I see none at present. I now will have the officer bring him in here."

More anxious and disturbed than before, if one were to judge from his pale, aristocratic countenance, Holden now checked the speaker, and said:

"You have been very considerate, Wildman, I'm sure, and I hate to ask you to add to my obligations. Yet I would like Felix Boyd's opinion of the situation before you question Leslie. Have you any objection to his expressing it?"

"Not the slightest."

"Or to his looking into this evidence?"

"None whatever. If Kirk can be saved, or his innocence reasonably established, I'm not the one to oppose it."

"What do you think about it, Boyd? Had I better let Kirk make any statement at this time?"

Mr. Felix Boyd appeared to come out of a reverie. He had been sitting on the edge of the table, with no apparent interest in what had been said. He now looked up and replied, with an air of uncertainty:

"Well, I can hardly say. You don't mind my asking one or two questions, Wildman?"

The latter smiled faintly, a bit derisively. Once before he had allowed Mr. Felix Boyd the privilege of looking into an affair then under his own investigation, only to have the props knocked from under the case he had established, and his edifice of circumstantial evidence brought down about his ears. That Boyd could accomplish as much in this case, however, or seriously shake the evidence incriminating Leslie Kirk, seemed altogether improbable.

"You may ask any question that occurs to you," he rejoined. "I shall not object to answering it, Boyd."

Felix Boyd appeared to lay no great stress upon the other's compliance, yet he asked, with an insouciant stare at Wildman's rather quizzical countenance:

"How long after she heard the disturbance did the chambermaid enter this room? I suppose you have questioned her."

"Yes, certainly. About five minutes, she said."

"Did she see anybody leave the room during that time?"

"No. She was busy in another room."

"Then a person might have left without being seen."

"Possibly."

"Have you found anything else of significance in Sleuger's pockets?"

"Only a ticket to Southampton, purchased and stamped this morning," Wildman replied. "It indicates that he was about to attempt flight by the evening train; also that he felt obliged to see Kirk before departing—another circumstance against the latter, in that it suggests their secret relations."

"Very true," Boyd thoughtfully admitted. "Every circumstance, in fact, appears to confirm your theory. Is this Sleuger's hat?"

Boyd glanced indifferently at the stiff, black hat that was lying near him on the table; then he carelessly took it up and looked into it.

"Yes, probably," growled Wildman, wondering. "There was no other hat here."

"It must have been his, then," drawled Boyd, replacing the hat where he had found it. "I don't think of anything more, Inspector Wildman. As for letting Kirk make his statement, Mr. Holden, I think he may make it now as well as later. Step into the bedroom and see what he has to say for himself."

Boyd's attitude was not encouraging. Consul Holden, who had appealed to him so confidently, gravely shook his head and entered the bedroom, quickly followed by both of the inspectors. The covert smile in the eyes of Wildman had become more noticeable.

Felix Boyd glanced after them, with a sharper gleam from under his drooping lids. Then his countenance suddenly changed, reflecting those latent qualities of his keen, forcible nature that rarely appeared on the surface. With lips drawn and eyes aglow, he took the hat from the table and stole quickly to the fireplace, where he attempted to fit the hat to the dead man's head.

Next he darted silently to the nearest window, drawing a lens from his pocket. There, in the better light, he fell to studying the sweat-leather in the hat, then the felt surface under it, and finally the worsted braid entirely around the stiff brim; all the while with his thin lips tensely drawn and his eyes gleaming brightly under his wrinkled brows.

He quickly replaced the hat on the table, however, upon hearing Holden and his companions returning, and his features wore again their former expression of mingled uncertainty and reserve.

The prisoner was about the type of man Boyd had expected—a tall, athletic fellow, with an attractive face, now very pale, and the aspect and bearing of one of strong will, and thoroughly indignant over his desperate situation.

Boyd drew aside and listened without interruption to the statements made by the young man. Kirk admitted that he had entered his room about half-past three, and said that he had removed his overcoat and cuffs and tossed them upon his bed. He declared, however, having had reason to believe that he recently had been shadowed, that he then had stolen up to the window of one of the upper, unoccupied rooms of the house, bent upon seeing if he could detect any man watching his rooms.

He further asserted that he had remained up there nearly half an hour, and that he knew nothing about the crime until he returned. Then, recognizing Wildman and apprehending that he was in some way involved, he had impulsively rushed into the corridor with the intention of hastening to a telephone to communicate with his uncle, as he had been allowed to do a little later.

As to the card found in Sleuger's pocket, Kirk admitted that it was his, that he had written the hotel address upon it; but he declared that he had given a score of such cards to acquaintances during the month that he had been living at the hotel, and also that he knew absolutely nothing about Sleuger or his mission there.

Such was the story, in brief, told with many a protest and growl of indignation, to which Felix Boyd silently listened. The dusk of evening had begun to fall. The case against Kirk had not been improved by his statements, and Inspector Coburn and the policemen were preparing to take him away. Holden glanced anxiously at Felix Boyd, and inquired whether he wished to ask any questions. Boyd merely shook his head, and the consul drew Wildman aside for a brief conference.

An opportunity was presented for which Boyd had patiently waited. He edged nearer to Kirk, who had relapsed into moody silence and stood frowning near the open door of the adjoining room. Presently Boyd glanced into the room, and quietly remarked, with an air of indifference not wasted upon Coburn and the policemen.

"This is your bedroom, Mr. Kirk, I take it."

"Yes."

The response was little more than a growl, accompanied with a resentful stare; yet a moment later Kirk felt the strong, slender fingers of Felix Boyd steal cautiously around his wrist, gripping it significantly, while his voice fell to a barely audible murmur.

"Whisper! Who among your rakish acquaintances is a tall man, with red hair and shaven features, who is left-handed and perspires freely?"

Kirk's dilating eyes met those of the speaker, read in them a command more forcible than could have been verbally uttered. He subdued his amazement, and answered, scarce above his breath:

"You must mean—Clinton Margate."

"Where does he live?"

"In Hadley Court, off Camberwell Road, Kennington. You don't think——"

"No matter what I think. Be patient and—silent! Not a word of this until you hear from me! One word may cost you your life!"

Kirk's face again wore its frown of bitter resentment, yet when he left the room with Inspector Coburn a little later, he walked firmly and carried himself erect.

Felix Boyd turned to Holden and remarked, with a gravity Wildman was quick to notice:

"The outlook is not favorable. Against the evidence involving him, Kirk's statements appear deplorably lame. I will notify you, however, if anything occurs to me later."

"Are you going?"

"It is six o'clock," nodded Boyd, glancing at his watch. "Detective Coleman, my companion in London, will meet me with a growl if I keep him waiting for dinner."

III.

"No, no, Jimmie, I have no doubt of it. A five-pound note is an alluring bait for a London cabby, and I feel sure that one of my men will finally locate him. He has nothing to fear in coming here, and the information he may impart should enable me to clinch the —ah, if I'm not mistaken, Jimmie, that should be our man."

From the corridor adjoining his suite in the Cecil, in which Boyd was seated with the Central Office man on the afternoon following Sleuger's murder, there had sounded the fall of heavy feet, the hesitating tread of one seeking a numbered room, and then followed a knock on the panel of the closed door.

Boyd arose and opened it, greeting with a smile a man whose clothes proclaimed him a London cabby.

"I'm looking for——" he began.

"For Mr. Felix Boyd—quite right, sir," Boyd genially interrupted, when the man paused to consult a scrap of paper. "Come in and be seated. So one of my several scouts finally found you, eh? Give our good friend a cigar, Jimmie. I hope you may prove to be the man we want."

The cabman gazed doubtfully about, then accepted the cigar and gingerly seated himself on the edge of a chair.

"I was told as I'm wanted here, though I'm dashed if I know for what!" he said, with a voice rendered hoarse by night mists and London fogs. "Him as questioned me said you——"

"I know precisely what he said, my good man," Boyd again interrupted, with a laugh. "You took a fare to Cole's Private Hotel between three and four o'clock yesterday afternoon, did you not?"

"I did, sir, and that's what your messenger asked me."

"He also told you that I had a five-pound note for such information as you could give me," said Boyd. "I merely want you to answer a few questions about your passenger of yesterday afternoon. Where did you pick him up?"

"In the Strand, sir, near the Tivoli," replied the cabman, still with a doubtful stare.

"Can you give me a description of the man?"

"Well, he was a good bit over medium tall, sir, as I remember," said the cabby, nervously fingering his hat and gloves. "He had dark hair and whiskers, and wore a black slouch-hat and a long, gray overcoat. I didn't notice him overmuch, sir."

"Your description is admirable, nevertheless," replied Boyd, with some enthusiasm. "You picked the man up in the Strand, eh? Was it before or after the sharp April shower of yesterday afternoon?"

"Just before."

"Capital!" exclaimed Boyd. "Could he, by the way, have reached his destination by taking a bus?"

"Well, he could have taken a bus along Piccadilly, but he'd have had to walk from there to the hotel."

"Did you drop him at the hotel door, or——"

"Not just that, sir," the cabman now interrupted. "He stopped me at the court near the side door, sir, and said for me to wait."

"Did he enter the house by the side door?"

"He did."

"And came out that way?"

The cabby nodded.

"How long did you wait for him?"

"Ten minutes, I'd say. Then I drove him to Charing Cross station, where I dropped him again."

"Was he excited when he came out of the hotel?"

"If he was, I didn't notice it. I hope I'm not mixed into that affair as took place there yesterday."

"Not in the least," Boyd declared, to the obvious relief of his hearer. "So you have heard of the murder, eh?"

"Only this noon, sir. But I didn't think as my fare——"

"Could have turned the trick so quickly, eh? Well, well, no wonder! Ten minutes is a short time, indeed, for so brutal a deed. What kind of a cab do you drive, my man?"

"A four-wheeler, sir."

"Very good, very good, indeed," laughed Boyd, rubbing his hands and glancing quickly at the Central Office man. "What did I tell you, Jimmie? It's just as I predicted. The way now appears open to easily—no, no, keep your seat, my good fellow! I'm not yet through with you. The five-pound note shall be doubled, providing you can serve my purpose."

It would appear that the cabman was equal to the service required, in that his four-wheeler drew up at the last of three modest "Queen Anne" cottages in Hadley Court, Kennington, soon after dark that evening.

With his long coat buttoned around him and his whip in his gloved hand, the cabby came down from his box and peered with sinister gaze over the wooden fence and at the plain front door of the cottage which stood back a step or two from the sidewalk.

Yet while he briefly hesitated a man slouched by him, muttering a word as he passed, and the cabby entered the yard and knocked on the house door with the butt of his whip.

The summons was answered after a moment. Light appeared at the vertical row of narrow, glass panels, and the door was opened by a man bearing in his left hand an oil-lamp—a tall, muscular fellow above thirty, with an angular, smoothly shaven face and short, red hair, a pair of sharp eyes, somewhat sunken and darkly ringed, a face wearing many signs of dissipation and by no means prepossessing.

He peered at the cabman for a moment, then caught sight of the motionless carriage beyond the fence, and his florid face lost color.

"Well?" he harshly growled.

With a hand on either side of the door-casing, the cabman bent forward until his grim face and sinister eyes were unpleasantly near those of his observer.

"I've a word with you alone, Mr. Margate," he said, with an impressive display of caution. "Come outside."

"A word for me?" faltered Margate, frowning.

"Aye, for you; d'ye hear? Come outside!"

The lamp flickered and flared in the man's unsteady hand, while he recoiled

and briefly hesitated. After a moment he answered, half in his throat:

"Come in, if you have something to say. I'm not coming out there."

"You'd best hear it alone, sir."

"I'm alone in here, fellow," said Margate, with suppressed feeling. "Come in, I say; or be off about your business."

The cabman's eyes lighted. He strode in and closed the door, then followed the man and the lamp through the narrow entry and into a plainly furnished sitting-room, the windows of which overlooked the side yard and garden.

"Alone here, eh?" he said, as he entered. "So much the better, Mr. Margate. My business is right here, sir."

Margate set down the lamp and took a chair at the table. Though very pale, his features were under control and his eyes had an ugly look. He frowned across the table at his visitor and answered:

"What do you mean, fellow, by such an intrusion as this?"

"You know what I mean."

"If you have business with me——"

"You know I have! Your face shows it."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"Well, I'll tell you, then," cried the cabman, with ominous intonation.

He strode nearer and bowed over the table, with his gloved hands resting upon it, one still gripping his heavy whip, and met with a threatening stare the uplifted eyes of his hearer.

"I've been at some trouble to find you, Mr. Margate, since dropping you at Charing Cross station at four o'clock o' yesterday. If——"

"You——"

"Keep your seat; d'ye hear?" The whip in the cabman's hand came down on the table with a crack that made the room ring. "Don't play rough along with me, mind you, nor put up any cock-and-bull story. I'm as wicked at rough-and-tumble as you can be—and was! Mind that before tackling a cabby of my build, Mr. Margate, if you feel a liking for it come over you."

Margate's face had turned white and haggard, as if from deathly illness. Gripping his chair, from which he had started to rise, only to fall back when the cabman's whip fell so fiercely upon the table, he cried hoarsely:

"What do you mean? Man alive! what do you mean?"

The cabman moved nearer, till the rays from the lamp fell full on his terribly sinister face and threatening eyes.

"You know what I mean, Margate," he replied, with augmented vehemence. "I knew when I dropped you at Charing Cross you weren't the fare I took to Cole's Hotel. I knew that much, mind you, but it wasn't till this morning, when I read of the killing of Sleuger and the making off with his stolen money, that I twigged the game you had played there. I've been at some trouble to find you, but now"—the whip rose and fell again—"you'll share with me, d'ye 'ear? Share here and now, you will, or I'll peach on you and have you locked up before you can open your mouth. Fork up, sonny. That's your only way out of it."

Once more the butt of the whip fell with a blow that threatened to split the table; while the voice, the eyes, the attitude of the cabman evinced, with appalling vividness, the spirit that moved him.

Clinton Margate weakened, as many a better man has done, when caught in a desperate corner, from which he could see only one way of escape—in this case the one offered him. Ghastly white, with every nerve shaken, he leaned over the table, impulsively gripping the cabman's whip and crying, hoarsely, rapidly, with lips twitching:

"Less noise—less noise! We must not be heard—I'll throw up the sponge. I'll do what you require. God hearing me, I did not murder Sleuger. I killed him in self-defense."

"Don't tell me——"

"It's true—it's true!" cried Margate, plunging into a statement of the facts with the frantic, abject eagerness of one eager to square himself. "I encountered Sleuger while leaving the Tivoli. He had insulted a girl, and I

called him down. We had words, and nearly came to blows. In the hope of avoiding a fight and arrest, I snatched a card from my case and threw it in his face, crying that I could be found at that address, if he wanted satisfaction. I saw him, livid with rage, stoop and seize the card; but only when I had escaped through the crowd and steadied myself, did I discover that I had used, not my own card, but another in my case—that of Mr. Leslie Kirk."

"What's this you're telling me?" cried the cabman. "D'ye think that I——"

"It's true—every word!" Margate wildly went on. "I was so disturbed by my error that I rushed to Kirk's rooms to explain, lest Sleuger should call and cause trouble. I found Kirk's door ajar, and entered. His coat and cuffs were on his bed, and I thought he would quickly return. So I sat down and waited."

"Then Sleuger showed up?"

"Yes, yes, on my word! He still was white with rage. The instant he saw me alone, he drew his knife. I leaped for the heavy iron poker at the fireplace. It all was over in half a minute—all but the sickening horror and the man lying dead at my feet!"

The speaker groaned aloud, shuddering from head to foot, and the cabman forcibly demanded:

"What then? What happened then?"

Margate drew forward again, convulsively gripping the table's edge.

"I knelt to see if I had killed him, and thrust my hand into his vest," he went on. "In doing so I discovered a package of money. His disguise, a wig and beard, had been displaced in our struggles, and I recognized the man from pictures recently published. Instantly I guessed the truth, and saw how I might escape detection. Knowing of the recent robbery, I saw that I might incriminate Kirk, save myself, and secure a small fortune. In my frenzy of fear, I took the despicable course. I soiled Kirk's coat and cuffs with blood and thrust them into the bedroom closet. I then pocketed Sleuger's knife and the package of money, and next put on his entire disguise, including his long, gray coat. I was compelled to wear his hat, and leave my own, mine being too small after the wig was on, but it had no marks that could betray me."

"You're sure of that?"

"Yes, yes, absolutely. I then fled by the court exit from the house and saw your cab at the curb. I guessed the truth, that you had brought Sleuger to the house, and I thought you did not see my deception. I had you take me to the Charing Cross station. There, out of observation, I removed the disguise and coat, turning the latter inside out to guard against being traced by it, and I then hastened home. I had no idea——"

"The money!" snarled the cabman, interrupting. "What's become o' the money?"

Margate arose, ghastly, unsteady, fumbling in his pocket for keys, and tottered toward a desk in one corner.

"I have it here," he cried hoarsely, deaf to the quiet movements of his hearer. "I'll do what you require. I'll buy your silence. Half of the cash is yours, if you will keep my secret. None other can know it. None other can betray me. The money is ours, if you say the word and swear that you'll never——"

Margate's voice died in his throat.

A window had been quietly raised, and Chief Wildman and Jimmie Coleman stood gazing into the room.

The hair and stubbly beard of the cabman, his leather gloves, and long, loose coat—all had been tossed upon the floor. In place of the cabman there stood, with a revolver poised carelessly in his slender, white hand, the tall, lithe form of Mr. Felix Boyd.

"Take it quietly, Mr. Margate," said he, in an effective way he had at times. "You'll not go up for murder. Take it quietly, I say. Better a short sentence for theft than an ounce of lead while attempting to escape. That's right—sit down! Come in, Wildman, if you please, and relieve me of further interest in this deplorable affair. Where is the cabman, Jimmie? Our good

friend must have his garments and two five-pound notes before he goes home."

At lunch in the Cecil the following day, Chief Wildman stared across the table at his host, and incredulously demanded, in reply to a casual remark:

"Do you mean to say, Boyd, that you deduced the truth from those two articles, the card found in Sleuger's pocket and the hat Margate left behind him?"

A smile lurked in the corners of Boyd's eyes, while he gazed over his claret at the speaker.

"Well, not entirely, Wildman," said he. "I believed from the first that Leslie Kirk was innocent. Despite his wild habits mentioned to me by Mr. Holden, his record in college and business indicates that he fundamentally is a man of good character."

"Yes, yes, I now am convinced of that."

"What first suggested the truth to me," said Boyd, "was the fact that Kirk's card was found in Sleuger's pocket. It indicated, as you inferred, Wildman, that an appointment had been made between the two men. Yet I quickly reasoned that the card might have been placed there by another, possibly by some person to whom Kirk previously had given it. Assuming that Kirk committed the crime, he certainly would not have left his card in Sleuger's pocket. On the other hand, a third person, guilty of the crime and aiming to incriminate Kirk, would very likely have done so."

"That's true, Boyd, I'll admit."

"Sleuger's ticket to Southampton further indicated that he was about to attempt flight. In that case he very likely had the stolen money on his person, which at once suggested to me a motive for the crime."

"Yes, I thought of that."

"But Sleuger was hard pressed by the police, and I could not believe that he had ventured into the streets of London without a disguise," Boyd smilingly continued. "Yet there was no sign of a disguise on the scene of the crime. I inferred, then, that the criminal might have worn it away, in order to hide his own identity in case he was seen leaving the house. It would have been a most natural step on the part of a man who had just committed a murder."

"I should have thought of that, also," growled Wildman, with a shrug.

"Having put on Sleuger's wig, the criminal naturally would have found that his stiff hat did not fit very well. A soft felt one, however, would have served his purpose, and it occurred to me that he might have taken Sleuger's hat and left his own. I confirmed that theory, Wildman, while left briefly alone with the corpse, by attempting to fit the stiff hat to Sleuger's head. It did not fit at all."

"Humph! I should have remained in the room with you."

"A careful examination of the hat," laughed Boyd, "enabled me to make a few valuable deductions. The sweat-leather was much defaced and warped, indicating that the owner perspired freely. A few short hairs cleaving to the felt inside were of a reddish hue. The braid around the brim was worn and a little defaced at only one point, on the left side, near the front, where the owner's fingers habitually gripped the hat when removing it. Obviously, Wildman, he was a left-handed man. Most of the blows received by Sleuger, moreover, were on the top of his head and forehead, and could have been delivered only by a man of considerable height and reach. In addition, if he wore Sleuger's disguise, his own features must have been smoothly shaven."

"Very clever, Boyd," nodded Wildman thoughtfully. "Very clever, I'm sure."

"So I had, as you see, a tolerably good description of the probable assassin," added Boyd. "I then whispered to Kirk and asked him who, among his rakish associates, was the tall, left-handed, red-headed, smoothly shaven fellow, who perspired freely."

"And he told you?"

"Yes."

"While I was in the room?"

"Certainly."

"I must have been temporarily deaf and blind," laughed Wildman.

"Not necessarily," grinned Jimmie Coleman, from the end of the table. "Boyd has a crafty way of doing things unseen."

"I should say so."

"As for Sleuger's motive in hastening to Kirk's rooms, the truth cannot be absolutely known. It may be that, upon seeing Kirk's card, he recalled how the latter had figured in the recent robbery, and fearing that his own identity was suspected, he may have rushed to Kirk's rooms to make sure, or to silence him. On the other hand, being a man of violent temper, he may have been actuated only with designs upon Margate. The latter is the more probable, I think."

"His motive, it strikes me, is not material," rejoined Wildman.

"Several other points had helped me hit upon the truth," Boyd indifferently remarked. "Despite the shower only a short time before the crime was committed, the soles of Sleuger's boots were dry, indicating that he had come to the hotel in a cab, since no bus passed the house. I noticed, too, that on the shoulders of Sleuger's coat there were no traces of blood, which should have fallen there when the blows were struck, though his breast and linen were considerably stained. I inferred, then, that he must have worn an overcoat, which the assassin afterward had removed."

"Yes, yes, of course," nodded Wildman. "I had eyes, Boyd, and saw not."

Boyd laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Having obtained the points mentioned, the rest was fairly easy," he said, in conclusion. "I employed several young men to hunt up the cabman who conveyed Sleuger to the hotel. I wanted a description of Sleuger before the crime, in order to confirm my suspicions. I knew, moreover, that Margate, if he had departed in Sleuger's cab disguised as Sleuger was—which proved to be the case—would have had only a cursory glance at the cabman. Yet he was the one man whom Margate should have feared, and I judged that, by preparing a proper disguise and assuming the character of the cabman, I could drive Margate into a corner and evoke a confession. You saw how it was done, Wildman, and I judge that you now have the case down pat."

Scotland Yard again gazed across the table at the thin, clean-cut face of the American detective.

"Down pat—yes, thanks to you! I'm not one to forget it, I assure you. Consul Holden feels that he owes you a debt not easily paid, Mr. Boyd; and the gratitude of Leslie Kirk hardly knows bounds. Indeed, I don't much wonder."

Mr. Felix Boyd dipped his slender fingers into the bowl just placed before him, then wiped them on his napkin.

"Ah, well, the case may teach the young man something," he indifferently rejoined. "He owes me nothing, I'm sure. By the way, Wildman, I'm awfully glad to have seen so much of you during our brief stay in London. If you visit New York, I beg that you'll look me up. All through, Jimmie? We must get our traps in shape, you know, if we are to leave for Paris at three."