

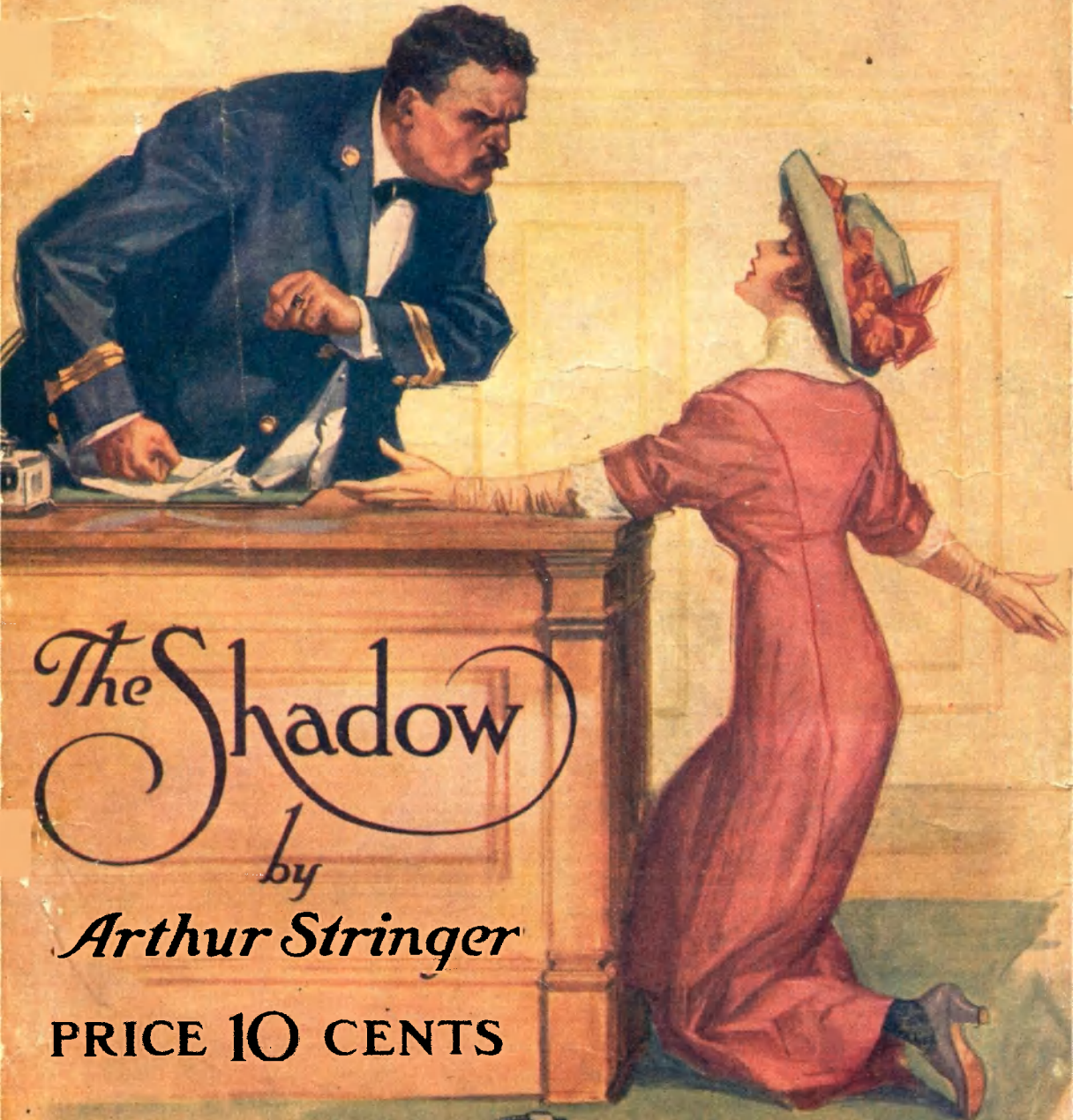
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Arthur Stringer

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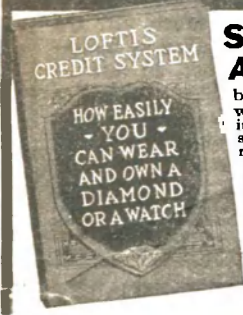
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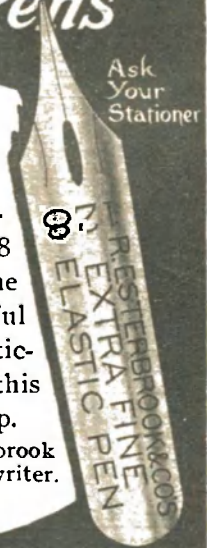
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THE CAVALIER

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Vol. XX

No. 2

THE SHADOW

A SERIAL

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

CHAPTER I.

Business—and Other Things.

BLAKE, the second deputy commissioner, raised his gloomy hound's eyes as the door opened and a woman stepped in. Then he dropped them again.

"Hello, Elsie!" he said, without looking at her.

The woman stood a moment staring at him. Then she advanced thoughtfully toward his table-desk.

"Hello, Jim!" she answered, as she sank into the empty chair at the desk-end. The rustling of silk suddenly ceased. An aphrodisiac odor of ambergris crept through the deputy commissioner's office.

The woman looped up her veil, festooning it about the undulatory roll of her hat brim. Blake continued his solemnly preoccupied study of the desk-top.

"You sent for me," the woman said. It was more a reminder than a question. And the voice, for all its quietness, carried no sense of timidity.

The woman's pale face, where the undulating hat brim left the shadowy eyes still more shadowy, seemed fortified with some calm sense of power. It was something more than a dormant consciousness of beauty, though the knowledge that men would turn back to a face so wistful as hers, and their judgment could be dulled by a smile so narcotizing, had not a little to do with the woman's achieved serenity. There was nothing outwardly sinister about her. This fact had always left her doubly dangerous as a law-breaker.

Blake himself, for all his dewlap and his two hundred pounds of lethargic beefiness, felt a vague and inward stirring as he finally lifted his head and looked at her.

He could see, as he had seen before, that hers were exceptional eyes, with iris rings of deep gray about the ever-widening and ever-narrowing pupils which varied with varying thought, as though set too close to the brain that controlled them. So dominating was this pupil that sometimes the whole eye looked violet, and sometimes green, according to the light.

Then his glance strayed to the woman's mouth, where the upper lip curved outward, from the base of the straight nose, giving her at first glance the appearance of pouting. Yet the heavier under lip, soft and wilful, contradicted this impression of peevishness, deepened it into one of Ishmael-like rebellion.

Then Blake looked at the woman's hair. It was abundant and nut-brown, and artfully and scrupulously interwoven and twisted together. It seemed to stand the solitary pride of a life claiming few things of which to be proud. Blake remembered how that wealth of nut-brown hair was daily plaited and treasured and coiled and cared for, the meticulous attentiveness with which morning by morning its hip-reaching abundance was braided and twisted and built up about the small head, an intricate structure of soft wonder which midnight must ever see again in ruins, just as the next morning would find idly laborious fingers rebuilding its ephemeral glories. This rebuilding was done thoughtfully and calmly, as though it were a religious rite, as though it were a sacrificial devotion to an ideal in a life tragically forlorn of beauty.

He remembered, too, the day when he had first seen her. That was at the time of "The Sick Millionaire" case, when he had first learned of her association with Binhart. She had posed at the Waldorf as a trained nurse, in that case, and had met him and held him off and outwitted him at every turn.

Then he had decided on his "plant." To effect this he had whisked a young Italian with a lacerated thumb up from the City Hospital and sent him in to her as an injured elevator-boy looking for first-aid treatment. One glimpse of her work on that thumb showed her to be betrayingly ignorant of both figure-of-eight and spica bandaging, and Blake, finally satisfied as to the imposture, carried on his investigation, showed "Dr. Callahan" to be Connie

Binhart, the con-man and bank thief, and sent the two adventurers scurrying away to shelter.

He remembered, too, how seven months after that first meeting Stimson of the central office had brought her to headquarters, fresh from Paris, involved in some undecipherable way in an Aix-les-Bains diamond robbery. The despatches had given his office very little to work on, and she had smiled at his thunderous grillings and defied his noisy threats.

But as she sat there before him, chic and guarded, with her girlishly frail body so arrogantly well gowned, she had in some way touched his lethargic imagination. She showed herself to be of finer and keener fiber than the sordid demireps with whom he had to do. Shimmering and saucy and debonair as a polo pony, she had seemed a departure from type, something above the meretricious termagants round whom he so often had to weave his accusatory webs of evidence.

Then, the following autumn, she was still again mysteriously involved in the Sheldon wire-tapping coup. This Montreal banker named Sheldon, from whom nearly two hundred thousand dollars had been wrested, put a bullet through his head rather than go home disgraced, and she had straightway been brought down to Blake, for, until the autopsy and the production of her dupe's letters, Sheldon's death had been looked upon as a murder.

Blake had locked himself in with the white-faced Miss Elsie Verriner, alias Chaddy Cravath, alias Charlotte Caruthers, and for three long hours he had pitted his dynamic brute force against her flashing and snakelike evasiveness. He had pounded her with the artillery of his inhumanities. He had beleaguered her with explosive brutishness. He had bulldozed and harried her into frantic weariness. He had third-degreed her with cowering and trembling indignation, into hectic mental uncertainties.

Then, with the fatigue point well

passed, he had marshaled the last of his own animal strength and essayed the final blasphemous Vesuvian onslaught that brought about the nervous breakdown, the ultimate collapse. She had wept, then, the blubbing, loose-lipped, abandoned weeping of hysteria. She had stumbled forward and caught at his arm and clung to it, as though it were her last earthly pillar of support. Her huge plaited ropes of hair had fallen down, thick brown ropes longer than his own arms, and he, breathing hard, had set back and watched them as she wept.

But Blake was neither analytical nor introspective. How it came about he never quite knew. He felt, after his blind and inarticulate fashion, that this scene of theirs, that this official assault and surrender, was in some way associated with the climacteric transports of camp-meeting evangelism, that it involved strange nerve-centers touched on in rhapsodic religions, that it might even resemble the final emotional surrender of reluctant love itself to the first aggressive tides of passion.

What it was based on, what it arose from, he could not say. But in the flood-tide of his own tumultuous conquest he had watched her abandoned weeping and her tumbled brown hair. And as he watched, a vague and troubling tingle sped like a fuse-sputter along his limbs, and fired something dormant and dangerous in the great hulk of a body which had never before been stirred by its explosion of emotion. It was not pity, he knew; for pity was something quite foreign to his nature.

Yet as she lay back, limp and forlorn against his shoulder, sobbing weakly out that she wanted to be a good woman, that she could be honest if they would only give her a chance, he felt that thus to hold her, to shield her, was something desirable.

She had stared, weary and wide-eyed, as his head had bent closer down over hers. She had drooped back, bewildered and unresponsive, as his

heavy lips had closed on hers that were still wet and salty with tears. When she had left the office, at the end of that strange hour, she had gone with the promise of his protection.

The sobering light of day, with its cynic relapse to actualities, might have left that promise a worthless one, had not the prompt evidence of Sheldon's suicide come to hand. This made Blake's task easier than he had expected. The movement against Elsie Verriner was "smothered" at headquarters. Two days later she met Blake by appointment. That day, for the first time in his life, he gave flowers to a woman.

Two weeks later he startled her with the declaration that he wanted to marry her. He didn't care about her past. She'd been dragged into the things she'd done without understanding them, at first, and she'd kept on because there'd been no one to help her away from them. He knew he could do it. She had a fine streak in her, and he wanted to bring it out!

A little frightened, she tried to explain that she was not the marrying kind. Then, brick-red and bull-necked, he tried to tell her in his groping Celtic way that he wanted children, that she meant a lot to him, that he was going to try to make her the happiest woman south of Harlem.

This had brought into her face a quick and dangerous light which he found hard to explain. He could see that she was flattered by what he had said, that his words had made her waywardly happy, that for a moment, in fact, she had been swept off her feet.

Then dark afterthought interposed. It crept like a cloud across her abandoned face. It brought about a change so prompt that it disturbed the second deputy.

"You're—you're not tied up already, are you?" he had hesitatingly demanded. "You're not married?"

"No, I'm not tied up!" she had promptly and fiercely responded. "My life's my own—my own!"

"Then why can't you marry me?" the practical-minded man had asked.

"I could!" she had retorted, with the same fierceness as before. Then she had stood looking at him out of wistful and unhappy eyes. "I could—it you only understood, if you could only help me the way I want to be helped!"

She had clung to his arm with a tragic forlornness that seemed to leave her very wan and helpless. And he had found it ineffably sweet to enfold that warm mass of wan helplessness in his own virile strength.

She asked for time, and he was glad to consent to the delay, so long as it did not keep him from seeing her. In matters of the emotions he was still as uninitiated as a child. He found himself a little dazed by the seemingly accidental tenderness, by the promises of devotion, in which she proved so lavish.

He grew heavily light-headed with his plans for the future. When she pleaded with him never to leave her, never to trust her too much, he patted her thin cheek and asked when she was going to name the day. From that finality she still edged away, as though her happiness itself were only experimental, as though she expected the blue sky above them to deliver itself of a bolt.

But by this time she had become a habit with him. He liked her even in her moodiest moments. When, one day, she suggested that they go away together, anywhere so long as it was away, he merely laughed at her childishness.

It was, in fact, Blake himself who went away. After nine weeks of alternating suspense and happiness that seemed nine weeks of inebriation to him, he was called out of the city to complete the investigation on a series of iron-workers' dynamite outrages. Daily he wrote or wired back to her. But he was kept away longer than he had expected.

When he returned to New York she

was no longer there. She had disappeared as completely as though an asphalted avenue had opened and swallowed her up. It was not until the following winter that he learned she was again with Connie Binhart, in southern Europe.

He had known his one belated love affair. It had left no scar, he claimed, because it had made no wound. Binhart, he consoled himself, had held the woman in his power; there had been no defeat because there had been no actual conquest. And now he could face her without an eye-blink of conscious embarrassment. Yet it was good to remember that Connie Binhart was going to be ground in the wheels of the law, and ground fine, and ground to a finish.

"What did you want me for, Jim?" the woman was again asking him. She spoke with an intimate directness, and yet in her attitude were subtle reservations, a consciousness of the thin ice on which they both stood. Each saw, only too plainly, the need for great care, in every step. In each lay the power to uncover, at a hand's turn, old mistakes that were best unremembered.

Yet there was a certain suave audacity about the woman. She was not really afraid of Blake, and the second deputy had to recognize that fact. This self-assurance of hers he attributed to the recollection that she had once brought about his personal subjugation, "got his goat," as he had phrased it. She, womanlike, would never forget it.

"There's a man I want. And Schmittenberg tells me you know where he is." Blake, as he spoke, continued to look down at his desk top.

"Yes?" she answered cautiously, watching herself as carefully as an actress with a rôle to sustain, a rôle in which she could never be quite letter-perfect.

"It's Connie Binhart," cut out the second deputy.

He could see discretion drop like a curtain across her watching face.

"Connie Binhart!" she temporized. Blake, as his heavy side glance slued about to her, prided himself on the fact that he could see through her pretenses. At any other time he would have thrown open the flood-gates of that ever-inundating anger of his and swept all such obliquities off the board.

"I guess," he went on with slow patience, "we know him best round here as Charles Blanchard."

"Blanchard?" she echoed.

"Yes, Blanchard, the Blanchard we've been looking for, for seven months now, the Blanchard who chloroformed Ezra Newcomb and carried off a hundred and eighteen thousand dollars."

"Newcomb?" again meditated the woman.

"The Blanchard who shot down the bank detective in Newcomb's room when the rest of the bank was listening to a German band playing in the side street, a band hired for the occasion."

"When was that?" demanded the woman.

"That was last October," he answered with a sing-song weariness suggestive of impatience at such super-erogative explanations.

"I was at Monte Carlo all last autumn," was the woman's quick retort.

Blake moved his heavy body, as though to shoulder away any claim as to her complicity.

"I know that," he acknowledged. "And you went north to Paris on the 29th of November. And on the 3d of December you went to Cherbourg; and on the 9th you landed in New York. I know all that. That's not what I'm after. I want to know where Connie Binhart is, now, to-day."

Their glances at last came together. No move was made; no word was spoken. But a contest took place.

"Why ask me?" repeated the woman for the second time. It was only too plain that she was fencing.

"Because you know," was Blake's curt retort. He let the gray-irised eyes drink in the full cup of his determination. Some slowly accumulating consciousness of his power seemed to intimidate her. He could detect a change in her bearing, in her speech itself.

"Jim, I can't tell you," she slowly asserted. "I can't do it!"

"But I've got to know," he stubbornly maintained. "And I'm going to."

She sat studying him for a minute or two. Her face had lost its earlier arrogance. It seemed troubled; almost touched with fear. She was not altogether ignorant, he reminded himself, of the resources which he could command.

"I can't tell you," she repeated. "I'd rather you let me go."

The second deputy's smile, scoffing and melancholy, showed how utterly he ignored her answer. He looked at his watch. Then he looked back at the woman. A nervous tug-of-war was taking place between her right and left hand, with a twisted-up pair of écru gloves for the cable.

"You know me," he began again in his deliberate and abdominal bass. "And I know you. I've got 'o get this man Binhart. I've got 'o! He's been out for seven months, now, and they're going to put it up to me, to me, personally. Copeland tried to get him without me. He fell down on it. They all fell down on it. And now they're going to throw the case back on me. They think it'll be my Waterloo."

He laughed. His laugh was as mirthless as the cackle of a guineahen. "But I'm going to die hard, believe me! And if I go down, if they think they can throw me on that, I'm going to take a few of my friends along with me."

"Is that a threat?" was the wom-

an's quick inquiry. Her eyes narrowed again, for she had long since learned, and learned it to her sorrow, that every breath he drew was a breath of self-interest.

"No; it's just a plain statement." He slued about in his swivel chair, throwing one thick leg over the other as he did so. "I hate to holler Auburn at a girl like you, Elsie; but I'm going—"

"Auburn?" she repeated very quietly. Then she raised her eyes to his. "Can you say a thing like that to me, Jim?"

He shifted a little in his chair. But he met her gaze without a wince.

"This is business, Elsie, and you can't mix business and—and other things," he tailed off at last, dropping his eyes.

"I'm sorry you put it that way," she said. "I hoped we'd be better friends than that!"

"I'm not counting on friendship in this!" he retorted.

"But it might have been better, even in this!" she said. And the artful look of pity on her face angered him.

"Well, we'll begin on something nearer home!" he cried.

He reached down into his pocket and produced a small tinted oblong of paper. He held it, face out, so that she could read it.

"This Steinert check'll do the trick. Take a closer look at the signature. Do you get it?"

"What about it?" she asked, without a tremor.

He restored the check to his wallet and the wallet to his pocket. She would find it impossible to outdo him in the matter of impassivity.

"I may or I may not know who forged that check. I don't want to know. And when you tell me where Binhart is, I won't know."

"That check wasn't forged," contended the quiet-eyed woman.

"Steinert will swear it was," declared the second deputy.

She sat without speaking, apparently in deep study. Her intent face showed no fear, no bewilderment, no actual emotion of any kind.

"You've got 'o face it," said Blake, sitting back and waiting for her to speak. His attitude was that of a physician at a bedside, awaiting the prescribed opiate to produce its prescribed effect.

"Will I be dragged into this case, in any way, if Binhart is rounded up?" the woman finally asked.

"Not once," he asserted.

"You promise me that?"

"Of course," answered the second deputy.

"And you'll let me alone on—on the other things?" she calmly exacted.

"Yes," he promptly acknowledged.

"I'll see that you're let alone."

Again she looked at him with her veiled and judicial eyes. Then she dropped her hands into her lap. The gesture seemed one of resignation.

"Binhart's in Montreal," she said.

Blake, keeping his face well under control, waited for her to go on.

"He's been in Montreal for weeks now. You'll find him at 381 King Edward Avenue, in Westmount. He's there, posing as an expert accountant."

She saw the quick shadow of doubt, the eyeflash of indecision. So she reached quietly down and opened her pocketbook, rummaging through its contents for a moment or two. Then she handed Blake a folded envelope.

"You know his writing?" she asked.

"I've seen enough of it," he retorted, as he examined the typewritten envelope postmarked "Montreal, Que." Then he drew out the inner sheet. On it, written by pen, he read the message: "Come to 381 King Edward Avenue when the coast is clear," and below this the initials "C. B."

Blake, with the writing still before his eyes, opened a desk-drawer and took out a large reading-glass. Through the lens of this he again studied the inscription, word by word. Then he turned to the office phone on his desk.

"Nolan," he said into the receiver, "I want to know if there's a King Edward Avenue in Montreal."

He sat there waiting, still regarding the handwriting with stolidly reproving eyes. There was no doubt of its authenticity. He would have known it at a glance.

"Yes, sir," came the answer over the wire. "It's one of the newer avenues in Westmount."

Blake, still wrapped in thought, hung up the receiver. The woman facing him did not seem to resent his possible imputation of dishonesty. To be suspicious of all with whom he came in contact was imposed on him by his profession. He was compelled to watch even his associates, his operatives and underlings, his friends as well as his enemies. Life, with him, was a *concerto* of skepticisms.

She was able to watch him, without emotion, as he again bent forward, took up the phone receiver, and this time spoke apparently to another office.

"I want you to wire Teal to get a man out to cover 381 King Edward Avenue, in Montreal. Yes, Montreal. Tell him to get a man out there inside of an hour, and put a night watch on until I relieve 'em."

Then, breathing heavily, he bent over his desk, wrote a short message on a form pad and pushed the buzzer-button with his thick finger. He carefully folded up the piece of paper as he waited.

"Get that off to Carpenter in Montreal right away," he said to the attendant who answered his call. Then he swung about in his chair, with a throaty grunt of content.

He sat for a moment, staring at the woman with unseeing eyes. Then he stood up. With his hands thrust deep in his pockets he slowly moved his head back and forth, as though assenting to some unuttered question.

"Elsie, you're all right," he acknowledged with his solemn and unimaginative impassivity. "You're all right."

Her quiet gaze, with all its reserva-

tions, was a tacit question. He was still a little puzzled by her surrender. He knew she did not regard him as the great man that he was, that his public career had made of him.

"You've helped me out of a hole," he admitted as he faced her interrogating eyes with his one-sided smile. "I'm mighty glad you've done it, Elsie—for your sake as well as mine."

"What hole?" asked the woman, wearily drawing on her gloves. There was neither open contempt nor indifference on her face. Yet something in her bearing nettled him. The quietness of her question contrasted strangely with the gruffness of the second deputy's voice as he answered her.

"Oh, they think I'm a has-been round here," he snorted. "They've got the idea I'm out o' date. And I'm going to show 'em a thing or two to wake 'em up."

"How?" asked the woman.

"By doing what their whole kid-glove gang haven't been able to do," he avowed. And having delivered himself of that ultimatum, he promptly relaxed into his old-time impassiveness, like a dog snapping from his kennel and shrinking back into its shadows.

At the same moment that Blake's thick forefinger again prodded the buzzer-button at his desk end the watching woman could see the relapse into official wariness. It was as though he had put the shutters up in front of his soul. She accepted the movement as a signal of dismissal. She rose from her chair and quietly lowered and adjusted her veil. Yet through that lowered veil she stood looking down at Never-Fail Blake for a moment or two. She looked at him with grave, yet casual, curiosity, as tourists look at a ruin that has been pointed out to them as historic.

"You didn't give me back Connie Binhart's note," she reminded him as she paused with her gloved finger-tips resting on the desk-edge.

"D'you want it?" he queried with simulated indifference, as he made a final and lingering study of it.

"I'd like to keep it," she acknowledged. When, without meeting her eyes, the second deputy handed it over to her, she folded it and restored it to her pocketbook, carefully, as though vast things depended on that small scrap of paper.

Never-Fail Blake, alone in his office, and still assailed by the vaguely disturbing perfumes which she had left behind her, pondered her reasons for taking back Binhart's scrap of paper. He wondered if she had at any time actually cared for Binhart. He wondered if she was capable of caring for anybody. And this problem took his thoughts back to the time when so much might have depended on its answer.

The second deputy dropped his reading-glass in its drawer and slammed it shut. It made no difference, he assured himself, one way or the other. And in the consolatory moments of a sudden new triumph Never-Fail Blake let his thoughts wander pleasantly back over that long life which (and of this he was now comfortably conscious) his next official move was about to redeem.

CHAPTER II.

"Never-Fail Blake."

IT was as a Milwaukee newsboy, at the age of twelve, that "Jimmie" Blake first found himself in any way associated with that arm of constituted authority known as the police force. A plain-clothes man, on that occasion, had given him a two-dollar bill to carry about an armful of evening papers and at the same time tail an itinerant pick-pocket.

The fortifying knowledge, two years later, that the law was behind him when he was pushed happy and tingling through a transom to release the door-lock for a house-detective, was perhaps a foreshadowing of that pride which later welled up in his bosom at the phrase that he would always "have united decency behind him," as the

social purifiers fell into the habit of putting it.

At nineteen, as a checker at the Upper Kalumet Collieries, Blake had learned to remember faces. Slavic or Magyar, Swedish or Calabrian, from that daily line of over two hundred he could always pick his face and correctly call the name. His post meant a life of indolence and petty authority. His earlier work as a steamfitter had been more profitable. Yet at that work he had been a menial; it involved no transom-born thrills, no street-corner tailor's suspense. As a checker he was at least the master of other men.

His public career had actually begun as a strike-breaker. The monotony of night-watchman service, followed by a year as a drummer for an Eastern fire-arm firm, and another year as an inspector for a Pennsylvania powder factory, had infected him with the wanderlust of his kind.

It was in Chicago, on a raw day of late November, with a lake wind whipping the street dust into his eyes, that he had seen the huge canvas sign of a hiring agency's office, slapping in the storm. This sign had said: "MEN WANTED." Being twenty-six and adventurous and out of a job, he had drifted in with the rest of earth's undesirables and asked for work.

After twenty minutes of private coaching in the mysteries of railway signals, he had been passed by the desk examiner and sent out as one of the scab train-crew to move perishable freight, for the Wisconsin Central was then in the throes of its first great strike. And he had gone out as a green brakeman, but he had come back as a hero, with a *Tribune* reporter posing him against a furniture-car for a two-column photo. For the strikers had stoned his train, half killed the scab fireman, stalled him in the yards, and cut off two-thirds of his cars and shot out the cab-windows for full measure.

But in the cab with an Irish engine-driver named O'Hagan, Blake had backed down through the yards again,

picked up his train, crept up over the tender and along the car-tops, recoupled his cars, fought his way back to the engine, and there, with the ecstatic O'Hagan at his side, had hurled back the last of the strikers trying to storn his engine-steps. He even fell to firing as the yodeling O'Hagan got his train moving again, and then, perched on the tender-coal, took pot-shots with his brand-new revolver at a last pair of strikers who were attempting to manipulate the hand-brakes.

That had been the first train to get out of the yards in seven days. Through a godlike disregard of signals, it is true, they had run into an open switch, some twenty-eight miles up the line, but they had moved their freight and won their point.

Blake, two weeks later, had made himself further valuable to that hiring agency, not above subornation of perjury, by testifying in a court of law to the sobriety of a passenger-crew who had been carried drunk from their scab-manned train. So naively dogged was he in his stand, so quick was he in his retorts, that the agency, when the strike ended by a compromise ten days later, took him on as one of their own operatives.

Thus James Blake became a private detective. He was at first disappointed in the work. It seemed, at first, little better than his old job as watchman and checker. But the agency, after giving him a three-week try-out at picket work, submitted him to the further test of a shadowing case. That first assignment of tailing kept him thirty-six hours without sleep, but he stuck to his trail, stuck to it with the blind pertinacity of a bloodhound, and at the end transcended mere animalism by buying a tip from a friendly bartender. Then, when the moment was ripe, he walked into the designated hop-joint and picked his man out of an underground bunk as impassively as a grocer takes an egg-crate from a cellar-shelf.

After his initial baptism of fire in the Wisconsin Central Railway yards,

however, Blake yearned for something more exciting, for something more sensational. His hopes rose when, a month later, he was put on track work. He was at heart fond of both a good horse and a good heat. He liked the open air and the stir and movement and color of the grand-stand crowds. He liked the ponies with the sunlight on their satin flanks, the music of the band, the gaily appareled women.

He liked, too, the offhand deference of the men about him, from turnstile to betting-shed, once his calling was known. They were all ready to curry favor with him, touts and rail-birds, clockers and owners, jockeys and gamblers and book-makers, placating him with an occasional "sure-thing" tip from the stables, plying him with cigars and advice as to how he should place his money. There was a tacit understanding, of course, that in return for these courtesies his vision was not to be too keen nor his manner too aggressive.

When he was approached by an expert "dip" with the offer of a fat reward for immunity in working the track crowds, Blake carefully weighed the matter, pro and con, equivocated, and decided he would gain most by a "fall." So he planted a barber's assistant with whom he was friendly, descended on the pickpocket in the very act of going through that bay-rum-scented youth's pocket, and secured a conviction that brought a letter of thanks from the club stewards and a word or two of approval from his head office.

That head office, seeing that they had a man to be reckoned with, transferred Blake to their Eastern division, with headquarters at New York, where new men and new faces were at the moment badly needed.

They worked him hard, in that new division, but he never objected. He was sober; he was dependable; and he was dogged with the doggedness of the unimaginative. He wanted to get on, to make good, to be more than a mere

operative. And if his initial assignments gave him little but rough-neck work to do, he did it without audible complaint. He did body-guard service, he handled strike-breakers, he rounded up freight-car thieves, he was given occasionally spot and tailing work to do. Once, after a week of up-holstered hotel lounging on a divorce case, he was sent out on night detail to fight river pirates stealing from the coal-road barges.

In the mean time, being eager and unsatisfied, he studied his city. Laboriously and patiently he made himself acquainted with the ways of the underworld. He saw that all his future depended upon acquaintanceship with criminals, not only with their faces, but with their ways and their women and their weaknesses. So he started a gallery, a gallery of his own, a large and crowded gallery between walls no wider than the bones of his own skull.

To this jealously guarded and ponderously sorted gallery he day by day added some new face, some new scene, some new name. Crook by crook he stored them away there, for future reference. He got to know the "habituals" and the "timers," the "gangs" and their "hang-outs" and "fences." He acquired an array of confidence men and hotel beats and queer shovers and bank sneaks and wire-tappers and drum-snuffers. He made a mental record of dips and yeggs and till-tappers and keister-crackers, of panhandlers and dummy chuckers, of sun-gazers and schlaum workers. He slowly became acquainted with their routes and their rendezvous, their tricks and ways and records.

But, what was more important, he also grew into an acquaintanceship with ward politics, with the nameless power above him and its enigmatic traditions. He got to know the Tammany heelers, the men with "pull," the lads who were to be "pounded" and the lads who were to be let alone, the men in touch with the "Senator," and the gangs with the fall money always at hand.

Blake, in those days, was a good mixer. He was not an office man, and was never dubbed high-brow. He was not above his work; no one accused him of being too refined for his calling. Through a mind such as his the law could best view the criminal, just as an eclipse is best viewed through smoked glass.

He could hobnob with bartenders and red-lighters, pass unnoticed through a slum, join casually in a stuss game, or loaf unmarked about a street-corner. He was fond of pool and billiards, and many were the unconsidered trifles he picked up with a cue in his hand. His face, even in those early days, was heavy and inoffensive. Commonplace seemed to be the word that fitted him. He could always mix with and become one of the crowd. He would have laughed at any such foolish phrase as "protective coloration." Yet seldom, he knew, men turned back to look at him a second time. Small-eyed, beefy, and well-fed, he could have passed, under his slightly tilted black boulder, as a truck-driver with a day off.

What others might have denominated as "dirty work" he accepted with heavy impassivity, consoling himself with the contention that its final end was cleanness. And one of his most valuable assets, outside his stolid heartlessness, was his speaking acquaintanceship with the women of the underworld. He remained aloof from them even while he mixed with them. He never grew into a "moll-buzzer."

But in his rough way he cultivated them. He even helped some of them out of their troubles—in consideration for tips which were to be delivered when the emergency arose. They accepted his gruffness as simple-mindedness, as blunt honesty. One or two, with their morbid imaginations touched by his seeming generousities, made wistful amatory advances, which he promptly repelled. He could afford to have none of them with anything on him. He saw the need of keeping cool-headed

and clean-handed, with an eye always to the main issue.

And Blake really regarded himself as clean-handed. Yet deep in his nature was that obliquity, that adeptness at trickery, that facility in deceit, which made him the success he was. He could always meet a crook on his own ground. He had no extraneous sensibilities to eliminate. He mastered a secret process of opening and reading letters without detection. He became an adept at picking a lock. One of his earlier successes had depended on the cool dexterity with which he had exchanged trunk-checks in a Wabash baggage-car at Black Rock, allowing the "loft" thief under suspicion to carry off a dummy trunk, while he came into possession of another's belongings and enough evidence to secure his victim's conviction.

At another time, when "tailing" on a badger-game case, he equipped himself as a theatrical "bill-sniper," followed his man about without arousing suspicion, and made liberal use of his magnetized tack-hammer in the final mix-up when he made his haul. He did not shirk these mix-ups, for he was endowed with the bravery of the unimaginative. This very mental heaviness, holding him down to materialities, kept his contemplation of contingencies from becoming bewildering. He enjoyed the limitations of the men against whom he was pitted. Yet at times he had what he called a "coppered hunch."

When, in later years, an occasional criminal of imagination became his enemy, he was often at a loss as to how to proceed. But imaginative criminals, he knew, were rare, and dilemmas such as these proved infrequent. Whatever his shift, or however unsavory his resource, he never regarded himself as on the same basis as his opponents. He had law on his side; he was the instrument of that great power known as justice.

As Blake's knowledge of New York and his work increased he was given less and less of the rough-neck work to do. He proved himself, in

fact, a stolid and painstaking investigator. As a divorce-suit shadower he was equally resourceful and equally successful. When his agency took over the bankers' protective work he was advanced to this new department, where he found himself compelled to a new term of study and a new circle of alliances. He went laboriously through records of forgers and check raisers and counterfeiters. He took up the study of all such gentry, sullenly yet methodically, like a backward scholar mastering a newly imposed branch of knowledge, thumbing frowningly through official reports, breathing heavily over portrait files and police records, plodding determinedly through counterfeit-detector manuals. For this book-work, as he called it, he retained a deep-seated disgust.

The outcome of his first case, later known as the "Todaro National Ten Case," confirmed him in this attitude. Going doggedly over the counterfeit ten-dollar national bank-note that had been given him after two older operatives had failed in the case, he discovered the word "Dollars" in small lettering spelt "Dollers." Concluding that only a foreigner would make a mistake of that nature, and knowing the activity of certain bands of Italians in such counterfeiting efforts, he began his slow and scrupulous search through the purlieus of the East Side.

About that search was neither movement nor romance. It was humdrum, dogged, disheartening labor, with the gradual elimination of possibilities and the gradual narrowing down of his field. But across that ever-narrowing trail the accidental little clue finally fell, and on the night of the final raid the desired plates were captured and the notorious and long-sought Todaro rounded up.

So successful was Blake during the following two years that the Washington authorities, coming in touch with him through the operations of the Secret Service, were moved to make him an offer. This offer he stolidly con-

sidered, and at last stolidly accepted. He became an official with the weight of the Federal authority behind him. He became an investigator with the secrets of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving at his beck. He found himself a cog in a machinery that seemed limitless in its ramifications. He was the agent of a vast and centralized authority, an authority against which there could be no opposition. But he had to school himself to the knowledge that he was a cog, and nothing more. And two things were expected of him, efficiency and silence.

He found a secret pleasure, at first, in the thought of working from under cover, in the sense of operating always in the dark, unknown and unseen. It gave a touch of something Olympian and godlike to his movements.

But as time went by the small cloud of discontent on his horizon grew darker, and widened as it blackened. He was avid of something more than power. He thirsted not only for its operation, but also for its display. He rebelled against the idea of a continually submerged personality. He nursed a keen hunger to leave some record of what he did or had done. He objected to it all as a conspiracy of obliteration, objected to it as an actor would object to playing to an empty theater. There was no one to appreciate and applaud. And an audience was necessary. He enjoyed the unctuous salute of the patrolman on his beat, the deferential door holding of office boys, the quick attentiveness of minor operatives. But this was not enough. He felt the normal demand to assert himself, to be known at his true worth by both his fellow workers and the world in general.

It was not until the occasion when he had run down a gang of Williamsburg counterfeiters, however, that his name was conspicuously in print. So interesting were the details of this gang's operations, so typical were their methods, that Wilkie or some official under Wilkie had handed over to a monthly known as *The Counterfeit Detector*

a full account of the case. A New York paper has printed a somewhat distorted and romanticized copy of this, having sent a woman reporter to interview Blake—while a staff artist made a pencil drawing of the Secret Service man during the very moments the latter was smilingly denying them either a statement or a photograph.

Blake knew that publicity would impair his effectiveness. Some inner small voice forewarned him that all outside recognition of his calling would take away from his value as an agent of the Secret Service. But his hunger for his rights as a man was stronger than his discretion as an official. He said nothing openly; but he allowed inferences to be drawn and the artist's pencil to put the finishing touches to the sketch.

It was here, too, that his slyness, his natural circuitiveness, operated to save him. When the inevitable protest came he was able to prove that he had said nothing and had indignantly refused a photograph. He completely cleared himself. But the hint of an interesting personality had been betrayed to the public; the name of a new sleuth had gone on record, and the infection of curiosity spread like a mulberry rash from newspaper office to newspaper office.

A representative of the press, every now and then, would drop in on Blake, or chance to occupy the same smoking compartment with him on a run between Washington and New York, to ply his suavest and subtlest arts for the extraction of some final fact with which to cap an unfinished story, Blake, in turn, became equally subtle and suave. His lips were sealed, but even silence, he found, could be made illuminative. Even reticence, on occasion, could be made to serve his personal ends. He acquired the trick of surrendering data without any shadow of actual statement.

These chickens, however, all came home to roost. Official recognition was taken of Blake's tendencies, and he was

assigned to those cases where a leak would prove least embarrassing to the department. He saw this and resented it. But in the mean time he had been keeping his eyes open and storing up in his cabinet of silence every unsavory rumor and fact that might prove of use in the future. He found himself, in due time, the master of an arsenal of political secrets. And when it came to a display of power he could merit the attention if not the respect of a startlingly wide circle of city officials. When a New York municipal election brought a party turnover, he chose the moment as the psychological one for a display of his power, cruising up and down the coasts of officialdom with his grim facts in tow, for all the world like a flagship followed by its fleet.

It was deemed expedient for the New York authorities to take care of him. A berth was made for him in the central office, and after a year of laborious manipulation he found himself third deputy commissioner and a power in the land.

If he became a figure of note, and fattened on power, he found it no longer possible to keep as free as he wished from entangling alliances. He had by this time learned to give and take, to choose the lesser of two evils, to pay the ordained price for his triumphs. Occasionally the forces of evil had to be bribed with a promise of protection. For the surrender of dangerous plates, for example, a counterfeiter might receive immunity, or for the turning of State's evidence a guilty man might have to go scot-free. At other times, to squeeze confession out of a crook, a cruelty as refined as that of the inquisition had to be adopted.

In one stubborn case the end had been achieved by depriving the victim of sleep, this Chinese torture being kept up until the needed nervous collapse. At another time the midnight cell of a suspected murderer had been set like a stage, with all the accessories of his crime, including even the cadaver, and when suddenly awakened the fren-

zied man had shrieked out his confession. But, as a rule, it was by imposing on his prisoner's better instincts, such as gang-loyalty or pity for a supposedly threatened "rag," that the point was won. In resources of this nature Blake became quite conscienceless, salving his soul with the altogether Jesuitic claim that illegal means were always justified by the legal end.

By the time he had fought his way up to the office of second deputy he no longer resented being known as a "rough-neck" or a "flat foot." As an official, he believed in roughness; it was his right; and one touch of right made away with all wrong, very much as one grain of pepsin properly disposed might digest a carload of beef. A crook was a crook. His natural end was the cell or the chair, and the sooner he got there the better for all concerned.

So Blake believed in hammering his victims. He was an advocate of confrontation. He had faith in the old-fashioned third-degree dodges. At these, in his ponderous way, he became an adept, looking on the nervous system of his subject as a nut, to be calmly and relentlessly gnawed at until the meat of truth lay exposed, or to be cracked by the impact of some sudden great shock.

Nor was the second deputy above resorting to the use of "plants." Sometimes he had to call in a "fixer" to manufacture evidence, that the far-off ends of justice might not be defeated. He made frequent use of women of a certain type, women whom he could intimidate as an officer or buy over as a good fellow. He had his aids in all walks of life, in clubs and offices, in pawn-shops and saloons, in hotels and steamers and barber-shops, in pool-rooms and anarchists' cellars. He also had his visiting list, his fences and stool-pigeons and shoo-flies.

He preferred the outdoor work, both because he was more at home in it and because it was more spectacular. He relished the bigger cases. He liked

to step in where an underling had failed, get his teeth into the situation, shake the mystery out of it, and then obliterate the underling with a half-hour of blasphemous abuse. He had scant patience with what he called the "high-collar cops." He consistently opposed the new-fangled methods, such as the *Portrait Parle*, and pin-maps for recording crime, and the graphic-system boards for marking the movements of criminals.

All anthropometric nonsense such as Bertillon's he openly sneered at, just as he scoffed at card indexes and fingerprints and other academic innovations which were debilitating the force. He had gathered his own data, at great pains, he nursed his own personal knowledge as to habitual offenders and their aliases, their methods, their convictions and records, their associates and hang-outs. He carried his own gallery under his own hat, and he was proud of it. His memory was good, and he claimed always to know his man. His intuitions were strong, and if he disliked a captive, that captive was in some way guilty—and he saw to it that his man did not escape. He was relentless, once his professional pride was involved. Being without imagination, he was without pity. It was, at best, a case of dog eat dog, and the law, the law for which he had such reverence, happened to keep him the upper dog.

Yet he was a comparatively stupid man, an amazingly self-satisfied toiler who had chanced to specialize on crime. And even as he became more and more assured of his personal ability, more and more entrenched in his tradition of greatness, he was becoming less and less elastic, less receptive, less adaptive. Much as he tried to blink the fact, he was compelled to depend more and more on the office behind him. His personal gallery, the gallery under his hat, showed a tendency to become both obsolete and inadequate.

That endless catacomb of lost souls grew too intricate for one human mind

to compass. New faces, new names, new tricks tended to bewilder him. He had to depend more and more on the clerical staff and the finger-print bureau records. His position became that of a villager with a department-store on his hands, of a country shopkeeper trying to operate an urban emporium. He was averse to deputizing his official labors. He was ignorant of systems and science. He took on the pathos of a man who is out of his time, touched with the added poignancy of a passionate incredulity as to his predicament. He felt, at times, that there was something wrong, that the rest of the department did not look on life and work as he did. But he could not decide just where the trouble lay. And in his uncertainty he made it a point to entrench himself by means of politics. It became an open secret that he had a pull, that his position was impregnable. This in turn tended to coarsen his methods. It lifted him beyond the domain of competitive effort. It touched his carelessness with arrogance. It also tinged his arrogance with occasional cruelty.

He redoubled his efforts to sustain the myth which had grown up about him, the myth of his vast cleverness and personal courage. He showed a tendency for the more turbulent centers. He went among murderers without a gun. He dropped into dives, protected by nothing more than the tradition of his office. He pushed his way in through thugs, picked out his man, and told him to come to headquarters in an hour's time—and the man usually came. His appetite for the spectacular increased. He preferred to head his own gambling raids, ax in hand.

But more even than his authority he liked to parade his knowledge. He liked to be able to say: "This is Sheeny Chi's coup!" or, "That's a job that only Soup-Can Charlie could do!" When a police-surgeon hit on the idea of etherizing an obdurate "dummy chucker," to determine if the prisoner could talk or not, Blake appropriated the suggestion as his own. And when

the press boys trooped in for their daily gist of news, he asked them, as usual, not to couple his name with the incident: and they, as usual, made him the hero of the occasion.

For Never-Fail Blake had made it a point to be good to the press boys. He acquired an ability to jolly them without too obvious loss of dignity. He took them into his confidences, apparently, and made his disclosures personal matters, individual favors. He kept careful note of their names, their characteristics, their interests. He cultivated them, keeping as careful track of them from city to city as he did of the big criminals themselves. They got into the habit of going to him for their special stories. He always exacted secrecy, pretended reluctance, yet parceled out to one reporter and another those dicta to which his name could be most appropriately attached. He even surrendered a clue or two as to how his own activities and triumphs might be worked into a given story. When he perceived that those worldly-wise young men of the press saw through the dodge, he became more adept, more adroit, more delicate in method. But the end was the same.

It was about this time that he invested in his first scrap-book. Into this secret granary went every seed of his printed personal history. Then came the higher records of the magazines, the illustrated articles written about "Blake; the Hamard of America," as one of them expressed it, and "Never-Fail Blake," as another put it. He was very proud of those magazine articles. He even made ponderous and painstaking efforts for their repetition, at considerable loss of dignity. Yet he adopted the pose of disclaiming responsibility, of disliking such things, of being ready to oppose them if some effective method could only be thought out. He even hinted to those about him that this seeming garrulity was serving a good end, claiming it to be harmless pother to cover more immediate trails on which he pretended to be engaged.

But the scrap-books grew in number and size. It became a task to keep up with his clippings. He developed into a personage, as much a personage as a grand-opera prima donna on tour. His successes were talked over in clubs. His name came to be known to the men in the street. His camera-eye was now and then mentioned by the scientists. His unblemished record was referred to in an occasional editorial. When an ex-police reporter came to him, asking him to father a macaronic volume bearing the title "Criminals of America," Blake not only added his name to the title-page, but advanced three hundred dollars to assist toward its launching.

The result of all this was a subtle yet unmistakable shifting of values, an achievement of public glory at the loss of official confidence. He excused his waning popularity among his coworkers on the ground of envy. It was, he held, merely the inevitable penalty for supreme success in any field. But a hint would come, now and then, that troubled him.

"You think you're a big gun, Blake," one of his underworld victims once had the temerity to cry out at him. "You think you're the king of the Hawkshaws! But if you were on *my* side of the fence, you'd last about as long as a snowball on a crownsheet!"

CHAPTER III.

"I'll Get Him."

IT was not until the advent of Copeland, the new first deputy, that Blake began to suspect his own position. Copeland was an out-and-out office man, anything but a flat-foot. Weak looking and pallid, with the sedentary air of a junior desk-clerk, vibrantly restless with no actual promise of being penetrating, he was of that indeterminate type which never seems to acquire a personality of its own.

The small and bony and steel-blue face was as neutral as the spare and reticent figure that sat before a bald ta-

ble in a bald room as inexpressive and reticent as its occupant. Copeland was not only unknown outside the department; he was, in a way, unknown in his own official circles.

And then Blake woke up to the fact that some one on the inside was working against him, was blocking his moves, was actually using him as a blind. While he was given the cold trails, younger men went out on the hot ones. There were times when the second deputy suspected that his enemy was Copeland. Not that he could be sure of this, for Copeland himself gave no inkling of his attitude. Hé gave no inkling of anything, in fact, personal or impersonal.

But more and more Blake was given the talking parts, the rôle of spokesman to the press. He was more and more posted in the background, like artillery, to intimidate with his remote thunder and cover the advance of more agile columns. He was encouraged to tell the public what he knew, but he was not allowed to know too much. And, ironically enough, he bitterly resented this rôle of mouth-piece for the department.

"You call yourself a gun!" a patrolman who had been shaken down for insubordination broke out at him. "A gun! Why, you're only a *park* gun! That's all you are, a broken-down bluff, an ornamental has-been, a park gun for kids to play round!"

Blake raged at that impotently, pathetically, like an old lion with its teeth drawn. He prowled moodily around, looking for an enemy on whom to vent his anger. But he could find no tangible force that opposed him. He could see nothing on which to centralize his activity. Yet something or somebody was working against him. To fight that opposition was like fighting a fog. It was as bad as trying to shoulder back a shadow.

He had his own spots and finders on the force. When he had been tipped off that the powers above were about to send him out on the

Binhart case, he passed the word along to his underlings without loss of time, for he felt that he was about to be put on trial; that they were making the Binhart capture a test case. And he had rejoiced mightily when his drag-net had brought up the unexpected tip that Elsie Verriner had been in recent communication with Binhart, and with pressure from the right quarter could be made to talk.

This tip had been a secret one. Blake, on his part, kept it well muffled, for he intended that his capture of Binhart should be not only a personal triumph for the second deputy, but a vindication of that second deputy's methods.

So when the commissioner called him and Copeland into conference, the day after his talk with Elsie Verriner, Blake prided himself on being secretly prepared for any advances that might be made.

It was the commissioner who did the talking. Copeland, as usual, lapsed into the background, cracking his dry knuckles and blinking his pale-blue eyes about the room as the voices of the two larger men boomed back and forth.

"We've been going over this Binhart case," began the commissioner. "It's seven months now—and nothing done."

Blake looked sidewise at Copeland. There was muffled and meditative belligerency in the look. There was also gratification, for it was the move he had been expecting.

"I always said McCooey wasn't the man to go out on that case," said the second deputy, still watching Copeland.

"Then who *is* the man?" asked the commissioner.

Blake took out a cigar, bit the end off, and struck a match. It was out of place, but it was a sign of his independence. He had long since given up plug and fine-cut and taken to fat Havanas, which he smoked audibly in plethoric wheezes. Good living had

left his body stout and his breathing slightly asthmatic. He sat looking down at his massive knees; his oblique study of Copeland apparently had yielded him scant satisfaction. Copeland, in fact, was making paper fans out of the official note-paper in front of him.

"What's the matter with Washington and Wilkie?" inquired Blake, attentively regarding his cigar.

"They're just where we are—at a standstill," acknowledged the commissioner.

"And that's where we'll stay," heavily contended the second deputy.

The entire situation was an insidiously flattering one to Blake. Every one else had failed. They were compelled to come to him, their final resource.

"Why?" demanded his superior.

"Because we haven't got a man who can turn the trick. We haven't got a man who can go out and round up Binhart inside o' seven years," answered Blake.

"Then what is your suggestion?" It was Copeland who spoke, mild and hesitating.

"D'you want my suggestion?" demanded Blake, warm with the wine-like knowledge which he knew made him master of the situation.

"Of course," was the commissioner's curt response.

"Well, you've got to have a man who knows Binhart, who knows him and his tricks and his hang-outs."

"Well, who does?" the commissioner questioned.

"I do," declared Blake.

The commissioner indulged in his wintry smile.

"You mean if you weren't tied down to your second deputy's chair you could go out and get him."

"I could."

"Within a reasonable length of time?"

"I don't know about the time. But I could get him, all right," replied the second deputy.

"If you were still on the outside work?" interposed Copeland.

"I certainly wouldn't expect to dig him out o' my stamp-drawer," was Blake's heavily facetious retort.

Copeland and the commissioner looked at each other for one fraction of a second.

"You know what my feeling is," resumed the latter, "on this Binhart case."

"I know what *my* feeling is," declared Blake.

"What?"

"That the right method would've got him six months ago, without all this monkey work."

"Then why not end the monkey work, as you call it?"

"How?"

"By doing what you say you can do!" was the commissioner's retort.

"How'm I going to hold down a chair and hunt a crook at the same time?"

"Then why hold down the chair? Let the chair take care of itself. It could be arranged, you know."

Blake had the stage-juggler's satisfaction of seeing things fall into his hands exactly as he had maneuvered they should. His reluctance was merely a dissimulation, a stage wait for heightened dramatic effect.

"How'd you do the arranging?" he calmly inquired.

"I could see the mayor. There will be no departmental difficulty."

"Then where's the trouble?"

"There is none, if you are willing to go out."

"Well, we can't get Binhart here by pink-tea invitations. Somebody's got to go out and *get* him."

"The bank raised the reward to eight thousand this week," interposed the ruminative Copeland.

"Well, it'll take money to get him," snapped the second deputy, remembering that he had a nest of his own to feather.

"It will be worth what it costs," admitted the commissioner.

"Of course," said Copeland, "they'll have to honor your drafts — in reason."

"There will be no difficulty on the expense side," quietly interposed the commissioner. "The city wants Binhart. The whole country wants Binhart. And they will be willing to pay for it."

Blake rose heavily to his feet. His massive bulk was momentarily stirred by the prospect of the task before him. For one brief moment the anticipation of that clamor of approval which would soon be his stirred his lethargic pulse. Then his cynic calmness again came back to him.

"Then what're we beefing about?" he demanded. "You want Binhart, and I'll get him for you."

The commissioner, tapping the top of his desk with his gold-banded fountain pen, smiled. It was almost a smile of indulgence.

"You *know* you will get him?" he inquired.

The inquiry seemed to anger Blake. He was still dimly conscious of the operation of forces which he could not fathom. There were things, vague and insubstantial, which he could not understand. But he nursed to his heavy-breathing bosom the consciousness that he himself was not without his own undivulged powers, his own private tricks, his own inner reserves.

"I say I'll get him," he calmly proclaimed. "And I guess that ought to be enough."

CHAPTER IV.

Wheels Within Wheels.

THE unpretentious, brownstone-fronted home of Deputy Copeland was visited late that night by a woman. She was dressed in black and heavily veiled. She walked with the stoop of a sorrowful and middle-aged widow.

She came in a taxicab, which she dismissed at the corner. From the

house-steps she looked first eastward, and then westward, as though to make sure she was not being followed. Then she rang the bell.

She gave no name; yet she was at once admitted. Her visit, in fact, seemed to be expected, for without hesitation she was ushered up-stairs and into the library of the first deputy.

He was waiting for her in a room more intimate, more personal, more companionably crowded than his office, for the simple reason that it was not a room of his own fashioning. He stood in the midst of its warm hangings, in fact, as cold and neutral as the marble Diana behind him. He did not even show, as he closed the door and motioned his visitor into a chair, that he had been waiting for her.

The woman, still standing, looked carefully about the room from side to side, saw that they were alone, made note of the two closed doors, and then with a sigh lifted her black-gloved hands and began to remove the widow's cap from her head. She sighed again as she tossed the black crape on the dark-wooded table beside her. As she sank into the chair the light from the electrolier fell on her shoulders and on the carefully coiled and banded hair, so laboriously built up into a crown that glinted nut-brown above the pale face she turned to the man watching her.

"Well?" she said. And from under her level brows she stared at Copeland, serene in her consciousness of power. It was plain that she neither liked him nor disliked him. It was equally plain that he, too, had his ends remote from her and her being.

"You saw Blake again?" he half asked, half challenged.

"No," she answered.

"Why?"

"I was afraid to."

"Didn't I tell you we'd take care of your end?"

"I've had promises like that before. They weren't always remembered," she answered.

"But our office never made you that promise before, Miss Verriner."

The woman let her eyes rest on his impassive face.

"That's true, I admit. But I must also admit I know Jim Blake. We'd better not come together again, Blake and me, after this week."

She was pulling off her gloves as she spoke. She suddenly threw them down on the table. "There's just one thing I want to know, and know for certain. I want to know if this is a plant to shoot Blake up."

The first deputy smiled. It was not altogether at the mere calmness with which she could suggest such an atrocity.

"Hardly," he said.

"Then what is it?" she demanded.

He was both patient and painstaking with her. His tone was almost paternal in its placativeness.

"It's merely a phase of departmental business," he answered her. "And we're anxious to see Blake round up Connie Binhart."

"That's not true," she answered with neither heat nor resentment, "or you would never have started him off on this blind lead. You'd never have had me go to him with that King Edward note and had it work out to fit a street in Montreal. You've got a wooden decoy up there in Canada, and when Blake gets there he'll be told his man slipped away the day before. Then another decoy will bob up, and Blake will go after that. And when you've fooled him two or three times he'll sail back to New York and break me for giving him a false tip."

"Did you give it to him?" Copeland asked.

"No, he hammered it out of me. But you knew he was going to do that. That was part of the plant."

She sat studying her thin white hands for several seconds. Then she looked up at the calm-eyed Copeland.

"How are you going to protect me if Blake comes back? How are you going to keep your promise?"

The first deputy sat back in his chair and crossed his thin legs.

"Blake will not come back," he announced. She slewed suddenly round on him again.

"Then it is a plant!" she proclaimed.

"You misunderstand me, Miss Verriner. Blake will not come back as an official. There will be changes in the department, I imagine; changes for the better which even he and his Tammany Hall friends can't stop by the time he gets back with Binhart."

The woman gave a little hand gesture of impatience.

"But don't you see," she protested, "supposing he gives up Binhart? Supposing he suspects something and hurries back to hold down his place in the department?"

"They call him Never-Fail Blake," commented the unmoved and dry-lipped official. He met her wide stare with his gently satiric smile.

"I see," she finally said, "you're not going to shoot him up. You're merely going to wipe him out."

"You are quite wrong there," began the man across the table from her. "Administration changes may happen, and in—"

"In other words, you're getting Jim Blake out of the way, off on this Binhart trail, while you work him out of the department."

"No competent officer is ever worked out of this department," parried the first deputy.

She sat for a silent and studious moment or two without looking at Copeland. Then she sighed with mock plaintiveness. Her wistfulness seemed to leave her doubly dangerous.

"Mr. Copeland, aren't you afraid some one might find it worth while to tip Blake off?" she softly inquired.

"What would you gain?" was his pointed and elliptical interrogation.

She leaned forward in the fulcrum of light, and looked at him soberly.

"What is your idea of me?" she asked.

He looked back at the thick-lashed eyes with their iris rings of deep gray. There was something alert and yet unparticipating in their steady gaze. They held no trace of abashment. They were no longer veiled. There was even something disconcerting in their lucid and level stare.

"I think you are a very intelligent woman, Miss Verriner," Copeland finally confessed.

"I think I am, too," she retorted. "Although I haven't used that intelligence in the right way. Don't smile! I'm not going to turn mawkish. I'm not good. I don't know whether I want to be. But I know one thing: I've got to keep busy—I've got to be active. I've *got* to be!"

"And—" prompted the first deputy as she came to a stop.

"We all know, now, exactly where we're at. We all know what we want, each one of us. We know what Blake wants. We know what you want. And I want something more than I'm getting, just as you want something more than writing reports and rounding up push-cart peddlers. I want my end as much as you want yours," she answered.

"And—" again prompted the first deputy.

"I've got to the end of my ropes, and I want to swing around. It's no reform-*bee*, mind! It's not what other women like me think it is. But I can't go on. It doesn't lead to anything. It doesn't pay. I want to be safe. I've *got* to be safe!"

He looked up suddenly, as though a new truth had just struck home with him. For the first time all that evening his face was ingenuous.

"I know what's behind me," went on the woman. "There's no use digging that up. And there's no use digging up excuses for it. But there *are* excuses—good excuses, or I'd never have gone through what I have, because I feel I wasn't made for it. I'm too big a coward to face what it leads to. I can look ahead and see through

things. I can understand too easily." She came to a stop, and sat back with one white hand on either arm of the chair. "And I'm afraid to go on. I want to begin over. And I want to begin on the right side."

He sat pondering just how much of this he could believe. But she disregarded his veiled impassivity, and continued:

"I want you to take picture 3,970 out of the identification bureau, the picture and the Bertillon measurements. And then I want you to give me the chance I asked for."

"But that does not rest with me, Miss Verriner."

"It will rest with you. I couldn't stool with my own people here. But Wilkie knows my value. He knows what I can do for the service if I'm on their side. He could let me begin with the Ellis Island work. I could stop that Stockholm white-slave work in two months. And when you see Wilkie to-morrow you can swing me one way or the other."

Copeland, with his chin on his bony breast, looked up to smile into her intent and staring eyes.

"You are a very clever woman," he said. "And, what is more, you know a great deal."

"I know a great deal," she slowly repeated, and her steady gaze succeeded in taking the ironic smile out of the corners of his eyes.

"Your knowledge," he said with a deliberation equal to her own, "will prove of great value to you—as an agent with Wilkie."

"That's as you say," she quietly amended as she rose to her feet. There was no actual threat in her words, just as there was no actual mockery in his. But each was keenly conscious of the wheels that revolved within wheels, of the intricacies through which each was threading a way to certain remote ends. She picked up her black gloves from the desk-top. She stood there, waiting.

"You can count on me," he finally

said as he rose from his chair. "I'll attend to the picture. And I'll say the right thing to Wilkie."

"Then let's shake hands on it," she quietly concluded. And as they shook hands her gray-irised eyes gazed intently and interrogatively into his.

When Never-Fail Blake alighted from his sleeper in Montreal he found one of Teal's men awaiting him at Bonaventure Station. There had been a hitch or a leak somewhere, this man reported. Binhart in some way had slipped through their fingers.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

TWO WOMEN, OR ONE?*

A SERIAL

BY E. J. RATH

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

FOR a six weeks' expedition into the unexplored north woods, Jane Boyce, the woman prospector, engages Ben Mitchell as guide. There is something unusual about Jane's requiring a guide, for she is a perfect woodswoman herself, and a fine specimen of physical womanhood. But there her attraction ends, for she is apparently without heart, utterly methodical and unhuman in her movements, entirely introspective and uncommunicative. She treats Mitchell like a piece of baggage, and his loneliness drives him almost frantic. Jane's mission into the wilds is unknown, but thought to be gold. One day Ben disobeys her orders by taking the obvious side of a rock in a rapid instead of the side he was told to take. As a result the canoe upsets in the white swirl.

CHAPTER VI (continued).

Disobeying Orders.

IT seemed like hours later, though I learned that it was but a few minutes, when I felt myself being half dragged, half carried up a sloping, grassy bank. Slowly I opened my eyes and looked up into the face of Jane. I remember noting, even in my half-dazed condition, that she wore the same impassive expression that was habitual with her. She was bending over, her hands clasped under my body, and I could feel the heaving of her muscles as she hauled me toward a level spot.

She was dripping with water, her

blue flannel shirt clinging to her figure like the drapery on a fine piece of sculpture. I must have uttered some sound; for she glanced quickly at me, and, seeing I was conscious, dropped me quickly and hurried down to the stream. I dimly understood that she was seeking salvage from the disaster, but for the life of me I could not then have gone to her assistance. I felt very weary and sleepy. For a time I closed my eyes, and I did not open them until I heard her stirring near me.

"Everything gone?" I asked slowly, as I looked up at her. She was standing near me, her arms folded, regarding me gravely.

"Nothing of consequence," she answered shortly. "Can you get up?"

* This story began in *The Cavalier* for September 14.

I rose slowly to a sitting position, and then a twinge in my leg warned me that some damage had been done. Also, there was a dull ache in my head, and I discovered a lump over one ear.

"Wouldn't wonder if I'm lamed up a bit," I said, as my mind began to clear.

She came over to me and slipped her arms beneath my shoulders.

"Stand up!" she commanded, lifting. I managed to get to my feet, and threw my weight on the injured leg. It made me wince, but I knew that there was no fracture.

"See if you can walk," she said tersely. She drew one of my arms across her shoulders, so that she supported much of my weight, and slipped an arm around my waist.

I never realized her strength until then. I leaned heavily upon her for a minute or two, grinding my teeth as I stepped back and forth across the little open spot. She steadied me, and half carried me until the muscles in my leg began to come painfully back to life. Then I found that I could limp alone.

I looked down at the rapid that surged a few yards away. On the bank was a water-soaked pile of duffle she had dragged from the white, rushing waters. I looked for the canoe and sighted it, drawn out on the shore a couple of hundred feet below us.

"You got—everything?" I asked in wonderment.

"Almost," she answered. "A few odds and ends gone; that's all. Are you all right now?"

I tested the aching leg a couple of times and nodded.

"We'll camp where the canoe is," she said, pointing. "You go ahead. I'll bring the stuff."

I started to protest that I would help her with the load, but she cut me short.

"You'll have enough to do to carry yourself. I'll attend to this." Her tone was smooth, yet peremptory, and without a word I turned and hobbled off down the bank.

As my brain cleared I felt a keen sense of shame and humiliation. I had proved the weaker vessel, and Jane Boyce knew it. I reached the canoe, and noted with a breath of relief that it appeared to show no injury. Warily I sat down with my back against a tree and nursed my leg.

Presently Jane came with the first load of duffle. She tossed it off her shoulders without so much as a look at me and turned back. Three trips she made to bring the stuff to our camp site, and then she started to set things to rights with never a word of comment. Fortunately, our grub had not been immersed long enough to permit the water to penetrate into the small, waterproof bags she had provided, and that was one stroke of good fortune. But our blankets were soaked.

She took the ax, cut some dry firewood, and started a blaze. Then she hung the blankets out. There was still a couple of hours of sun and a nice breeze, but I had little hope that we would have dry bedding that night. After she had made these preparations she set about the pitching of our tents, and then she got supper. I did not offer to help her. I felt weak; my head was aching abominably, and my leg also pained me considerably. She brought my supper to me without a word, and we ate in silence. When she had finished cleaning up the dishes she walked over to where I sat and looked at me narrowly.

"Are you all right now?" she asked.

"Yes; thank you."

"Then listen: I told you to push inside the rock."

I nodded. It was coming now, but I knew that I deserved it.

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't know," I answered slowly. "It seemed right to do the other thing."

"Well, it was wrong," she said, shortly. "I knew. I've been upset there before. Now, I hire you to obey orders. You didn't obey."

"That's right," I murmured, shamefacedly.

"Will you obey hereafter?"

"Yes; I'll obey."

"All right," she nodded. "Don't forget."

That was all of it! A tirade would not have made me feel so mean and impotent as this cool, colorless, unresentful rebuke. I knew that she had contempt for me. As she turned away, I called to her:

"I am sorry. I was wrong. And I will not forget that you saved my life. Will you let me thank you for that, Jane Boyce?"

She merely shrugged her shoulders and went about the duties of the camp. The incident of the day's travel, so far as she was concerned, was closed. I could sit and grit my teeth in mortification, but it was evident that she proposed to give it no further thought. And she never spoke of it again.

CHAPTER VII.

Blindfold Passage.

FOR two days after that spill in the rapid our progress toward the goal sought by Jane Boyce was slower than the record we had left behind us. This slackening of the pace was entirely because of me. I was chagrined and mortified, although she never made the slightest allusion to the reason for our delay.

My leg had been so severely wrenched in the rapid that I could do little more than carry myself across the portages that followed. Nearly all of the work, heavy and light, fell upon her, even the carrying of the canoe. She accepted the burden without a word of comment and with what seemed to be total indifference, rather than philosophy.

I often wondered how she got my unconscious body out of that rapid. It must have been swift, magnificent work in that turmoil of white water, requiring skill and daring. Her first thought must have been of me, rather than of the canoe or any of its con-

tents, else I should have drowned where I lay.

Attempts to get some of the details of the rescue from her were unavailing, for she did not choose to talk about the matter. I was forced, however, to the conclusion that she did it because of no regard for me, or even solicitude about the life of a human being. It may have been mere instinct, but I am inclined to think the reason lay solely in the fact that I was a necessary item in her plans, and, therefore, must be preserved in order that her program might not suffer an interruption. In short, I was merely a valuable tool, an essential part of the equipment.

Linked with my feeling of humiliation over the incident was one of gratitude for the saving of my life. Despite the mystifying reserve which repelled all attempts at friendship, I felt the human sense of thankfulness toward her. She had refused to acknowledge my effort to express this gratitude, and I did not repeat it in direct form.

Rather, I sought to show her, by manner and by deeds, that I was sensible of the debt I owed her. As for deeds, there was little I could do in my crippled condition, and that fact was exasperating. But I made an effort to be "nice" to her; to show her little attentions to which I had never before given the slightest thought. I forced myself, despite her self-isolation, to attempts at cordiality.

So far as Jane was concerned, I might as well have spared my endeavors. I do not believe that she even recognized the change in my attitude toward her. Not the slightest response could I awaken in her. Nevertheless, it afforded some relief to me, for I regarded it as the discharge of a duty. I proposed to be set right with myself, even though I might as profitably have paid tribute at the feet of a bronze idol.

So I persisted, with all the tact I could command, but without, as I soon realized, making the slightest impres-

sion upon her mind. That was all I sought to impress. I cared nothing for her regard, and I was careful indeed to avoid anything which suggested a step toward friendship or intimacy. Even with what she had done for me, I could not like her. All I wished to do was to pay my debt. And all of her cold aloofness did not prevent me from carrying out my resolution, though I was fully aware that she recognized the existence of no debt, and expected of me nothing but a return to my former efficiency as a hired man.

We were soon in bigger waters again, where travel was easier, and where I could more nearly approach my full share of the day's work. Much of the time when we were in camp I spent in repairing some of the damaged parts of our equipment. Her own steel fishing-rod had survived the disaster in the rapid, but my light bamboo was split, and I spliced it as best I could with the materials at hand, for it was one of my old possessions, and I had a certain affection for it that a man feels toward old and tried companions.

We had lost a few articles of food, included among them, by the irony of fate, the extra strip of bacon I had insisted upon bringing. I laughed over that, and even called Jane's attention to it, but she apparently neither perceived a joke in it nor considered it a matter of moment. It was desperate work, trying to be friendly toward her; but I think I at least achieved the outward semblance of it.

And then a fine, sunny forenoon brought us into what I believe to be the most curious and beautiful lake I have ever seen in the north woods. We entered it after a paddle through a gently flowing stream. How large it was there was no means of my guessing, unless the ridges of low-lying hills that girded it could be taken as a measure of its circumference. No general view of it would have been possible without ascending one of the timber-topped bluffs that overlooked it.

There was an infinite number of small islands, clustered so thickly that the channels between them were narrow and partly shaded. The nearest of them was within a couple of hundred yards as we emerged from the mouth of the river, and those that lay in sight were so nearly alike in character and dimensions that they suggested artificial creation and orderly arrangement, rather than the unstudied work of nature. Many an island-dotted lake have I traveled, but none with the peculiarities that impressed themselves here. It would have been almost impossible for a storm to arouse its placid surface, for there was no room for either sweep of wind or sea.

I could not repress an exclamation of wonderment as the scene presented itself so abruptly. Great white cloud-banks hung over the green hills and islands. Here all the rugged features of the country seemed to have been clothed with verdure. I looked in vain for rocky shoulders along the shoreline, or for cliffs in the faces of the surrounding slopes. Evidently my exclamation aroused her, for she turned with one of her alert motions, and asked sharply:

"You know this lake?"

"No," I answered. "Everything has been new to me for more than a week. You must realize that. But it is beautiful, and very queer."

She nodded, after one of her stares of suspicious inquiry, and then indicated we were to enter the channel that lay between the nearest pair of islands. It was cool and still as we ran close to the shady banks; something like a spirit of peace and contentment seemed to live there.

We made endless turns as we passed from one channel to another. The sameness of this cluster of thickly wooded islands was their most astonishing characteristic. I believe, had I closed my eyes for five minutes and opened them again, I would have thought the canoe had been motionless during that time. There were no dis-

tinguishing marks, and the absence of rock in their conformation helped in the illusion that one was but a replica of the other. I was glad to dawdle along in this maze of nature; and as Jane, for some unknown reason, now appeared to have lost her usual desire for haste, much of the time we did little more than drift.

Probably I saw a hundred of these islands before she informed me that we would go ashore for lunch on one that then lay directly ahead of us. It was rather early for that detail of the day's travel, but I made no comment on the fact. Ever since the day of my humiliation I had been docile and anxious to do her bidding.

Our lunch-camp was made on a shore so thickly overhung with brush that it required some use of the ax to clear a spot even large enough for our limited needs. There was nothing about us but the green, fresh foliage, the narrow, glassy channels that parted one isle from another, and the trees that shut off all view of the hills that rose from the mainland. From the general course we had followed, taking it from the position of the sun—my compass had been lost in the upset—I judged we were somewhere near the center of the lake.

Following our meal, Jane did something that was new for her at midday, and, consequently, surprising. She leaned indolently back against a tree and rested. I was not loath to follow her example, although this had been one of our easy days, and neither of us was in any way wearied.

But it appeared that, for some reason, she was in no present haste to push on. I asked for no explanation, and we thus spent an hour of loafing in silence, during which I took advantage of the opportunity to test my mended rod. It answered my expectations better than I had hoped for. Standing by the edge of the water, I cast out into the channel, and soon had the joy of a tussle with a sturdy three-pounder who seemed to have been waiting for

my bait. Another, and a third followed him into captivity, and then I began taking apart my rod, for I was never a wanton fisherman, much as I delight in its fascinations.

Jane apparently accepted the termination of my fishing as a signal, for she rose lightly from her mossy seat and went down to the canoe. With some surprise, I noticed that she began a rearrangement of its load, so as to clear a long, open space near the bow. I surmised that she intended to assume the stern paddle again, and asked:

"More rapids coming?"

She shook her head, and continued the adjustment of the packs until they suited her. Then she asked:

"Have you a handkerchief?"

"Certainly," I replied, mystified.

"A large one?"

I handed her a square of blue that I had been wearing around my neck, and she nodded her approval of its dimensions.

"I shall paddle for a while," she said. "You are to lie down in the canoe."

Naturally, I stared at her in surprise.

"You will also be blindfolded," she added.

"What!"

"Blindfolded," she repeated unemotionally, and she pointed to the space she had cleared in the fore part of the canoe. "Please get in."

"But what does this mean?" I stammered.

"I wish it."

"But what sort of a crazy—"

"It is time to start," she interrupted me. "I have made room for you."

Still I did not offer to obey her, for it was of all things she had thus far commanded me to do the strangest. More than that, it was the only utterly senseless order she had given me.

"You'll have to give me an explanation," I told her. I was too astonished to display any temper. "This is somewhat unusual and, I think, unreasonable. I am entitled to see where I am going, at the very least."

She merely motioned to the canoe, not impatiently, but imperatively.

"But, look here, Jane. This is idiotic and useless. I suppose you want to keep a part of our route a secret from me. Is that it?"

She nodded affirmatively, with the utmost frankness.

"Well, that's not fair to me," I said. "Not that I'm at all likely to ever want to make this trip again on my own account; and if you've got any secret, off in this country, I'm not going to pry into it, if you don't want me to. But simply suppose something should happen to you. I'm entitled to know the way by which I came, so that I, at least, will have a chance to get back."

"Nothing will happen to me," she answered coolly. "You need not fear."

"Oh, I'm not afraid!" I retorted. "But it's something I never heard required of a man before, and I see no reason why it should be asked of me."

"There will be no rapids. The paddle will take little more than an hour," said Jane.

"And will I have to return under the same conditions?"

"Of course."

I still made no move to comply with her extraordinary wish. I was resentful at this childish treatment of me and at her constant suspicion. It was clear that she put no trust in me.

"Will you obey me?" she asked evenly, after a short pause.

"What if I don't?" I demanded.

"I think you will, Mitchell."

She said it without the slightest raising of her voice, but there was a hardening of the notes that I did not miss. Also, there was again coming slowly into her dark eyes that expression that made me restless.

Whether she would have undertaken force had I flatly refused I have never been able to settle in my mind. She possessed the little rifle, if she cared to use it as an emblem of authority, and I knew that it was loaded. Probably, if she had found it necessary, she would not have hesitated to threat-

en me with it. But it was evident that she relied upon the subtle influence of her manner to compel me to do her bidding.

As I stood rebellious and irresolute, the memory of my promise to her, on the day she had pulled me out of the rapid, came to me. I shrugged my shoulders and stepped into the canoe.

"I promised to obey you," I said. "I will."

I sat down with my back toward the bow, while she tied the blue handkerchief across my eyes with quick, strong fingers. Then she directed me to lie at full length. Had my eyes been unbandaged, from the position in which I lay all I could have seen was the sky, unless we had passed close to a shore where the trees overhung the water. As it was, the only thing I could detect was a faint light filtering through the texture of the handkerchief. To make my temporary blindness doubly sure, she drew a spare bit of canvas that we carried over my head, so that it was suspended from the gunwales of the canoe, but did not in any way interfere with the ventilation.

Unseeing, I could feel the motion of the canoe as she took her place in the stern and pushed out from the shore of the island. It seemed to me also that she turned the bow back in the direction from which we had approached, but I could not be sure of that, because she dipped her paddle so silently and the canoe moved so gently.

The whole proceeding seemed so silly and melodramatic that I had not been five minutes in my helpless position when I had a mad desire to tear off the bandage, sit up, and refuse to proceed further with the business. Yet, time after time as I resolved to do this, that irksome promise to obey her orders stayed me from carrying the idea into execution. Presently I gave myself up to an effort to follow the route we were taking by observing the motions of the canoe.

It was very confusing. Had my feet been placed toward the bow I be-

lieve I should have had better success. But, conscious of the fact that I was traveling head first, I was able to get no very clear idea of what Jane Boyce was doing. The steady, rhythmical, yet slight roll of the light vessel enabled me to keep a count of her strokes, which were silent yet powerful, because I could also detect the lift of the bow with every pressure of her paddle against the water. Had there been a ripple on the water, caused by a wind whose direction I had known, that would have helped me to make a mental chart of our direction, but the lake was quite calm. From time to time I could detect turns in our course, but their angles it was impossible to judge, and I soon lost track of them.

I wanted to smoke and fumbled around for my pipe and tobacco. But after I had lighted up and burned my fingers with the match, I found no enjoyment in it. I have heard men dispute the statement that is it impossible, with the eyes closed, to know whether your pipe is alight or not. All I know is that it is impossible for me to relish a smoke with my eyes blindfolded. I soon abandoned the attempt.

Then, with a sigh of resignation, I made an attempt to go to sleep. That, also, was futile. My brain was too filled with the strangeness of the proceeding to permit of slumber. I became restless, hitching my body into one position and another, each of which seemed to become quickly tiresome.

To all this Jane apparently paid no attention, for the even play of her paddle went quietly on, although I imagine she kept a sharp eye on me to see that I made no attempt to remove the handkerchief from my eyes. Of the passage of time I had not the least idea. Once I asked her and she told me that we were about half-way. It seemed as if I had already been lying there for more than an hour, yet I believe she told me the truth.

Presently I became conscious that it was growing darker. This at first I judged to be due to the cutting off of

the direct sunlight by a bank of clouds; I knew by the hour that it was nowhere near sunset. Then the darkness seemed to increase, and I could also feel a coolness in the air that had not until then been noticeable.

Gradually I felt the sense of things closing in about us; it seemed as if we were being walled in. I cannot describe the sensation, but it was distinct and real. For what appeared to be many minutes we went on in this seeming confinement of space. If there were cliffs about us they seemed to be coming closer to the canoe. Yet the water was smooth and evidently without the least current. She had told me there would be no rapids.

Suddenly an expedient to test the nature of our position came into my head.

"Jane!" I called, sharply.

"Well?"

"Never mind," I answered, after a moment's pause. "It's nothing."

A faint echo had come from the sound of my own voice. Her own had sounded deep and hollow. I knew now that we were passing through some sort of a rocky cleft, and I felt rather pleased at the stratagem which had gained me this knowledge. I think, perhaps, she divined my idea, for when I called to her again, after a few minutes more had elapsed, she did not answer, and it was evidently her wish to discourage conversation. But my own voice had again aroused a muffled echo.

Soon after that I felt the canoe grate slightly on one side, and I knew that we must be passing through a very narrow channel, for Jane was too good a hand at the paddle to scratch the paint when there was the alternative of taking more room. We touched only once, and not long afterward I had the impression that there was more space about us. This was soon confirmed by the sense of more light, and then the air became warmer. I spoke her name once more and there was no resultant echo.

The unmistakable sound of little

waves lapping at the bow fell upon my ears presently, and I detected a gentle rising and falling of the canoe. We were in open water again, where there was a breeze blowing and where I could feel the heat of the sun through my garments. Not yet, however, did Jane release me from my blind state. I imagine that we went on for ten minutes more, swiftly now, for she was putting more power into her paddle. Then the paddling ceased and she let the canoe run. I could feel it ground gently on a pebbly bottom an instant later.

"All right," she said, quietly.

I pushed aside the canvas she had thrown across the gunwales and thrust back the handkerchief from my eyes. For a full minute I was so dazzled by the sudden burst of sunlight that I could see nothing. When my eyes became accustomed to the glare, however, I found that we were in a tiny cove, between two rocky points.

"We camp here," she informed me.

"Is it an island?"

"Yes."

There were other islands close to us, but I knew instantly that we were in another lake, for these were quite different from those we had left behind.

"Anyhow," I said, finishing aloud a thought that had been running in my mind, "I know that we went through a narrow place between high rocks."

"I should have gagged you," she answered in the most matter of fact way. "I forgot to."

And, truly, I think that was the only reason.

CHAPTER VIII.

Marooned.

AS we made camp that evening back among the trees that sheltered one of the rocky points which enclosed the cove, I had plenty of time to reflect on the singular events of the afternoon. Fortunately, I had been forcing myself to adopt an attitude as nearly philo-

sophical as it was possible to attain, and I did not work myself into a temper. In fact, I found something humorous in the situation.

The blindfold business had, at least, the merit of novelty, and it seemed, after all, such a trivial affair that I wondered Jane Boyce should have indulged in the fancy. If she had something she wanted to protect—a mine, for instance—the government regulations gave her ample guarantee that she would not be cheated of her reward. All she needed to do was to stake her claim properly and file her papers. If there was more than she could legally claim, there was no sense in barring others from an opportunity to share. I did not credit her with being so ill informed that she did not know her rights under the law.

The only conclusion to which I could come was that she had, deeply ingrained, all the characteristics of a miser; that she wanted all for herself, if there was any way to get it, and short of that she did not propose to allow anybody else a chance.

She herself had told me she knew of nothing else in life save money. The primitive way in which she sought it was curious, in a woman, at least; most of the money-mad folks do not go into the wilderness to dig it from the earth. Every prospector has dreams of wealth, but it takes something more than the pot of gold to lure him to the end of the rainbow; there must be the spirit of gambling, the love of adventure, the yearning to discover.

None of these things, however, did she possess, even in a trace; there was nothing but the sordid, unrelieved passion for gain. All her splendid woodcraft was but an incident, a means to an end, in which she took not the slightest pleasure.

I do not believe that for one instant she ever considered or found any satisfaction in the superb physique which her life in the open had given her or the glowing health and strength that were hers. Certainly she had not a

particle of vanity, either feminine or masculine.

Just now, as she set up her own little tent, she displayed the same unusual indolence I had observed in her during the luncheon hour. Ordinarily she was brisk and direct in her movements. I have read somewhere of a thing called the Taylor system, which is a method of performing work so that all useless motions are eliminated. Jane Boyce could have given lessons to the man who invented the Taylor system; at least, so far as woodcraft was concerned. There was no wasted effort about her. But this evening she worked in a most leisurely fashion. We had camped earlier than usual, and there was still plenty of daylight when I called her to supper. I was curious to discover the reason for this let-up in the ceaseless routine we had been following.

"What time do we start to-morrow?" I asked her, as she sat with her tin-plate on her knees, skilfully dissecting firm, white flesh from the bony structure of one of the bass I had caught that day.

"This is our last camp," she answered, without a glance at me.

"The last 'out' camp?"

Jane nodded.

"From this point we return, over the same route?" I pursued.

"Yes."

My eye involuntarily roved over as much of the island as was within vision, but there was nothing that suggested the presence of a mine. The character of what rock I could see was, in fact, distinctly unfavorable to the presence of metal.

"And what do we do to-morrow?" I asked.

"I'll tell you in the morning," was her unconcerned reply, and I was acquainted sufficiently with the finality of her answers to know that it was useless to press inquiries now.

When supper was finished I lighted my pipe and left her for a stroll around our island. It was not more than a

couple of acres in extent, and I followed the shore line most of the way. What puzzled me was that from no point of view could I see anything on the mainland that even faintly suggested the presence of the rocky chasm through which I felt sure she had piloted me. The hills were smooth and green as far as I could see, yet I knew that somewhere within a ten-minute paddle was the entrance to the narrow channel by which we had come into the lake. Neither was there anything in the geology of the land within sight that suggested mining possibilities. Certainly the several islands in view from ours offered no such encouragement.

I made one cross-cut through our own island, and soon convinced myself that, wherever Jane's goal might be, or however near, we were not camped upon it. The underbrush was not heavy, and I had a pretty comprehensive idea of the place by the time I returned to camp. There was no hope of gold there.

She was resting lazily against a boulder that marked the point where our camp lay, her eyes half-closed, her figure completely relaxed, her mind apparently dwelling upon things remote. But I was wrong in my assumption that Jane was giving no heed to the things at hand. She had paid not the slightest attention to me when I started to explore the island, but now, when I took my fishing-rod and prepared to shove off the canoe, a sharp exclamation from her caused me to pause.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Stay ashore." It was a peremptory direction.

"I'm going fishing," I explained, placing my rod in the canoe.

"Stay ashore."

Her eyes were wide open now, regarding me with that domineering look I had often seen in them. She was also sitting erect, all the indolence of her pose a moment before having disappeared in an instant. For a few seconds I was puzzled as to her mean-

ing, and then it flashed upon me that she suspected me of a little scouting journey in search of the secret passage. In truth, the idea had not entered my mind; I really was going fishing. I laughed at her openly.

"You're afraid I'll do some exploring," I said.

"I wish you to stay ashore," was her only answer.

With a shrug of indifference I took my rod out of the canoe and walked out to the end of the point to try a cast or two from there. Nevertheless, she had put an idea into my head and I resolved at the very first opportunity I would do the thing which it was so evident she had suspected as my intention.

But Jane gave me no chance that evening. She remained at her post of watchfulness all during the hours of dusk, where she could keep an eye on our craft. Not until it was dark did she move, and then she arose and started in the direction of her tent. She knew well enough I was not likely to go hunting for something on a strange lake after nightfall, and evidently did not care, even if I made the venture.

"What's the time for breakfast?" I called after her.

"Six o'clock," she answered.

That was a good hour earlier than our habit had been, and I concluded that to-morrow would be well filled with work, so I crawled into my tent soon after she had retired.

Early as I was about in the morning, Jane was ahead of me. She had even taken the preliminary steps toward getting breakfast, and when I relieved her of that task she went back to her tent and was busy there until I called her to eat. I noticed she had made the canoe ready for a trip, having placed a couple of paddles in it and a tin drinking-cup. When she finished breakfast she slipped a few pieces of hard biscuit into a small canvas sack, picked up her hat and walked down to the waterside.

"If that's lunch," I remarked, with

a smile, "it won't quite do for me. But I'll not be long getting something ready."

"You'll lunch here," she answered laconically, stepping into the canoe and shoving out from the shore.

Before I recovered from my astonishment she was a dozen yards out from the island and was dipping her paddle to swing the bow around. Then, with an exclamation, I ran down to the edge of the water, almost going overboard in my haste.

"You mean to say you're going to leave me here?" I cried.

Jane nodded to indicate that I was precisely correct.

"For how long?"

"I'll be back before dark," she answered.

"But I don't propose to be left here," I called, angrily. I felt that she had tricked me. "Suppose you don't come back."

"I will come back," she replied, simply, as the canoe began to move forward.

My rage must have looked childish to her, although she gave no indication that it made the slightest impression upon her.

"You bring that canoe back here!" I shouted.

Without so much as a glance at me she fell into a steady swing of the paddle, and the light craft moved rapidly away from the island. For an instant I had a wild notion to rush back to her tent for the rifle and threaten her with it, but I had not quite reached that point of desperation; instead, I did what was far more absurd—ran along the shore in a line nearly parallel to our course, shouting after her. I even think I swore at her. It did not have the slightest effect, however; the canoe went steadily onward. At last, breathless with my yelling and scrambling over the rocks, I came to a halt and stood looking foolishly at the fast disappearing figure.

She laid a course for the point of an island about a quarter of a mile from

our own, and within five minutes she had swung around it and disappeared from view. For some time I stood transfixed, staring stupidly at the spot where she had passed from sight. Finally I regained sufficient control over myself to turn and walk moodily back to the camp. I sat down on a rock and tried to figure some rime or reason out of the proceeding.

My first thought, naturally, was of myself. Truly, I was in a nice state if anything happened to Jane Boyce. Marooned on an island in a lake of which I knew not even the entrance was not an enviable situation. That this country was absolutely untraveled, at least in the present season, I knew. There was not the slightest likelihood of any other canoe coming through. There was probably six weeks' allowance of food for one able-bodied man; it might be stretched to cover two months on a pinch.

But at the end of that time where would I be, presuming, of course, a failure of the woman to return? My only possible chance of leaving the place with an outfit would be to wait until the lake froze for the winter. And that, I knew, meant starvation, on the one hand, and freezing on the other. I was provided with no winter clothing, and I knew what the rigor of the cold months in that country meant only too well.

Of course, there was a good deal of useless alarm in these reflections; yet put yourself in the position in which Jane Boyce left me and you will find your imagination fertile with all sorts of cheerless ideas and theories. I was now literally a captive, so far as any hope of getting back to Deep-Water on my own resources went. I could easily have swum to the nearest island; even to the mainland, for that matter. But I could have taken nothing with me, and there would have been no object in such a trial. She had left me utterly helpless.

I knew, of course, that she had not the least idea of marooning me, and

that she intended to return by the time she had set, nightfall. But how could I be sure that something would not befall her? Even the most expert and hardy traveler in the big woods is subject to mishaps. I thought of a dozen different things that might happen to Jane Boyce. There was no solicitude for her in all this; so far as she was personally concerned, I did not care what might become of her.

The solicitude was entirely for myself. Self-preservation, the instinct which we share with the beasts, was at the bottom of all my gloomy speculation. She might break a leg on a portage; that there was a carry involved in her errand I judged from the fact that she took two paddles, to make the usual trusses from thwart to thwart. She might fall over a cliff. She might, by some misadventure, upset the canoe and drown. She might become lost, although I did not waste much time thinking about that. Yes, there were almost endless fates which I could conjure up for her.

And then, too, I was ashamed at the manner in which she had completely hoodwinked me and left me staring on the shore, like a fool, and shouting like a madman. That part of the business filled me with rage. Of course, she knew very well I would not have permitted her to leave me there in that fashion had I gained the slightest inkling of her intention. So she played a trick on me, very cleverly; I had to admit. Of course, she could have left me at daylight, before I was out of my tent, but it was clear that she did not consider that necessary. On the contrary, she even let me go through the usual routine of getting breakfast for her. I had been the useful drudge to the last.

I must have spent several hours sitting there and allowing my imagination to take charge of my thoughts. Finally I roused myself from this morose state, which was doing me no good whatever, and was doubtless nothing but folly. For want of some-

thing better to do, I decided to make another exploration of the little island upon which I had been so neatly isolated.

It occupied an hour or so, but it did not yield anything new in the way of information. It was like a thousand other islands I had seen in the north woods. Although Jane had seemed to know the place well, I could not discover that it had ever been camped upon before. Probably on her lonely journeys she had gone straight to her destination, without pausing here for a camp. On this trip she had merely selected it as a convenient place to deposit me, while she went about the mysterious private business which had taken her so far into the wilds.

By midday I was hungry, and I prepared for myself the most elaborate meal I had eaten since our journey had begun. It was with a sort of grim satisfaction that I delved into our supplies and helped myself with a liberal hand to the best that they afforded. We carried no luxuries, but I made a choice of the things that approached them most nearly, and the result was a repast that approached the dignity of a dinner. As I ate I found myself contemplating with joy a mental picture of Jane, munching her few dry biscuits and drinking water out of her tin cup. I hoped that she was hungry for a square meal; I wished she had even forgotten to take the biscuit.

Eating put me in a more philosophical frame of mind, and I smoked lazily for awhile, too indolent to go about the task of washing dishes. After that I fished a bit, circling the island again and casting from points where there seemed to be a fair chance of getting a rise. No success rewarded me, but the effort occupied my time and amused me. When I tired of that I went to Jane's tent and got out the little .30 rifle. Incidentally, I am ashamed to say, I poked around a bit among her effects, out of sheer curiosity. There was not a thing that offered a vestige of information con-

cerning her; not a scrap of paper, not a map, not an article that threw any light upon her past, her identity or her present mission.

There were about fifty cartridges, so I wasted a few shooting at a mark set up against a tree. It was a beautiful little weapon, close-sighted and nicely balanced. After I had shot away all the ammunition that seemed judicious, I cleaned it carefully and put it back in her tent.

It was getting on toward supper-time, and I began to cast frequent glances toward the island around which Jane had disappeared in the canoe. I decided, however, not to wait meals for her, and went ahead with the preparation of my own. After eating it, I lighted my pipe and went along the shore, seeking the best vantage point from which to watch for her return. There was not much anxiety in my mind for awhile, but when it got to be seven-thirty and still no sign of Jane, I began to get uneasy. True, there was more than an hour of light yet, for it darkens slowly in this north country during the summer months. Yet, now, all the unpleasant sensations of the forenoon began crowding back.

Every few minutes I looked at my watch, which was still running in good shape despite its immersion on the day of our upset in the rapid.

Presently I got up and began pacing the rocks. It was after eight o'clock now and she would have to come soon, if she wanted to make good her promise to return before dark. I never enjoyed the company of Jane Boyce; her proximity had always inspired me with a vague discomfort. But now I yearned for her. Perhaps it was not Jane that I wanted, either; what I most desired was to see that canoe safely drawn up at our camp.

She was well past the point and headed toward the island when I caught sight of her, as I turned in my restless pacing. Her paddle was plying smoothly and evenly, yet I thought I detected a certain weariness in the

swing of her body. A tired canoeman may get just as much speed out of his craft as a fresh one, but he cannot conceal from the practised eye the fact that he is tired. Evidently her journey had been a considerable one.

My first impulse, so great was my relief when she appeared in sight, was to give her a friendly hail. But I was checked by the memory of her shabby treatment of me that morning, and also by the recollection of the futile exhibition I had made of my own temper. Instead of calling to her, I made my way back to the camp and began stirring up the fire, for I knew she would be ravenous for food. She grounded the canoe while I was engaged in heating up supper for her, and as she came up the rocks I gave her a casual glance.

The first thing that attracted my attention was a bag she carried in her hand. It was the same canvas sack into which she had put the biscuits that morning, but now it was rounded and bulging and evidently very heavy. She went past me toward her tent, lugging it with considerable effort, for it kept knocking against her legs as she walked. I saw her throw aside the flap of the tent, drop the bag inside and then throw back her shoulders and stretch slowly.

When she came toward the fire I noticed that her hands were grimy and scratched and that her heavy-soled boots were scraped in places, as though she had been climbing over rocks. There was a general air of weariness about her that was new in my experience of her, yet she still preserved the same lithe erectness of carriage that always characterized her.

There was no conversation with her whatever, for I had decided to make no comment on the events of the morning, and she did not choose to speak to me. She ate hungrily and in silence, and it was dark when she finished. Also, she wasted no minutes after her meal, but started for her tent, with the single injunction:

"Breakfast at six."

That set me to thinking. I wondered if she contemplated a similar expedition on the morrow. It seemed rather likely she did. I had been hired for a six weeks' trip. We had arrived at our present camp in seventeen days. If we were to return at once our round trip would be completed in five weeks. To stretch it into six would involve a stay of several days more here. Further, the order for an early breakfast coincided with the program she had followed to-day.

A sudden resolution entered my mind, as I stood watching her enter her tent.

"We'll see in the morning, my lady," I thought, "whether you'll go without a passenger again."

And then I began wondering about the heavy bag she had carried so laboriously out of the canoe. When I fell asleep in my blankets I think I dreamed of it; I am not sure.

CHAPTER IX.

A Smile and a Discovery.

I WAS up before her this time, and breakfast was nearly ready when she came out of her tent. Every trace of the weariness I had noted in her when she reached camp the night before had disappeared; she looked fresh and splendidly strong, equal to whatever toil the day might have in store for her.

Following her custom of the day before, she slipped a few biscuits into a bag, took a tin cup and went down to the canoe. I followed at her heels. There was to be no marooning of me this time, I resolved. Without waiting for her to lay hands to the canoe, I turned it over and shoved it part way into the water. Then I stepped in and took the stern seat.

For the first time in my knowledge of her, Jane showed surprise in her face. From my silence of the evening before I imagine she concluded I had decided to make no further protest

against her leaving me on the island, but had become reconciled to her plans. This time it was my turn to play a trick on her. She raised her eyebrows as she looked at me, and then said quietly:

"Get out of the canoe."

I simply shook my head and smiled, enjoying the situation in a derisive sort of way.

"You're not going," she said, sharply. "Step out."

"Either I'm going or you're not," I told her.

"You are to stay here, as usual, Mitchell," she answered, coldly. "I order you."

"I've obeyed orders up to now, and under reasonable conditions I'll continue to obey them," I said. "But it is not reasonable to leave me tied up on this island all day, with no certainty that you'll come back at all."

"Afraid?" she asked, quietly.

"No; I'm not afraid. I simply don't propose to take the risk that's all. Either we both stay or we both go. I sha'n't follow you ashore, wherever you're going; but I shall stick with the canoe, and you may as well make up your mind to that."

I saw the sinister look creeping into her eyes again, but this time it failed of its usual effect. My mind was made up and I did not intend to let Jane Boyce unmake it for me. Further than that, I felt the justice of my position. For a full minute she stood looking at me, as if deciding what course to pursue. I do not believe that for a moment she considered the idea of taking me with her. She was simply pondering upon a method to get me out of the canoe.

"Once more, step ashore, Mitchell!" she commanded, without raising her voice.

Again I smiled at her and shook my head. I was finding a sort of childish amusement in tantalizing her.

"Then I must force you to," she added.

"If you can—certainly," I assented. She dropped the bag she had been

carrying, turned quickly about and started toward her tent. For an instant I sat watching her and then her intention suddenly flashed into my mind. The rifle was in the tent.

I sprang forward in the canoe and leaped ashore. Not for one instant did I propose to allow her to hold me up at the point of a rifle, for I was convinced she would not have the slightest hesitation in doing so. She heard my shoe crunching in the gravel and, without looking back, started forward at a run.

Quick as she was in her movements, I had more momentum than she, and in a couple of steps I was not more than a yard behind her. Just what I intended to do I had no definite idea. I had no desire to engage in a hand to hand struggle with her, for, after all, she was still a woman. I imagine I should have simply tried to get to the rifle first.

But she balked that by turning upon me suddenly and launching a swift blow at my head with her clenched fist. Instinctively I dodged and her hand went past my ear. The impetus of the intended blow brought her face close to mine, and the evil ferocity of her expression startled me. Her eyes were narrowed to mere slits, her lips compressed in a thin, bloodless line. I stepped back involuntarily.

With catlike swiftness she came at me again, striking out with the other hand. She hit straight from the shoulder, like a trained boxer. I did not raise my hands, because I had not the least intention of harming her, but merely dodged again, more amazed than alarmed by her furious onset. The two steps I had taken altered our positions somewhat with relation to her tent, so that I was now as near to it as she. It seemed like a chance to get the rifle in my hands without a struggle, and I took it.

She divined my plan instantly, and turned as I did, with a sharp exclamation that sounded more like the cry of a beast than a human voice. I was

a step ahead of her now, and the tent was only a dozen yards away. Then chance came to my aid. Usually as sure-footed as a goat, Jane stumbled on the uneven rocks over which we were racing and fell forward. Instead of trying to save herself, she reached for me with her arms as she was falling, but an instant too late. Her hands clutched my leg, but I slipped through her grasp and she went headlong. Without looking back, I ran on to the tent, dived into it and snatched up the rifle, which was lying on her blankets. Then, with a chuckle, I stepped out again, expecting to confront a demon.

Jane was lying face down on the rocks, where she had fallen, one arm bent under her and the other stretched out at her side. There was a limp look about her body that alarmed me, and I dropped the rifle and ran toward her. As I reached her side I saw a pool of red slowly spreading under her head.

I dropped to my knees, rolled her over on her side and lifted her head. Blood was flowing from a cut over her right temple, staining her face and hair and trickling down on her rough blue shirt. The complete relaxation of her muscles was almost sickening. Her eyes were closed, and she did not seem even to be breathing. I placed my ear against her body, and then only could detect a faint pulsation of the heart.

Putting her head down gently, I dashed in the direction of the camp fireplace, snatched up a tin pail, filled it with water from the lake and ran back to her. I poured some of the water over her face and then, using my handkerchief as a sponge, I began wiping the blood away from the wound over the temple. It was still bleeding freely, but in a minute or two the cold water began to check the flow. Then, leaving the handkerchief on her head as a compress, I again put my ear against her heart. The irregular, feeble beating frightened me, for she

seemed to be in a state of utter collapse.

In my own tent was a small medicine kit that I have always carried in the woods, but seldom used. But I ran for it now, with a prayer that the little hypodermic outfit that it contained had not been damaged by the rough usage it had received in the accident of the rapids.

Fortunately, it was safe. I warmed a teaspoonful of water over the fire, dissolved one of the tiny strychnin tablets, filled the syringe and raced back to Jane. I do not know much about the administration of hypodermic stimulants, but simply jabbed the needle into her arm at random.

For several minutes there seemed to be no effect, during which I bathed her head with fresh water and rubbed her hands, which had grown ominously cold. Then the faintly stirring pulse began to strengthen and become more regular, and I knew the drug was taking hold. Her breast also began to rise and fall, although weakly and hesitantly for a while.

Relieved by these evidences of reviving vitality, I could now give some attention to the cut in her head. It ran part way into the hair, which I lifted back, and was, indeed, an ugly looking gash. I brought my medicine kit over to where she lay, sat down, and took her head on my knees. I washed the cut perfectly clean and examined it.

Fortunately, there was no fracture of the skull, although the blow which she had sustained was a pitiless one. I knew from the look of the wound that it ought to be sewed, but I hesitated to attempt something with which I was not familiar. However, if it had to be done, it was better to do it while she was unconscious. There was a surgical needle and some catgut in my kit, neither of which I had ever used, but I now prepared them, and, with rather rough fingers, I fear, put four stitches in the cut.

While I was doing this I was surprised to discover another scar over her

temple. It was diagonal to the new wound, and at one point they intersected. The scar was white, evidently not of recent infliction, and was so completely covered by her luxuriant black hair that I had never before noticed it. It seemed curious that Jane should have sustained two such wounds in almost exactly the same spot, and, even in my agitation, I remember vaguely speculating upon the coincidence.

When I had completed my rough surgical work she was still unconscious, but now showing such plain evidences of returning vigor that I was encouraged to believe she was past the point of collapse.

The next thing I did was to carry her blankets out of the tent and make a couch for her in the shade of some small trees, where she would get more air than under canvas walls. As I described her at the beginning of this story, Jane was a full five feet seven and no weakling. She made a considerable burden as I lifted her in my arms and carried her over to the place I had prepared for her. Her muscles were completely relaxed, and her body was a dead weight. I fixed her as comfortably as I could with the materials at hand, and sat down by her, to await her return to consciousness.

Now, for the first time since the accident, I had an opportunity to think about myself, and in an instant a feeling of remorse and shame took possession of me. The whole business had been my fault. I had been savage enough to engage in a struggle with a woman. True, I had not laid hands on her, and not for an instant had the slightest idea of harming her in any way. But my desperate race with her had virtually amounted to the same thing.

Suppose she had reached the rifle first. She would not have injured me with it; she would simply have employed it to force obedience. I should have obeyed, Jane would have gone her way in the canoe, and no damage would have been done. But now, be-

cause I had made a fool of myself, she lay here an unconscious, even pathetic figure, helpless as a child, and, perhaps, for all I knew, badly hurt.

I marveled at the change in her face. When she made that last spring toward me there was an expression in it that almost caused me to shudder. Now it was as peaceful as that of a sleeping child. The stern set of her features that was habitual with her had disappeared. The lines were softened, the mouth drooping a little, with a sort of wistful sweetness about it that I never should have believed it could assume. All the hard tension was gone from her lips. Something of this I had seen in her face in rare moments of preoccupation, when she seemed to be detached from everything about her, but never so clearly as I saw it now. The features were those of Jane Boyce, but the cold, hard spirit that used to illuminate them was gone. Now it was the face of a peaceful sleeper, waiting to be lighted by a soul. Strange things had I observed in my acquaintance with this woman, but none so surprising as this.

All my resentment toward her faded, and I had nothing but pity and sorrow as she lay there, a victim of my own foolhardy rebellion against her. She would awaken again, of course, and become the same strange, even inhuman, creature that I had grown to hate; but now she was simply a helpless woman. I harbored no anger or dislike of her now, even though I knew that it would return to me; there was nothing but self-reproach in my mind.

It must have been half an hour before she gave even a sign of returning consciousness, and then it was slight, an almost imperceptible turning of the head. Presently her fingers moved, and then, as though they were burdened by a great weight, her eyelids lifted and she looked up. At first she did not seem to see me and I had an opportunity to note in her eyes what I had observed in her face, the astounding change in their expression. They were dark and soft and wondering.

"Jane," I said, speaking gently and leaning toward her.

She heard, for her eyes turned toward me. She looked at me steadily for a moment with a sort of bewilderment. There was nothing of pain or fear in her look, only a pathetic perplexity. Her lips stirred, and I bent close to her, but the effort to speak was still beyond her power to make.

There was nothing but a faint, formless sound, and then her eyes closed again, as if she were very weary. She seemed to sleep. I placed my hand over her heart, and found it now beating evenly and quietly. There seemed nothing more I could do for her then; but I sat beside her for the next hour or two, watching.

She was still slumbering when noon came, seemingly strong, and with no evidence as yet of fever, yet apparently unable to rouse from her stupor. I made no attempt to disturb her, although somewhat puzzled by her long lapse into unconsciousness. The physical collapse had passed, but her mind had not yet come out from the spell.

I got a hasty lunch for myself, keeping a close watch upon her; and when I had eaten, resumed my vigil by her side. All through the afternoon she lay thus. Twice I made attempts to waken her, by speaking and chafing her hands, but without results. She did not even open her eyes, but lay inert, breathing softly and regularly, yet apparently in some sort of trance. Toward evening I began to worry about her again, for surely by then it seemed as if a woman with the magnificent physical vigor of Jane Boyce ought to rally, even from the effects of as cruel a blow as she had received. But she merely continued to sleep like a child.

Not waiting for darkness, I decided to take her into her tent, where there would be shelter from dampness and chill. I lifted her in the blankets, carried her with some difficulty through the low entrance, and laid her down. Then I went for my own blankets, broke some balsam boughs, and made

for her as soft a couch as I could fashion. When I had placed her upon it, I unlaced and drew off her heavy boots, opened her shirt at the throat, and drew the blankets over her. Her head was pillowed on her sweater. Before the light faded I undertook to put a new dressing on the wound over her temple.

It was during this operation that she showed signs of rousing again. After what seemed to be a struggle her eyes slowly opened and regarded me gravely and questioningly. Then her lips moved again, and she whispered something. I leaned over her.

"What is it, Jane?" I asked.

Her lips were silent for a minute more, while she looked at me steadily. Then, as they stirred again, I put my ear close and caught one word:

"Mother."

Had she whispered a curse, I could not have been more amazed!

Jane Boyce, stern, hardy, soulless creature of a rough environment, whispering "Mother"! It seemed so incongruous, with all I had known of her, that I could scarcely believe my ears. Somehow, I never thought of her in connection with a mother. She seemed naturally to be a being utterly removed from all the rest of humankind. I had grown to look upon her as a sort of living machine, with nothing but a cold, strange will to guide her, without one of the normal emotions that the Creator puts into His men and women. And now she was calling "Mother." Something, indeed, had happened to Jane Boyce.

But she was once more to amaze me before her eyes closed again. Her lips quivered for an instant after she whispered that single word—and then she smiled! It was a shadowy, weak, tremulous smile, gone in a couple of seconds. But it was a smile, none the less—the first I had ever seen on her face. Would wonders never cease? Had I been told a moment before that it was possible for Jane Boyce to smile, I should have labeled the statement as

a lie. But now I had seen it with my eyes. It did more than astonish me; it startled me.

She relapsed into slumber again, and until darkness fell I watched by her, but she did not stir. The word and the smile had affected me strangely. It seemed wrong to hear Jane say "Mother," just as there was some mistake about the smile.

Neither belonged to her. They stood for things of which she knew nothing. That was the pity of it, and I was truly sorry for her. Now, as I studied her face by the glow of a candle I had lighted, I saw that there was beauty and even tenderness in it. That was again a pity, for neither of these things belonged to her. They were mere shadows, that would vanish when the will returned and took command again. Could you have seen her then you would have read her face for that of a sweet and gentle woman. But I knew her to be only the living tomb of a soul.

After a while I crawled softly out of the tent and got myself something to eat. Then it dawned upon me that I had not smoked that whole day, a most amazing event. I filled my pipe and sat by the entrance of her tent, so as to be near in case she stirred or spoke again. The night was cool, and I pulled my sweater over my shoulders. My own blankets and hers had been used to make a couch for her, so that there was no chance for me to sleep that night. After a while I went in to watch by her again. She was still sleeping calmly, and, it seemed to me, more naturally now. She did not rouse when I entered, and I made no effort to disturb her. In truth, since she had said that word and her lips had betrayed her into that smile, I was almost loath to see Jane awake.

The candle guttered out on top of the tin can to which I had affixed it, and for some time I sat there in darkness, looking out through the tent-flap at the still water where the stars were mirrored. Now and then I shifted my position as I became cramped. It was

during one of these movements that my hand came upon something which brought me sharply back to the events of the night before. It was the bag which Jane had carried laboriously up from the canoe. I had completely forgotten the existence of it. Now I ran my hands over it in the darkness. It seemed to be nearly filled with something hard, like small stones. I lifted it, and found it strangely heavy. I tried to put my hand inside of it, but there was a string tightly knotted around the neck.

Feeling in my pocket for another candle, I lighted it. Jane did not stir as I drew the bag toward me, placed it between my knees, and began to untie the string. I found the knot to be refractory; so I finally cut the cord and thrust my hand into the sack. Just then it seemed as if she stirred, and I leaned toward her; but evidently I was mistaken, for she still slept. I watched her for a minute, forgetting the business in which I was engaged.

When my eyes looked down again I found that my hand was filled with heavy yellow stones. I bent closer. They were not stones. They were gold.

Pure, dull gold! I dropped the handful and dug deeper into the bag. Again gold. The sack was filled with it. I poured the stuff from one palm into the other, examining it closely by the candle-light. It was as pure as any unrefined gold I have ever seen; heavy, clear metal, roughly shaped and oddly sized. It did not look like gold that had been through a washing-pan. There was something about it that suggested it had been picked up, as a child will single out the bright-colored pebbles on a beach. None of the pieces were very large.

So, after all, Jane Boyce had found her mine! I wondered idly how much more of the stuff there was, off in that mysterious place whither she had journeyed alone. How had she ever found it? What had lured her so far, yet so certainly, into the north country? Where had she gained her knowledge

of gold and the signs of it? True, this sort of gold might easily be found and known by the veriest tyro; yet, even in those rare spots where it lies awaiting a discoverer, there is usually something that must first make the subtle suggestion, and that something is seldom visible to any save the trained eye of the miner.

And here was what she had gathered in a day's search; nay, perhaps an hour or two, for there were signs that she had spent much of the day in hard travel. Off in the hills, somewhere near me, lay fortune. It stirred my blood; yet I cannot say that I was excited. I had seen gold before; raw gold, like this. I had never seen a bagful gathered so easily, yet I had heard of such things, and knew enough of the strange fortunes of the prospector to realize that these things do happen, though but seldom. It was more with a professional than a gluttonous eye that I examined this treasure-trove. Yet it fascinated me, for all that.

The second candle guttered and went out, and again I sat in darkness, lifting the stuff by the handful and letting it run back into the bag through my fingers. I could hear the soft breathing of Jane Boyce. Now and then a faint whiff of breeze stirred the tent-flap. I became drowsy. My eyes closed, and my head sank forward. And then I slept, sitting there with the bag of gold between my knees.

CHAPTER X.

Molly Hope.

JANE was still sleeping when a stream of daylight, pouring through the open flap of the tent, awakened me. I was chilled and stiff, and for a moment dazed. It was the presence of the bag of gold, in which one of my hands was buried, that brought me back to a realization of the events of yesterday.

I glanced at my watch. It was nearly nine o'clock. For more than twenty-

four hours she had been in this half slumber, half stupor. Yet there was color in her cheeks, and none of the wan aspects of illness. I placed my hand upon her forehead and found no fever. The touch did not arouse her.

Tying up the treasure-sack clumsily, I lifted it aside and crawled out into the open. The sun was warming the air, and had already dried the dampness from the rocks and grass. I moved about for a few minutes to get the blood started in my stiffened muscles; for sleeping without blankets, even on an August night, is no comfort in the north woods. The morning was a pleasant one, and I decided Jane would be the better for air and sunlight; so I went back to the tent and carried her out, arranging a couch for her under the trees, as I had the day before. It astonished me that she should still sleep thus, but I thought it better not to try forcing her into wakefulness as yet.

I busied myself preparing breakfast, my mind principally occupied with the golden contents of the little sack, their origin, their value, and the manner in which this strange woman had gathered them. What the Deep-Water people had said of her was true; she had found treasure off in the wilds, although little did they realize the richness of it or the toil of the journey that led to it. It was while thus engaged that a low exclamation caught my ear, and I turned quickly in the direction of Jane.

She was sitting up in her blankets, staring at me. As I moved toward her she raised her hands to her head and felt the bandage that was wrapped about it. An expression of bewilderment was on her face, and her eyes strayed slowly to the woods about her, to the lake, and to the camp paraphernalia. As I came close to her she looked up at me again, her dark eyes questioning me and her forehead furrowed into little wrinkles.

"How are you, Jane?" I asked. "Is the head better?"

"Jane?"

She repeated the name slowly after me, and then shook her head, as if she did not understand. After that she studied me again for a minute. That her mind had not yet entirely cleared was evident, but I judged it to be from weakness more than anything else. There was coffee on the fire, and I brought her a tin cupful of it. She took it from my hand mechanically, and drank two or three swallows, watching me all the time with her dark eyes. The old unreadable expression in them had gone, and in its place was one of doubt and perplexity, as if her mind was groping blindly for something to guide it into the light. She put the cup down and passed her hand across her eyes a couple of times.

"Jane?" she repeated again. "Jane? I—"

Here she broke off, and a shudder seemed to pass through her body.

"Call my mother," she said suddenly.

It was as if the voice of another woman had spoken to me. The hard, even tones of Jane Boyce were not there; neither was there even a faint trace of the old domineering manner.

"Your mother is not here, Jane," I answered gently, for I saw that her mind was still wandering, and I did not wish to startle her.

"Not here?" she echoed slowly. "Where did she go?"

"She did not say," I said, humoring her.

"I was to go with her," she went on, puzzling. "Is it after two?"

"It is only ten," I told her. "Perhaps if you will lie down, Jane, you will understand in a little while."

There was something uncanny about this groping of her brain for understanding.

"Jane?" she repeated after me for the third time. "Who is she?"

"Think," I suggested. "You will know in a moment. You are Jane."

Once more she looked at me steadily and shook her head.

"No," she said softly. "I am not Jane."

"Never mind, then," I soothed her. "Suppose you wait a while before you try to talk."

This suggestion seemed to puzzle her, and again she felt the bandage on her head.

"But my mother," she whispered. "Why didn't she wait for me? Are you sure she went? Look in the living-room. Perhaps—"

Her eyes roved again to the lake.

"What is that place?" she asked, as a child might put the question.

"That's the lake," I answered.

"The lake? Then this isn't our house. Why, where—"

She started violently and half rose to her knees. I put my arm on her shoulder to steady her, but she shrank from me; and for the first time I saw something akin to fright in her eyes as she turned to look at me.

"Who are you?" she gasped, drawing back.

"I'm Mitchell—your guide. Don't be afraid. You'll understand presently."

She was staring at me with a timid wonder that was pathetic.

"Mitchell? Guide?" Again she was repeating words of mine as if they conveyed no meaning to her.

"You've just had a little accident, that's all," I reassured her. "You're all right now, and soon you'll be stronger."

"I—I remember the accident," she said. "Yes; now I know. I saw it falling, but—but— It fell so quickly. And it struck me here." She put her hand to the wounded temple. "I knew it was going to hit me—I couldn't get out of the way. There wasn't time. I—"

Suddenly she clasped her head in both hands and closed her eyes. She seemed to wince, as if from an impending blow.

"Wait! Wait!" she cried. "It's coming now! Something is coming. Oh, my head hurts! Oh! Mother!"

-Her voice rose almost to a scream. I sat in awe, watching her, but helpless to relieve her agony. Presently, her body rocking to and fro, she broke into a storm of sobbing. This lasted for several minutes, and I made no attempt to interrupt it. Perhaps it was nature's way of bringing the poor mind back into the light. But the strangeness of this feminine weakness in Jane Boyce filled me with wonder.

When she looked up again the pain had gone out of her face, and she spoke calmly and slowly.

"Something has happened to me," she said. "Everything seems to have been changed. You must tell me. What is this place?"

"You are in a camp—in the woods," I began. "You'll remember as I recall it to you. We left Deep-Water eighteen days ago—"

"Deep-Water? I don't know it. And who are you?"

"My name is Mitchell—Ben Mitchell. I am your guide. You are not afraid of me?"

"No," she answered, after a pause in which she studied my face. "I'm not afraid. But where are mother and Frank? Father is abroad, but where is mother? I don't understand."

"We'll start at the beginning," I said. "In the first place, Jane—"

"Didn't you call me that before?" she interrupted. "Why do you keep saying 'Jane'? It is not my name."

"I must have made a mistake, then," I humored her. "As I started to tell you, you engaged me for a six weeks' trip, and we left Deep-Water eighteen days back. This is our second day in this camp."

"And my mother?"

"She did not come with us."

"And Frank?"

"No; just you and I."

"That isn't possible," she said quietly. "Why should I come here, after an accident? Please tell me the truth."

"You had the accident here, yesterday morning. Don't you recall falling? You were running over those rocks."

I felt a pang of shame as I spoke of it. She shook her head and looked at me with pleading eyes.

"Oh, tell me the truth!" she begged. "Why was I sent here? It did not happen here. I remember the accident. I was sitting at the piano, waiting for mother to dress. We were going— Oh, please tell me about it! I shall be frightened if you don't explain."

"I'm trying to," I said. "But perhaps if you rested a little while it would be better."

"No; go on," she answered. "I wish—"

Something seemed to fascinate her eyes, and I saw that she was looking at her hands, brown, strong, and calloused. She lifted them closer, and studied them in wonderment, turning them slowly back and forth as though she had just discovered the possession of them.

"My hands!" she exclaimed, thrusting them toward me. "Look at them! What have I been doing?"

"Your hands are all right," I answered. "They're just a little hardened up—with the work, you know."

She rolled back the sleeve of her flannel shirt and gazed at the rounded, muscular forearm as though it were a curiosity. And then for the first time since her waking she seemed to notice the shirt itself. She felt it with her hands, and looked down at it with bewilderment in her face. Then she threw aside the blanket that had covered her. There was a little cry of dismay, and as she stared at the rough brown trousers, thrust into a pair of heavy gray lumberman's socks, I could see a deep red color rising under the tan in her cheeks.

"But these?" she half whispered, looking at me for an instant and then averting her eyes to the coarse masculine garments.

"That's just your traveling outfit," I said. "You see, Jane—"

"Why do you persist in that?" she asked.

"Because your name is Jane—Jane Boyce."

"Who told you that?"

"You did," I replied. "Why, everybody knows it."

"Everybody?" she mused. "Everybody where?"

"Back at the post—at Deep-Water."

"But my name is not Jane," she repeated. "And I cannot understand."

I began to pity her now from the bottom of my heart. The poor mind, I knew, was drifting. The accident I had brought about through my clumsy obstinacy had severed the mooring. Yet there was an outward appearance of sanity in her manner that bothered me. The old mystery of her eyes had gone; the voice was that of a woman with a soul.

"What is your name, then?" I asked, after a pause.

"Molly."

"Just Molly?"

"Molly Hope," she answered.

"You would prefer to be called that, perhaps?"

"Why, it is my name!" she exclaimed. "What else is there to call me? Why do you puzzle me so?"

"I'm not trying to puzzle you," I said gently. "But circumstances seem to be puzzling us."

And, in truth, I had before me a riddle of which I had not even begun the solution.

"You don't believe that my name is Molly!" she said, looking directly at me.

"Oh, yes—if you say so."

"But you doubt. I can see it."

"I'm merely bothered a bit; that's all. You see, you began by telling me your name was Jane, and the change is a little sudden."

"But why should I have told you that? For what reason? It's impossible. Oh, Mr.—"

"Mitchell," I supplied.

"Mr. Mitchell, please try to tell me what has happened. I'm getting frightened."

I was sorely perplexed by the poor, pleading creature who sat there in the blankets, watching me with her soft, dark eyes. It was impossible to make her understand. Her mind seemed to be beyond the reach of suggestion.

"Now, let me tell you a story," I said, after a pause. "It will be short, but you must listen to it closely. Back in the Deep-Water there was a woman named Jane Boyce. She was a prospector. She had her own cabin on an island. She wanted to make a trip to a mine that she owned, and, while she knew the way, she needed a guide to help do the heavy work. She hired a man named Ben Mitchell. They took provisions for six weeks. They traveled through many lakes and streams, and across many portages. They went northwest, and after a while they crossed the height of land. There was one accident, in a rapid, where the canoe upset. Presently they came to more lakes, one of them filled with islands that all seemed exactly of a size. Mitchell was then taken blindfolded to another lake which Jane Boyce knew of, and that was their last camping-place. The next day she took the canoe, and was gone all day, alone. When she came back she had a bag with her. It had gold in it—much gold."

I paused to watch the effect of the brief narrative upon her. She had been listening closely, but still with that baffled look in her eyes.

"Doesn't that story remind you of anything?" I asked, finally.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I don't know anything about it."

"But you were the woman!" I exclaimed. "And I am Mitchell."

"I brought you on a journey like that?" she murmured. "No; there's a mistake. I never was in a canoe. I never heard of a mine; never saw one. And I'm Molly Hope—not Jane Boyce."

I sighed and shook my head. It seemed useless.

"Where is the snow?" she asked suddenly.

"Snow?" I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes; why, there was a heavy snow. I was watching it through the window as I sat playing."

"This is summer," I explained. "It has been a long time since we have had snow."

She puzzled over this for a while.

"It's August," I added.

"August! That's impossible. Yesterday was in February."

She said this with such certainty and sincerity that I could only stare at her.

"Oh, what has happened?" she cried, suddenly. "What has happened? It is summer; I can feel it. Yet I saw the snow—only yesterday. Why, there were sleighs out, and people dragging children on little sleds."

"Where?" I asked, watching her closely.

"Home?"

"And that is?"

"New York, of course. Is this near New York?"

Her eyes wandered over the virgin woods and hills that lay beyond the water.

"We are more than a thousand miles from New York," I told her.

"Oh!" I read fright in her face as she gasped the word.

"This is Canada," I explained. "But don't be frightened. You're safe, anyhow."

She clasped her hands convulsively and closed her eyes, as if trying to shut out something from her vision.

"Suppose," I suggested, "that you tell me something about your accident. I want to help you, you know—to help you understand."

To tell the truth, I needed understanding as badly as she. My brain was whirling with the impossibility of the thing, and I was beginning to doubt my own senses.

"Why, I was playing," she said. "Sitting at the piano, playing, and waiting for mother to dress. We were going to make some calls. There was a bronze statue on top of the piano; it

is an upright, you know. A statue of Pan, and heavy. The maid must have left it very near the edge. I suppose it was the vibration that made it slip. Somehow, I knew it was coming, for I looked up. But it was too late for me to even move. It struck me here." Her hand was raised to the bandaged temple. "And then I remember falling—falling. It didn't hurt; I was just falling. And—why, that's all."

As she had put her hand to the wound I remembered what I had discovered as I stitched the torn flesh—the white scar that seemed to have healed long ago. Something stirred me strangely; I felt as if I sat in the presence of one of God's mysteries.

"This was in February, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is August now. I think you have been ill for some time."

"Have you a glass?" she asked quickly. "A mirror?"

I had a small one in my kit, that I used for shaving, but I was reluctant to let her have it, for fear she might see something in it that would produce a shock. But she was insistent, and I brought it to her.

"Don't let the bandage on your head frighten you," I said.

She gave a cry as she beheld her face; then studied the reflection in silence for a full minute.

"I am old!" she exclaimed. "Oh, what does it mean?"

"You're not old," I answered, with a smile. "You're young. How old are you—exactly?"

"I was twenty-one on my last birthday." She said it very positively and without hesitation.

"In what year was that?"

She must have caught a strange note in my voice, for she looked at me quickly as she answered:

"Why, this year, of course. It was in January—nineteen-six."

Then there flashed into my mind the lie she had told me on the first day of our journey—that she was thirty-four. I knew it for a falsehood then; and I

knew that what she was telling me now was far nearer the truth.

"Why did you ask the year?" she demanded.

"Because—"

I was still groping for the light myself, for I began to read a tragedy in the story of Jane Boyce.

"Tell me!" she pleaded, as I hesitated.

"Why, because," I answered slowly, "nineteen-six was five years ago."

Her face went paler under its tan, and for a moment I thought she was about to faint. Her body swayed and I steadied her. Then she buried her face in her hands and sat there for many minutes. At last I heard her murmuring, brokenly:

"Five years! Oh, my mother!"

I felt a lump in my throat, but I could not speak to her. I seemed as dazed as she. In a clumsy way I patted her shoulder and tried to comfort her in that fashion. At last she raised her head and looked at me with weary, dry eyes. She put her hand on my arm and whispered brokenly:

"But I am Molly Hope. Truly I am! Oh, won't you believe that?"

"I believe that you are Molly Hope," I said gravely, stroking her trembling hand.

I was awed with the miracle that I had seen with my own eyes. And the woman I had hated I now pitied from the depths of my heart.

CHAPTER XI.

Groping in the Past.

I HAD said that I believed her, and it was the truth; but my belief was a matter of faith rather than of reason. The whole startling unreality of the thing still confronted me.

More than five years of this woman's life had been diverted into a mysterious channel, dark and uncharted as that through which Jane Boyce had taken me blindfolded; and now she was back in the clear waters again, as sud-

denly and inexplicably as she had quitted them. There was so much I could not understand that my mind was simply a confusion of impressions, nor did I for many days reach the point where I could see the facts plainly and arrange them in the order in which they belonged. And even to-day there are gaps—yes, whole years—that have never been filled and never will be.

We talked but little most of that forenoon. There were long periods of silence when both of us seemed to be overwhelmed with the discovery that her awakening had brought. I could see that she was trying to think the thing out, slowly and laboriously, and it was best not to disturb her, I believed. When she did speak, for a time it was mostly of her mother, her father, and Frank.

"Think of their agony," she said in a half whisper. "Five years! I wonder if mother believes I am dead. And father—he was in Europe when it happened. I wonder if he saw me again before—before I went away. And, oh—"

She turned to me with a frightened face as her words halted.

"Do you suppose they are alive?" she asked piteously. "I wonder if it killed mother."

Always her mother was first in her thoughts. I tried to cheer her by telling her it was almost certain they were safe and still searching for her.

"But how could I have gone away?" she mused. "How could they have let me?"

"They didn't let you go, of course," I assured her. "You must have slipped away."

"And do you suppose I was—the other woman—the one you have told me about, before I went?"

"We cannot know," I answered, "until we have found your people."

"You think we will find them, then!" she exclaimed eagerly. "You believe I will see my mother again?"

"I am sure of it," I told her earnestly, though I knew it was nothing more

than a guess. But I was trying to keep her courage up.

It would have seemed, perhaps, the natural thing for this woman and me to try to piece together, logically and consecutively, the events which had brought her to this strange point in her life; but for a long time our talk was desultory, seizing upon this scrap and that, as though our minds were not yet ready to grasp the thing in its entirety. It was too big for us. Afterward we tried to reconstruct, but now we were still treading a maze.

Suddenly I remembered something, and, without telling her why, I began to whistle softly the opening bars of a tune. For a moment she seemed to pay no attention, but then she turned to me quickly.

"How curious—that tune," she said. "Do you know what it is?"

I had guessed, but waited for her to go on.

"It is the thing I was playing as I sat at the piano, when the accident happened. I remember it as clearly as though it were but a moment ago. How strange you should whistle it now."

"I whistled it because it was the tune that hurt your head," I answered. "That was a couple of weeks ago. I started it one day and you ordered me to stop it."

She looked at me incredulously.

"Nothing else bothered you," I added. "Only that tune. And when I asked you why you objected, all you told me was that it hurt your head."

"I don't remember telling you that," she said slowly. "I don't seem to remember anything. You, for instance; you are absolutely new to me."

"But you remember things before the accident?" I suggested. I wanted to test her memory. "You remember your family?"

"Remember!" she echoed. "Why, I can see mother now. Dear mother! And father, and Frank, and—oh, everybody."

"What does Frank look like?"

"My brother? Why, he is only two years older than I. He is tall and strong—taller than you, I think. Frank is fair; there was always such a contrast between us that we were never thought to be brother and sister."

Then she told me something about her father, who had gone abroad on business; the cities he had visited, the letters he had written, the little gifts that he had sent home to her. The whole of her life, up to the day when the darkness came, was as clear as a mirror to her. She convinced me of that.

Finally we began to talk about what she had been during the lost years, and then I knew for a certainty that all recollection of Jane Boyce had vanished utterly from her mind. This seemed incredible to me; time and again I tried her with this incident and that, but it was useless. She remembered nothing. There was not the least suggestion in her mind of what she had been; not even an elusive, dim memory. For a long time I could not convince her that the things I related of Jane Boyce had really taken place.

"But how could it have happened?" she would say. "Why, I never knew anything about such things. I had scarcely heard of them."

"Had you ever been in Canada?" I asked, wondering what had brought her to this place.

She shook her head, after a moment's thought.

"Were you ever in London?" I pursued.

"I have never been abroad," she answered.

Then I told her how she had claimed to be English, and we wondered if, in the missing years, she had really been abroad.

"Perhaps I said it because my father was there when we had his last letter," she suggested. That may have been the solution, yet I was not convinced. Even to-day I have never been able to find out whether Jane Boyce had been in England.

It was surprising, when I tried to tell her, how little I knew of the woman she had been. This was her fourth summer in the north woods. Where had she been during the first year of her vanished life? The mystery was beyond our understanding. There was not the slightest clue that could be followed. Where had she spent the winters, after she left the Deep-Water country? That, also, was beyond the veil. How had she lived, what did she do, where did she journey? These were some of the things that we struggled with, aimlessly and without result. There was but one thing convincingly clear:

The years when she was Jane Boyce had disappeared utterly from her mind. It was not even possible to find a reason for the name she had taken. It meant nothing to her now.

From time to time her speech reverted to her mother, and I gathered that there had been between them an attachment unusually strong. It was concern for her mother that seemed to be constantly in her mind; a pathetic anxiety to know whether she still lived; whether she had been utterly broken by the loss of an only daughter. It was during these parts of our conversation that I was so strangely impressed with the total change in the character of the woman who sat before me.

Jane Boyce was cold, stern, and without a glimmer of affection for any single thing, living or inanimate. Molly Hope had a heart overflowing with love for her mother, her family, and her friends. Jane's eyes were hard, baffling of interpretation, yet commanding and domineering in their expression. This woman had eyes that were dark and soft, and filled with tenderness and anxiety and tears. They were the same eyes, but how utterly unlike.

The whole face, indeed, had undergone an alteration that seemed incredible. The clear, well-cut features of Jane Boyce were there, the broad forehead, the straight nose, the slightly

cleft chin; and the head was poised with the same suggestion of courage and independence. But something had erased from her face all the harsh and repellent things I had seen there, and with them had gone the odd, unrelieved detachment of her manner. It was as if some power had restored her soul again, after holding it in keeping during all the lost years. The lips that used to set so closely and straight were now even tremulous. The firm jaw that had never relaxed still gave character to the face of Molly Hope, but it seemed to have become more rounded and softened. There was strength there, but no harshness.

Even the voice was different. It had always been deep-toned and rather rich, but the hard monotony of it had vanished; it had become sweet and womanly, and it had new shades of sound and expression that were absent in the Woman Prospector. The marvel of the transformation filled me with wonder. There were times, as I watched her, when I was tempted to believe the change which had been wrought was even physical; and perhaps this was true, in a way, because of the complete relaxation of the old, stern set of the muscles. Jane Boyce had been merely a wonderful piece of mechanism. Molly Hope was a woman.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked once, as she observed my scrutiny.

I merely shrugged my shoulders, not caring to tell her the sort of woman she had been.

"Was I different?"

"Yes; different," I answered.

"I do not yet understand what changed me," she went on, apparently having forgotten the wound in her head.

Then I explained to her the accident which had brought Molly Hope back again into the body which had been tenanted by Jane Boyce. I did not tell her why she had fallen, nor of the desperate struggle in which I

had been engaged with a being that was scarcely human. My own part in it filled me with shame, and I did not wish to shock this new creature with a tale of what manner of person she was but a few hours before. I merely told her she had been running over the rocks, had tripped and fallen.

"My surgery, I am afraid," I said, "is crude and clumsy. There are four stitches in the wound now, and there may be another scar."

"Another?"

"Yes, for I found one underlying the new. It is the mark of the old blow that—changed you. It was the new accident that brought you back."

"It is wonderful!" she said musingly. "And I am glad. But, oh, I am sad also, and frightened."

"You must not be frightened," I assured her. "We are safe, and we will go back without mishap when you are strong enough to travel. Unless—"

"What?" she asked.

"Unless you wish to make a search for the place where you found the gold."

"Did I really find gold?" she asked. "Are you sure?"

For answer I went over to her tent and brought out the sack. I opened the neck of it and poured a handful of the stuff into her palms. She examined it curiously, as a child might inspect a strange toy.

"This is gold?" she murmured. "And I found it?"

"It is as pure as any gold I ever saw, Miss Hope. And you brought it back with you to camp."

"But how did I know anything about gold? What made me seek it?"

"I don't know," I answered simply. "We merely have the evidence that you did seek it and found it."

She ran her fingers through the stuff and then asked:

"Is it worth anything?"

I lifted the bag and made a rough guess at its weight.

"There may be ten thousand dollars' worth there," I answered.

Her eyes were wide in amazement, but she had no further curiosity to examine the contents of the sack.

"It makes me shudder a little," she told me.

"Shall we try to find the place?" I asked. "Perhaps you would recognize it if we made the search."

"No, no!" she cried hastily. "Let it stay there. I want to find my mother."

Presently she rose to her feet, a little unsteadily. As she did so the blankets fell from her and she stood there, straight and slim, in her man's clothes. She was unconscious of her costume for a moment, but as she glanced down and saw the trousers again, the color once more came into her cheeks. She saw me gazing at her, and there was a confusion in her face that was pretty to watch.

"Is this all I have?" she asked, with a little gesture.

I nodded.

"You mean I have been wearing—these, all the time?"

"On this journey, that has been your costume," I said. "But when you went over to the post, at Deep-Water, you wore skirts."

She gave a little sigh of relief at the intelligence.

"Is there anything here that I could use—to make a skirt?" she asked presently.

I smiled a little and her color heightened.

"I suppose you could sacrifice a blanket," I answered. "But it would be foolish to do so. You will find your present costume better suited for the kind of traveling we have here than a skirt. Besides, we shall meet nobody, and I—I am quite used to it."

I had it on my tongue to tell her I even admired it, and that she made a fine, attractive figure in the garments of my sex; but I had no wish to add to her confusion, and refrained from saying it. She pursed her lips in a doubtful way, and then sat down again.

"Have I no shoes?" she asked.

Her high boots were in the tent, and I brought them to her. She looked at them in wonderment, particularly the hobnails that studded the soles of them.

"They're just the thing for this business," I assured her. "You couldn't think of wearing anything else."

She drew them on and laced up the leather thongs.

"They're rather comfortable," she admitted apologetically, as she stood up again and tried them.

But her costume had suddenly imposed a restraint upon her that was foreign to the woman I had known. Jane Boyce had worn it with never a thought that there was anything unusual about it. But Molly Hope was conscious of it. She walked a few steps, rather timidly and with none of the fine freedom of old. Graceful she was as the day I had first seen her, swinging the ax on her little island; but now she had become feminine in an instant. She could not put the trousers out of her mind.

"Suppose we have some lunch," I suggested. "It's noon."

"I am hungry," she assented.

I started a fire and got the grub ready, while she sat near and watched me. The proceeding interested her and aroused some surprise in her.

"I don't believe I ever saw a man cook before," she informed me.

"Everybody is a cook in these parts," I said, smiling.

"But I am not. I fear that I know very little about it."

"I'll teach you, then. But it will not be much of a schooling. We have nothing but plain fare here."

"I think it is rather wonderful," she observed, as she watched me mix a panful of biscuits and place the little reflector oven close to the flames. "I had no idea people baked in the woods."

"Yet you have watched me do this a dozen times," I answered, looking up at her. "And I dare say you have done it a thousand times yourself."

She passed her hand across her eyes, as I had seen her before when she was trying to remember.

"I have no recollection," she said. "Everything has gone—more than five years. To think of losing five years!"

"But you haven't lost them, really. You are strong and healthy and you are only twenty-six. That's not much."

"Twenty-six," she repeated wonderingly. "I have jumped five birthdays."

"One day I asked you how old you were," I said. "Do you know what you told me?"

"Twenty-seven?" she ventured. "Or twenty-eight?"

"Thirty-four."

"Oh! Really did I tell you that? But you don't believe it, do you? Do I look it?"

I could not help laughing at her feminine anxiety, although she was very serious about it.

"No; you don't look it," I said. "When you said it I knew that you were lying, and I never could understand why."

"And how old did you think I was?"

"About twenty-five," I answered truthfully.

"Thank you," she said simply.

Then she seemed to recall a remark I had made a minute before, and added:

"I am strong. It puzzles me. I never used to be. I was thin. When I looked at my arms a little while ago I could not understand. I am much heavier. Why—"

Her eyes had roved again to the rough brown trousers, which only partly concealed the rounded outlines of her straight, boyish legs, and once more the color in her cheeks appeared. She looked at me with a smile of frank embarrassment. It was marvelous to see a smile on those lips, that I knew only in their hard, cold expression. Jane had never smiled; never laughed, which is less.

"Your five years have not been

lost," I told her, "if they have made you what you are. You are even stronger than you think. I have seen you shoulder a seventy-pound pack and carry it with ease."

She regarded me with astonishment, and unconsciously began feeling the muscles of her arm.

"Yes," I added, "and I've known you to do more than that. You picked me out of a rapid one afternoon, when I was unconscious, and carried me ashore. Don't you even remember that?"

She shook her head, and I saw wonder and incredulity in her eyes. As we ate lunch I told her the story. She seemed hungry for information about herself, and I related several incidents to her, while her astonishment steadily grew. But I did not tell her the kind of woman Jane Boyce had been, nor how repellant she was to me, nor how I even hated her. That was now a thing of the past.

After we had eaten I showed her things about the camp. Her strength was coming back to her, and she said

the wound in her head did not annoy her. Everything she saw proved a curiosity. Even the big woods were new to her. Her tent and her personal outfit she examined in mute bewilderment. The canoe interested her. She had seen canoes, of course, but told me she had never been in one. And she declared that not in all her life had she fired a rifle. These things occupied her for a considerable part of the afternoon, and then she suddenly came back to the underlying desire in her mind.

"And do we start back now?" she asked.

"To-morrow," I said, "if your head feels all right."

"I wish it were to-morrow!" she exclaimed earnestly. "I want to see my mother."

I saw no reason why we could not start in the morning, for she seemed to be recovering amazingly well from her accident. And then, like a shock, came the memory of something. We would start to-morrow. But which way?

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

THE CUP OF LIFE

By Emma A. Lente

I LIFTED up my Cup of Life,
 And begged of Wealth to fill it:
 He smiled, and said: "Oh, foolish hope;
 I never will fulfil it!"

I lifted up my Cup of Life,
 And begged of Fame to fill it:
 He scornful smiled, and said: "Vain child,
 I do not choose to will it!"

I lifted up my Cup of Life,
 And begged of Love to fill it:
 And now it brims so overfull,
 I cannot help but spill it.

KING OF THE CAMORRA

A SERIAL

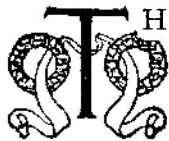
BY E. SERAO

Translated by BARON BERNARDO QUARANTA DI SAN SEVERINO

Graduate of the Naples University and of the Royal Oriental Institute of Italy

CHAPTER XXV.

The Treasurer's Report.

HE noise of running water in the main sewer resembled the sound made by a swarm of beetles. Many bats flew around in the thick, heavy air.

In the darkness of that sewer, almost as lofty as a nave, were two men: the head of the Camorra and the treasurer-general of the society. They stood on the edge of a running stream of water in the faint light afforded by a small, rectangular opening to the street above their heads.

The treasurer was speaking in a monotonous voice which seemed to come from a distance. He stood in a submissive attitude, and bowed frequently and reverently before his chief, while giving him a full account of the doings of the society during the "King of Mezzocannone's" absence.

The head of the Camorra was listening with a fatigued and slightly annoyed air, often turning his shoulders upon the speaker to walk up and down on the narrow sidewalk of the sewer.

He had been away on some mysterious errand for about nine weeks, during which time the treasurer had acted in his name.

"The most serious event of these past weeks, in which your excellency has deprived us of the guidance of his

supreme wisdom and venerated presence," he was now saying, "has been the death of our brother, Costanzo Ardia. I have been able to ascertain, however, that he was not actually killed by Peppe Curto, but by one of the shots fired by the police."

"I know it," interrupted the "King of Mezzocannone."

"How is it possible? Your excellency has only just arrived this morning!"

"Still, I already know everything. I will tell you something more; his daughter, Luisella Ardia, is being closely watched in her retreat by a pair of relentless eyes belonging to a mysterious person who has lately been often seen wandering about the streets of Naples. You will probably know who I mean."

"If your excellency will be pleased to give me the name, I will at once be able to answer."

"The people have nicknamed this strange man the *Evil Eye*."

"To tell the truth, I have never bothered myself about him," said the treasurer. "Why should I, since he does not come within the circle of our affairs?"

"Wrong, wrong, very wrong!" retorted the head of the Camorra. "It is our duty to notice everything and everybody, even the most insignificant personalities — especially the latter, I should say. Who assures you that the

* This story began in *The Cavalier* for August 31.

last beggar of the street may not one of these days render our community such eminent services as to raise him to the highest degrees of the society? Now, in the present case, my dear treasurer, this man is especially worthy of notice—first of all because he is not a man at all, but a woman in a man's disguise, and such a woman as is capable of greatly benefiting or greatly harming our society."

The treasurer was mortified, and tried to murmur some excuse, but the supreme head cut him short.

"Very well," he said; "you will do better the next time. Listen to me now: this woman I am speaking of is Fortuna Parascandolo, who has been also called '*the lioness of the Vicolo Tagliaferri*.' She is a mother who cannot rest or find peace since her son's death, and she watches us with keen eyes in the hope of getting a clue that may lead her to vengeance.

"Well, Fortuna has disguised herself in a hundred different ways; she has penetrated, unseen, unheard, into many houses; has questioned even the shadows—has had recourse to the most diabolical shrewdness and audacity; has, we may well say so, searched the whole city, watching and noticing, unseen and unsuspected, without, so far, any tangible result. Yet, her indomitable courage is not disarmed, her will, which is of steel, does not bend.

"A few weeks ago a faint glimmer of light was offered her. By a mere chance, borne along by her feverish restlessness, Fortuna Parascandolo was among the crowd which accompanied Costanzo Ardia to the Villa of Peace. She alone knew he was a Camorrist chief, and, disguised in the strange garb of the mysterious man nicknamed the *Evil Eye*, the human flood carried her to the place where our brother was dying. By almost incredible ingenuity she got within the gates, and, mingling among the frightened inmates of the home, she listened eagerly, intently, divining that a mystery was going to be unfolded to her.

"She is convinced that some one belonging to the Camorra possesses the terrible secret of the murder of her son; she probably even thinks that many of us are cognizant of that secret, and that we are keeping it from her with the tenacity of silence imposed upon us by our rules. She would like to see us all give up our last breath, in the hope that one of us would utter some word which might put her on the track of the murderer. Something of this kind she thinks she gathered in the presence of the dying Costanzo Ardia—not from his mouth, but from his daughter's, more unconscious than the dying man himself, and, therefore, more capable of telling the truth."

"Excuse me, excellency, for presuming to interrupt you; but how have these details come to your knowledge?"

"Treasurer, remember that I know everything!" answered jokingly but with emphasis the "King of Mezzocannone," breaking into a harsh, guttural laugh. "Treasurer, you know that, when I will, I am everywhere, and my glance penetrates into every place. Little does it matter, therefore, that I was traveling very far from here in these past weeks, for I know the smallest details of the rash doings of our daring sister as if I had witnessed them, and I know that, since Costanzo Ardia's death, she is seeking some way of getting hold of Luisella to follow the clue she thinks she has been given."

"What does your excellency, therefore, order with regard to our poor departed brother's daughter?" asked the treasurer.

"She must be watched so that no harm shall come to her. It ought to be an easy task, because Antonio Spina has occasion to be often about the place, as his daughter Rosa lives at present in the home. I hope in this way to protect the interests of the community, which are the constant guide of all my actions."

"Your excellency does not need to seek the approbation of any one," pro-

tested flatteringly and unctuously the treasurer.

"That is understood!" retorted proudly the head of the Camorra. "But I like it to be known that my authority, which is enlightened and just, reproves the conduct of Gennarino Parascandolo's mother, who thinks she can emancipate herself from our authority, wishes to act only in accordance with her own ideas, and still has the strange pretension of being protected and assisted by the 'Great Mother.'"

"We will call her severely to order!"

"Yes; but you must wait until I give you my precise instructions on the matter. I wish to see how far she will go in her impudent behavior."

"Will your excellency allow me to express an opinion?"

"Speak!"

"The mother of Gennarino Parascandolo has so far received assistance, in my modest opinion, far beyond what she could have deserved. For example, she was the object of such a favor from your excellency as none of our sectional chiefs even has ever received."

"What favor do you mean?"

"Fortuna Parascandolo, the very first time she was received into our highest assembly, was allowed to enter through the secret entrance that even I do not know, and which is reserved to the supreme head only."

"I can explain this circumstance so as to satisfy at least your curiosity."

"You will remember the revolt, severely censured by me at the time, which took place in consequence of Gennarino Parascandolo's murder? I was that day underground, as we are now, following perplexed the vicissitudes of the struggle, the sound of which reached very faintly the great sewer underneath the Via Toledo, still clearly enough to be gathered by my experienced ear.

"Several of our members were with me, whose names it is not necessary

for me to disclose, and every now and then I sent one of them up to try and get our most conspicuous brothers to withdraw from the useless conflict, when I had the perception that something sinister, something excessively serious, was happening right above our heads.

"I could hear the blows of the pick-axes which were furiously tearing up the pavement—so furiously, in fact, that soon the light poured onto us from a large hole made in the street above.

"What had happened? The rioters had torn up the pavement with such violence that they had broken through the vault of the main sewer. We that were underneath, and who were far from wishing to be so illuminated from above, would have been obliged either to stop the gap or to escape to avoid being noticed by some officer of the law who might have happened to look down through the aperture.

"We made a human ladder with the most agile among us, and I climbed to the top to give a look to what was happening. In a moment my head was on a level with the street. I at once saw Fortuna, who was being attacked by the cavalymen. In another moment she would have been massacred. Her son's body had been already sabered.

"I caught her dress and dragged her down through the gap, which the soldiers had not noticed because of the crowd that stood all around. Twenty arms received her as she fell into the sewer, still holding on to her son. We had saved her. Was it for pity? No.

"It was necessary for us to get her out of the conflict which her presence instigated, leading the crowd to ever greater excesses which would only harm us in the end."

"Therefore the body of Gennarino, of whom no one knows the resting-place—"

"Has been buried in a given place of the underground city which only I and Fortuna know. I prepared his grave, placed him in it, and planted a little cross on the spot. Since then I

have added to it a little brass inscription which bears the name of the deceased, gives the date of his death, and affirms it to be the deed of the police, adding that some day exemplary punishment will be meted out to avenge him.

"All this is engraved in Egyptian characters which Fortuna, who is the descendant of a long line of illustrious Camorrista, is perfectly acquainted with."

"Does your excellency, therefore, think that Gennarino was killed by the police?" asked the treasurer in great surprise.

"I don't dream of such a thing! Why, my dear treasurer, I am surprised that you should think me so stupid. I should not have thought a man of your intelligence could conceive such a thing!"

"That is just why, excellency, I was greatly surprised and astonished—"

"Listen; with you I will speak frankly. To any one else I would say it is as clear as daylight that Gennarino has been the victim of the police. In fact, I have spoken in this sense to his mother. *She* believes, however, as I do, that her son was a victim of the Camorra."

"Upon which of our number do her suspicions fall?" asked the treasurer.

"You heard her, when I brought her with me to the meeting of the 'Great Mother' in the subterranean vault on the property of Antonio Spina. She came with me through the secret passage that even he ignores, because she had clung to me like a burr from the moment I had saved her from the swords of the cavalrymen."

"That day she thought, as did most of us, that Don Gennaro Consolo might have been the cause of her son's death. She asked fiercely for the price of his blood, and her hand of avenging mother weighed heavily in the balance against the Consolo couple, who were already under the cloud of many accusations."

"Both the Consolos were con-

demned to death. Fortuna asked to be present at the execution of the sentence, and it was granted her as a special concession. So as not to attract attention, she was dressed in a man's attire, and accompanied the chosen executors of the sentence to the scene of the tragedy on the solitary shore of the small town of Torre del Greco, near Naples.

"Consolo joined them there, attracted by the proposal of laying the plans for a big burglary to be carried out in one of the rich villas of that delightful summer resort.

"When the little party reached a deserted spot of the shore one of our men dealt Don Gennaro a savage blow on the head with his heavy stick. He faltered, stunned, but did not fall; then the whole band threw itself upon him with knives and sticks. But one knife alone gave him the mortal blow, and it was that of Fortuna.

"Seeing him fatally wounded, she claimed the body of the murdered man. With prodigious strength she raised him from the ground, and, as if her arms had been made of steel, she carried him upon a rock, where she could see him under the rays of the rising moon and taste the cruel joy of seeing him die amid atrocious suffering.

"'You dog! You infernal monster!' she hissed. 'You have killed my only son, who was all my life. May you now die the death of the damned!'

"She lifted her knife to strike once more the bleeding body. A strange thing then happened. The dying man gave a start, tried to raise himself, gathered his last strength with so vigorous an effort that he succeeded in murmuring distinctly a few words.

"'No, I must not die damned! I swear before God, in Whose presence I am about to go, that I am innocent of this crime!'

"Fortuna started as if struck by a violent blow.

"'Innocent?' she exclaimed. 'Who, then, has put out the light of my eyes?'

“Ask Tore Santangelo; he knows,” was all the dying man could utter before falling into eternal sleep.

“From that moment Fortuna has lived in a state of furious indignation against our society, which, in her mind, took advantage of her consuming grief to formulate a false accusation and to decree the death of an innocent man,” concluded the “King of Mezzocannone.”

The treasurer and general cashier of the Camorra laughed long and loudly on hearing the last words.

“Innocent, Don Gennaro Consolo!” he finally exclaimed. “As innocent as an Easter lamb! Only a woman could make up such a story, even if she does descend from a long line of Camorra kings!”

“Treasurer, do not pass risky judgments!” warned the supreme head.

“Does your excellency also believe we have been on the wrong track concerning the murderer of Gennarino Parascandolo?” asked the treasurer, becoming suddenly serious and respectful.

“Yes,” answered the other, with conviction. “But what was that noise? I thought I heard steps.”

“It is probably the bats.”

“No; I have a good ear. I distinctly heard some cautious steps.”

“Let us go and see.”

The supreme head and the treasurer carefully inspected the vast subterranean gallery and its exits into the minor passages. Every now and then a score of big rats fled before them or a frightened bat made a hasty retreat to its nest. No human being was in sight, but on the muddy ground which the two men were examining with the aid of their lanterns some fresh footprints were discernible which, to judge from their size, must have belonged to a boy or a woman.

The “King of Mezzocannone” and his chief aide-de-camp, who knew every secret turn of these underground galleries, searched in every corner around the place where they had been talk-

ing, in every possible hiding-place of which the Camorra associates availed themselves when they were in danger of some “surprise” from the police, or when a gang of men working in the sewers happened to pass; but they found no one. Still the footprints were quite recent, and stopped at about twenty feet from the place where they had been talking.

It was not the first time, either, that both of them had felt they were being spied upon with pertinacity, and at the same time with infinite caution. But whenever they had tried to track down the spy they had been unable to discover anything.

It seemed as if some grave, inexorable, and invisible creature accompanied them everywhere, watching, listening, not only for their words but for their thoughts, their intentions, their very heart-beats.

Still, neither one communicated his thoughts to the other, fearing to appear timid or superstitious.

After their useless exploration of the gallery the two men returned to the place where they had stood before and resumed their conversation in a lower tone.

The head of the Camorra said:

“I seriously think that Fortuna Parascandolo is on the right track in watching Luisella Ardia.”

“What relation could there be between the Ardias and Parascandolos?” slowly asked the treasurer.

“It is very simple: Luisella was the betrothed of Tore Santangelo, and the latter hated Gennarino Parascandolo.”

“But they were always together, almost like two brothers!”

“All the more reason to hate each other! They exercised the same profession and worked in the same Camorrist field; of necessity, every now and then, the one must have encroached upon the other’s sphere of action,” continued with conviction the supreme head.

“But Tore was a prisoner when Gennarino was found pierced through

the heart in the Vicolo Tagliaferri," again objected the treasurer.

"Yes, but Luisella was free!"

"Is it possible that your excellency should think that that frail creature, a mere child in body and mind, could have suppressed him?"

"No; of course I realize that would have been impossible. To kill with one blow a man like Gennarino it must have taken a much stronger hand and an infinitely braver heart. But the girl may have known, may have plotted. In fact, it must have been she who laid the plan and paid its executors," continued the "King of Mezzocannone."

"It seems to me we are in a field of suppositions, of wild surmises, if your excellency will allow me to say so."

"I think, instead, I am in the field of certainty. There has been one circumstance which has escaped general notice—a circumstance of extreme significance—which a mother, and *such a mother* as Fortuna Parascandolo—would not fail to notice.

"At the Villa of Peace, during the strange scene between Costanzo Ardia and his insane daughter, the latter, her brain quivering under the tempest of tragic recollections, repeated more than once that she was guilty of a murder. '*I, I alone, have killed him!*' she exclaimed. She was, therefore, not alluding to her mother's murder, but to a man's.

"All those present overlooked this particular, and have judged the whole outburst as the painful obsession of a poor insane girl whose mother had been most horribly murdered by the hand of her own father! But Fortuna heard and shuddered, divined and understood. She would, by now, have known even more, if I were not preventing her from carrying out her criminal designs upon the girl.

"I am keeping her in check because she is undisciplined and headstrong, you understand; and I do not tolerate in *any one* the slightest overbearance, or permit the assertion of a principle

of autonomy in any of our members. It would be a senseless, irreverent, anarchical conception to try and develop a personality where it is necessary for the very existence of our society that its associates should only be instruments in my hand, and merely a part of the extraordinary mechanism of which I am the motor and the only thinking guide."

"Your excellency talks in golden language!" approved unctuously the treasurer. He then added: "Tore Santangelo, therefore, need not fear on this score."

"There you are wrong again. I am not protecting Tore, but the girl who has been his tool. Tore himself is worthy of no consideration; on the contrary, he deserves the severest punishment."

The eyes of the treasurer were questioning, but he did not speak.

The supreme head, therefore, added:

"Call together in all haste the 'Great Mother.' Tore Santangelo must be at once expelled from our ranks."

"It has already been done, your excellency; the 'Great Mother' will assemble to-day, in about two hours' time."

"Very well; you will preside over the assembly in my name," ordered the head of the Camorra.

"Your excellency's orders will be obeyed; but what reason shall I give to justify Tore's expulsion?"

"I was just coming to that. This unworthy brother of ours, who is now a fugitive, deserves even greater punishment than we can at present mete out to him. After having escaped from the San Francesco prison, instead of coming and placing himself under the protection of his chiefs, his first action was to betake himself secretly to the home of his brother and superior, Costanzo Ardia, and to loot it, carrying off an enormous amount of money which belonged to our dead friend and to which our society was by right entitled."

"Would your excellency explain?"

"Costanzo Ardia had made a will in favor of our community. This will is in my hands, and is written in cryptographic characters. I was present when Costanzo Ardia, obeying my injunction, wrote out this document, which bequeathed to us about eighty thousand dollars with the one condition that the hiding-place of this fortune be known to me alone until after his death.

"Having written these few lines, Costanzo Ardia opened a vein in his arm, and, having drawn some blood, dipped a tiny camel's-hair brush into it and traced at the bottom of the sheet his signature, followed by the sentence, '*Blade of Toledo in a satin sheath; strong as love, inflexible as hatred*,' which was his distinctive motto in the ranks of our order.

"Well, almost the whole of this sum has disappeared, only about four hundred dollars in gold and silver were found among the debris from the hole excavated in the wall where the hoard was concealed; therefore, Tore Santangelo, who without a doubt is the thief, has defrauded our common treasury of almost eighty thousand dollars."

"Unbelievable!" exclaimed the treasurer with horror.

"Unbelievable, perhaps; but quite true, nevertheless!" answered coldly the supreme head.

"Who knows, however, that, under the threat of a capital sentence, he might not decide to return this fortune?" suggested the treasurer.

"No; there is no hope of that," answered the head of the Camorra.

"Who can say?"

"I say so, and you know I never say anything unless I am certain of it."

"I know that, excellency, and I bow with ever greater admiration before your excellency's all-seeing wisdom."

"Do you know where I have been during these nine weeks' absence?"

"No, excellency; I confess quite candidly I do not. Any investigation on

this subject would have seemed to me irreverent. None of us has the right to act as a spy toward our venerated chief, be it also for a good end."

"I do not understand; what good end do you mean?"

"Well, your excellency will forgive me, for I am not at fault in this matter. The fault is of some meddlers—how shall I call them?"

"Speak!" thundered the "King of Mezzocannone." "Since when has such reticence been displayed with regard to my person?"

"Well, since your excellency orders it, I will say that one of our members hinted that your excellency had disappeared under a disguise on the same yacht which bore the Prince of Mingralia on his cruise, on the morrow of the extraordinary scene in the cathedral."

If the treasurer could have seen the face of his listener, and if this face had not been one of the most inscrutable masks which have ever disguised the real feelings of a man, he would have noticed with terror the effect upon his chief of the words he had carelessly uttered. But the darkness was complete, and the head of the Camorra, not to betray his intense emotion, was prudent enough not to speak for four or five seconds, which, even to him, seemed eternal. He then gave vent to his harsh, grating laughter.

"Ha! ha! ha! The buffoons! But who is it, tell me—who has circulated this nonsensical story?"

Awaiting the answer to this question, the "King of Mezzocannone," this diminutive demon quivering with rage and fearful spirit of darkness, grasped in his hand the hilt of a small dagger, ready to strike dead the treasurer if his voice had betrayed the slightest emotion indicating that he was a party to this story. In so doing he raised his lantern quickly to his dependent's face.

The treasurer did not even blink; he smiled simply and humbly, and with a sincere ring in his voice he answered:

"Your excellency, the thing was first mentioned to me by one of our sectional chiefs, but he said he had received it from—"

"From whom? Out with it!" hissed the "King of Mezzocannone."

"From Fortuna Parascandolo," answered, unmovable, the treasurer.

"Fortuna Parascandolo? What business is it of the old hag's, I should like to know?"

"Fortuna happened to be in the gipsy camp which had just unfolded its tents in the neighborhood of the prince's villa at Posillipo, at the time of his departure."

"How on earth did *she* come to be among the gipsies?"

"Excellency, always obeying her fixed idea of discovering the secret that tortures her, she had disguised herself as one of them. She even obtained access to the prince's presence, and the latter, who is a strange man, and loves to have ever-new emotions, received her very graciously, and allowed her to read his future in his hand."

"Oh, yes! I heard of that—I believe she even told him he would die in some tragic manner. Ha! Ha! What a ridiculous humbug that woman is!"

The shrill, harsh laughter of the "King of Mezzocannone" rang again in the silence of the dark and heavy atmosphere. The treasurer, who wore usually an expression of imperturbable gravity, now imitated his chief with loud guffaws.

When they had laughed enough, they both instinctively raised their lanterns and looked each other in the eyes.

"Do you swear you do not believe these silly stories told about my absence?" asked solemnly the head of the Camorra.

"I do not believe a word of them, I swear it," answered the other, with deep conviction.

"Do you know where I have been these nine weeks, while the Prince of Mingralia was cruising in the waters of Greece?" asked the "King of Mez-

zocannone." "I have been to the other end of the world and back. When the Prince of Mingralia set sail on his yacht I was steaming toward South America."

"South America!" exclaimed wonderingly the treasurer.

"Yes; and, now that you know this secret, which I did not mean to reveal to the air I breathe, much less to a living soul, you will be able to deny with more authority the stupid tales which have been circulating; that is to say, that I have been meditating a big robbery on my own account, and, by obtaining possession of the wealthy prince's person, to levy a ransom of several millions on him as price of his freedom, after which I would leave Naples and desert the society, to which I would give no share in the spoils. All things so unspeakably ludicrous and impossible that I can scarcely repeat them without laughing! Am I right? Is this the tale you have heard?" concluded the supreme head.

"Yes, your excellency is right, as ever," answered without hesitation the treasurer.

He then passed rapidly to relating the minor events of the past weeks.

"It has been an unfortunate period of unauthorized robberies, your excellency. Among others, a small gem-studded watch was torn from a lady driving in her carriage through one of the most crowded streets of Naples. You can imagine my dismay when I learned that the lady in question was no less than the wife of the prime minister. The police were frantic; his excellency the minister thundered from Rome; the prefect and the police commissioner were in consternation. Removals of public officials high and low were threatened, as well as merciless raids within our ranks.

"The prefect, at the suggestion of one of the police inspectors, sent for me. He showed me three hundred warrants all ready and signed by him. He added that if within twenty-four hours her excellency's watch were not re-

turned, the warrants would be sent forth, and as many again made out for every twenty-four hours which would pass with no result."

"I imagine you lost no time!"

"I should think not, excellency; there was a warrant ready for me as well. After ten or twelve hours the thief had been discovered, and the watch traced and returned."

"Who was the thief?"

"A street Arab who has already been twice an inmate of the Concordia juvenile prison."

"Did you have him whipped for stealing without our orders?" asked the chief.

"No, your excellency. I thought it would be more to our advantage to send him to our school for thieves at San Nicola Caserti!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha! That was a fine idea. Did you send him there as a pupil or as a teacher?"

"As a teacher, of course! What better teacher than that little scoundrel who had had the pluck and audacity to rob so high-placed a personage, to dupe the police and almost ourselves as well?"

"Wonderful! What is the name of the little monkey?" asked again the "King of Mezzocannone."

"He has no name, as almost all his like. He is a vagabond, a child of the street."

"Ah, the street! There is our great ally, the germ-breeder and school of Camorristi. It is she who sends us every year fresh recruits; it is she who is the inexhaustible nursery of baseness, deceit, and corruption. Where would we be, what would our society become, were it not for the ever-fresh blood which pours into its veins through this source?"

The supreme head was talking like a philosopher saddened by the contemplation of social evils.

He now seemed in deep thought, and the treasurer went on quickly with his report. The horse-market had cleared a social dividend of five hundred dol-

lars, the percentages from the fruit-markets were dwindling; at the slaughter-house there had been seven refusals to pay the Camorra dues on as many pieces of slaughtered animals, therefore the society had been obliged to have recourse to the seizure of the goods in question.

The sectional chiefs were working to prepare a bed of rose-leaves for the murderers of Don Gennaro Consolo and his wife, and were using all their influence toward incriminating for this murder the absent Tore Santangelo.

The report had reached this stage when the "King of Mezzocannone" finally shook himself free of his dark thoughts.

"You have not asked me," he said, "why I went to South America, and why I have come back so soon."

In his accent one divined that his uppermost preoccupation was that of dispelling by another direct affirmation the possibility of a belief that his absence could have had anything in common with the trip, taken about the same time, by the Prince of Mingralia.

The treasurer answered:

"I would not take the liberty of questioning your excellency without permission."

"I went to Argentina to capture the faithless Santangelo!"

"Is it possible? And has your excellency succeeded?"

"Yes and no. In fact, I have traced the fugitive. Owing to my having taken a faster ship I reached Buenos Aires before Tore landed there. I recalled him to obedience, but he refused to serve me, adducing the reason that he was now beyond my jurisdiction. At any rate, I have succeeded in quenching for some time to come, I should say, the spirit of that daring rebel."

"That cannot surprise any one who knows your excellency's energy. But by what means?"

"By taking his plunder from him."

"Costanzo Ardia's eighty thousand dollars? Oh, the masterly device!"

"Let me finish. Unfortunately it was only directed, not accomplished, by me. I could not bring back so much gold. Besides, I had my personal reasons for not wishing to act in that country."

"I understand; your excellency has lived for some time in South America."

"It is unnecessary that you should understand, my dear treasurer, and my past *must not* interest you; remember!"

"I spoke unthinkingly, because your excellency had mentioned—I beg your excellency to forgive me."

"Very well, I accept your apologies. Our meeting is over."

"I am truly mortified. If, at least, your excellency would tell me what became of Costanzo Ardia's hoard, not to satisfy my own personal curiosity, but in order that I may report it to the 'Great Mother' which is about to assemble."

"You can tell the assembly of my trip to Buenos Aires, and add that I have delivered Tore Santangelo to the local criminal society. I have informed its most important members of the true nature of the heavy luggage of our unfaithful associate and—you may assure the 'Great Mother' that by now Tore Santangelo has been relieved by able hands of his burden of gold. To make eighty thousand dollars down there it will take a good little bit of work!"

"He is an able *worker*, your excellency!"

"Let him work out there; he is too far to give us further trouble."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The "King" Is Restless.

UPON leaving the treasurer, the "King of Mezzocannone" quickly directed his footsteps towards the nearest exit from the dark, subterranean gallery.

He was in haste to get into the open, and had purposely avoided presiding at

the meeting of the "Great Mother," for, somehow, he was not in possession of his usual amount of energy. He felt more moody and morose than he was willing to admit, even to himself. His spirit was oppressed by an inexplicable weight and dread which he could not trace down to any particular cause.

What was the matter with him? Was it remorse for his numberless crimes? Was it preoccupation caused by the constant threats of his enemies far and near? Was it the weight of the enormous debts he had contracted and which he could hardly hope to pay in spite of the big proceeds of his office of supreme head of the Camorra, almost equaling the appanage of a crowned head? Or was he under the spell of those relentless and inscrutable eyes which had seemed lately to follow him everywhere?

But he had been always threatened, had ever been deeply in debt, had constantly been watched and hated by enemies, whom, in every case, he had ground into dust beneath his feet. Still, he had always flung himself into the thick of the battle, had sought danger and foes to enhance the pleasure of his triumph.

He had no time to waste upon such futile thoughts. Other cares called for his attention, and he pulled himself together and tried to shake off these shadows which made him ridiculous even to himself.

He had much road to travel, a long career of pleasure was before him, and he could not stop to consider the suffering of the human beings who would have to be sacrificed to his pleasure and selfishness. How many more lives would be humbled and crushed that he might go through his life of crime unmolested? What mattered? He must live and win, humiliating the weak, enchaining his slaves, harvesting everywhere his own welfare; this was the program of his life as a refined despot, as absolute sovereign and king of the Camorra.

He emerged from the darkness and heaviness of the subsoil to light, to air, to the wonderful sight of Naples under the kiss of the glorious sunshine of the south.

The gay Neapolitan spring was merging into summer. In the air was light and song and the joy of living. Yet he knew that Naples had no reason to be joyful, although the sun and the sky and the blooming gardens and terraces made it look like the abode of perpetual happiness.

The cholera, which in that sad year had attacked Russia, Egypt, Germany, and southern France, had reached Naples, and was beginning its harvest of death. Still, in spite of the danger of the epidemic, the lower classes of the people continued to spend their Sundays and holidays gaily banqueting in the cheap suburban taverns.

The "King of Mezzocannone," in passing the Ottocalli village, was almost deafened by the clamor of song and laughter arising from the crowded tables laid out in the open air under bowers of tender vine, leaves, and ivy, where enormous plates of tasty macaroni were consumed by the hundreds of customers of those country eating-houses.

Why had he chosen that noisy road? He scarcely knew. Instinctively, emerging from the underground gallery, he had walked in this direction without noticing whither his steps were leading him. When he shook himself free from the thoughts that had kept his mind busy, he saw that he was not far from the Pontirossi road and the Villa of Peace, to which his thoughts had so often traveled of late. In it lived the girl, who, for a passing moment, had struck his fancy. He could not forget, somehow, that she had been his wife; she *was* his wife, were she capable of knowing it and did he want to claim her; but this thought he dispelled from his mind. No! Better leave things as they were; what did he want with a poor insane creature to whom he had wished to be secretly

united, to avoid inspiring her with the horror all women showed for his repulsive appearance?

Yet he unconsciously felt a longing to see her again, to shield her from the hidden peril he knew was threatening her, to save her, and perhaps be able to put in her heart some feeling of gratitude, if not love, for himself.

Still deeply in thought, he quickened his steps, directing them toward the sanatorium, when he was struck by a sudden idea and abruptly stopped.

He looked down at himself. There he was clad in the unattractive costume in which he was wont to mingle with his criminal associates — tight trousers, short jacket, the classical *gamurro* of the Camorristis; small, square cap, with a straight, narrow vizor; a small whip in his hand and a gaily checkered bandanna handkerchief twisted around his neck. His face was horribly scarred, and his whole appearance very far from prepossessing.

No, that was not the way to show himself to the girl in whose heart he hoped to awaken some sentiment at least akin to love. His attire as Camorra king would have been all right if he had wanted to take her by force, but such was not his intention. He had no definite idea even of claiming her as his wife, but only an unconscious longing for the sweetness and purity of her presence and the irresistible attraction which an inveterate criminal will sometimes feel for a creature who is his direct antithesis.

If there was to be any hope of winning her or of restoring her unbalanced mind, it must be by other means, and these, fortunately, the small and unprepossessing "King of Mezzocannone" had at his disposal.

He, therefore, started to retrace his steps, taking a path through the fields which would shorten his route.

As he did so he thought the tall hedge, covered with blooming wistaria which bounded the Villa of Peace, was shaking; that some one who did not

wish to be detected had jumped down to the ground beyond it, like a hunted animal that precipitously retreats to the forest upon the approach of its pursuers.

The head of the Camorra stopped; his heart was beating more rapidly than usual. What possessed him, anyhow, to go about in broad daylight in the attire which he reserved only for his public appearances among his principal lieutenants at the meetings of the "Great Mother"?

Yet who could the person be who, from the gardens of the Villa of Peace, had watched him and had quickly retreated when noticed? He felt himself suddenly ill at ease, and again had the sensation that a pair of dark eyes were fixed upon his person. He went up to the hedge and bent down to look through the leaves, parting the thick foliage with his hands.

Nothing. The solitude and peace were unbroken. He then laughed aloud at his stupid fears, and thought he must be getting old to have such unusual sensations.

"Come on," he said to himself. "What does this mean? When have I ever known fear? It would be ridiculous to begin now."

He whistled a light song, and, turning his back upon the Villa of Peace, directed his steps through a mossy path which led to the tavern of Antonio Spina, sectional Camorra chief for Capodichino and Pontirossi.

The tavern was closed. Since Antonio Spina's daughter had deserted it to go and assist the stricken Michele Valanzaro in Dr. Marotti's sanatorium the tavern-keeper had been broken-hearted. His clientele, no longer attracted by the charms of the delightful Rosa, had dwindled and disappeared.

The head of the Camorra gave a rapid glance around, then leaped nimbly over the wall dividing Antonio Spina's garden from the road. The tavern-keeper was absent. People said that he was now scarcely ever at home, and that he was wont to go

about trying to forget his troubles; but the "King of Mezzocannone" knew that in reality he was busy at a very delicate and important enterprise—that is to say, the formation of a group of able counterfeiterers of the paper currency and the manufacture of a big batch of notes for large amounts, whole packages of which, with the complicity of some bank employees, were to be substituted for good ones in the Bank of Naples.

This enterprise was to replenish the rather exhausted coffers of the society, which, on account of the late clamorous events, deemed it prudent to work for a while in more silent channels.

A big watch-dog barked as the supreme head jumped from the wall into the garden; but, recognizing the newcomer, wagged his tail and lay down again in his kennel.

The "King of Mezzocannone" ran lightly to the old cistern and crept rapidly down to the bottom of it and through the passage leading to the big vault where the "Great Mother" had held its last meeting. Here he stopped an instant, took a lantern from the wall, and directed his steps toward the mysterious entrance, which no one had ever been able to discover, and through which he was wont to suddenly appear in the midst of his lieutenants.

In the rear of the cave were some dark and tortuous passages, a real labyrinth which seemed to lead to the very bowels of the earth. At the end of these passages ran a rapid flow of water, which, rising in the cave, after tumbling noisily over the rocks for a brief distance, disappeared into a large crevice.

No one could have imagined that right in the middle of the bed of that diminutive torrent there was a trap-door formed by a sheet of steel, which, by pressing heavily upon a steel button placed in the bed of the stream, would suddenly spring open, disclosing a cabin in which two people could easily stand.

The "King of Mezzocannone"

went rapidly to this point and pressed the button. The trap-door sprang open and the steel, egg-shaped cabin rose from the bed of the little torrent. He touched another button; the shell opened in half, he entered it. Automatically it closed and rapidly disappeared through the trap-door, which returned instantly to its place, letting the little stream, whose course had been for a moment stemmed, resume again its noisy flow over it.

The steel cabin traveled rapidly through the cylindrical underground passage prepared for it, and stopped at its end. The supreme head again pressed the button; the shell divided and let him out.

The gallery was in that point extremely narrow and low. The head of the Camorra had to bend himself almost double as he quickly crossed it to a larger vault, where he could stand erect.

He now went on for some time from one gallery into another with the swiftness and security of a man accustomed to go about in the darkness and to travel in the bowels of the earth.

After some time he reached a wide underground space, in the middle of which arose enormous granitic masses rigidly squared. They were the foundations of a magnificent building, broad and massive like those of a fortress.

The supreme head walked around them, and finally reached a small iron door. Drawing a tiny key from his pocket, he fitted it in the lock. The door opened; a breath of delightfully scented air was wafted into the heaviness of the atmosphere; the "King of Mezzocannone" stepped quickly inside, letting the door close noiselessly behind him.

He was now at the foot of a small marble staircase, which he rapidly mounted, reaching the first floor of a palatial residence, absolutely regal in its furnishings and luxury.

The little man stepped into an apartment where every noise was deadened

by the softness of the thick Asiatic carpets and magnificent hangings. The air was deeply scented, and the light tempered by the storied panes in the windows and heavy lace curtains. A bright fire burned in the fireplace under a wonderfully carved alabaster mantelpiece.

Here the head of the Camorra quickly undressed and threw all his clothes into a hidden closet, which he carefully locked. He then passed into the adjoining bedroom, where a beautiful bronze bedstead could barely be seen under its heavy brocade hangings, and shut the door.

Fully a quarter of an hour elapsed; but when at last he emerged from it he was a small, well-shaped, distinguished man with an aristocratic profile, pale but good-looking, with dark, restless eyes and a well-cropped blond beard. His clothes were stylishly cut, and he had a firm and elastic step.

Passing before a tall mirror, he stopped for a minute and looked himself over approvingly; then smiled, and, placing a silk hat upon his thick, glossy hair, he stepped into the adjoining parlor. He now crossed four or five rooms and reached a wonderful conservatory; beyond this was a broad marble staircase decorated with palm-trees and blooming azaleas. He descended it and met a valet in a flaming, gold-braided livery, who bent low as he appeared.

"My carriage," he briefly ordered.

Not more than five minutes later the beautiful horses of the Prince of Mingralia were bearing him swiftly toward the Villa of Peace.

When he reached the sanatorium he stepped from his carriage and, taking out a card, which he handed to the porter, who had respectfully come forward, said rather haughtily:

"Tell Dr. Marotti that the Prince of Mingralia would like to be shown around this establishment."

A few minutes elapsed and the porter returned.

"Your highness, Dr. Marotti wishes

me to say he regrets he is unable to depart from the rule he has made to admit no visitors to the home," he said.

In fact, Dr. Marotti's ideas on the subject were well known. He considered that the inmates of his house were not exhibits to be exposed to the curiosity of outsiders. He had only disdain and contempt for the rhetoric and sentimental philanthropy which gives itself the airs of a pity that is not demanded and that it does not feel, at the expense of sufferers.

The man who had just come under the name and title of Prince of Mingralia, the friend and connection of several crowned heads, and benefactor of the city of Naples, president of every committee and organization put together under the name of charity, had believed in his unbounded vanity that an exception to the rule would be made in his favor.

He received the courteously worded but firm refusal, however, without giving any outward sign of displeasure; but reentered his carriage and told his coachman to drive him back to Villa Osiris.

Night was coming on; a slight mist had settled on the city and the outlying villages which complete its wonderful panorama. As his carriage entered the gates of his princely villa the park was beginning to be lighted by hundreds of Venetian lanterns, for the Prince of Mingralia was giving that night a grand reception and supper to celebrate his return from his cruise in the East.

When the carriage stopped, instead of entering the main building, the prince walked toward a rustic pavilion built in the park and, having entered it, awaited until complete darkness descended upon the grounds.

He then issued from it and, walking to one end of the park, opened a small gate, letting himself out unperceived by any one.

He now again directed his steps toward the road that would take him to the Villa of Peace.

He was not a man who would easily submit to being thwarted, and his non-success that afternoon had made him more determined than ever to reach Luisella Ardia—by force, if it could not be done by ruse.

When he arrived at his destination he wandered around the villa for some time, while his mind worked rapidly to find the easiest way of escalating the place, and his small stature and wonderful suppleness made it a rather easy task for him.

Having made up his mind, he started to climb over the big iron gate which shut off the garden of the sanatorium. He had just reached the top, and was beginning the descent on the other side, when he again heard the curious rustling sound in the leaves which had so startled him a few hours before.

For an instant he was perplexed, then smiled at his stupid fears. The villa was in complete darkness, except for the faint light of the stars and the occasional glimmer of a firefly, and in this darkness he fixed his piercing gaze.

Nothing was in sight.

Still, the "King of Mezzocannone" was troubled. His heart beat as if it meant to burst through his ribs while, with small, cautious steps which made no noise on the gravel, he ascended the path toward the sleeping house.

Why was he so ill at ease? This was the first time he was experiencing such sensations in a whole lifetime of battles. Was his soul, which had been cast in bronze, weakening?

"It is ridiculous!" he almost exclaimed aloud; still, he could not suppress the curious fluttering at his heart.

He had now reached one of the marble staircases of the pretty villa. The light of the stars did not worry him, and the moon would rise late that night. Everything was silent in the home; but even if any one had been awake, it would have been impossible to detect him in the darkness.

Who could be watching him, any-

how, unless it be those relentless eyes which of late had so insistently followed him about? He now thought he saw them again among the leaves, and, forgetting his caution, he ran to the flowery hedge and furiously shook it, heedless of the danger of awakening some of the porters and of being caught like a thief.

There was nothing, *nothing*; and he bit his hands with rage at his stupid hallucinations.

For a while he almost decided to give up the enterprise and leave that abode of human misery and suffering by the same road which had taken him there; but his wild nature, disdainful of danger, his warlike and adventurous spirit, soon regained the upper hand.

He now slowly began to ascend the stairs. It took him several minutes to reach the top of the first flight. He stopped on the landing and listened anxiously. The quiet was impressive. The hum of the city lying at the foot of the hill, shrouded in a sheet of mist, arose to his ears in the still night air.

Beyond the landing were a few more steps leading to a terrace covered by a bower of morning-glories. Suddenly a bright light shone upon it, for a balcony window had opened, and in the stream of light which poured from the illuminated room the "King of Mezzocannone" saw with a thrill of joy that Luisella had appeared.

Wrapped in a light shawl, she had come out softly, doubtless not to disturb the other inmates of the house, and was leaning against the iron railing that encompassed the terrace.

From his place of observation the little man could not take his eyes from the girl, and a sudden longing to fall upon her, fold her in his arms, and bear her away swept fiercely over that hardened soul who knew no obstacles. But, controlling himself, he waited to be sure that no one else were in the illuminated room or the adjoining ones, and held his breath, concentrating all his exquisite physical sensibility in his hearing, to be certain that nothing

would this time come between him and the execution of his plan.

A few steps from him Luisella Ardia stood, thoughtful and motionless, looking out upon the supreme peace of the starlit night. Every now and then a small sigh would escape her lips, and the head of the Camorra could hardly refrain from overcoming at a bound the small distance which separated them. His heart beat violently within his small but powerful body, and he felt he could not stand the suspense much longer.

Keeping his eyes always fixed upon the girl, he began to creep toward the terrace. Luisella now left the railing, and was returning to her room with that light, soft step of hers which gave her a peculiar charm.

The little man could not repress a movement of joy. To come upon her on the terrace would have been rather risky, because, to reach her, he would have had to cross the stream of light that poured from her room. She would probably have seen him, and her cry of alarm would have aroused the nurses and other inmates.

To seize her in her own room and keep her still until he could bear her away, would be an easier matter. He, therefore, stopped, took off his shoes, and crept softly toward her.

His eyes, his face, all his small person, were in that moment animated by so violent a joy at his approaching triumph that he could scarcely refrain from shouting out his victory. Fate had favored him. Luisella was so absorbed in her thoughts she did not turn her head as he reached the open casement. Only a few feet divided them, and the head of the Camorra was about to step into the room through the balcony, embowered in a luxuriant vegetation of plants and flowers, when two powerful hands were suddenly thrust out from behind the leaves and, like steel springs, seized the little man around the throat so tightly as to prevent either movement or sound.

A tall figure had now emerged from

the plants, and, holding him suspended from the ground with those strong hands inexorably tightened around his neck, bore him swiftly and noiselessly to the other end of the terrace.

As easily as if he had been a toy, the powerful figure lifted him over the railing, held him dangling in the air for a moment, then, loosening one hand from his throat, caught him for an instant by the hair before precipitating him to the garden beneath.

A groan escaped the little man's lips as his throat was released; then came the thud of the falling body on the path below. No other sound broke the stillness of the night; but, as it aware of some danger, Luisella came to the balcony window and closed it. She was not frightened, however, because it was not the first time she had heard strange sounds about, which her child-like mind had not even attempted to explain.

Fortuna Parascandolo, for it was she who had seized the "King of Mezzocannone" and had thrown him over the parapet, stood for a moment looking down into the garden below; then, suddenly, she realized that something had remained in her hand. She looked at the thing. It seemed as if the scalp and the whole skin of the face had been torn from the head of the little man in that brief moment in which she had held him suspended by the hair.

She could not refrain from shuddering at sight of the gruesome thing her hand was still clasping, and she fully expected to see it covered with the blood of her victim. She looked at it closely. No, it was perfectly dry.

"It is a wig!" she exclaimed at last. "And what a wig! It is a perfect masterpiece!"

She turned it over carefully. The whole thing, from the blond curly hair to the exquisitely fine and delicate skin of the face, evidently made to adhere closely upon the human features from which it had been torn, to the carefully cropped fair beard, was the living image of the Prince of Mingralia.

Quietly she put it in her pocket and descended softly to the garden, and looked around carefully, expecting to find the body of her victim on the gravel; but, in spite of the terrible fall, and although there were signs of blood upon the path, the head of the Camorra had vanished.

Fortuna then quietly climbed over the hedge and walked slowly away from the Villa of Peace.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Abdication of a King.

THAT same evening, while the head of the Camorra was paying so dearly for his sudden whim of going like a thief to wrest Luisella Ardia from her peaceful retreat, the Prince of Mingralia was expected in vain by the host of friends he had invited to the reception and supper at Villa Osiris.

Midnight had struck, and, although the peculiarities of the prince were so well known as to have ceased to cause surprise, his prolonged and unexplained absence was beginning to preoccupy his guests, when the prince's first secretary received the following telegram from Florence:

Impossible to be home to-night. Present my apologies to my guests; beg them to enjoy entertainment in my absence.

MINGRALIA.

When this telegram was communicated to the Prince of Mingralia's guests, it was greeted with loud laughter and applause.

"Ha! ha! ha! Splendid!"

"The prince has played one of his jokes upon us!"

"Most comic! He probably was in Rome and in his haste got into the wrong train!"

"All great men are absent-minded."

"Really, it is most amusing!"

"This little story will go around all the Neapolitan drawing-rooms!"

"Let us have a good time since we

are here," suggested one of the guests. "This is clearly the prince's wish. He would be very sorry if we showed by our conduct that we had taken offense!"

"Of course, of course!" chimed in every voice. "We are all most pleased. Hurrah for the Prince of Mingralia, our absent host!"

Dancing began, only interrupted by a delicious supper, and continued until morning, when carriage after carriage rolled away from the Villa Osiris, bearing the tired but delighted guests of the popular Prince of Mingralia.

In the mean time the prince, or rather the head of the Camorra, or both, was locked in the mysterious pavilion which arose in the park of his Villa.

Bruised and limping from his terrible fall and shorn of the wonderful disguise which made him the Prince of Mingralia, he had slowly retraced his steps from the Villa of Peace to his own princely residence, stopping on the way to send a wire to one of his associates in Florence, asking him to telegraph from that city his apologies to the guests who were expecting him.

Fortuna Parascandolo followed him from afar and forced him to see her in the pavilion.

She looked at him steadily for a moment, then said very slowly:

"You cannot get away from me now, for the secret of your double life is in my hands."

The "King of Mezzocannone" did not answer, but gave a swift glance around the room. A collection of weapons hung on the wall within easy reach, and, with the rapidity of lightning, he caught up a dagger and was upon Fortuna. But she had guessed his intention, and her strong arms were ready for him.

There was a brief struggle, but the wounded, bruised, almost crippled man could not hold his own against his tall, wiry and powerful opponent. She soon wrested the dagger from him and threw it out of the window. Then, looking at him calmly, she said:

"It is no use for you to try that on with me. You had much better listen to what I have to say. Your secret will be safe with me if—"

"If what, you infernal hag?" hissed the "King of Mezzocannone."

"If you will consent to my conditions, of course," calmly went on Fortuna, not heeding his rage.

"What are they?" growled her vanquished foe.

"You must abdicate into my hands your leadership of the Camorra and I must be your successor!"

"How can I do that?" he asked, trying to evade her request.

"You know that your power over the society at present is such that any order from you will be executed. Besides, you have no alternative; for, if you refuse, to-morrow at daybreak the whole city will know that the munificent Prince of Mingralia and the head of the Camorra are the same man.

"If you prefer this inglorious way of closing your reign, you can take your choice. On the contrary, if you will accept my proposal I promise you absolute secrecy; you will have to leave Naples in forty-eight hours, but I allow you to take with you the priceless treasures you have accumulated in your princely residences. I do not want riches, I want power, and I want it only because it will give me the means of avenging my Gennarino.

"This cannot interest you now, and time is flying. I must go, but you must answer me first. Will you or will you not accept my conditions?"

Long before she had finished speaking the "King of Mezzocannone," the invincible monarch of the most extraordinary criminal organization of modern times, knew that he had been defeated and conquered, that this relentless woman had him completely in her power, and he decided to make the best of it.

Sitting down at a little writing-table, he quickly wrote out a document in which he announced his abdication and named his successor. He signed it hur-

riedly, like a man who wishes to end a painful situation, and pushed it over to Fortuna.

She read it slowly, carefully folded it, and thrust it in her bosom. Then she drew from her pocket the wonderful and treacherous disguise which had been his undoing and held it out to him.

"I have no further use for this," she said deliberately, looking at him steadily; "and you have—if the Prince of Mingralia is to act the last scene of his life in this city. Your highness, I will not trouble you further with my unwelcome presence. I, Fortuna Parascandolo, the lioness of the Vicolo Tagliaferri, and from this moment the head of the Camorra, wish you a good morning and a pleasant journey!"

The "King of Mezzocannone" did not answer or look at her. When he finally turned his head, she was gone.

He sighed deeply. So this was to be the end of all! But no, not of all; power was gone, but wealth would still be his. He must bestir himself; the time allowed him was short and much had to be done. He waited until he heard the last carriage of his guests drive away; then, donning his wig, he left the pavilion and arrived at the villa while the servants were still engaged in rearranging the rooms after the night's revelry.

Without showing himself to any of them he went to his rooms, and rang for his butler.

"You are faithful to me," he said, as the man entered and bowed low before him. "I can, therefore, tell you that we are about to leave for a long journey."

"Your highness has only to order."

"It is useless that my plans be known. I do not wish even my secretaries or friends to be acquainted with them," the prince went on.

"The most absolute secrecy will be observed, your highness."

"Very well. We will take four of my men with us. You can discharge all the other servants with an extra month's wages and they must leave at

once. The four men will be sufficient to help you to pack all the things I wish to take with me."

"What things does your highness mean?"

"Everything of value that is not too cumbersome."

"From the villa alone?"

"From both my winter and summer residences."

"Where shall I send the cases, your highness?"

"To my yacht."

"The cargo will be very heavy," respectfully objected the man.

"There will be another boat at my disposal. I will charter the Andalusia."

"At what time must the cases be on board, your highness?"

"By to-morrow at five everything must be ready. We will sail at six."

"Your highness's orders will be punctually and carefully carried out," said the faithful butler; "but shall I remain behind for a few days?"

"You must remain here for three or four days. I will expect you to join me at Port Said."

That was all. The prince waved his hand and the butler bowed himself out of the room.

He had abdicated from that moment the scepter of luxury, smartness, and philanthropy he had so long wielded in the city of Naples.

But even stranger appeared the fact that, a few days later, the "Great Mother" was hurriedly called together to be told that the "King of Mezzocannone" had also abdicated. The little despot had disappeared, but had left a document, addressed to his lieutenants and to all the sectional Camorra chiefs, in which he chose Fortuna Parascandolo as his successor, adding that, to his mind, she was the only person capable of saving the society from the terrible ordeals threatened by the present troubled times.

The Prince of Mingralia's flight—because such was the name given to that gentleman's sudden and complete disappearance—caused a great com-

motion among the enormous mass of his creditors. Their losses were valued at several hundreds of thousands of dollars and many a modest fortune was wrecked. A great part of the wealth of the most thrifty Neapolitan business concerns had been swallowed up by that small idol who, for several years, had been compared to a modern Cræsus, from whose liberality the city was to expect its regeneration.

Only when his true personality was revealed, and it became evident that the extraordinary man was gone for good, did the people become aware that all, high and low, had been the victims of an adventurer and of those who had been his instruments and satellites.

But, as in Naples everything always ends in a laugh, when the first soreness wore off, the people finished by laughing heartily of the imbroglia which was called the "Mingralia folly."

In fact, little by little, the Mingralia folly had become the theme of conversation wherever people met to take their afternoon coffee or ice, to smoke and discuss something less gloomy than the cholera, the death rate, disinfectants, lazarettos, etc.

For, in spite of the fact that the epidemic had fiercely assailed the popular quarters of the city, to which converged through numberless channels the charity of all the Italian sister cities, that part of the population which lived in healthy surroundings was almost immune and had not lost its irrepressible cheerfulness, and willingly spent an hour in pleasant conversation or strolling along the sunlit streets.

Nevertheless, the shadow of Death hung inexorably over the beautiful city.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Rosa Spina's Mission.

IT was now September. The day was declining in a purple sunset. Red clouds hung over the Capodichino Hill. In the fields the luxuriant vines were

heavily loaded with fruit, but no workers attended to the harvest. The usual silence of the road was broken by the loud rattling noise of a long line of funeral coaches, their ungreased axles creaking loudly in the descent and their wheels jolting over the stones brought down the hill by the first autumn showers.

Those who met the solemn procession fled at its approach, terrorized by the fear of possible contagion. From some of the houses bordering the road weeping women gesticulated, crying out that the end of the world was approaching since there was no longer any respect for the dead.

In fact, in the haste of clearing away the bodies of those who had succumbed to the epidemic before they became the cause of even greater mortality, the departed were rushed into the funeral vans with a seeming irreverence which deeply shocked the feelings of the people.

The Villa of Peace had not been respected by the hurricane of death. All the villages lying around the hill, where the inhabitants of some of the most thickly peopled quarters of the city had taken refuge since May, had now been violently assailed by the disease, which, in a few days had ravaged the whole section, destroying hundreds of lives.

Upon every road traveled almost uninterruptedly the funeral-vans loaded with bodies. The luxuriant fields were abandoned, the rustic farms deserted, as if death had made them silent forever.

In the villa itself, until lately so pretty and trim, everything had assumed the aspect of sorrowful neglect and decay. Weeds grew between the marble slabs of the terraces, the paths disappeared under a wild vegetation enlivened here and there by red berries and yellow flowers. The delicate hands which had cherished the blooming bowers of the home were still and silent beside the bodies of those who had been rescued by death from the torments of insanity.

Of all the women inmates of the sanatorium only Luisella Ardia, Rosa Spina, and a few others had been spared by the cruel malady.

It was the 25th of September, that terrible day which is remembered with horror in the history of great epidemics. The death-roll of that day in the city and suburbs reached the fearful figure of six thousand.

That very morning Don Michele Valanzaro had breathed his last.

Rosa Spina did not weep or give any outward sign of distress. Unknown to all, she quietly watched his body.

"I could not be yours in life," she murmured, kissing him tenderly for the first time; "I will at least be yours in death!"

She knelt beside him, leaning her head upon the cold form that had remained powerful, although twice struck by the arrow of death.

She hoped she, too, might be stricken, so as to have the supreme joy of lying beside him in the grave; but her wish was not to be granted.

The door opened softly, and Luisella Ardia entered the room. Rosa looked around, deeply annoyed at not being left alone with her dear one.

"What do you want? Why do you come here? He is mine only! Go away! Let me be with him!"

But the blind girl came up to her and said sweetly, with that inspired air which blindness gives to youth:

"Rosa, why are you clinging to the dead? You have health and sight and a brave, loving heart. If I had all these qualities I should attach myself to the living, to sufferers, to the poor, the sick, to comfort and help them."

"He was all my life," groaned Rosa.

"You can still give him yours by devoting it in his name to deeds of love."

"What is the use? I will probably not outlive him longer than to-night."

"How do you know *if* and *when* you will die? You are a creature of God!"

Luisella, meanwhile, had gone from her friend to the dead body, touching it lightly on the forehead with a motherly caress.

"Let us prepare him for his last sleep," she said.

Rosa mechanically obeyed and the two young girls moved quietly about the room, tenderly ministering to the silent form for the last time.

"Are you not afraid of contagion?" asked Rosa Spina.

"Contagion?" answered Luisella smiling. "No, I am not afraid. This is the tenth cholera victim I am assisting. Father has given me his permission. When *my* hour comes some one else will mercifully assist me in my last moments."

Rosa Spina was now weeping copiously, and against her expectations these tears were doing her good. A sense of profound peace was slowly entering into her bleeding heart, and as if her friend's words had touched a latent chord in her soul, she felt the birth within her of a new and unknown sentiment that was not an aspiration toward death. She realized vaguely with her primitive but generous nature that the scope of life should be something far vaster than attachment to one person, and she felt for the first time that, were she to be spared, it would still be possible for her to live and to find a balm for her grief in assisting the suffering of others.

So, when through the Villa of Peace ran the cry that there was a fresh case of cholera, she was the first to hasten to the bedside of the stricken man, an old and most unmanageable lunatic, whom it was very difficult to attend.

Michele Valanzaro's body was taken to the cemetery the next day, and Rosa asked and obtained permission to follow it to the last. Her hand did not tremble as she covered his form, which had been sewn in a linen shroud, with quicklime. Over the lime she threw handfuls of fresh flowers which, coming in contact with it, seemed to brighten into more vivid colors, and

she left him comforted by the thought that her love and tears had accompanied her beloved to the very last.

Rosa was not stricken by the fearful epidemic. Her vigorous health emerged triumphantly from the danger and her heart, which had heretofore been closed to every feeling outside her love for Valanzaro, now opened itself to pity for every form of human suffering. Under the guidance of Dr. Marotti she became the sister, the nurse, the comforting angel of all sufferers.

Her enthusiasm for charity was such as only a primitive nature like hers could give forth under the chastising effect of a great sorrow. Her ignorant, undisciplined and fanatical attachment for the handsome young Camorrist developed, upon his death, into a boundless and intelligent love for all those who are the disinherited, the weak, the suffering of the world.

The people to whom she ministered called her a saint; she was, instead, only a simple, deeply loving heart, to whom a great and all-absorbing passion was the only reason and possibility of life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Fortuna's Vengeance.

ROSA having given herself up to her mission of love, which often carried her very far from the Villa of Peace, Luisella Ardia felt deeply the loss of her companionship. She was often very sad and seemed to fall into long periods of strange lethargy, from which she would be awakened by acute physical suffering.

She would then run like a child in alarm to Dr. Marotti.

"Daddy, dear daddy, help me!"

She looked like a frightened dove, pursued by an unknown enemy, that seeks refuge in its nest.

"Daddy" would smile. He knew the reason of her physical pain and would try to comfort and reassure her

with loving words, such as one would use toward an alarmed child.

He knew that Luisella would soon be a mother, and inexpressibly painful as the thought was to him, who had no knowledge of her secret marriage with the "King of Mezzocannone," he felt only unbounded pity for the girl whose pure, sweet face told him she could not have been but an innocent victim.

Beside her, to assist, take charge and watch over her, now that the terrible epidemic took up almost all his time, Dr. Marotti had placed a woman who had been highly recommended to him—an elderly nurse with a motherly heart, scrupulous exactness, and unbounded devotion, he had been assured. She appeared, in fact, most excellently qualified for her position.

She was strong and active, with wonderful endurance and extremely careful as well as experienced in similar cases. So admirably did she perform her duties that the doctor's vigilance soon became less close, and being constantly called away by other duties, he was happy to think Luisella was being tenderly cared for in his absence.

Oh, if Dr. Marotti could only have known what an infernal wild beast he had placed beside his weak and tender little lamb!

That woman, who was the personification of deceit, cunning, and cruelty, was Fortuna Parascandolo, the most formidable enemy of Luisella Ardia, the mother of Gennarino, the lioness deprived of her cub and thirsting for vengeance.

To accomplish it, Fortuna, daughter and mother of Camorrists, descendant of famous criminals, had succeeded in a few months in seizing the supreme leadership of the Camorra. From the day of her son's assassination her one dream had been to become the head of that formidable criminal army in order to penetrate the mystery of that crime with the extraordinary means such a position would place at her disposal. Her end once attained

she would retire and go to die on the grave of her Gennarino, murmuring with her last breath:

"I have avenged you! Now I can die content!"

There had been a moment in which she had thought herself in the presence of her son's murderer, when she had participated in the assassination of Don Gennaro Consolo on the solitary shore of Torre del Greco, but after his supreme protestation of innocence before giving up his last breath, an invincible hatred against the "King of Mezzocannone" was awakened within her and she resolved to be his undoing.

From that day she followed him about like an invisible shadow, because she was extremely careful not to awaken the powerful little man's suspicions. She followed him in his wanderings through the substrata of Naples, and she had the good fortune of being acquainted, since the first day of her admission to the "Great Mother," with the head of the Camorra's secret passage to Antonio Spina's cavern.

That was the starting point of her investigations, which led her to ascertain that the "King of Mezzocannone" possessed the key to a secret subterranean entrance to the Prince of Mingralia's palace. The wig which had remained in her hand on the night in which she followed him to the Villa of Peace and thwarted his attempt to secure Luisella, had supplied the missing link to her chain of evidence, and led her to the startling conclusion that the popular Prince of Mingralia and the powerful "King of Mezzocannone" were but one person.

The prestige and power of the supreme leadership, which she had grasped in her strong hands, did not intoxicate Fortuna. Although she did not yet know who had been the material executor of her son's assassination, she had, since the scene of Gennaro Consolo's death, become convinced that Tore Santangelo must have been the man who ordered and directed the crime. The murdered Don Gen-

naro could not have deceived her in that supreme moment.

But Tore was so far it was impossible for her to reach him, especially as she had been unable to discover his whereabouts; and from the day in which she had listened unnoticed to Luisella's outburst before her dying father, Fortuna had felt that in some obscure way the girl must have been closely connected with the crime, even if it had not been actually her hand which had treacherously stabbed her darling boy.

She had haunted the Villa of Peace, trying to get at the unhappy girl to draw from her some unconscious confession which would confirm her suspicions, but the "King of Mezzocannone" had silently and constantly opposed her progress.

Once he was out of the way she found it a comparatively easy task to impose upon Dr. Marotti and obtain full charge of the helpless young creature upon whom she had decided to wreak her vengeance.

Many times, when she was alone with the poor blind girl, she would drop the mask of kindness she assumed before the nurses and doctor, would bend over her like a terrible inquisitor, questioning her furiously, torturing her with subtle cruelty.

"Tell me, you little viper," she would exclaim with passion, "who killed Gennarino Parascandolo, the handsomest lad in Naples?"

Other times she would shake her violently by the shoulders, saying fiercely:

"Listen to me and answer! Where is your lover? Where does that coward hide from the knife with which I will some day destroy him?"

But Luisella did not understand and would answer either with a smile, which inflamed more than ever the older woman's wrath, or would weep softly, saying:

"Don't hurt me; please don't hurt me! What harm have I done you?"

Still Fortuna did not give up hope, and she had conceived an infernal

plan. With inexhaustible patience she waited that the time should arrive for her to act upon it.

The weeks passed uneventfully for Luisella, who did not complain, but was only a little sadder than usual in that once so pretty villa now made dreary by death, beside a nurse who showed herself so cruel with her.

Her mind was as placid as a dead river in the presence of the mystery of motherhood, of which she was not aware, she would remain long hours as if in deep thought, and sometimes flashes of remembrance would illuminate some dark corner of her brain, revealing for a brief instant some episode of the forgotten past. But even before she could grasp it it was gone, and she was again plunged in complete darkness.

Little by little these flashes of intelligence came to her more frequently, and during the last days she was almost conscious of what was going to happen.

"I will be a mother! 'Daddy' has said I will be a mother!" Then: "What does *mother* mean?" she would ask herself anxiously several times a day.

The last day she suddenly seized Fortuna by the arms and asked, with that voice of hers that was the sweetest music:

"Tell me, will I see? Do you think I will see?"

In that question were anguish and hope in one. Hope of a supreme joy she now almost expected; anguish at the fear of a cruel disappointment.

Finally she became quite calm. She asked "Daddy" to remain in an adjoining room and to send her every now and then a word of encouragement, to which she would answer by throwing him a kiss on the tips of her fingers.

"Yes, yes, I will see—I am sure of it!"

What, who, did she expect to see? She herself did not know.

A cry rang out suddenly in the still room, in which Fortuna was deftly doing all that was necessary:

"Oh! Finally I see! I see!"

A tiny wail followed the cry.

"I see! I see! Child of my soul! My child! My child! Here, here, give him to me!"

And as he was not put in her arms, as she had not yet been given the supreme joy of pressing him to her breast, she half arose to seek him.

"Where are you? Where are you? I no longer hear your cry! My child! My baby!"

The hands of the blind girl, who, under the effect of a divine joy, had regained the sight of the mind, clasped feverishly the counterpane and her voice arose in a wild and piercing cry of despair.

Suddenly, alarmed at the sound, the doctor, who had been called away for a moment from the adjoining room, rushed back, but the door had been locked from within, and before it could be thrown down several minutes elapsed.

When he could finally reach the anguished girl, he saw that the other door of the room, which led to the terrace and the outer stairs, was wide open, and through it Fortuna, clasping her prey, had disappeared like a shadow.

In the darkened room rang the tortured, despairing cry of a soul rent with anguish:

"My child! My baby! My son!"

But Fortuna had long since swiftly passed out of the gates of the villa. As she ran into the road, and from there to the fields, holding tightly in her arms the innocent little being who was the price of her vengeance, the piercing cry of the agonized mother reached her ears.

She turned to look back for a second, then, quickening her step, her cruel face alight with a horrible joy, she exclaimed fiercely:

"As you took mine, so have I taken yours!"

A DESERT EDEN

A NOVELETTE

BY EDWIN L. SABIN

CHAPTER I.

The Entrance.



THE mesa waited, its flat gray-green top upward lifting above the yellowish desert country around about.

As it waited it gently shimmered, blending, in ethereal way, with the blue sky over. Its sides were very steep, it stood alone, as if it might be a gigantic fungus growth.

It was beautiful, for even a fungus sometimes is beautiful!

Far and near below all else was gravelly sand, dry, stiff brush and cactus; and that blue sky o'er-bending contained but a single spot.

The spot increased in size, and changed in shape, as if drawing onward.

Presently it resembled an enormous bird, seeking the mesa for its aerie.

And presently it was an aeroplane unskilfully handled, or with something wrong.

It swerved and jibed, tilted, and with an awkward flop (accompanied by feminine shriek and masculine exclamation), came down upon the mesa's upturned face.

A youth in white flannel trousers and white soft-silk shirt sprang first from the machine; he was followed, less agilely, by a rotund, red-countenanced man, in khaki trousers, leather puttees, white blouse, and white helmet.

The youth hastily helped a middle-aged, stout woman to extricate herself;

he then would have helped a girl—but she had helped herself.

The rotund man, puffing and evidently mentally expostulating, in the mean time was glaring defiantly about him, as if blaming the mesa for having got in his way.

"Anybody hurt?" he demanded curtly. "You, my dear?"

The middle-aged woman agitated her ample skirt, and adjusted her toque.

"I haven't found out yet," she said. "But I am sure I must be dreadfully shaken. I shall never fly in one of these machines again. I shall complain to the adjutant-general or to the Secretary of War. I insist upon my complaint being forwarded at once, Benjamin!"

She smoothed her ruffled plumage, and viewed the little company.

"Nonsense." In the tone was finality. He addressed the girl, whom the young man was eying anxiously. "You, my dear?"

"Not a bit."

"Examine the machine and report." This time he addressed the young man. About voice and manner was a military brusqueness, which was well explained by the eagle shoulder-straps and by the device upon the front of his helmet.

He was a colonel in the regular service—colonel of infantry. The machine was an army model. This, evidently, was an army party.

And here we may as well present at once to the reader of these lines Colonel Benjamin Bool, of the tradition-

ally gallant Forty-Fourth; Mme. Bool, his spouse, fairish, distinctly fattish, and fifty, joint head of the regiment; and Mistress Bowie Bool, fair, not fat, her name alone reminiscent of past years.

Old Fort Bowie of the Yuma trail had been the colonel's initiative fort, after the academy.

As for the young man, he was only Danny Daviess, not of "the service"—save Bowie's.

He poked here and there about the aeroplane—shaking it, surveying it, testing it.

A pleasant-featured young man he was, with tanned, smooth-shaven face, and muscular, alert figure.

"Nothing wrong, sir, as far as I can see," he reported.

"Then what made it wobble so?" asked the girl.

"Bowie, if you cannot choose your language better, do not talk," reproved her mother. "Yes," she continued severely to the young man. "If there is nothing wrong, what made it wobble so, as my daughter expresses herself?"

"The engine missed. It needs tightening."

With a quick, sidelong glance at the girl, whose eyes seemed to twinkle demurely in response, he again bent over the machine, examining the motor. This he slowly revolved by hand, listening.

"Fix it up. We'll get out of here," ordered the colonel testily. "Bless my soul, what a place to land."

"It was better than down below, papa," corrected the girl. "We didn't have so far to go."

"Bowie," reproved her mother; and majestically opened a parasol.

The young man had thrown the battery and had started the motor. He shut it off again, and reexamined.

"Well, well?" prompted the colonel impatiently.

The young man raised his head, and with back of blackened hand gingerly wiped his forehead.

"There's a bolt gone."

"Where did it go to?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir."

"Put in another. Where's your tool-bag?"

The young man smiled.

"I don't think a tool-bag would carry such a part. There are plenty of nuts and washers, but not one of these little connecting bolts."

"Did you look?"

"Yes, sir."

The colonel's face grew redder, and he swelled indignantly.

"Outrageous!" he declared. "This shall be looked into. Make a mental note of it, my dear."

"I shall appeal to the Secretary of War," announced Mrs. Bool.

"Mama!" expostulated the girl.

"The idea! Any machine goes wrong some time."

"Gross negligence," sputtered the colonel. "You will consider yourself under arrest, sir, for not having your apparatus in condition for service." He stamped and fumed.

"But, papa! You can't arrest a civilian, off the reservation," protested the girl. "And Danny is our guest. Lieutenant Kunke had the machine out last, you know. It worked beautifully then."

"Bowie!" reproved her mother. "You must not oppose your father."

"All right, colonel," answered the young man. "I'm arrested. Bring on the drum-head jury. But I plead not guilty. We took the machine on somebody else's say-so. I'm very sorry, however, that you and Mrs. Bool and Bowie have this inconvenience. I picked out the best landing-place in sight."

The colonel snorted.

"Explore the plateau, sir, and report its topographical features, practicability of descent, etc. We must get help."

The young man trudged away, cheerfully whistling. The girl gazed rather wistfully after.

When he glanced back he saw the

little party, conducted by the colonel, making careful way through the brushy growth toward a couple of piñon trees.

The two elders, he well knew, were toiling and perspiring; the girl would be lithesome and cool and dainty, as always.

She waved at him quickly. He waved back, a gladness in his heart.

She was a dear girl, was Bowie; dear to him, dear to Lieutenant Kunke (confound him), dear to sundry others.

He sighed; he was not a West Pointer—he was entitled to no straps or stripes.

However, being a healthy, wholesome young man, he put infinite faith in the future and proceeded upon his mission.

The mesa was perhaps forty acres in extent, slightly undulous, with some sage, bushes of species unknown but flowering with yellow and purple; a few piñons, and a clump of gigantic cedars—gnarled, squat, thick-trunked.

No bees hummed, no birds twittered or flitted; a perfect quiet reigned; under the blue, cloudless sky the mesa lay as enthralled.

Reaching the edge, the young man halted, surveying.

The edge was cut sheer, like the edge of a precipice. Down three hundred feet lay spread the desert, calm, purplish yellow, a vast tinted Persian carpeting mellowed by age, extending on and on. Between it and the sky nothing moved.

It strangely wooed; but descent to it, from this point of the mesa, was manifestly impossible.

As the young man's eyes traveled over it, and right and left along the brink upon which he stood, his ears caught a rustle behind him.

He turned, to see the girl near at hand. She smiled brightly upon him, and advanced to his side.

"Hello!" he said, much content.

"They're both asleep," she explained. "Mama under her parasol,

and papa with a handkerchief over his face. But I wanted to explore." She gazed out. "Oh, isn't it wonderful," she breathed. "I love the desert."

"At a distance," he supplemented. "I thought that maybe we could place the post, from up here; but I don't see it."

"How far did we come, do you think?"

"Not more than eighty or a hundred miles. The thing zigzagged, so it's hard to tell. The post ought to be somewhere off there, in that haze along the horizon."

They peered. No army post differentiated itself among the misty outlines of far, nebulous up-lifts, before.

"How still everything is," spoke the girl wonderingly, not moving. "If it was not for papa's snore—hear him, clear here?—we might be the only people alive in the world."

The young man would have said: "I wish we were." He covertly eyed her aslant, as she stood, lips parted, poised at the edge of the mighty void—a white figure like to a shining priestess from the sun.

Yet about Bowie Bool, petted daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Bool of Fort Roosevelt, was nothing psychical. She was a wholesome lass of real flesh and blood, as spoony subalterns had ascertained.

Checking fancy with fact, the young man only said:

"Let's follow the edge along. I'm on special survey duty, you know. Your father wants a map of the mesa."

She started, out of her girlish reverie; they strolled on together.

With few indentations, the mesa's verge ran abrupt and hopeless; nowhere less than the three or four hundred feet above the tinted plain surrounding, and nowhere proffering descent by anything save parachute or wings.

"Well!" declared the young man finally. "We're marooned, all right, unless I can fix that blamed machine."

They had paused once more.

"But there must be some place to get down," she protested.

"Where?" he challenged.

"I don't see what papa expects when we do get down."

"I, either," he replied succinctly. "But I suppose I'm to find the post or meet somebody."

"Oh, Danny!" She gazed upon him uncertainly. "But you might get lost."

"I'm condemned for drum-head court, anyway, you know," he grinned.

"We'll stay and wait. I'd rather wait up here than down below."

"But the dickens is," he objected, hesitatingly, "about water."

"You can take some with you. There's an olla in the machine."

"But the rest of you. You can't stay long up here without water."

"N-no," she assented dubiously. "I suppose not. Maybe there is water, though."

He shook his head.

"Not on these mesas. They don't have springs very often. Anyway, I'm not down yet."

She shuddered.

"Isn't it still!" she reiterated. "I believe it's enchanted. We're on an enchanted island. Perhaps I'd better find papa and mama again before they're changed into trees or something."

"I'll finish the survey. You're not afraid? If you are I'll go with you."

"No. There aren't any snakes—are there?"

"Don't think so. We haven't seen any signs. There's nothing alive except us."

"Maybe we aren't. Maybe we've 'passed out' and have been translated to the mesas of the blest. I'll find papa and ask him."

With a backward smile over her shoulder, making glad his heart and flushing his cheek, she tripped away.

He watched her anxiously.

Presently, seeing her white gown safely passing through the low bushes, he turned to pursue his course along the mesa verge.

He had almost completed the circuit, but had found no likely descent, when he noted the girl returning, from a new direction.

She came hastily, excitedly, nevertheless with gay and not apprehensive beckoning wave of the hand. So, pleausurably expectant, he advanced to meet her.

Her fresh face was aglow, her eyes shone, her red lips were apart.

"Oh, Danny! There is water! I've found it. And there's something else. Come. I'll show you."

Taking him by the hand (an act much to his liking), she led him inland (so to speak), or back from the desert sea at their feet, until assured that he was following her she fain must transfer her clasp, for they were entering a clump of the shaggy, thick-trunked cedars, whose branches constantly clutched at them.

"Look!" she cried jubilantly.

The cedars opened, to fringe either side of a wedge-shaped rocky little depression. Here was indeed water; held in a cup made by human hands.

A semicircle of the rocks (which were mainly flat, hard sandstone, dark red) had been piled like a low dam, and rudely cemented.

As intimated, it was not a wide pool, but it seemed, by its placid darkness, quite deep. No veriest ripple disturbed its surface. It shared the enchantment of the mesa. All the spot was very quiet.

About the pool, surprising in itself, was something strange and brooding.

"A reservoir. That's an old Indian reservoir, sure," murmured the young man. "This mesa must have been inhabited. I suppose the water collects here from rains."

"The mesa's inhabited now," she whispered eagerly. "I'll show you more."

Eager as a child, she led him on again, this time by the arm, past the pool, and down a slight slope.

Pressed back upon either hand the cedars opened more; within the hollow

of their kindly embrace, at the foot of the slope, full in the sun, was a garden.

It was a garden of recent cultivation; a small garden containing some hills of beans, some squash and melon vines, several rows of corn—all laden with promise of harvest.

A hoe made from a crooked, pointed branch, lay as if thrown carelessly down; the reddish earth had been stirred and crushed of late; from the reservoir above a shallow ditch extended to the head of the garden for irrigating; but by evidence of a brown clay jar lying carelessly like the hoe, the water was being more sparingly dealt out.

This was all: the fruiting beans and squash and melons; the rows of corn; the idle hoe; the waiting jar; the recently stirred earth; perfect quiet, and never a print of foot.

The young man thrust a finger into the soil beside a squash-stalk.

"Damp," he said. "It may be seepage from the reservoir, but things look as though somebody had been watering."

The girl stood a little closer beside him, while they gazed and listened.

The sun shone down from the blue sky, the broad old cedars clustered about, the air was warm and pungent, but their own breathing was the only motion.

The place might have been an Eden; they the sole invaders.

The young man spoke.

"By Jove, but this *is* queer! If anybody gets up here to tend this garden, I'd like to know how and where from. If he gets up, we can get down."

"Do you think the garden is tended, really, Danny?"

"It's a regular Pueblo or Moqui or Mohave garden; but I don't see any footprints; do you?"

She shook her head, wonderingly. She slipped her arm within his, half frightened.

"And the earth is damp and cultivated. If it wasn't for the cultivation, then we could believe the patch was an

old abandoned one. The dampness might come from the seepage. Only, the rains that fill the reservoir would wash out down here. The hoe and the jar mean nothing. They could have been lying out this way for a thousand years. It's mighty mysterious. Maybe there's a cave or hollow tree."

"The mesa's all so mysterious; isn't it, Danny?" she faltered, clinging to him. "I feel as if we were being watched; I know somebody else is up here besides us four."

She shivered.

His eyes rapidly searched the cedars around about.

They were sparsely set, the view beneath their branches and between their trunks was easy, the sun shone, the quiet maintained: it seemed impossible that any human being could be in covert.

Outside the cedar grove extended the open, with only occasionally a piñon tree or solitary cedar.

He covered the girl's hand with his own, reassuringly.

"I hope there is somebody here," he said. "Anyway, we've found water and food. That's lucky if we're to be marooned up here long. Let's move about a bit more, and perhaps we'll discover something else. Tired?"

He looked upon her: she turned her face to him bravely. In its flush and girlish appeal it was a very kissable face, but he refrained.

"No. Only I wouldn't want to be left alone. I wouldn't be by myself now for anything. I know we're being watched."

Circuiting the garden patch they wandered to the other side of the reservoir.

Here the slight slope (the reservoir appeared to occupy a crater in the side of a little knoll) fell sharply, cut at the base by a stratum of shelf rock.

This stratum explained why the water was held so securely; rock formed the bottom of the reservoir.

It furnished another fact, also; under the stratum, projecting near the

base of the slope, was a human habitation!

This was a shallow cave or cell; the reddish earth had been hollowed out, accentuating the shelf projection; dried cedar fronds, grass, and brush had been spread for carpeting and couch; a small pile of ashes before the entrance told of fire. A few fragments of squash, hard and dry, told of food. The earth-walls of the cave were smooth and firm; but no path led to the spot. Yet the cave had all the appearance of having been occupied within a day. Outlined in the rear wall was a cross.

The invaders again stood startled.

"Here's where the gardener lives, but he isn't at home," remarked the young man, breaking the moment of suspense. Again they listened, straining for sound.

"What do you think of all this, anyway, Bowie?"

"Oh, Danny!" she exclaimed, palpitant, clutching his sleeve. "Let's go back. Something may have happened to papa and mama. I want to be with them. I'm afraid."

Feeling a little thrill himself, he turned with her, and away they hastened (not without that uneasy sensation, expectant rather than apprehensive, which was growing more and more) out of the cedars and across the bushy growth, to find the colonel and lady. A fin or plane of the air-ship stuck up, guiding them, and presently a reassuring sound was encountered.

The girl exclaimed happily.

"They're there. Papa's snoring. Shall we tell them?"

"Would it make your mother nervous?"

"Yes, it would."

"We might wait, then. We can tell them of the water, and of wild squash and corn."

"All right." Again she laughed; enthusiasm had succeeded fear. "It's almost like being shipwrecked on a desert island. I've always wanted to be cast away."

"With me?"

"Well—with somebody like you, Danny."

She cast him an arch look, demurely fond.

As if aroused by their approach, Mrs. Bool suddenly emerged from underneath her lopping parasol; and severely challenging criticism, straightened her bonnet, adjusted her hair, and literally or figuratively put herself together while awaiting their arrival.

The colonel's handkerchief fell away, and he also (with sundry grunts and blinkings) connected himself again with the world.

"Bowie!" reproved Mrs. Bool, in greeting. "I hope you have not got overheated. Where have you been?"

"We've explored the mesa." The girl sat down by her mother and patted her plump hand.

"Well, sir?" prompted the colonel, apoplectic with his efforts to awaken, addressing the young man.

His blouse was bulging up; he did not appear comfortable; but he was militant and military.

"Assisted by your daughter I have made the circuit of the plateau and have found no available descent. We have traversed the interior also, and have encountered no human being. The surface is mainly flat, with bushes, piñons, and cedars. The extent is about forty acres; shape, oblong. I am glad to say, moreover, that Miss Bowie discovered a pool or reservoir of water, and a patch of squash and corn. So we will not suffer."

"Not suffer! In this desolate spot, far aloof from all comforts," groaned Mrs. Bool dismally.

"There are no snakes, mama, anyway," proffered the girl, "or any spiders."

"Scarcely a bee or fly!" added the young man.

The colonel struggled and puffed and stood.

"Try the wireless, sir," he ordered. "A pencil, my dear, and paper."

His wife dutifully fumbled in her hand-bag and produced them.

The colonel heavily wrote (the hand-bag his table), and passed the despatch over.

Ship disabled on small, isolated mesa northwest fort eighty miles. Uninhabited. Water, squash, corn found. No casualties, but great distress. Send Kunke immediate in other ship.

Bool.

The young man read, and nodding with a "Very well, sir," strode to set up an army portable wireless field station, the colonel toiling after

Mrs. Bool watched them hopefully, and with a groan, then surveyed her daughter.

"This is terrible, terrible!" she announced. "What are we to do, Bowie? We cannot stay on this dreadful place. It will kill your father, and probably me."

"But, mama!" expostulated Bowie, interested in the erection of the collapsible pole. "There's water, and a regular garden. We shan't suffer. Maybe we can make a squash-pie."

"If Lieutenant Kunke doesn't come, where will we sleep?" moaned Mrs. Bool dismally.

"Right here."

"Bowie!" Mrs. Bool's voice was tragic. "It won't be decent."

"It will be fun, mama. We can't possibly be cold. We can spread our lap-ropes and the men's coats over us. I'll love it. I hope Lieutenant Kunke doesn't come till morning. I've always had to sleep in a tent before when I've been out."

"I will catch cold. Your father will catch cold. We neither of us can stand a draft on the head."

"You can wrap your heads up and stick them under your parasol."

"What a plight! I wonder if they can't reach the Secretary of War. It will kill your father. An uninhabited country, not even a cot: water—squash. He has not been subjected to such exposure since he was a captain. He never drinks strange water, dear. In fact, water is bad for him. And he can't abide squash. I remember I once

made him a squash-pie and he wouldn't eat a mouthful of it. So don't mention such a thing in his presence."

"He brought his flask. I saw it. He can pour some of that in the water, can't he?" asked Bowie anxiously.

"Yes, dear. But such a small flask." Mrs. Bool sighed painfully. "And no bed. I ache already. Do you think they've succeeded in reaching the post with their message? Lieutenant Kunke will be frantic. That is one satisfaction; he will come instantly, on your account."

"Y-yes," admitted Bowie, demurely, but not all enthusiastic. "I suppose he will."

"I'm sure if he had been at the helm or the rudder, or whatever you call it, we never should have got into such straits," declared her mother. "What can a civilian know of any army machine?"

"But Danny does know!" asserted Bowie. "He knows more than Lieutenant Kunke, for that matter. Lieutenant Kunke couldn't use a wireless. Danny's had a fine technical education. And if Lieutenant Kunke hadn't left the machine in bad shape we wouldn't have broken down."

Her mother only groaned and shifted.

"Anyway, if nobody comes we've got enough lunch; and it will do papa good to fast a little. He's too fat."

At the wireless station the colonel sat by, expectantly, while having donned his apparatus, the young man again and again sent forth the call for the fort.

"Dead as a door-nail," he reported cheerfully to the colonel. "Can't raise a thing. But I'll keep trying."

The colonel fumed and hitched, his face waxing redder.

"Whole damn post asleep. Playing croquet. That's what the service is coming to. I'll complain of this. I'll embody it in a special report. Leaving an important detachment, commanding officer and all, to perish, while they're junketing. Damme, it's outrageous.

Squash and stagnant water! By gad, when I was a subaltern like that Kunke, and my girl went out and didn't come back, I was on my toes till she did, I was! He ought to be right at the station, himself."

"But he doesn't read Morse, does he, colonel?"

"No. Young officers these days don't read anything but—Oppenheim. Oppenheim, by George! But he ought to be there, anyway. He ought to be anxious. Can't you get anybody?"

The young man shook his head—clamped like a central's.

His eyes were upon the key, as monotonously he issued the call, or varied by pausing for response.

"Not a soul, eh?"

"Key's absolutely dead, sir. I can't explain, but seems to me the waves don't travel ten feet. There's something peculiar about this atmosphere."

"Tremendously still, eh?"

"Stillness doesn't count. But it's shut-in, isolated like the mesa. Nothing coming and nothing going. I think I'd better wait and try again later. By evening we can raise somebody."

"Supper's ready," floated to them the silvery voice of Bowie.

"Gad," muttered the colonel, disconsolately, but with a certain resolution as if facing a crisis, as he gruntingly arose: "it may be the last supper I ever eat, too, unless that relief-party reaches us in a hurry! I'm past squash and water days; and I can't fit my back to a hollow like a young sprig just out of the academy."

"Bowie has fixed us our lunch for supper, Benjamin," announced Mrs. Bool solemnly. "It is very lucky that we brought it. She has fetched your flask. You must use it sparingly, for the olla is half empty, and you may have to disinfect that dreadful pool water. Did you talk with the post?"

The colonel, her husband, snorted.

"No. What does the post care about a colonel missing? All it cares about is the mess layout, and the last color for full-dress uniform!"

"Well," remarked his wife, "let us be thankful for what we have." And with sigh implying "eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die," she unfolded a napkin over her ample lap and viewed the teapot.

The tea, steeped over the alcohol-lamp, the sandwiches, etc., served with the utensils out of the compact "picnic" assortment carried by the aeroplane, made a supper which, despite the forebodings of the elder Bool twain, would seem entirely adequate.

When, with a grunt which might mean thanks or protest, the colonel finally wiped his mustache, and discarding his napkin, tentatively surveyed a cigar which he drew from a case, the sun was just touching the northwestern horizon.

"I suppose," said Bowie, dubiously, "the dishes ought to be washed. Will it be easier to take them to the water, or to bring the water here?"

"Oh, wash them in the morning," interposed the colonel, her father. "We can't fuss with dishes now. Try the post again, sir. There's liable to be somebody there at mess-time. But if the operator's eating, don't interrupt him. Let him finish." And with this sarcastic addendum the colonel lighted his cigar.

"We'll wash them by moonlight, then," proffered Bowie alertly.

The young man had returned to the wireless apparatus and was persistently signaling.

"Spark's working well," he called presently; "but nothing comes."

"Keep at it," ordered the colonel. "By gad, they've got to answer!"

"I shall certainly complain to the War Department, I shall write to the Secretary direct," declared Mrs. Bool.

The sun set, leaving all the west aglow with a golden tint. Opposite, advancing its banner of silver, upfloat-ed the great full moon.

Upon the mesa the silver and the gold mingled. The stillness was as intense as ever. Mesa and desert and sky alike were without life.

A chill was wafted about through the thin air, and Mrs. Bool shivered.

"I'm cold," she complained.

"Get your mother a wrap," commanded the colonel to his daughter.

"Perhaps we'd better make up the beds, colonel," suggested the young man. "Then Mrs. Bool can lie down. She must be tired. I believe I got the post, but I'm not sure."

"What made you think so?"

"Felt like it. That's all I can say. Anyway, I put the message through, on the chance. I can try again. I left the sounder so that if anything comes in I'll know."

"They ought to be calling us; they ought to be calling us, sir," grumbled the colonel. "Worse case of negligence I ever met. It's a court-martial offense. The operator ought to be shot. They all ought to be shot, every one of them."

"But, papa! It isn't late. They wouldn't think anything about it. We might be enjoying a ride by moonlight," reminded the girl, with a spontaneous merry laugh.

The colonel grunted. Mrs. Bool plaintively groaned.

"I'd better spread the beds right where you are, under the piñon, hadn't I, colonel?" queried the young man, briskly overhauling the aeroplane effects.

He returned with an armful of wraps—steamer-rugs, mackintosh lap-robes, etc. The girl helped him sort them. Mrs. Bool looked on apathetically.

The colonel endeavored to preserve a stoical calmness, as befitted an old campaigner. But his cigar puffed rapidly, and with gingerly touch he located the tender points of his external anatomy.

"There," prompted the girl, surveying the so-called bed as carefully laid out. "Now, mama, you and papa can turn in right away, so you won't catch cold. Danny and I'll be washing the dishes at the pool."

Mrs. Bool allowed herself to be

tucked in, under steamer-rug, her head upon a rolled-up coat and beneath her opened parasol.

The colonel half reclined, cloaked in a mackintosh, his helmet pulled well down. He wheezed, but appeared resigned to the worst.

"Don't be gone long, dear," cautioned Mrs. Bool. "Really, you could let the dishes rest until morning."

"It's such a lovely night. And I don't want to go to bed yet."

"Try the wireless again, sir," murmured the colonel.

The young man did.

"Nothing doing, sir," he reported after he had vainly sent the spark again and again into the vastness overhead.

"I don't see what's the matter with the confounded thing. It works all right at this end."

The colonel snorted drowsily. In his snort was indignation, resentment, and contempt, boding ill for the other end.

The girl had strolled from the camp to the edge of the mesa, not far, and was standing looking out. Leaving the instrument the young man joined her. That utter quiet still prevailed.

The night had set in; all traces of the sun had vanished from the sky; the full moon, large and rotund and shining white, was well up, flooding earth and sky.

Below the mesa edge the desert was exposed almost as plainly as by day, save that its tint was silvery, not ruddy yellow. Outward it stretched, silent, glamorous, ghostly, as pure in its chaste transformation as the girl herself, midway stationed thus between it and the spangled, silver-flooded dome above.

Neither the man nor the girl spoke for a few moments; they gazed out into the transparent sea, of which the desert might have been the bottom.

The girl's parted lips emitted a sigh of content.

"Beautiful, beautiful," she murmured. "It's fairy-land—we're all—enchanted!"

"Not even a coyote barks. We're insulated from the world."

She sighed again, happily.

"Who cares for the world, far away? What do New York and Chicago and railroad trains and shops and army-posts amount to in the desert? Only—I suppose we've got to wash those dishes!"

They turned at the camp to gather up the supper utensils. The colonel already was snoring; Mrs. Bool, entirely concealed, was breathing gutturally and significantly.

CHAPTER II.

A Startling Discovery.

IN the moonlight the two young people crossed the mesa for the reservoir. Their footsteps through the brush was the only sound abroad. Warm and mysterious by day, cool and mysterious was the mesa by night.

All objects were revealed, but in a different phase. Both in white, the twain moved amid it like happy spirits of a realm which none else knew.

"I wonder if we'll see anybody this time," breathed the girl. "Perhaps the owners of the garden come up here nights to work."

"*Quien sabe?*" he answered softly. "They could show us the way down then."

"I don't want to go down," she retorted wilfully. "I want to stay. I could be perfectly happy here for a long, long time. It is such perfect peace."

"Well, we'll stay then," he assured; "if we can persuade your father and mother."

"Sh!" she cautioned. "Here's the pool, isn't it? We mustn't disturb the brownies."

Threading the cedars, they peered intently, walking expectantly; but the grove proffered no fluttering figures; and when they emerged they found the pool glistening by moonlight as lonely as in the sunlight.

For a moment they gazed, waiting; the girl's hand slipped into the man's.

"Let's go on to the garden," she whispered; and setting down their dishes they proceeded.

All illuminated by the generous silver shine, in its open plot lay the garden; squash and melon and corn and beans uplifting as if entranced by the splendor of the night.

But the plot was as deserted as before; no gardener—mortal or semi-mortal—appeared amid the waiting rows.

The twain paused; the young man advanced, inspecting closer. He stopped.

"Has somebody been here?" called the girl softly.

"Come and see," he bade, straightening.

She advanced to his side.

"They've been watered!" She spoke with awe. "They have, haven't they, Danny? They're wetter than when we were here before."

"And never a footprint; that's the queer part of it. But they certainly have been watered. Moreover, the hoe is gone!"

The two pondered, standing close together, eyes and ears alert to pierce the mystery surrounding.

"I'll dare you to look into the cave," whispered the girl.

"Will you stay here?"

She answered instantly with sudden alarm.

"No. I'll go, too."

The cave would solve the enigma!

By day it had been empty; but now in the night-time—what? The inmate would be at home. He had watered his garden; that was proof of his presence; the cave was of course his sleeping-place.

The young man hesitated.

Alone he would not. But Bowie was with him, dependent upon him, and he was weaponless. He had not even a pocket-knife; the whole party was defenseless.

However, if the mesa's inhabitant or

inhabitants were unfriendly, why had they not attacked the party before? Exposed to any eye, he and Bowie had crossed the mesa unmolested.

Or was the attack planned for this very moment, when a portion of the camp was asleep, and the other portion absent?

He listened; no sound of blow or voice came from the piñon clump. Peace reigned.

"Shall we?" pleaded the girl, tremulously. "Let's. Then we'd know."

"Come on," he yielded. She was right. But for the instant he wished that she was not there. She was so precious to defend.

Hand in hand, they circuted, on tip-toe. No sound beyond themselves could be heard. The cave opened, in front of them; from their distance they halted, to reconnoiter. The moonlight fell broad and reassuring, flooding the shelf-rock and penetrating the shallow cell; all was apparently as when inspected in the afternoon. Man and girl advanced boldly; the cave was empty.

"I'll be darned," muttered the young man. He was disappointed. Having taken the risk, he would like to have made it count.

"So will I, Danny," agreed the girl. Again sudden alarm seized her. She felt the fear that he had felt. "Oh, supposing the cave person is at the camp! I thought I heard manna call! Let's go out where we can see."

In a sudden flurry of trepidation she fled for some vantage-point outside the cedars, scurrying like a wraith, so swiftly that he did not catch up with her until they were in the open.

Hence they had view unobstructed, across to the piñons; they could see the planes of the air-ship—the trees marking the camp—even Mrs. Bool's parasol. All was undisturbed, somnolent.

Throughout the length and breadth of the mesa nothing stirred; truly it was a spot enchanted.

The girl's breath subsided, with a long respiration of relief.

"They're all right," she said. "I don't see how there can be anybody up here except ourselves. The garden tends to itself; it's an automatic garden. We'll wash the dishes now; shall we, Danny? You can wipe."

"We must be sparing of the rinsing," he said. "This reservoir is priceless. Water in this country can't be replaced. It doesn't flow in as it flows out, like Eastern rivers."

They sat at the marge of the pool, in the moonlight. Surely an occupation rated so prosaic never had surroundings so poetic.

The brilliant silver shine like the tropics, the quiet, the burly cedars, their squat, shaggy trunks and gnarled boughs in bold relief and casting black shadows, the brushy level beyond, the haunted garden near, the sense of elevation above the sleeping desert, combined for an effect of peace and aloofness. It might be but a dream.

The girl daintily polished the few dishes with a wet napkin and the man wiped them with a dry one.

She ceased, and sitting upright, on the low embankment, with hands folded in her lap, gazed afar.

"Don't you think the post will send for us right away?"

"If they get the message. But that wireless acts queer. As I said, nothing comes in, and I'm not at all certain that anything goes out."

"They'll send some time, though."

"Oh, yes; as soon as they find we're missing. But this little mesa is only a speck on the desert. They'll have considerable scouting to do."

"Poor papa and mama."

"Poor Kunke, too." He shot this jealous shaft, and relented. "But I'll take back whatever I've said of him. He's all right. And I have him to thank for landing us here."

"Why?" She spoke dreamily.

"What why?"

"I mean—"

"He left that loose bolt in the machine, didn't he? I knew it was loose before we'd gone twenty miles; and

then it was too late to turn back. We had to make the best landing that we could."

"He's a West Point graduate, though."

"I've had that dinned into me, before."

"I'm not 'dinning,' Danny," she reproached, gently.

"I know it—dear. You're an angel. So are your fond father and mother. If I were an army man would you marry me, Bowie?"

She shook her head, silently. His heart failed him; it was hard, as heretofore, to fathom her attitude. He loved her—God, how he loved her; if she loved him 'twas apparently in a different way.

They always had been boy and girl together; to be man and woman together seemed difficult.

"You'd rather be a sister, I suppose." He tried to speak evenly. "That's mighty nice."

She slipped her hand into his. He clung to it hungrily. How fair she looked.

"Don't be mean, Danny," she pleaded. "We've threshed all this out before; haven't we? Let's just only enjoy ourselves."

"Are you engaged to Lieutenant Kunke? I want to know."

She flushed, but turned upon him defiantly.

"I shan't tell you. Are you going to act horrid?"

He released her hand, and made a movement as if to stand.

"If I stay I'll bore you. There's only one thing I can talk about and that's ourselves. Kunke probably would quote poetry. Perhaps we'd better go back. I ought to try that wireless some more."

"Don't be mean, Danny dear," she pleaded again. "Ought we to go? Maybe we ought, then."

She did not stir, save to gaze up at him.

With sudden overmastering impulse he stooped; her face did not avert,

their lips met, she let him; her's even responded to the pressure of his—responded frankly, girlishly.

As he straightened, a bit unsteady, she smiled up at him tremulously.

"That wasn't wrong, I think," she said. He hoped that it was. "Go ahead, Danny dear. You can carry the dishes. I want to sit a minute more."

"But I can't leave you alone, Bowie," he protested. "I'll stay too, then."

She shook her head.

"No; please go, and try the wireless. I'll come right away. But I want to sit and think. I'm not afraid. Nothing could live up here on such a night, and be harmful. The spirits are all good spirits. I'll call, if I need help."

"Well." He gathered the dishes, and started.

Once he looked back.

She was in the same posture, motionless, entranced, white in the white moonshine.

He strode on, his bitterness gaining the ascendancy. Probably she was thinking of Kunke; "mooning" about him.

The camp was dormant, its only symptoms the gurgles and the snores.

He settled down to the wireless, stubborn in his determination to get the post and bring Kunke and succor; the one for Bowie, the other for the rest including himself.

To be here with Bowie was maddening.

Brooding over his trials (confound it, he had known Bowie all his life; but now that she was grown up, that sister relationship was insufficient) he applied himself to the instrument. But his reiterated signal brought no result.

The stillness enfolded like a transparent canopy—a stillness, an immobility which seemed uncanny. In the midst of his efforts he aroused himself with a start.

He had been expecting Bowie to approach; he had been anticipating the rustle of her steps; a vague uneasiness

overcame him; he arose and looked; he did not glimpse her.

He dropped the apparatus, his heart throbbing.

Could anything have happened to her? Or had she fallen asleep? He *must* get her!

Retracing his steps, through the enchantment, he waxed more and more in haste.

No white figure advanced across the brush, to meet him!

His eyes swept the cedars, and the vicinity of the pool, and did not locate her. He "coo-eeed," softly; she did not answer. He was thoroughly disturbed.

Threading quickly the cedars, he arrived at the reservoir; she was not there. The spot was empty of her. She was not in the garden.

Calling as before, he hurried, frightened but resolute, around to the cave.

She was not there, either!

This was a relief—although he had hoped, also, to find her there safe and asleep. But the magic realm of pool, garden, and cave was all untenanted.

He returned again to the spot at the edge of the pool where he had left her—where he had kissed her—where she had been so fair and sweet and dear—and called:

"Bowie! If you're hiding, for Heaven's sake come out. You've got me scared, dear."

No voice replied.

"Bowie! Oh, Bowie!"

He examined the ground for trace of intruding foot, or for struggle. He could find nothing. This was reassuring, yet it was alarming, too.

It only increased the mysteries of the place. What had tilled the garden may have taken her!

He began to roam, searching the cedars, thence the open outside, for the glint of her white garb. It was impossible that she should or could be concealed! The moonlight made all things (except her) distinct.

He bethought of the reservoir. Perhaps she was in it!

With a moan he ran like a wild person. He ought to have investigated it before. It was deep enough, if she had fainted or had been thrown in unconscious.

Circling the brink, kneeling and peering, fearfully, for a glimpse of whiteness, he at last sighed, gladdened. The bottom, under the clear water, was innocent of tragedy, thank God!

Next the thought of a fall from the mesa edge smote him.

He fairly ran from point to point, leaning over to gaze down. The moon was high, spreading its beams evenly on all sides, so that he could see the sands below. And finally he was convinced that she was not there.

Silver desert, like silvery mesa, gave no trace of her.

He stood, breathing quick, listening, looking, his mind, like his eyes, darting vainly hither and thither.

"Whoo-ee! Bowie!" he called.

What the dickens! Where was she? No movement, nor even an echo, responded to him. The tranquil world slept.

Pshaw! He wagered that she was tucked in, at camp. Of course. She had fooled him. That was it. Heart lightened by the surmise, he made for the piñons.

She had taken the occasion of his search to turn in. Probably she had gone to sleep at once, and was not knowing how she had frightened him. He fully anticipated seeing her occupying the appointed spot near the two others. He prayed that this might be so.

But the coverings lay as arranged. They revealed no outlines of Bowie.

She was not hiding in the air-ship. He knew that she couldn't be, but he clutched at every hope.

The increasing fear which had pricked him hither and thither, in feverish activity, now by reaction numbed him; he paused, and hesitated, helplessly. He was uncertain whether he ought to awaken the others.

It was a nightmare; it *must* be a nightmare!

Nobody could thus vanish utterly, in broad moonshine, on a level, deserted mesa. Nevertheless (and he pinched himself again and again, desperately) that had happened. Bowie was gone!

If planned as a joke, it had developed past the joking stage. And probably it was no longer a joke to her; her absence was beyond her control. That was the worst feature.

Good God, he supposed that he ought to awaken the colonel!

No, he would make one more search, first; one more, and Bowie might turn up. He shrank from alarming anybody needlessly; and the colonel would be of no use.

But Mrs. Bool interposed. The parol which finished off the mushroom effect that, swathed and canopied, she presented, heaved and tilted, and prompted by motherly vigilance less obsessed than her other facilities, she half sat up, blinking about her.

Not a lovely creation, in the moonlight, was disheveled Mrs. Bool—nor, at the juncture, a welcome one.

She sleepily surveyed the young man.

“What time is it?”

“About half past ten, I should think, Mrs. Bool.”

“Bowie?”

It had come!

“Bowie! Bowie dear.”

Mrs. Bool's thin quaver grew firm.

Not unlike a fat goose she craned, inspecting the spot where according to propriety her daughter should have been figuratively housed. The young man bided the inevitable.

“Why, where is Bowie?”

This was a demand.

“I don't know, Mrs. Bool. I can't find her.”

Mrs. Bool's swathings heaved apart. She sat up wholly and stared. Her eyes left his face and swept wildly about. She gasped.

“Don't know! But, Daniel! Hasn't she been with you? What has happened?”

“I don't know, Mrs. Bool,” he only

could confess, miserably. “She was with me until half an hour ago. Then she disappeared. I've been looking high and low for her ever since.”

Mrs. Bool called frantically: “Bowie! Bowie! Come this instant!” She again addressed the young man. “I don't understand. This is frightful! It's indecent! I demand to know what you have done with her. I shall wake the colonel. I never heard of such an outrage. The colonel must be roused at once. The idea, sir! Colonel! Colonel! Wake up! Something has happened to Bowie.”

“Eh?” The colonel mumbled stupidly.

“Bowie has gone. Daniel says she has disappeared. I don't understand.”

“What's that? Nonsense! Isn't she here?”

The colonel, too, sat up; he struggled hard to bridge the space between fancy and fact.

His round, florid face was poignant as his internal machinery rebelliously resumed interrupted routine, his blouse was under his double chin, his helmet was askew.

“No. And he says he doesn't know where she is.”

“Bowie!” The old colonel's gruff, parade-ground tone barked gruffly into the moonlight. “Where are you? Why aren't you in bed?”

“She doesn't answer,” wailed his wife. “Where is my daughter? Make him tell, Benjamin.”

“Where's that girl, sir?” demanded the colonel, bestirring to arise.

He staggered to his feet, and swelled belligerent.

“I wish I knew, but I don't; I absolutely don't.” The young man replied earnestly. “I'll explain what I do know, if you'll give me the chance.”

“By gad, you'd better, and quick, too,” retorted the colonel. “Bowie!” he boomed. “Bowie!” He squared his shoulders, pulled smooth his blouse, straightened his helmet, and with heels together waited sternly upon the young man. “Report!” he ordered.

Daviess did so.

He related what was incumbent upon him to relate; some of the items (such as the kiss) were not, it seemed to him, of importance in the especial case. But even with that included, the narrative could be only a bald one.

He had left Bowie, sitting alone for a minute by her own request; thereupon she had vanished.

"The idea!" gasped Mrs. Bool, at the conclusion. "Preposterous! I never heard of such a thing."

"Your report is insufficient," declared the colonel. "I hold you responsible. And by gad, sir, if that girl is not returned safe and sound, you shall be hanged, or I'll shoot you with my own hand. I will, by the Eternal! I'll shoot you like a dog!"

"But great Hēavens, colonel, and you too, Mrs. Bool: I love Bowic as much as you do. You know that. I wouldn't harm her—I couldn't harm her. I'd cut off my right arm, any day, for her. She's gone entirely without my slightest knowledge. I've searched the place over for her."

"She's fallen down some hole, then," asserted the colonel.

"A wild animal has got her!" wailed his wife.

"We can only keep looking. I'll start out again. We must find her," spoke Daviess, doggedly.

"Cross-section the island—the plateau, that is. Cross-section the plateau, sir," ordered the colonel. "You stay here, my dear," he instructed, to his wife. "We'll bring her in, if we find her, or she may come of herself."

"My child," moaned the poor woman.

Nothing is more pathetic in distress than fatness.

The colonel moved in the one direction, Daviess in the other—not opposite but at right angle.

His course took him past the cedar grove.

He halted, on the farther side of it, to look back into it and again to search it with hungry gaze.

Infringing suddenly on his sight, there stood Bowie!

It was the white of her, and the grace of her; he could not mistake.

At a glad run he returned; she advanced to meet him. Where had she been?

As he drew near she waved her hand with her familiar girlish gesture, and stopped to await. In the moonlight her face was sparkling, eager.

He did not have a chance to speak a word ere she was talking excitedly.

"Danny," she exclaimed, "come, quick! I've found out everything. I know the gardener. There is one. The dearest old priest! Come! I'll show you!"

But first he must touch her; he must know that she was really with him; that it was Bowie, his Bowie, alive and well and sound.

He gathered her in to him; he could not help it; he held her close, and felt that she was indeed warm, living flesh and blood. And she did not resent.

No, she yielded willingly to his clasp; she let her cheek press against his; her hair brushed his lips.

"But where were you, Bowie?" he reproved, choked with joy. "I couldn't find you. I've been hunting high and low."

"I was right there. I was talking with the old priest. You passed me, and seemed not to see me at all." She disengaged herself. "Do come, Danny!" By the hand she led him. "You'll like him, too. He's tending his garden now. He lives here. It's his cave, and everything. He speaks Spanish. I can understand him."

"Didn't you answer when I called?"

"Yes. Didn't you hear?"

"Not a word."

He suffered her to lead him—although to follow her and keep her was his only thought. Not again would he leave her, to lose her.

They hastened through the moonlight-fretted cedars, and the garden-patch was revealed.

Amid it stood now a figure.

"He's there," whispered the girl jubilantly. "Be nice to him, Danny, because he's been nice to me."

The figure was that of a priest—a tall, spare man, in black cassock girded by a twisted rope.

His head was bare and tonsured; about the circumference of the tonsure the thin, silky hair gleamed in the white shine like a halo—a halo which seemed to crown fittingly a face thin, benign, saintly.

An old man he was—evidently very old and worn by many vigils; but in his black frock, amid the garden and the moonlight and the peace, he was beautiful.

At the approach of the two he smiled, irradiating kindness.

"This is Danny, father," presented the girl simply. "He found me."

The priest lifted a long forefinger—otherwise moving not—and traced the cross.

"*Benedicite, filius,*" he said—and the intonation was as gentle as the gentlest breeze. But here there was no breeze. The mesa's enveloping stillness rested upon the garden.

"*Gratias, padre,*" answered Daviess.

The priest addressed him briefly and musically, and paused for response.

Evidently the words had been a question and in Spanish, but Daviess could only smile back and shake his head.

With another kindly, rather wistful smile on his part—Daviess saw that he had blue eyes—the priest resumed what evidently was an interrupted task; he had been leaning upon a crooked branch, worn like himself. It was the hoe. With it he stirred the soil along the rows of corn.

"What did he say, girlie?"

"I think he said something about his garden. He welcomed you to it."

"That so? He didn't use any of my words. '*Gratias*' and '*Chile con carne*' are all I know—except beans. They're '*frijoles*.' We can talk gar-

den if he'll confine himself to one vegetable."

Daviess spoke lightly, glad in the feel of her by his side. Somehow, she seemed, all at once, unreservedly his.

Although speaking thus lightly as they stood, still hand in hand like two children, together watching the slowly moving form in the garden as it plied the rude hoe, a sense of awe entered into him.

The dream was continuing—the return of Bowie, so rapturous, so tender, the mystic garden now tenanted by that silver-crowned, black-cassocked form, the sign of the cross, and the *benedicite, filius*, were a part of it.

The mesa was a mesa of spells. Might this one never break.

But he must ask.

"Where did he come from?"

"I don't know. He was here—just as if he'd been here all the time. I saw him all of a sudden after you'd left me. He came out of the garden to the reservoir for a jar of water. At first I was afraid, but when I'd looked into his face I wasn't. He said the same thing to me that he said to you. Isn't he a dear old man? I love him."

"I don't understand then why I didn't see him or you when I was searching so."

"That was funny," she admitted. "You passed right by us; but you wouldn't stop, and you wouldn't hear. Somehow, I knew you'd come back, though." She nestled with fond, happy little abandonment. "And I told him everything while you were gone. We had such a long, nice talk while he worked."

"What did you tell him, dear?"

"Oh, all about—us. About what a nice boy you are, and about papa and mama, and about how much I think of you, and about Lieutenant Kunke, and the air-ship, and—me!"

"Did he understand?"

"Yes, I'm sure. He acted so. He'd seen you kiss me, anyway, and I thought I ought to explain."

What an ingenious, bonny lass she

was! His arm stole about her; she leaned trustfully against him.

They stood a moment in silence, while in the moonlight-flooded plot the tall priest slowly worked.

"I love you, Danny," she said abruptly. She lifted her face to his, proffering her lips. "I've always loved you, and I always will, forever and ever. No matter whom I marry—Lieutenant Kunke or anybody—it's all the same. I want you to know it, dear, before we wake up."

"Thank you, dear," he said. "I'll remember. And I love you, and always will. But I've told you that before."

They kissed. She continued in a pleading, almost feverish, tone:

"You know I can't marry whom I please, Danny. Lots of us girls can't. And you're poor and you aren't in the army. Mama is bound that I marry into the army. She's more army than papa even. I'm sick of the army. I'm sick of being a civilized girl, anyway; of having to do things just because somebody else pronounced them right and proper. I've often wished I might be in a place like this, away off where one could throw aside convention and be oneself. Out in the world I couldn't tell you I love you, Danny; but I can here. Out in the world you're poor, and you aren't in the army; but here you're as good as anybody. Just this once I'm doing as I please—and I don't care. Isn't it grand, Danny?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

They kissed again, lingering long, lips pressing lips.

With a little shiver of pure joy she nestled her head upon his shoulder.

He saw that the old priest, noting them, was smiling; and he was unashamed.

The embrace and the kiss, and the confession, there in the wonder and the quiet of the moonlit, mystic mesa, seemed but intuitive with the spirit of the place.

So might first man and first woman have stood and surveyed their Eden,

and have been blessed by some guardian angel!

But the peace was rudely broken. How long the two thus stood neither was conscious—so proof against time is love—when a raucous voice boomed through the cedars and across the mesa.

CHAPTER III.

More Mystery.

"**B**OWIE! Daviess! Daviess! Where are you, boy?"

The girl started and disengaged herself.

"We must go," she said. "Poor papa, and poor mama! They'll be frantic."

"I'd forgotten all about them," answered the young man ruefully.

"I hadn't. But I didn't care for a minute. It must be scandalously late. Come on, Danny. We're going to wake up. It's been a nice dream. I wanted you here with me and the old priest, and you came. Thank you, dear."

"Daviess!" The colonel's voice was bellowing indignantly.

"Must we go?" appealed the young man to the girl.

"Of course. No, we mustn't kiss again. We're waking up. Good-by, father," she said to the old priest. She took Daviess by the hand and led him away.

The old priest, pausing an instant to gaze benignly, spoke briefly. He said:

"*A Dios*, my children."

"I hate to leave, dear."

"So do I. It's our garden, and he's the keeper of it. We won't tell anybody about it, Danny; not anybody at all. It's ours. Papa and mama wouldn't care about a place like this—some moonlight and some flowers and an old priest. They've got past that."

She was talking feverishly, walking rapidly.

A strange sensation of lightness and exhilaration permeated him, despite

the fact that they were leaving behind them their Eden.

She dropped his hand; they emerged from the cedars, and before them lay the level brush, steeped in the silver night.

The stout, white figure, like a fat ghost's, of the colonel loomed spectral before them. He was tramping wildly, as if much perturbed. His mutter reached them.

They swerved toward him.

"Papa!" called the girl clearly.

The young man heard the word pass out into the lambent space around about; but the colonel appeared to notice not, nor had he yet sighted them apparently.

"Bowie! Daviess!" he boomed.

"Oh, dear," exclaimed the girl, "there comes mama, too! He's excited her." And she called again: "Papa, we're all right." And—"Hurry," she said.

They hurried, calling apace; for from the direction of the camp Mrs. Bool also was hurrying, filled, like her husband, with alarm now needless, and evidently as oblivious as he to the twain for whom they were frantically seeking.

The situation was preposterous. The young man yodled cheerfully; this cry they surely must hear. But—

"Bowie! Oh, Bowie! Daviess!" The colonel's voice broke; he was hoarse.

"Can't you find either of them, Benjamin?" cried his wife tremulously, panting with stress, physical and mental.

"Danny!" gasped the girl. She wavered, almost halting. "They don't hear us, and they—don't see us."

"They're too excited. I'll give them a call they will hear. Hello! Whoopee! What's the matter?"

The colonel and Mrs. Bool had met.

"What is the matter, Benjamin? Have they both gone?"

"They're hiding. It's a trick; by gad, I believe it's just a trick!" stormed the colonel.

"Oh, they wouldn't do that! Bowie wouldn't, I know. Something's happened to them, Benjamin."

"But, mama, we're here," expostulated the girl earnestly. "If you'd only listen and look! You and papa are acting ridiculous."

The younger couple were now within a few yards of the elder. It was impossible that they should not be recognized.

They paused, waiting the sudden acclamation. The girl again gasped. She clutched her companion.

"Danny, they don't see us, and they don't hear us! They don't know we're here! They must be blind! They're looking right at us, too."

"Then they must be deaf and blind in a funny way. They see and hear each other. They're walking in their sleep, or else we are." He advanced resolutely and grasped the colonel by the shoulder.

"Colonel," he said, "wake up!"

But the colonel noted the touch not at all.

"If they're out together this time of night and deceiving us, it's indecent, Benjamin," quavered Mrs. Bool. "I—I'm going to faint!"

"Nonsense, my dear," snapped the colonel. "Er—I mean, try not to. What do you want to faint for? We'll go back to camp. Er—here's my arm. Lean on it."

"They don't see us, or hear us, or feel us," reported the young man to the girl, amazed. "I clapped him on the shoulder and never feezed him."

"Oh, Danny!" wailed the girl, hovering from one to the other. "We must be dead and turned to ghosts!"

"Then he ought to have shivered when I touched him," declared Danny.

"Mama," appealed the girl, "don't you know me?"

"It's indecent," was proclaiming that worthy weakly, as upon her husband's arm she toiled on back to the piñon-camp. "They've been gone together hours—in the night—without sign of any chaperon. What will Mrs.

Major Jones say—what will Lieutenant Kunke say? Such a thing never could take place in the East. Lieutenant Kunke has often told me that he does not consider it proper to take even his own sister about after dark without a chaperon. If this gets out, Bowie's chances are ruined."

"Mrs. Jones is a fool and Kunke is an ass!" retorted the colonel hoarsely. "Balderdash! Bowie can take care of herself. I'll risk her reputation. I've always thought it a pity that young Daviess didn't join the service. He'd make a damn sight better man for Bowie to tie to than that jackanapes. Chaperon! Bah! Did you want any chaperon around, my dear, when I was courting you? No. And I didn't, either. If these young folks were off spooning I wouldn't be half as concerned. By gad, I'd go to sleep."

"Bully for him!" quoth the young man across to the girl. "Did you ever hear him preach such gospel before?"

"No, never! But he always takes the contrary. I wish we had a short-hand witness."

They were escorting, one on either flank of the older couple.

That they should not yet have been detected was all incomprehensible; here they were, touching elbows virtually with the other two—and no attention was being paid to them.

Yet they walked and talked, and apparently were like anybody else.

"It's indecent. I never shall hold up my head again," protested Mrs. Bool. "I shall take Bowie and go to Europe."

"Humph!" grunted the colonel.

Bowie clapped her hands in approval.

At the piñon-camp Mrs. Bool sank upon her bed with a sigh of fatigue and a groan of dismay mingled.

The colonel, with sound non-committal save that it expressed fatigue on his part also, surveyed her.

His glance swept anon the mesa, lying white and brooding around about.

"If I only knew that they were safe!" moaned his wife. "What time is it?"

The colonel seated himself beside her. He consulted his watch.

"Eleven-thirty," he reported.

"It is indecent. I never shall survive such a scandal. Lieutenant Kunke will break the engagement. I know he will. He will be perfectly excusable."

"We won't sue him for breach of promise," quoth her husband grimly. "By Jove!"

"Oh, we're *not* engaged!" exclaimed the girl indignantly. "How dare mama talk so? Don't you believe her, Danny."

"What's eleven-thirty on such a night?" scoffed the colonel. He hitched nearer to his wife. With an effort of avoirdupois he extended his right arm back of her massive waist. He chuckled sheepishly. "You and I saw the twelve o'clock moon many a night, my dear, when we were younger. Egad—and the one o'clock, too, if we could!"

"Benjamin!" she gasped. She sighed. The arm did its best to accommodate itself. "But society is different now. What will people say?"

"Damn people, my dear!" exploded her husband.

"If I only knew they were safe—" She faltered.

"They've sneaked off, the young rascals!"

"But Danny said he didn't know where she was."

"Probably he didn't. I'll venture to say he does now. We'll give them a good wiggling, my dear. But egad, I don't blame them! She wanted to stay 'just a minute more.' We know how that is, my dear. Damme, I admire his spirit! He's a change from Kunke, eh? Kunke'd be afraid of getting the crease out of his trousers. Give the girl and boy a fling, my dear. Egad, I feel spoony myself!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Bool. "Benjamin! You took my breath."

You mustn't—" The arm evidently had tightened.

The colonel chuckled.

"If you're sure they're safe," murmured Mrs. Bool drowsily.

"Sleepy?" queried the colonel tenderly. "Take a nap, Kate. Poor girl! Egad—" and he kissed her.

"Shocking!" declared Bowie, her face dimpled with amusement. "Papa certainly is moonstruck."

"Perhaps I'd better withdraw," hazarded the young man. "The Bool family may want to be by itself."

"Wait!" she ordered.

"My dear, this moon's certainly getting into my blood," murmured the colonel. "I'd like to throw off about forty years on a night like this, or about forty pounds. Hee-hum!" and he sighed. "Confound those young rascals! Eh, Kate? I'll catch them sneaking in."

His wife was breathing heavily; her eyelids were fast closed; placidity smoothed her full face. The colonel nodded. Presently he, too, slept.

Side by side they sat under the moon, pudgy arm about fat waist; and if Cupid laughed he laughed happily, for they appeared very content.

"What do you think of that?" laughed the girl merrily.

"I think," he said, "that it's a good example."

"To sleep—on such a night?" she protested in mock dismay.

"No, we'll cut out the sleep."

He kissed her; she kissed him back; and arm about one another's waist they stood for a moment, gazing upon the unconscious elders.

"And they have not seen us yet," she resumed wonderingly. "How do you account for it, Danny?"

"I don't, unless we're invisible."

"Naturally we are."

"Unnaturally, you mean."

They laughed.

"But why? They aren't invisible to us."

"No. But they ought to be—two silly old coots."

"We're two silly young coots, then."

"And they don't hear us, either; that's the odd thing."

"You didn't hear me at first; I called to you when you were looking for me. I must have got invisible first."

"But I found you, girlie."

She pressed closer to him.

"The garden must have done it, Danny. It's the garden."

"Maybe. It's something."

She sighed luxuriously.

"Let's go back, quick, before we wake up. We're still asleep. Hurry."

They fled away, hastening across the moonshine to their haven. Still and glamorous lay the mesa, breathing of love and peace.

Even the snore of the colonel blended with its somnolent spirit.

"The wireless. You forgot the wireless," she prompted, halting suddenly.

"Drat the wireless," he answered.

"We might shock Kunke."

"I'm not engaged to him, Danny," she declared. "And I never was."

"And you never will be."

She sobered, eying him wistfully.

"Let's don't wake up," she pleaded.

"Hurry for the garden."

They again threaded, hand in hand, the cedars, fleeing like refugees seeking sanctuary.

The garden was waiting, bathed in the moonlight; the priest was there, progressing slowly with his hoe among the beans.

At their approach he paused, straightening, to smile upon them. Once more his finger blessed them with the sign of the benediction.

"We've come back, father," announced the girl.

The priest spoke musically.

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Welcome, my children.'"

"Do you think he would tell us what has happened to us?"

"He might, if we could understand. I'll ask him what is the matter."

At the question the old priest smiled gently.

He carefully laid down the hoe, and with a lingering, loving look upon the plants which he had tended made sign for the twain to follow him. His tall figure moved around the little slope to the cave.

Here he knelt at the door; they likewise knelt (they knew not why, but within the cave was the rude cross); rising, he gestured for them to be seated; he rearranged the rushes at the door.

After a moment of silence he spoke slowly, choosing his words, and always with that smile of utter good-will.

"*Si, padre,*" assented the girl from time to time, comprehending. Her brow knitted in puzzled way. The priest ceased, and she turned upon Daviess.

"What is the fourth dimension, Danny?"

"Did he mention that?"

"Yes. I'm sure he did. We're it. Only I don't understand."

"You've heard of it, though?"

She nodded, wide-eyed.

"Just a little, Danny. It's something besides length, breadth, and thickness, isn't it?"

"It's the next step beyond the cube. We can see the cube, but we could not see more than the cube. That would be two bodies occupying the same space, probably; therefore, one of the bodies would be invisible until we were educated into seeing its fourth dimension. I've always thought that mediums and Indian fakirs demonstrate the fourth dimension. Spirits, you know. We're it, are we? Good!"

Her hand slipped timidly into his.

"We don't occupy the same space, do we, Danny? You're there, and I'm here."

"We occupy the same space as the atoms of air, I guess. So the colonel and your mother saw the air instead of us. But I'm not explaining."

She snuggled beside him.

"We do occupy the same space, dear," she ventured. "I'm you and you're I, because we love each other."

"Sure. That fourth dimension is nothing new, girlie. It's as old as the first Adam and Eve are. Older than the *padre*—and he's too old for figures. Has he been here long?"

"Centuries. He says he was one of the early Spanish fathers to the Pueblo missions. The people that lived on this mesa understood the fourth dimension. It was a mesa of wonders. Now there is only this little bit of it left; the rest was washed away by a great storm. He is alone. He tends his garden and blesses God. He saw us when he came, and he waited for us to see him. We are the first visitors in many, many years."

"But ask him why we caught it—I mean, why we're fourth dimension."

"I did. He only said, '*Quien sabe?* It is the way of the mesa and the will of God.' Will papa and mama catch it, too?"

"Shouldn't wonder. That would be quite a job. They're more bulky."

The girl laughed drowsily.

"Isn't it funny?" she cooed. "And very nice? Now I think I should like to sleep. May I?"

The old priest spoke.

"What did he say?"

"Oh!" The girl sat upright. She had flushed. "Let's go back, Danny. Maybe we ought to go back. I didn't think."

"But what's the matter, girlie?"

"He asked—if we're married!"

"What did you tell him?"

"No."

"Not yet, you should have said."

Scarlet, she started to rise.

"I'm going back. Now, he asks if we are Christians, of the true faith. Are we, Danny?"

"He means Catholics."

"I'll tell him we're Christians, but we aren't Catholics. We're Unitarians." She did. The old priest spoke gently again, smiling.

"What next?" demanded the young man.

She was still scarlet, flaming beautifully; but she bravely translated.

"Of course, he doesn't understand what Unitarian is; but he says he'll marry us. Oh, Danny, take me back! If you won't, I'll go alone."

The instincts of her maidenhood were struggling. She panted and rebelled.

"We ought to go back. Mama says our being out this way isn't decent. Come, please. Please, Danny. Don't you see?"

She stood for flight.

"Sure, girlie, if you feel that way now. But you're safe here. You can sleep in the cave. Between being here, with the old priest, and being there where you can't be seen, I should think you'd rather be here."

"He can't be seen, either—can he?"

"You see him."

"I see mama, too." She paused, irresolute.

"He expects you to stay. He's getting a place ready for you, isn't he?"

The priest spoke again, with a gesture which, like all his gestures, was a benediction.

"He says for me to rest in peace; he calls me 'daughter.' I believe I will, Danny. I'm—so—tired and sleepy. I don't care. It seems far—over to—the other place."

She swayed, as if yielding to the hypnotic stillness of the moon-bathed open. With a little laugh, and a murmur of thanks and relief, she cuddled down upon the dried grass at the rear of the cave, under the cross.

The old priest, smiling, with his finger indicated the symbol above her.

"Where are you going, Danny?"

"Just outside, somewhere."

"Not far. Don't go very far. I want you near me."

"I'll be where you can call me. All you have to do is to speak."

She sighed luxuriously, pillowing her head upon her curved arm.

"Good night, dear."

"Good night, Danny."

The old priest was kneeling in the entrance to the cave; his lips moved steadily; his hands were upon his

breast, in humility before the mystery which he was invoking.

The moonlight enveloped him. But the rear of the cave, where reclined the girl, was cut off by shadow. Daviess withdrew, and stretched himself under a cedar. The dried fronds were a soft, fragrant mattress.

"Danny."

"What?"

"But he *can't* marry us. We're heretics."

"Would that cut any figure out here?"

"Of course."

The old priest has ceased his audible devotions. He stretched himself across the entrance for sleep.

There was a space of silence. But the girl, troubled, must argue.

"I don't see how he can, if we're heretics."

"He ought to be the judge."

"He may not understand. A Catholic can't marry Protestants—can he, Danny?"

"Go to sleep, girlie."

Her voice trailed off drowsily and died away. Amid the silence and the moonshine of the haunted mesa they all slept.

Slept likewise, at the piñon camp, the colonel and his plump spouse—drooping, leaning against one another, a caricature upon Cupid's pranks, yet also a picture not without its pathos.

When Daviess awakened the silver sheen had been changed to a rosy glow. But this alone heralded the day and the sun; for no twitter of rejoicing birds uplifted; the mesa knew no stir; it lay prone, silence-bound, as if awed by the majesty of the dawn as it had been by the wonder of the night.

So Daviess also lay a moment longer, unwinking, motionless, gathering his thought; then he stood.

He surveyed, expectant, uncertain, the entrance of the cave. Was Bowie safe? Surely.

The form of the old priest was gone from the doorway; but in another di-

rection it appeared, with noiseless tread bearing from the reservoir pool the jar of water.

This he set within the cave; and kneeling at one side, and facing the young man, smiled that sweet smile, and by gesture blessed him.

He beckoned him to follow; at the reservoir they laved their hands and faces. The garden plants were straightening their tops after their night's repose. The hoe lay as left.

When they returned to the cave the first beams of the sun were striking it full, and shone pinkly upon Bowie, waiting, fresh and youthful and glorious to view. The night's rest had vivified her.

"Hello!" she greeted.

"Hello, dearie!"

He would have kissed her, but she declined. Her soft hand detained him; that was all.

"Not any more, Danny," she said. The old priest was looking benignly on. "We mustn't. We're going to wake up. Things are different in the daytime. And he *can't* marry us, you know. He can't possibly—can he?"

"He can, if we give him the chance."

She shook her head soberly. She released his hand.

"No. We must wake up. I ought to go back to mama. I've behaved dreadfully, and I suppose I'm disgraced forever."

The old priest spokē. He seemed troubled.

"It's the breakfast, Danny," explained the girl. "He says his fare is only dried corn—just a few mouthfuls. We are welcome to it. But I told him we must go."

"What about a squash-pie?"

She dimpled; but she was resolved.

"No; we must go. He doesn't mention squashes. Come. Good-by, father."

She held out her hand to their host. He took it. His mien was still troubled. He spoke earnestly in his liquid Spanish.

"Won't he go with us?" asked Daviess.

"They wouldn't see him. I'll tell them about him. They won't believe it, of course. I'm disgraced, and so are you, Danny. Maybe we can get there before they're awake; but I shall tell them."

Daviess extended his hand, also. The old priest held it gently.

He blessed them; and, looking back through the cedars, they witnessed him gazing, as if sadly, after them.

"He said we'd come back again. He wants to marry us, Danny. But he can't—can he? Do you think we'll ever be back in the garden with him?"

"We'll try it," assured Daviess.

Again they fled—out of paradise into the world. The sun was flooding warmly the open. There was no dew.

The air was soft and pellucid, and above the edges of the mesa it shimmered. No speck flecked the blue; no sound arose, not even the passage of their quick steps.

The impromptu camp was as left; although ages, instead of a few hours, seemed to have passed, the aeroplane rested undisturbed, its one fin canted slightly; near it was the wireless apparatus; and there beneath the piñon were the colonel and lady, bolstering one another, fond even in slumber.

The sun shone in upon them—a disturbing element; for as, halting uncertainly and guiltily before, the truant couple surveyed, the colonel stirred and muttered, contorting his face.

"He's going to wake up," murmured the girl. "I wish we could wake up first, Danny. I'm trying hard, but I can't. Can you?"

"I'm afraid he'll beat us to it," admitted Daviess. "And then—the deluge. But I'm to blame."

"No; I am," she insisted.

They each drew a long breath, apprehending the inevitable.

The colonel's eyes struggled open; he blinked and gasped, his countenance reddening with the exertion. He stared before him.

"He sees us!" whispered the girl.
 "Oh, he does see us!"

They stood very still, waiting.

Daviess essayed a smile—a quizzical smile of reassurance; but he felt that it was only sheepishness.

"Eh—what?" stammered the colonel, staggering to his feet. "By Jove! We thought you were lost.

"Where have you been?" he asked. He frowned upon them and grunted as he pulled down his blouse. "Yes, you—young rascals. Egad!"—and he addressed the girl—"you frightened your mother almost to death."

"We've been right around here all the time, papa. But you wouldn't see us."

"Wouldn't—see—you!" The colonel was explosive. "Couldn't see you, you mean. Most scandalous thing I ever heard. Worse than a modern novel. Young man, you've gone the limit. You'll account for this high jinks to me. Bowie can explain to her mother."

"Very well, sir. If there's any blame, I'm responsible."

"Papa, you're horrid!" exclaimed the girl. "Anyway, Danny is not to blame. I'm to blame. And last night you said you didn't blame us a bit if we did—stay—by ourselves a little while."

The colonel's eyes winked rapidly. He rubbed his chin.

"Eh? I did, did I? Where were you when I said that?"

"Right beside you."

"Nonsense."

"But we were. We were closer to you than we are now. We walked along with you and mama from where you and she met, over here."

"Go ahead," commanded the colonel. "Stretch it out. What, then?"

"You kissed her. We saw you."

"We couldn't help it, sir," supplemented Daviess. "We were on hand, trying to get recognized."

The colonel was gasping.

"You young villains!" he reprimanded. "Saw me kiss my wife, eh?"

Humph! I don't believe it." His full red face twinkled roguishly. "By Jove, I'll kiss her again! Hi diddle diddle!"

He gave a ponderous gambol—an effort at a hop, skip.

"I will. I feel funny this morning. It must be the air. Always heard that sleeping out was a fine thing. Let's wake the old woman up and tell her. Sound the reveille, somebody. Toot-tootle-toot-tee, toot-tootle-toot-tee, toot-tootle-toot-tee, toot-tee—Everybody out! Come on, Kate!"

"Oh, papa—don't!" expostulated the girl. She was annoyed. Daviess stared. Was the colonel crazy?

However, Mrs. Bool, who had been left in a very uncomfortable position, leaning against nothing, was commencing to arouse.

The act was more difficult than in the case, even, of the colonel, her husband.

With a movement surprisingly ready, he knelt gallantly beside her.

"Awake, my love, the stars are shining—or the sun, rather," he warbled hoarsely. "Up-sa, daisy. Gaze upon the truants, restored to us safe and sound."

"The mesa has gone to your father's head," declared Daviess. "He's bewitched."

"Like we were. But look, Danny; look!" the girl ejaculated. "He's in the fourth dimension, too. She isn't. She doesn't see him one bit! And she doesn't see us!"

Mrs. Bool was gazing vacantly about her. She moaned, stirring painfully.

"Benjamin," she faltered. "Benjamin! Bowie! Where am—where are you? Oh, my back!"

"Here, my dear. Here we are. Brace up. It's not so bad. You'll feel as fine as a fiddle in a minute. Gad, I'm twenty years younger!" informed her husband. He put his arm about her. "Let old Benjy help. Up—up you come. What's the matter with you? Blind? Can't you hear? Danne, it's all right, I tell you! Eh?"

Mrs. Bool now appeared thoroughly alarmed. She stared wildly about her.

"Benjamin!" she implored. "Benjamin!" She was frustrated. "Why," she said, "this is terrible! I seem to be all alone. I'm deserted." Tears welled and flowed down her trembling cheeks. She struggled to stand. "Benjamin! Bowie!" She sank helplessly back.

The colonel recoiled; he had blanched. His jaw dropped, and he sat inert, paralyzed, his eyes upon his wife.

"Blind staggers!" he muttered. "Stone-deaf, too. Looks right through me. Doesn't even feel me when I touch her. My God!" He roused himself. "Bowie! Help your mother. Something's wrong. Don't you see?"

The girl already was impulsively beside her mother, cooing over her, patting her hand.

"It's no use, colonel," spoke the young man. "We can't do anything. Bowie and I were in the same fix last night. You and Mrs. Bool didn't see us, or hear us, or know we were near, although we tried the same way to make you know. Now you've caught it. I think she'll be infected after a while. Hope so."

"What is it?" demanded the colonel. "Are we all dead? Most mysterious thing I ever heard of. How do you explain it, sir?"

Bowie stood. The colonel stood. They surveyed Mrs. Bool, who rocked and moaned.

CHAPTER IV.

The Cause of It All.

"**P**oor mama," commiserated the girl.

"Kate!" blubbered the colonel.

"It's the fourth dimension, colonel," vouchsafed the young man. "You know what that is?"

"I'll be cussed if I do!" growled the colonel.

"It's the next step beyond length, breadth, and thickness, papa," proffered

the girl. "When we're in it, other people can't recognize us until they're in it, too. You're in it now. But mama isn't. Danny and I were that way all night, and you thought we were gone. We were, part of the time," she added truthfully. "I'm so glad you're in it now, because, then, you can understand."

"Damned if I understand!" vowed the colonel testily. "Where did you learn all that rubbish?"

"From an old priest we've met. Oh, the dearest old priest! He lives here. We'll show him to you."

The colonel only muttered, rebelliously and incredulously. He stood facing his wife, awaiting her recognition.

She had ceased her weak, frightened weeping; she dried her eyes and looked piteously about her.

"Gad!" muttered the colonel. "Doesn't see any of us. Doesn't know we're here. Kate!" he addressed. "Kate! Wake up! We're right in front of you, not three feet!" And he added again: "Gad!"

"I must get up," she declared resolutely. "I must not give way. I must get breakfast and keep my strength. Then, if anything has happened, I shall be ready."

She stood.

"By Jove! there's pluck for you," observed the colonel admiringly. "There's a woman! I'll kiss her again." He did so. "Humph!" he commented at the lack of effect.

Mrs. Bool sneezed.

"I'm afraid I caught cold," she soliloquized. "I knew that I would. I never can sleep in a draft. But now I shall wash, and then I shall eat. If I can find the garden and the water, I can live quite a while. But I shall not give up. I can exist on my fat, I suppose, all else failing. People do."

"She's all right," quoth the colonel. "When your mother once sets her foot down, Bowie, she'll march to the bitter end. I know her. I'm proud of her, too."

"So am I," declared Bowie.

"Do you think she'll—er—get it eventually?" queried the colonel anxiously. "She hasn't yet. And if she doesn't, we're in a confounded awkward position."

"She'll come to, I'm sure, colonel," asserted the young man. "A little slow, is all. You caught it. No reason why she won't."

"Not if she's willing," assented the colonel. "But she's mighty determined when she wants to be. Can't you help her with that breakfast, Bowie?"

"I wouldn't dare, papa!" Bowie's eyes opened widely at the thought. "I don't know that I could. But if she saw those dishes moving, of themselves, it would frighten her to pieces. Goodness!"

"Like a medium act, eh?" mused the colonel. "You're right. Don't try it. Let's get out of here for a while. It—damme, it isn't polite to spy on her."

"We'll go back to the garden place," proposed Bowie. "Then you can see our nice old priest. He'll explain everything. I'm not a bit hungry."

"I'm not, either," declared the colonel. "Hang it, I feel like a colt turned out to grass, and too frisky to eat. I don't believe I'd ride at a hundred pounds. Take me to your priest, then."

"We feel the same way," confessed Daviess. "Queer and light and mobile."

They proceeded. The colonel caracolled and skipped.

"Watch me jump that bush," he invited. "Egad, I can do it!"

He ran and leaped.

"Papa!" exclaimed Bowie. "Your feet went right through it! Didn't they, Danny?"

"Looked like it. Didn't jump high enough."

"Didn't I? Thought I went over it. Used to be quite a jumper when I was a lad."

"Perhaps we can go through a tree,

too," suggested Bowie. "You try it, Danny. But don't get stuck."

They were among the great cedars.

"What do you expect me to do? Butt at it?"

"Stick a leg into it first," prompted the colonel.

Daviess kicked gingerly at a trunk.

"No," he said. "Can't make it. Guess we're not resolved fine enough."

"Trees aren't resolved, perhaps."

"But that bush was," reminded Bowie.

"Optical illusion," grunted the colonel. "I went so fast you couldn't see."

"I'm glad, anyway," declared Bowie. "It would give me the creeps to see you pass right through a tree trunk! That would be too ghastly."

"Yes; rather dodge them myself," admitted the young man.

They could sight the cave.

"He's there!" cried the girl happily. "See him, papa? That's the old priest. He's been here hundreds of years. He's one of the first missionaries."

"Gad!" commented her father. "Looks like Time himself."

The priest was moving slowly among his crops as if tending a flock of proselytes. He paused to smile upon his advancing guests and to await their arrival. Bowie called gaily.

"We're back again, father. We've brought papa."

"Glad to meet you, sir," vouchsafed the colonel. "These young folks have brought me over to inspect this garden. Egad—er, I would say, by George, it's quite a garden! Raise all this yourself?"

"He doesn't understand English, papa," reproved Bowie. "But you mustn't swear, anyway."

"Never thought of swearing," protested the colonel.

"He says you are welcome, Señor Capitan."

"Captain, eh? Damme, I haven't been a captain for twenty years," ruffled the colonel. "What's he got planted here? Corn, beans, pumpkins, eh? Where's the water?"

"Just up there. Come. We'll show you. Or we'd better let him. It's his."

The old priest gently led.

The colonel gravely gazed upon the little reservoir.

"Not much of it, is there?" he commented. "But it's wet."

"Danny and I sat here for a long while in the moonlight last night," informed Bowie. "It's the most beautiful spot you ever saw, by moonlight."

"I suppose," grunted her father. "Most spots are to young people."

"Now we'll show you the cave, where I slept. It's his cave, but last night he gave it to me, and he and Danny slept outside."

"Humph." The colonel gazed reflectively. "Not so bad. In fact, quite snug. Old fellow is pretty well fixed, isn't he? Why, damme," and he warmed to the topic, "I don't see but what a man or a woman either could live here right comfortably, if he didn't die of loneliness or get poisoned by the water. I could stay here myself. Might do me good. Been getting too fat. Could make whisky out of corn, but I'd try it without for a week. Don't suppose he understands what I'm saying, do you?" he added with alarm.

"No, not a word," assured the young man. The old priest was looking blandly on.

"He hasn't any liquor around or he'd have offered it, like a gentleman," murmured the colonel.

"I slept on that bed of grass," explained Bowie. "I wasn't afraid, and it was lovely. But mama'll be scandalized."

"Fiddlesticks," declared her father. "Didn't hurt you a bit. She'd have done the same, at your age, if she'd had the chance. I remember—you bet! Why, damme, we wanted to spend our honeymoon in just such quarters; but we spent it in New York instead. You don't know your mother, Bowie."

Daviess threw back his head and laughed. The colonel wheezed in company.

"If we have to stay on the mesa to-night mama can sleep here with me," proposed Bowie. "I'll ask the father. He'll be tickled to death, I'm sure."

"Well, he won't die young," grunted the colonel. "Eh, old chap," and he chuckled at their host.

"I'd better try that wireless first," suggested Daviess.

"How can you, Danny, without frightening mama?"

"That's right," agreed the colonel. "I'll fetch her over here, and you can try it when she's gone."

"But you can't fetch her, papa. How can you?"

"Why not?"

"She doesn't know when you're around."

The colonel's face fell.

"By Jove!" he muttered.

"She's coming," announced the young man.

Mrs. Bool was to be descried, wending rather forlorn way through the cedars, her glances apprehensive, from trunk to trunk, but her pace unflinching.

"She sees us!" ejaculated Bowie, running back to meet her.

"That's right. She's caught it!" said the colonel. "Damn glad of that!"

Mrs. Bool had stopped, stock-still, and was staring, transfixed. Her face worked convulsively—between smiles and tears.

"Bowie!" she cried. "Oh, my dear; where have you been? And your father, too? And Danny. You've frightened me dreadfully!"

The two embraced. The colonel hastened agilely down.

"Well, Kate," he declared, "we thought you never were coming to, and joining us."

He kissed her fervently; she clung to him.

"What do you mean? Coming to? I woke up and I was alone—alone! I thought I'd been deserted. Nobody answered me. It was cruel."

He patted her broad back, and with a look warned the others.

"Never mind," he comforted. "We were just taking a little stroll. The children wanted to show me this place. There, there. Come along. I'll introduce you to their chaperon. He runs the garden and pool. Show your mother about, Bowie."

"Bowie!" upbraided Mrs. Bool, suddenly recalled to the enormity of the night's escapade. "Where were you? Your father and I looked all over for you. Why didn't you answer?"

"We did answer; and we came, too," retorted Bowie. "But you didn't hear us, and you didn't see us. So we went back here."

Mrs. Bool gasped, bewildered, incredulous.

"Then you did not come until after we were asleep; and that was midnight. Oh, Bowie!"

"You wouldn't understand, mama," vouchsafed the girl patiently. "It's all about the fourth dimension. Please don't try to understand. Papa knows. He thinks it's all right. I'll show you the cave where I slept. You can sleep there, too. It belongs to that old priest; and so do the garden, and the pool, and everything."

"The idea!" gasped Mrs. Bool, still bewildered. She suffered herself to be conducted on. "This is my mother," presented Bowie. "And mama, this is the nice old priest who watched over me last night. He and Danny slept outside and I slept inside."

"I don't understand," faltered Mrs. Bool. "How de do," she addressed. "I thought I might be able to get a little water for my tea."

"He doesn't speak English; he's Spanish," explained Bowie. "And he's been here hundreds of years."

Mrs. Bool sniffed the sniff of the unbeliever. The priest smiled benignly.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Bool?" asked Daviess.

"I don't know," she answered qua-

veringly. "I thought that I was feeling miserable when I woke up; I seem to be better now. I wonder if it's the sleeping out of doors."

"Without doubt," declared her husband. "I feel like a fighting-cock myself. Watch me kick my hat off, Kate." He essayed another gambol.

The old priest was bringing a jar of water. Daviess turned to withdraw.

"I'll go to the machine," he said. "That wireless ought to be working by this time."

"Don't be gone long, Danny." The girl ran to him. "Don't try too hard," she whispered, "or Lieutenant Kunke will come."

"I savvy," he answered. She held up her face; they kissed; and releasing him, she looked boldly back at the two elders and laughed.

"Bowie!" gasped her mother.

"Good example—but we'll shock the priest," quoth the colonel, promptly kissing her. "It's in the air, Kate."

Mrs. Bool sank down.

"Benjamin! What possesses you! I don't understand. And I'm sure this other gentleman won't understand. I'm so upset that I don't believe I want my tea."

Laughing, light-hearted, Daviess hastened away.

When he returned he found the party seated in the shade of the cedars.

"Did you get the post, sir?" demanded the colonel.

"Not that I know of. It's a question whether I could make them hear, you know."

"By Jove," acceded the colonel. "Never thought of that."

"We've decided we can stay very comfortably, Danny," spoke the girl. "All but mama."

"I will have to do as the rest do," said Mrs. Bool helplessly. "But I am sure I never can survive on raw corn or beans."

"Parched corn, my dear," corrected the colonel. "I can, anybody can. Egad, I remember once on a scout after

the Apaches, out of Fort Bowie (it was my first post; I named Bowie for it), the whole column lived on parched corn for three days. Had nothing else, and lucky to get even that. We thrived."

"But my teeth," moaned Mrs. Bool:

"Cheer up," directed the colonel. He put his arm about her; with a languishing sigh she leaned against him. "Why, Kate, we can live on our fat. That's what you intended to do—didn't you say so?"

"You heard me say that?" exclaimed his wife. "Benjamin! Where were you?"

"But there are squash, you know," prompted Bowie. "And when the melons are ripe we can drink them."

Daviess seated himself beside her. Their hands met and clung.

"I feel so foolish," she remarked, *sotto voce*. "And so does papa—and even mama's getting that way." She sighed ecstatically. "I wonder if the people who lived on the mesa were all as silly. The father says it was called the Mesa of the Enchanted Happy Ones."

"But your father can't endure squash; can you, Benjamin," objected Mrs. Bool, persistent.

"Love it," declared the colonel. "Very nourishing, too. Ought not to eat it account of fat; can eat it up here though all right.

"I don't see," he continued, "but what we can stay a week very comfortably. Egad, that old priest has been here several hundred years. We'll have to enlarge the garden. May have to fix out another cave in case these two young folks want to go to housekeeping—what?"

"Benjamin!" exclaimed his wife. "What nonsense."

"The old priest does want to marry us; he wanted to last night. but we decided to wait for you to be present," informed Bowie.

"Humph!" grunted the colonel. "Sort of Garden of Eden we'll make it, then."

"Well, they *ought* to be married, I am sure," denounced Mrs. Bool severely. "It would be a very proper solution. But I had *hoped*—"

"Let young love have its way, Kate," encouraged the colonel with a little squeeze. "Eh? We were young once."

"I'm ready," said Daviess blithely, springing up. "How about it, Bowie?"

"He *can't* marry us, though," protested Bowie, eyes shining, cheeks flushed, but voice uncertain. "Oh, Danny! He can't."

"Why not? He's a priest, isn't he?" demanded her father.

"But he's a Catholic; we're heretics, papa. I've tried to explain to him."

"I was going to say," finished Mrs. Bool, bewildered, "that I had *hoped* to fit Bowie with a worthy trousseau."

"Nonsense," retorted the colonel. "Do you want to marry this boy, or not, Bowie?"

"But, papa! We're Unitarians and the priest's a Catholic."

"What difference does that make?"

"He may not understand. He thinks because we're Christians we're Catholics."

"But I'm sure Unitarians are Christians," proffered her mother feebly.

"There weren't any Unitarians in his day, mama."

"I'll risk it," declared the colonel. "I'll risk it. You can have another service when we get out of here. Gad,

Daviess, if you want this girl you'd better take her, while we're on this confounded plateau. Eh, Kate! We'd have got married by an Apache medicine-man, wouldn't we? What's young blood coming to, anyway?"

"Benjamin!" faltered Mrs. Bool.

The girl was blushing crimson. She looked at Daviess, helplessly.

"Come on, before we wake up, gir-
lie," he pleaded. He interrupted himself: "Listen!"

A vibrant hum reached their ears.

The colonel scrambled to his feet.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated. "A motor—what?"

"Sounds like an air-machine," vouchsafed the young man.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bowie in dismay.

"Is it from the post, Benjamin?" queried Mrs. Bool anxiously.

"Shouldn't wonder. Messages must have reached them, Daviess."

"As like as not, sir."

"Get out in the open, everybody," ordered the colonel. "Where we'll be seen. By Jove, but I'll give that fellow a wiggling, for his delay."

Even within the brief space ere, led by the energetic colonel, they trailed out from the cedar grove, the humming waxed louder; and now they beheld, with view unobstructed, close in the south an aeroplane scudding straight for them, through the ambient blue.

"Kunke!" informed Daviess. "See him?"

"Oh, Danny!" cried the girl. "It's coming to take us away. We'll wake up. Aren't you sorry? I wish we had—"

"Why, damme! Why doesn't he slow down? Hey! Give him a yell, somebody. By the Eternal! Passes us right by."

"I declare," panted Mrs. Bool, astounded. "Signal him, Benjamin. Wave, Bowie."

"I won't!"

"He doesn't see us," exclaimed Daviess.

"He doesn't!" The girl chimed in; her tone was jubilant, her face aglow. "He doesn't, does he, Danny?"

"I'll have him court-martialed. I'll have him reduced to a private, by gad. I'll have him drummed out of the service," stormed the colonel, reckless with his penalty.

With vibrant whir and audible rush, one hundred feet over the mesa, sped headlong the lean machine.

Two figures, khaki garbed, were in it; the pale, peevish face of Lieutenant Kunke stared down, wild-eyed but dapper still even to accurate little mustache.

A moment and the machine had come and gone.

"We must be still in the fourth dimension, colonel, remember," suggested Daviess, striving against a shout of joy.

"Fourth fiddlesticks!" retorted the colonel. "Here's the mesa. There's our own machine to look at. He's a fool, a positive fool. I knew it. I always knew it."

"Won't he come back, Benjamin?" quavered Mrs. Bool. "I don't understand."

"God knows; I don't," growled the colonel.

"He's circling," announced Daviess, his eyes upon the air-machine, now far receded in the mighty blue space about, swinging broadside.

"Danny!" The girl seized his hand. "Quick." She implored breathlessly. "Before we wake up. He'll see us. Oh, I'm sure he'll see, next time. I don't want him, Danny."

They fled away. Lightly and swiftly they moved, and almost instantly were in the garden. The old priest smiled upon them.

"Shall we, Danny?" she entreated. "Shall we? Will it be wicked? I don't care."

"Tell him, sweetheart."

She spoke.

"Marry us, father," she said; and evidently repeated it in Spanish.

The old priest answered gently.

"He asks us if we are confessed," she translated piteously.

"Oh, I wish he'd hurry!"

"Tell him all we have to confess is that we love each other."

She did.

With smile renewed the father drew from the folds of his cassock a small missal.

There were a few words by him, he joined their hands, and his fingers enscribed over their heads a sign of benediction.

That was all.

"We're married, Danny," whispered the girl in awe. "Kiss me. I'm so glad!"

"I, too, sweetheart."

They kissed. The old priest turned away.

"Do you think me—you know—too bold, Danny? Did I urge too much? I didn't mean to."

"Sweetheart! But won't you be sorry? Supposing you have to keep me—supposing we don't wake up?"

So happy, each was filled with doubt and joy struggling.

"I love you, Danny."

"You said you wouldn't marry me. Now you have!"

"Did I?"

"I asked you would you marry me if I was in the army."

"But you aren't, Danny! I'm tired of the army. You never asked me to marry you, anyway."

"But you thought you couldn't."

"I know."

They stood enfolded by their mutual rapture. The hum of the motor resounded again. The girl sighed, and shivered blissfully.

"Now we must go back," she said.

"We must tell mama and papa. But even if this *is* a dream, Danny, and they make me marry somebody else when we're waked up, we'll remember. We will, won't we, dear? Don't you forget."

"Never."

Kunke, peering wildly from his seat in the machine, was for the second time passing directly over. Yet he did not slacken, nor give any token of recognition.

The colonel, raging, shook his pudgy fist and bellowed wrathful imprecations.

Mrs. Bool had collapsed.

"Bowie!" she chided. "Where have you been?" She eyed them suspiciously. "He hasn't seen us; he doesn't stop. You should stay here. Perhaps he would see you."

"We've been married, mama," informed the girl, quietly.

"Bowie! How dreadful."

"Not at all," snarled the colonel. "Glad of it. Serves the fellow right. By gad, sailing round like a blind bat—

can't even find his girl, when she's square in front of him. Can't find a whole mesa. He's a fool. Congratulations, young man. Now you've got her, keep her."

"There it goes. It's going away," wailed Mrs. Bool, despairingly. "Benjamin! Can't you do something?"

"Do something!" snorted the colonel, her husband. "I've helloed till I'm black in the face. He's running for shelter. He's afraid of the storm. There's a dust-storm brewing. Look at that sky! He's liable to get dirtied up, if he stays out!"

"It's the mesa; it's the whole mesa, colonel," exclaimed Daviess, suddenly struck with the thought. "He doesn't see the mesa because it's just like we are! Here."

He turned, and with resolute movement walked through—a cedar trunk on the edge of the grove!

He walked back again, the same way.

"By Jove!" gasped the colonel.

"Oh, what fun!" chortled Bowie, imitating the feat. "I do it too, don't I?"

"Stop," faltered Mrs. Bool. "You're making me dizzy. I don't understand, Benjamin. Are you all bewitched?"

"Everything's gone into the fourth dimension," continued Daviess, excited. "It's been coming on gradually. Our being here has stirred the place up. We caught it, and now the whole mesa's caught it. That's why your feet passed right through the bush, colonel. Now the trees have followed suit. I expect Kunke didn't see us because he couldn't. The mesa is invisible; bushes, trees, and all, or else it is just a bare patch. Probably the whole surface is affected."

"Sort of creeping paralysis, eh?" commented the colonel. "Jove!"

"Try it, papa. Try it, mama," begged the girl. "It's fun. I feel so light and queer. The tree merely melts away. I don't know that I'm touching it at all."

"But you make me dizzy," quavered her mother. "Benjamin!" For the

colonel himself was gravely performing the astounding act. "You're so ghastly. I shall faint."

"Try it, Kate," jubilated the colonel, excited as a schoolboy.

"I don't want to. It isn't decent," she quavered, eyes tightly shut. She wept. "We shall never be rescued. If nobody can see us, how will we ever get off?"

"Exactly," concurred the colonel. He removed his helmet and mopped his brow. "Whew! Hot."

"Couldn't we jump off?" queried Bowie.

"And float away," supplemented Daviess, mischievously.

"Never," groaned Mrs. Bool. "You forget that the colonel and I are not young. We can't jump, or float; we're—"

"Except in water," corrected the colonel. "Gad, I believe I *could* jump, though."

"If we stay long enough maybe the whole ground will catch it, and we can sink right down," proposed Daviess.

"Ooo!" shuddered the girl. "And maybe have it relapse and close in on us part way."

"Bowie!" groaned her mother. "Don't mention it. I'm afraid to sit here. I might sink and stick!"

"Here comes the old priest," commented the colonel. "He may have something up his sleeve."

"He looks worried," whispered Bowie to the young man. "Do you think our marriage bothers him?"

"Too late now, sweetheart," answered Daviess. "It must be something else."

But his own heart was troubled. He could not give her up—he would not.

The old priest spoke, earnestly.

"It's the storm," explained Bowie, to the others. "He thinks there's going to be a storm."

"So do I," agreed the colonel. "Sky's bad, off there. Cyclone weather. Sultry as Hades."

"But not a cyclone region, colonel," prompted Daviess.

"It can blow, though, like sin. Danme, once at Fort Bowie, before the girl was born—"

"What will we do? What does he say? Ask him what we shall do, Bowie," implored Mrs. Bool.

"We'd better go into the cave," advised Daviess. The southeast sky was strangely metallic; the stillness of the mesa was suddenly disturbed by a sharp, whiff of fiery air.

"By Jove! Look!" gasped the colonel. "We're weaving round like smoke. Look at those trees!"

"We'll be blown away," cried Bowie, whitening.

She gazed about with startled, frightened eyes, and clung to her lover.

"Certainly not," he reassured. "The mesa's been here a thousand years, remember."

"It's rooted fast. But the people disappeared."

The gust had passed, and with it the uncanny wavers. Things resumed their seeming stability.

The old priest was upon his knees; his lips were moving rapidly.

"We'd better make for that cave," declared the colonel. "Can't wait for this old man to get done praying. Come along! Come along, Kate! I'll help you up."

She shook her head, and moaned, with eyes closed tightly.

"I can't. I can't, Benjamin. I couldn't move a step. Don't leave me. We shall all be blown into little pieces. Oh, if you could only see yourselves!" A second gust swirled among them. She opened her eyes, and shut them again instantly. "Ooo!" she shrieked. "You're all crooked. You wobbled. You spread right through that tree, Benjamin! Didn't it hurt?"

"Not a bit. You were somewhat out of plum, yourself," retorted the colonel, grimly.

"We might be blown through the back of the cave, and stick *there!*" exclaimed Bowie. "I'd rather stay out here. Let's get away from the trees. Oh, Danny! I'm afraid, too."

"It's that heavy air from the outside."

He was blanched; the colonel even was blanched; the old priest was praying, ceasing not.

By this he realized that a crisis was at hand. He tried to speak boldly. "If that machine was working we could get above it, or beat it."

Bowie spoke quickly.

"Could we? Here, then." She thrust something into his hand. "Don't tell," she whispered.

'Twas the missing bolt of the aeroplane!

"I found it. I've had it a long time. Hurry."

"You—darling!" he grinned. He sprang away. He halted, for a third gust arrived.

The colonel and Mrs. Bool crouched together; the kneeling priest; Bowie, upright and slender; the cedars and bushes wavered dizzily.

He must shut his eyes; the effect was sickening. He started again.

"Where's he going?" demanded the colonel.

"He thinks he can fix the machine."

"He does! Gad, let's get out of here, if he can! I've had enough. Eh, Kate?"

"Get up; hang onto me," he bade. "Take a brace, Kate. Let's make the machine between gusts. Then we'll be there. Help your mother, Bowie. Damme, we'll get her there if we have to carry her."

Mrs. Bool, groaning, staggered to her feet.

"I'm coming," she faltered. "Don't leave me."

"That's the spirit," encouraged her husband. "If we're blown out we'll hang together."

Intense stillness—a stillness of fright rather than of peace—again had enwrapped the mesa.

They left the old priest upon his knees, and hastened across the open toward the machine, where Daviess was fumbling at the engine.

The sun was brazen, not golden; the

sky was thick with haze; the colonel and Mrs. Bool perspired freely.

Before they had arrived the young man had straightened, to wave his hand. They could hear the drone of the motor. The air-ship was trembling with new energy.

"Right," he called. "All aboard."

Panting, they piled in.

"Wraps?" queried Daviess.

"No, no," groaned Mrs. Bool. "Go, go."

"Never mind them. Lets pull out of here before we're blown in two," exhorted the colonel.

Above the drumming of the motor swelled a resonant drone, eery, confused, filling the high and the low. To the southeast the desert was blotted by a veil of yellow.

Mrs. Bool whimpered and cowered; Bowie exclaimed; the colonel swore. But even in the instant of confusion and uncertain apprehension, the aeroplane stanchly rose.

It shot upward at sharp angle, like a winged rocket, or like a great dragon-fly.

"We're off," exclaimed Daviess, exultantly. "We'll beat it."

"By gad, there's no fourth dimension about this!" declared the colonel, presently. "I'm solid as a rock. How are you, Kate? Look about you, old girl."

"Don't we bend?" she quavered, cautiously opening an eye.

"Not a bit; and we're raising a confounded breeze, too."

"We *are* solid," confirmed Bowie. "Aren't we, Danny?"

The parting of the air before their swift flight made a wind in their faces. Loosened tendrils streamed from her forehead and temples, and in her cheeks was a pinkness.

"Sure," agreed Daviess; he felt for her hand, and found it. "When we left the mesa we must have been resolved again."

"Thank God," muttered the colonel, piously. "But we ought to have taken that priest."

"He married us," said Bowie. "He did; *really* he did. Danny's mine."

"I wasn't thinking about that. I was thinking it was inhumane to desert him. By Jove, he'll be blown into knots!"

"The whole mesa is probably full of knots—love-knots," quoth Daviess.

"It did have that atmosphere," concurred the colonel, reflectively. "Eh, Kate?"

"The Mesa of the Enchanted Happy Ones," dreamily murmured Bowie.

Underneath the air-ship the desert country lay clear to the view.

Behind, the vista was cut by murk—the murk of the storm which had been outstripped.

Swinging in a great arc the machine turned back; for the murk was settling, the storm was done.

"Fizzled," grunted the colonel. He put his arm about his wife; they sat content.

Steadily hummed the propellers; the machine was heading upon the homeward trail.

Bowie, peering down, over the edge, where she sat, forward, beside Daviess, suddenly exclaimed:

"There!" she cried, excited. "It wasn't hurt. Look, Danny; look! It's just the same—isn't it?"

"There's our mesa, Kate," directed the colonel, to his comfortable wife. "Trees and everything. Don't see any

priest, though. We might throw him a line, if we could sight him."

"Don't go too near," begged Mrs. Bool.

"Too much of a good thing, eh?" laughed her husband. "We see the place, though, and it looks all there. How do you account for that, Daviess? I knew Kunke was blind."

"It must have lost its fourth dimension quality, after we left, sir."

"Humph!" grunted Colonel Bool.

Below, the mesa waited, its flat gray-green top upward lifting above the yellowish desert country roundabout.

As it waited it gently shimmered, blending, in ethereal way, with the blue haze. Its sides were very steep, it stood alone, as if it might be a gigantic fungus growth. And it was beautiful.

The air-ship dropped slightly, in salute, speeding above some six hundred feet.

"Daniel!" gasped Mrs. Bool, alarmed.

"Not too close, sir," warned the colonel. "Confound you, we've been there."

But Bowie sighed tremulously. She tucked her arm within that of Daviess, and gazed backward at the forbidden land.

"Do you think we will ever find it again, Danny—The Mesa of the Enchanted Happy Ones?"

"Of course, dearest," he said.

(The end.)

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EDITOR, THE CAVALIER, Flatiron Building, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

THE GOLDEN DELUGE

A SHORT STORY

BY GERALD VILLIERS STUART

IT is not an easy matter to obtain an interview with Lord Ordsburg, the great international financier; even ambassadors have been reminded of the value of his time; but Edward Hearne sent in a cheaply-manufactured card with "Chemical Engineer" printed in the corner, and was admitted so promptly that grave elderly clerks in the outer offices looked at each other, and one who was of a less matured vintage actually whistled.

They saw a young man pass through whose clothes were spotted with strange stains; only his boots were new, and these announced the fact with glib creakings. His face was the face of an enthusiast, clean-shaven, dark, with brilliant deep-set eyes, and a resolute mouth which, more than his straight, sensitive nose, was in keeping with the powerful square contours of his head.

There was something incongruous between the back and the front view of the man. His form was on heroic lines, but gaunt and slightly bent, suggesting a great force partially dissipated. He drew a long breath with a gasping catch at the end when he entered Lord Ordsburg's private office, as men breathe who are enforcing calm on greatly excited nerves.

Lord Ordsburg sat at his plain mahogany desk, which was strangely neat and bare of papers. There were a few sheets with initials in foreign script opposite rows of figures which were seldom less than seven, also two

charts not unlike the tracings of a trained nurse in a typhoid fever case.

The room was austere, unhaunted by human passions, sufficiently large to accommodate a directors' meeting, dadoed in small mahogany panels, with a dark-green anaglyphic paper above, stamped into austere conventional figures, highly grazed, frightfully impersonal.

It was a room whose occupants could readily detach themselves from their more human selves, and see facts and figures floating in a cold, clear atmosphere as free from the fogs of sentiment as interstellar space.

Had ever such an eager human being as Edward Hearne entered this room since the paper-hangers left? Probably not. Its atmosphere ran through his fevered nerves like some malignant anodyne.

The man who raised his eyes gravely from the study of a chart to absorb the personality of his visitor announced by a secretary was between fifty and sixty. The predominating superficial note in his face and head was length. One must except his hair, for he was rather bald; but his almost white beard, which curled up and inward, concaving to a point, was long; so, also, was his nose; and between his rather sad gray eyes and the top of his forehead there was a great distance. The predominating inward note was strength.

He picked up a card from his desk, glanced at it as though to remind himself of something, and said in a slightly foreign voice, restrained as the voices

of men who habitually husband their forces.

"Sit down, Mr. Hearne," he said.

The young man obeyed nervously. Lord Ordsburg opened a drawer, from which he took a snap-shot photograph, some papers, and a tiny slab of metal. He examined the photograph, appeared satisfied with a swift glance of comparison, and replaced it in the drawer. The slab of metal he held up.

"You claim to have made that?"

"Yes," replied the younger man, stifling with excitement in his voice, "I made that. Have you tested it?"

"I have satisfied myself that it is gold. Yes."

"And the other sample—the material in process of—"

"It is convincing, Mr. Hearne, or you would not be here."

The young man clasped his twitching hands together.

"Then—then you are satisfied—you will deal?"

"Extraordinary statements," said the chilly level voice, "require extraordinary proofs. Many men have claimed the discovery of manufacturing precious metals and precious stones. Cleverer men than I have believed in them. You are only at the beginning of your deal, Mr. Hearne. I am interested. I am willing to be convinced. I am even going to offer you a small sum for an absolute option on the process pending investigation."

"Oh, thank—you, Lord Ordsburg! Thank you!"

"What sum do you suggest, Mr. Hearne?"

"I—I am very poor. I have spent everything — materials — chemical apparatus—I am in debt."

"We are all in debt," said Lord Ordsburg with a wintry smile. "I owe millions—many millions."

"I owe ten pounds," said Hearne solemnly, "but I am at the end of my resources; give me enough to exist on until I have demonstrated. I am so certain of my invention, you see. It is all I ask."

"You claim to be able to manufacture gold. Your poverty is not the best proof of your claim."

"You do not understand. How could you understand such poverty as mine. It is not only the raw materials, the chemicals. You see, it takes a little radium to start the process—which I cannot buy, but the food for my brain, my brain, you see, and my hands. A hundred pounds' worth of material will make more than a thousand pounds. If I had the first hundred, or even ten pounds, but I have less than nothing. I, who have invented a method of making the whole world rich."

"A secretary will accompany you to your laboratory"—Lord Ordsburg refrained from referring to the culinary and sleeping utilities of the room, though he knew all about it—"he will superintend in your presence the packing up of its contents to the last scrap of paper; he will then seal up the room. You will accompany my secretary to Scarforrest, my place on the Welsh border. There you will be virtually a prisoner under surveillance. You will be supplied with everything you wish, and receive fifty pounds a day. I am satisfied that you can already make gold cheaper than the average mining cost, I will see that you receive such a price for your invention as the interests of civilization make possible."

Lord Ordsburg looked up at the young man with the shadow of pity as he said this.

"I will deposit two hundred thousand pounds in your name as a guarantee. On this deposit, however, you cannot draw for two months, and only then on your adding to it ten thousand pounds in gold ingots. Should you fail to do so, the deposit reverts to me. Do you agree to these terms, Mr. Hearne? If so, read and sign this paper."

He pushed across the desk the paper which had been attached to the photograph.

"I will sign; I trust you implicitly, Lord Ordsburg. You have been very kind to me."

Hearne hastily scanned the paper and attached his signature.

"You may trust me, Mr. Hearne, to do what is right by—well, within the limits of the safety of civilized society."

"I don't think I understand." The young man looked puzzled.

"It is unlikely you would. I think that is all; my secretary will arrange details, and, by the way, he will not ask you the nature of your invention, and you will not tell him. Good morning."

He touched an electric button on his desk, and Edward Hearne was ushered out by the secretary. When the door had closed upon the inventor, Lord Ordsburg leaned back in his chair and sighed wearily. He did not look like a man within measurable reach of unlimited gold.

Scarforrest is a Norman keep made habitable by the addition of a Georgian house. Norman keep and Georgian house have alike been modernized within. There are electric lights and electric heaters furnished by a harnessed mountain torrent, luxurious bath-rooms, and even lifts.

The gray battlements are no grayer than they were five hundred years ago. There is not more ivy; there are no fewer jackdaws; only the inhabitants have altered. The hard-bitten men-at-arms have given place to softly moving footmen. The host talks no more of the splendid strategic position, when he points from the portcullis doorway; he expiates on the view, the silver river winding in the valley below, the forest-clad hills above it, the scarred and jagged sky-line of the mountains beyond it.

Speculation was rife among Lord Ordsburg's neighbors. Why had he come to the castle without the usual house party? The pheasants were eating their heads off in the covers. Where were the famous game-shots and the inevitable prince to put the finishing touch to the pheasants man-made and furnish group photographs to the illustrated papers?

Through this village ran a whisper. The ghost walked once more in the Alchemist's Tower!

Shepherds out on the hill at night had seen strange beams of far-flung lights flashing balefully out through the tower windows slitted narrow to defy the archer's hail.

Men said that in the haunted tower the ghost-lights had been extinguished when the castle passed forever from the great family of Scarr. What did the lights portend? Was Sir Roger Scarr making ghostly gold once more to buy back for its descendants their squandered patrimony?

Some wandering dramatic instinct must have inspired Lord Ordsburg to allot that tower to his strange guest as a laboratory, for there in the fifteenth century Sir Roger Scarr had practised the transmutation of metals. "The black art," said the church, and accused him of bartering his soul for the devil's aid.

The lands of Scarforrest marched with the Abbey of Thornbury. Perhaps that had something to do with the church's persecution, or, who knows but what Sir Roger, after twenty years' work, was too near the elucidation of the problem—the church was the guardian of civilization in the Middle Ages.

This fact, however, stands out clear from all the legend and tradition which from the mists of time have gathered about the Alchemist's Tower. One day a monk had audience with Sir Roger in the tower. The night shepherds on the hills saw rays of light coming from the narrow windows, then they heard an explosion. In the morning Sir Roger was occupying various corners of the room, the crucibles were shattered, and all the walls were splashed with molten gold.

Of course, men said that the devil had paid in cash and come for his own, but I don't know—that monk might have been a bit of a chemist himself. It may be that Lord Ordsburg had never heard of Sir Roger; he had little

time for such human things as ghosts, and Scarforrest was a recent acquisition. His choice of the tower may have been guided by its facilities for isolation.

Six weeks had passed since the financier had come to Scarforrest. The household was reduced to a minimum.

There was but one secretary, though among the servants Hearne also passed in that capacity. He was well dressed now, and his boots no longer squeaked. His form no longer suggested a great force dissipated; it had straightened, and he carried his head like a conquering soldier.

He had the appearance of one in whose ears a triumphal march is constantly ringing. The look of eager excitement had not passed; it had rather increased, and showed in every gesture. So men look to whom success is coming faster than they can adjust themselves to its corrosive action.

Lord Ordsburg had aged, so men said who passed him in his solitary drives. He looked worried, so worried that a neighbor who prided himself on his astuteness predicted a European war, and sold out his consols to hoard gold.

The great financier had never before lived at Scarforrest alone; he had always entertained the neighborhood with regal magnificence and regal formality; his residence was to the lesser gentry the event of the year, and their wives had always marked the event by new dinner-frocks, and now—not even a house-party.

But, though his own servants knew it not, guests were on their way to Lord Ordsburg's castle. One was hurrying from New York on board the *Lusitania*, another had left Johannesburg by special train two weeks before. And from Notting Hill, if certain negotiations were successful, would come a third.

There was a window in Notting Hill next a chemist's shop in the High Street. From black letters on a red

ground the passer-by could learn if he so desired that Dr. McAllister, physician and surgeon, had his office hours from nine to twelve and from three to six. But any one wishing to consult Dr. McAllister would hardly have been balked of his ambition had he arrived a little too early or a good deal too late, for Dr. McAllister's practise made few calls on his time, and between his surgery and his place of abode there was no great gulf fixed. He was young, and had but recently left the hospitals to join the great throng known as struggling professional men.

One who rang the bell about six weeks from the day Edward Hearne had called upon Lord Ordsburg, experienced no difficulty whatever in gaining access to the young surgeon, though the hour which he had chosen flagrantly failed to correspond to the time mentioned on the window. He was kept waiting, in fact, about as long as it takes a pretty girl, whose hair is not the least of her charms, to balance her hat among the only gold beyond the power of alchemist to make or miner to dig.

Perhaps the caller had to wait a minute more; it takes that long for a girl to extricate herself from a strong man's arms when he is kissing her as he believes for the last time. Besides, she had to dab a handkerchief to her eyes, because she did not want it to be for the last time.

The fact is that Viola Crean was not one of Dr. McAllister's patients; she was the only woman he could ever love, and he had sent for her, not to tell her so—that fact had been conveyed to her every day for a year—but to say good-by.

"I'm beaten, darling," he had said huskily. "I am going to chuck my profession, and with it my hope of marrying."

"How dare you say that to me!" She had fired up. "After—well, after you have kissed me every day for—almost ever since you have known me

and taught me to—I was going to say love you.”

“You’ll have to forget, dear,” he answered drearily. “You didn’t promise to marry a laborer; that’s what I am going to be. Education! Brains! The world has overstocked itself with these—overbred them. That’s been hammered into me at last. I’m water finding its level, that’s what I am.”

“You are probably the cleverest surgeon in London, Jim,” was her answer, and lightly as a snowflake her hand had settled on the shoulders bent across the table. “There’s your pamphlet on ‘The Nerves of Memory.’ Is there another man in London who could have written that? It is bound to attract attention.”

“No! There’s not another man in London could have written that pamphlet, and some day one of those successful beggars in Harley Street will be knighted because it has attracted his attention. I’ll be driving a reaper and binder on a Canadian wheat ranch. Well, some one’s got to raise wheat; the world can’t live on gold and restaurant entrées, and that’s what it’s trying to do.

“I tell you,” he went on forlornly, as the girl let him talk down his misery, “that when my grandfather educated my father out of the old farm, he injured me and wronged the world. Your grandfather did the same. We could have married and been of some use in the world, adding to its store of food, coaxing grain and grass from the windy hills, and our children would have been a blessing instead of a ban.”

McAllister hurled out the words with all the rhetoric of an emotion-driven Celt. It was the first time the girl, who knew him so well, had ever seen him lose the calm poise into which he had drilled himself. He was a good specimen of the human race, large-boned, but not ungainly. His face, in its bold contours, might have suggested some Indian chief had it not been for the overwhelming indications of intellectual force piled up behind it.

Though only of medium height, he gave an impression of size. The little surgery, with its pathetic attempts to proclaim professional prosperity, the imitation-leather furniture, and the inadequate store of drugs and appliances was dwarfed by its owner as a parrot’s cage by an eagle. The only creation in the room which looked as though it should belong to him was the splendid-looking girl whom he was banishing from his life, or trying to banish, since she was evidently going to fight for her right to share this man’s vicissitudes.

“Very well,” said Viola Crean; “we will go back to the land together. I am not afraid of the land.”

“I knew you would say that,” he groaned. “You’re too great, Viola, not to have said it. But I tell you, it wouldn’t do. You’d have to pay too dearly; a man can go back on the soil if he has not degenerated, a woman can only drag herself back to it if she has degenerated. The time would come when you’d give voice to your misery, for it would be misery to you. Do you think it’s easy to say this? If I was a weakling I’d accept the sacrifice of your life quick enough. As it is—no! Do you hear, Viola? No! And may God have mercy upon us.”

The girl knew that she had lost. McAllister’s voice, shaken as though with the wo of worlds yet vibrating with indomitable purpose, left no doubt in her mind.”

“Very well,” she said, with a mirthless laugh; “I’ll go, but before you abandon your profession, Jim, you ought to put your theory into practise.”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“The nerves of memory, Jim. You claim that there is no atom of remembrance which you cannot extirpate. Take your instruments and kill the memory of this last year, of my love, of what you have meant to me; kill it, kiss by kiss; extract them one by one; blot your face out of my life with a red-hot needle.”

McAllister was making a tremendous effort to be strong, holding his

arms to his sides by main force. He might have failed but for the tinkle of the surgery bell.

"Jim," cried the girl, "suppose it should be a patient; suppose your practise is going to begin; perhaps your luck is going to change."

McAllister made a despairing gesture. Then spoke lightly with the instinct of a man to jeer at his fate. "One patient doesn't make a practise."

Viola Crean was hastily putting on her hat. "I'll be out of this in a moment."

"Don't bother. I'm not going to see the patient. I'll cut the cables while the knife's in my hand. What's the use of temporizing; one patient could make no difference."

"You *shall* see him!" cried the girl, turning round from the little mirror.

"I won't," he said stubbornly. "Put down your hat."

For answer she came up to him and flung her arms round his neck. "I'm going, Jim. Good-by."

They clung together for a moment; then she struggled to free herself, and succeeded as the loud footfall of the lodging-house maid sounded at the door. "A gent to see you, sir." The maid held a card in her grubby hand.

"Tell him I am busy," said the young surgeon gruffly. "This is not in office hours."

"'E told me to 'and you this." The maid held out the card.

The young surgeon took it mechanically.

"Lord Ordsburg," he read. "This must be meant for a political joke, or it's a dream. The king is as likely to come to a Notting Hill surgery as Lord Ordsburg."

"Show him in quick, Alice!" cried Viola Crean, and vanished through the door which led into the house, leaving her lover staring at the card.

"I am sorry, Mr. McAllister, that I was unable to call on you during office hours," said Lord Ordsburg, putting his top hat wearily on the table. "My time—"

"My office hours are elastic, Lord Ordsburg," replied the young surgeon. "Won't you sit down?"

"You are, I believe, the author of this?" The financier produced a pamphlet from his pocket—"Work on the Nerves of Memory."

The young surgeon bowed assent.

"It contains some very remarkable, quite startling theories; can you put them into practise?"

"Certainly, Lord Ordsburg; certainly I can put them into practise."

"I wish to consult you professionally, then, Mr. McAllister—professionally, but not personally. I may have urgent need of your services during the next few days; in any case, I shall have to secure your professional secrecy. I offer you a retainer of a hundred pounds. Would twenty pounds a day repay you for leaving your practise?"

"I may as well be frank, Lord Ordsburg; twenty pence would be a more honest figure."

"Thank you—we will leave it pounds. I should want you to go to Scarforrest. You will have to pass there as my private physician."

"I do not like mysteries, Lord Ordsburg."

"I detest them, Mr. McAllister."

"What is the nature of the operation? I must know that."

"I do not know that there will be any operation. You may leave Scarforrest without any calls on your professional skill. I merely want you on hand in case certain eventualities should arise. I will say this, however, your minimum earnings will be five hundred pounds. Will you—"

"I'd be a fool to refuse—it commits me to nothing."

Lord Ordsburg counted out two hundred pounds in large notes. "I should like you to leave by the midday express the day after to-morrow. I should wish you to procure by then everything which is necessary to prepare a room in a private house for an operation. The second hundred is for that purpose."

And now Scarforrest no longer lacked for guests. The three expected visitors all arrived by the same train, and none of them knew the other. The man from New York had often written to the man from Johannesburg. The man from Johannesburg had often written to the man from New York.

The man from Notting Hill had heard of them both, for they were financiers of world-wide reputation, magnates of the first magnitude, but neither of them had heard of the man from Notting Hill. Both financiers knew Lord Ordsburg, knew him so well that they came at his call from the uttermost ends of the earth without knowing the reason of the summons.

They traveled *incog.*; they visited Lord Ordsburg *incog.* The newspapers believed the American to be in Paris; the South African magnate to be at his Park Lane palace. The former visited Lord Scarforrest under the name of Silas Cordray; the South African said: "Just call me Mr. Smith," and with these *nom de guerres* the reader must be content.

The three men dined alone and did not talk very much. The South African discussed racing-stables with his host; the American occasionally succeeded in turning the conversation to the old masters which lined the walls. This left the South African out in the cold, and he was not a man who could long be left out in the cold. He was the only one of the three who had not been born a banker.

Mr. Smith was a miner—a banker because he owned so very much gold. He was a huge man who gave the impression of being chronically angry; his vast shoulders were stooped, and his hands as he walked swung in front of him unless he kept them in his pockets.

With those enormous hands, backed by shrewd common sense and the faculty of being angrier than the next angriest man, he had threshed his way

from the mud at the bottom of the ladder to the topmost rung.

The American was perhaps the suavest of the three; he always seemed to depreciate the least divergence from diplomatic language. His figure was what is known as stocky, slightly threatened also with the development of a fourth dimension, but his careful diet suggested that he had an eye on it. His head was magnificent; his face ugly, but very kind and frightfully intelligent.

Every word which fell on his ears was sifted, thrown into the waste-paper basket of his brain, or else carefully considered and docketed. You gained the impression from watching his eyes that all the world's great processes looked small to them and were in focus.

"Well, here we are—Ordsburg." The South African had schooled himself to omit the lord. "What are we here for?" The servants had placed the coffee and liqueurs on a table by the library fire. The room had been secured against intrusion. Silas Cordray leaned forward in his chair expectantly.

Their host put down his coffee-cup.

"We are confronted by a great danger; the entire basis of civilized society is threatened. I summoned you gentlemen because I felt that you should share in the responsibility of dealing with the matter."

"Quite right, Lord Ordsburg," said the American banker. "And the nature of the danger?" He spoke as men do who confront peril too often to be stirred by its presence.

"Gold," Lord Ordsburg spoke very slowly; "can be made in unlimited quantities for half a crown an ounce. I don't think I need expatiate on the meaning of that discovery."

There was silence in the library for a moment, then Smith called out angrily: "Pshaw! Some one's been unloading a gold brick on you, Ordsburg—that's about the size of it!"

"A good many gold bricks, sir," an-

swered the financier coldly. "They await your inspection. At the present market price they are worth fifteen thousand pounds, and they were made under test conditions in my own house. The materials were all checked off as they were brought in. Five hundred pounds is a liberal estimate of their value. I don't charge up the entire cost of the radium, because it seems to take more to start the process than to continue it."

"Knowing you, Lord Ordsburg," said Cordray quietly, "I accept your facts and your figures as proven. I am anxious to hear what steps you have taken to deal with the situation."

He looked at the South African, who was about to explode again, and that gentleman bit the end off a cigar with a savage twist of his great jaws, and obeyed the silent command.

Then in a series of cold, formal statements Lord Ordsburg explained his course of action.

"I congratulate you," said Silas Cordray when his host had finished. "The crisis could not have been handled with a more masterly touch. The situation is absolutely under control."

"Caged!" growled the South African. "The beggar's chained up. Now, I call that smart of you, Ordsburg—darned smart!"

"I should like you to view the gold, gentlemen," said their host; "then we will discuss the best methods of dealing with the unfortunate occurrence. I have conveyed the ingots accordingly, as Mr. Hearne has produced them, to the strong room built into this wall."

He went over to the wall and unlocked a bookcase, which then swung back, revealing a modern strong-room door. When he unfastened this the three men found themselves in a safety-deposit vault let into the thickness of the wall, part of the old castle against which the Georgian house had been built. Neatly piled on a shelf, burnished and splendid beneath a clus-

ter of electric lights, were the ingots of alchemist gold.

Silas Cordray ran his fingers over one of the ingots, then drew away with a shudder, as though he had touched something dreadful.

"I have always feared this moment," he murmured dreamily; "man will invent, invent, invent; mankind must in the end invent the instrument of its own destruction. The last conquest!"

The South African picked up an ingot and weighed it in his hairy hand; then he bit it.

"I know the taste of the stuff," he said; "I'd like to bash in his head with it." He slammed it back into position.

The great financier watched the effect of the alchemist gold upon his guests with scientific interest.

"Shall we proceed to discuss the affair to-night, or would you rather sleep on it?" he asked.

"To-night," replied Silas Cordray; "I shall never sleep again until the matter is settled."

"Same here," said the South African.

When they had returned to the library fire, Lord Ordsburg rang the bell.

"Some fresh coffee," he ordered, "and tell Dr. James"—the name by which McAllister was known—"that I may want to see him to-night."

"Who is Dr. James?" asked the American.

"At the moment my private physician. I do not care to trust myself to the local doctor."

"Quite right," said the American absently, for his thoughts were not on the doctors.

The three men drank their coffee in silence; no word had broken the stillness of the great room for nearly half an hour, when the South African rose to his feet, rammed his hands deep into his pockets, and kicked out his legs, as though trying to get rid of some superfluous energy.

"Kill the beggar!" he said; "that's

my humble advice. Kill him, and be done with it!"

"I should object," said Silas Cordray, "to such an extreme measure until every possible alternative had been discussed. Under his contract Mr. Hearne may be kept a prisoner indefinitely; there is no limit set on the time. Of course, in the greatest luxury, he could employ himself in making gold. It would be the height of dramatic irony — and a wonderful object-lesson in economics to the multitude to whom gold means wealth. Here would be a man surrounded by more gold than the richest man on earth possesses, yet deprived of the power of exchanging it until so much had been manufactured that the mere announcement of its existence would make it less valuable than its weight in steel. Very interesting. The theory—"

"We are not confronted by a theory," said Lord Ordsburg; "we are confronted by a danger."

"Hear — hear!" cried the South African.

"I am willing to admit that imprisonment is difficult," said Cordray, "but with the vast dungeons in this castle it should be possible to save civilized society from disruption without taking life. I regard this man Hearne as a coiner, and imprisonment is the punishment decreed by society for such a crime."

"Very well, I take imprisonment as your suggestion. How does it appeal to you?" Lord Ordsburg turned to the South African.

"It doesn't," he answered. "Think I want to lie awake nights wondering whether the man is still in chokee or out selling his secret? What's the objection to killing him? There's hardly a process of civilization that doesn't kill men in hundreds. The life of one man is nothing in the scale. I was reading in one of those personal journals about this old place of yours, Ordsburg—at the time you bought it. There was a Johnny blown up in one of the towers five hundred years ago—

playing at the same game; a monk did the trick. Well, you just give me five minutes alone in Mr. Hearne's factory, and history'll repeat itself. You'd never miss a tower or two from this old rat-warren."

"The end of some of those ancient alchemists was singularly unfortunate," observed the American.

"I consider your suggestion the better of the two," said Lord Ordsburg to the South African.

"It is certainly simpler," said Silas Cordray, "but I felt bound to speak in the interest of humanitarian methods."

"I am going to suggest an alternative," said Lord Ordsburg. "Civilization had to injure this man to a minimum; all the resources of civilization, all the discoveries of science should be at this man's disposal. A young brain specialist has issued a pamphlet on 'The Nerves of Memory.' He is able at will to destroy that function wholly or partially. He has this afternoon demonstrated the practicability of the operation—guinea-pigs, I think it was—to my entire satisfaction; a nerve nucleus touched with a needle and the animal could not remember its own hutch, though otherwise uninjured."

"Very interesting," said the American; "very interesting."

"I propose," went on Lord Ordsburg, "that we have Mr. Hearne operated on, the inventive faculty destroyed, and such parts of the memory as are involved with it. Keep the man under observation long enough to assure ourselves of the success of the operation, pay him three hundred thousand pounds, and let him go. A small explosion in his laboratory would explain to the man the reason of his illness; he would never know there had been any operation."

"Again, Lord Ordsburg, I congratulate you," said the American, almost reverently. "The plan does credit to your intellect, and I may say to your humanity."

"What do you say?" He turned to the South African.

"Oh, I am agreeable! Only if he shows any signs of coming to, I suppose there'll be no objection to a bang-up explosion in his laboratory?"

"If all else fails," replied Lord Ordsburg, "we shall have to fall back on your suggestion; our consciences will at least be clear. Dr. James is the writer of the pamphlet, and we may as well have him in and arrange about the operation."

He rang the bell and told the servant to send Dr. James to the library.

"As for financing this transaction," he continued, "I suppose we will contribute equally. I put the amount at four hundred thousand in round figures."

"No," said Smith, "we are doing this in the interest of the public; let the public pay, confound 'em! We can put down stocks with a wave of the hand; let's wave it—that's what I say."

"It is a small matter," said his host, "but I see no objection to a temporary depression. Shall it be Yankees? They go down easiest."

"Too tender at the moment," pleaded the American financier; "as a personal favor I would—"

"Oh, certainly! Can your public stand it in Kaffirs?"

"They'll have to," answered Smith.

"I'll not do it," said McAllister when the situation had been partly explained to him; "it would be most unprofessional. If there was mania, I should be justified in operating; if the man had a delusion that he would make gold, I could remove the delusion. But operate on a sane man—I'll *not* do it! You say he has made the gold? If there were not three of you asking it, I should think I knew where was the delusion."

"You are placing professional etiquette before the safety of civilization," reasoned Lord Ordsburg in his level voice. "You have a chance to save mankind from chaos, or rather to help us to do so."

"Men like you," said McAllister

stubbornly, "do not worry about mankind. It is your own fortunes which are troubling you."

"You are wrong," replied Lord Ordsburg patiently. "You do not understand. There is a certain balance of power between the quantity of real wealth in the world—I mean food-stuffs, fuel, cloth, leather, and the medium of exchange by which they are distributed. It is men like ourselves who maintain this balance between real and fictitious wealth. We are fighting now to prevent its destruction. If I was fighting for my own hand, I could have made an enormous fortune out of this invention and bought wheat-lands and beef-ranches all over the world, and paid in coinage I knew to be valueless. If this secret became known, and Australia could make gold at half a crown an ounce, would they pay the interest on their debts in wool, or Canada in wheat, or the Argentine in beef? That is not the contract. They are payable in gold. England would be ruined first, but all countries would fall together; another civilization would have to be built on the ruins of this."

McAllister laughed bitterly.

"You are talking to a man whose life has been ruined by this civilization. Let it fall. I have nothing to lose."

Lord Ordsburg rose and went to his desk; the other men looked at him with curiosity, but in silence. When he returned he had a check in his hand.

"You are quite right, Dr. James; I should have foreseen that point." He handed the young man the check. "You now have a stake in civilization to the extent of twenty-five thousand pounds."

"Man, you are trying to buy me; you are trading on my poverty; you have found out the price of my soul; you know some way that I'm in love—that I want to marry; you are devils, trying to trade on my best instincts to arouse my worst!"

"We are not trying to bribe you," said Lord Ordsburg, calmly as ever; "there are no conditions attached to

the acceptance of this money; it is yours, whether you perform the operation, or whether you don't. I merely wish to put you on a plane of thought from which you can see our point of view. I assure you that you are free to leave my house this minute, taking that check with you. Considering the importance of the secret which your professional honor forces on you, the money has been earned."

Of the three men who watched the conflict take place in the young man's mind, the South African was the best able to follow the struggle. The other two understood human nature, because they had been born to great financial positions; but the South African had arrived at a great financial position because he understood human nature.

There had been a time when he, too, would not have raised a finger to save civilization from chaos. He had experienced the sensation of sudden wealth; he had known what it meant to yearn for the love of a woman; he was very human.

McAllister sat and looked at the bit of paper with the words "twenty-five thousand" written across it. Then the face of Viola Crean came and blotted out the words. He had earned this money. The price of a consultation. That dream which is part of youth—the sudden gift of fairy gold—had come true. He was rich, and he had done nothing wrong.

There had been such consultation fees before; and yet, because the possession of this money had suddenly converted him to the side of these capitalists, he felt uneasy. He was one of them now; he could understand their point of view. The change had been too instantaneous to be honest. If he operated, it would be because his newly acquired fortune was in peril.

"Sleep on it, doctor," said the American; "sleep on it, but don't forget that if this secret which we are trying to suppress ceases to be a secret, those thousands will be meaningless. The carefully balanced civilization in

which you may live and prosper, the society which will enable you to marry and pass the results of your life on to your children will disintegrate; it is all based on gold as a precious metal. If the young inventor up in that tower was cheapening the cost of human food, the man who tampered with his brain would be the enemy of mankind. You will be one of its benefactors."

"I'm not saying that there isn't something in what you say," answered McAllister slowly, "I am seeing things from your point of view fast enough since the money was given me—since a new world was opened to me—and all I wanted of the old world was put within my reach. 'Tis that which is troubling me."

The South African yawned without concealment.

"I'm for bed; we are all talking rot; our young friend here can write pamphlets on the nerves of memory, but he can no more perform the operation he describes than the veterinary in my racing-stables. I don't want to hear about professional etiquette. Rummy game if you ask me. If that inventor chap came to me with a headache, he'd open up his head out of sheer curiosity. Think he wouldn't operate to save the human race from catastrophe, if operate he dared? Don't tell me! I know a spoofer when I see one!"

McAllister jumped to his feet with an oath.

"That's a lie. I can do what I say, but I'll not be bought. These two gentlemen"—he dwelt meaningly on the last word—"had about convinced me that I would be justified in operating, but I'll not be bought." He took the check from his pocket and tore it up. "I'll operate with clean hands. Arrange the details among yourselves."

He walked out of the room.

"That was a good move of yours," said the American financier to the South African. "You played upon the right note."

"There's times when it pays to make men angry," he answered.

The American stooped and picked up the torn check. "I think I am glad he wouldn't take the money. I'll set him up in New York; if he'll come, he'll make his fortune. There's good stuff in that man."

"So good," replied Lord Ordsburg, "that we can't spare him to you. If anything goes wrong with my brain, I'd like to feel that there was a man like that in Harley Street to patch it up."

Next day there was a slight explosion in the alchemist's tower, which rendered Edward Hearne insensible. It was, in fact, a week before he fully recovered consciousness.

When he did he found himself in luxurious chambers in Pall Mall. It was explained to him that he had been threatened with brain-fever, resulting from excitement on learning that an eccentric old gentleman had left him three hundred thousand pounds. The firm of solicitors who handled the

money had put Dr. McAllister in charge of him.

There does not seem to be any ill effects from his accident, except that he becomes strangely irritable if any one discusses scientific facts in his presence. He says that machinery bores him, and he is about to study art in Paris. It is said that his advance as a painter is phenomenal. But then he looks an artist to the tip of his hair. Sometimes he wears a puzzled look.


There are three financiers—millionaires all—who seldom smile because a great danger continues to haunt them. There is also a new brain specialist in Harley Street—the youngest disturber of the human anatomy in all that street of wo.

His elders say that it was on his wife's money that he set up shop. There are others who know better—Lord Ordsburg for one, the great international financier who continues his weary sentry-go at the gates of chaos.

"FINGER-PRINT" FLANDERS

A SHORT STORY

BY PAUL WEST

 "SO help me, Flanders, I kin prove every word I'm tellin' you! I didn't do it no more than you done it yourself, and I kin get an alibi fer every minute o' that night. Why, you yourself seen me standin' at Barney Haynes's bar, loaded to the guards, at one o'clock, didn't you?"

"That may be, Healey. But there was plenty of time after that. How about what happened after closing time?"

"Aw, stow it, Flanders! You know

as well as me that Barney never closes. When he had to shut the front door I rolled into the back room an' slept in a chair, an' they's a dozen guys can swear to it."

"I guess that's right," laughed Flanders, and stepped away from the door of the cell through which the conversation had been going on. "You've got a gang over at Barney's that would swear to anything. But their evidence wouldn't go against what I've got on you."

"But, holy smoke! You mean to

tell me I'm goin' up on the say-so of a—of a—"

"Thumb-print? I guess you are, Healey—that and your previous record. I'm sorry for you, but you can't burglarize flat-houses and expect anything else these days. I admit you did it in your usual slick way, and maybe we wouldn't have got it on you if it hadn't been for the thumb-print. But that gave you away, old man, and up you go."

"But I tell you it ain't mine, that thumb-print. It's somebody else's. There's t'ousands jest like mine."

"Not in my collection, Healey! There couldn't be."

"But I'll prove it. I'll tell the judge—"

"Tell him. It's no use. So-long. See you in court!"

Healey did not tell the judge. Nor did he produce his witnesses to prove that on the night when the particular flat robbery with which he was charged had occurred, he had slept off the effects of too much whisky in the back room of Barney Haynes's saloon.

He begged his lawyer to produce these witnesses, and he persisted in his eager declarations of innocence. But the lawyer put his client's vehemence down to an overstrong, though perfectly natural desire to stay out of prison a while longer (seeing that Healey had emerged from Sing Sing but a month previous), and advised him to plead guilty.

So Healey "went up" on the strength of a perfectly good thumb-print which corresponded so accurately with his own, officially on file at headquarters, as to leave no doubt that both had been made by the same member, the only difference being that Healey's acknowledged "signature" emblazoned a sheet of cardboard and was written in lampblack, while the one that had caused him so much trouble happened to have been left on a mahogany sideboard from the drawers of which the thief had taken an expensive solid silver dining-set.

And, as Healey, raging and fuming, was led away, Detective Flanders smiled, for once again had the infallibility of the finger-print test been shown; once again had his enthusiasm been vindicated.

Around headquarters they called him "Finger-Print Flanders," and laughed at him good-naturedly. Not that they dared scoff at his almost absurd devotion to his hobby, for Flanders took things too seriously. Anyway, even the most skeptical members of the detective squad—and detectives are a particularly skeptical lot—had long since been convinced that there was "something in" the theory that a man could be identified by the impression of his thumb or a finger-tip.

They had seen it worked out time and again by Flanders, and more than once he had helped a brother sleuth to "land" his man by finding that he had left behind him, on a tumbler, or a picture frame, or a window-pane, a bit of telltale evidence in the form of a smudge from a dirty hand.

They had seen Flanders, on such occasions, take a photograph of this smudge and hurry back to headquarters, where he had a print made from the negative. They had watched him, armed with this, go to the cabinet wherein were kept the thousands upon thousands of finger and thumb signatures of previously arrested crooks, and browse through the lot until he hit on one that seemed to resemble his photograph. And then they had seen him look up, after a long and careful magnifying-glass scrutiny, and exclaim:

"Go get so-and-so. He's your man!"

And not once had he been wrong. Not once had they failed to land a crook after Flanders had satisfied himself that the man was guilty.

Still, sometimes they smiled when Flanders boasted of the achievements of his department, or they told him he was overdoing things when he spent whole nights at work in his little room, studying the splotchy cards.

"Not that we're sayin' there ain't nothin' into it, old man," said Kelly, one of the best of the city's blood-hounds, one day. "I ain't goin' to deny that if it hadn't been fer the bloody finger-marks you found on old Solomon's collar I'd never have suspected that Limpy Donovan done the murder. But it's like everything else—they's a limit to it."

"What do you mean by a limit?" asked Flanders, looking up from his inevitable work, classifying or examining the contents of his cabinets.

"Well, as to there never bein' no two thumb-prints alike in the world. It ain't reasonable to suppose that they couldn't be two men with exactly the same kind o' thumb."

"It is reasonable, because it's so," was Flander's reply. "It's like two men who look alike. Unless you compare them you would never detect the slightest difference between them, but it's there. Some of these finger-prints in my collection are so much like others that it takes the closest inspection to tell them apart. But an expert can do it. No, I don't believe it's possible for a mistake to occur if a man is careful."

"Then," continued Kelly argumentatively, "ain't you stretchin' it a little when you say that a feller's thumb-print never changes? The rest of us changes, don't it?"

"That's a fact," said Flanders. "That's what's the matter with the Bertillon measurements. A criminal is measured and you've got him, only he's liable to change in many important ways. Weight, of course, and even in height, sometimes. And he can disguise himself in a lot of ways. But give me that fellow's thumb-print, and I've got him for good. That never changes from the time he's a boy till he dies. And I'll stake my reputation on it!"

"Well," said Kelly, "I ain't sayin' you wouldn't be bettin' a whole lot, for you've done some mighty big work since you took up this new gag, but some day—well, some day you'll fall

down on it. You'll find two fellers with the same breed of fingers, or—well, they never was a dope-sheet yet that didn't go wrong sometime."

So far Kelly's dire prediction had not been fulfilled. The department's finger-print system, under the management of Detective Flanders, had flourished. Criminal upon criminal had learned to fear it. The Healey case was its most recent confirmation. Finger-Print Flanders had a right to feel that he was doing good work, and to believe in his part of the department more strongly than ever.

Then came the case of Tony Conterno, and Detective Flanders gasped.

You may remember the affair better as the Hadley mystery. It was a murder. Policeman Schmitt, of the West One Hundredth Street station, patrolling his beat about one o'clock in the morning, heard a shriek.

He located it, after some search, in the house of Walter Hadley, a rich piano manufacturer. The body of Mabel Hadley, his daughter, lay in the front hall at the foot of the stairs, surrounded by the horrified family. They had heard a shot, and a scream. Then they had found Mabel dead, and that was all they could tell.

Policeman Schmitt's quick eye showed him an open window in the front parlor, a bag full of bent and twisted silverware near by, and the evidence of hurriedly ransacked side-board drawers in the dining-room beyond. He placed the servants under surveillance, commanded that nobody touch anything, telephoned for the family physician, next the coroner, and then headquarters.

It was not till morning that Finger-Print Flanders arrived on the spot. He was sulking like a child called late to a game, and he confessed that he "had it in for" the night-telephone clerks at headquarters and his brother detectives.

"I've asked 'em time and again," he said, "to let me know the moment anything's doing. Valuable time may

be lost, and fine evidence wiped out by a lot of people going around and handling things at the scene of a crime.”

“ I give you my word,” said Police-man Schmitt, who had clung to his post during the night, “ they ain’t anybody handled nothing here. And from what little I see, they’s plenty fer you to work on. Look there.”

He pointed to a bloody mark on the wall, near where the body of the murdered girl had been found. Finger-Print Flanders pounced on it with a magnifying-glass.

From this he darted back and forth, into the dining-room at the rear of the first floor, about the drawing-room, examining window sills, pieces of the silverware, the surface of the mahogany dining-table, a locket about the neck of the victim of the crime—everything on which a man could have left a tell-tale finger-print.

And when he found these marks his eyes grew bright, and his nostrils dilated. It would not have surprised anybody who saw him if he had bayed like a bloodhound on the trail of a fleeing convict!

Finger-Print Flanders began to take photographs. He handled his own camera where he could, but in several instances he was obliged to delegate the work to the department’s photographer, especially in the dining-room, which was dark, and where flash-lights must be taken. Where the finger-prints had been made on dark surfaces, like the dining-room table, Flanders treated them with a white, powdered substance, which, being allowed to stand a while and then brushed off carefully, left the marks clearly showing.

The bloody marks—one in the hall and two others on the window-sill in the drawing-room—gave him the greatest delight, and the most concern as well. When they had been photographed, he seemed to breathe with more relief.

“ And now,” he said, when he had apologized to the family for intruding

on their grief, “ I must ask you to do me a favor. I am—er—the finger-print expert of the department, and I want the finger-prints of everybody in the house last night. If you will just press the tips of your fingers and thumbs on this sheet of blackened paper, and then press them on this white sheet—there, like that! Thank you.”

With the servants he was equally polite, but insistent.

Then, with his package of prints carefully tucked away under his arm, he took his camera, called the photographer who had been helping him, and departed down-town for headquarters.

Almost before the majority of the city had finished reading of the horror, Finger-Print Flanders was seated in his little office, his table littered with the hurriedly printed photographs taken at the Hadley house. From its place in the wall, he would take out a drawer from the cabinet and lay it on his desk. Then he would run quickly through the hundreds of thumb-prints therein contained, passing the majority by, but occasionally stopping to compare one with some of the photographs. Expectation, hope, disappointment in turn showed themselves on his studious face; despair, never!

All day long he worked, stopping only once, late in the afternoon, when the gathering darkness and a glimpse at his watch showed him that evening was coming on. He hated to quit, even for a short respite, but he realized the task before him, and knew that he must eat something, so he ordered it from a near-by restaurant, and devoured his food rapidly. Even then he did not quite stop, but tried to continue his work with one eye while the rest of his attention was fixed on the sandwich that formed his “ dinner.”

In a few minutes he brushed the crumbs from his coat, and turned on the incandescent lights. Then, placing a green eye-shade on his forehead, he bent to his task with renewed zeal. With only one interruption he worked

on and on until long after midnight. The single interruption occurred when the chief of detectives and the first deputy commissioner came in to see if Flanders had discovered anything.

"We haven't a clue," the chief confessed. "We don't know where to look for the murderer; though, of course, in spite of the open window and the bag of silverware, it could be an inside job; but—"

"It wasn't," said Flanders. "I've compared the finger-prints of the family and the servants with the bloody marks on the hall wall and the window-sill, and they don't fit."

"But the butler," said the chief, "knew about the silver. It was his place to lock the best of it in a small vault in the dining-room—"

"Where I found the finger-marks on the door of the vault," said Flanders, "with others over 'em, as if the burglar had tried to monkey with the combination and failed. And those marks over the butler's are the same as the bloody ones. That's the man we want."

"Yes," said the first deputy commissioner, a trifle impatiently, "but who is he?"

Finger-Print Flanders performed a comprehensive movement with his arm, indicating the compartments in the cabinets on the wall.

"If he's in there," he said, "I'll know before morning."

Dawn was breaking. Finger-Print Flanders still sat at his desk. During the night he had examined thousands of registered finger-impressions in his cabinets. There were still thousands more that he might have to examine before he found one to compare with the photograph which he held before him.

With his left hand he rifled the small cards in a drawer of the cabinet. With his other he held the picture taken from the bloody thumb-mark on the wall in Walter Hadley's hall. His eyes glanced from one to the other.

Suddenly he started; his left hand

snatched a card from the drawer, and, bending over his desk, he laid it beside the photograph. Through a magnifying-glass he examined the two prints, holding his breath while he did so. More and more intent he became, until his eyes were only a few inches above the two blotches which he was comparing. At last he pounded the desk and leaned back exultingly.

"Got him!" was all he said, but it was the certainty, the absolute sureness of his manner that meant volumes!

He touched an electric button, and an officer came in.

"Anybody down?" asked Flanders.

"Chief's just gone home," said the man. "But he left orders if you had anything to tell him, to call him up."

Flanders got the chief of his department on the wire.

"I've got your man in the Hadley case," he said quietly; but even the sleepy man at the other end noted the suppressed elation of his voice.

"Who is it?"

"Tony Conterno."

Then he went up-stairs to the police dormitory, and turned in for a few hours' sleep.

They got Tony Conterno in his kennel off Chatham Square, with little trouble, and by the time Flanders came down-stairs and got cleaned up in the barber-shop, they had subjected that young gentleman to every form of grueling permissible under the widest interpretation of the law in such cases. But so far Tony had proven adamant. Not only, he declared, had he not been in the neighborhood of the murder on the night it had occurred, but he could prove where he had been.

"I got me load on at Barney Haynes's an' other joints in the Bowery," he insisted. "And I can prove every word of it. They chucked me out at one o'clock because Hurley, the head barkeep, an' me ain't friends, an' I slep' on the corner for quite awhile. Then somebody woke me up and I went home. I can prove it by any number o' people dat seen me. I never croaked

nobody, an' I never would, so you've got de wrong man dis time.”

But neither the police nor the newspapers took any stock in Tony's story. One evening sheet took the trouble to interview Barney Haynes as to Tony's presence in his emporium on the night of the murder, and was suavely told:

“Say, young feller, do you think I've got nothing better to do than to keep tabs on every loafer that hangs around my place? How do I know whether this guy was here that night or not? Ask me something easy.”

Finger-Print Flanders sat in a room with the commissioner, the chief of detectives, and one or two other high officials, receiving congratulations on his work, all of which he accepted modestly.

“It wasn't much,” he said, and he really meant it. “It simply proves that this finger-print system is the real one. I only had to find out who left his mark on the door of the vault to place the burglar. Then the rest of it worked itself out. The girl probably heard him. She was a brave young woman, they say. She came downstairs; he saw her; maybe there was a struggle. Anyhow, he pulled a gun and shot her. She must have got hold of him and held on, and his hands got bloody. That was the mark on the wall. Also the marks on the window-sill. As to those prints being Tony Conterno's, there wasn't the least doubt. I never got such plain ones to work on, I think, in the five years I've been at it. He'll confess when he gets ready.”

It was at this point that the door opened, and Detective Kelly came into the room. He saluted the commissioner and looked at Flanders with a strange expression on his face.

The commissioner said:

“Hello, sergeant! I'll hear your report on that New Haven matter later.”

Kelly spoke to the commissioner, but he never took his eyes off Flanders, as he replied:

“It isn't about that I'm here, com-

missioner. It's this Hadley murder case.”

“Yes?” said the commissioner. “What do you know about it? I thought you'd just got back to town an hour ago, after a four or five days' absence on the Connecticut affair.”

“I know a lot about it,” said Kelly. “You've took in Tony Conterno, the burglar, for it, ain't you?”

“We have.”

“Well,” said Kelly quietly, still looking at Flanders, “he didn't do it!”

“What's that?” Flanders, the commissioner, the chief and the others present spoke as one man. But Kelly only regarded the finger-print expert.

“Tony Conterno didn't do it,” he went on. “Oh, I know the whole story—the finger-prints gave him dead away—and they ain't a chance of his bein' innocent; but all the same, he is. And I'll tell you how I know.”

“The Hadley murder was last Thursday night. That night they was a bunch o' friends o' mine in town, and some of them wanted to be showed around Chinatown and the Bowery, so they called me up. Being my night off, and they being friends, I had to take 'em. So I lugged 'em around the usual places that all rubes want to see, and finally, when I thought it time to send 'em home, we come out into the Bowery at Chatham Square, where I was goin' to load 'em into a taxi.

“Right in front of Barney Haynes's they was some little excitement, and I looked over to see what it was. They was chuckin' a drunk out. He wobbled about on the sidewalk a little and then fell up against the side-wall of the place and went to sleep. I didn't want to bother with him, but I kept my eyes on him while we waited for a taxi. It came along after a while, and I bundled my friends into it and said good night. Then I walked across the street to take a look at the drunk. He was still asleep, and I turned him over. He looked up at me like they do, you know, and we recognized each other. Then he fell asleep again, and, knowin' who

he was, an' that they wasn't any danger of his being frisked, I left him for the cop on the beat to attend to when he'd come along.

"That drunk, Mr. Commissioner, happened to be Tony Conterno."

In the silence that followed, Kelly looked at Flanders. There was a smile of boyish joy on his round face. Here, at last, he was proving the value of his prediction that some day Flanders's finger-print theory would go astray. Flanders looked away from him, toward the commissioner, who spoke.

"What time did the murder occur?" he asked.

"Officer Schmitt gave the time as exactly 1.15 A.M."

"And what time did you see Tony Conterno?"

Flanders glanced up with an expression of hope as he waited for Kelly to speak.

"It was exactly ten minutes past one. I had just looked at my watch to convince my friends they ought to be goin' home."

All eyes were now centered on Finger-Print Flanders, and all minds were working the same way. He knew it, and he rose to his defense and the support of his pet hobby, which was on trial now in earnest.

"You're absolutely sure of this?" he asked Kelly.

"I'm sorry to say I am," was the reply. "Because if ever they was a sneakin' little rat that ought to be in jail for life, it's this Tony Conterno."

"Never mind that," said the commissioner. "The old days when they used to railroad innocent men to prison to get convictions are over. If what Detective Kelly says is so, and there's no reason to doubt it, Tony Conterno couldn't have killed Miss Hadley. As a matter of fact, all we've got on him so far is the finger-print."

"It's never failed yet," cried Flanders eagerly. "It can't be wrong. I'd stake my life on it."

"But, great Scott! How can a man be lying drunk in Chatham Square and

shooting a woman up-town at the same time?"

"There's a mistake, commissioner. I don't profess to know what it is, but do me a favor. Don't say anything about this just yet. Keep Tony Conterno locked up for a little while."

"I fail to see what the use of that can be. You've slipped a cog somewhere—we're all liable to make a mistake now and then, and you mustn't be so cut-up over it—and we've got the wrong man. Nobody's a firmer believer in the finger-print idea than I am, but it can fail, as it has now."

"It hasn't failed!" Flanders was on his feet, and he flashed the words out defiantly, almost insubordinately. "The finger-print idea hasn't failed. I don't care what Kelly or anybody else says, Tony Conterno made the thumb-print in blood on the wall in Hadley's house, and I'm going to prove it."

"D'ye mean to say—" Kelly began belligerently, at this apparent impeachment of his veracity. But Flanders interrupted him.

"I don't mean to doubt you at all, Kelly, old man," he said. "I'm only sure that there's a mix-up somewhere. I can't make it out. But I'm going to. And I ask you, commissioner, to keep this thing quiet for a day or so—it won't do Tony Conterno any harm to stay locked up, even if he is innocent—till I can look into it."

"All right," laughed the commissioner. "I appreciate your situation, Flanders, and you can have a try at it. But we may need you in this case at any minute, so don't get too deep in any personal investigations."

"I won't, sir," said Flanders. "If you don't mind, I'll take a run downstairs and see Tony, now. And if Kelly—"

He looked appealingly at his superior, who smiled.

"Go along with him, Kelly," he said. "He wants to confront you with Tony."

Flanders and Kelly did not exchange a word on their way down to the cell-

rooms. The former was thinking too fast and confusedly; the latter did not wish to irritate him, having succeeded sufficiently to his own satisfaction in confounding his brother officer. But when they reached their destination, and Flanders had sent the turnkey in to bring the prisoner out to the quizzing-room, he said to Kelly, shortly:

“Now, I’m going to find out if that was really Tony Conterno you saw lying in front of Barney Haynes’s, or just thought it was. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Bring him out,” said Kelly good-naturedly.

Tony Conterno sifted into the quizzing-room, growling to himself in anticipation of another chapter of the “third degree.” He looked uglily at Flanders, who welcomed him. Then his eyes fell on Kelly, and his face lit up with a sudden flash of hope.

“There!” he exclaimed. “There’s the guy!”

“What guy?” asked Flanders.

“The guy that turned me over in front of Barney Haynes’s the night they said I croaked that dame up-town. Say, you remember it, don’t you? You know you do! You’re a cop. I’ve seen you many a time. I knowed you then, soused as I was, and I’ve been tryin’ to remember who it was. It was you, wasn’t it? You remember, don’t you? I was lyin’ there. It must have been ‘long about one o’clock, an’ you come along and turned me over, an’—”

“That’ll do!” said Flanders sententiously.

“But on the level, let him tell ye—”

“I believe you. Much obliged, Kelly!”

Without a word, and with the voluble thanks of Tony Conterno ringing in his ears, Kelly strode out of the room, casting an amused smile back at Flanders, who had leaped to his feet nervously, and was walking back and forth, trying to think.

For a strange idea had struck him. He was seeing a light that blinded him with its intensity, and he could not

quite gain his composure until the prisoner, for the third or fourth time, had asked him if it wasn’t all right now, and if they weren’t going to turn him loose at once. At length Flanders said:

“Hold on, there! I want to ask you a few questions.”

“But I don’t know nothin’ about it. Don’t you believe him? Don’t you think he’s givin’ it to you on the level?”

“Sit down!”

The little Italian subsided into a chair protestingly, and Flanders, still pacing the small room, began to bore into him.

“Tony,” he said, “I guess you’re all right in this Hadley case, and maybe you’ll be free in a little while. But only on one condition. I’m going to ask you some things, and you’ve got to give me good, straight answers to them all.”

“Sure!” said Tony. “Only, I tell you I don’t know nothin’—”

“Maybe you do. You say you were in Barney Haynes’s all that night?”

Tony shook his head.

“Not me,” he replied. “I ain’t been goin’ to Barney’s much lately, an’ I wouldn’t have been in there at all that night, only I’d got full up to the roof.”

“Why wouldn’t you have gone to Barney’s?”

“Why, because I ain’t so welcome there. I don’t stand well with Barney, and worse with Hurley, his head bar-keep.”

“Why not? It used to be your regular hang-out, along with all the crooks down in that part of town.”

“That’s right, but after me last mix-up with the cops—you know, when me an’ Hurley’s brother-in-law, Nolan, went to the Island for six months for that scrap in Allen Street—Hurley’s been sore on me.”

“Why should he be?”

“He said the scrap was my fault, and I’d oughter took all the blame, an’ let Nolan git out of it.”

“Anything else?”

Tony hesitated.

"Well," he said diffidently, "they was. But—"

"You'd better hold nothing back," said Flanders.

"All right; here goes. About a month ago I was in Barney's, and Hurley tells me there's a chance to pull a trick up-town. They's a couple o' policy men, he says, that puts their cash in a safe in a saloon over on Seventh Avenue every night, and he says they's a grand chance for a couple o' strong-arms to hold them up an' get away with a bagful o' dough. So this same Nolan an' another feller is goin' ter try it, an' they wants me to help 'em out. But I didn't like it. I don't like Nolan nor Hurley, an' I tells him they's nothin' doin'. Well, he turns loose on me an' tells me it'd be like me to put the policy men on, an' if I do, I'll git croaked, sure.

"Well, somebody must o' put them wise, anyhow; because the night Nolan an' the other guy holds 'em up, one of 'em's got a gun, an' he gits Nolan in the arm, an' the two o' them has a lot o' trouble gittin' away from the cops. I thought Hurley'd have it in for me, sure, so I went 'round to Barney's one night, a week after that, to square meself. But instead o' bein' sore he was all right, an' told me he didn't suspect me none. An' the both of us gits well lit up, an' I'm asleep in the back room before I knowed it.

"But somehow I woke up, an' I could o' swore they was a guy goin' through me, though God knows what for. Anyhow, I gits up an' goes out. I never did like the place, anyhow. I've always been afraid Barney and Hurley an' their gang would do any feller dirt, if they had it in for him."

"What makes you think that? Did you ever know of their doing anything of the kind?"

"Well, not that I could swear to. But look at the way they treated poor Johnny Healey!"

"Healey!" At the mention of that name Flanders stopped short in his walk and stared at Tony.

"What Healey! Not the one that went up a month ago for that flat-house robbery?"

"Sure! The guy you sent up—another one o' your finger-print fellers!"

"But what about him? What did Barney and Hurley do to him?"

"Nothin'. That's what's the matter. Only the night that robbery was pulled off, they knew as well as me and half a dozen others, that Johnny Healey was in their place all the night, and even slep' in the back room, so loaded he couldn't have got to Harlem excep' in a taxi. An' when some of us asked Hurley why he didn't step up an' save Johnny, he told us to mind our own business an' keep out of the district attorney's office if he knowed what was good for us. 'An' though I sent 'em word when I was pinched to gimme a hand with their word about me bein' around there the night o' this murder, they'd let me go to the chair first, they would."

"Never mind that," interrupted Flanders eagerly. "You say that they knew that Johnny Healey was innocent of the charge I convicted him of?"

"Surest thing you know. He wasn't ten feet away from Barney's bar once that night, an' all that finger-print dope you pulled on him was dead wrong, same as it is with me."

"But why should they have it in for Healey?"

"Didn't Healey near kill Barney's brother, one night, in a row in Chinatown? Barney never pretended to have it in for Healey for that, knowin' the whole thing was his brother's fault, but it looks now like he did. They're a bad pair, him and Hurley."

"It looks like it!"

There was more behind these words of Flanders than the expectant Tony imagined. For in the detective's mind had begun to sprout a well-defined suspicion that he was on the track of an astounding mystery—a mystery which Tony's story had not only created, but had also shown him the way to a solution of it.

"But say, boss," he heard the prisoner saying, "if you got any more to ask me, hurry up, because I want to git out of here."

"Don't hurry!" he replied. "You're going to get out, but not this minute. You tell me Barney and Hurley have had it in for you and Johnny Healey. Do you know of anybody else? Any other crook they don't like?"

"Well, no," said Tony, "unless it's me brother Joe. They ain't got any love for him, because he told 'em what he thought about 'em in the Healey case an' said he was goin' to put youse fellers wise to what they was doin'."

"Is Joe in town?"

"Aw, say, what d'ye wanter drag him into this fer? He's been keepin' straight fer six months."

"I'm not going to hurt him. But I've got to see him, and if you want to get out of here, you've got to tell me where he is. Come, put me wise to where I can find Joe, and I'll guarantee that you'll be out of here in two days. Refuse, and I'll see that you aren't let loose for a month. I don't mean to threaten you or do you dirt, Tony, but I've got to do this."

"Well," said Tony, "if I got to, I got to. Only you pass yer word you'll treat Joe right?"

"I promise, on my word of honor."

"That settles it. You'll find Joe at home, up in Harlem."

It was nearly midnight that night when Joe Conterno, much the worse, apparently, for a devious evening spent in Bowery purlieus, rolled unsteadily through the swinging doors at Barney Haynes's.

A roughly-dressed longshoreman, consorting with others of his kind, or worse, at the further end of the long bar, near the back room, scarcely gave the newcomer the slightest notice; but that was sufficient for the unsteady Joe to appreciate the fact that he might go ahead with his part of the performance.

He reeled to the bar, and spread himself upon it.

"Hello, Hurley, old man," he said thickly to the white-frocked individual behind it. "How are you, old man? Ain't got any hard feelings against me, have you?"

The bartender looked up and saw who was there.

A frown passed up and down the middle of his forehead, but before he could give vent to the harsh greeting which was apparently on his lips, a thick-set, smooth-faced man, better dressed than any one else in the place, stepped from among a crowd that had been surrounding him, approached the insistent Joe, and slapped him merrily on the back. At the same moment he passed a quick wink to Hurley which, however, was not overlooked by the longshoreman at the other end of the bar, and said warmly:

"Why, hello, Joe, me boy! How goes it?"

Joe turned.

"Hello, Barney!" he exclaimed. "How are you? Have something?"

"You got to have it with me, Joe," said the proprietor. "It's a long time since we've seen you in here. I thought maybe you might be feeling sore on us because we ain't gone down to the district attorney's yet to set Tony right. But we're only waiting, in hopes they'll let him out without our help. Not that we ain't willin' to help him, y' understand, but it don't pay for us to nose around in the cops' business any more than we can help. Does it, now? Y' understand?"

"Sure, that's all right, Barney!" agreed Joe, as he picked up the glass of beer which Hurley had filled at his order and touched it to the small one held by the proprietor. "Tony an' me know you an' Hurley wouldn't t'row us down. You're all right, both of you!"

He shook the hand of each in turn vehemently. The longshoreman down the bar could not help but admire the mock cordiality which Joe put into the ceremony.

"A wise kid, all right!" was his

mental comment. "I guess he'll do, if they try to pull the same game on him!"

One o'clock came. The crowd at the bar had pretty well thinned out, for Barney's was not for promiscuous custom after the official closing hour. Finally, only two of the night's roysters remained.

One was the longshoreman, on whom his long sojourn at his corner had produced elaborate results. Shortly before the lights had been turned low in the front part of the establishment, the longshoreman, with trembling knees and glazed eyes, had slid through the spring door leading to the back room, and deposited himself limply in one of the chairs against the wall in this dimly lighted chamber, where he lay sleeping.

Barney and his henchman, Hurley, hardly noticed him when they led the maundering Joe into the same room and deposited him in another chair, with the injunction that it would do him good to rest there a bit before trying the streets where the sidewalks might "rise up and hit him."

The longshoreman, however, stirred slightly, mumbling something in his heavy sleep, and Barney looked in his direction.

"Throw that feller out, Hurley!" he commanded.

"No, let him alone," cautioned Joe, whispering. "I think he's still got a roll with him, an' mebbe I can frisk him fer it!"

Barney laughed. "You frisk anybody in your condition!" he said. "You just sit there and go to sleep. We'll look out for you, won't we, Hurley?"

"Sure!" said Hurley. "Now lay there, Joe. That's right. Lemme put your arm up on the table. It'll rest easier that way. We'll call you when we're goin', and see you home! But don't bother with that sleeper over in the corner. You're too fur gone, yourself!"

They would have expressed still fur-

ther doubts of Joe's ability to "frisk" the longshoreman, if they could have seen the rapidity with which he roused himself for a moment, as they left the room. He sat up, suddenly, every trace of soggiess gone from his bearing, and leaned forward to whisper to the equally wakeful Joe.

"Easy now," he cautioned. "They're going to work something on you; but I'm with you! Look out!"

He sank back into his huddled position against the wall, and Joe resumed the pose in which he had been arranged by Hurley. Both men slept, apparently, breathing deeply. Outside in the barroom there was silence, broken only by a slight sound of moving about, and a whispered conversation which they could not overhear. At length, however, the door opened and Barney entered. He did not deign a glance to the sleeping longshoreman. His entire attention was fixed on Joe, and his inspection seemed to satisfy him, for he turned and whispered to Hurley:

"It's all right. Come on."

He held the door open for Hurley, who came in with something held in one hand. The sleeping longshoreman could not see what it was, but he was equally opinionated toward putty and wax. Hurley leaned across the table at which Joe slept, and lifted from its limp position the arm of the slumbering man.

He held it for a few inches clear of the table, and then slid his other hand, the one containing the substance which interested the longshoreman, beneath the sleeper's outstretched fingers. Then he lowered the man's arm, and, with his now disengaged hand, pressed gently on the back of Joe's hand.

First the thumb he pressed down, then each of his four fingers in turn, very gently, but very firmly, and as gently and firmly raising each member again from the mass of stuff in the palm of his own hand.

With equal care he now raised Joe's arm to permit his sliding his hand out from underneath it, then lowered it

softly once more to the table, and rose slowly to an upright attitude.

"All right?" came in a whisper from Barney, who had stood watchfully behind him.

"All right!" came the whispered answer. Barney again held the door open for him, and, guarding the wad of stuff in his hand from collision with the wall, the barkeeper started to pass his boss.

"Hands up, there!"

In the surprise and consternation of the instant, both men obeyed the order, which came from the corner of the room, where the forgotten longshoreman had been sleeping. Before his hands were as high as his shoulders, however, Hurley realized that he had dropped that which he had been guarding so carefully.

He had half-stooped to catch it up from the floor, regardless of the command to leave it alone; but it was too late. A quick movement of the longshoreman's foot, and the article was swept across the floor.

Not until then did either Barney Haynes or his companion recover sufficiently to make a movement of defense. The boss's hand flew to his hip pocket, but never reached it, for there came a still more insistent demand for the elevation of hands, and, as he gazed into the muzzle of the revolver which the longshoreman had projected toward his gaping eyes, he decided, though not without a growled oath, to obey.

At the same moment there was a rattle of the handle of the side door, leading into the alley. It flew open and Detective Kelly, with two policemen in plain clothes, burst into the room.

"Are ye there, Flanders?"

"It's all right, Kel. I've got 'em with the goods. Put the cuffs on 'em!"

"What the—" began Haynes, as the handcuffs clicked on his wrists.

He was interrupted by the slap of a heavy hand across his open mouth, and the hoarse exclamation of Joe Conterno, saying:

"That! Fer railroadin' my brother with yer fake finger-prints!"

"Leave 'em alone, Joe," said the longshoreman, rising from the floor with the mass of soft material which he had rescued from Hurley. "I'll attend to 'em. This'll settle their game, along with what I've found out already."

"What is it?" demanded Kelly, regarding the soggy thing in Flanders's hand.

"Wax! said the longshoreman. "Wax, with Joe's finger-prints in it. Oh, but it was a good bit of work! A dandy! Bring 'em along!"

"Ye ain't got no right!" came the growl from Hurley. "Whatcher tryin' to frame up against us?"

"Nothing much," said Flanders, wrapping the wax up in a bit of newspaper. "Nothing much—only the murder of Miss Mabel Hadley!"

They put in a long night at headquarters, that night. Hurley and Haynes stolidly, defiantly denied everything, until confronted with the evidence gathered at the barkeeper's rooms in the form of half a dozen finger-tips of rubbery composition, each marked with the whorls and loops of a human finger.

Not till a letter was found there and brought back by the searchers from the old German who had been making the things for Hurley, did they weaken in the least. Confronted with these bits of evidence, and in the scowling presence of Tony Conterno, they let drop so much, finally, that confessions were a certainty of the next few hours.

In the morning Detective Flanders was further enforced with the past records of both Hurley and the dive-keeper. Against both he found unpaid charges, charges, which could and would be pressed unless he found out what he was after. Then he brought in Johnny Healey, who had been hurried down from Sing Sing. That seemed to clinch it. They told it all.

"It was an easy game," said Hurley, "this throwing suspicion on guys we

had it in fer. The finger-print business put us onto it, and when the Dutchman here—who's just as guilty as any one—showed me how much of a cinch it was, we fell fer it."

"So you got the finger-prints of crooks that you knew were in the collection at headquarters, as I saw you take Joe Conterno's last night, eh? Then the German made these rubber-glove fingers to correspond with those prints. And when you had a pal who was going to pull of a trick somewhere, you let him wear these glove-fingers, and innocent men were arrested on the evidence left behind!"

"They deserved all they got," said Haynes. "We never fixed it up against a guy that hadn't done us dirt first."

"We don't care about that," said Flanders. "What we want to know now is, who wore the glove-tips with Joe Conterno's finger-prints on them, that night up at Hadley's?"

"You can search me," said Hurley. "We lost them particular tips."

"Well," said Detective Kelly, who had just come in, "we found 'em. Found 'em just now, and the guy that wore 'em. Come in, Nolan!"

A slouching, whining creature crept into the room and threw himself at the feet of the oath-ripping Hurley.

"I know it, Dan!" he cringed. "I know I'm everything you're calling me! But they got me when I was asleep, an' I didn't know what I was sayin'. If you'd 'a' gave me the money like you promised for the getaway, I'd have been all right; but it's too late, an' I've blabbed everything!"

"Much obliged, Kel," said Flanders, looking at his brother officer with a smile.

It was late that evening when Detective Kelly, looking across the table at Detective Flanders, in a brightly lighted Broadway restaurant, said,

through the fragrant haze of his fifty-cent cigar:

"That was a grand dinner, Finger-Prints, but it had oughter have been on me!"

"Not at all," laughed Detective Flanders. "It's my celebration. If it hadn't been for your finding Tony Conterno asleep outside of Barney's the night of the Hadley murder, I'd never have known just how good the finger-print idea was. You gave me a scare. You made me think the impossible had happened—that at least two fellows had been found with the same finger-mark."

"O-ho! So I did have you guessin', eh?"

"Worse than that. You had me staggered. You had me believing what I knew couldn't be true. For I knew, in spite of it all, that those were Tony's marks on the wall and window-sills at Hadley's. Kel, no matter what had happened, I'd have believed it, just the same."

"Well," said Kelly, "I'm kinder believin' in your game myself, a little. In fact, I may say I believe it pretty well."

"How well? On the level, how much has this last thing convinced you?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said Kelly, slowly, looking at the white ash of his cigar. "If they was to be a murder up in Buffalo, an' you come to me an' said, 'Kel, old man, I'm sorry, but I've found the marks of your left-hand thumb on the neck of the party that was croaked,' and if I had been in South Ameriky at the time, I'd just hold out me hands an' say, 'Finger-Prints, old boy, put 'em on me. I was five thousand miles away, but if me finger-marks was found there, that settles it. I must have flew up there in me sleep and flew back again!'"

Those who are making a noise to-day will not be heard to-morrow.

IN THE VALLEY OF SHADOWS

A SHORT STORY

BY LAURA J. HINKLEY



FIRST, the attendant wheeled another reclining-chair past him into the sunniest corner of the sanatorium porch.

It was probably the sunniest place in the world, he reflected, watching the brilliant light dazzle and flash on the angles and surfaces of the cunningly placed segmented mirrors, the distinctive local-color touch of this hideous place where the very light was medicated.

Then came Dr. Roland himself, stoop-shouldered, deep-eyed, shaggy-browed. On his arm leaned a girl in white, fair and frail as a snowflake.

"I have moved your chair to this corner, Miss Winston," spoke the doctor's deep voice.

She murmured a tired, polite acknowledgment. Every one of her soft, swaying steps, every utterly languid movement, revealed a native grace in the grip of a deadly lassitude.

The doctor settled her in the chair, arranged the rugs about her feet and the screen to shade her book, tilted one of his big mirrors to another angle, and hurried away amid her gentle thanks. She sank back among the cushions, closing her eyes.

She was less than two yards beyond her neighbor in the next chair. He could not help noting how pale she was as the flush of exertion faded, how dark the long lashes lay against her waxen cheek. Her heavy golden hair was loosely braided like a schoolgirl's and looped up with a wide, black ribbon, for comfort among the pillows.

She was thin to the point of extreme emaciation, yet dowered with a certain beauty of outline and expression which her transparent fragility only heightened. She reminded him of a phrase he had read somewhere describing a great woman poet: "A spirit of fire in a shell of pearl." The blue-threaded veins on her temples, the weariness of her sweet mouth, touched him with sharp pity.

So there were other aspects of the great tragedy—more poignant, perhaps, than his own!

He turned his glance the other way, down the line of patients taking their sun-baths among the great mirrors.

There was the little girl with black curls who coughed so much; the gaunt, black-bearded man whose knotted forehead registered continuous, dumb rebellion against it all; the little, withered lady with graying hair, smiling a gay acceptance of everything.

They all lay propped in their reclining-chairs; here and there they talked lazily; a few were reading with books and eyes shaded from the intense light; but most of them lay quiet under the searching rays. And each half told in face and gesture and attitude some human story which he coveted, which some imperious instinct, still living in him, grasped at yearningly.

So much to be seen and felt and understood, even here in the house of derelicts! So much to be known and written and wrought under the sun, and the strength and the power to do it—spent!—spent!

A year earlier, James Sargent had left the consulting-room of the best lung specialist in his city with a curious white look around his clenched jaws. The physician had insisted on perfect quiet as the imperative condition of a doubtful cure. It was impossible, Sargent had told him, and again he told himself, impossible! How could a young man, face to face with opportunity, neglect her to coddle himself?

Opportunity had come at last, so richly laden. All through the poverty-straitened circumstance of his youth he had longed for just such a chance as confronted him—not only to do good work for one's self, but to make life-conditions a little fairer for other people. He told himself that the doctors did not always know, that if one must die, it were better in the harness!—and plunged into the fight.

It was not a spectacular fight, only an ordinary newspaper struggle for cleaner, juster government, in a city that had grown indifferent to graft-rule. So Sargent played the game of his choice, knowing the stake he laid upon the table. The symptoms relaxed; his life took on the keenness and glorious exhilaration the gambler knows when he dips recklessly into his capital.

But there came at last a day after a night he had been obliged to spend in a drenching rain, when he gasped for painful breath, and knew that he had won the game and lost the stake.

Considerably to his own and the doctor's surprise, he pulled through the sharp attack of pneumonia which followed. As soon as a little strength returned, he was sent to the Roland Sanatorium, ostensibly, of course, for the mountain air and the sun-baths; in reality, he felt, to get through the closing scenes as decorously as possible.

His friends realized his doom. He read that in the concealed shock on their faces, their resolutely cheerful good-byes. They were warmly kind—he was one who made warm friends—but they could not help him now. His

only relatives were sisters in a distant State who must not leave their young families. He made that clear in his own resolutely cheerful letters.

When he thought of the girl he had asked to marry him three years ago, it was chiefly to be glad she had refused. What a fate this would have been for her! Yet—it was lonely work, this dying; hardest—dying without a woman's tenderness. The love-craving lay very deep, deeper than one supposed. "To die without having known anything, not even love!" That was Marie Bashkirtseff. Yes! Girls, too!

His glance came back to his neighbor. She still lay as if asleep, the book half fallen from her languid hand. How the light shone and melted in her hair!

Hair a wonder of flax and floss,
Fulness and fragrance, floods of it, too!

What was that from? Ah! Avert the omen! But how true the lines ran for a little way of this other beautiful girl, too white, with her great, gold hair:

Here life smiled, "Think what I meant to do!"
Here Love sighed, "Fancy my loss!"

Suddenly her eyes opened and caught him staring. He felt a flush of vexation rising that he should seem guilty of impertinence. But her look held his, first soothed and then stung him. There was no resentment in it; self-consciousness seemed to be one of the things she had left behind. Her eyes were very blue and deep and wonderful.

They recognized his confusion with a faintly humorous sparkle, but the chief quality of her gaze was sympathetic, compassionate. In a flash it came over him that he bore the outward stamp of the unfit; that his eyes could no longer offend a woman.

Her lashes dropped, and she turned, shifting among uneasy pillows.

The patients, one by one, began to leave their chairs to go indoors. Pres-

ently Miss Winston slipped from hers and walked feebly down the line. After she had disappeared, her book, which had fallen down among the rugs, slid to the floor. Sargent leaned forward to pick it up as it lay open. His eye lit on the words:

Let us stay
Rather on earth, beloved, where the unfit,
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits and permit
A space to stand and love in, for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour round-
ing it.

The arrangement of chairs proved permanent, fulfilling his prevision that it would be necessary to take care for all the little labors of the toilet.

Why, after all, should one meet death like a sloven? Miss Winston was always bravely dainty in her attire, always exquisitely courteous in manner, in spite of her frequent, unconcealable languors; a constant marvel of hopeless, patient sweetness.

She had promptly accepted his credentials in the Ancient Guild of Suffering. The unspoken freemasonry of pain underlay their quick friendliness, a friendliness that throve on the discovery of common tastes, on similar modes of thought, and deep mutual respect. Yet their talk was seldom serious; they often jested with that amazing light-heartedness the children of the shadow learn.

He had divined from the first that she knew her doom as thoroughly as he. She had implied it once in one of her rare touches of confidence: "Mama was completely worn out taking care of me; she wouldn't let any one else. And I saw she had to have a rest, so I pretended to believe in the mirrors." Otherwise they had always politely assumed that each was on the high road to recovery.

One day as they lay under the piercing gleam of the mirrors, Miss Winston lifted blue eyes full of level solemnity. Their desultory chat had been graver than usual. After a silence she asked abruptly:

"Are you afraid?"

"No," he answered meditatively, guessing her thought, "not of the thing itself—the mere dying. And not of my personal fate hereafter. But of giving up life, going out from the sunlight, ceasing to be on any of the terms of existence we know." He drew a long sigh. "Life in the large is so infinitely desirable; and life in the little so weary a matter to lift one's hand to!"

"I know," she breathed. "I know!"

One of the nurses came into their corner on some errand, throwing them a merry word in passing. She was a laughing nurse. Her rounded, elastic figure and rosy face radiated high spirits and health. The eyes of both man and maid followed her with unconscious clinging, sucking up the overflow of her vitality, avid of life.

Another day Miss Winston was seized with a spasm of coughing which shook her delicate frame piteously. To help her control it, Sargent, as he had seen the doctor do, laid a firm hand on hers. Every sensitized fiber of his wasting flesh thrilled unexpectedly at the touch. The paroxysm passed. He would have withdrawn his hand, but her fingers tightened. She lay a little while with closed eyes, exhausted. Presently her eyes opened and she looked her thanks.

"You're such a comfort," she whispered.

"I am glad," he answered as simply.

"You feel everything," she went on, "and yet you are so brave."

"Am I?" he asked in considerable surprise. "But you are brave, too."

She shook her head.

"Not very," she confessed. "I often cry in the night."

"Don't!" he urged huskily. "Don't do that!"

"It's the stars," she explained. "You know they make us sleep up there on the roof—the women patients. And the stars are so bright and cold and cruel! Going on their own way—"

'suns of a limitless universe'—crushing and not caring! And I am such a speck, such an atom, and nothing seems to care! Oh, it frightens me so! I had got over being frightened once, so that I didn't mind anything. But it's all come back again. Do you know what I think sometimes as we lie there, each tucked up in her little cot! I think that we're all dead already, and lying in our graves, waiting the judgment! And I am afraid! The dark and the loneliness are so terrible!"

"Well," said Sargent slowly, "if you should go into the dark, why—I shall be going about the same time."

Her hand clutched his as one grasps a friend in a horror of great darkness. Sargent smiled suddenly at the whimsicality of it. He had a swift remembrance of entering a dark room with his little sister once long, long ago; his little sister's frightened clutch; and his own manful assumption of courage over a wildly beating heart.

"But you oughtn't to say that," Miss Winston reproached him. "It is a duty to hope."

"So it is!" retorted Sargent. "Remember that!"

They smiled reassuringly at each other as they unclasped hands.

After a time they began to talk wistfully and reverently of immortality and faith. Clara Winston combined a liberal and inquiring mind with a child-like reliance on the essentials of the creed in which she had been reared. Sargent brought to the discussion chiefly a philosophic hope drawn from his favorite poets.

As Sargent looked up at the stars that night he reflected that life is significant to the very end. Destiny drops strange blessings where we look for them least. He could not call that fate all unkind which granted this gentle company through the Valley of the Shadow.

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Sargent," said the doctor. "Another word. Regarding Miss Winston."

Sargent sat down again. He was

deadly tired. These interviews with the doctor exhausted him hideously; but he looked up attentively at Miss Winston's name.

"She ought to walk," explained the doctor. "The difficulty is to induce her to make the effort. Now, Mr. Sargent, can't you persuade her to take little walks with you? Through the grounds first and then on up the mountain. She'll go if you ask her."

Sargent suppressed a bitter reflection on his quality as cavalier.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that Miss Winston—that there is hope for her?"

The doctor looked him quietly in the eyes.

"I cannot say. She is stronger than she was a month ago. At least, exercise is essential. She must fight off the lethargy."

Sargent bowed.

So she was to live, perhaps! What was that half-remembered story in Chateaubriand about the virgin appointed to stay with the doomed prisoner till his death-hour?—the virgin of Last Love!

Miss Winston readily consented to the strolls Sargent proposed. He presently detected, as the mainspring of her willingness, a gentle solicitude for himself; and paid reluctant tribute to the doctor's astuteness. Yet he did not hesitate to challenge her feeble strength to its utmost vital effort, sternly disregarding his own lassitude.

Their walks lengthened day by day. It became their custom to spend the afternoon abroad in the rich sunshine and tense air of these altitudes, among the rough, torn rocks and scattered pines and gloriously tinted hills.

There was a large reddish, irregularly shaped boulder some distance up the mountain, half surrounded by scrubby evergreens, which the sanatorium patients called the Red Rock. Hither their walks often tended, and here they rested for the descent.

It was a time of unlooked-for peace. The insistent fatigue and other symp-

toms of their physical state fell into abeyance—a painless lull. The body ceded sway to the soul. They attained a level of rare confidence. Each soul, snatching its brief respite, turned to the other with those things one cannot bear to die without saying.

The burden of utterance that lies at the heart of all men, that which is the sting of death in youth—"I shall die and no one will know"—found relief. Here was a perfect confidant, framed to a noble congeniality, formed by a differing experience, touched to an exquisite sympathy—a sharer of doom!

So, sitting side by side on the mountain, in the still, bright Indian summer of these strange days, they talked of the dear, lost world below, and each gave to the other's keeping the long thoughts of their sharply ripened youth.

With the giving came a joy so sweet that Sargent found himself going softly for very wonder of it. It was a satisfaction which annulled past and future pain. Horror of death and darkness lay just beyond, but what matter inside the charmed circle of this content?

He found himself trying to say something of this, reflectively, one late afternoon as they sat on the Red Rock. Clara Winston sat a little below him, her hands lying in her lap, looking up quietly.

Sargent, looking down tranquilly now and then at her tranquillity, but gazing for the most part at the flooding gold and folding purples of the sunset hills, let his sense of the strange and rare blessedness that wrapped them slip into speech.

"Happiness is a strange thing. I thought I was done with happiness. I never expected to have the feeling again—and I have had more pure, absolute joy in the last three weeks—" He stopped, not at all constrainedly, letting his companion follow the thread of his thought where it ran beyond speech.

"It is because we did not expect it," said she.

"Nevertheless we have attained it. And it is good—good! And very rare in all the world. 'Men have died trying to find this place which we have found.'" He quoted meditatively, his eyes on the crimson west.

The very voice of Constance echoed from the ground in a passionate breath: "'Found! Found!'"

Half startled, he looked down.

Clara got to her feet, almost with a spring.

"Come, Norbert! The sun is setting. We must hurry back."

They ran down the hill together, hand in hand, laughing like children, but a veil had fallen between them. A pang of foreboding smote him. Was the golden-winged moment which had fluttered forth in speech to be the last? Had the exquisite bubble broken at his touch?

Surely—surely, the pink on her cheek was not fever! And the cheek was fuller! Her hand in his lay warm. Across the subtle, new estrangement he looked at her with new eyes. His heart leaped with a great hope for her, and then sank, hard and heavy, in his breast.

"We are late," cried Clara. "Dr. Roland will scold us dreadfully—maybe. Shall you care?"

Sargent did not answer. He was facing a baseness he had not dreamed his nature contained. He was learning that he could be jealous—jealous of all the living world that called her back!

The morning confirmed the evening's revelation. As she reclined in the searching sunlight of the mirrored porch, Sargent could see visibly upon her the rosy shadow cast by the wing of the Angel of Returning Life.

She lifted her arm, and the loose sleeve falling back, let the light passing through her fairy flesh transform it to a delicate translucency of pink-pearl. He was astonished that his eyes had been so long holden.

It was as if he had been too near her to see her; and now, thrust back by the inexplicable recoil of their spirits, perceived for the first time the miracle that had been wrought beneath his unseeing eyes.

He recalled unnoted things; she rarely coughed now; her voice fluted clearer and fuller; her step had grown firm and light. Dr. Roland's system which forbade his patients the close noting and comparison of symptoms, had helped his self-deceit. And she? She had not known. She must surely know now.

The veil still hung heavy between them. They exchanged speech on casual things, but their minds did not touch. Her blue eyes under their surface frankness were baffling, inscrutable—those eyes where he was accustomed to look far down unrepelled, into the candid meanings of her soul. About her lips, usually so sweetly, clearly expressive, hovered a little strange, meditative, not happy smile.

Nor was he, for his part, quite ready to draw aside the veil. He must conquer first, or drive into impenetrable concealment, the ungenerous pain that taunted him with their separated destinies. But he would do it. He promised himself to lift the veil that afternoon at the Red Rock, to offer her pure joy in the new life. And she? Would she not say that he, too— And was it true?

He fought that question as if it had been a wild beast lurking to spring out at every turn of his thought. After the settled calm he had won, to hope, even for an hour, and despair again, seemed more than he could bear. He drove the thought out of his mind, and it turned to a clamor of joy and dread in his bosom.

He beat down the emotion and it changed to a spring of wine and sunlight and fire in his veins. Then he turned and faced it sternly. Well—suppose it were true? What was there in the haltered life of a half-invalid man to be desired? Must it be remembered that he had nothing but the labor

of his languid hands and inert brain, while she was one of the daughters of ease? Should it be needful for him to remind himself of the crime of commingling tainted blood?

Then he began to perceive that it would not be for him to lift the veil. He felt that even as they lay side by side in the sunlight the world already rolled between them, and he found himself reaching desperately into its stormy current for broken fragments of the golden dream—the golden dream of perfect friendship and understanding.

A diversion occurred on the porch. The forenoon was wearing on, and many of the invalids had gone indoors, when a visitor appeared. He was a ruddy young man of well-fed girth and exuberantly healthy and prosperous carriage, and he walked along the row of reclining chairs, mostly empty now, blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight, with the air of looking for some one. When he came at length to Clara Winston's chair, he stopped abruptly in unconcealed surprise and delight.

"Clara!" cried the young man.

She started erect; she had been lying with her eyes shut.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed.

She blushed and bit her lip as the ruddy young man crushed her hand between both his large, plump, pink palms. He beamed upon her joyously, exultingly, possessively, seeming to feel any disguise of his mood unnecessary in the semi-desertion of the porch.

"Why, Clara!" he cried, "you're well! Do you know it, girl? I never saw such a change. Your mother's in the parlor. We came up together. She said I might. But we weren't expecting any such wonderful surprise—we weren't looking for this!"

Clara drew her hand at length out of his grasp, and, half turning toward Sargent, named the men to each other. The ruddy young man accepted Sargent as a human accessory of the scene. He turned upon him eyes in which shone a moisture of glad tears.

"She's almost well, isn't she?" he appealed. "Don't you all see how she's improved?"

Clara slipped out of her chair.

"We must go to mama, now. Come, Arthur!"

They walked away together, the young man bending over her in a flutter of fussy, unnecessary, unskilled—but privileged—protectiveness.

Sargent lay back in the sunshine, with closed eyes, very white and still. The back of Clara's chair which the ruddy young man had pushed out of line, cast a shadow across his face in which it looked blue and old and grimly rigid like the face of one who died in pain.

The golden hour of the afternoon glowed upon the Red Rock. Behind it, wholly concealed among the pines and undergrowth, a man lay, full length, face-downward, with his cheek pressed against the rock. He lay so still that the little lizards of the sand passed fearlessly within an inch of him.

It was the third afternoon since Constance and Norbert sat upon the rock. Sargent had borne himself like a man. He had received the effusive thanks and done his aching best to enter sympathetically into the rejoicings of Clara's mother and her betrothed, as the ruddy young man too evidently was.

He saw that it did not occur to Clara's *fiancé* to be jealous of him; in the eyes of the ruddy young man he appeared an agreeable bit of sanatorium local color; he could hear the condescending "poor devil" in the other's thoughts. That did not hurt; it was swallowed up in a wider misery. He had meant not to allow himself to flinch till Clara should be gone, for they insisted on taking her away with them; but the departure met unexplained delays, and three hours earlier the sight of her setting out with her lover on one of *their* favorite walks had driven Sargent forth to be alone with his wretchedness.

As he lay behind the Red Rock he

suffered exquisitely. The worst was that this agony cast a shadow back over the pure and perfect past. He had not suspected that her nature harbored so much concealment, nor his own so much self-seeking. He thought of death, false priestess of their mystic marriage, and, with longing, of death's dark robes and cool, benumbing bosom.

Then a better mind came to him, and he willed that he might acquit himself, living or dying, so as best to honor her. And slowly out of it the ashes of dead happiness rose a spirit, weeping and sorrow-crowned, but very fair, his soul's supreme and eternal possession. He knew that he held her for his own, in life or death, beyond all the flow of circumstance, the more surely that he could give her to the arms of another.

There was a noise of footsteps on the other side of the Red Rock, a rustle of women's garments, and a sound of women's voices. The first voice that spoke did not penetrate Sargent's consciousness, but at the second a sort of shiver ran through him, and the little lizards darted out of reach.

This voice said: "So you must be very kind to Arthur, mama."

The first voice answered:

"But, Clara, Arthur has a right to say that you haven't treated him quite fairly. Don't you think so, dear?"

Clara sighed.

"I only told him he might speak to me again if I got better. I didn't think then that I ever would be better; and you all liked him, and he begged so—and I didn't care." Then her voice took a note of half-weeping resentment. "But Arthur had no right to treat me as if I belonged to him! I can't bear fat men!"

The man behind the rock lifted his head and looked about for a way of escape. Beyond the shadow of the rock the mountainside stretched in the clear light, desert-bare. The shadow of the nearest pines—tall, high-branched, single-standing trees, touched it, but they were on the women's side. He could

not retreat without betraying his presence.

Clara's voice struggled between resolution and a cruel embarrassment.

"I can't go home yet, mama. I *must* stay a week or two longer."

The mother's voice, when it came, after a long pause, betrayed a startled comprehension, a cajoling smoothness, a yearning tenderness.

"Of course, it's perfectly natural, dear; it's perfectly right that you should feel sorry for your friend—"

"Sorry for *him!*" cried Clara. "I'm sorry for myself! Oh, mama, mama!"

Then the sound of weeping, gasping, choking sobs, the rustle of an embrace: low, soothing, cuddling noises, and the mother's broken tones:

"There, there! Of course, you shall stay, dearest, if you want to. And I'm sure Mr. Sargent is everything—except his health—and, of course, that may be— Oh, darling, don't cry so!"

A light burned in the doctor's study late that night. The doctor sat, along with his books, while, silent and dark around him, the sanatorium slept. It was all so still that he started as a sudden, swift step came toward the door. It opened, and Sargent entered.

He had the look of one who has walked far along a rough and unconsidered way. His shoes were covered with dust; his clothes disheveled and dusty and slightly torn here and there as if he had been forcing his way through thick bushes. His face was pale and weary, but curiously alight.

"Mr. Sargent!" exclaimed the doctor. "Where have you been?"

"I don't know. All over the mountain, I think. I've been seeing the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. I believe I'm rather tired."

He sat down in the consulting-chair, rested his arms on the elbows of it, and, leaning forward, faced the doctor with those strangely buoyant eyes. He spoke earnestly, yet not as one whose fate hung in the balance; rather as one assured of his best good inquiries for some excellent minor thing.

"Doctor, am I going to live?"

The doctor's gaze traveled over the thin, nervous figure, unconsciously relaxed already, and rested a moment on the enkindled face before he answered dryly:

"Apparently."

"To live a man's life, I mean? No chimney-corner substitute! To do a man's work and take a man's risks?"

Again the doctor's measuring glance surveyed him. It seemed as if the steady radiance of Sargent's face lit a glow under the doctor's deep brows. He said as quietly as before:

"Why not?"

Sargent drew a long breath. After a little silence he put his third question tremulously:

"And can I—marry?"

Sunlight poured and gleamed and dazzled on the porch as Sargent walked down the row of chairs. Most of the patients were already in their places, and they smiled happily at Sargent as he passed, and he smiled back. It was not until he reached the little gray-haired lady whose chair was next beyond theirs, and noted how pointedly she absorbed herself in her book, that he perceived they were all rejoicing with him in as much as they divined of his romance. His heart was so full that, instead of resenting their interest, he loved them for their love of love.

Clara smiled up at him as he took his place.

"Mama was so sorry not to see you to say good-by," she said calmly. "She charged me to urge you *very particularly* to come and see us. Mama is not usually prodigal in her *very particular* invitation."

"I will come," said Sargent simply.

But there was something in the grave and shining look he bent upon her that confused her. She picked up a book that lay upon her lap, and held it toward him.

"Please read something to me."

It was the book she had been reading that first day, the book that had fallen

to the floor among her rugs. Sargent turned the leaves rapidly, and began:

"I thought, once, how Theocritus had sung."

Clara gasped, recognizing his choice. Then her eyes flew to his face and clung there, as the beautiful, solemn words went on in the low voice that wavered under the weight of them and

sank almost to inaudibility with the last:

A mystic shape did move
Behind me and drew me backward by the
hair,
And a voice spake in mastery while I strove,
"Guess now who holds thee!" "Death!"
I said; but there
The silver answer rang, "Not Death, but
Love!"

THE BACK SEAT

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANK M. O'BRIEN

WHEN I tell you that I never saw young Mr. Gerald Forbish in his original form, you may wonder that I should attempt to write of him on matters so strictly personal. Bear with me patiently.

I was blind at the time. My rigid nerve had developed charley-horse, and was not putting the optics over the plate. My doctor gave it a long name, emptied the Arctic sea, drop by drop, into my beautiful blue eyes, and put on a bandage. When he had pinned the far end of my optic shroud he told me that I would be blind for two weeks.

"Meanwhile," he advised, "have all the fun you can."

"Ball games," I suggested, "and visiting the Metropolitan Museum?"

"Neither," he said; "nor aviation meets—nor pantomimes."

"We have no pantomimes in America," I replied. "You must have read about them in that holiday number of the *Graphic* which has been on your waiting-room table since my mother brought me here with whooping-cough. As far as aviation meets are concerned,

I can go to the field and hear the bones crack when they fall, can't I?"

"Too racking on the nerves," he decided. "Try automobiling, unless you have learned to play the piano in the dark. Good day, and keep the bandage on."

As I could not play a piano at all, even were all the unrarried constellations beaming upon it, and as I had no motor-car, nor the means of getting one, I was sad as I went home on the arm of a messenger-boy, who was only forty-five years old, and who seemed to feed a sporting fancy in letting me miss taxicabs by the length of a butcher's lead-pencil.

The angels heard my prayer, and the next morning Mr. Peter Forbish called me up. The telephone is a joy to the blind.

"Come motoring with us to-day," said Mr. Forbish. "I want you to see our new car and our son Gerald, just home from college."

I explained that I couldn't see either of them, but that I would be proud to listen to both.

"The car," said Mr. Forbish, "is absolutely silent."

So I went to their house.

The Forbishes condoled with me about my eyes, and Mrs. Forbish told me a soothing story about a friend who had had eye-trouble which she considered just like mine, and who had been jollied along for years by the doctors, who told him each week that he would be able to see the following week, but, of course, it was all a kind lie, and—

Gerald came in, and I was introduced.

He spoke perfect Harvard, and his hand was clammy, it seemed to me; but the blind, like the deformed, I reflected, are always given to prejudice.

The car came to the door and we sped away.

I sat in the wide, soft, back seat, with Mr. Forbish on my right and Mrs. Forbish on my left.

Gerald, I fancied, was sharing the front of the car with the chauffeur.

We entered a park-gate at an acute angle, and I could feel the curb take three dollars and thirty-eight cents' worth of rubber off a rear shoe.

"Your chauffeur," I commented, "is a bit—er, er—snappy, isn't he?"

"We left our regular driver at home, you know," said Mrs. Forbish; "Gerald is driving."

My forehead became like Gerald's hand.

I am a fatalist, but I do not believe in putting pepper in fate's beer.

Blondin was blindfolded, I admit, but he had a balancing-pole, and no Harvard undergraduate was allowed on the wire with him. Besides, he had the nice, soft, Niagara gorge to fall into; not a mess of telegraph-poles, iron fences, or exploding gasoline tanks.

"Have no fear with Gerald at the wheel," said Mr. Forbish, whispering lest Gerald hear him.

He used the tone of that inspiring song, "My Dad's the Engineer," which, if I recall rightly, was contemporaneous with "The Baggage-Coach Ahead." Somewhere in the park a

band was playing "Casey Jones," with staccato on the bars

We're goin' to reach Frisco,
But we'll all be dead.

"Have no fear," repeated the fond father. "Gerald possesses all the caution which has been linked with the name of Forbish for generations.

I had not known that the name of Forbish had been linked with anything for any time. The word link always reminds me of sausage, and then my thoughts wander to Chicago, where persons cursed with the front name of Adolph rid themselves of wives by the vat route.

Mrs. Forbish broke in on this pleasant line of thought.

"Say, rather," she remarked firmly, "that Gerald inherits the coolness and self-possession of the McGintys, famed throughout Kildare for these qualities."

I had not known that Mr. Forbish was a McGinty, but now, like a war-correspondent, I smelled the battle from afar.

"A Forbish is a Forbish," said the husband with Scotch finality, "and Gerald is one from every point of view. I wish you were not blind, Mr. Glow, so that you might study Gerald's head. It is not necessary to see the face to glimpse the Forbish in every line of the head's contour."

Mr. Forbish rested his case, it seemed, but Mrs. Forbish did not let it go to jury.

"If you knew anything about phrenology, Peter," she said, "and if you were not as blind through stubbornness as Mr. Glow is through his ailment, you would realize that the dominant qualities of Gerald are inherited from his grandfather on the distaff side."

"Meaning Mike McGinty, who took the excursion to Tasmania?" queried Mr. Forbish with sly brutality.

"I did not refer to him," said Mrs. Forbish, "but now that you bring the matter up, please remember that it took eight British constables, half of them

probably Scotch, to put that same McGinty on the ship. His blood may be responsible, in some degree, for Gerald's bump of combativeness, which is so plainly to be seen alongside of each ear."

"Then perhaps," suggested Mr. Forbish, "you referred to old Edward Halloran."

"The same," said Mrs. Forbish. "He was a great man; none greater in Kildare. Through me from him have descended to Gerald the inestimable qualities of veneration, conjugality, parental love, friendship, and inhabitiveness."

"That last one," said I, "doesn't that mean staying in one place?" The hind wheels of the car had just slewed in a tremendous arc.

"Oh, not in that sense," replied Mrs. Forbish sweetly, retrieving herself from my lap. "In phrenology it means love of country."

"There's nothing in that phrenology stuff," said Mr. Forbish. "It's the general make-up of the head that counts. Nature doesn't find it necessary, in making the perfect head, to cover it with knobs like a Malay war-club."

I wished, at the moment, that I could hoist the bandage long enough to see whether Gerald had such a knobby poll as his sire's remark suggested. But Mrs. Forbish came to the rescue.

"Gerald's head is perfectly symmetrical," she declared hotly.

"Of course it is," replied Mr. Forbish. "Having all the Forbish qualities, how could it be otherwise? On it is written all the determination and self-sacrifice of the 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled.'"

"A set of haggis-fed hirelings," said Mrs. Forbish. "Sometimes when I get to thinking about the Scotch I wish I had married a Mecklenburger."

"We are just passing the reptile-house," remarked Mr. Forbish with some evident wish to change the subject. "Have you ever seen the collection?"

"Yes," said I, "and the sight there always filled me with wonder as to the purpose of the Creator. Why, for instance, do such horrible creatures exist as Gila monsters?"

"They make Scotchmen bearable by comparison," sighed Mrs. Forbish. I could see that she had her eye on the ball and was batting .800.

And Forbish saw it too, for when we passed the primate-house a minute later (I know the park's geography even when blindfolded), he did not utter a peep about it. It would have been tossing a ball straight into the batter's groove.

"Reverting to Gerald's head," said Mrs. Forbish, directing her words at me, "it shows in every line that he is a young man of action. Mark me, Gerald will do something—"

And, at the very words, Gerald did.

He played the old game, using the car for the resistless force, and one of the largest park trees for the immovable object. I know it was a large tree, because I saw it a moment later when my head, tired of bounding along the sward, had tossed the bandage aside and stopped.

I saw Gerald, too, for the first time, but I did not see his wonderful head, because fate had wrapped the steering-post and a long blue mud-guard around it.

That evening I sat in the library of the Forbish home, alone.

The elder Forbishes were in their rooms, recovering rapidly and worrying about Gerald. My task was to get bulletins by telephone from the hospital about their noble son.

After two orderlies had informed me that Gerald had just died and two more had said that he had been discharged, I had the luck to get an old friend, Dr. Globb, on the wire. He was one of the surgeons in the hospital.

"The young man will recover," Globb told me, "but it is a close call. You see, he had the wrong kind of a head, to begin with."

"Explain!" I cried. And he did, but

in language that the doctor's pay for in college and swear to use all their lives. Perhaps it sounded like this:

"His skull, we found, was dolichocephalic to an extent hitherto unrecorded in medical annals, and the impact reversed the gazilla. This left the coronal suture waltzing with the stephanion and the nasion telescoping the orbit."

"A terrible thing to happen to a young man of his intellect," said I.

"Intellect!" cried Globb. "Intellect! Is any one else on that wire?"

I assured him there was no one.

"Say," said he, "old Doc Kenken-deim, the cranium specialist, was here when they brought the youth in and the old villain wanted to croak him and put the head in alcohol so he could study it at his leisure. He said he wanted to find out how a human being born with such a lack of mental ma-

chinery could even *live!* He says there's a minus mark at every point on the diagram. But we checked his murderous designs, and he consented to operate if he could be permitted to make the head all over again. He's doing it now, and he's a real workman. When our young friend comes out he'll have a first-class bean on his shoulders, but he'll be lighter by about three pounds of excess adamant."

I went up-stairs and called to the anxious parents that Gerald was doing nicely and would soon be restored to them.

"The doctors say," I added, "that a man of less powerful intellect would not have survived."

"And yet I feel," said Mr. Forbish, "that he will never be quite the same again."

And indeed, happily, he never was the same.

L I S T E N !

By Alfred Vincent Marx

KNOW what it is to feel down in the mouth,
 Unable to stand the "gaff"
 To feel that you're sliding down in your game
 And the world simply stands by and laughs.

And you're losing your nerve, pal, almost complete
 And a frown's where a smile ought to be,
 And the world looks as black as a starless night,
 And despair's the one thing you can see.

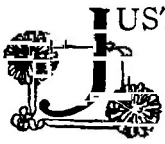
Banish these thoughts from your brain with a dash,
 You're as good as the next in the run.
 Throw back your head and out with your chest,
 And laugh with the world in its fun.

Your nerve's there: it had been taking a nap,
 And it's awake from its sleep fresh and true,
 And only remember it lies in *your* hands
 To MAKE the world look up to YOU.

WRATH AT RISING WATER

A SHORT STORY

BY W. EDSON SMITH



JUST above where the Rio Santa Fe runs laughingly into the reservoir, there is a place where one may cross its shimmering shallows easily enough by means of thickly scattered stepping-stones.

Beyond, at right angles both to the cañon road and the stream and directly opposite the old Martinez homestead, is the unobtrusive arroyo which leads to Aztec Springs.

Lolita Martinez had loitered along the white sand-carpet of that same pine-shaded watercourse hundreds of times in her seventeen years.

It was a pleasant place to pass an idle hour, and idle hours were not a few. But the hot Spanish blood was racing now as she came out of her father's house, and, with an assumption of lazy nonchalance, picked a way slowly, gracefully, across the river.

The beating of her heart could be pardoned. Perfect May days, enchanting with the magic fragrance of a million apple-trees, are many in this happy valley. But it is on only one May day in a lifetime that a girl runs away to be married—and to an American. Of course an American! Suppose it had been Francisco Gonzales—there would have been no running away!

They would have been wedded at the cathedral with all the ancient ceremonial, and Francisco would have taken her to his new-built home far up across the range.

Even drunken Manuel Valdez—

who had no house on his barren hillside acres—whose name was a byword for wickedness, and whose evil eyes made her shrink for fear and shame when he leered at her in the road—even he would have been an easier suitor for her father to accept than Bross—the American. Well—so be it—though the Virgin alone knew why it must be so.

Over the girl's arm was flung the folds of a light, many-colored Navajo blanket. It was draped around a long, capacious pasteboard box.

There seemed to be no reason for such secretiveness, for her father and mother had driven to town very early that morning—a holiday which would, beyond reasonable doubt, last until nearly midnight. But she knew of many prying eyes at the Lucero adobe, even although it was a whole half-mile down the road.

The sight of the box would fill them with an idle curiosity which would result in her being followed by a half-grown boy.

The blanket would mean no more than it had meant many times—only that she was seeking some favorite crooning pine-tree for a siesta.

It was as well to be careful. By night she would be long miles away. To-morrow—she would write home. Soon she would be forgiven—by her mother first—later by the surly old father—then all would be well. Mrs. Perry Bross! How queer it sounded!

The shadows were shortening toward noon when she came around the last winding turn of the white ribbon

of sand, flushing vividly as a tall, handsome young man leaped to his feet from the grassy bank where he had been lying, and, throwing away his cigar, came forward eagerly.

He caught the girl's lithe, unresisting body close. The blanket and box fell unheeded to the ground. Her proud, dark head went down on his shoulder with a low-breathed sigh of wistful content.

Tender stars looked up at him timidly from the splendor of unfathomable dusky depths, then her eyes closed. The young man kissed the crimson, alluring lips in rapturous fashion.

"Sweetheart—my dearest! You've come at last!" he murmured.

Lolita's round arm went around his neck—close and closer.

"Yes, beloved," she answered in the slow, sweet music of careful English. "I've come for good and all—forever and ever. Ah, I wonder if you want me enough—as I want you!"

"Want you!" cried Bross. "Want you, my Lolita? You do know, don't you, *chiquita*? You're going to be my own loyal, beautiful, stately wife, Lolita—until the end of time. I would do anything—anything—for your sake, sweetheart. And you'd do anything for me, I know. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered fervently. "Oh, I love you! I would give my life—more than that—I would kill any one who came between us. I'd dare do anything—my dear one—for your sake."

"Only it will not be necessary," smiled her lover. "We're just to be happy, and that's all. The only clouds we'll have, sweet, are those that are coming up now. It looks like a thunder shower. I dare say our arroyo here will be under a foot or two of water shortly. But our really true sky is going to be always bright. Lolita—to the very end of life itself."

The girl's eyes traversed the quiet corner which was so utterly shut off from the world on every side.

Her gaze went, almost somberly,

past the green slopes and beyond to where the blue-black storm was piling itself over the cliffs and cañons of the higher range, making murky contrast to the dappled sun and shade about them.

"I'm afraid of something—something that is going to come upon you and me," she insisted. "Who can tell what it may be? It is like the strange wind that blows—icy and cold—in your face and through your hair when the grave plot where you are to lie is trodden upon. Oh, do you love me? Say it once again, dearest!"

Bross caught her fiercely to his heart again—half angrily.

"I love you—love you—love you!" he cried. "And nothing shall come between us!" His voice relaxed.

"Anyway, how could it?" he continued gaily. "Over beyond the hill, just out of sight of the east road, is my—our—own team. We'll drive to Las Vegas and take the train. I told the boys at the stable that the horses wouldn't be back. Might as well pay their board one place as another while we're gone. So all we have to do, dear, is to climb to the crest hand in hand. Kiss me, and let's be on the way."

Lolita seemed to shake off the vague depression. She laughed deliciously.

"Not all!" she protested merrily. "I've the most beautiful dress in this box you ever beheld. And a hat—a new hat—and—other things. I bribed Pedro, the wood-hauler from up the cañon, to take the rest of my belongings to the express people, as my lord and master said."

She bowed low before him in happy mockery.

"I did not dare put on my lovely clothes at home. Those Luceros below see everything. A rabble they are—with vulture eyes looking for evil. They would talk, perhaps follow—or telephone my father. Now, I shall go up the hillside and make myself presentable, while you sit here and smoke. When I am ready I will call, and you can follow.

"But before I go," the liquid voice faltered, "let us go and drink where the spring flows into the pool above. It may be long—long—before I drink of it again—I who have played here since I was but a little girl. 'Come.'"

Together they clambered up the green bank at the side of the arroyo.

The rocks below the ever-flowing springs had been hollowed in places, and at others walled higher by long, dead hands; perhaps—who might know?—by Pedro Peralte himself.

Into this basin the crystal current trickled continually. The pool itself was only a foot deep, for there was a narrow break at one side, through which the overflow ran away down the grass, into the thirsty white sand of the famished watercourse.

Only for that the water would have been four feet and more from its surface to the stony bottom.

Lolita cupped her small hand and shyly held the fairy drink, so that Bross might wet his lips. Then she herself drank where the water came out of the living granite. The pines, young and old, clustered around. It seemed that they watched her intently, gravely.

It was very still by those olden Aztec Springs—not a breath of air—not a call of a bird. Only once—leagues distant—a note of muttered thunder from the purple clouds beyond the hills, and near at hand the faint melody of the rivulet.

That was all.

The Spanish girl looked at the scene with tender eyes—then she turned silently away, and, smiling back at the man, went upward toward a thicker cluster of green upon the long, swelling slope.

When she turned again at the hither side of an intervening curtain of cedars Bross was seated on the huge, flat rock by the spring, his hands clasped over one knee.

Lolita passed a whole wonderful hour intent upon her toilet. It was a sunlit boudoir she had, with walls of

green shrub half-way to the summit. A momentous occasion, truly.

It is hard to keep a small hand-mirror at the right angle to give a satisfactory view of a gown, when it has only swaying, rubbery, slippery branches for support. She would scarcely have heard a cannon-shot close by—or a shout.

At all events, she knew afterward that there had been one cry that went unheard.

And then the hat—a drooping, piquant affair—simply would *not* look right with her hair as now. She thrust a cruel, vicious-looking hatpin this way and that so its heavy metal head protruded at every conceivable angle.

At last she had to give it up and coil the wonderful glory of her night-black tresses another way.

Afterward, half laughing, half crying, she put the old black cotton dress into the pasteboard box and tucked it in one corner beneath a fir, where even a whole day's rain would hardly harm it. Some day they would come back and go here and there to the dear places.

Then she came down the hill to a point where she could be seen and heard, working patiently at one of the new gloves the while.

At the first careless half glance she thought the figure on the flat rock was Bross, and she trilled—a call that died abruptly as the man's face turned toward her!

Even at this distance she could see the malicious ape—grin. It was Manuel Valdez. *Carramba!* What was that low brute doing here—and where was he—her sweetheart? Where was he?

The man on the rock was drinking—long and leisurely—something—whisky, no doubt—from a bottle.

Presently he waved the flask mockingly in her direction, then tossed it away. It fell among the rocks and splintered with a tinkling crash.

Lolita's frightened eyes roved from him to the bronco, tied to a tree at the

edge of the arroyo—then back again. She could not see into the pool itself from where she stood—the rocks interfered.

Her breath failed, and her very heart halted when the one below pointed to it with one hand and beckoned to her with the other.

A yell of coarse laughter came up the hillside.

At the sound the girl threw away the one loose glove and hurried downward. Had he killed him—and thrown the body into — It could not be — surely, it could not be!

Now she was past the jutting angle of overhanging rocks, and but ten paces from the pool—Valdez between.

She looked past him in an agony of relief. Bross had been taken unawares by the Mexican. He was wrapped from shoulder to heel in the snaky folds of two lariats—trussed so that he was little more than an inanimate log. There was the tip of a branch to serve as a gag—thrust roughly into his mouth and tied behind.

A thin stream of blood was running down his face where he had been struck first by the butt of a gun and stunned so as to be an easy victim to the lariat.

And he was in the midst of the pool—bent into a sitting posture—his back against a supporting boulder and another slab laid heavily across his knees, precluding any possibility of movement.

Lolita drew a hand across maddened eyes—and looked again. Valdez leered viciously at her.

“Well, little one,” he snarled in Spanish, “you see! Quick work, eh? You go up the hill from your *Americano* and behold—he becomes a drowned rat!”

“Valdez—you dog!” she cried with eyes ablaze. “Let him go! Do you hear me? Let him go!”

“Not I, Lolita. It has been too great a trouble to put him where he is. You do not notice the labor I have performed in stopping up the holes in the

walls of our small meeting-place of waters. I have crammed every crack with grass and sod, Lolita. Soon the water will be deeper. If your *amigo* is thirsty, it is well; he will not have long to wait.”

The girl understood.

She gave one shuddering, gasping sob; then, shrieking, she ran forward, trying to pass. Valdez pushed her backward once—twice—a dozen times. The last time he caught her in a hideous, drunken embrace.

His reeking lips were pressed upon hers until she furrowed the fiendish face with savage scratches, and he flung her from him so violently that she stumbled and fell.

The back of the bound man in the water was toward them—he did not see. But the small waves, widening from his straining, tense figure showed that he heard.

Lolita, bruised and shaken, crept up on hands and knees and gazed with bloodshot eyes. The water was up to the armpits.

“*Por Dios!* Manuel!”

The girl crawled shrinkingly nearer to his feet, still on hands and knees. “Why would you murder this man? What has he done to you?”

The face of the Mexican was not human.

“What has he done?” he hissed. “What indeed? Nothing! But he would have taken you from me, Lolita. For that he dies. And do you know what I shall do then? I heard your talk of your horses and your traveling. I will take the horses myself. No one will be the wiser. After the water rises somewhat higher, sweet Lolita—after a few bubbles come up from the lips of your *hombre*—why, then I will take the team—and you, my girl—back to my cabin on the Pecos—a month, perhaps. By that time I think you will be glad to follow me, will you not? You will be my little dove with a broken wing. What a pleasant jest! All who know you will think you are with this rat.”

She groveled, her face low in the dust.

"You will not do this—this dreadful thing, Manuel? Manuel!"

"All hell shall not save him. I hate the cursed *Americano!* I have hated him since the first time ever I saw him. He shall die, Lolita! He should die if the Virgin herself interceded. And I am not afraid of your running away, my dear. You will watch every one of the tiny bubbles. You can say farewell. And we will hear the rat squeak—begging for life. Keep back now."

Valdez leaned over the crystal surface and cut the string. The branch with its brush of green needles dropped into the water. Bross worked his numb jaws and tongue convulsively. Lolita staggered around to the far side of the pool and crouched at its very edge.

Her tortured eyes were fixed on the face not three feet distant. The Mexican, seated on a boulder, regarded them with a terrible joy.

There came a ferocious, prolonged growl of thunder, low along the pine-fringed crests of the hills. It was as if some Titan tiger was stalking colossal prey within the depths of that jungle of tangled cloud.

The horse in the arroyo snorted and strained at its rope fastening.

Bross met her eyes quietly with a little smile.

"You must go, sweetheart," he said. "It is useless to wait—it will only cause you agony; there is no reason or mercy in him. He is insane with drink—and worse. Go now—as fast as you can—he will not leave his vengeance to follow—not now. See, the water is above my shoulders. There is really no hope. There's no one likely to be around these hills in the face of a threatening storm. Good-by, my own beloved! God keep you always! Now go. You can do nothing. If you try—it will only give him pleasure. He will drag you back—and perhaps harm you—even as I die. He is a wild beast. I heard him strike you to the ground behind me. Spare me that—beloved—

go—go quickly. It is the end. Farewell!"

The girl covered motionless for another moment in her torn, draggled finery. The rain began to spatter noisily into the glassy font as if in impatience at the slowness of its filling.

From below came the roar of the arroyo suddenly rampant with a torrent from the hills behind.

Half sobered, the Mexican ran a pace or two toward his horse; then, seeing that the bronco was high enough to be clear of the rushing stream, turned back to his struggling victim.

Lolita had leaped to her feet, and was wailing frantically. The water was over her lover's tightly closed lips. She pressed clenched hands to her temples. There came a strange, startled look to her eyes.

"Manuel," she moaned, her arms outstretched, "I yield. I will be your slave. Only take me away. I do not want to see this—this man die!"

The Mexican reached out his drunken arms. She was close—within easy reach.

They were standing at the margin of the water—now dancing in the rain-drops.

Looking down, she saw the first air-bubbles leap upward from the nostrils of the drowning man. The submerged body began to quiver horribly!

It was over in an instant. The long hatpin was in her hand. It leaped forward like a snake's fang!

Just behind the ear of the Mexican it struck through—deep—deep—then out again—leaving a tiny mark—a mere prick of the skin it seemed. But the man fell heavily—his head and shoulders in the water.

Even before he struck, Lolita was tearing at the sods and watching the choked contents of the pool gush out and plunge over the bank. Then a knife from the belt of the dead man slashed the bonds, and with the strength of desperation she rolled the pinioning rock aside.

And, almost at the same instant, the storm passed and the sunlight came!

"You shall drive to town and get dry clothes," said Lolita, "and then come back to me here. An hour's delay—what of it? I have yet my old dress unharmed—and a mantilla you shall bring from Gerdes's store."

"And that?" queried Bross, pointing to the body in the pool.

The girl's face hardened.

After all was said, she was of the wild blood of Cortez and his *conquistadores*.

"There is no mark to be noticed," she said coldly. "The goat herd comes by here every morning. They will find the body and say that, drunk, he fell into the pool and drowned."

They turned away up the hill.

"Ah, me!" mourned Lolita. "Will you be ashamed of me in that old black dress, I wonder?"

ABDUCTING DORA DREW

A SHORT STORY

BY BEECH HILTON



AS a tall, light-haired man of about thirty entered the office, Borsum wheeled round in the chair he filled so tightly and smiled the smile that never failed.

"Howdy do?" he exclaimed, waving a pudgy hand toward the only available chair. "Take a seat."

The younger man dropped into the chair and laid his hat on the floor beside it. "You are Mr. E. G. Borsum—" he began inquiringly.

"President and manager of the Happiness Surety Company," completed the other, "and most cheerfully at your service, Mr.—er—"

"Whitney—Paul Whitney. I saw your poster—"

"May I ask where, Mr. Whitney?"

The visitor's pale face flushed for a second, and he dropped his eyes to the floor. Then he met the other's gaze quite frankly and spoke more readily.

"At the end of a dock on the East Side. I wandered there aimlessly last night, but when the words 'Before

You Jump!' confronted me I realized that a few more hours of despondency might have turned my thoughts to self-destruction. For ten years I've been employed by the Shoppers' Bank. I've been cashier for three."

At this point Mr. Borsum became doubly interested, and gave vent to a most confidential cough.

"You are mistaken," returned the other, now entirely at his ease. "My relations with the bank are quite satisfactory to all concerned, and my accounts have never been questioned. There's no tragedy in my life, except the tragedy of life-weariness. Perhaps I can keep on twenty years more, working for the bank so as to keep alive, and keeping alive so as to work for the bank. But I'm sick of it. The idea doesn't appeal to me."

"May I ask why you've never married, Mr. Whitney?"

"Never met any one who attracted me sufficiently. Another thing, when I meet a girl I don't like I'm a stick. When I meet one I do like I'm rattled.

Other men seem to run into situations more or less romantic. I never do."

Borsum struggled out of his chair and applied his fat hands to Whitney's head, as though trying to mold it into a different shape.

"Pardon me," he explained, "we resort to phrenology, chiropathy, palmistry — anything and everything that can aid us in discovering the possibilities of happiness that lie in each particular character. No one was ever born without the capacity to enjoy life. Will you let me see your hands? Ah, yes! You dot your 'i' exactly over the letter? I thought so. Now, Mr. Whitney, listen to me if you please, and see if I have a general perception of your manner of life."

The fat man wedged himself into his chair again and clasped his hands over his chest.

Whitney crossed his knees, folded his arms, and looked incredulous.

"You rise at the same minute every morning, eat a light breakfast with never more than one cup of coffee, reach the bank on the second, perform your duties with the regularity and precision of a good clock, have a sandwich and a cup of tea at noon, walk home on a certain side of the way, eat a light dinner, read until a particular hour, and go to bed from a special side. If you make a new acquaintance, you've forgotten him by the next time you meet. If you're asked out, you send regrets. You never try new paths. You shun all change. Speculation and risk are horrors to you. Am I right?"

"You are, most certainly. I flatter myself upon being a prudent man, and—"

"Prudence," interrupted the other, "is an excellent safety-valve, but a mighty poor engine. Prudence dominates you. Life doubtless has offered you hundreds of chances for change, advancement, happiness; and because you couldn't prove by figures that each chance was an absolute certainty, you refused it and thought yourself wise. Now, the man without caution is just

a plain fool, and soon gets what comes to his class, good and plenty; but one little, puny life out of earth's teeming millions isn't so important and precious that we ought to cling to it and guard it and protect it as though a mistake or two would be an overwhelming calamity. Let yourself go!"

"Doing that would never have brought me happiness," replied Whitney decidedly.

"I doubt it," said Borsum. "Be that as it may, what has this hemmed-in life of caution brought you?"

The other turned his gaze to the surging life outside the big window, and shook his head. "You have me there," he admitted.

"Life is a treasure-chest," went on the fat man, now sure of his case. "You've very carefully kept yours locked tight. At thirty there's nothing in it. It's an empty trunk, that's all. Useless now, and a heavier burden every year."

Whitney, pale and shaken, sprang to his feet and threw out his long arms in a gesture of despair.

"You're right — you're right!" he cried; "but, in God's name, what shall I do?"

"Fill it!" answered Borsum, bringing down his fist upon the desk with a resounding thump.

"With what?" returned the young man desperately. "Seeming happiness and success so often turn out to be misery and failure."

"Fill it!" repeated Borsum. "Fill it with the best that comes. Heart-aches and disappointments are better than emptiness. Failure and regret have made many a man. While you are alive *live!* If you are dead, get into your grave and clear the road!"

Whitney sat down again, outwardly calm; but excitement fairly blazed in his deep gray eyes, and, from the set of his jaw, long-dormant determination was waking.

"If I admit all you say," he observed steadily, "what then? Your sign promised happiness to every one. All

I ask is something in my life to make it worth the living. Can you help me find it?"

"Is it worth five hundred dollars and one day of your time?"

"As many thousands, if I had them."

Borsum pressed a button, and a boy hurried in.

"To Mr. Billings," he said, holding out a paper covered with notes he had jotted down throughout the interview.

"Now, Mr. Whitney," he resumed, "while the solution of your special problem is being put into concrete form allow me to do a bit of explaining. You won't believe half I'm going to tell you, because you won't be able to prove my statements by figures."

He laughed good-naturedly, and laid his hand upon the other's knee.

"But in this case works, and not faith, are required of you."

"All the old beliefs hold at least a germ of truth, scoffed at though they be. The ancients calculated a man's lucky days according to the positions of the stars at his birth. We do the same by classifying men according to their dispositions, characters, temperaments. For instance, you fit exactly into what we call Class Xb2. There are certain days in the year when you—and all in your class—are safe to seize every 'chance,' as you call it—whether it be an opportunity to start a friendship, do a good deed, make an investment, drop a burden—whatever it is, on such a day go in for it. Good fortune of some kind is knocking at your door. Use no caution, no prudence; just let yourself go, and plunge!"

"For one day?" said Whitney. "Well, I'm game for it. It will be queer if in that time I don't land somewhere—if it's only in jail."

"Queer, indeed," assented the Happiness Surety Company's president with an odd smile. "And here is the report. Well, my young friend, your good fortune has begun already, for I find by this that your first day of opportunity is to-morrow. 'From sun-

rise to eight at night,' it reads. Good enough."

"And my instructions are?"

"Simply to take a day off and see what happens. Don't shut yourself in the house. Go somewhere, if it's only strolling about this wonderful city of ours. Be ready for anything, like a knight of old setting out for adventure. Get something for life's treasure-chest, if it's only the remembrance of one care-free, reckless day. But you'll get more than that we guarantee. Now, if you will leave us your check for one hundred, Mr. Whitney, we'll call the remainder due day after to-morrow. You'll be glad to pay it then, I know."

II.

ALL that night Whitney sat in his lonely hall-bedroom, alternately asking himself whatever possessed him to be talked out of a cool hundred by a fat stranger and calling himself uncomplimentary names.

And yet, as the sun rose, his spirits quickened to the dawning of the day of promise. Nothing would come of it, of course; but the very fact that he was going to "let go" was a pleasure in itself.

He felt a glow of long-forgotten vitality. Certainly the lost hundred had given him an interest in life, if only for one day.

At eight o'clock he left the house and started briskly down-town.

He had no aim except to enjoy the walk and breathe in the cool morning air. Obeying the slightest inclination to cross the street or turn a corner, he found himself at nine o'clock passing a famous restaurant. The walk had made him hungry, and he went in and ate the best breakfast he could order.

Now was the time, he thought whimsically, to meet some benevolent old party willing to part with his interest in an orange-grove or copper-mine. Now was the time to discover that his only available assets consisted of a button, and not a half-eagle. But his uneventful life still clung.

As he wheeled into Broadway he was conscious of being followed. Now he came to think of it, that thick-set, slouching figure was just behind him when he turned to enter the restaurant.

The man must have waited for him. This, at least, was a new experience. To see what would come of it, Whitney took the next cross-street to the west, and stopped before an art-store window.

The shadow, instead of keeping a reasonable distance, came slouching on until he stood beside him. Without looking at Whitney, he spoke.

"Number Seventeen?" he inquired, in a low but distinct tone.

"Wh-what?" returned Whitney, staring into his beady eyes in amazement.

"Don't look at me!" cautioned the other, sharply. "The bull over the way's gettin' curious."

"The bull?" inanely repeated Whitney, making an absurd attempt to appear intensely interested in a basket of impossible peaches. Then came the tardy realization that this was not exactly letting himself "go."

"If you're bluffin' to find if I'm all right," said the man, "I'm Forty-Four, the chief's first aide."

"Oh," said Whitney, easily. "Why didn't you say so in the beginning?"

"My fault, gov'nor," replied the man, hurriedly. "Thought you knew me. It's just this: Chief says to tell you 'Leven's sick, and you'll have to take his place. You know the lay. Just go ahead with 'Leven's job—see?"

"All right," assented Whitney. "But you'd better repeat instructions. My mind's been on other things."

The man gave a stealthy glance over his shoulder.

"The cop's either lost interest in us, or else he's playin' fox and goin' to come up on this side. Nail this, Seventeen, for I won't have time to repeat it. The girl to be abducted is Dora Drew, only daughter of old Phineas Drew, the broker. He's out West, and she's stayin' with her aunt and uncle.

Her brother George is visitin' a college friend, Henry Dewing, up at Shandon Lake. She got a telegram this mornin' sayin' George has broke his leg and wants her to come to him. She's to meet this Henry Dewing, a man she's never seen, at the Grand Central at two o'clock and go up home with him. You're Henry Dewing—see? She's been told to wear a white and a pink carnation so you'll know her. Get two tickets for Munville—that's the nearest station to the lake—and take her up there. There'll be a covered trap waitin', with one of our men as driver.

"You'll land with the girl," he continued, "just before dark, at a hut in the woods, ten miles from anywhere. Old Ma Blodgett'll relieve you of your charge and keep her safe. The trap'll take you over to another station, and you're to get back and report to the chief before mornin'. He said to tell you that five per cent of the hold-up will be yours, providin' your part goes without a hitch; and that your life'll answer for any serious hitches. But you know that. Now you know that. Now I must beat it. Luck to you!"

Whitney kept staring at the peaches until the watchful dealer rubbed his thin hands in joyous anticipation of a coming sale.

The brain that so long had concerned itself with nothing more puzzling than figures, refused for a time to grasp the present problem in real life—let alone solve it.

"Let me see—let me see," he kept repeating under his breath. "I must straighten this out. First, I'm mistaken for a member of some gang of criminals bent upon abducting a rich man's daughter. Next, I'm chosen to impersonate the friend and host of the girl's brother. I'm ordered to conduct the girl to the isolated cabin of some depraved old woman and leave her there. According to my performance, I'm offered part of the money to be wrung from the grief-stricken father—or sudden death.

"Well, there's nothing complicated

about the situation after all. The chance is given me to save the girl, and by notifying the police the deed is done."

Whitney started toward Broadway filled with happy purpose. Although requiring no personal danger, his office was to him a very satisfactory one.

The day had actually thrust upon him no small part in an impending tragedy. The fact that this part was to be played behind the scenes made it no less important.

By the time he sighted a policeman, he had concluded to lay the matter before the captain of the precinct. He would simply ask the whereabouts of the nearest station-house.

As the officer looked round at his approach, Whitney was jostled by a ragged man carrying a huge bandbox.

"'Scuse me, boss," said the man, "but will you tell me the way to Seventeenth Street?"

Whitney halted abruptly and stared at him.

Was the number merely a coincidence? Undoubtedly; and yet the fellow had lurched between him and the policeman, and was looking up with a peculiar expression.

"Have you walked far?" he asked.

"All the way from Forty-Fourth Street, boss," came the quick reply.

The cashier went cold. He was no hero of fiction, and this first taste of espionage made him feel utterly helpless and sorely menaced. He gave the requested direction, hardly knowing what he said, and hurried on.

At the corner he jumped on a car. Where it was going he neither knew nor cared. To escape those knowing eyes was all he asked. Was he followed? No. The man was walking down-town and looking straight ahead.

Whitney drew a deep breath of relief and wiped his forehead. The solution of the problem required some thought, after all. When the conductor came for his fare, he casually asked him how near they went to a police station.

"Within five blocks," was the reply. "Get off at the next corner and walk east."

Ten minutes later he saw the building half a block away. No one was following. In fact there was no one in sight, except a telegraph-messenger hurrying ahead. Was the boy going to the station, too?

Whitney hurried faster, and then reached the stone steps at the same instant.

"Is this for you, sir?" suddenly asked the boy, facing him and holding out a card. It was blank except for a large red "17."

"See here!" exclaimed Whitney, grabbing for the boy's arm and missing it.

"Look!" cried the boy, pointing to a house half a dozen doors down the street, on the opposite side of the way. At an upper window was a man apparently cleaning a rifle. It happened to point straight toward Whitney.

He looked back just in time to see the boy disappear around the corner. Should he risk sprinting up the seven steps? If he failed, there'd be no one to save the girl.

He could neither wire nor phone her, not knowing her uncle's name or address. An empty taxi was coming from Broadway. Immediately his mind was made up. He hailed it and got in, saying,

"Grant's Tomb in a hurry!"

His plan was to keep zigzagging about, up-town, until about one o'clock, then run into some store and phone police headquarters.

As the hours passed without sign of pursuit, Whitney regained his confidence. They were running along Amsterdam Avenue when he noticed a pay-station sign on the window of an obscure tobacconist's.

"Hold up!" he called. "I want to get a cigar."

As he alighted, the chauffeur leaned toward him and shook his head gravely.

"It's no use, Seventeen," he said.

"You got to do your job, so what's the good of tryin' to dodge it? What's the matter, anyway—you never showed cold feet before, as ever I heard?"

The cashier looked into the beady eyes of Forty-Four.

"I give up," he said, with a sigh. "Take me down to the Grand Central and leave me there. I had something else on hand, but I'll drop it and take the girl. Watch me all you like. I see it's no use, as you say."

"It's never no use to buck against the chief," said the man, as Whitney got in again. "You certainly had your nerve to try it on. What good'd it've done you anyway? It'd been the river for yours, sure."

III.

FOR AN HOUR Whitney had watched in vain for a girl with a white and a pink carnation.

He had haunted entrances and exits, he had mingled with the shifting crowds, he had scrutinized young and old until his eyes ached.

As he searched, he had mentally rehearsed all that he must tell the girl, if she ever came. Everything he thought up, however, seemed inadequate, unconvincing.

"She won't believe a word I say," he concluded, despairingly. "No matter how I acquaint her with the facts that her brother *hasn't* sent for her, that it's all a game to hide her and blackmail her father, and that she must return at once to her uncle, under my protection, she'll distrust me. And why shouldn't she? I'll be handed over to the police as a suspicious character, and the girl will either start for Munville alone or home alone. In either case these fiends are not likely to let her escape.

"Another thing. If I try any revelation business here, probably some of that gang will mix in and prevent my saving her. I'll have to play Henry Dewing, that's all. If we start according to schedule, maybe we'll not be shadowed further. On the train I'll

have a chance to make her understand, and we'll get off this side of Munville and take the first train back."

He bought the tickets, and stuffed them with a time-table into his pocket, and started once more around the big waiting-room.

"Wonder what that girl in the long fur coat, thinks I am, anyway," he soliloquized, as he passed an exceedingly pretty young woman for the fifth time. "Probably a green detective or a loafer. She looked at first as though she half thought she knew me. Now I seem to amuse her."

She wore a bunch of violets that just matched her eyes, and a jaunty fur cap but half concealed her soft, wavy hair of dusky brown. One little velvet tie peeped from beneath her skirt of dark-blue cloth, and this same tie was graced with a very saucy velvet bow.

Moreover, she couldn't have known it, but just above the saucy bow showed a full inch of most distracting silken hose.

Each time he passed her, Whitney found it harder not to stare.

"If she looks amused next time," he decided, "I shall smile into those eyes of hers in return. If she's offended, it will serve her right."

But next time she was looking the other way, utterly oblivious of his approach. It gave him a moment's opportunity of feasting his eyes upon her dainty beauty, and he walked slowly, thinking what life would be with such a girl to work for, succeed for, exist for.

Then, when three steps more would carry him past her, she drew one hand from her big muff, and carelessly dropped a pink and a white carnation.

"My day to fill life's treasure-chest!" breathed Whitney, and this sordid world seemed but a speck in the distance. The next he knew, he was standing hat in hand before her, saying: "Miss Drew, I believe. I am Henry Dewing. The fear began to possess me that you were not coming."

"Oh, how do you do?" she replied,

flushing slightly. "I have been here quite a while. Won't you sit down?"

"Er—thank you," said Whitney; "but we'll have to hurry, I'm afraid, to make that train."

"What train, if I may ask?" She showed polite interest, but no inclination to move. The man caught his breath.

"Don't tell me you're not Miss Drew!" he pleaded. The eyes raised to his were innocent of mirth, but her sweet, curved mouth gave a little twitch of merriment.

"Not for worlds," she replied.

"Then you *must* understand," insisted Whitney. "Surely you received your brother's telegram—that he's broken his leg and needs you—to come to the lake—to meet me here—to carry the carnations. And there's not another train for Munville until nine-fifteen to-night!"

"Then we *must* hurry," she said simply, and arose with lithe grace and walked beside him. The gates were closing as they passed through, and the train slid noiselessly into the open as they took their seats.

"I'm sorry they don't include a Pullman with this train," said Whitney, as he hung up her coat and his own and tossed his hat on the rack.

"It's all right," she answered vaguely, as though her thoughts were elsewhere. "Tell me about my brother."

Solomon and other cynics to the contrary, all men are not liars; and Whitney, although certain that the end justified the means, started in with discomfort and grievous forebodings. Besides, how could he think of anything but her?

"Why, Billy," he began—"I mean George—wasn't hurt very seriously. His leg was doing nicely when I left. You mustn't worry. He'll be running about in a day or two, I guess."

The faint scent of her hair and the loveliness of its soft, dark coils made him long to touch it, ever so gently; and there were so many pleasanter things to talk about than George!

"Oh," she murmured, in relief, and her voice reminded him of a flute's tenderest tones, "then he didn't break it, after all."

"Yes, he broke it," explained Whitney, "only the air out there is such a restorative, you know." What a cute little nose she had! Patrician and yet saucy.

"Wh-where was the break?" she asked, and coughed into a mite of a lace handkerchief. Even her cough possessed a charm all its own, thought Whitney, and marveled.

"Different places—here and there," he answered vacantly. Did any one ever see such eyes? But they turned and looked into his with such wonder, that he pulled himself together with an effort, and realized what he had said. "What I mean is," he added solemnly, "he was scraped up a bit here and there, but the only real break was through the calf."

She turned her face away and buried it in that same handkerchief, and with one elbow resting on the window-ledge, shook and gurgled in suppressed but musical laughter.

Whitney, supposing he must have said something humorous, he couldn't remember what, laughed in sympathy, and watched the delicately molded ear in sight grow pink like the inner petals of the first roses.

In a moment she wiped her eyes, and, although little bursts of merriment kept bubbling up between her words as she talked, sat very straight and tried to be conventional.

He was thinking about her slim, graceful hands—how well cared for and yet how capable they looked; and how the touch of them could charm away a fellow's headache, after a hard day at the bank.

He was thinking this and more, when it suddenly came to him that she had asked how the accident had really happened.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Drew," he hastened to say. "Why, we were playing—er—polo, and B-George—"

"Polo?" she interrupted. "Isn't it all rocks up there?"

"Oh, yes, it is," agreed poor Whitney. "This was indoors, you know—table-polo. Never heard of it? Oh, it's a great game—out there. How? Well, George, you see, was a little excited about the game and stumbled over a chair—yes, just a chair—and broke it. His leg, I mean. We got him into bed, and called up Dr. Jones, and soon he was as snug as—that is, as comfortable as could be. But, from the first, he talked of nothing and no one except Dora. He must have Dora. He'd go mad with nerves and things unless Dora came."

"And who *is* Dora?" the lovely one beside him asked. Whitney's jaw dropped.

"Why, *you!*" he exclaimed. "Isn't your name Dora? Forty-Four—I mean B-George said it was."

"But there are lots of Doras," said the girl.

"Not to a man who has ever known you," said Whitney simply.

It was the first compliment he had ever paid a woman, and his heart throbbed with apprehension at the sound. Would she be offended—or just class him with the insipid beings who say such things to every woman?

Without a sign of displeasure, without a trace of coquetry, she turned, and, looking up from under the shadows of her long, curved lashes, asked him why.

He looked down into the violet depths, that seemed lovelier and dearer to him every moment, until her cheeks grew rosy—but her gaze never faltered.

"Because," said he, "I believe you are the very dearest girl upon God's earth!"

"Thank you," she said, unable to face his ardent eyes longer. "Now tell me about your home—your people. Is it your mother's home?"

Whitney had invented an Aunt Jane and a number of other imaginaries, when preparing himself for such ques-

tions, but he wouldn't have lied to her again for his life.

"Miss Drew," he said, so earnestly that the girl instinctively placed her hand on his arm, "I can't go on with it. I've been playing a part, I've been deliberately lying to you, for your own sake. I thought I should have to keep it up for some time yet, but you're going to hear the whole truth now. After deceiving you as I have done, you'll be justified in doubting me; but, if you can trust me, I can help you much more surely."

She was very calm.

"You did not deceive me," she said; "but I shall believe you now."

In gratitude he held out his hand and she placed hers in it for a long moment. Then he told her all. He expected her to be horrified—aghast—alarmed.

Instead, she listened with perfect composure, and merely asked at the end what they were to do. The conductor came through as she spoke. Whitney asked him how soon they could change to a New York train.

"Why," said he, "if you get off at the station we're coming into now, you'll only have ten minutes to wait, sir."

This they did, without interference, and soon were flying toward the city again. Any minute the power and resentment of the gang might be manifest, but Whitney felt keyed-up for anything. With the girl beside him, he wondered why he had ever feared.

He turned and looked at her as she leaned back with her head resting against the cushion. The pure curve of her rounded chin and smooth, white throat was youth and beauty incarnate.

Her eyes were closed, and the shadows of her lashes lay on her cheeks like the tender tones of purple that tremble and fade beneath distant trees as the sun goes down.

The love of her, the desire to take her in his arms and hold her there forever, raised him to the realms above while they choked and crushed him

down. She trusted him now—could he ever make her love him? The empty treasure-chest of his life!

"Fill it," Borsum had cried—"fill it with the best that comes."

And she had come! Would she ever come all the way? The tears of unendurable longing came to his eyes as he watched her, and he prayed his first prayer since childhood, with silent lips.

She slept like a weary child until they were coming into the station. "Why did you let me sleep?" she asked. He couldn't speak, but she saw the look in his deep-gray eyes, and understood.

Without molestation they took a taxi, and neither spoke as they speeded to the street where she said her uncle lived.

"The house looks familiar," he told her, as they mounted the stoop, and stood together in the inky shadow of a tree that stood between them and the sputtering electric light. "I must have known some one who once lived here."

"Goose," she whispered, "listen!" He tried to take her hands, but she buried them in her big muff and held it between them. "I have a confession, as well as you. I'm no more Dora Drew than you are Henry Dewing. I don't suppose there are any such people—nor B-George (as you would call him) nor old Ma Blodgett nor any gang. I went to the Happiness Surety Company, just as you did—and just as half of the city is going, if

they'd own up. They named to-day as my lucky day, too. I was to be at the Grand Central before two o'clock, and 'let myself go.' I must carry the carnations. That's all they told me. I went there for the fun of the thing, but, of course, without the flowers. When I saw you mooning around so long, I was sure they'd planned for us to meet. So I went over to the flower-stand—and you know the rest. My uncle is your old friend, Halbert Johns, who has been asking you to come see him again ever since I lost father, two years ago, and came here to live. All that time I've seen you scribbling away in your stupid old bank—for I go with uncle every week—and all that time I've been obliged to hear what a manly boy you were, what a splendid class-mate you were, what a loyal friend you are, and all manner of things that I take no stock in at all, sir! I'm sorry you couldn't really have saved a Dora—which, by the way, is a name I detest! But I'm much obliged, Paul Whitney, for taking such excellent care of Ruth Filmore. *Uncle* will be glad to see you, if you ever care to call. Good night, Mr. Whitney."

Although she was on her guard, the big muff had no chance, and he caught her close in his arms.

"My life's treasure," he whispered; "my life's treasure! Listen, dear—the tower clock is striking eight. Till then I'm to take all that fortune offers, without prudence, without reserve." And with the last stroke he kissed her.

F A I T H

By John Troland

WHEN, as with timorous steps and fear,
 We tread the destined vale of night,
 To faith, all dreaded shapes appear
 Transfigured in a heavenly light!

AVE AND FAREWELL

A SHORT STORY

BY FRANCES NORVILLE CHAPMAN



IN Mabel Larned's final arraignment of her husband, the only tangible evidence she could produce was that he was "so palpable," and that, to her, was sufficient.

Larned himself had no idea that his case was on trial, and if he had, he would have attributed it to a case of nerves, and perhaps would have offered his wife a new ring, or suggested "a little supper and take in a show afterward."

If he had but known it, those "little suppers" were not the least of the evidence that had convicted him. Mabel could see him spreading his napkin over his ample stomach as he looked at the bill of fare; then the inevitable remark:

"How does a steak strike you, with some hashed brown? A plate of asparagus; salad for you—I never eat the stuff if I can help it—and a bottle of Pilsner. That cook of yours gives us so much fancy grub that it seems good to get out and have just what we like."

How many steaks "with hashed brown" had she swallowed with rebellion raging in her heart, feeling like a middle-class shopkeeper and his wife out for a treat.

And therein lay the tragedy. They were middle-class, and Mabel honestly did not know it; but it was a fact which Larned accepted frankly. He spoke of the "big bugs" and the "swells," and boasted that he never went to school a day after he was ten years old, and that he was self-made—every inch of him!

The persons whom he regarded as big bugs and swells laughed at him and

rather liked him, but they snubbed Mabel, who thought bitterly that they only tolerated Larned on account of his money, and that they snubbed her because *he* was so crude.

Larned was proud of himself for having accumulated such a substantial fortune. He liked his money, but he liked his old friends, and really didn't want to make new ones outside his own class. He belonged to innumerable fraternal organizations and secret societies, and he loved to wear his regalia, but he jovially declared that in a frock coat and a high hat he looked like "a barkeep."

Among his friends he was called "a rough diamond," "the salt of the earth," and some, who had never seen royalty, declared that he was "a prince." He had a loud, hearty laugh, and he liked to swagger and brag a little. He was proud of his wife, and because she had studied French and belonged to the Woman's Club, he always spoke of her as "lit'rary."

He was passionately fond of children, and the one sorrow of his life was that they had none of their own, and if he sometimes vaguely felt that there was a little rift within their domestic harmony, he attributed it to this lack, and was very patient and gentle with what he termed "Mab's tantrums."

They had been married for eighteen years, and every night for eighteen years, as sure as Larned had come home, just so surely had Mabel been greeted with: "Well, what's the good word?" He had a lot of stock

phrases: "Speaking of angels," "Well, the world is small," "A rolling stone," and a number of his own coining. His wife often felt that this alone was ground for a divorce.

One of the most perplexing puzzles of the American people is the remarkable divergence in type in even a single generation. Larned was exactly the man his father would have been if he had succeeded in life. But with the plastic adaptability more common to women, Mabel had acquired all the little surface refinements of her new surroundings, and that indefinite *je ne sais quoi* which indicates the woman of leisure and luxury.

Perhaps it was the combination of *leisure* and *luxure* that had caused her present dissatisfaction. She had no real culture; she was childless; she had reached the psychological age of forty-two, and she longed for romance, change, experience, with an ardor no younger woman could feel.

She met a few kindred souls who read Nietzsche and Rosny's analytical novels, and she spoke with an *ex cathedra* air of the revolution that was bound to come in the marital relationship. In her heart she felt that she possessed qualities of mind, emotional depths, that under different circumstances would have placed her high in the list of *grande amoureuses*.

It was about the time that Larned had unconsciously stood trial and conviction in his wife's estimation that he decided he needed a vacation, and he suggested that they should go West, through Yellowstone Park, and down to California and Mexico.

Mabel assented eagerly; she loved to travel, and Larned never spared expense. "The best is none too good for us as long as we've got the spondulix to pay for it," he declared, and they always stopped at the best hotels, usually in the largest and most ornate suite; they ordered expensive foods, and Larned tipped with a generous and discriminating hand.

It was not until they were well on their way West that Larned began to talk about Tom Keith. Tom Keith was one of his old cronies who had gone West and made good, but his chief claim to Larned's affection was that they had "gone up through the commandery together." Mabel rather despised the secret orders to which her husband was so loyal, and when he began to talk about Tom Keith she said suspiciously:

"I hope you are not thinking of looking up all of your fraternal friends who may be scattered through the West?"

"We'd be a long time getting home if I did that," Larned laughed. "But now, Tom Keith," he continued earnestly, "why, Tom Keith is—is—Tom Keith—one of the best fellows alive, Mabel. He's got a heart as big as all outdoors, and he'd never get over it if we passed right through his town and never stopped off. Their lodge is going to have a big pow-wow Tuesday night, and I thought it would be kinda nice to take a look in." He looked a little sheepish, but hastened to add encouragingly: "They say there is a corking good hotel there, with private baths and all."

"Evidently the matter is quite arranged." Mabel's voice was icy. "And pray tell me, is there a Mrs. Tom Keith who will expect to initiate *me* into the sacred mysteries of The Eastern Star or The Daughters of something or other?"

"Lord, no, Mab. Tom's a bachelor. Don't worry; you won't be asked to ride the goat."

Larned laughed uproariously, but Mabel shrugged her shoulders and maintained an offended silence for the remainder of the afternoon.

It was late in the afternoon when the Larneds reached Buena, the Minnesota town where Tom Keith had "made good." The station was a low frame building, painted red, and was surrounded by long freight-houses and

gaunt grain elevators. The diverging streets were muddy and unpaved, bordered by tumble-down shanties or low frame buildings. A cold rain denied the spring, and there was a vague gray emptiness in the flat landscape that depressed Mabel unspeakably.

The hotel was a rambling frame building. There were no elevators, and their rooms were on the fourth floor, reached through circuitous halls and unexpected steps up and down. It was the "bridal suite," two rooms and a bath, and as it was the only suite in the hotel, Mabel was somewhat compensated for the three flights of stairs.

They met Tom Keith at dinner.

He was a bluff, hearty fellow, who seemed genuinely glad to see Larned. He was very polite to Mabel, but she felt that she had made about as much impression on him as Larned's watch-fob; less, for the fob was heavily incrustated with masonic emblems, and she simply "belonged." However, it filled her with amused contempt rather than resentment. "Birds of a feather," she thought scornfully.

"Now, Mrs. Larned," Tom Keith began, and Mabel wished he would swallow the food in his mouth before he began to talk; "I hope you are not going to get mad at me for taking your hubby away to-night. I'll promise to bring him home in good shape, even if it is a little late. Our goat's a mighty tame old buck, and I'll promise that he won't be any the worse for wear. If you'll forgive me, I'll square myself by taking you for a spin in my new auto to-morrow. We've got a mighty pretty little town here, and some of the finest farming country in the world. Carnegie's given us a new library, and we're tearing down most of the old frame buildings and putting up nice brick business blocks. We've got over ten miles of paved streets laid and contracted for, which ain't bad for a burg of twelve thousand. I let the contracts for them, and I didn't lose anything by it. Ha, ha! How's that, Larned?"

And Larned replied that he would bet on his "Uncle Dudley" every time.

"How refined!" was Mabel's inward comment, but she replied with what she considered cool hauteur: "Please don't disturb yourself. I have a book and shall get on very well. I am fatigued and shall retire early."

Larned, conscious of the coolness of her voice, hastened to mollify her by explaining to Tom Keith:

"Mrs. L. is very lit'rary; reads French and 'parley voos' in the original, and all that sort of thing, you know; but she's a good fellow in spite of it—hey, Mabel?"

Mabel winced, but she smiled faintly, and let her cool eyes wander over the large, bare, dining-room.

The food was surprisingly good, but nothing could redeem the ugliness of the room, with the ghastly rough, gray plaster walls, the sad expanse of which was broken by photographs of General Grant and Stonewall Jackson, both evidently in the throes of a hectic fever; bunches of high-colored flowers and abnormal fruits; gasping fish, or limp, resigned ducks nailed to boards of a grain and luster never seen outside the lithographers' art.

The gas-lamps flared in oblongs of yellow fire, and seemed to accentuate the dreary waste of tables, pickle-casters, bottles of condiments, and highly varnished chairs that filled the room. Tom Keith and her husband were talking over old times and laughing loudly. They had forgotten all about her. She didn't want to talk to them or to listen to their talk together, but she suddenly felt sad—sad, lonely, and misunderstood.

The inexorable years spread before her in endless commonplace repetition like a hideous menace. And this was life! She closed her eyes in momentary anguish, and when she opened them she found herself gazing into a pair of mournful brown eyes at a table back of her husband.

There was something familiar in the face of the man to whom the mournful

brown eyes belonged; she wondered if he was some one she had met before, but instantly she realized that it was one of those strange recognitions of reciprocal interest that she had read of, thought of, dreamed of, but never experienced until now.

She tried to blush; but, that failing, she looked down; but always her eyes were drawn back, and always they met the pathetic gaze of the stranger. He had an arresting face, pale, with delicate features and heavy brown hair; he was young, but not *too* young, Mabel swiftly decided, old enough to know life and young enough to still have illusions. "That man understands me," she thought as she looked away, filled with an inward trepidation and wonder that shook her with a sweet, warm shudder.

She felt as though they had suddenly begun to converse with each other in a foreign tongue. She noticed that his companion was a small, drab-colored woman with a worried, querulous face who picked at her food and accompanied her occasional remarks with an impatient twitch of her shoulders. The man treated her with a sad, patient courtesy, which made Mabel turn and offer Larned the mustard bottle with a gentle wintry smile.

When they left the table she glanced back and flashed a look at the mournful brown eyes. She had never "flashed" a look before, but that was the way she termed it to herself. The moment was full of dramatic import and significance.

She went directly to her room; she wanted to be alone to savor her experience, for it *was* an experience. She had read in the mournful brown eyes an interest respectful, tender, beseeching, that she had never met in a man's eyes before, and she had returned it nobly, bravely, understandingly. "Two shall be born the whole wide world apart," she quoted solemnly. To think that this—this experience—had come to her in a country hotel in Buena, Minnesota!

But Mabel was forty-two years old, and she had had a long journey across half of the American continent; and, despite her "experience," she had not neglected the excellent food provided by the hotel, and ten o'clock found her yawning and feeling decidedly stupid. She wondered if Larned intended to stay out "all hours."

In any event, she wouldn't wait up for him, and she was soon in bed and fast asleep.

Two hours later Mabel was wakened with a queer sense of suffocation. She reached out her hand and found that Larned had not yet returned.

"I forgot to open the window," she thought drowsily; she lay for a moment in a semidoze, but presently she started up. Strange, rumbling noises and hoarse, inarticulate cries came up from the street outside.

A pungent, stifling odor filled the room and set her to coughing. Her heart gave one terrified leap as she heard the brazen clang of bells and a shout of "Fire!"

She reached out for the button, then remembered that there were no electric lights in the hotel. Where had she put the matches? She groped around the litter of the table until she found the little box. She made two or three ineffectual attempts to strike a light before she succeeded, only to find that the gas had been cut off.

In the feeble light of the tiny flame she saw that her room was full of blue smoke. At that moment a flaming tongue leaped across her window, lighting the room with ghastly vividness!

She seized her bath-robe, and, throwing it across her shoulders, she ran to the door leading into the hall. A wall of blinding smoke drove her back into the room. She rushed to the window, but the greedy flames were licking the glass, and she dared not raise the frame.

Frantically she ran to the bathroom, feeling that somehow she could

protect herself with the thin trickle from the faucets, but here her efforts were again foiled; she twisted and turned the faucets, but no water came. Again she dashed blindly into the hall.

She knew that their room was a long way from the stairway, and that there were many turns and steps up and down before it was reached; she had no idea which way to go. She lifted up her voice and shrieked madly, but the sound seemed thrust back into her throat. The hotel seemed to be deserted except for its fiery guest.

"I'm all alone—they've left me here alone—everybody's gone!" she whimpered pitifully as she stumbled back into her room.

"Wait! For God's sake, don't shut me out! Isn't there some way out of this? I can't find the stairway!"

A hoarse voice stayed her hand on the knob, and through the dense cloud of smoke, half crawling, half stumbling, the disheveled figure of a man reeled into the room.

The air was much clearer there, but it was some moments before Mabel's smarting, tear-dimmed eyes recognized in the panting, half-suffocated figure leaning against her door the man she had seen at the dinner-table. In a moment he recovered himself and rushed over to the window; but, like her, was driven back by the licking flames that peered into the room with an evil leer.

"Not that way! Good Heavens! what shall we do?" he groaned. "To think of being shut up here like rats in a trap! I've been in every room on this side, and there isn't a single fire-escape. Why did I come back? I was the first one out after the alarm was put in; then I thought of Hattie's rings and my wallet, and like a fool I rushed back!"

He raged through the rooms, wringing his hands, talking to himself; Mabel was crying piteously, but he seemed unconscious of her presence.

"Oh, can't you d-o-o-o something?" she sobbed, and he looked at her distractedly.

"How did you come here?" he asked.

"I don't kn-o-ow!" she gasped.

He paid no attention to her answer, but said in a dazed voice:

"Well, you mustn't cry like that. We'll get out somehow if we have to jump for it. We must let them know we are up here."

Grasping her arm, they stumbled into the bedroom. The flames had died down around this window, and together they tore the lock from its fastening and threw up the sash; the smoke poured in, strangling and blinding them; but the man leaned far out, and shouted as long as his voice would last. They were soon discovered, and a great roar came up from the street.

"Man up there!"

"Good Heavens—there's a woman, too!"

"Bring the ladders!"

"Turn the stream up there, and hurry up about it—there's a man and woman trapped on the fourth floor! Hurry up now! All ready!"

"We're saved!" Mabel screamed hysterically.

"Yes, yes—it's all right now. They see us, but why don't they send the water up here? What's that? Shut the window, they say. My God, I believe the water's given out! Come away from the window, or we'll be suffocated before they can get here!"

He dragged Mabel away from the window and slammed it shut; but stood, trying to peer through the blanket of smoke and flame that obscured the street below.

The air in the room became thicker, and little tongues of flame ran along the edge of the floor. Mabel beat at them impotently, but she staggered back to the window when she heard a groan from her companion.

"We're done for! The ladders won't reach, and we'll be burned to a crisp before those country bumpkins can lash them together. Let's try the hall again." But one look outside drove them back into the room.

There was a crashing of glass and a rush of cool air into the room. Their first thought was that succor had reached them, but it was only a piece of falling timber that had broken a window-pane as it fell; however, the smoke lifted a little, and as the man groped his way across the room, still grasping Mabel's arm, he gasped: "Well, this is about the end for us."

Mabel gave a terrified cry, and he looked at her for the first time with recognition in his mournful brown eyes, made more mournful now by streaks of soot and stains of smoke.

"So—it is—you!" he panted brokenly.

"Yes, it is I." Mabel's voice was hysterical, but even in this dire moment she felt the pang of an exquisite emotion.

"I—I saw you at dinner," he muttered.

"Yes," she replied simply.

"You noticed?"

"Yes."

Then, after a moment's silence, he said softly: "Isn't this wonderful? How did you know?"

"Your soul spoke," she whispered, "and mine replied."

"Ah!" he sighed, and they stood with clasped hands in the center of Mabel's sitting-room, unconscious of scant attire, bedraggled hair, and sooty, smoke-streaked faces.

"No one ever understood me before." Mabel shifted the bath-robe in an attempt to hide the slender braid of her rather scanty hair.

"And I have been so lonely!" her companion declared as he wiped his smarting eyes.

"Well, we've had our moment!"

"And it was worth it," he replied, somewhat ambiguously. Then he added softly: "He who sees Jehovah dies."

Mabel was not very familiar with her Ibsen, but she nodded her head comprehendingly.

"I, too, am a poet," he coughed smokily. "It is beautiful that I should

have met you here; that our meeting should be both *ave* and *farewell*."

"You are my true soulmate." Mabel's voice was firm, noble, almost defensive.

"Tell me good-by, dear." She stood for one long moment clasped in his arms.

But the sudden crashing of glass and a familiar voice in the bedroom destroyed the beautiful harmony of the moment. They both sprang for the door, but before Mabel could reach the room her soulmate had dashed ahead of her.

"The ladders are up—the ladders are up! I'm saved!" he shouted wildly, and was struggling to get out of the window. But a ruthless hand shoved him back.

"Get back there—you fool! Where's Mabel? Where are you, Mabel?"

Mabel was close at hand, and with a cry she threw herself on the panting, perspiring, smoke-stained figure of her prosaic husband.

"My husband! My darling! I knew you would come for me. Oh, *how* I have prayed for you! Thank God you've come!"

"Yes, yes, but let loose there now. This ladder ain't any too steady. Come on, we haven't any time to lose. That ladder's fearfully shaky. I don't believe you could ever go down it. Can you climb on my back? Oh, you would, would you?"

This to the soulmate, who was making furtive rushes at the window. Larned gave him a sounding punch.

"You'd run ahead of the women, would you?"

"Oh, my brave hero!" Mabel hiccuped.

"Now, go easy, old girl, and keep your head. You ain't any lightweight by any matter of means."

Tremblingly, but with a feeling of salvation, Mabel climbed out of the window and onto the broad security of Larned's back. Slowly, haltingly, he descended the slender ladder with his burden.

In the street a breathless silence awaited them. Mabel heard her husband's breath come like the rhythmic pants of a toiling engine; drops of perspiration rolled down his face and fell on her hands, clasped tightly around his neck. "Ease up there, old girl; you're chokin' me!" he gasped.

Suddenly the tense silence of the waiting crowd was broken by a high, hysterical voice. The soulmate had started down the ladder, which bent and creaked under the added burden. As he descended he called to his wife below:

"I'm all right, Hattie! I'm safe, Hattie! I got your rings! I'll soon be with you, dear!"

"Shut up!"

"Get back there! Stop shaking that ladder!"

"Wait until they get the woman down!"

"Oh, you big coward!" were some of the pleasing epithets that rose from the waiting crowd, but the soulmate continued to descend unheedingly.

Larned reached the ground exhausted and his strength all but gone, but before he had reached the lowest rung of the ladder willing hands had relieved his back of its burden. The soulmate had descended with such agility that he was down as soon as they, and was clasped in the arms of his Hattie.

Mabel wavered for a moment, then she gasped sobbingly: "Oh, my big, heroic, splendid, beautiful husband!"

"Look out there!" a warning voice called. "Somebody catch her — she's fainted!"

RAMUR'S RACE

A SHORT STORY

BY ELI MOFFATT MILLEN



NOBODY was looking for Ollie Bryson when she arrived that afternoon at Cotton Plant.

She got off the dusty, cramped, rattling, little coach, which was commonly known as the passenger-coach, on the narrow-gage road that had condescended to make a station at Cotton Plant.

There was no roof over the station. There was no ticket-office or waiting-room; only a platform where the cotton bales could be loaded easily upon the flat cars.

And Cotton Plant was the name of the station. Just how it got the name no one had troubled to inquire.

A half-minute's survey of the place, however, at any season of the year would have satisfied a curious person.

In the springtime the tiny plants of cotton popped out of the ground and spread out their two round, dark-green leaves in the rows that ran almost up to the ends of the cross-ties.

In the summer and autumn the drying stalks, filled with bursting white bolls, stood waist-high in single file down the long rows. In the late fall the tough, star-pointed, empty bolls on their still dryer stalks held sway, while the leaves were drifting between the rows.

And in the winter the dead stalks stood on till they were broken down

on frosty mornings with heavy hoe-handles or shillalahs.

The first party of surveyors for the narrow-gage must have named the place.

Even in the years that flew along after the narrow-gage went through the cotton-fields were never forced to give up much of their acreage. They were still a part of Cotton Plant.

There came a store on one side of the depot, or cotton platform. Then another opened on the other side of the platform. And the cotton rows ran up as close to the back doors of each store as a mule could be driven at the plowing time.

The doctor came—as some doctor always will to a new place—and built a home not far from the platform. The store-owners built their homes.

The three families became the aristocracy of the place, and the community revolved about its coming town.

Cotton Plant never grew into a city. Neither did it become a town. Perhaps—perhaps it did attain the standing of a village.

But the growth of Cotton Plant was so slow that Ollie Bryson, when she got back, looked upon things as though she had left it the day before.

The things that had changed were the faces—the faces on the platform.

She had been away nine years. She had been in the "No'th" with Congressman Whittleton's family. In nine years faces will change. Ollie knew that. But she had expected a few faces to look like some she had known.

Half a score of young men were sitting on the bales of cotton, watching the movements of the train-crew, which crew acted, collectively and individually, in whatever capacity the conductor saw fit.

Ollie looked into the faces of the group on the bales. They stared back at her. She thought she ought to know every man of them. They must have been children she once knew. But she was not sure.

Certainly *one* face that once loitered about the platform was not there. Ollie had not expected to see it. But she had seen it on the platform before she left. The narrow-gage had been something new then.

The woman paused, as if to ask a question of the young men.

One of them slipped down from a bale, upsetting a marking pot and brush, and removed his broad-brimmed, calico-lined straw hat as if to answer her question.

But she suddenly lifted her eyes and looked across the cotton-field at the back of them into space.

Then she turned, without a word, and walked to the end of the platform, where she knew the steps led down to the ground.

As she descended the steps she saw two men, sitting on the ground in the shade of the platform. Evidently the bustle of an arriving train had no excitement for them. They had not been on the platform when the little dinky unloaded.

One of the men looked up.

"Well, Job Foley!" Ollie cried, a tone of real delight emphasizing her discovery.

"If it ain't Ollie Bryson, so help me Rachel!" grinned Job Foley, and he shook her hand just as though she had been a man. "I thought you wa'n't comin' back any more, Ollie? But I'm as glad to see you as a kitten is to get in out of the wet. Fresh as a daisy, ain't you? All the old folks will be tickled to death to see you."

"I am glad you think so," Ollie answered.

"I don't think so. I know so."

Job Foley paused and dropped his eyes to the ground a moment, as if a sudden recollection of the past had struck him.

When he looked up the next instant a slight cloud had darkened his face.

"But, Ollie," he said cautiously, "you had better go back if you have come to—"

"I did not come back to see *him*."

What kind of woman do you think I am, Job Foley?"

Tears of mortification rose up in her eyes and blinded her.

"I didn't mean it, Ollie," Job explained quickly. "I wasn't thinkin'. I was 'bout to tell you somethin', but I clear forgot."

His apologetic tone convinced Ollie Bryson that he had not meant to tease.

"Ain't nobody here to meet you?" Job changed the subject.

"It seems not," Ollie said, looking about her expectantly. "I guess Aunt Molly McBryde did not get my letter. But I know the road, every foot of it."

"'Tain't changed a bit in the nine year since you went away. Same old mud-holes to dodge; same old gullies on the sides. Come to see us, Ollie, if you stay long."

"I am going back to-morrow," Ollie said.

Then the trim, tailored little woman started off, taking the middle of the dirt road.

She knew where she was going. She knew no one would come to meet her. In fact, she had never written.

She was not going to Aunt Molly McBryde's—that is, direct. It might be dusk before she reached there.

And while Ollie was still in sight of the Cotton Plant platform Job Foley sat by his companion's side, looking after her in silence. When she had turned the bend in the road just before it went over the hill, he shook his head and smiled doubtfully.

He had a pretty definite conviction that Ollie Bryson was not going straight to Aunt Molly McBryde's. He knew that she had not written. If she had, he had confidence enough in Uncle Sam's service to believe the letter would have been delivered.

If it had been delivered they would have come for Ollie in the two-horse wagon, with the spring seat and one of Aunt Molly's best quilts for a cushion.

Job knew that Ollie Bryson, brave, noble, upright little woman that she was, had lied.

And Ollie Bryson knew that she had lied!

II.

OLLIE walked with affected jauntiness till she was well around the bend in the road and over the hill.

She was aware that she was being watched by Job Foley and any other old acquaintances about the stores who had learned of her arrival, and they would be trying to gather from her bearing whether, in her absence, she had become an independent woman—a woman with courage of heart and stamina—able to lead instead of follow.

She knew there was not even a child in the neighborhood that did not know why she had gone away.

Her leave-taking, nine years before, had been for a strange cause.

She had gone away with the love of every man, woman, and child in a ten-mile radius of Cotton Plant following her. The charm of her ways could never be forgotten.

At that time the Cotton Plant community had not been seriously infested with character-killers. Not a mortal in those parts would allow so much as the tilt of an eyelash to cast reflection on Ollie Bryson. Yet all had been glad when she went away.

She went away because she loved a man.

And the man she loved was feared and hated throughout two counties as much as Ollie Bryson was loved.

Ollie had not believed in marrying a man to reform him. She had tried to reform him first. In this she had failed, for so soon as her lover left her, after each call, he relapsed into a drunken, gambling, browbeating rowdy.

And the wonder of the people was that Ollie Bryson could love the man. But she did. And more than that, she did not care who knew it.

She told Ramur Barclay that she would marry him when he had reformed. Ramur had asked her to kiss him to bind that promise.

"I will kiss you," she had said, "when I am sure you have reformed. And when I kiss you, Ramur, it will be the sign that I am willing to marry you at any day or hour, thereafter, you may name."

Ramur Barclay had smiled. But when he looked into the earnest eyes of Ollie Bryson he quit smiling. He might have known she did not joke about such matters.

"All right then, Ollie," he said with a laugh, "I am still in the runnin'."

He went out, got on his horse, and in less than an hour was at the county seat, eight miles away, celebrating Ollie's promise.

He was still in the running, three years later, when Ollie went away.

At the foot of the hill, where the branch crossed the road, she passed the little old schoolhouse where she and Ramur had stood side by side in the spelling-class while the teacher gave them words out of the old blue-back speller.

The one-room building was new when she went to school there. Now it was decrepid and old. The roof sagged in the middle, like a sway-backed horse. The front door would not close because a rotting lintel stuck out. A round block of wood had been set up on its end for a step.

The flat-top stumps which used to be in the yard, and on which boys and girls together had eaten their lunches, were all gone. So was the brier-thicket at the back of the schoolhouse, into which she had once seen Ramur throw a boy because he had spoken profanely to a group of girls.

She went inside. The vacancy—the deadness of all that she had loved chilled her. She sat down in the place where her old desk had been. And then she looked across to where Ramur had sat.

One little smile had crossed her face. She thought of the day the doctor's little boy first came to school. How he sat down in the desk with Ramur and put his little tin lunch-bucket un-

der Ramur's seat. How they had all smiled, except Ramur, who had not only made room for the little fellow but had frowned when the others had laughed.

Then she laughed outright as she remembered how, at the little recess, Ramur had thrashed a boy who had dared taunt his young protégé.

And this same Ramur, as a man, was the ruffian and terror of two counties!

Perhaps—Ollie often feared—the law might some time want him. And when it did— She tried not to think.

Yet she had come back, just to see *him!*

She slipped out of the old schoolhouse, fearing that if any one saw her they might guess why she was there.

Half a mile farther on she turned into a by-path and looked cautiously ahead to a house she could see through the clearing.

It was not the home of Aunt Molly McBryde. It was the home of the Misses Cynthia and Miriam Barclay, prim, precise, psalm-singing spinsters—sisters of Ramur. It was also Ramur's home, when he cared for one.

And Ollie Bryson—known and loved in the Whittleton house for her strict regard for proprieties—was going straight to the home of her old beau without invitation. With no credible excuse, she was going in open disregard for all proprieties.

But as she neared the house she seemed to realize what she was about to do. She sat down on a log not far from the path and rested her face in her hands. For a few minutes she sat in deep study. Then she looked up, fearing lest some one might come upon her.

She glanced backward to the road, as though she had best retrace her steps. Then she fixed her eyes upon the Barclay house and watched, as a hungry dog at a kitchen-door.

No one came out or went in. The place was still. Even the chickens in the yard seemed not to have a guardian.

Ollie finally took out a powder-puff and touched her face in spots. She got up from the log and shook out her crumpled skirt. With challenging eyes, depicting the defeat of propriety, she went toward the house, stepping noiselessly on the leaves that littered the path.

She did not know what she would say or do when she got to the door. She had no excuse for the call.

She had not come back to give herself up to Ramur Barclay, for she knew that he had not reformed. She would have heard if he had. She simply wanted to see him. The next day she would go away again. She felt certain that she would never see Ramur after that. Perhaps the next time she heard of him he would be in the penitentiary.

Her mind was clouded yet—her soul was aflame with love!

She almost laughed at the realization of her presence here with no pretext for the call. Perhaps, she thought with a smile, one would rise up at the door to meet her.

There was no answer to her knock. She knocked again. She remembered how quickly the Barclay sisters used to open their door at a knuckle tap.

A thrill of fear sped over her body. Her mind had cleared a little.

Perhaps Job Farley did have something to tell her. She wondered why she had not listened. If she had she might have known.

Shivering all over with a sudden dread of what might be in store for her, she went around the house. At the kitchen door there was still no answer. She peeped in at the windows. The rooms were clean and neat as of old. But they seemed lonesome. The Barclay sisters had never been away from home together—that she knew, except to go to church. And there could be no church at this time of the week or at this hour of the day.

Ollie sat down on the step while she tried to think of the things that might have taken them from their home.

After a little she got up and went down to the stable and corn-crib.

She could tell whether Ramur's horse, which carried him faithfully on his long night sprees, had been housed and fed there. By this she might know whether Ramur ever came home now.

She looked into the nearest stable. It was empty. She was about to enter and look into the trough for signs of a late horse-feed. But she heard voices, and stopped.

The voices of Cynthia and Miriam she could make out. There was also a third—a man's voice. But it was not Ramur's. They were talking in subdued tones.

She slipped around and looked through a crack between the logs into the corn-crib. There sat Cynthia and Miriam. They had been shelling corn by hand. But just now their hands were idle. Their faces were strained and troubled.

Ollie did not know the man standing before them.

"How did you know this?" Miriam was asking the man.

"They were—were drinkin'—a little last night, Miss Miriam, and stopped out in front of my house. I guess they didn't really know they were near a house. And so I heard them. But I am glad it was in front of my house, instead of some others along the road."

"And Ramur? Was he very loud? Did he make any threats?" Cynthia asked.

Ollie shivered.

"Yes'm, Miss Cynthia; he was—was—he didn't just seem to know what he was doin' or sayin'."

"Do you think they meant what they said?" Cynthia asked again.

"I kinder think they did, even if they was so—drinkin' a bit too much. I know it is likely to happen, for Rufe Brock has been tryin' to get that girl to run away with him for a long spell. She won't do it. She's kinder like that Miss—"

Misses Cynthia and Miriam each held

up a protesting hand, as if the name must not be mentioned. For a moment Ollie wondered.

"She won't have nothin' to do with Rufe till he quits his ways. Then she says she will marry him," the man finished.

Ollie leaned her head against the log and gazed down at the ground and at the "doodle-bug" holes in the soft dust under the edge of the crib. She understood. Or did she? Was the man about to mention her own name, the moment ago?

"Her father, did you say, had threatened to have Rufe arrested if he comes back any more?" Miriam asked.

"That's what Rufe was tellin' out there in the road."

"Are you sure you heard Ramur say that he would tar and feather him?" asked Cynthy, as though she believed her brother to be a very gentle youth.

"That's why I come to you, Miss Cynthy. Sounded kinder like Ramur was plannin' the whole thing. I hate to tell you. He said he would—"

"Oh, don't tell us any more, please!" Miriam interrupted.

"Surely Ramur wouldn't," Cynthy added.

"No'm, Miss Cynthy, he didn't say he would touch off the barn. Rufe is goin' to do that. Ramur said he would—"

The corn in Cynthy's lap spilled down, unrestrained, upon the crib floor as she arose. Miriam sat motionless.

"Come, Miriam," said Cynthy, "we must go to the house. We need a season of quiet. Ramur may come home to supper and then—"

Ollie did not wait. She slipped over the rail fence and crouched behind a scrub-oak till the man had gone.

The sun was almost down; and if she reached Aunt Molly McBryde's at a respectable hour, it was time for her to be upon the other mile.

But she was not going to Aunt Molly McBryde's at all—after hearing what she had.

She knew the girl Rufe Brock had courted—almost as long as Ramur had courted her.

She would keep the girl from being frightened by drunken ruffians, and keep the drunken ruffians from the penitentiary—at least, *this* time!

The place was four miles away. Ollie had not set foot in a rough country during the years she had been away, but she had not forgotten her strength of former years.

She looked toward the house. Cynthy and Miriam were not to be seen. They were sitting silent in their anxiety for a bad brother. Ramur was not coming home for supper. That had only been an excuse Cynthy had offered to gild her brother's waywardness.

Ollie touched her hand to her lips and blew a kiss toward the house, as if in farewell. Then she moved stealthily through the woods to the road and across it into another woods.

III.

NEAR midnight, five men and their horses grouped themselves under the low limbs of an oak five miles from the object of their wrath.

"So the old man 'lowed he'd have you arrested if you come again, did he, Rufe?"

Ramur Barclay unwrapped a big round bottle and diligently applied a corkscrew while he spoke.

"The same old ride, boys," he said.

"Remember we don't draw a rein till we are at the crossroads, two miles beyond the house. Then we can circle back, after everybody's sure we are in the next county. We mustn't be too quick. Somebody might have heard us plannin' our fun. Fact is, I don't know where we did frame it up. Safest way is the best way. Ready? Ride! Whoop 'em up!" he yelled.

Every farm house along the main county highway stirred with feverish terror as the familiar sound of furious hoofs came beating upon the hard dirt

road. The night was punctuated with yells and curses of the riders.

When an elder whispered, "Ramur Barclay and his crowd," the heads of the youngsters sought shelter under the covers.

At the crossroads the men became soberly quiet. The circling and redoubling began. Into a dense woods and through a field of tall corn the five men rode silently.

Two miles back from the crossroads, two hours after the roar of the wild riders had passed, the last tiny light in the uneasy house was extinguished, with the feeling that the danger had passed, and a man stole out to his horse in the nearest thicket.

The darkest hours before the dawn had been chosen by Ramur Barclay for the work of his crowd. Their victims had forgotten their fright, if they had been uneasy, and were fast asleep, Ramur reasoned.

With his plans well laid, Ramur rode out of the woods back of the victim's barn with his four companions trailing close behind him.

They hitched their horses to the nearest gate and crept cautiously toward the house.

In the deeper gloom under the eaves of the smoke-house they paused. Ramur turned to the men.

"I'll get the old man. When he's safe in hand, I'll yell. Make straight for the horses, hear! Rufe can stop in the barn as we go by, if he wants to."

A dew-drenched woman rose from the block-step of the smoke-house as the five men came around it.

"You, Ramur Barclay!"

The challenge was soft, but clear and true as the ring of metal.

No face could have been seen in that blackness, even though it had been within an arm's reach. Only the form could be distinguished, but Ramur Barclay knew that voice.

"Ollie!" he cried.

Then he fled.

Three minutes later five horses were pounding away down the road. But

there was not a yell; not even a word from their riders.

And those who heard went back to sleep feeling sure that this time it was not Ramur Barclay and his crowd.

IV.

OLLIE had looked for familiar faces when she alighted at Cotton Plant in the afternoon, but the next morning she hoped that not a soul would know her.

She had waited since daylight in a thicket not far from the station, so that she could hear the screeching whistle of the little dinky a few miles up the track.

It was nearly noon when the rattling rail conveyance came along. Ollie slipped out into the road and came up to the platform as though she had reached it after a long walk.

The first person she saw was Job Foley.

The little woman that Job saw coming up to the platform was not quite the same one he had seen the afternoon before. He was puzzled. He could not understand why either the Barcleys or McBrydes had not sent her back to the train, even if it had to be by horseback.

As Ollie came nearer, Job saw that the neat, close-fitting, freshly pressed suit she had worn the afternoon before was berry-stained in a spot or two, and that it appeared to have been wet. The folds and creases were gone, and there was a big wrinkle across the front.

Job took off his hat and scratched his head vigorously.

"So you must hurry back, Ollie? Can't you stay and take a snack with us?" he asked.

"I only had a little time," she said briefly, and then hurried to get into the stuffy coach, but Job followed her in.

"How's Aunt Molly's folks this mornin'? Guess you had a fine time? Know they was all glad to see you," Job rattled, slyly.

"I did not go to Aunt Molly's," Ollie said shortly.

Job laughed as though he had seen the joke.

"I kinder thought you wasn't goin' there—least not first," he said, still laughing affectedly. "Cynthy and Miriam are powerful good to company."

"Cynthy and Miriam have not seen me," Ollie said. "I have not been inside their house."

Ollie did not notice Job's amazement. She was staring out the tiny window without seeing a thing outside. Job stood for a moment with his mouth open.

"You do look like you had a long, hard walk, Ollie," he hazarded. "They oughtn't to expect a woman to attend to business that's so tryin'."

Ollie did not hear, or if she did she made no answer.

The little train started. Job tried again.

"Want to leave a word for Ramur? Or have you got another beau up there in Wash'n'ton?"

"No message, thank you, Job," Ollie said, with a weary smile as she turned and held out her hand to him.

"Well, say, Ollie," Job blurted out, "what did you come back for? I'm switched if I know."

Ollie laughed outright.

"Just to walk around, Job," she said.

Job was running to get off the train, which was rapidly gaining a maximum speed of approximately twelve miles an hour—it sometimes risked fifteen.

"Lordy mighty!" Ollie heard him gasp as he tumbled off in the soft earth between cotton rows.

Ollie gave a deep sigh of determined resignation and began to smoothe out her rumpled skirt. Then she turned her face to the front of the coach as if that would help her put away the past and fix her mind upon the future.

The train came to a stop in the old Henderson meadow.

A man got on, pulling himself up on

a flat car with the aid of a friendly brakeman.

Ollie gave him no notice.

She was wondering how the news of her sudden coming, mysterious stay, and more mysterious departure, would be taken in the neighborhood.

After the train had started again the door to the coach opened and the man who had gotten on walked in. Ollie by this time was looking meditatively out the window.

The man paused, after he had closed the door, and looked carefully over the passengers. He was a splendid type, physically, of the farmer of those parts. His face was ruddy and his eyes shrewd and friendly. He was dressed in his best.

Had it not been for the sprinkle of gray about his temples those who did not know him might have taken him for a country swain off to see his sweetheart.

When his eyes came to Ollie he rested them there and looked no farther. For a moment he stood still by the door as if undecided.

Then he moved deliberately up the cramped aisle.

When Ollie looked up a full minute later the man was standing mutely before her seat.

She did not speak. Not a feature of her face changed its expression of calmness.

The man might have been a stranger to her, but for the fact that she did not inquire what he wanted.

The man's face tinged faintly, then grew crimson. But his eyes did not falter in their earnestness.

He seemed to be watching Ollie's eyes for a sign of recognition.

After a few minutes of this silence the corners of Ollie's mouth twitched slightly.

"Ollie," the man said in low, meaningful tones.

"How are you, Ramur?" Ollie asked.

"Cured!" was the steady, deep-voiced answer.

His eyes never wavered from those of the little woman before him.

After a time Ollie lowered her eyes. It was the first time she had ever failed to shame Ramur Barclay.

When she looked up again at him he met her look with the same determined gaze.

A new light came into her eyes—one that had not entered them in nine years. She smiled mischievously at him.

"Since when?" she inquired.

"Three o'clock this morning."

Ollie laughed, musically, happily.

"I stopped at Aunt Molly's this mornin' to find out if—if you were expected. She'd seen somebody that had seen somebody else that had seen Job Foley last night, but she said you had not been there. She had heard that you were goin' back to-day. So I thought maybe—"

"Maybe what?" questioned Ollie, smiling.

"I am still in the running!"

Again Ollie's musical laugh rang like that of a schoolgirl.

"Ramur Barclay, do you know where I live in Washington?" she asked, quite soberly.

"Yes."

"Do you care to call there a year from to-day?"

"And report?"

"That you are able to stop running."

"Lordy, yes! If I have to run all the way there."

The train was stopping again.

"I get off here, Ollie," Ramur said, holding out his hand as if he was now perfectly satisfied to go.

She took the hand.

"A year from to-day," he said, "and—you'd better be ready!"

THE TOP STAYS WHITE

By Mary F. K. Hutchinson

WE'VE found such a bright little laundress,
Who comes Monday mornings at nine;
A widow with three little children,
She doesn't lament nor repine.

She always seems cheerful and happy,
While scrubbing the dirt all away;
As smiling when rinsing and bluing
As when she's receiving her pay.

We asked of this bright little laundress:
"How came you so cheerful to be?"
She answered: "I wasn't so always,
The suds taught a lesson to me.

"Perhaps, when you've washed, you have noticed,
It's surely a most common sight,
No matter how dirty the water,
The suds, right on top, stay white.

"An' so I jest figgered it out, ma'am,
My soul should stay top o' the heap,
No matter how hard work or life was,
The top white and shining I'd keep."

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR



HASN'T this been a fierce summer? Rain, wind, soggy woodlands, and weeping dells. A man might just as well have taken his vacation under a fish-dock as any other place.

Do not get the impression that I am irritable; 'tisn't true. But I do not mind transmitting to you the information that it is no fun to pack a trunk full of summer togs, flannel trousers, near-silk socks, and nobby neckties, and wind up in a Hudson Bay post pricing a rubber blanket, a Mackinaw coat, and a pair of gum boots.

Another thing: Frank O'Brien is confined to his bed in Smithtown, Long Island, with the comforting assurance from his medical adviser that he will be on his back two weeks yet; Frank Condon is hibernating in Wiscasset, Maine; Paul West has quit writing verse while he chops some fire-wood; Strickland-Gillilan says that the poem entitled "Microbes: Adam had 'em" (that's all there was to it), which appeared in the "Heart to Heart Talks" of July 20th, was swiped from him—which it was; and altogether I am up against' it.

The fact of the matter is, the microbe poem of Mr. Gillilan's is the best thing he ever wrote. The only thing he could possibly write that would beat it would be something shorter.

But as far as you have gone, Strickland, you are the best in the business, and the reason I didn't give you credit for the poem in the first place was because in going the rounds of the press your brother craftsmen attended to your absolute extinction.

Permit me to put you back on the map again before five hundred thousand American people. If you will wait until the first of the year, I shall make it a million, or a year from now—

Oh, let's get back to the present and the next number of *THE CAVALIER*, and

"SCHOOLMA'AM ISLAND"

By BAILEY MILLARD

a complete novel which we propose to put over all in one number.

This is distinctly a story of adventure in the lighter vein. It is a combination of laughter and thrills. You cannot help but be amused at the complications which arise after the wreck, when a bevy of charming school-teachers are hurled from the briny deep to the dry sands under the protection of one perfectly good American citizen and a South Sea island king.

Bailey Millard is to be congratulated on the number of effective scenes and incidents he has crowded into "SCHOOLMA'AM ISLAND." It never lags for a moment. You will step from sensation to sensation with the rapidity of a man running down-stairs—or up-stairs, as the case may be.

The love story which is the larger part of "SCHOOLMA'AM ISLAND" is of the exhilarating sort, and when adventure appears it steps right into the middle of the stage.

I used to know a man out West who was an artist at telling funny stories. It was his habit, however, when any gentleman laughed hysterically over his yarns, to kick him violently. He did not believe in continued mirth in anybody. Bailey Millard is not quite as rough as my Western friend, but he is every bit as active.

"SCHOOLMA'AM ISLAND" will give you a day of genuine pleasure. ,

Scammon Lockwood, in a story entitled "WHERE THIEVES BREAK IN," has done about the best job of the sort that ever crossed our desk.

It really takes a great deal of experience to be a competent, painstaking, first-class thief. Lots of men have butted into the business who ought to be counting breakers at a seaside resort. A low-brow can never be a high-class criminal. When a man sets out to take something that does not belong to him, that is the best indication in the world that he is a low-brow at the outset. But if he gets away with it, he is an artist, unless, of course, the constabulary, which itself is not as artistic as it might be, stumbles upon the guilty one and rounds him up in the gray stone front, where all men are equal—in their guilt.

To anybody who is about to reach out and take some other man's property, Mr. Lockwood's story will come as a shock—a hair-raising, paralyzing, stupefying wallop. It is a very bad story for a kleptomaniac to pick up and read, but it will do an honest man good. It will show him how many great temptations he has overcome. It will make him like himself, especially his powers of resistance.

I cannot recommend this story too highly. It is a good plot, good reading, and good writing.



"LOVE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING," by Adriana Spadoni, is pitched in quite a different key than Mr. Lockwood's yarn. It is a simple plot—so simple that it seems almost inadequate to justify a 7,000-word story. Yet Miss Spadoni has handled the theme so artfully and touched it with such skilful fingers that she has wrung from it a new chord. Read the scenario:

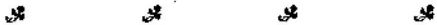
A woman, burdened with a husband who is worthless, falls in love with another who is a man in every way worthy of every fine feeling that is born in a woman's breast. The wife is crushed between a sense of duty and a wild longing to take the happiness within reach. To her mother she pours out all that she feels in a torrent of emotion.

Well, we may as well admit it here as anywhere that the mother understands her daughter's mind better than any one else in the world. Why? For ample reasons. And to make matters more interesting still, the mother knows that the inevitable is not far off. How truly she understood will be made plain to you when you read "LOVE THAT PASSES UNDERSTANDING."

This is the first contribution we have had from Adriana Spadoni. Be assured it is not the last.



"GETTING BILLY'S GOAT," by Jack Brant: A football story. There is a man who can play a wonderful game of football, but who doesn't simply because he never gets mad enough to make himself felt in the game. The captain and the coach conspire to get him in a frenzy at the right moment, and what he does in consequence is enough to paralyze both teams and spectators alike.



"TRENTON GEORGE'S WIDOW," by Eugene A. Vogt: A real human-interest story, the kind of a romance which enters the simple lives of the common people of a great city, told with a charming directness which holds and cheers.

A poor cigar-maker who is very heavily in debt is taken into partnership by a politician. He has loved a little German girl who marries and goes out of his life for a time. The cigar man prospers and never ceases his search for his early love. When and how he finds her furnish the dramatic climax for this picturesque story.



Those of the readers of THE CAVALIER who recall Mary Rider Mechtold, the author of the story with the two endings about which there was such a great controversy, international in its scope, will be glad to know that she is a contributor to the next number of THE CAVALIER with a story entitled "TROUSERS AND THE MAN."

There is nothing so important to a boy as the moment he emerges from his knickerbockers and steps into a pair of four-dollar pants. A recently elected Congressman has nothing on him. Of course he has got pants on him, but not the four-dollar kind.

When the boy becomes a man, he sets behind him the things that he considers unworthy of the man—the things that are part and parcel only of a boy's mind.

Mary Rider Mechtold, in her story, has built up a big situation in which the boy, for the first time in his long trousers stands in the presence of an opportunity to prove that he is worthy to wear the pants, that there are some things in heaven and on earth that are not understood by those knee-pants:

If you are grown up, you will like this story, because it will turn your mind back to the very day when you hung your abbreviated pants in the closet for good, slid into your long jeans, and climbed out over the fence of boyland among your fellow men.



There are other short stories in this number, any one of which is worth the price of the magazine.

Also, the second instalment of "A SINISTER SOUVENIR," the great mystery collaboration of Edgar Franklin and Gilbert Riddell, will be found. These two popular authors are always effective, alone or in pairs.

"THE SHADOW," Arthur Stringer's new serial, which lays bare the tactics of the metropolitan police, is making a sensation. We can supply back numbers to those who were not fortunate enough to read the first instalment.

A HANDFUL FROM THE MAIL-SACK

In THE CAVALIER for August 10 we published, in Esperanto as well as English, a story entitled "IN 2112." As a matter of fact, it was an experiment, but a very successful one. I wish herewith to thank my various correspondents who wrote me on the subject. It is quite impossible to print all of the letters. There is one letter, however, which I wish to print, because it carries with it the stamp of approval for all of the Esperantists.

MY DEAR MR. EDITOR:

The Esperanto story, "En 2112," in THE CAVALIER, looks exceedingly well, and I am sure the Esperantists who have seen it must have enjoyed it. A number of your non-Esperantist readers must be taking an interest in it, too, for inquiries about Esperanto, referring to THE CAVALIER, are being received by the Esperanto Association of North America. Inquiries like that indicate a very genuine interest, for there is some energy and purposiveness back of them.

We shall mention the story in the next number of *Amerika Esperantisto* to call it to the attention of any Esperantists whose friends have not already mentioned it to them, among persons not yet acquainted with THE CAVALIER.

The introduction you gave was excellent, and I have heard many appreciative comments about it.

Very sincerely,
IVY KELLERMAN-REED,
Editor, *Amerika Esperantisto*.

Washington, D. C.

Leading the World.

Here is a letter from Converse, Indiana, which shows pretty clearly how THE CAVALIER grips a man when it grips him at all.

There have been times when I have missed magazines long before this—many times—but never before did I miss one as I have the good old CAVALIER.

My last CAVALIER is dated July 6. No. 3. I have received none since the above date.

It would be useless for me to try and tell you just how disappointed I am in not receiving this, how I have missed it, and how no other magazine will take its place. But no other of any kind will, and so I am enclosing subscription and my \$4.00 and trust that you will not overlook to start it with the July 13 number.

Will you please favor me by sending me the back numbers just as soon as you possibly can? If you will see that these numbers are started to me at once, I shall certainly believe that you are interested in all your readers. And I want to state that I believe that all readers of THE CAVALIER are good fellows, every man, woman, and child, and I am going to be one of them when THE CAVALIER is leading the world among magazines with the largest subscription list and a list that will stagger all others.

Wishing you all, from the devil up to Frank A. Munsey, all the great success you deserve so well, I am, one of your readers that has come to stay.

J. A. KENNY.

Converse, Indiana.

Mr. Kenny shows no inclination to fog the issue. In fact, he makes it very clear that he is a CAVALIER reader first, last, and all the time.

A Busy Farmer's Wife.

What could be more encouraging than this letter from Eldorado Springs, Missouri? It is frank, to say the least, and I am willing to wager that the chickens and the cows on the Bush Farm get pretty good treatment.

For goodness' sake, do not make another attempt to improve upon THE CAVALIER. It is as good now as a magazine could be. Anyway, it suits me, and I am selfish enough not to care for the other fellow.

I am a busy farmer's wife, or a farmer's busy wife. Well, both expressions are true, for we are both busy. What I am trying to say is that in spite of our work my husband and I find time—or take time—to read THE CAVALIER. Maybe the horses and chickens do have to wait a little longer for breakfast on mornings after that innocent-looking magazine arrives, but the horses, at least, do not mind, as they know rest periods are longer from some cause.

I clipped the following society note from one of our popular monthly magazines:

Charles Neville Buck, whose novelette, "The Beneficent Burglar," you will doubtless recall, is at this writing heading from Louisville toward the "feud country" of the Kentucky mountains, where one travels with saddle-bags instead of a suit-case, much of it being inaccessible to wheeled vehicles and the railways knowing it not. He leaves the rails at Jackson, the county-seat of "Bloody Breathitt," and will simply drift about, gathering material and relying for shelter on the well-known hospitality of the mountaineers.—*Exchange.*

CAVALIER readers will be interested to know that Mr. Charles Neville Buck had a very delightful trip through the "feud country" and brought back in those "saddle-bags" referred to, a very delightful story of the Cumberland Mountains and "Bloody Breathitt" entitled "THE STRENGTH OF SAMSON SOUTH," which was written for and will appear in THE CAVALIER at an early date. It is beyond question his strongest work, better by far than "THROUGH THE PORTAL OF DREAMS," which appeared in a previous number of this magazine.

The nearest my husband and I ever come to quarreling is over who shall have first chance at it. We often have to compromise by one of us reading aloud.

We buy each weekly copy at our news-dealer's, and it costs us ten cents—five dollars and twenty cents per year at that rate. We would subscribe for it, but oftentimes our rural carriers leave papers or other mail in other boxes by mistake, and we never get them. And we simply won't take any chances on missing a CAVALIER, while we be unto our newsman if he fails to reserve our copy!

How soon will we get the sequel to "Darkness and Dawn"?

Please tell Junius B. Smith and Dr. J. U. Giesy that we want Semi Dual's love story with his youthful sweetheart that promised to "return" some time. Make them produce it.

Very truly yours,

CLARA E. BUSH.

Eldorado Springs, Missouri.

Mrs. Bush will be glad to know that the sequel to "DARKNESS AND DAWN," by George Allan England, will be finished shortly, and that Giesy and Smith, the creators of Semi Dual, will complete their next novel within a fortnight. It will appear shortly in THE CAVALIER.

FOR YOUR THREE BEST FRIENDS

HERE IS AN IDEA

Send me the names and addresses of three of your friends whom you think will be interested in the stories in THE CAVALIER, and I will send them sample copies direct from this office. You might, if you wish, to prepare them for the coming of the magazine, write to them as well, and say that sample copies of THE CAVALIER are being sent them at your request.

This is just a suggestion. If it is too much trouble, don't do it, but I will appreciate it if you do, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have let your friends in on a good thing.

EDITOR, THE CAVALIER, Flatiron Building, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York

HER MOTHER'S DAUGHTER

A SHORT STORY

BY MARGARET BURROUS MARTIN



"CONNIE'S going to get married." This statement of matrimonial futurity, uttered in a behind-the-counter *sotto voce*, carried easily to the farthest girl standing beside the long table of "Special, Lingerie Waists," in the basement section of the big department-store:

A gleam of interest, quite distinct from the counterfeit interest, yielded conscientiously (Rule IX) in Manual of Instructions to Saleswomen) to tentative customers, whether cash or account, lighted the faces of the girls, gowned monotonously (Rule XVI) in white waists and black skirts.

"Well, what do you think of that? Who told you, Alice? Ain't she the lucky one? Do you know him? Gee! I believe if Steve himself," with a deprecatory glance at the cash-boy, whose stunted appearance made obligatory the frequent presentation of the age-certificate which gave him the privilege of earning his unschooled livelihood in the big store, "should ask me, I'd say, 'You're sure a bargain, Steve. Wrap yourself up quick. Here's even change; I won't wait for the check.'"

"If I had a home and—a mother"—'twas the first speaker who again had the floor—"a mother" she repeated wistfully—"I don't believe I'd care about getting married, or anything like that."

"I know," 'twas a little girl with a most amazing length of home-grown red hair, that added her treble note to the yearning music. "That's what makes it easy for me to stand all this,

and no gay times—it's my mother. But say, Alice, what's to hinder your getting Connie's place? Mr. Mason thinks you're the whole show down here, and you sure have made good; you with one hundred and ninety-seven plunks yesterday from this here truck," with a contemptuous wave at the waists, conspicuously "hand" embroidered in great loose blotches of vivid colors.

"You have a way with you, and know how to get next to the swells. Why can't you make a grab for Connie's place up-stairs? She'll put in a word for you; and Minnie up there is leaving, too, next month. I'd give it a try, anyhow— Yes, ma'am, they're awful cheap, and the latest; just down from up-stairs. They were higher-priced up-stairs. What number did you say, ma'am? Yes, that coral pink is the newest shade. It would be swell on you. Number forty-two, did you say? Oh, yes, ma'am, if it don't fit, bring it right back—we have larger sizes. No, we haven't had any complaint about the colors running. Yes, ain't they pretty? No, we don't dare wear them. Oh, no;—we all wear just white. It's the rules, you know. You'll take that one?—\$1.10 from \$2.00."

The girl with the auburn hair, in the toils of her perspiring, lop-hatted customer, size forty-two or forty-four, the girl with the merry eyes, who facetiously had avowed her similitude to *Barkis*, the ever-willing, took up the customer-interrupted conversation with the first speaker, the motherless girl, who was making good.

"Ain't that always the way? Them

that has homes and mothers, they're the ones that get nice fellows, while it's either up to us cheap lodging-housers to stay here till we dry up and blow away, or be like some we know, and have our time on the side. Sometimes, 'Alice, I think we're fools."

A deep flush stained the face of Alice as she answered.

"I don't think I understand about them—some we know. How they can—especially when it's like Minnie. Minnie. She knows her friend is married, and has children. She has seen his wife, and yet she runs around with him, and look at the clothes she's got. Miss Heaton, up-stairs, says she got a whole outfit of French, the real thing, unders last month, and they cost her nearly seventy dollars, and she getting only ten a week, and no home and—no—mother, either!"

"And that's one good thing," put in again the free girl of the auburn braids. "My mother would just die if I carried on like Minnie has this while back. She's welcome to her hand-made unders. Seconds of the knit kind are good enough for me, and I don't have to hire 'em washed, either. I tell you, six plunks don't go far in this here burg."

"I know," sadly answered Alice, "and my room goes up twenty-five cents this next week, and I just can't walk the four miles to the store these hot days; I am too wet and sticky to wait on them when I get here."

"That's it," put in a girl who had spent her last free minutes manicuring her stubby nails, a mouth-moistened kerchief and a hairpin serving as implements. "We've always got to look just so. I got a call-down last week for my nails being dirty. Gee, when we see the nails of some of the customers, and they ain't living on seven a week, either—that's what I get—and they don't have to keep clean white waists on top. It don't worry me none about what's underneath. They don't know nothing about that. It costs awful to keep clean," she added. Then with the echo thought for which she

was contemporary famous, "to keep clean *both ways*."

Alice flushed and sighed again. How it cost "to keep clean both ways!" How it cost even if one kept well; what would happen if It that claimed her father, and then her mother, got her.

No one, not even the girls with whom she worked day by day in the low-ceilinged basement, knew the size or the shape of the dragon that drove her restlessly on. "One hundred and ninety-seven plunks yesterday." How feverishly she had seized every chance; how shamelessly she had eulogized the shoddy goods she displayed to add figure on figure to her sales' account for the day.

She must have more money, and this was the only way she could get it. She could not live in a cheaper room. God, yes, there were cheaper rooms than the one she occupied with its two hundred and ninety-four cubic feet of center-shaft, sunless air, her little room with its tiny, measle-flaked mirrored dresser.

She was grateful for the size of that mirror—its feature-distorting surface offered just enough space to stretch one washed-out kerchief and stock each evening. If she was careful, and squeezed them very tightly, they dried smooth, and almost white over night. It was a little room, but the house, on whose fourth floor it hid itself, was unquestionably respectable, and quite near the "L" Station, and that meant dry skirts in rainy weather.

Rainy days were especially hard for Alice. The slender frame and narrow chest under the refined, flower-pretty face, seemed to wilt and try in vain to lift a heavy weight with each breath on the rainy days. The dragon pressed very close behind the slender, undeveloped girl on rainy days. Sometimes she seemed to feel its fatal breath on her slender, white neck, as she breathlessly reached her little room, three flights up, and waited with trembling lips and frightened eyes, the characteristic cough that had not come yet.

Oh, for a sunny room, a room where

she could sleep with her head at the window without getting the terrible odor from the bath-rooms, whose single window also opened on her center air-shaft. If she could have Connie's place, with Connie's pay, she could have a better room, perhaps. Her heart beat quicker at the thought; perhaps a room with a *real outside window*.

Some one in the house where she now lived had a cough like the cough she feared. Alice knew, for the mother she missed so with a constant, aching, ever-piteous yearning, had coughed just like that. So had her father, but Alice remembered less about that.

"Try and leave the city, Alice, before it is too late," her mother had said. "Oh, my little girl, you must not get it, too! Try and leave the city."

How she had tried to leave the city. "Housework in the suburbs?"

Alice flushed now as she displayed a vivid blue-blotched waist to a hard-faced woman at her side. She looked, this woman with broad shoulders and stiff, shiny, rat-stuffed pompadour, like the woman at whose home in the suburb she had applied for housework.

"You're not very strong. How old are you?" had been the question hurled at her from the big, square mission-rocker in which the woman who looked like this woman had sat stiffly, as Alice stood before her, pink-cheeked and frightened. "Where's your mother?" came the next bolt, and then, "What did she have? What!"

As Alice left the ugly, pretentious home, she heard the window flung up with a bang, and the sound echoed now in her ears with the never-to-be-forgotten indignant protest of the square, hard woman in the square, hard chair. "And you to come here and think I'd have you in my house with my children! How do I know you ain't got it now? You look it, unless your cheeks are *painted*. I think there ought to be a law against such girls going out to work. Mercy! I might never have asked, and let you bring it right into my home.

The color that challenged the woman's faith had left the softly rounded cheeks on which two mother-sick, indignant tears fell as Alice climbed her way to the city-bound car.

City-born, city-bred, city-bound forever!

If only she could have a different room. The city was all right, all right—if—if—

"Yes, ma'am, the lace is real fine. Certainly, you could wear that color. Yes, indeed. I am not sure which would be most becoming. This matches your eyes, and yet—oh, yes, that is the best way; take both—five dollars—two-twenty from five. Just a minute—here's your change; thank you."

As Alice sold waist after waist, she thought again and again of the other girls' suggestion that she make a try for Connie's place—Connie, who was to go from a pretty little home, where she wore the pretty things she earned at the big store, with no burden of board or lodging to concern her, to the pretty little flat, "decorated to suit," on the north side.

If she could have Connie's place, she could have another room; a room with a window, a room with a real window, to keep open all the time. Mechanically she repeated her attentive jargon to customer after customer.

"Yes, ma'am, with your complexion, you can wear any color."

"You sassy piece! I'll report you pretty quick."

Alice, visioning the little room with a real window, looked for the first time with seeing eyes at her latest customer, and met two flashing black eyes over a shiny, black face.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said penitently, as a kinky head under a huge purple willow plume went swaying through the crowd to find some one to whom to report the insult.

Alice sighed. The report of that unintentional offense meant a check against her record. If she could get Connie's place—if she only could get Connie's place—and no longer spend

her days in this hot, close basement. Over and over sang the thought in her aching head.

"Look at the cheap waists! Wouldn't they jar you? Hello, girls!"

Alice raised her clear eyes from a bare throat above a beautiful, real, lace blouse, and flushed as she met the hard eyes of a former fellow salesgirl. Harsh, bleached, was the hair coiled like huge buns over each ear. The chain with pendant around the young, beautiful throat, might have been the gift of a proud young husband to his girl bride, to be treasured for generations as a family jewel, but unbride-like was the rouged young face above it, and no plain gold band had its place among the sparkling stones on the plebeian hand.

As Alice flushed and gazed silent into the eyes meeting hers, a hateful glitter in them startled her.

"Too nice to speak to an old friend, eh? You girls give me a pain, and say, but you look like mutts. Gee! I'm glad I cut it all out and went in for a good time. What do you think of my bag; ain't it a beauty? Sterling, every link of it.

"How do you do?" stammered Alice, gazing stupidly at the silver luxury through which she saw the glint of gold coin.

"How do you do?" mimicked the girl with the gilded hair. "Oh, you girls make me sick! You ain't any better than I am. If you got sick like I did, and lost your job and couldn't get any clothes fit to wear to ask for another, you'd do just like I did. I'll bet Alice will be asking to meet my friends when that cold of hers gets steady. So long! I never seen such a stiff bunch!"

As she passed down the crowded aisle, young girls gazed at her beautiful, inappropriate clothes with envy. Older women, the mother kind, with pity, some in pharisaical scorn, and the men—but Alice, with cheeks a little pinker, continued to sell shoddy waists to economical beauty seekers—while the phrase, "when that cold of hers

gets steady," rang harshly in her ears. She *must* have Connie's place.

When the floor-man told her she might go for lunch an hour later than her usual lunch hour, she went instead to the offices on the fourth floor.

A fat man, with a bald head glistening above a green eye-shade, turned impatiently as she stood by his desk.

Quickly his experienced eyes traveled over the girl's exotic beauty, taking note of her neat, cheap attire.

"Basement salesgirl, eh?" as she faltered her request. "What does Mr. Mason say?"

"He told me," answered Alice, while her heart pounded—"an outside window, an outside window"—"that I should tell you I was the best he had—my books would show it—and to give me a chance."

"M-m, he did, eh?" said the man with the great ring on his fat finger. "What you getting now?"

As Alice named the sum that made an outside window impossible, he said again, locking and unlocking his hands over his fat stomach, "Live at home?"

"No," faltered Alice; then eagerly: "That is why I want the place so much."

"You girls are crazy," said the rasping voice: "you come here to the city and expect us to pay you big wages when you ought to be at home. The girls that live at home make our best girls. You ought not come to the city and expect to take care of yourselves."

"I was born in Chicago," said Alice. "I didn't come."

"Why don't you live at home, then?" asked the man, curiously observing the quietly dressed hair, the dainty hands, the cheap waist and skirt, the low-heeled shoes.

"Father and—and—and my mother are—are dead," faltered Alice, wondering vaguely what this had to do with her ability to sell waists on the second floor, and thus earn rent for a room with an outside window.

The man wheeled again toward the desk. He lifted the eye-shade from his

eyes, tapped irregularly a moment on his desk's mahogany surface, and then continued, in a voice softer and somehow searching, while his eyes avoided those of the girl near him:

"Are you sure—you know many of the girls—are you sure—you must depend on—on—what we pay you alone. Some of the girls, you know, most of them, dress better, more expensively than you; especially on the other floors; are you sure, you will have to depend on what we pay you alone? You will have to wear nice waists if I put you in that section. The department has a standard to maintain. The girls must all wear nice waists. You will find the larger pay will seem small when you consider the added expense for clothes. Are you sure you will have to depend on your wages alone?"

It had come. Alice knew the current that swept at the feet of all the girls in the store. Always she had heard that some way, sometime, the insult would meet her, and here it was face to face.

Could she take Connie's place and dress as Connie, who lived at home, had dressed? Connie's place on the sunny floor? Again Alice heard the voice from the white bed, "Try, dear, to work in a sunny room."

Well, the room to sleep in, with a real window, was a lost dream. A girl couldn't have both, but maybe she could have the sunny room to work in.

What was the man, the bald-headed man at the wide desk saying?

"Are you sure you must depend on your wages alone?"

Clearly, without a least thought of the other, the thing she couldn't understand, came Alice's answer. "Oh, yes, I have nothing except what I earn," and then, as the chair swung around again, and the eyes of the man met hers, a deep flush covered the beautiful girlish face and then faded, leaving it white, while a look of the young father she remembered but dimly settled around her arched lips.

"I will never have anything but what I earn here at the store."

Slowly the question faded from the man's experience-hardened face. Out came the fat hand with the big ring.

"Miss Coulter, you may have the place on the second floor. I wish I might put you down at more money, but I can't. You will have hard work to dress for the place on the money we give you, but I am sure you will win out. Let me congratulate you, because, because—you have a mother. Yes," as the tears filled the clear eyes meeting his—"yes, I know. She isn't here, but *you have her*, and I am sure you will win out. Let me know how you get on. Bring me your records in three months. It will be a close shave for you, for you must wear nice clothes but—you *have a MOTHER!* I—I never knew mine—There! There! This isn't business. Report on the second floor next Monday."

"You will have to wear nice waists."

Alice stopped on the second floor before her return to the basement. How bright and pleasant it was by the big waist section! Yes, "the department had a standard to maintain." All the girls had good waists on; not a waist behind the counter but was daintily clean and showed its value in dollars and cents.

She waited at the middle counter until Connie folded an exquisitely fine plain waist with a hand, on which sparkled one stone, her label of—Best Beloved—and sent it to be delivered, and then said, while her eyes shone almost as happily as the eyes of the girl whose love and security had made her long since friendly and sweet to the "rest of the girls." "I am to have your place, Connie, when you leave—to get ready to be married."

Unconsciously, the bright, happy eyes of Connie traveled over the clothes of the girl that stood before her. With instinctive well-bred recovery, she let her eyes rest again on the pink, flowerlike cheeks.

"How well you look, Alice, and how happy. Maybe you will be leaving next to get married?"

Both of them laughed, and Alice replied:

"No, it ain't that. It's just that I am coming up here where it's nice and light, and—and I wanted to ask you, Connie, about—about the clothes. I must wear them here. I must get a waist out of this week's envelope. Not a real nice one; I won't have enough, near, but something that will do."

Connie, her eyes unconsciously straying to her stone of promise, answered slowly:

"I see; but I don't know how you are going to do it. All of the girls here live at home except—some, we know, who are different—" Cruel scorn hardened her eyes as she spoke of "some who are different."

"They," she continued, "wear the nicest things, and Mr. Curlow does like to have the girls here dress nice. I pay three seventy-five for my waists"—she hurried with instinctive repugnance from discussion of the girls who wore the nicest things—"that is, they cost me that. Of course, we get the discount. Sometimes I wear a waist three days, but not often. I have mine done at home, Mabel, here, pays three twenty-five for hers. You can't get the kind they like us to wear for much less, and Mabel pays thirty-five cents to have them done up. They spoil them at the cheaper places. On real hot days, if we are busy, sometimes we get awfully dirty in one day. I wore four waists last week! Of course, that doesn't happen often," she hastened to reassure the look of alarm in Alice's face. "If I was you, at first I'd wear my plain waists on the cars, and change in the dressing-room here. It saves some. Of course, you have to come a little earlier. Mabel does that. She helps clothe her sister at home, so has to be kinda careful, and they have their wash done out at her house. Don't you get to worrying about your clothes. You're pretty and got nice hands, and a way with you. You will look nice without awfully expensive things and—your teeth are nice."

Alice shrank. Somehow it sounded like tales her grandmother used to tell about the South and the black people who lived on "The Place" before the war. Hands and teeth—did they count so much, for a girl, selling just her labor? and then she remembered Hazel, of the gilded buns of hair, and the sparkling pendant, and the clothes she she had not the money to buy after she had been sick.

Typhoid she had had, and her hair had all come out, and she had marks on her face when she came from the hospital, too; some infection she had gotten in the charity ward, and her teeth—Hazel never had good teeth. Poor Hazel, with the sterling bag, with its glitter of gold beneath. Alice wished she had been kinder to Hazel in the basement that morning.

Well, she would see her again. The girls, that kind, always wore fine waists, and she was to be here next week to sell them here on the nice, light floor. She would get a waist that would do, and then she need stand no more in the basement, with its close, human-smelling air.

"A sunny room to work in." Oh, how happy she was to know that next week she would take her place at daily work in a room lighted by God's own sky.

"A well-aired room to sleep in."

Well, a girl, a girl without a home couldn't have everything, and it would be nice to have the pretty waists she must wear. If only she could have both—

"Gee! I'm glad you're back. Wouldn't they drive you crazy? You'd think we were the only ones on State Street selling waists." It was the little girl with the great red braids that greeted her as she stood again by the crowded basement tables.

"Say, that nigger came back, and the lies she filled that floor-walker with when she found you weren't here would knock you silly. But she knew she was spreading herself, so he just laid down and rolled over for her, and

she bought two pink waists to wear with that purple willow, and went off grinning, thinking she'd canned you. What'd you get for lunch; you look like you'd met a friend? What? Connie's place? You did? Bully for you, girlie! Oh, say, I'm glad—if—

"Yes, ma'am; don't you see I'm busy? No, we haven't any more thirty-sixes in that pattern. Yes, I'll look, but I know there ain't none left. Yes, we had them this morning. I don't know, ma'am, whether we'll have any more or not. Yes, I think your husband will like you just as well in lavender. Oh, yes, if he thinks you're too old; I mean, if he's too old for you, you can bring him back—

"Gee! what *did* I say! I'm dippy over your getting Connie's place; honest, dearie, I'm crazy about it; only it'll seem different without you down here—

"Yes, ma'am; just a minute, ma'am. Oh, they'll wash, all right. We sell so many of them. They just came down from up-stairs; dollar ten, ma'am. Well, we did have your size—forty eight, did you say? Lots of ladies wear forty-eight. Here's a forty-four. Take it with you? In a minute it will be back—

"Say! I'd give a dollar ten to see her in that waist with the tucks let out. Oh, well, what's the odds? Gee! I hope I'll never get fat—and you're to have Connie's place. Just look at these tables. It will take us all of a half to get our stock straightened up to-night. What's on to-morrow? Oh, to think you're going up-stairs? Honest, Alice, I'm just crazy over it."

Finally the closing-bell clanged. When the tables were all cleared, she stood a moment to rest. Mr. Mason, he who had been so helpful, so distantly kind, ever since she began to work in the bonds of the great building, stepped to her side.

"Miss Caldwell! I just wanted to tell you how glad I am that you are to go up-stairs, but I—I'll miss you; you know that."

Alice's eyes widened. There was a new note in the man's voice; a new note that surprised and thrilled, but did not frighten her. Then she decided that she was mistaken. Mr. Mason, like the Mr. Mason she had always known, was just trying to be kind to her. It was the new hope, the new happiness about the new place that made everything, even his voice, seem different.

"You are awfully kind to tell me that. You know, if you had not been so patient with me at first about everything, I would never have made good down on your floor."

Alice hesitated over her reply. The light in his eyes made her flush, but flush happily. Why, the whole world, even Mr. Mason's eyes, were different to-night.

"It isn't that I really wanted to tell you," he was saying. "It is about my sister and you."

Alice's eyes widened. His sister! She did not know he had a sister. She knew so little about Mr. Mason, so little beyond that he had been kind in that distant, respectful way since she first knew him.

"Is your sister coming to work at the store?" she asked, voicing the first thought in her mind.

"Thank God, no!" he said, and then explained. "She is all I have, my sister. I have taken care of her since we were left alone. She has just finished her Normal course. She was at the university first, and in the fall she is to teach in a high school down State. She is like you, my sister. I think our mothers must have been alike." The man was silent a minute, and then: "I am going to walk with you a few blocks. I must not keep you here. That is why I never told you anything of what I wanted; what I sometimes hope. There is so much of the hard thing here at the store. It was not fair to you to be anything but what my position demanded, but now you will be up-stairs and my sister is coming here next week to spend the rest of the summer with me, and I wanted to

ask you to be with us often. I have told her about you long ago," he went on as Alice walked at his side, too surprised to speak. "She wants to know you. Will you go with us to the parks, to the big churches, the zoo—oh, every place people go who come to Chicago, except," he added with a touch of relief for Alice, whose eyes seemed about to overflow, "to the stock-yards? You wouldn't want to go there."

The saving laugh he bid for came, and when he left Alice with a lift of the hat that seemed to hold reverence and hope in its commonplace action, he held her promise to share his pleasures with his sister when she came.

Alice, as she continued her walk homeward, strangely thrilled by the words of her newly recognized friend, reflected unconsciously the new light in his eyes; even the gray pigeons descending between traffic rushes on the city streets seemed to strut with a new air of pride. Oh, well, but she had so much to be thankful for! She must be getting stronger; she was not nearly as tired as she usually was going home. How pretty the clouds were; and that dear little kiddy with the pink shoes and bare, fat knees. How young and how happy his mother looked!

"Oh, you kid!" greeted her at one corner, but Alice, busy with plans of saving enough to buy a waist that would do, heard neither the thoughtless challenge nor its laughing criticism from the other fresh youth on the curb.

"Nothing doing. Ain't you got any eyes? She's going home."

Going home!

Happily she climbed the narrow steps, smiled as she heard the children of the seamstress on the third floor quarreling over their supper of bread and sirup. It seemed happy quarreling. Up-stairs she brushed carefully her street skirt. Carefully she wiped her shoes and filled them with paper.

She hummed a little tune as she smoothed her handkerchief and collar, newly washed, on the limited surface of the scurfy-looking mirror. Gaily she washed out the thin, black stockings and hung them at the tiny window. Briskly she brushed the long, glossy hair, and then, a little later as she knelt by the narrow, paint-flaking iron bed, as she flung long, slender, beautiful arms across its grayish-white coverlid, a hollow cough bore its way up the air-shaft and passed the limp, wet stockings, but Alice heard it not.

Next week she was to begin work in a sunlit room, and was to have pay enough to buy the pretty waists she must wear at her work. It would have been heavenly to have had all that, and a room with a real window to sleep in, too; but, after all, it was a beautiful world, and a girl couldn't have everything. The face between the long arms flushed as she thought of the girls who tried, like poor, poor Hazel, to have so many things.

"How could they. How could they?" she thought, and then at last came her whispered prayer. "Oh, God, I am so glad—so glad—because I have a mother!"

W A R N I N G

By Ralph M. Thomson

HAVE a care you, Mister Trouble,
How you track me through each day—
How you follow in my footsteps
All along life's winding way;
I am weary of your dirges,
And disgusted with your creed,
And unto my soul-bred warning,
You had better give due heed!

I am bound for that glad country,
Where the heart delights to sing—
Where hope thrills the humblest mortal
With the promises of spring—
And unless you seek your shadows,
And forsake me, you will find
I shall lead you through love's portals,
And then close the gates behind!

BENEATH THE SURFACE

A SHORT STORY

BY VERA CONNOLLY

IT was the evening of the great Hollingsworth wedding.

The concentrated interest of a city was directed toward the cab-filled street, the lighted church through whose doors the soft purring of an organ prelude poured out faintly, the fashionable throng of men and women that streamed up the carven stone steps and into the fragrant, hushed interior of this house of worship, where a man of one race and a woman of another were to be made one in the sight of God.

It was not merely the fact that Senator Hollingsworth was a factor in the clean conducting of the nation's business, nor yet his narrow escape from death at the hands of an unknown assassin five weeks before, but as well the romantic history of this lovely, French noblewoman—last of a distinguished house—as also the charming story of the Venice courtship that exalted this marriage in the imaginations of a practical, prosaic people to a plane far removed from all other international unions in the country's history.

To Caruthers, Dawson, and me, who, from the vantage of our club's smoking-room window next door, looked out into the teeming street, there was something infinitely pathetic in the presence there of that mob of the city's impoverished—a solid phalanx of men and women and children kept back from the steps by a file of stolid police.

I have said that all three of us understood keenly just what starved

dreams, just what tragic love of beauty, color, romance, drew these shivering, hungry creatures from their countless holes of hiding about the city, as a candle-flame draws moths, to provide the dun background for this ceremony of extravagance—but I must correct that statement. Caruthers had evinced no interest whatever in the study in contrasts next door, other than a half-moody, half-angry disgust.

He stood at the window, scowling, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, staring out silently. As the last belated guests, swathed in yellow fur from neck to toe, slipped from their carriages like sleek cats and disappeared within, the church doors closing after them, he turned from the window with an angry sound, threw his half-smoked cigar into the fire, and dropped into a chair, leaning his head on his hand.

Dawson, who loved him, gathered up Caruthers's sickly, drowsing yellow pup from the window-seat, and, crossing over, dumped him into Caruthers's lap.

"This damned little neurasthenic of yours has snored about enough, Caruth," he growled fondly. "For Heaven's sake, and mine, keep him awake a while!"

Without looking up, Caruthers cuddled the shivering pup against his knees and stroked him gloomily.

Straddling a chair, Dawson faced him.

"What's the matter, old man?" he demanded. "Getting worked up to some more of that high-brow stuff of yours—inequality of the classes and all

that? Sore because all those people in the street won't have any dinner to-night, and all those in the church'll eat about six times too much, eh? Don't feel too bad about it. Lucky thing for me it happens that way sometimes. A doctor's got to live, you know."

Caruthers looked up with a grin. But his face instantly settled into somberness again.

"No," he said gruffly, "it isn't that this time. It's something quite different—something that sours me on Jim Hollingsworth and all this performance, till—"

He hesitated.

"You see," he added abruptly, "during the five weeks I've been away from town I've stumbled on one of Hollingsworth's life messes—had to see it and live with it and have it stuffed down my throat. If there's one thing sickens a man more than his own fool mistakes, it's the mistakes his friends make—especially the kind I mean, the kind that have to be paid for by a woman somewhere."

I had heard this much, when a telephone summons called me from the room.

I returned, a few moments later, to find Caruthers giving this account to Dawson. How he came to tell the story I'm sure I don't know. At the time it amazed me that he should recount such a thing.

It was not the sort of information a man would be apt to repeat wantonly, and I knew that Caruthers was especially fine and sensitive, as men go.

Somewhat embarrassed, I went over to the reading-table and picked up the evening paper. But it was not many moments before I became aware that Caruthers was addressing me as pointedly as Dawson. Laying aside the paper, I listened. This, as nearly as I can recall it, is what he told us—in his own words:

"When I left town six weeks ago Saturday, acting on your tyrannical orders, Dawson, I went direct to a little watering-place down the coast known

as Halcyon Cove. I'd spent a season there, and knew the lay of the land. I felt sure I would have no difficulty in securing accommodations at that season of the year.

"When I got there I found the village far more desolate than I had imagined. Only a handful of tradespeople who lived above their stores, and who received me with surly, suspicious glances, had been left behind by the departed summer colony. On gray days the fog piled in, thick and dank, while after dark coyotes slunk down the still, sandy streets, or banded together in the pine-woods and howled.

"Oh, it was charming! After a week of it I was more than ready to get back to the city. What restrained me was the certainty that Dawson here would simply meet me at the train and order me off to some other God-forsaken health-restoring hole. I decided to stick it out till my month was up, then shake the dust of the place from my feet and forget it—take it as I do the other medicine Dawson hands out to me.

"When I engaged my cottage I chose it because it stood in the same yard with the only other occupied house in town, yet for two weeks I saw little of my neighbor—a tall, heavy-shouldered, distinguished-looking fellow, with a mop of curly gray hair and pair of wretched, youthful black eyes—for he kept strictly to his side of the dividing fence between our cottages.

"Occasionally he smoked his evening cigar beside the gate that led from my sparse lawn into his neglected garden, but always when I seized my pipe and went to join him he turned away with a curt bow and went indoors.

"All day and every day he sat in his dining-room window and read books. At first I supposed him to be a student of some abstruse ology, or a college instructor who was devoting his Sabbathical year to research work; but I abandoned this theory upon discovering some roughly whittled inventor's models lying on a chair in his garden.

"The man was a mechanical genius, I decided. He seldom went out in the daytime, and seemed to avoid encounters with the tradesfolk—writing his orders on a slip of paper pinned to his back door.

"I was lonesome, and he must have been starved for companionship. Yet the days passed without any further civilities being exchanged between us than an occasional nod across the garden fence. He was quick to repulse the least friendly advance on my part. I perceived this after a time, and came gradually to let him strictly alone.

"I had been his neighbor three weeks, when one afternoon as I was tramping home along the beach I came upon a torn copy of Poe's tales lying open in the mouth of a low-rock cave, together with a heap of cigarette-stubs, a tin match-case, and a beach-lantern with its chimney badly smoked.

"I knew at once that this must be the retreat to which my eccentric neighbor betook himself, when, as frequently happened, I heard him leave his cottage in the small hours of night and return a little before dawn.

"Puzzling to understand what could possibly be the reason for these night vigils in that desolate hole in the rocks, I turned away, leaving the cave as I had found it, and went home.

"On approaching my cottage I discovered a man sitting on my front steps, his head bent low over something that he held in his lap. Drawing nearer, I recognized my neighbor, and was about to hail him, when something strange in his attitude held me.

"While I hesitated a peculiar rhythmic crooning reached me. It was a low, little throaty sound—like that a young mother makes over her babe. It was the cry of a man's hungering soul. You know how a dammed river, swollen by a winter's rain, will break over the wall that confined it? I thought of that, too, as I listened.

"Suddenly he glanced up and saw me. All the color left his face, then streamed back furiously. Painfully

ashamed, he dropped his arms and stood up, tumbling from his lap a wizened, scrawny yellow pup, with nothing to distinguish him from a host of others that slunk about the empty houses, except his appalling leanness and a certain quick way he had. He wormed and squirmed about the man's ankles, jerking his stub of a tail, pride and relief writ large on his homely little face.

"I went up to MacComber—the town butcher had told me his name—and held out my hand. He shook it nervously. His embarrassment was terrible.

"'Come in,' I urged, 'and have a smoke.'

"'Thank you,' he rejoined stiffly, 'but I—I—'

"Briskly ignoring his refusal, I motioned him in. To my surprise, he came very willingly, closing the door after him. Casually I opened it a few inches.

"The foundling pup, afraid for the moment that he had again been disowned, threw himself at me and hung on. I finally made him understand that he was to be included in the party. His joy was terrific. Distended with pride, and wriggling horribly, he squeezed in and fawned at our feet.

"'Beastly shame,' I remarked to MacComber, 'the way these pets are left to starve by the summer colony. I think I have some bones for him. If you'll wait a moment I'll give them to him.'

"MacComber had quite regained his self-possession.

"'Ah—why, yes, do!' he agreed formally.

"I left him examining the books on my table and went out with the approving pup. When I got back MacComber had some questions to ask that launched us into a discussion of bridge-building. It wore away the afternoon and carried us, still interested and disagreeing, into the first dusk of evening.

"Sound him as I would, I could learn nothing about him or his family,

except that he was unmarried and had been making his home with a young sister—a college girl, and something of a beauty, I gathered. He mentioned a New York gallery where a portrait of her—one of Croyle's pastels—was on exhibition.

"After once having introduced her name—it was Agnes—into the conversation, he quoted her almost continually, with a dotting brother's proud approval. There was a flavor of defiance in all he said. I felt vaguely that he was overpraising her as if in fear I might hear of her from some one who wouldn't do her justice. Oh, it was the frankest sort of boasting!

"And yet, when he had at last interested me, and I turned to him with the simplest of questions—the one that instinctively leaps to a man's mind when he is told of a woman's talent and charm—whether or not she was still a girl, unmarried—MacComber got up slowly from his chair, his face grown suddenly very still, and glared at me. The rage and hate of years' accumulation flared in his dilated black eyes.

"Before I could move or utter a word he had reseated himself, the gloom of indifference had again settled on his face, and he was deliberately leading the talk back to things impersonal.

"At six o'clock he jumped up, thanked me for a pleasant talk, and made for the door. I urged him to eat supper with me, but he shook his head.

"Don't you want to take the dog?"

"He hesitated, all the time an eagerness that was pitiful looking out of his eyes.

"Yes," he agreed at last. "Might as well keep him, I suppose. Good watch-dog."

"I only smiled inside of me, and went to fetch the pup. He came flopping in like a hairy yellow eel on four legs. MacComber gravely stuffed him under one arm, thanked me again, and closed the door.

"Late that night I heard the click of

my neighbor's gate, the dog's pleading whimper, and a brusky gentle:

"All right, then; come on, old fellow!" in MacComber's deep bass.

"They went off together. At least, I thought to myself with a certain sense of relief, the strange chap's vigils on the rocks would not be quite so desolate as before.

"In the two weeks that followed the man next door carefully and courteously avoided me. Several times I heard him whistling about the place—an unwonted demonstration—and once I even discovered him playing with the pup in the seclusion of his back yard. The dog's delighted squeals, and the man's deep laugh, called me to the window to watch them.

"As I came gradually to appreciate the marvelous change the little pup was working in MacComber, I discarded all my own elaborate plans to try to pull the chap out of his morbid state, and watched his affection for the dog and its absurd devotion to him, transform the lonesome, melancholy fellow. The little stray mongrel had done for him, what I, with all my desire to help him, could never have done. He had somehow broken through this crust of indifference or fear, or whatever it was, that made MacComber shrink from the society of his fellow men, and had wriggled his way to the man's heart.

"I realized, as I watched the two walk together in the morning, curl up together on MacComber's window-seat in the afternoon, while he read his books and the pup drowsed, or sit together in the after-supper twilight, on the front porch, MacComber with his head in his hands, the dog sitting close to his elbow, sniffing the air contentedly, how much it meant to both outcasts to belong to some one once more.

"In spite of the change that was being wrought in him, MacComber's attitude toward me remained the same. He still avoided me. The knowledge that next door to me was living a man from my own world, who could talk and had traveled, and was in every way

fitted to be the best sort of a companion, yet who ran from me as if I had been a monster, half irritated, half amused me.

"Of course, I respected his wishes and kept out of his way. Had it not been for an accident, I would probably have left the place without coming any closer to him. It was all due to the pup's interference—my real acquaintance with him—and it came about in this way:

"About three weeks after his adoption by MacComber, the enterprising young scalawag uprooted a choice purple lily—a beautiful plant that stood as high as Dawson's shoulder here. MacComber and I rushed from our respective dining-rooms to interfere. We came face to face at the wicket-gate, each of us sure that something had to be done about it.

"The offender squirmed ingratiatingly, safe between two soft-hearted idiots. I objected to being forced into disciplining another man's dog. Ignoring MacComber's imploring glance from my hand to the pup's scrubby flank, I said sternly:

"Better whip him. He'll do it again if he isn't punished."

"A look of misery came into the man's brooding eyes, but he caught the dog by the scruff of the neck, selected a slim switch, and administered a dozen quick taps with it. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. Jaune—the little wretch had been so named by his master—gratefully licked MacComber's fingers. There seemed to be an understanding between the two—a pact that did not admit of beatings. The man gave him a last, affectionate slap, and put him down. Together we planted the lily.

"'I'm going for a tramp after lunch,' I offered, as we patted the ground smooth. 'Be glad to have you come with me.'

"MacComber could find no decent excuse handy, so he agreed to accompany me. At two o'clock I stopped for him, and we set out along the beach.

"For an hour we trudged in silence. The surly water hurled itself in foam at our feet, eliciting barks of insult from Jaune, who ran along before us, his firm paws kicking up the wet sand. Every little while he would scamper back to us, dragging a strand of seaweed or a dead gull by one stiff-fingered claw.

"At my elbow MacComber stalked, as slow and stooped as if the heaven's weight rested on his bowed head. Perhaps once in fifteen minutes he would look up and around, include me in his dull, resentful stare, and throw out some vapid remark about the weather. Without waiting for any response from me, he would lower his head promptly and sink into an intolerable gloom. For once his somberness aroused in me only annoyance. Had he not been utterly miserable, there would have been something farcical about it. Even nature sulked that day.

"Except for one bright splotch where the sun tried to pierce the fog, ocean, land, and sky closed us in—heavy, desolate, and oppressive. Only we two men and the little dog that bobbed far ahead like a scrap of yellow rubber broke the uninterrupted sweep of dunes.

"In a curious spirit of exasperation I was about to excuse myself on the plea of a sudden fatigue and go home alone, when suddenly a romping band of children, their picnic pails banging, and with two collie dogs barking at their heels, swung into sight around a jutting mass of rock and raced straight toward us down the wet beach.

"With an exclamation of blank dismay MacComber stopped short and stared at them. Turning on his heel, without so much as a word of apology or explanation, he left me and made off across the dunes that undulated between us and the village.

"My first disgust at his rudeness dwindled as I watched his stooped figure diminish in the distance and finally disappear. By the time his weary shoulders had slouched out of

sight the last tinge of resentment had left me.

"Some frightful apprehension was setting the poor chap apart from all the world, was snipping his little length of thread from the great human spool—was making an outcast and a crazy thing of him. I decided to discover what the trouble was and set it right, if possible. The man had qualities of mind alone that made him worth saving.

"I was aroused from these thoughts by the clamor of a dog-fight in progress up-beach. It was Jaune and the collies. The pup may have started the quarrel; but when I looked up he lay on his back in the sand, yelping faintly, with the two collies standing over him. The children were jumping about excitedly, urging on the dogs and clanging their picnic buckets.

"I broke into run. When I came up the largest collie had Jaune by the jaw, the other was cold-bloodedly chewing his foreleg. There was a businesslike ferocity about it that suggested a feud of long standing. I kicked the biggest dog in the ribs. He yelped, let go for an instant, then closed his strong, white teeth again on the little pup's lower jaw.

"It was the action of a bully. No self-respecting dog would take such a method of attack. I booted him a blow that knocked the wind out of him. It was a moment before he could suck up enough air for the angry, long-drawn howl that preceded his swift flight up-beach. I turned to the other collie, but she drew back at once, snarled frightenedly, and made off after her mate.

"The children helped me to brush the sand from Jaune's eyes. His jaw looked like a chunk of raw beefsteak. It was swelling badly. While he licked the blood from his lips, he blinked gratefully up at me. I stood him on his feet; but he was too weak to walk. So I wrapped my coat around him and carried him home.

"When I knocked on the door of MacComber's cottage, I got no response, although a light was hastily ex-

tinguished in his dining-room. After his afternoon's behavior it didn't astonish me that he should refuse to see me.

"Hurrying on to my own place, I unwrapped the pup and examined his jaw. It was badly torn. I bathed and dressed it, then made a bed for him in a cracker-box on my back porch. Through it all he showed an amazing pluck—only whimpering a little when I fastened the cotton bandage behind his ear.

"At ten o'clock I turned in, but I couldn't get to sleep. I wondered about MacComber—his probable identity, and his offense against humanity that had made a hunted thing of him. I was still puzzling over it when I dropped off.

"At about two o'clock I was disturbed by the opening of MacComber's front door. His gate banged. I heard his retreating footsteps on the plank sidewalk.

"'More Poe!' I thought to myself.

"Suddenly I remembered that Jaune was disabled and asleep on my back porch. MacComber would be alone down there. The man was in no condition to stand the strain of a night alone on those rocks. There was no telling what he might be driven to do.

"Impelled by a curious sense of disaster, I jumped out of bed, slipped into a dressing-gown and some tennis shoes, dragged on my overcoat, and left the house. Shaking with the chill of early morning, I floundered down my dark front steps, felt my way to the gate, and made after MacComber on a brisk run. I had reckoned without Jaune.

"Whether he heard his master's gate slam, or whether some sure instinct, such as mine, that some one ought to be with MacComber had aroused him, I never knew. But I had gone only a little distance when he flew past me in the half-light to which my eyes were getting accustomed, his little claws rapping on the planks of the walk, the white bandage slipping back from his jaw.

"I called to him, but he paid no attention. He plunged ahead, his nose to

the ground, careened awkwardly around a corner, gained the open beach before I could, and raced along it toward the hollow in the rocks, which, lit up by the lantern, looked like a long yellow throat. A great bulk that I knew to be MacComber moved within.

"Jaune reached the opening and sprang through it like a gopher popping into his hole. For a space the only sounds that came to me were the crashing of the surf close by and the scuff-suff of wet sand beneath my shoes.

"Then, all at once, I heard MacComber's agonized 'My God!' and a scream from Jaune that— If you've ever heard an animal scream like something human, you know what it's like. If not, I can't make you understand. Only, that dog's cry seemed to turn all the warm blood in my body to ice.

"I grabbed up my overcoat in both hands and ran up that beach, as I hadn't run since I was a boy at college. I remember thinking to myself: 'Pretty good, old man! When you tell Dawson this he'll let you off.' And with the other corner of my brain I was thinking of MacComber ahead there, or counting the dog's cries. There were three, each more piercing than the last, each more human. He was not yelping or barking or howling. He was screaming like a human thing.

"As I drew closer I made out MacComber's big body jammed in the opening. He was on his knees in the sand, with his head and one arm inside. Every second or two he would reach back for a stone or handful of sand and cast it at something in the cave. And he was talking—talking like mad. I couldn't make out a word of it—only the mumble of his voice.

"'MacComber!' I shouted.

"He crooked his face over his shoulder and stared. Then all at once he recognized me.

"'Caruthers!' he cried, getting to his feet and coming to meet me. 'I've got 'im. Right in there. He can't fool me. By God, he'll marry her now or I'll kill him! I mean it!'

"He seized hold of me and dragged me over to the cave, his clutch tightening till my forearm throbbed. There he tried to force me down on my knees. Pushing him off, I signified my willingness to get down, and dropped to the level of the cave's mouth. As I did so my fingers rested on his revolver that lay half-buried in the sand near at hand.

"At once it flashed over me what MacComber had intended to do that night, and why the pup and I had left our warm beds to tag after him. I closed my fingers on the gun and shifted it so that when MacComber flung himself down beside me it was in my farthest hand. With an angry sound he leaned against me, his great body tense. I could feel his breath hot on my ear, as with his two powerful hands he seized my head and forced it down opposite the mouth of the cave.

"'See?' he demanded excitedly. 'In there!' His voice was tremulous and high like an old woman's.

"Obediently I peered in. At first glance I thought the dimly lighted hole was empty. Then, beyond the smoked lantern that leaned drunkenly two feet from my face, I made out a small, dark form that shrank so close to the wall it seemed he must be a part of it.

"Only a pair of yellow eyes, gleaming horribly, and a swollen jaw, with the white bandage slipping from it, stood out against the shadows. It was Jaune.

"For an instant I was as incapable of movement as the wretched little animal that froze to the cave wall. And all the time the man at my elbow was pressing closer, babbling insane threats to himself, or me, or both. I never knew. But I caught the name Hollingsworth, and the words: 'Can't fool me—that jaw—know him in the shape of a monkey!'

"When I didn't answer, he broke into a rage and made a lunge at the dog, his fist closed on a stone as big as a baseball. My body was in the way. The stone grazed my ear and fell with

a soft thud on the sand of the cave. MacComber's empty fist reached past me and beat the air in a futile groping after Jaune. Impatiently he drew it back and tugged at my shoulder.

" 'Get away!' he snarled.

" I looked around at him. His face, lighted grotesquely by the toppling lantern, was contorted—livid with anger. His bright, crazed eyes met mine, and I saw what I had to deal with. The man was mad as a March hare. It was bad business; but I couldn't go off and leave the poor, little beast in there to get stoned to a pulp. In desperation I resorted to the only scheme I was able to think up.

" 'Let me get him out,' I urged.

" 'All right,' he agreed sullenly, loosing his hold of me and drawing back. 'But, mind you, don't kill him. That's my job. Got a gun here, somewhere?'

" He began to search, prodding the wet ground.

" Tightening my fingers about the gun, I commenced to crawl up the narrow approach to the cave, moving as slowly as I dared, planning all the time how I should back out.

" He'd be waiting, of course; but he wouldn't know till I was outside whether or not I had the pup with me. And, by the time he'd discovered that I had not brought Jaune, I'd be free of the cave and able to swing my arms. After that I could defend myself.

" When I hit on this plan I was so close to Jaune that I could have put out my hand and touched him. As I wormed still nearer, making ready to shove the lantern aside with my boot, so I could have a clearer path to back out by, the pup opened his mouth spasmodically and closed it again without uttering a sound. Turning his face away, he attempted to scale the rock wall, his frantic little feet dislodging a shower of pebbles. Finally he abandoned even this and crouched, shivering.

" 'Jaune,' I whispered.

" At the sound he raised his head

and stared at me—his swollen bandaged jaw outthrust. I drew back, appalled. A vision of Hollingsworth's ornate rooms on Van Ness Avenue, where Dawson and several other men and I awaited returns on election eve, and of Jim Hollingsworth himself, his heavy jowled face, swollen with the toothache and wrapped in a cotton bandage that kept slipping from place as he paced to and fro, flashed before my mind.

" I recalled the newspaper statement that Hollingsworth's jaw was still swollen and bandaged when he was discovered, early the next morning, lying wounded on his study floor.

" Suddenly the whole thing became understandable to me—Jim's wrong to MacComber, MacComber's swift grasp at retribution, and his overwhelming cowardice which had driven him from the city to that isolated, depressing little cove before he had ascertained the result of his attack on Hollingsworth, and then the suffering that had come after—the long weeks of loneliness and remorse (pain that had been eased for a time by the coming of the pup into his life), his movement toward self-destruction; finally, the total loss of his reason and his insane attack on the little brute he loved—the young dog that crouched there, close to me, among the stones that had been aimed to kill him.

" Without another glance at Jaune, I turned and backed out in a rush. MacComber was blocking the entrance. When he heard me thrashing out, he moved aside, and, still kneeling, waited for me. I could determine his every movement by the play of light and shadow on the dim wall. In a moment more I was free of the cave. I tried to stand, but my cramped, stiffened legs doubled under me. MacComber was crawling slowly toward me along the sand. I remember how his eyes looked. His tense fingers fastened claw-wise on my wrist.

" 'G—give 'im here!' he demanded hoarsely.

"Straining to my feet I wrenched myself from his grasp, swung the revolver in a wide circle and brought the butt of it down on his head with a glancing blow that knocked him senseless and prone on his face."

We continued to stare into the fire. It had burned to a heap of red embers. Dawson's question broke in on our thoughts like the clanging of a bell.

"Well?" he queried impatiently.

"Well," Caruthers echoed deadily. "That's all. I was glad I didn't have to turn him over to the law. In prison he'd have gone on thinking, poor chap. No—he's better off there at the asylum. I went with him myself and saw to it that his room was comfortable. When I left he was begging for his models and a tool-chest. God! It was terrible! I made arrangements for him to have them, if ever he gets any better. But they tell me it's hopeless. He'll always be like that—or worse."

He hesitated, then went on quietly:

"You know, Jim Hollingsworth was the best friend I had on earth. But, after this— Here was this poor chap, struggling inventor, not fitted to cope with the practical world, you might say. And the only thing he had—the thing he worshiped—that young sister—oh, it was—"

Dawson leaned forward from the shadows.

"The sister—eh?" he asked gently.

"Yes," said Caruthers grimly, "the sister—"

A restless stamping of feet broke in on his words, reminding us of the cold, hungry, impatient crowd waiting out there in the frosty street. Starting at the sound, as if it had dragged him back from across the world, Caruthers grunted and tumbled the sleeping Jaune from his lap.

Walking over to the window he

stood, staring out into the street with a white, drawn face. He had made a movement to come back to the fire, when the sudden, glorious outburst of an anthem, which, since the days of our fathers, has made holy the union of man with woman, drew him back to the glass.

The church doors were open, vomiting the wedding pageant into the cold, white, moon-flooded street, where the crowd, held back by the snarling file of police, craned and clamored. A carriage rumbled away over the frozen asphalt. Without stirring from our seats by the fire, Dawson and I knew it was carrying away Jim Hollingsworth and his bride. As the murmur of women's voices and the tramp of many feet told us that the wedding guests were leaving, Caruthers turned to us passionately, his hand gripping the back of a chair till his finger-nails went white.

"Dawson—" he said unsteadily, "the—his real name was Farley—John Farley. He's been away—in South Africa—for something like twenty years—since he was a young man. She—she was here—in school here—at Hopkins. Dawson, you—you remember—remember she used to tell us about him—her brother down there in South Africa. She—"

I looked at Dawson. He sat bolt upright, as if frozen, and I knew that Caruthers had called up images and intimate recollections of their boyhood in which I had had no share.

Rising suddenly, he sprang across the room as if projected.

"Caruth," he begged hoarsely, catching the other man by the shoulder fiercely. "Not—Hollingsworth—Agnes Farley— My God, Caruth, it couldn't be! Not Agnes Farley!"

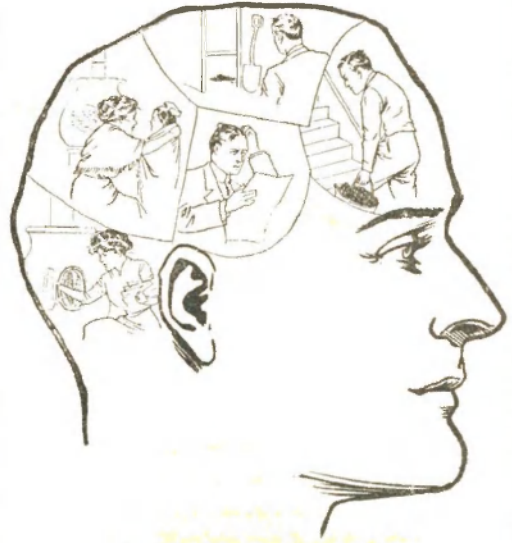
Wearily Caruthers faced him.

"It was Agnes Farley!" he said.

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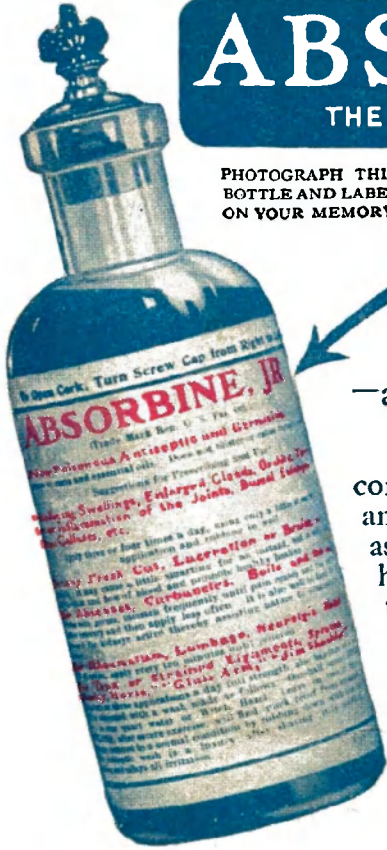


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