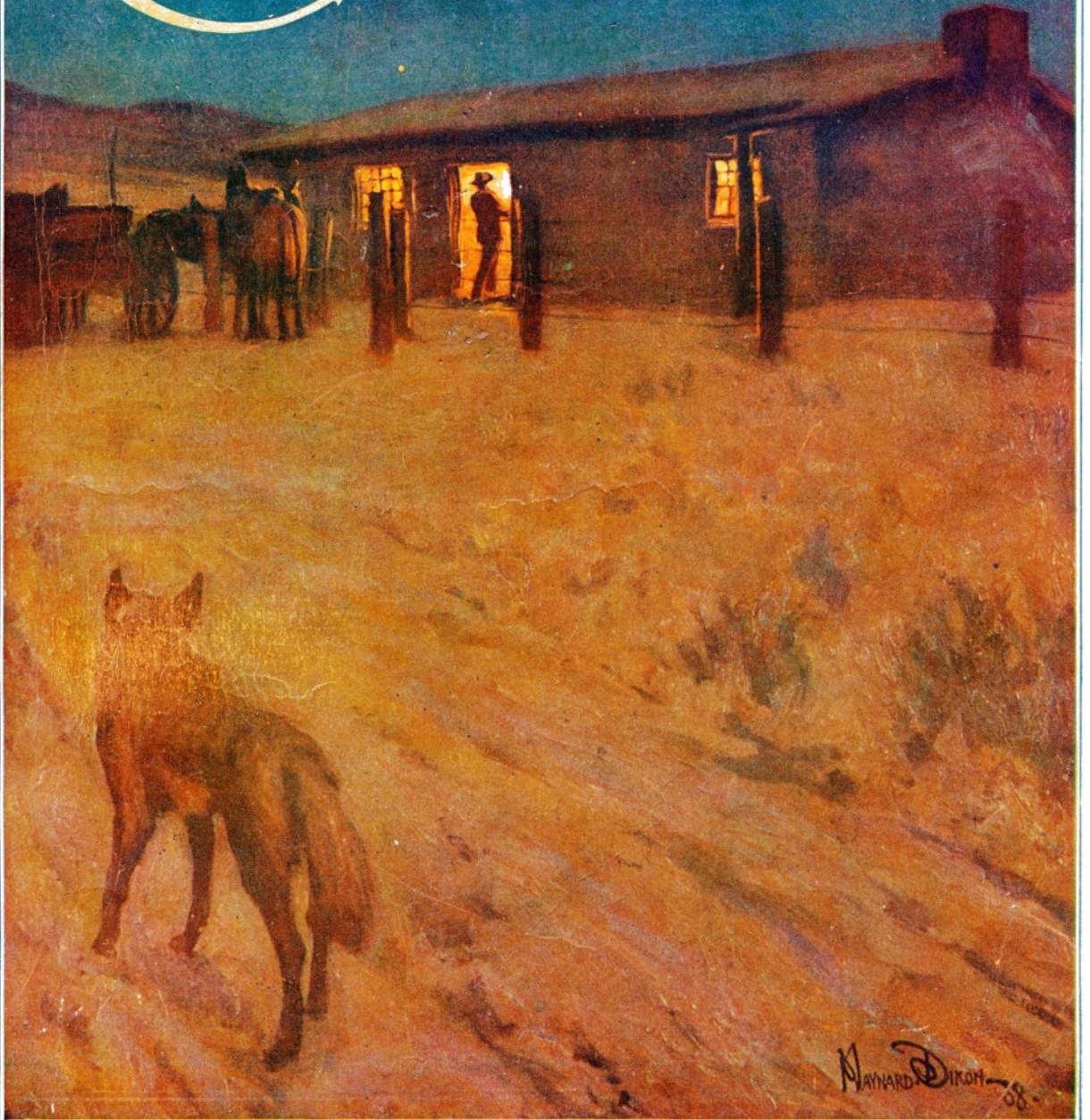


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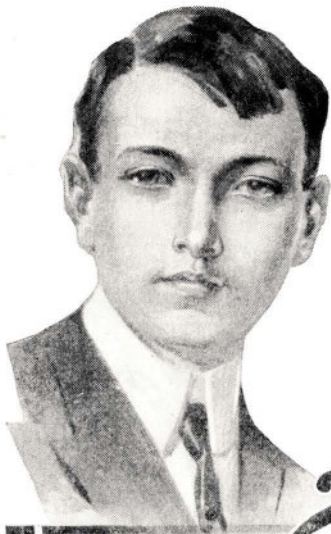
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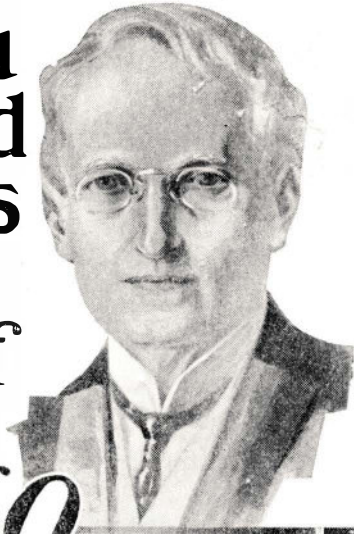
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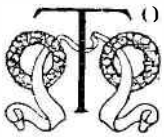
LOVE AMONG THE CLIMBERS.

BY BARRY LITTLETON.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER I.

PROPOSAL BY INSULT.



TO the shabby man on the park bench who saw her drive by, she was simply the most beautiful creature in the world. He had watched the approaching high-wheeled trap drawn by a pair of smart roan cobs with a rather listless eye, as if the gay perfection of the equipage had but little interest for him, until he saw that it was indeed she herself who was driving, and then his face lighted up. His lips smiled, and his eyes smiled too, although a close observer would have seen a wistful look in them.

"Yes," he mused half aloud, "the most beautiful creature, I verily believe, in all the world."

It was no sudden, ill-considered enthusiasm. He had seen her scores of times before. Now that the fine spring weather was coming, he saw her every day here in the park. It was the first time he had seen her driving. She usually rode a horse.

They were not easily come by, these fleeting little daily glimpses, to a young man who had to earn a living by arduous

labor and for meager pay, but they were worth all the courting and the self-denial that they cost.

She had never seen him. She, with her wealth and beauty, her liveried attendants, lived in an altogether different world. Her eyes, indeed, had traveled sightlessly over his shabby figure a good many times. She had been aware, now and again, that there, on that bench, or here, on this sidewalk, loitering while she passed by, was some shabby denizen of that other world from which she was so sacredly shielded.

Once he had come a little—oh, just a little—nearer her consciousness. It was a rainy night as she traversed the awning-covered space between the curb and the entrance to one of the theaters. She had seen him huddled in under the uttermost edge of the awning shelter, had seen him, wet and shivering, and rather ghastly pale, under the glare of the arc-lights, and had thought, with half-contemptuous pity, what the life of such a wretch as that must be.

To-day, fortune was kinder to him. The air was balmy, the sun sparkled, the trees were joyous in the tender veil of their first green. Even a heart-sick man might feel glad.

The lady, flushed with the excitement

of keeping her mettlesome pair in control, looked to the man on the bench tenfold more beautiful than ever before. Fortune was not at the end of her favors, either; for to-day, instead of flashing by and leaving him to feed on the mere momentary memory of her, the lady, with a glance up the bridle-path which converged to the drive at this point, suddenly pulled her team to a standstill.

A horseman was cantering toward her around the bend, and as he came within speaking distance, she nodded to him brightly.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hadley. I thought I should find you somewhere," she said.

The young man bowed profoundly, but his face wore an expression of annoyance.

"How do you do, Miss Farwell. I have been looking for you up and down the path here for half an hour. I was so stupid that it did not occur to me, when you said you were going to ride in the park, that you might have meant drive, instead."

"I didn't," she answered. "I fully meant to ride when you telephoned, but this is all quite new: a birthday surprise from Uncle Obie. Aren't they dears?" and she nodded toward the pair of roans who were pawing and champing in protest against deferring their afternoon spin for mere human conversation.

"Very smart," he said—"very smart, indeed. They look like a pair that Calvert won a blue ribbon with, last year."

"They ought to," she said. "No one has a better right. Won't you get in and see how they go? Manning, here"—she indicated the diminutive groom behind, who sat immovable with folded arms—"Manning can take your mount back to the stables."

Richard Hadley hesitated. He felt that she had taken rather a liberty in allowing a person of his exalted social consequence to waste half an hour looking for a girl on a horse who was not on the bridle-path at all. He felt that she ought to be snubbed, but the treatment was not easy to apply to the radiant young beauty he saw before him. Besides, she was very, very rich, and he meant to marry her.

Indeed, it was necessary that he marry somebody pretty soon, somebody with a

lot of money, for he had some debts that had to be paid. He was not thinking of his tailor—a tradesman could always be bullied into waiting a little longer. But his debts at the clubs were another matter, and unless he got relief soon, they would spell disaster for him.

Clearly, it would not be safe to snub Marian.

The little groom had sprung down, and was standing at his horse's head. The next moment he himself dismounted and climbed up beside her. He gave a word of direction to the groom, and then, at the touch of Marian's whip, the cobs trotted away down the drive.

But this did not happen before Hadley had had time to shoot a curious and rather insolent glance at the man on the bench. Like Marian, Richard Hadley had seen the shabby waif a good many times; yet, unlike her, he had come to recognize him, and he paid him now the compliment of a thoughtful frown.

Then, dismissing him from his mind, he devoted his whole attention to the girl.

"A birthday present?" he questioned. "I didn't know this was your birthday."

"Didn't you?" she asked. "Then that eliminates one possibility."

"What do you mean?"

"I am afraid I was guilty of thinking aloud," she said. "It's just a little mystery of a pleasant sort. A big bunch of daffodils, which happen to be a favorite flower of mine, that came to-day without any card."

"I am sorry I can't plead guilty," he said. "I didn't know it was your birthday."

"You would not have been guilty, anyway," she observed—"not of omitting your card, I mean."

"Quite so," he assented, "quite so. Anonymous gifts are in frightfully bad taste. They are generally impertinent."

There was a few minutes of silence between them while the roans flew along, side by side, up the curving driveway through the park. Hadley was thoughtful. He had been gradually making up his mind, ever since he first met her, to ask her some day to marry him. The Farwells were nobody, of course, from a social point of view. Martin B. Farwell, her father, had been, at the time of his death, just a brand-new multi-

millionaire, who had made his money, goodness knew how, out West.

The money was indubitably there: that was the important point: and as Marian was the only child, it would all be hers some day.

No question entered his mind but that the girl was his for the asking. She had practically thrown herself at his head this afternoon, when she had dismissed her groom and asked him to ride with her.

"They are beautifully matched, certainly," he said at last, indicating the flying pair with a gesture: "and it's matching that counts: style, size, and color. They might have been cast in the same mold. Together, they make a very distinguished pair."

Then he took the plunge.

"How do you think we'd go in double harness, Marian?"

Her eyes brightened and the color surged up into her cheeks, but the light in her eyes was not a tender one, and the bright color in her cheeks suggested excitement rather than any gentler emotion.

"How do I think we'd go in double harness?" she replied. "That question is not exactly before the house, is it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why," she said, "are you in the habit of asking young women of your acquaintance how you think they'd go in double harness with you?"

Hadley turned rather red and bit his lips. He had meant to get through his proposal in as airy and patronizing a way as possible, and had thought this manner of putting it rather happy.

"Naturally"—he stammered a little—"naturally. I meant more than I said. I thought you would understand. People of our world nowadays don't talk like the characters in a romantic novel. I meant to ask you if you would marry me. Will you? I can't spout poetry and get down on my knees, but perhaps you will take that for granted."

"Why?" she asked coolly enough. "I mean, why do you want to marry me?"

He controlled his rising anger with difficulty, but still he controlled it.

"It is I who don't understand now," he said slowly. "Surely that's an extraordinary question."

"Yes," she said soberly, "I suppose it

is. But that's because it is generally answered without being asked. Most men," she went on, after a little silence—"most men, when they ask girls to marry them, say it's because—because they care for them—and—that sort of thing. Care so much, they feel they can't go on living without them. And even in our world, as you call it, isn't it still the custom at least to say such things, to keep up a decent sort of pretense out of respect to a venerable old tradition?"

Under the cover of his gauntleted hand, Richard Hadley, in his vexation, pinched the corners of his beautiful military moustache. He felt like a bungler—an utterly new and unexpected feeling. He had made love to too many women in the course of his protracted bachelorhood—for some of whom he had felt less genuine regard than he felt for Marian—to feel the slightest misgivings of his ability to carry himself in this case in a graceful and plausible manner.

He was the sort of man whom most women find attractive: well set, well poised, lean, graceful, good-looking in a rather worn sort of way. His nose was slightly aquiline: his chin square and determined. The tinge of gray about the edges of his black hair improved his appearance; and if this hair, once luxuriant, was becoming somewhat thin on the top, it was still possible to brush it so that this fact was not betrayed.

In addition to this, he had an alert, attentive mind; a light, dry, well-modulated voice. He could assume, when he chose, an intimate, particular sort of manner, which, among the women he had known, had been very successful.

Things were going badly. It was she who was cool and self-possessed. She was contriving in some intangible way to laugh at him, and yet leave him in a miserable, awkward doubt whether she did not intend at last to accept him.

As a matter of fact, his confidence in this result was hardly shaken. He had been so sure, from the first, that she wanted him—that she would take him for a husband on almost any terms he might propose. Well, he would pay her for it some day, when she was safely his to treat as he pleased. For the present he must bow to the inevitable, and carry the scene through according to her ideas.

"How can you doubt that I care for you?" he asked, trying to get something that sounded like real emotion into his voice. "If I haven't shown it from the first, it can only be because—well, because it was too deep to show easily. But do you suppose I could look into your eyes without—"

She interrupted.

"I think that's all of that I care to hear," she said. "You did your best to oblige me, which was very nice and polite of you. But now let's tell each other the truth, sha'n't we?"

"It is the truth," he said. "It's an insult to me—to both of us—to think there could be any other reason."

"Well, if you can't, I will," she said. "You thought—tell me if I am not right—you thought that, for the privilege of putting 'Mrs. Richard Hadley' on my visiting cards, I would be willing to marry you; and for some time you have been trying to make up your mind whether, for the sake of—well, of getting away from a certain class of troubles—"

Now he interrupted her:

"I think we have gone quite far enough, Miss Farwell. Rather farther, perhaps, than necessary. I have asked you to marry me, and you have—"

He broke off suddenly, for he realized that she had as yet made him no answer at all.

"Yes," she said, "you may consider that I have declined."

"You have assumed," he said bitterly, "that I was merely offering you a bargain."

"That is not why I declined it," she said. "I am not at all sure that I should decline such a bargain, if it were honestly offered. People blame girls like me for doing that sort of thing, but I'm not sure there isn't a good deal to be said on the other side. But if I ever do accept such a bargain, Mr. Hadley, it will be when it is honestly offered and—" she paused a little to let the sting of her words have their full effect—"I shall be sure I am getting the real thing."

He was no longer flushed. He was fairly white with rage, but he could find no words to answer.

"Where shall I put you down?" she asked.

"Here, if you please," he said thickly.

Obediently she pulled up the horses, and almost before they had had time to stop, he sprang out and, scarcely lifting his hat, strode away.

The moment the trap had disappeared round a curve in the road, Hadley whirled about and stood still. Never in his life had he experienced such a fury of anger against a person as at this moment he felt against the young girl whom, not ten minutes before, he had been asking to become his wife. He clenched his teeth, and bent his riding-crop between his muscular hands until he nearly broke it. Then, rather blindly, he set out across the driveway.

A furious tooting of an automobile-horn caused him to spring out of the road again, and, looking up, he recognized the man at the steering-wheel, and in the same instant gave the man a chance to recognize him. The clutch went out, the emergency-brake went in, and the next moment the big, high-power run-about had come panting to a standstill amid a cloud of dust.

"What's the matter with you, Hadley?" called out this cheerful young man, noting his friend's riding costume. "Did you fall off your horse? You look as if you had just fallen off something, I swear you do."

"I sent my horse home with the groom," said Hadley shortly. "I wanted to walk."

"Jump up in here with me, and I'll take you home," said Tommy Glenn.

Hadley was minded to refuse. He liked Tommy Glenn well enough in some circumstances, but in his present mood he found him almost unendurable. Still, here was another case where he was confronted with some one he could not afford to snub. He owed Tommy too much money, and before he got through with him he meant to owe him a good deal more.

"All right," he said. "Thanks for the lift."

"I met our Western millionairess," said Tommy as he started the car. "Have you happened to see her? I passed her just a bit back, up the road. She's got a very smart pair there, but they'll break her young neck one of these days."

"I hope they may," said Hadley.

Glenn looked at him with an expression that, on any other face, would have been called thoughtful.

"You, too, eh?" he said. "I knew you'd fallen off of something. Well, you can shake with me. We're in the same boat."

CHAPTER II.

THE SHABBY MAN REAPPEARS.

WHEN Hadley dismounted from the trap, Marian, without the fleetest parting glance at him, drew herself a little straighter, settled back her shoulders a little squarer, and laid a level, lingering, and wholly undeserved cut of her whip-lash across the backs of the pair she was driving.

She was hardly conscious of the act. It was merely the natural expression of her mood. She was a good horsewoman, absolutely fearless, very strong, and so thoroughly accustomed to the management of horses, both in the seat and the saddle, that she was able, when she chose, to give her mind to something else and do the right thing from instinct.

She had an almost mannish capacity for mental abstraction, and was sometimes a little startled, after having set out to drive somewhere, to find herself at her destination without the slightest conscious memory of anything that had happened on the way, of anything but the train of her own thoughts.

That was the way she was driving now. She was doing it perfectly, so far as the observer could see, guiding her flying horses in and out among the stream of vehicles crowding the park, and even returned the salutations of her friends; but the sight of them never went beyond her eyes.

In some subtle way her mounting anger, not only against Richard Hadley, but against the whole of his parasitic tribe—an anger that almost reached the point of recklessness—communicated itself through the reins to the nervous, high-strung horses, whose sensitive mouths responded to every check upon them. If she had given a moment's attention, she would have seen that they were gradually but certainly getting out of hand, and it was time to quiet them

down. As it was, she was conscious of no such thing, conscious of nothing but the fact that the flying rhythm of their hoofs was beating time to her own wild, surging heart.

This was the situation when the fresh spring breeze picked up a newspaper that had been left by some careless hand on one of the park benches, opened it out scientifically, and drew it in a series of ungainly swoops along the driveway and straight under the feet of Marian's pair. They needed no more provocation.

There was a scurry, a wild, sidewise leap that would have unseated a less expert whip. The next instant, with the bits in their teeth, with distended nostrils and staring eyes, the pair bolted in good earnest.

Being run away with was no new experience for Marian, and even now she felt no fear. Her position on the high seat had not changed. She did nothing futile or frantic. She kept the almost useless reins taut, and in an even, quiet voice tried to calm the panic-stricken animals.

Luckily, for the present, she had the road to herself, and the horses running straight down the middle of it. A hundred yards ahead, perhaps, the road curved sharply to the left, and what she might encounter on reaching that point was masked by a heavy growth of trees and shrubbery.

She was aware of some people on the paths beside the driveway who shouted and waved their arms as she flashed past, and who, judging from their cries, started in pursuit down the road as soon as such pursuit became, from their position, perfectly futile. All her energies were concentrating for the moment when she should arrive at the curve.

The horses, following a blind instinct, tried to keep to the road, and, lurching along behind them, the trap started round the curve on two wheels. The instant her position gave Marian a chance to see what was ahead, her face blanched a little, for there, a hundred feet away, a little clump of vehicles filled the whole road. A steady, old-fashioned landau going in her own direction, and two automobiles, one in the act of passing the other, coming toward her.

She pulled the right-hand rein with

every ounce of energy that her finely strung nerves could command upon it, and by sheer strength she succeeded in turning the horses out of the driveway altogether and across the lawn. It was down-hill a little, and right ahead of her, impossible to avoid, was a clump of trees.

And then she saw a man running.

In the course of her afternoon drive with Hadley and by herself, Marian had made a complete circuit of the park. The place where the horses caught sight of the newspaper and bolted was not two hundred yards away from the point where the shabby man on the park bench had seen her rein up to receive Richard Hadley into the vehicle. Ever since that moment the man on the bench had been sitting there, almost in the attitude he had held when Hadley shot that quick look of contemptuous recognition in his direction.

A close observer, if any such there had been to watch him, would soon have become aware of a great difference between this young man and the other chronic occupants of park benches. His dress, indeed, except for its neatness, gave him little advantage over them. But there was in his air, in the unconscious poise of his body, in the fine lines of his pallid face, something that those pathetic derelicts of society did not share with him.

The sharpest contrast of all between him and his neighbors was to be found in his eyes and mouth. The eyes of the defeated man generally tell his story for him. You will see in them a look sometimes sullen and angry, sometimes patient and forbearing, but always something vacant, purposeless. This man's eyes told no such story. When they turned dull, it was with the intense concentration of his thought. The mind might be miles away, but it was active, perfect in its operation as a fine machine. And when they brightened, those strange, dark eyes of his, it was with a look of intense understanding of purpose and of power. His mouth, sensitive as it was, told the same story. There was suffering there, no doubt, from his hard experience, but there was nothing that looked like defeat.

He had met Hadley's insolent stare with a very faint smile of indifferent

amusement. Whether the man had remained in his mind at all after that fleeting interest, or whether he had been put out of it at once as quite unworthy, it would be hard to say. But the lady, at least, had remained. The beautiful lady—whom he had declared to be the most beautiful in all the world!

The place where he sat commanded a view of the very curve in the driveway which had interposed such a terrible wall of uncertainty before Marian's eyes when her horses had started to bolt. The first thing that caught the young man's attention was the excited cries down the road, and the clatter of hoofs whose swift crescendo told him they were coming in his direction.

He started to his feet, saw the trap and who was in it, stood perfectly still for a barely appreciable instant of time, and took in the whole situation: the block of vehicles in the road ahead, the curve, and the declining stretch of lawn that led toward the clump of trees. Then he began to run.

The moment Marian saw that flying figure crossing the lawn ahead of her she knew she was saved. His path, she saw, would cross that of the horses to a point about ten paces from the clump of trees, and she saw that he would reach that point as soon as they did. What he would do in that fraction of a second of time she had no idea, but she felt sure he would not fail. He had not the air of a man who would fail.

All those impressions her mind, working as one's mind does in such moments of crisis, with incredible rapidity, registered with perfect distinctness.

Evidently the horses saw the man themselves, and in the impulse of flight, swerved to the right a little from the course they had been running. She attempted vainly to counteract this with a last desperate pull at the left-hand rein, but the man only increased his speed. He would still be in time.

Then she saw him leap through the air with hands extended toward the bridle of the near horse. If he missed, he would be down under their hoofs in a second—would, in all human likelihood, be killed. She watched him make the leap, but that was the last thing she saw. Her self-control, which had never faltered up to

that point, suddenly deserted her. She could not bear to look any longer. She dropped the reins and covered her face with her hands.

Then she felt a sudden jar that tipped her out of her seat. The next thing she knew, the trap was standing still; she, herself, was huddled on the floor of it, between the dashboard and the seat, entangled somehow in the reins so that she could not get up. A bicycle policeman, panting with the exertion of the tremendous effort he had made to overtake her, had already dismounted from his wheel, and was standing beside the trap, talking in a soothing voice, asking her not to be frightened.

She looked about. One of the horses was down, and struggling to regain his feet. The other was standing beside him, trembling with fright; and a little way off, staunching a wound in his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief, was the man who had saved her life.

What had happened was plain enough: the horse, in the last mad effort to escape from his clutch, had lost his footing on the slippery grass, and the two, horse and man, had gone down together.

She took another look at her rescuer. The excitement and shock of the last minute—for it was hardly more than that since the horses had started to run—must somehow have stimulated her memory, for she was aware that there was something familiar about the look of him. Then, in a flash, it came to her. The little scene at the entrance to the theater that stormy night under the wind-blown awning, and the poor shivering wretch who had stood under the extreme edge of its shelter, watching her with hungry eyes as she passed into the warmly lighted theater.

The first thought that flashed across her mind was that she was glad it was he—glad that she would be able without offense to reward him, and the next thought, which brought the sense of acute embarrassment, was that she had no money, not a penny upon her person.

She got to her feet and, without the aid of the policeman, sprang lightly down from the trap. Already her muscles and nerves were in perfect control. She had not been in the least hurt, and she was no longer frightened.

"I think," she said to the shabby man—"I think you have saved my life. I am sure you have risked your own. I hope you are not hurt."

"This scratch is nothing," he said; "nothing that a child would cry out about. No, I am not hurt."

She turned to look at the horses. The one he had pulled down had got to his feet again. Neither of them was injured, and their escapade, as it happened, had not even damaged the harness or the trap. None of these things, however, had any real place in her thoughts. She was awkwardly conscious of the situation which confronted her. It was plain what she must do, she told herself impatiently. The man was a mere waif and a vagabond. It was probably with no hope other than of a substantial reward that he had taken the risk and made the almost superhuman effort to save her. She must reassure him that his effort had not been in vain. She must tell him that he would be handsomely rewarded. If she had been her cool, every-day, self-possessed self, she would probably have seen more truly, and the vision of the man in the theater entrance would not have possessed her and prevented her from listening to the inner voice which warned her the thing she was forcing herself so laboriously to do was the wrong thing after all. Yet, she finally nerved herself to the task. Embarrassment made her seem cold and haughty.

"You have done me a great service," she said, not looking into the man's face. "I am sorry that I can't just now give you any substantial evidence of just how much I appreciate it. But I shall see to it that you are rewarded. If you will tell me your name, and where we can find you—"

"I have many names and many places of address," he interrupted, speaking so low she could scarcely hear him, "but there is none of them with which I would have you concern yourself."

She looked up in astonishment, but already he had turned and was walking slowly away across the lawn.

"Well, he's a queer one," observed the policeman in a tone of strong disapproval; "but he did a good job stopping this team, and that's true. Now, miss, what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," she answered. She gave a last glance at the harness, and swiftly mounted to her seat in the trap. "No, really, there is nothing you can do," she added, "except to let me go before any more people gather. You don't have to take my name, do you, and report the matter? You see, nothing has really happened."

The next moment her groom came running up. He had been coming through the park, on his way home from the stable where Hadley kept his horses, and had been attracted by the crowd. He was horrified when he found his mistress was the center of it.

"It's nothing, Manning," she said as he came up to learn what had happened. "Nothing at all has happened—nothing."

"Don't you want me to drive you home, miss?" he asked, touching his hat respectfully.

"Not at all. I shall drive home myself. Get up behind."

With a nod to the policeman, she brought the horses round in a wide circle, and turned away down the road, nervously holding the horses in check.

CHAPTER III.

A GENTLEMAN'S REVENGE.

TOMMY GLENN was one of the most widely known young men of his class in New York. The class he belonged to is easily described. He was of the sort of men who never get out of college; who carry on, into their thirties, the same infantile delight in the loud waistcoats, grotesquely shaped shoes and freak hats, which are usually considered the earmarks of the sophomore. No fashion that tailor or haberdasher could devise was too ugly or too eccentric for Tommy Glenn.

He boasted as proudly of the times he had been arrested for violating the speed laws in his automobile as any débutante over the number of notches in her fan. He still turned brick-red, with pride and embarrassment, whenever a chorus-girl cast a fleeting glance into his box at the theater. He was a conspicuous figure at the track during the racing season, and he claimed a friendship, amounting al-

most to intimacy, with a well-known middle-weight prize-fighter.

There was nothing very distinguished about this sort of life—nothing that would have marked him as any different from hundreds of other silly headed young men, had it not been for the fact that, instead of having to live on a more or less rigid paternal allowance, Tommy Glenn had the irresponsible and unlimited possession of about two hundred thousand dollars a year.

In spite of the apparent simplicity of his character, there were only two or three people who really understood him; among them, Richard Hadley. To the rest of the world, Tommy was generous, good-humored, incapable of malice. The popular belief in his possession of this set of characteristics arose partly from his personal appearance. He was short, fat, pug-nosed. His light blue eyes were round and rather infantile, and his sandy hair completed the picture of innocent good-nature which he presented. You had only to take one good look to be perfectly convinced that there could be no harm in him. The other fact that bore out this theoretical and almost wholly fictitious character of his was that he obviously cared very little about money. There was no reason why he should. He had always had plenty, and, of course, he had never earned a cent.

As a matter of fact, and as Richard Hadley knew, he was not only intensely vain, but, in his heart, perfectly implacable when his vanity was wounded. This did not often happen, to be sure, partly because most of the people he liked flattered him assiduously, and partly because he was too thick-skinned to perceive insult in anything that was not a very direct affront.

Hadley had known him for a long time, and during the first few years of their acquaintance had never suspected him of being any different from just what the general public thought him. To Hadley, his carelessness about money had been a good deal of a boon. The older man had almost lived on him, shared in his costly amusements without sharing the price, and had borrowed money from him in the casual, offhand manner which men of his sort know how to affect. Until recently he had supposed that

Tommy was blithely unconscious of the use to which he was being put.

But during the past few months some things had begun to make Hadley a little uneasy. From two or three intrinsically trivial incidents it was brought home to him that his young friend was not the innocuous, negligible sort of person he had supposed him to be: that he might, to a man hanging on desperately to the edge of things, as Hadley was, prove dangerous.

That is the reason why, though he wanted intensely to be alone, to get himself in tune again after the shock Marian had administered to his self-esteem, he thought it best to accept Tommy's invitation, and climbed into the seat beside him in the big touring-car.

But before they had ridden along, side by side, for five minutes, he was glad Tommy had picked him up. For Tommy was proving himself useful.

Of course, Hadley knew—had known for a good while—that Tommy Glenn was in love with Marian Farwell; indeed, the whole circle of Tommy's wide, rather promiscuous acquaintance, knew it. It was a great and very disconcerting event to Tommy. Women of her sort had never appealed to him before. He was always uncomfortable and ill at ease in their presence. His one idea regarding them seemed to be to give them as wide a berth as possible. Hadley remembered his own astonishment when Glenn had come to him and shamefacedly begged to be presented to Miss Farwell.

The acquaintance between them had prospered after a fashion. Marian was a genuinely kind-hearted girl: and while her new admirer's clumsiness and embarrassment in her presence had amused her somewhat, it had only had the effect of making her treat him more considerately. When he had asked her to marry him, though he took her by surprise, and though the whole thing was obviously preposterous from her point of view, still the sincerity of his feeling had touched her, and she had refused him as gently as possible.

When Tommy met her, driving, two minutes before he picked up Hadley, he was as much in love with her as ever. Tommy's confession that he had proposed to her and been rejected took Had-

ley absolutely by surprise. It filled him, the next moment, with a new satisfaction. He saw an opportunity to gratify his new-born hatred for Marian.

He made no spoken comment on what Tommy had told him. For a moment he kept his face in a mask of immobility. Then, slowly, he permitted himself to smile.

Tommy Glenn's quick, shifting little sidewise glance caught this expression, as Hadley meant him to.

"What are you grinning at?" Tommy asked. "You don't seem so very much surprised."

"Why, no," Hadley confessed. "The fact is, I knew about it already."

"Yes, you did!" said Tommy with a skeptical, downward inflection. "I've not told a soul about it but you."

"Oh, yes, you have," Hadley replied. "Unfortunately, it is not possible to make a proposal of marriage without telling the lady herself."

"You mean, she told you?" Tommy Glenn demanded.

"Why—yes," he said. "I don't know that there's any use in denying it."

There was nothing that looked like malice in Hadley's face. There was nothing that proclaimed the liar, either in his eyes or in his hesitating, reluctant voice. Yet, deep within, he was chuckling over as malicious a piece of mischief as a man ever contemplated.

It was going to be easy, too; ridiculously easy. He knew Tommy Glenn like a book: had seen him in all his moods of gaiety, of anger, of embarrassment. He was just as sure of what Tommy's manner had been when he proposed to Marian—just as sure of some of the phrases he must have used—as if he himself had been present at the interview.

Already Glenn's face was ominously red, and his eyes looked as hard as if they had been made of china.

"Tell me what it was she said to you," he demanded.

"Oh, come," said Hadley carelessly. "I've told you enough already. I give you my word you wouldn't like it."

"Tell me what she said," Tommy fairly yelled. "I guess I've a right to know."

"Oh, if you put it that way—but re-

member I warned you. You won't like it a little bit."

"Go ahead," said Tommy in grim rage.

And Hadley did his bidding. He had to be careful, of course, not to be too specific. He had no idea whether the scene had taken place at Marian's home, in this motor-car, or out in the harbor in Tommy's yacht. Without committing himself on any of these points, he could still give a description of it which would convince Tommy that he had had it from Marian's own lips. The only danger he ran would lie in cross-examination. Three well-directed questions would be sufficient to prove that he was lying.

As he had foreseen, it was easy to reduce the younger man to helpless, speechless rage in the course of the first ten words. His voice flowed smoothly along, every phrase, every word burning in like hot acid. Every little grotesque trick of Tommy's eyes and voice and hands—yes, and feet—was related with perfectly merciless fidelity, until at last, with an imprecation, Tommy bade him stop.

After that, for the better part of an hour, they rode along in silence. Hadley had set out to excite Tommy's rage against Marian with no very definite idea of the use to which he meant to put it. His own anger against the girl had prompted the act, and he had excited the same feeling in the younger man with no more definite idea in mind than that Tommy might be counted upon to do things which he, a gentleman, would not do.

But now his plot against Marian began to take more definite shape. The thing in his own interview with her that had remained most clearly and most irritatingly in his mind, was her statement that if ever she assented to the sort of bargain he had proposed to her, she would be sure she was getting the real thing. It provided him now with an idea.

"Well," he said at last, "she's really not worth bothering about. She'll get what's coming to her one of these days. Girls like that always do. Their money gives them a mad ambition to break into a society where they don't really belong. They don't know the real thing when

they see it. Any cad with a languid manner and foreign clothes can make them believe in him. And the result is, they generally marry waiters or footmen masquerading as Italian counts."

Hadley saw, with joy, that Glenn was putty in his hands. His rage against Marian was all he could hope for—coarse, vindictive, reckless. His mind, thus prepared, proved a fertile soil for Hadley's latest suggestion.

"I only wish she'd do it," Glenn muttered. "How I'd like to see her do it; and then, after a year or two, I'd like to ask her if she didn't think she'd made a mistake."

Hadley laughed.

"Well," Glenn demanded, "what's the matter now?"

"Oh, it always amuses me," said the elder man easily, "to hear a man with an income the size of yours wishing. Wishes are a luxury for the poor. Don't you know that?"

"Don't talk epigrams," Glenn snapped. "Tell me what you mean. Give it to me straight."

"Why," said Hadley, "I can wish things because I can't do them. A man with money can do anything, if he really wants to."

"Do you mean," demanded Glenn, "that I could make that girl marry a waiter?"

"Why," said Hadley, "of course it's a thing a man wouldn't do. But if you really wanted to do it, you could. You could do it, I should say, for less than ten thousand dollars, and inside of three months. It's only a question of finding the right man, financing him properly and introducing him to her."

Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Of course we're talking nonsense," he concluded. "Come, I made a mistake telling you anything about it. Forget that I did, and treat the girl as if nothing had happened. She let you down easy enough, didn't she—that is—when she was talking to you?" He interrupted himself with a short laugh.

Tommy Glenn swore feelingly.

"It's the only thing to do," Hadley continued. "Absolutely the only thing. Treat her as if I had never said a word to you on the subject."

"You watch me do that," growled

Glenn. "No, sir—I can give her a bad fifteen minutes, anyway."

"Oh, well, have it your own way," said the elder man resignedly. "But if you ever should see a chance to help along a little game like the one I spoke of, how much could you do, unless you were on speaking terms with her?"

"Hm—" grunted Tommy. "There's something in that."

There was another rather long period of silence.

"By the way," said Hadley at last, "have you ever noticed that fellow who's been hanging about her for the last month or two? She's never seen him, I'm sure, though he's a rather picturesque foreigner. He's likely to be loafing on the curb when she goes out to her carriage, and so on. He was sitting on one of the park benches this afternoon when she was driving."

"How do you know she's never seen him?" inquired Glenn.

"Oh, she'd never really look at a man who wasn't well dressed, and this chap is horribly seedy."

"Is he a tall fellow, with very black hair and a pale face?" asked Glenn suddenly.

"That's the man. He plays the violin in a restaurant orchestra—one of those summer restaurants along Broadway. I think it is. Apparently, he's about half out of his head about her. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, he sends her flowers without telling her who they come from. Well, poor devil, I pity him."

There was silence between them for a few moments. Then Tommy Glenn pulled out his watch.

"Shall I take you home?" he asked.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLIMBER'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE Farwells lived on upper Fifth Avenue, in an architectural monstrosity, which might possibly be called a palace—that was the effect it aimed at, anyway—but certainly could not be called a house. Marian's father had bought it from a Wall Street broker, who had built it on one turn of the market, and lost it on the next.

She halted her team of roans under the great porte-cochère of carven stone. Her groom had sprung down from his high seat behind and run around to the horses' heads. The footman came down the steps and helped her to descend from her seat.

Marian had not particularly relished the prospect that she imagined awaited her. She felt rather uneasy about reporting to her mother upon the events of the afternoon—the event of the afternoon, that is—which was the dismissal of Richard Hadley. The whole Hadley affair was largely her mother's doing.

Mrs. Farwell was a good woman according to her lights, but she was intensely ambitious and not very intelligent. New York had been a disappointment to her. She had come to live in the city, thinking that her husband's millions afforded her a golden key which would unlock all doors. She had moved into this great house expecting to make it at once an important center in the brilliant social life of New York. She lacked, however, the tact and skill to make the most of her opportunities. She made the fatal blunder of betraying her eagerness for the thing which society will never give to any, except to those who can contrive an appearance of indifference to its favors.

Hadley was a man of undeniable position, and Mrs. Farwell had, in popular parlance, simply thrown herself—or her daughter, rather—at his head. She had met all of Hadley's tentative and rather patronizing advances with undisguised delight. This afternoon, when Marian had arranged to ride in the park with him, her mother had declared she knew he meant to propose, and had warned Marian to be ready.

She could not have done a thing more ill-advised, from the point of view of her own wishes and ambitions. Marian knew perfectly well what her mother's hopes and ambitions were, and she felt that it was not going to be particularly easy to say that she had flung away the prize fairly within her grasp. She had no reason to expect a respite, either. Her mother, she felt sure, would be on the lookout for her return, waiting, in all probability, in the drawing-room.

As she passed the great doorway into

the hall she fully expected that an inquiring, "Well, Marian?" would necessitate her telling the whole story at once.

Mrs. Farwell was, indeed, in the drawing-room; but she asked no such question as Marian anticipated, and on looking in, the young girl understood the reason.

There, in the room with her, seated uncomfortably upon the very edge of a gilded French armchair, was a visitor.

He was a large man, somewhere in the sixties, with a great gaunt, loosely hung frame, whose every awkwardness was accentuated by the clothes he wore.

His long, lean neck protruded, what seemed an immense distance, out of a collar that was at once too low and a size too large for him. His coat hung awkwardly away from his sloping shoulders. His trousers, which draped themselves shapelessly about his ankles, were not long enough to conceal the gaping tops of the big and broad congress shoes which he wore. From a sartorial point of view, he was anything but an impressive object.

But his wrinkled face, in its frame of thick white hair and beard, was enough to demand more than a careless glance from any discerning observer. It was boldly modeled; stern, yet kindly; and it had that look of authority which nothing but success can give.

Ordinarily, there was a shrewd, humorous smile about his mouth and eyes, but at the particular moment when Marian entered the room he looked supremely miserable.

At sight of him, however, the girl's face lighted up.

"Uncle Obie!" she cried delightedly, and crossed the room with a rush.

She kissed him and settled down on the arm of his chair, with one of hers about his neck, and her caressing fingers already busy with his hair.

Her mother stiffened up a little. "Marian, my dear," she said, "that's hardly a drawing-room attitude."

The girl laughed. "You've been keeping Uncle Obie in a drawing-room attitude, haven't you? Poor old uncle, I never saw you look so uncomfortable in your life, I assure you. Why aren't you smoking?"

"Well, the fact is, my dear," he said, "I never learned to smoke cigarettes."

She interrupted him with a peal of laughter. "Can't you just imagine him trying, mama?" she said.

But Mrs. Farwell refused to be placated. Her only answer was to draw herself up a little more stiffly in her chair.

Marian looked at her mother with a little sigh of disappointment. She wished she could see things a little straighter; could understand the relations of life a little more truly. But, apparently, the wish was hopeless.

She rose, rather reluctantly, from her position on the arm of the old man's chair, and seated herself, as conventionally as her mother could desire, in a chair near by.

Then, with an idea of breaking the ice a little, she began an exciting account of her runaway. She began it, without seeing clearly how much the narrative was going to involve.

"You say you were alone in the trap?" questioned Mrs. Farwell suddenly. "Can you tell me what had become of Manning?"

"Oh, I had sent him off," said the girl quickly. "He was riding Mr. Hadley's mount back to the stable."

"In that case," said her mother, "why wasn't Mr. Hadley with you?"

The girl flushed crimson. "Why, I had put Mr. Hadley down," she said. "He—he—didn't think he wanted to ride any farther."

For an instant mother and daughter looked steadily into each other's eyes. Then the elder woman rose, laboring, evidently, under a stress of annoyance and excitement.

"I think I understand," she said. "I understand just how much weight you attach to my wishes. I—"

She broke off suddenly, for her voice was getting out of her command, and started to leave the room.

At the door she turned, bowed curtly to the old man, and addressed the last word to her daughter.

"When you are at liberty, Marian, I wish you to come to my room. There is something I very much wish to say to you."

(To be continued.)

THE KAFIR'S SKULL.

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

A SHORT STORY.



It was but yesterday Elsie asked me why I had never written the story of the great Brandon diamond—or, at least, that part of its history with which we are acquainted—and I am now making an attempt to carry out her wish.

It was on the afternoon of January 18, 1906, that I turned into an auction-room in Tottenham Court Road, London, and became mildly interested in a sale of unclaimed baggage sent to the rooms by the Great Northeastern Railway Company. Such a sale easily stirs one's imagination. There is a mystery connected with every box and portmanteau put under the hammer of the auctioneer, and the mind of the thinking onlooker, in endeavoring to account for the negligence of the owners in not making thorough search for their property, hints at possible happenings that thrill one to contemplate. I have always thought that unclaimed baggage should be overhauled by detectives before being submitted at auction, and if such a course was followed I think that the fate of many a missing traveler might be solved. There must be strong reasons why valuable personal effects are unclaimed, yet the law neglects this opportunity of solving mysteries, and allows the baggage to be sold to dealers in old clothes, who pay little attention to papers found within the packages.

The auctioneer on this particular afternoon was a large, good-humored man, and he endeavored to encourage speculation by hinting at possible wealth within the packages offered for sale.

"Nothing has been examined, gentlemen," he cried, as he tapped a locked tin hat-box with his ivory mallet. "Nothing has been touched. Now, what would

any one think was in this box? Eh? Not potatoes! Not bloaters! No, my friends. It sounds as if it was stuffed with Bank of England notes! It sounds—"

"Five shillings!" screamed a black-bearded man, angrily interrupting the discourse of the auctioneer. "I bid five shillings."

The bulky auctioneer looked surprised. He studied the face of the impatient bidder for the space of a minute, and then started to bait him for the amusement of the crowd.

"Five shillings?" he asked contemptuously. "Oh, you are a funny fellow. You want to get a box stuffed with bank-notes for five shillings. You are a humorist. Don't you think you could spare a little more—just a little more?"

The crowd laughed. The bid was a fair one, but the poorest quality of auctioneer's humor always provokes a smile.

"Just a little more!" whined the man with the mallet. "Just a little more for the box stuffed with bank-notes!"

All eyes were turned on the black-bearded man, and he fidgeted nervously. He looked wildly round the room, stared at the dirty ceiling, and then he did a peculiar thing. He raised his own bid.

"Seven and six!" he cried.

I don't know if the others in that room were affected in the same manner; although, when I consider their subsequent actions, I am certain that they were; but to me came a peculiar indefinable feeling. I cannot describe it. It seemed as if the cold, raw air blowing through the room had suddenly been replaced with a warm, soul-stirring atmosphere from some far-away spot, and I thrilled again. The others must have felt it—it stirred the room. Men shuffled forward and craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the man and the tin

hat-box, and the auctioneer stared as if dumfounded at the result of his own wheedling tactics.

A voice with a Whitechapel accent, that cut the air like a razor-blade, broke the strange little silence that followed the second bid, and challenged it by yelling out: "Arf a sov're'n!"

"Twelve an' six!" shrieked another.

"Fifteen!" screamed the black-bearded man.

The battle for the hat-box had started. Men moved forward and bid excitedly.

"Seventeen an' a arf!" cried the Whitechapel man.

"A pound!" yelled another.

"Twenty-five!"

The auctioneer was delighted. The manner in which the bidders struggled forward brought great smile-furrows on his round face.

"Stuffed with notes!" he roared, and again he thumped the box with his mallet.

"Twenty-seven an' six!" screamed the black-bearded man.

"Thirty!"

"Thirty-five!"

"Two pounds!"

"Guineas!"

The bidding was remarkable, unprecedented. The boxes previously auctioned sold for sums ranging between seven and fifteen shillings; yet this battered hat-box, because of the peculiar actions of a nervous speculator who foolishly exhibited a mad desire to obtain possession of it, had been rushed up to two guineas without any bid-hunting efforts on the part of the auctioneer. Men like myself, who had strolled in to pass an idle hour—with no intention of taking part in the sale—pushed forward eagerly, and stared at the box as if they could pierce its tin sides and see the contents. Bidders whispered to each other, and the dirty auction-room became a place of mystery.

And yet, not one of the bidders competing against the black-bearded man had the slightest knowledge of the contents of the box. They bid because they saw that he was consumed with nervous horror lest the box should be lost to him; and his claw-like hands, raised imploringly to the auctioneer as he shrieked his bids, stirred competition.

"Two guineas," mumbled the auctioneer. "Two guineas I'm bid for this treasure-box! Two—"

"Forty-five!" shrieked the man from Whitechapel.

"Fifty!"

"Fifty-five shillings!"

"Three pounds!"

Nerves were at a tension. I edged up closer to the black-bearded man and noticed that his yellow face was bathed in perspiration, while waves of agony flitted across his features. His thin lips moved in silent prayer, but the prayers were changed to muttered curses whenever a challenging bid echoed through the room. There was no deception about his actions. I put from my mind all the common tricks of the salesroom tout. The horrible lust for possession that was visible on his face sickened me. He had lost all control of himself, and the opposition of the others stirred a murderous hate that was apparent in every glance he bestowed upon a competitor. But there was no trace of insanity. The man had a keen, cruel face, and his deep-set eyes twinkled far back in their skull caverns, as if trying to escape the fancies of a past.

By half-crown rises the bid for the box reached four pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, that being the offer of the black-bearded man, and for a minute his competitors were mute. The next bid would take it to five pounds, and five pounds appeared a large amount of money to pay for a battered box.

"Four seventeen six," murmured the auctioneer. "Four seventeen six, I'm offered. The box stuffed with Bank of England notes going for four pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence! Going for four seventeen six! First, second, third, and—"

"Five pounds!" I gasped.

For the space of ten seconds I was doubtful if it was my voice that had interrupted the auctioneer; then I knew that I had spoken. In the instant before I had made my bid, I had noticed that the palms of the black-bearded man's hands were covered with blood where he had, in his intense excitement, driven his nails into the flesh, and my bid had leaped from me so suddenly that

my brain was doubtful if it had authorized the words that my ears had checked.

"Guineas!" yelled "Blackbeard," glaring at me viciously.

"Five and a half!" I stammered, the blood pounding through my head as I noted the hate on his face. We had the field to ourselves. The others had dropped out, and all eyes were turned upon us.

"Five fifteen!" screamed my competitor.

"Six," I mumbled.

The auctioneer beat upon the box till the room echoed.

"Six pounds!" he cried. "Only six pounds offered for the treasury-chest! Any advance?"

Blackbeard raised himself on his toes, as if fighting for his breath. Fear seemed to be choking the very life out of him.

"Seven pounds!" he yelled. "I bid seven pounds!"

I was insane at that moment. "Guineas!" I added.

A gurgle of horror came from my opponent. He turned upon me savagely, as if he contemplated an attack; then he rushed forward and whispered excitedly to the auctioneer. I guessed that he had come to the end of his tether.

"No, no, no!" cried the auctioneer, shaking his round head in answer to the other's question. "This is a cash sale, my friend, and you must show the yellow coin to get the goods."

"Seven guineas!" I repeated.

"Seven guineas!" echoed the auctioneer. "Seven guineas offered for the wonderful treasure-chest! Only seven guineas offered! Going at seven guineas! First, second, third, and last time! Going at seven guineas! Going, going, gone!"

I was the owner of the mysterious box.

II.

AFTER I had paid the clerk, I looked round the dirty room in search of the black-bearded man: but he was nowhere to be seen. It was evident that the hat-box of all the articles to be offered was the only one that interested him.

As no goods were delivered till the sale was over, I had to wait some two hours for my precious purchase, which

remained in full view meanwhile. On account of this delay, it was after five o'clock when I crossed from Tottenham Court Road into Oxford Street, and, after making a small purchase at a druggist's, took the Tube to Shepherd's Bush.

During the ride I pondered over my investment. Seven pounds was a large sum of money for me to speculate at that time, and the suggestions that imagination put forward to account for the actions of the excited bidder brought me little consolation. My cautious mind hinted that old papers and mementoes—valueless to me—might have induced the reckless bidding of the other; and, in consequence, I was not in a particularly exuberant state of mind when I reached the Uxbridge Road Station and alighted.

Walking slowly to the elevators that take the passengers to the street, I was shut out of the second one, and with a quartet of feeble old men I ascended to the little side passage leading out upon the road near the small park. The fog that hung over the city all the day had now thickened. The voices of the newsboys and bus conductors at the end of the passage sounded eerily through the heaving sea of vapor, and the electric lights appeared like sputtering candles behind panes of frosted glass.

I had made but two or three steps from the door of the station building when I discovered that my boot-lace had become untied, and I stooped quickly with the intention of fastening it before walking out on the crowded pavement. The movement was providential. As I bent my head forward, a fist, moving swiftly in what is termed in pugilistic parlance a round-arm swing, grazed the back of my neck instead of landing squarely on my jaw, as the person who aimed it evidently intended. The impetus caused by missing the point aimed at made the striker carom heavily against me, and next instant we were rolling in the mud. I clung tenaciously to the hat-box, and yelled loudly as my antagonist tried to wrench it from my grip.

I could not see the face of the thug, as I was momentarily blinded by the upward sweep of his coat-sleeve; but as I struggled and yelled, the look of hate

that came upon the face of the man in the auction-room when I made the first bid flashed through my mind. The awful blanket of thick vapor choked my cries, and the half minute that we struggled in the mud seemed an eternity. At last there was a rush of feet in the passageway, and, half unconscious, I was dragged to my feet. But the foot-pad had fled. Staggering blindly, but still gripping the precious box, I allowed myself to be led to the street; and as there were no police present, and I had no wish to make my doings public, I climbed into a cab that waited at the corner. Fear lest my assailant might be then within hearing distance prompted me to give a wrong address to the driver; and I urged him to drive quickly, as the crowd around the vehicle increased.

III.

THE cab dashed up Richmond Road into Addison Gardens, and then along Dunsany Road to Brook Green, where I countermanded the order given at the Tube Station, and ordered the driver to take me back to my lodgings in Sinclair Road. I dismounted from the vehicle a block away from my apartments, and then dashed quickly through the fog-bank to my rooms, feeling perfectly satisfied that I had outwitted the thug, even if he had hung round the outskirts of the crowd in an endeavor to hear the address I gave to the driver.

After locking the door, I lit the gas, and with a broken chisel I wrenched off the lock of the box, my heart pounding wildly as I did so.

What had I given seven pounds for? I asked myself again and again as I struggled with the hasp. What could the box contain to induce a man to risk seven years' imprisonment by attacking me in an open thoroughfare? I thought over the oft-repeated assertion of the auctioneer when he spoke about it being stuffed with bank-notes, and with a stupid smile at my own folly I lifted the lid.

The box appeared to be filled with coarse cloth, similar to that used for bed-ticking. It bulged up as the opening of the lid relieved the pressure, and kneeling on the floor, I picked up a loose end of the cloth and pulled it slowly.

It was then that I became cognizant of the fact that something was concealed in its multitudinous folds. Carefully I unwound yard after yard of the thick cloth, my excitement increasing as the ball remaining in the box became smaller and smaller.

Imagination suggested a thousand things that might be concealed within the package, and delicious thrills raced through my body. Still unwinding, I lifted up the bundle, and holding it in my left hand, I stripped away the cloth with nervous fingers, my whole form quivering with the desire to see what the peculiar bundle concealed. Suddenly the cloth ended, and I gave a little cry at sight of the object left in my hand.

It was a human skull.

I sat down and looked at the thing, then burst into a wild fit of laughter. I had paid seven pounds and received a severe mauling to become the possessor of a weather-worn skull that looked as if it had been bleaching in the open for centuries. It was decidedly humorous. Even the skull, which I perched on the pile of cloth that had wrapped it round, seemed to see the humor of the situation and grinned in company.

But why had the black-bearded man evinced such a mad desire to possess the thing? This question I put to my overwrought mind a score of times. Why had he bid so determinedly to acquire the worthless memento? Why hadn't he acquainted me with the contents if he was aware of them; or, better still, given me his name and address in case I wished to dispose of the relic after satisfying my curiosity?

I was attempting to evolve a rational excuse for his action, when a knock came at the door, and Macklin's deep bass voice asked admittance.

Macklin was a medical student, who lived on the floor above, and I rushed to the door and dragged him in.

"Hallo!" he cried, as he saw the skull on the pyramid of ticking, "have you been interviewing a client?"

I might explain Macklin's remark by stating that I was a beginner at the law when the incident happened.

"No," I answered, "but I have an idea that the fellow who owned this skull had a grudge against the frater-

nity. It cost me a bruised lip, torn trousers, and seven pounds in cash to obtain possession of it."

Macklin whistled. "Caesar!" he murmured, glancing at my muddled clothes. "It's an expensive specimen. Did you steal it out of the British Museum?"

I laughed stupidly, and, pushing forward a chair, I told him the story.

"I suppose it's the skull of some relative of his," I added, as I finished the account of my roundabout ride from Uxbridge Road Station.

Macklin picked up the purchase and examined it carefully—upon his face that wise look which the budding medico imagines makes up for inexperience. He prattled learnedly about the formation of the skull, and gave it as his opinion that the original dweller within was a person of low intelligence, on the same grade as an Australian aborigine or African black.

"But he's not worth seven pounds," I said wearily.

"Not quite," laughed Macklin. "You've been—" He stopped suddenly and dashed across to the light.

I followed him.

Across the frontal bone was written an address in lead-pencil, and we deciphered it with difficulty. It read:

MISS ELSIE BRANDON,
21 Ryewood Place,
Manchester, Eng.

Near the address were the initials "J. B." and the words, "Kimberley, South Africa."

We stood looking at each other for a few minutes; then I reached forward, and took a railroad guide from my desk. I was going to get to the bottom of the mystery.

"Where are you going?" queried Macklin, as I turned over the pages.

"To Manchester," I answered. "There was something about that black-bearded man I can't explain; and if Miss Brandon can say a word or two about this skull, it will ease my mind greatly."

"Why not go to-night?" he laughed, the slightest suggestion of a sneer in his voice.

"I will," I retorted, and springing up,

I pushed the skull into a valise; and five minutes afterward I was on my way to the station.

IV.

THERE is no necessity to tell of my wearying search through Manchester for Elsie Brandon; but late in the afternoon of the day I arrived I found her, serving as waitress at the Queen's Hotel. I asked for a few moments' private conversation, and before speaking of the skull I inquired if she knew any one in Kimberley with the initials "J. B."

The little girl broke down and sobbed bitterly, and bit by bit I managed to extract her story. Her father, John Brandon, who had been in South Africa for many years, had written to her ten months before, stating that he was returning home. Although the girl had proof that he left Capetown by the Cairngorm Castle, and left that vessel at Tilbury Docks, all her efforts to trace him had proved fruitless, and she had come to look upon him as dead.

Without questioning my object in making inquiries, she handed me the last letter she had received from her parent before he started on his way home, and I scanned it quickly. The first sentence on the second page caught my eye, and with throbbing heart I read:

I am followed by a man named Healy, who is aware of the contents of the packet, and for this reason I am packing it inside a Kafir's skull and trusting it with my luggage rather than carry it upon my person.

I read no farther. I flung the letter down, and hurriedly opening my valise, I placed the skull upon the table. The girl's eyes opened wide as she gazed upon it, and with a cry she clutched my arm and asked me to tell her what I knew.

I told my story before we investigated the skull, and from it we then drew a little package that had been gummed securely to the inside.

In that package we found the great Brandon diamond!—the stone that afterward startled the experts of Hatton Garden and created much spirited competition among buyers till it passed into the hands of Prince George Frederick of Helentz-Murstein.

The whole affair lay before us. Brandon's fate was plain, but Brandon's murderer had missed the gem which actuated the crime. The stone, in its curious resting-place, had evidently been left at the luggage-office of the Great Northeastern some time before the murderer had attacked his victim; and the failure to discover the gem upon Brandon's person had led him to suspect that it was concealed in his luggage. By weariless watching he had discovered when the unclaimed property of that date would be put up at auction; but here again his mad desire to possess the box that he knew was Brandon's had upset his scheme when he rushed the price up beyond his means. It was a peculiar case of retributive justice.

With the marks of the murderous attack still upon my person, I advised the girl to seek her friends, lest the thug might then be on my trail; and finding that her only living relative resided in Chelsea, I persuaded her to pack hastily and leave with me that very evening.

V.

WE reached London a few minutes before midnight, and after leaving Elsie Brandon with an aunt in Vine Grove, I drove toward Sinclair Road. The night was wonderfully bright; and as the cab turned down from the Olympia, a man dashed madly up the street with

a policeman and half a dozen civilians in pursuit. As the pursued one passed my cab, the policeman raised his revolver and fired. The man staggered forward and fell upon the snow.

The cab-driver turned his horse round in response to my call, and when I sprang out of the vehicle I collided heavily with Macklin.

"By Jove!" he cried, as he picked himself up, "you're back just in time to identify stolen property. That beggar was trying to get away with the tin box that you brought your skull home in."

Through the little knot of people we shouldered a passage, and leaning over the policeman who had turned the dying man on his back, I saw again the haggard face of the man who had bid against me in the auction-room. His run of bad luck had carried him to the grave.

The Kafir's skull now ornaments my study, and Elsie has a whimsical habit of curtsying good night to the thing when she comes in to tell me that it is bedtime.

"It brought me luck and you," she murmurs if I expostulate.

When I look into the bright eyes of John Brandon's daughter, I also am inclined to salute the skull.

She is a treasure, worth more than all the diamonds ever discovered in the gray land south of the line.

MY LADY DREAMS.

My lady dreams, my lady dreams,
 She walketh to and fro,
 Afar beside the crystal streams,
 Where lotus-blossoms grow,
 And softly, with her jeweled hand,
 She plucks the blossoms white,
 And scatters petals through the land
 At coming of the night.

My lady dreams, my lady dreams,
 All silver are her shoon;
 And pale her rippling hair it gleams
 Beneath the silver moon,
 So soft on sandaled feet she roams,
 In silence, to and fro—
 That no one knoweth whence she comes,
 Or whither she doth go.

Gene B. Lynch.

TOO MUCH SUNSHINE.

BY ANTON F. KLINKNER.

A SHORT STORY.



don't know Simon Trout?

No?

Well, he is a common, ordinary mortal like myself. Possessed of the same little frailties and virtues that make an otherwise uninteresting existence possible.

Simon Trout is a business man. The same as myself. After hours, in the café, over a cup of Herr Schmidt's hot coffee, we discuss life as we find it.

"Do you know," Trout was saying, "that the world isn't the same any more as it used to be?"

I nodded.

"No, sir, Klein, it isn't a bit the same. Do you know, I believe there isn't half enough sunshine in the world."

Now, as a matter of course, I was extremely well aware that there are times and places when a great many people are perfectly satisfied with the amount of sunshine in circulation, but, as a matter of friendship, I agreed with him that there was a woful dearth of sunshine.

"Not half enough sunshine," I said.

"I mean, sunshine in people's hearts. Do you know, I think we, as a rule, are entirely too much taken up with our own affairs. We have no time for sentiment, or beauty, or art, or nature."

He was putting the case pretty strong, but I agreed with him.

"Klein, I'll tell you what's the matter, we're so confounded busy with our own schemes and machinations that we ain't really human any more."

This was indeed news to me.

Trout stopped for breath, and lit his pipe.

"I was reading Josh Billings to-day. Josh hits the nail on the head every time. He just expresses my sentiments

to a T. I came across a line or two of his that just bears me out exactly. I copied it off into my note-book. I'll read it to you: 'Duty is the good action that bores you. When you are doing your duty, your face looks like a tombstone. When you learn how to make pleasure of your good deeds, your face will be as welcome as a strawberry-patch in the tall meadow grass.' Klein, what do you think of that?"

"Old Josh is right, there, Trout."

"You bet he is."

We smoked in silence for a while, and then Trout's face brightened up.

"Do you know, Klein, I'm going to see just how much truth there is in old Josh Billings's statement. I'm going to start out to-morrow and be as kind and gentle and considerate as I can be, and see if I don't feel better for it when the day is done. What do you think of the idea?"

"Why, it ought to be all right, I guess."

"I'd like to have you try it, too, and we'll compare notes here to-morrow night. Is it a go?"

"It is!" I replied; and we solemnly shook hands to seal the compact.

II.

REMEMBERING my promise of the previous evening, I started in the day by jumping out of bed with a song. I continued to warble in the kitchen, and was just beginning to realize what it meant to be happy, when Mrs. Klein appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Alfonse, for Heaven's sake, keep still! You will wake the baby."

That settled the song.

However, I made up my mind to be light-hearted at all odds, and I went out into the yard to work in the garden.

Scientists say it's the most healthful thing in the world to shovel dirt in the garden. There is a resiliency in the ground as you tread it, and a repercussion of earth-waves that sets free properties in the soil that kill the germs of consumption—and I had been coughing lately, anyway!

Suddenly I became conscious of the fact that Mrs. Klein was watching me from an upper window.

"Such a man!" she cried. "Alfonse, haven't you an ounce of sense? Do you know what you are doing?"

"Why, er—my dear, I believe I am working in the garden," I meekly answered.

"You are tramping on the cucumbers, and you have ruined my tomato-vines, so you have. Get out of the garden this minute!"

I was tempted to swear as I put the tools away in the shed, but I didn't, and I resolved to be game.

When Mrs. Klein sat down to breakfast, I beamed at her most graciously and assumed the broadest smile I had in stock at the time, for I was sure it would please her.

She looked at me rather surprised.

I smiled again.

Mrs. Klein gazed at me sharply.

"Alfonse, what's getting into you? You look so silly!"

This was rather depressing, and I felt that the smile was coming off.

Then I remembered Josh Billings, and put on a broader smile than before.

Mrs. Klein grew furious.

"Alfonse! You are making fun of me. You mean—"

"There, dear. I assure you I had no such intentions whatever."

So the meal ended in a sobbing contest on Mrs. Klein's part, and I tried in vain to comfort her.

Before I went down-town to the office she called me into the house.

"Alfonse, I want to know what ails you this morning? Are you sick? Did you get overheated yesterday?" There was a note of anxious pity in her voice.

"No, dear," I replied.

But she wasn't satisfied. She was going to ring up the doctor; and, in order to square myself, I made a clean breast of the whole affair to my wife—

told of the plan Trout and I were following for the day—and she laughed heartily as I bade her good-by.

III.

I HAD just finished my supper, that evening, when the telephone-bell rang.

"Hallo."

"Hallo."

"This Mr. Klein?"

"Yes; this is Mr. Klein."

"This is Mrs. Trout."

"How do you—"

"Dear Mr. Klein, I wish you would go down-town and see if you can find Simon. He's been acting awful queer to-day, and I'm afraid something has happened to him. Will you go?"

"Why, of course. When—"

"I'll be awfully grateful. Good-by."

I hung up the receiver, rather anxious, and told my wife Mrs. Trout's message. My wife said she didn't know, now, whether a man was a bigger fool before marriage or after. I jumped into my coat, grabbed my hat, and hurried off in search of Simon.

I went to Herr Schmidt's first. He signaled to me mysteriously, walked me into a corner, and whispered:

"Dey haf Mr. Trout locked up in shail."

"What for?"

"Ach! How should I know? Somebody said he was getting gay mid de goils and acting awful funny."

I rushed frantically to the jail.

I met a man patrolling Water Street with a gun.

He said he was looking for "Mister Trout, who had steppped in his house and tried to separate him and his wife, who had been haffing a leedle misunderstanding!"

There was a crowd of people standing near the grated window.

"Th' impudent whelp!" one young woman was saying. "He's th' nice scoundrel that was tryin' to flirt wid me."

"He came into my yard and insisted on helping me carry a bookcase into the house. I told him to never mind, but he persisted, and he stumbled on the walk and broke the glass door," commented an elderly widow. "He'll never leave that jail if he doesn't hand me the price of the glass door he broke."

"The villain! He's been laughing at me every time he passed my shop to-day. I believe he's crazy!"

"He came into my house and tried to tell me how to hang a picture. I chased him out with a broom."

"He stopped our children on the way to school, and took up a quarter of an hour of their time telling them how many beautiful places there were in America that every boy and girl should some day make up their minds to visit, and the children were late for school."

"He got me to untie a tin-can from a dog's tail while he held the dog. The dog bit him and the tin-can cut my hand so I had to pay a doctor four dollars to sew it up."

"What does all this mean?" I de-

manded, as I elbowed my way to the window.

"That you, Klein?"

I took Trout's outstretched hand and shook it warmly.

"Tell Malmsby it's all a mistake."

Malmsby was the chief of police, and in a short time he came and released the disciple of Josh Billings.

Over a cup of hot coffee at Herr Schmidt's café we talked of life as we found it.

"How did you make out to-day?"

I told him.

"Do you know, Klein, I believe it isn't practicable to scatter too much sunshine. I believe it's better to mind your own business."

I agreed with him!

THE SWORD OF TARROLOYS.*

BY BANNISTER MERWIN,

Author of "A Knight of To-Day," etc.

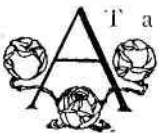
SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

DENIS FOU CART is sent by King Louis XI to Touraine for the purpose of settling a quarrel between Guillaume de Mescun and his brother, Hugues de Cornay, who is being held prisoner by Guillaume pending the restoration of the forest of Jolin.

Accompanied by Jehan de Tarroloys, a young noble in whose family he had formerly been employed, Foucart proceeds to Jolin. He is received by Hugues's seneschal, Gilbert de Baisignan, and meets the young Comte de Rainemont, who evidently has on foot some plot of his own. On the way from Jolin to Mescun, Jehan rescues the Lady Clothilde, sister of the quarreling nobles, whom Rainemont is attempting to kidnap.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BROTHERS.



At a sign from Jehan, Simon Crouay lifted the half-conscious tiring-woman to the saddle of his little pony, and held her there.

Then Jehan himself led forward the palfrey which Rainemont had brought from Jolin.

"We are bound to the castle," he said to the Lady Clothilde. "Will you let us take you thither?"

It amazed me to note how completely Jehan was assuming charge of the ven-

ture. The sword was now master, but I felt no dissatisfaction with the result, for the youth was bearing himself superbly.

What surprised me most was the reticent sureness of his manner. After those first words of wondering admiration, he had seemed to be lighted by a great resolve, softened with a sweetness that I almost fancied had passed from her to him in the long interchange of looks.

When her eyes at last fell before him, and he turned to see to the horses, I knew that his true mastery of life had begun. And I was forgotten.

The Lady Clothilde silently took her seat on the palfrey, Jehan helping her.

* This story began in *THE CAVALIER* for December, 1908.

As her hand touched his, I saw again that look of wonder on his face. The old Greek books tell the story of a giant named *Anteus*, who, every time he touched the earth, became many times stronger. Even so did the look and the touch of this lady seem to add to the strength of Jehan. And it was plain that she herself was not unmoved by him.

Now it seemed time for me to intervene. I rode forward.

"Lady," I said, "I am Master Denis Foucart, who have come hither on the king's business. My companion is the *Seigneur* Jehan de Tarroloys. As to that recumbent knight, Rainemont, who lies there groaning, we know somewhat of him. Will you not tell us more?"

She turned her dark eyes on me.

"I was awakened an hour ago by a message which came to me through a servant of my brother Hugues. He said that if I would go afoot, with one of my women, to this spot just before daybreak this morning, I would here find the Seneschal Gilbert de Baisignan, who would treat with me concerning the unfortunate dispute between my brothers. I came, and at once was seized. The arrival of this *seigneur*—she looked at Jehan—"was opportune."

"It was so willed," said Jehan gravely. "Lady, my service is henceforth yours. Have you no token that I may wear?"

She plucked a ribbon from her gown, and he took it and kissed it reverently, then fastened it to his helmet. He was progressing fast, this young knight. If my plans were to succeed, I must hold him back a little, or he would ride away with her before we could reach the castle. On my life, as I gazed at her in that moment I believed that she would not resist even so rash a plan.

"Tell me, lady," I said, "will your brother, the Comte de Mescun, receive me? I come, as I have told you, from the king."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "he will receive you."

"It is my mission," I went on, "to make peace between your brothers. That would please you well, would it not?"

"It would please me well," she replied.

"Then, let us go forward," I said, with a look at Jehan. He started, as though awakening from a dream.

Rainemont remained where he had fallen, but now he was muttering words, as well as groaning, and it could be but a short time before he would recover himself.

"Shall we take him prisoner to the castle?" I asked, turning to the lady. Her answer I expected.

"If we did," she said, "I could not restrain my brother of Mescun from killing him, and that would bring his county against us."

I nodded, and we rode away, leaving Rainemont with his page still bending over him. The man-at-arms whom Jehan had slain lay quiet on the dark carpet of his own blood.

As we topped the rim of the little valley, the Lady Clothilde looked back.

"That was a brave deed," she said to Jehan.

"Not brave, lady," he replied. "But it was necessary, though Rainemont was at a disadvantage. I had the ground above him."

"None the less, it was brave," she insisted. "I am thankful that you saved me."

He bowed over his saddle, but spoke no word, for I had given him a meaning look.

I glanced at Simon Crouay. He held the tiring-woman close to him, though she no longer seemed in need of such tender support, and I noticed that he was talking soothingly in her ear in a low tone.

The castle, as we approached it, proved to be a stout fortification. The hill upon which it stood was only a gentle slope, but there was a wide moat, and the outer wall of defense was high and strongly battlemented, with towers and turrets properly disposed. The inner buildings were higher than the wall, after the approved manner of the king's castle of Plessis-le-Tours, though here at Mescun there was only one outer line of defense. No entrance appeared on the side which we approached, and we circled about toward the town where the drawbridge was.

"How did you come out?" I asked the lady.

"There is no enemy at hand," she answered, "and the gate is so strong that we do not always raise the drawbridge at night."

"But is there no danger that the Seigneur Hugues will escape?"

She sighed.

"At night he is locked in a high chamber, under guard. By day he moves about freely within the walls, under his own promise to make no escape unless in the hours of darkness."

I pondered a little.

"Shall you tell your brothers the truth about this morning's venture?"

"It will be better," she said, "to say no more than that I went forth with Mirelle and was set upon, and that your *seigneur* came to the rescue."

How persistently she set Jehan above me! But, like my master, the king, it is my rule to resent nothing when I have an object in view. Moreover, I am not so old but that the workings of young blood appeal to me.

A lone sentinel opened the gate to us, and we rode into the inner court. Instantly, it seemed, the castle became awake. Varlets ran to our horses and aided us to dismount. The Lady Clothilde gave brief instructions as to our disposal, and then bade us be patient while she arranged for our reception. With that she disappeared.

We were conducted to a large room, furnished with a massive bed. Here basins of water were brought to us, and an over-servant told us that, by the lady's wishes, we were to sleep until the day was farther advanced.

There was no sleep for me, nor was there for Jehan. His thoughts were busy with his new dream, while mine were concerned with a range of events of which his dream was an incident. But we lay at length on the soft bed, and I, for my part, closed my eyes and assumed a regular breathing. In the midst of my thoughts, from time to time, I heard Jehan sigh and turn from side to side.

At last he could keep silent no longer.

"Master Foucart!" he whispered.

I moved uneasily, like one disturbed in slumber, but not aroused.

"Master Foucart!" he repeated.

"Yes," I muttered, "what is it?"

"She is very beautiful, the Lady Clothilde."

I made no answer, but I heard him murmur the name softly once again—"Lady Clothilde"—and his inflection was as gentle as the rustling of the young leaves in May.

The morning was well advanced before we were summoned to meet Count Guillaume. Accompanying the man who brought us the word was Simon Crouay. I drew him aside and questioned him.

"Have you been recognized, Simon?"

"No, master."

"What do you make of the situation here?"

The fellow smiled.

"While I was at Tours," he said, "my uncle introduced me to the game called chess. In that pastime there are occasions when neither adversary can move without loss."

I understood. But, more important than what he said was the evidence that Simon Crouay might become a valuable helper. I decided then that I would seek to attach him to the king's service—a purpose which afterward I carried out, to the advantage of myself and of the king.

We were now conducted through many corridors. The chamber in which Count Guillaume received us was long and high. The windows, on one side, commanded a view over the wall and across the narrow intervening plain to the town of Mescun. There was a table, and there were chairs, beautifully carved, and a great fireplace of stone—though no fagot blazed on the hearth, for the day was warm.

Seated beside the table was Guillaume de Mescun. Behind him, richly gowned, her look as clear as the day and as unfathomable, stood the lady Clothilde. In that moment I realized that what I most strongly liked in her was not her great beauty, but the elusive sense of mystery which was attached to her. I never solved it, for it was a mystery of heart, guarded against all but the favored one.

To Jehan it seemed to be clear from the first. He understood her, and she him, by ways to which my lore gives no hint. But I liked her for the things I saw and did not understand, just as Jehan loved her because he saw and did

understand them. Is not that the distinction between liking and love?

But to return to the man who, seemingly oblivious of his sister's presence, awaited the approach of Jehan and myself. Count Guillaume was a man of large frame. Unusually strong he looked, with a slow strength of the kind that can steadily push an obstacle out of the way, but not knock it aside by sudden blows. His eyes were small, and they smoldered with a sullen fire. His hair was thick and coarse, and shot plentifully with streaks of white, giving him a singular and distinctive appearance which his heavy features could not have claimed for him.

There was no formality attached to our reception—no heraldic pomp, no weighty presence of counselors and underlings. This fact greatly facilitated my task. I divined that the Lady Clothilde, with a quick appreciation of the methods I must use, had thus arranged the meeting. I had really but one person to deal with.

Count Guillaume rose as we approached.

"The lady, my sister," he said in the voice of a smothered bull, "has told me of the aid you gave her this morning. I am grateful, but I regret that you let the villains go when they were in your power."

"It was the lady's wish," said I. "The mercies of a woman's heart are beyond the denial of men."

He nodded, like one who wishes to appear to comprehend; then he turned to Jehan, looking at the youth with frank admiration of his grace and strength.

"You are well made, *seigneur*," he said. "Stay with us a while, and we will have jousts. And there may be fighting hereabouts."

"No, brother, no," put in the Lady Clothilde. "No fighting."

He cast a softened glance at her.

"Who knows?" he muttered. "If I am pressed too far—"

"Sir count," I broke in, "the lady has doubtless told you that I come direct from His Majesty, King Louis. Perhaps you know of me—Master Denis Foucart—as one who is frequently deputed to arrange matters of policy."

"I have heard of you," he admitted, though there was no respect in his voice. "What does the king want of me?"

"Sir," I said boldly, "he wants peace in Mescun and Cornay."

He set his great jaws tight.

"That cannot be." His face clouded.

"Sir count," said I, "it was long ago written that nothing is impossible. Why do you not free your brother, the *Seigneur de Cornay*?"

"A thousand curses!" he bellowed. "I will free him fast enough when he relinquishes my appanage of Jolin, with well-backed promises not again to seize it."

"Then, your brother must relinquish Jolin," said I firmly.

"That he will not do." Guillaume was breathing heavily. The topic weighed hard on him. I saw the Lady Clothilde watching him anxiously, as though doubtful of his temper. With a flicker of my eye I sought to reassure her, and she seemed to understand.

I smiled with as pleasant a deference as I could muster.

"You will pardon me, sir count," I said, "if I ask questions which may seem beyond my right. I am here, as a servant of the king, to serve you. Tell me, if you will, why did the *seigneur* your brother seize Jolin?"

"Why?" he thundered. "Why? Because I would not consent that our sister should wed that wretch, the Comte de Rainemont."

"Guillaume!" The voice of Clothilde came in protest. Her cheeks were reddened.

"Lady," I said, "it is necessary that all should be made clear." I could hear Jehan breathing hard at my side, and I saw Clothilde throw a glance at him—a swift, half-fearful glance, of which she herself could not have been conscious.

I addressed myself again to Count Guillaume.

"And is the Comte de Rainemont so unfitting a suitor?"

Guillaume brought his heavy fist down on the table at his side.

"His holdings adjoin Cornay," he shouted. "He and Cornay would lord it over me—over me, who am older. I will never brook it."

Now, for the first time, I saw everything plainly. Hugues and Rainemont had intrigued to strengthen themselves at the expense of Guillaume. And the price of Rainemont's backing was to be the Lady Clothilde.

The point of chief interest to me was that the Lady Clothilde made the real center of the dispute. Obviously she did not wish to wed Rainemont. Obviously, also, she had led Guillaume to become her ally; for his thick brain would otherwise never have comprehended the diplomatic obstacle which he had just pointed out to me.

The fact that Rainemont adjoined Cornay and that the Comte de Rainemont and Hugues de Cornay were friends would mean little to a man like Guillaume unless its significance were expounded to him by another.

But the lady had not foreseen that Rainemont, in the face of Guillaume's refusal, would drive her brother Hugues to extremes. So the deadlock had come to pass, and Hugues, committed to his course by definite deeds, could not withdraw.

The Seigneur Hugues, then, would be the person for me to reach. He must be made to give up the forest of Jolin. He must be made to withdraw from his alliance with Rainemont. Meantime, I would use the opportunity to prepare Guillaume's mind—that he might be amenable when the time for a peace should come.

"Sir count," I said, "I should like to talk upon this matter more privately with you. There are interests of the state that must be made clear."

I looked at Jehan as I spoke, and he moved away toward a window. Then I looked at the Lady Clothilde, and she, too, after a moment of hesitation, obeyed the entreaty of my eyes. She went to another window, and there Jehan quickly joined her. They stood side by side, looking forth and talking softly. I marveled at the subtleties of her self-defense in her relations with her brothers. Few women could thus deal with men.

For there was no talk of her own objections to Rainemont, though I felt sure that she hated him. She had brought Guillaume to her point of view merely

by showing him how easily the alliance might cause him to lose strength. A clear mind to do all that! Yet now she was whispering to Jehan, with all her soul in her eyes—and a true and noble soul, as I could see.

At some length I talked to Count Guillaume. I pointed out the folly of the deadlock. I spoke of the king's growing power and of his desire that there be no strife among the nobles. I made plain the advantages of peace. And ever and anon he granted his comprehension of my points—which indeed were so worded that a child could understand them.

While I was talking I turned the subject quickly to his brother.

"Do you keep him constantly under watch?" I asked.

"He is free by day to move about as he pleases, for he has promised that he will not try to escape unless by night. From the time he retires to his chamber in the evening he is closely guarded till morning."

"Has he any servants?" I was thinking of the false message that had lured the Lady Clothilde from the castle that morning.

"One," he answered—"a varlet named Pierre, who was captured with him."

"And Pierre has access to him?"

"By night." He looked at me with an unspoken question of vague concern.

"Do you guard this Pierre?"

"Why, no. He goes and comes. But he is a stupid fellow."

"I would send this fellow Pierre away," I said. "He may well be in communication with Baisignan."

The Count Guillaume looked at me.

"I will do that," he said. "You are right. There is danger of communication."

"And the Seigneur Hugues," I went on, "must be made to see the necessity of withdrawing his men from Jolin."

A sharp, metallic voice broke in on me.

"The Seigneur Hugues," it said, "will mind his own affairs, and will thank others to mind theirs."

I turned. At the tapestried entrance stood a gaunt, somber stranger, plainly a man of the type that none might override. He entered the room lazily, threw

a swift glance at Jehan and the Lady Clothilde—who had faced about at the sound of his voice and now stood with their backs to the window—they eyed me with prolonged insolence.

“Who is this varlet, Guillaume?” he demanded, his eye still on me.

“No varlet,” explained Guillaume, clenching and unclenching his heavy hand as it lay on the table. “No varlet, but an envoy from the king.”

“A varlet of a varlet, then.” He laughed bitterly.

So this was Hugues de Cornay. Truly a formidable person.

He now again stared at me.

“Well, fellow,” he said, “if you have no name, what does the master who hires you want of the Comte de Mescun?”

I looked at him full.

“What his majesty desires of the Comte de Mescun is of no concern to the Comte de Mescun’s steward—which I presume you may be.”

The answer may sound rash, in that it would tend to anger the Seigneur Hugues. That was just what I wished to do: for a man of sharp wit is ever at his worst when angry.

But he shifted quickly.

“Oh, I understand, Master Foucart”—so he had already learned my name from the servants—“I understand the difficulties of your position. But, think of the difficulties of mine, and you will forgive the bitterness of my tongue. If you were in the power of a brother who aspired to play the part of Cain—” He paused to sneer at Guillaume.

I saw the veins stand out on the count’s face, saw his shoulders heave convulsively.

“Yes,” continued Hugues, “my own brother would kill me if he dared. But he knows that such a deed would bring the nobility buzzing around his head like hornets.” With that he laughed, and again Count Guillaume struggled to hold himself in check.

And now the Lady Clothilde glided forward from her place at the window and confronted the snarling *seigneur*.

“Shame on you, Hugues!” she cried.

He looked at her with a cool eye.

“True, lady sister, my tongue does run away with me. But what would you have? I am a humiliated prisoner.”

“You need not be,” she returned.

“Need I not?” His tone was light, and his manner convinced me that he had some project afoot of which the Count Guillaume did not dream.

He would not venture to bring the Seneschal Gilbert against the castle, I reasoned, for that would force Guillaume to extremes. But what of Rainemont? I could imagine that this unwelcome suitor for the hand of the Lady Clothilde had stirred the country strongly against Guillaume de Mescun. If the nobility stood back of him, Rainemont might bring his own forces against the castle. For this there could be no direct blame upon Hugues de Cornay. What more natural than that Rainemont should first try to abduct the Lady Clothilde? And that Hugues was in such a plot seemed to me certain from the fact that his servant had brought the message which lured the lady from the castle.

But at the present juncture all this was no more than a surmise. I addressed myself to Hugues. “You have asked me, seigneur, what is my business with the Comte de Mescun. I am here because the king desires that this unhappy embroilment shall end.”

“Ah!” Hugues bowed with mocking deference. “Then if you can persuade my surly brother to set me at liberty, all will be well.”

“Provided,” said I, “that you first retire your forces from Jolin, under bonds of forfeiture.”

He turned his back on me, and spoke to Clothilde.

“Who is your companion at the window, lady sister?”

She looked at him with level eyes.

“One who came hither with Master Foucart.”

“Oh, I know his name,” said Hugues. “But what is his mission here? Come nearer, Seigneur de Tarroloys.”

Jehan did not budge from his place at the window, but looked steadily at the hard-breathing Guillaume.

“The Seigneur de Tarroloys,” said Guillaume slowly, “saved our sister from peril this morning. A villain had seized her and would have carried her away but for the *seigneur’s* arrival.”

“Ah,” said Hugues, “and did our sister tell you who this villain was?”

"She knew him not," said Guillaume.
 "Then," said Hugues, "I can tell you."

"Hugues!" The Lady Clothilde's voice came in quick protest.

But he disregarded her.

"It was Rainemont," he jeered. "Every varlet in your courtyard knows it, brother. You alone are ignorant."

"What?" Guillaume sprang to his feet.

"Yes," sneered Hugues, "it was my friend and your enemy—Rainemont. A pretty guard you keep."

Before any of us knew what was to happen, Guillaume swung his arm. His hand struck flat against the cheek of Hugues, who, taken unawares, went to the floor. He was quickly on his feet, however, ready for onslaught, and I saw his eye jump to a stand of battle-axes against the near wall.

Guillaume gathered himself for a rush. His eyes were blood-red. But before he could charge forward Jehan had bounded across the room and seized him by the shoulders. With a strength incredible, the youth forced the count back to his chair, then turned to Hugues.

"Shame!" he cried. "Cowardly knight, to force the temper of your captor!"

Hugues bowed. His composure had returned to him.

"You are right," he mocked. "Youth is always right." Then, to his brother: "Adieu, Cain." With that he went from the room.

CHAPTER V.

TAPESTRY.

I GLANCED at the Lady Clothilde. Her cheeks, which had grown pale when Guillaume's rage broke forth, were now rosy, and I noted that her eyes were fixed on Jehan, who was looking grimly at the open door through which Hugues had left the chamber.

At length Jehan turned to me.

"A bad affair," he whispered. "For the lady's sake, there must be no more of it."

I nodded. It was indeed a bad affair. So I beckoned the lady away from her brother.

"Your brothers must not meet again," I said.

"I have feared this," she replied. "For many months matters were quiet, but within the last few days Guillaume has been goaded as you have seen."

"Then, have the Seigneur Hugues confined to his chamber by day as well as by night. There is something afoot, lady."

"I know," she said. "I have felt it in the air. I have seen it in the changed manner of my brother Hugues."

"Do you know also," I asked, "that every attack which the Count Guillaume thus makes upon his brother will be bruited through the country and used to increase the prejudice against him?"

"Do you think so?"

"I am certain of it."

I turned to Guillaume, who still sat brooding, his face suffused.

"Sir count," I said, "I beg that you look at once to your brother's servant, Pierre. He must not carry this news abroad."

Guillaume groaned.

"Oh, that I have struck my brother! But he enraged me! I was beyond control."

"None of us who saw it can blame you," I said soothingly. "But the story will be distorted for the ears of others. So look to Pierre."

He roused himself and called a servant.

"Take the varlet Pierre," he ordered, "and place him in the donjon."

The servant returned after a few moments, with a frightened face.

"My lord," he said, "Pierre has just ridden from the castle."

Guillaume jumped to his feet.

"After him!" he cried.

"Wait," said I. "Let me send my servant, Simon Crouay."

Guillaume, who appeared to be dazed by the course of events, yielded.

In a short time I was talking to Simon.

"Listen," I said. "You are a servant to the Seneschal Gilbert de Baisignan."

He met my eyes squarely, with the expression of one who has weighed the chances and cast the die.

"I am *your* servant, Master Foucart," he said.

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"You have not my learning, Simon, but you see as I see and think as I think. The king has need of men like you. Serve me well in this present affair, and be assured of your preferment with the king."

"Gladly," he said.

"Then, take a swift horse and ride after this fellow Pierre. Kill him—or, better, bring him back if you can."

He was gone on the instant.

I went back to Guillaume, who still sat in his chair. Jehan and the Lady Clothilde near him.

"Sir count," I said, "as a matter of precaution, you would better prepare for an attack."

"How should that be?" he demanded. "Who would attack me?"

"Perhaps no one; but there is mischief in the air. How are you provisioned?"

"Not for a long siege."

"Then, if I may advise, get your supplies in, and call in also your full forces."

Jehan and the lady both nodded their assent, and, thus backed, my advice had its weight.

I then gave to the count my reasons for thinking that an attack might be expected, telling him of our meeting at Jolin with Rainemont and the Seneschal Baisignan, and putting two and two together for him. Reluctantly he agreed with my surmises.

The orders were given, and all that day carts brought provisions from the town, and messengers scoured the county, carrying the word to the vassals and men-at-arms. By morning of the next day the castle was garrisoned to resist a strong besiegement. But this is anticipating events which have not yet place in the order of my narrative.

In reply to my further questions, the lady told me that Hugues had been placed in his chamber, under lock, a guard at the door. I requested speech with him, and this was soon arranged, so that before long I stood in the locked chamber.

The Seigneur Hugues was leaning against a narrow casement of the tower. Far below, the plain spread away toward Jolin, and in the distance was the low, dark line of the forest. He turned as the lock clicked after me.

"Well, trouble-maker," he said.

"The epithet is one that you yourself deserve," I replied. "You are the root of all the difficulties here."

"I make no trouble that does not lie within my rights." He came toward me, and stood with one foot on a low stool, leaning forward, his elbow on his raised knee. "Listen, Master Foucart, the king is meddling here in a matter which he does not understand. The forest of Jolin is rightfully as much mine as my brother's. I was in doubt at the time of my father's death, but I was then too young to know my rights."

His manner was now direct and free from the taunts and sneers which he had used to goad his brother.

"Whoever is in the right," I said, "you know that the king cares little. He desires merely that by some means the dispute be settled, the royal tithes paid, and the levies met. I tell you frankly that, if you let the present situation continue, he will send an army."

"Oh, come, Master Foucart. You know that would cost more than Louis cares to pay."

I ignored this.

"If I aid you to escape," I said, "will you promise to withdraw from Jolin?"

"I will promise nothing," he replied. "My situation is stronger than you think."

It seemed wise to let him believe that I suspected nothing of his plans. To trick him would have no real value in solving the difficulty, for as soon as he discovered that he had been made a fool of he would repeat his aggressions. No, I would have to contrive a permanent basis of peace, by some plan which would appeal both to him and to the Count Guillaume. Money, I knew, would not buy him, unless much more were offered than the king would be willing to pay.

My frame of mind was not happy. Unless I succeeded in my work at Mesun, the king was really quite capable of sending me to Bretagne, as he had threatened. It seemed as if I might have to make for Italy, after all. As you will have guessed, I had thought that by trying to bring about a match between Jehan and the Lady Clothilde I might force the brothers together; but

now I found that the central point of their difference was the disposition of the sister's hand.

I said little more in this interview. Hugues was unshakable. So, in time, I went to the door and knocked, and the guard let me out.

Then came to me Simon Crouay, disappointment written on his face.

"I followed the tracks of Pierre almost to Jolin," he said, "but I had to turn back. A group of riders pursued me part of the way."

"Oh, well," I said, "it is nothing against you. He had a long start. But we shall see fighting now."

I told him to keep a sharp eye on the people of the castle, to be sure that none of them was in touch with Rainemont or the Seneschal Baisignan.

The mischief had been done. There was little doubt that Rainemont would soon come before the castle. As I turned to go back through the corridors, there was already much busting about. Heavy wagons laden with grain were creaking into the courtyard outside the casements which I passed. Out on the plain, men were driving in cattle. Mescun was preparing for siege.

It was well that the castle stood apart from the town, which was not walled. With the small force at Guilhaume's command, it would be easier to defend the castle by itself.

I asked a varlet where the Count Guilhaume could be found, and learned that he was employed with all these preparations—keeping check on the provisions that were brought in and receiving the vassals as they arrived.

Indeed, the stir in the castle affected me with a contagion of excitement. I had never served in battle, nor did I care to, and I wondered how I should fare if Rainemont succeeded with a leaguer. I did not believe that he would dare to injure the king's accredited servant, contemptuous of me though he was. And as for Jehan—why, fighting was his vocation. No cause to fear for him. Such fine youths as he are not born to be killed on their first field.

The sword had put mind in the background. Where was my cunning? Was young Jehan right? Was the strength of the arm still the final solution of dis-

putes? And craft, like the king's, like mine—did it merely postpone the solution?

I looked down at my black scholar's garb, which showed so plainly the thinness of my limbs. A pretty figure was I for scenes like this! And yet—I knew that mind must win.

At this moment I passed an arras-hung doorway, through which came the sound of a voice. Pausing, I silently drew the heavy folds aside and looked within. Before a loom sat the Lady Clothilde, deftly weaving a tapestry.

Her fingers carried the colored threads back and forth, back and forth, in a motion of grace that well became her. I will not say that she looked like a princess, for all the princesses that I have ever seen were ugly to the eye; but she looked as a princess ought to look. And by her side stood Jehan, gazing down at her fingers as they slowly wove the picture of old history.

They would not have seen me, those two, had I entered the room; they would hardly have heard me had I spoken.

"And what is the picture, lady?" Jehan was saying.

"It shows the battle of Roncesvalles, where Count Roland withstood the Saracens."

"It is very beautiful," he said—and, to my eyes, he appeared to be gazing not at the picture but at the lady's hair.

"See!" She halted in her work and pointed a taper finger to the loom. "Here is Count Roland himself, winding the horn which Charlemagne heard so many miles away, though he came too late to save the noble knight from death."

Jehan sighed.

"Ah, they were valorous in those days! Count Roland fought to the death against an overwhelming horde. Lady, that is what I could wish to do for you."

He had taken from his helmet the ribbon which she gave him in the morning and had fastened it upon his cloak: now he raised it gravely to his lips.

"To the death?" she faltered, her head down toward her idle fingers. "No, *seigneur*, do not say that. It is better to live."

"To live with honor; to die with valor"—lady, that is the motto of my house."

She repeated the words softly: " 'To live with honor; to die with valor.' *Sig-nour*, you will do both. But first you must live—with honor."

He leaned down to look at the picture. His lips were close to her hair.

"If I could live as that knight lived," he said, "and die as he died, there is no more I could ask, except—except such love as, I doubt, he never knew."

She turned her face up to him. Long they looked into each other's eyes, and no shame was in her face for the frankness of her gaze, but only the strength of such loving recognition as comes to few. And Jehan's face was filled with radiant devotion.

At last she bent again to her work. She did not speak, but her fingers now and again lingered tenderly with the threads, as if in symbol of her reverie. And Jehan stood as in a dream.

Softly I stole away, and left them to weave their hearts into that picture of ancient battle.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISTANT GLEAM.

OF what befell during the remainder of that day and in the early hours of the next—of the feast, when fifty fighting-men sat about the board in the great hall; of the growing love of Jehan and the Lady Clothilde; of the clatter of arms in the courtyard, and the grunts of the varlets who carried the few cannon to the embrasures; of the news that came to me that the Seigneur Hugues continued to sit in mocking silence in his prison tower—of all this I need say little.

It surprised me at first that the Count Guillaume so readily yielded to my advice to prepare himself against attack. But, in truth, he was at his wits' end to know how to act; and, then, to his soldierly training the advice had appealed as a sound precaution, in the carrying out of which he could find vent for his chafing energies.

Indeed, as the hours passed, he became more cheerful. The prospect of battle brought out his surer traits. He knew the strength of his castle, and he believed that any assaulting force would wreck itself against his walls and leave

him stronger than before. That much he proclaimed at the feast, and all goblets were drained when his words were done.

I remember how he stood by his seat, his legs braced apart like pillars, his face afire with zeal, and thundered assurance of his strength. He would not speak too definitely concerning the enemy, he said, but he had knowledge that an enemy would come. And that enemy would find all efforts vain.

But alas! what followed is not clear to me. The wine of the Loire is potent, and I drank deeply. Jehan, who sat beside me at the head of the table, counseled me to take no more, but I answered that, were my cup the hemlock of Socrates, I would drain it to the success of Count Guillaume.

"Keep your head, Master Foucart," urged Jehan.

At this I laughed, and told him that my head would keep. And I sang to the company a song of my own making, the same which Master Villon had refused to hear. The last that I recall is the cheering which followed my song.

Jehan told me afterward that he carried me to bed, after he had explained to the board that in the veins of a man whose head was busied as was mine, wine surged with double strength.

But I woke in the morning, well toward noon, none the worse but for a thickness of thought which the douse of a basin of cold water soon remedied.

And, strangely enough, I found myself able to look upon the problem of the day with greater acuteness than before.

The king, I realized, had sent me to Mescun too late, for at the time of our arrival the gage of battle had virtually been cast. My hopes rested on Jehan and the Lady Clothilde. The brothers, Guillaume and Hugues, were too far estranged to be brought together.

As the day advanced I sought an interview with Guillaume. He was restlessly pacing his cabinet, running his hands over a suit of Milanese armor which stood in a corner, and rapping his knuckles against the ringing metal, or going to the easement to look out over the plain.

"Well, Master Foucart," he said, turning to me. "we are well prepared. Now if the enemy will but come soon."

"Rainemont is impetuous," I said. "He will come soon, if he comes at all; and if Pierre has reached him, he is quite sure to come."

"Curses on my brother's treachery!" he muttered.

"No need for curses," I protested. "Your brother has been made a tool by that false knight. He is in worse case than yourself."

He sighed heavily.

"Would I could see it all clearly!"

"Then hear what I say," I spoke quickly, eagerly. "The issue has rested with your lady sister. She would have none of Rainemont. Why could not you and the Seigneur Hugues leave the matter wholly to her choice?"

"Hugues would never agree to that," he grumbled.

"True. But have you eyes, sir count?"

"Eyes?"

"Have you not seen how her favor goes? Jehan de Tarroloys wears her ribbon."

He looked at me, startled.

"That is a reward for service to her."

"But when her eye is on him—have you not seen?"

With an oath he paced away from me.

"I will not have it," he roared—"an untried stripling, a youth with an empty estate. He who comes to her must bring fortune, not take it."

"But heed me," I protested. "Jehan de Tarroloys, though a youth, has proved himself. He is of gentle birth—his shield bears sixteen quarterings. His estate may be empty, through famine and plague, but industry will set it right. Give your sister to him, and she shall be well guarded. And then there can be no quarrel for the Seigneur Hugues."

He knit his brows over this.

"But, Jolin," he said at last.

"Leave that to be adjusted. It would go well as your sister's dower."

"She is a lady among thousands," he said proudly.

"And Jehan de Tarroloys is a man among a million. Believe me, sir count, I know him."

From his mutterings I realized that the plan was getting its hold on him.

"A few words from the priest," I said, "and all things will be brighter here."

"It is too soon." The count was struggling with the idea. "Tarroloys has not yet shown himself to me."

"Then, think it over," I said, "and the sooner the event the better all will be."

Enough had been said for the time, and I left the count with his thoughts.

I now sought out Jehan. He was in the courtyard, idly watching the varlets at their work, and now and then exchanging converse with some of the fighting men.

"How fares it with you, M. Jehan?" I asked, drawing him aside.

"Well," he answered. "But there is a fever in this preparation that gets into my blood. I itch to see the enemy."

I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Ah, my youth," I said, "your fever is not all for fighting. Do not think that I have not seen."

His answer was simply given.

"I have known that you would see. There is no shame to me if all the world sees."

"Nor to her," I said soberly. "You deserve well, M. Jehan. And my wish to you is the success which is already yours for the asking."

He took my hand with a return of his old boyish eagerness.

"You believe that she cares?"

"Believe? Why, do *you* doubt it?"

"When I am with her, I *know*. But when we are separated I have misgivings, Master Foucart, for then my mind refuses to believe what her eyes have told my heart. It has all come so quickly."

I smiled.

"Yes, quickly—to you both."

"But my estates are poor."

"Love makes all life rich," I answered. "Without it the earth is a desert."

He meditated, hope rising in his face.

"Tell me," I said, "where is the lady now?"

"Attending to her duties as chatelaine. There is much to occupy her, now that the castle is manned."

"If Rainemont comes," said I, "she will no longer be able to take the air. Go to her now, while there is still no enemy about, and ask her to talk with you on the eastern battlements."

He was away without a word.

"Hold!" I called. He returned

swiftly. "Do not be afraid to follow your heart," I said. "It is a new master for you, but, believe me, a safe one."

My next step was to go to the Seigneur Hugues. He was more silent than when I had talked with him the day before.

"You know, I suppose, that the castle has been garrisoned and provisioned?" I said to him.

"I have ears," he replied, "and eyes."

He waved toward the casement, whence it was possible still to see the cattle being driven. Such of the herds as were not brought within the walls were, I knew, being taken to a far corner of the county, out of reach of the expected enemy.

"Your brother can resist a long siege," I ventured.

"Long or short, he must yield in the end."

"But, yourself—what of you?" I persisted. "You must starve with the rest."

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled sardonically. I guessed that he had some project of escape.

"Do you know," I went on, "that you have been much befooled by Raine-mont?"

"How so?" His voice was tolerant.

"You think he is aiding you. In truth it is you who are playing into his hands. Let him have your sister, and how long do you think it will be before he masters you?"

Again the shrug of the shoulders.

"He has set you and the count by the ears for his own profit." I spoke gravely and earnestly. "Your family will be ruined for his aggrandizement. Your sister will suffer in his hands. Are you, the Seigneur de Cornay, willing in your heart to see all this?"

Suddenly he stood erect before me with blazing eyes.

"What do you think I owe my brother? You are a man of craft, Master Foucart. Hear me! I was always abler than Guillaume. As a lad I could outmatch him in feats of arms, outwit him in argument. But he was the older, and, therefore, in the end, by our father's command, he would ever have his way. And when he became a great clumsy knight, he was the head of our house. The broader lands were his, and I must go to Cornay—to Cornay, with its pasture hills and its unthriving vineyards.

"Think you that was pleasant to me, Master Foucart? Then, hear me again. There was a lady. I loved her, but her father gave her to Guillaume, and she died, childless, within a year. I have not married. And why? He, great beast that he is, has always had everything. To me it has always been the small portion."

His outburst came to me as a great surprise. I had not expected so to get at the heart of the man.

"Your brother," I said, "may be thick-witted, with a mind not open to what is new, but he is not evil."

"Bah!" He spat. "It is just that. Stupid though he is, he has always been called 'Guillaume the Good.'"

"Guillaume the Good!" I cannot show the intense scorn with which the words were uttered, nor can I picture the baleful gleam of the *seigneur's* eyes.

"Too clumsy to be bad," he went on—"stuck in the ruts of life! How I hate him!"

He seized my shoulders, gripping them with hands that hurt me.

"Do you know what it is to hate? Do you know what it is to wish another man to suffer?" A hard laugh broke in his throat. "By all the saints," he said, "I would joyfully have him kill me, if only that he might feel the remorse of Cain!"

"But your sister, *seigneur*—do you wish her harm?"

"No." He softened. "No, though she clings to Guillaume. But he is doomed; I have filled the ears of the country with my wrongs."

"But would you give her to Raine-mont?"

He released his grip on my shoulders. "Raine-mont loves her," he said. "He would make her a great lady."

"But would she be happy?"

"She would be dutiful," he returned, "and if not, the sorrow would lie on her own conscience."

"The Count Guillaume's refusal is also hers," I answered. "It is her happiness that is at stake."

"Happiness is not for our family. We shall fall, but we shall fall like stars. The lands of Cornay are not fertile, but the men of Cornay are brave. For years I have sacrificed everything to make my

forces strong. But Rainemont will do the work. I am thankful for that, as I would not have my brother's blood on my hands."

"*Seigneur*, if blood is shed, it will lie upon your hands. God will look to the fomer of this discord."

He laughed.

"If God looks so far as that," he exclaimed bitterly, "he will find my father's favoritism."

It pained me to learn how years had nursed such hatred. But I had not done.

"If you are so determined against your brother," I argued, "why not first agree to arrange that your sister shall not suffer? Find your issue in some way other than the disposal of her hand."

"In no other way will Rainemont support me."

"You are frank with me, *seigneur*." I looked at him searchingly.

"Why not? It is too late for you to undo my plans."

"Be not too certain of that. Here," I beckoned to the casement. Below us was extended the eastern wall of the battlements. Upon its broad top walked Jehan and the Lady Clothilde, oblivious to all but themselves, conversing slowly with many a tender gesture. And as I looked, Jehan took her hand in his and raised it to his lips.

I turned to the *Seigneur Hugues*. The rage on his face made me fearful for my own safety. In time he looked at me, and his eyes were strangely cold.

"Have you a hand in this?" he asked.

"Who can foresee or prevent the joining of two hearts?" I replied.

"If I were sure it was your work," he muttered, "I would strangle you."

I had never been nearer to death, and it is useless to pretend that I was not frightened. But I knew that in such a case the best policy was to divert attention to new things.

"There at least is a fact," I said, pointing to the lovers. "They have but to go to the chaplain and your work is undone. Why not admit it? Then let Jolin fall to your sister as a dower. You will be released, and your brother's position will be that much the weaker."

"Never!" he exclaimed. "You would set me back ten years."

"Fate has already done that. Why

not yield graciously to Fate, and wait your further chance?"

"It may be a trick," he muttered. "You may have set your *seigneur* there to fool me."

"If their love be not true," I said, "then my life shall be forfeit to you."

"No, no. I will wait. Ha!" He leaned forward in the casement, and, shading his eyes with his hand, peered far out on the plain. "Ha!" he exclaimed again. "Look, Master Foucart, there is my deliverance. I will wait! I will wait! Let us see what Rainemont does."

I, too, peered out on the plain. The sun, which was falling in the west, threw long, slanting rays toward the forest of Jolin, and from the far distance came to me a sudden gleam—and another—and another—and then a long, sparkling line. It was the flashing of bright armor.

"Rainemont!" I whispered.

"Yes, Rainemont," the *seigneur* laughed wildly. Then, raising his arms in a gesture of unholy joy, he cried: "This hour marks the end of Guillaume!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE CHALLENGE.

THE approach of the enemy had been observed by other eyes as sharp and eager as the *seigneur's*. When I left his turret prison and went down the winding stairs to the lower halls, I found a scene of much excitement.

The Count Guillaume in person stood in the courtyard, superintending the final preparations for defense. The last yokel was sent under the portcullis with his cart to rumble back to the town, and then, with much creaking, the drawbridge was raised. Everything inflammable was stored away where no lighted arrow could reach it. The handful of arquebusiers took their stations on the battlements, and, with them, the archers and crossbowmen, who had been gathered from the countryside.

Meantime the gleaming line seen from the walls and upper casements drew nearer, though hidden now and then by the little gulleys it had to traverse.

I sought a point of vantage on the

wall, and for an hour watched the oncoming force. Soon I was able to judge of its strength. At the front rode a line of armored knights, fully sixty of them. On the flanks were men-at-arms, and behind came squires and varlets. The fighting number was about three hundred, by the estimate of my eye—a formidable enemy, but scarcely strong enough to attack Count Guillaume's castle.

Would Rainemont wait for the slow processes of siege? That seemed an unlikely policy for one of his impatient and masterful temper. But, perhaps, other forces were to join him, combining a strength which would increase the chances of a successful assault.

I had no longing for a siege. It might be carried on for months, and even a fortnight of delay meant the failure of my work for the king. What would his malice be against an agent who permitted himself to be entrapped within a beleaguered castle? But I still had hopes for the success of my craft—for the Lady Clothilde loved Jehan.

The enemy drew up in camp two bowshots from the castle, and between us and the town. Knights dismounted, and standards were set. A man-at-arms pointed out to me the banner of Rainemont, flaunting bravely in the wind. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"The banner of Cornay!" he cried. "See, on the farther flank!"

So the Seneschal Baisignan had come to the relief of his master without waiting for the word I was to send him by Simon Crouay. I wondered at the *seigneur's* hardihood in ordering this move—for I had no doubt that the command had been sent to Baisignan by the servant Pierre. The appearance of the arms of Cornay would but the more enrage the Count Guillaume. And then I remembered the black view I had been given of the soul of the Seigneur Hugues. He would welcome death at the hands of his brother.

Word now came to me that the Count Guillaume desired my attendance at a council which he was to hold with his chiefs, and I hastened to the great hall, where the principal vassals were already gathered.

At the head of the hall sat Guillaume. A squire standing at his right held his sword and helmet. Before him were

Raguillet, Solammes, Charles de Ramé, and others whom I have not named because they are not central in my narrative. But they were brave men all, and well-born, and loyal to their liege lord of Mescun. I looked about for Jehan, but he had not appeared.

"Men," said Guillaume, his words coming from his lips like the repeated blows of a mace, "the Comte de Rainemont has appeared before our castle with an armed force, among whom are the vassals of our brother. Hugues, Seigneur de Cornay, now a prisoner in our hands. What their purpose may be we shall soon learn. Meantime, we are prepared for a stout defense, and though their numbers are greater than ours, we will not hesitate ourselves to attack them, if the issue should so require. You know our wrongs—the ingratitude of our brother, his seizure of Jolin, and the manner in which he has turned his friends against us. We now call on you to stand with us in what may befall."

Swords flashed high, and cheers rose from a dozen throats. I felt puny amid all that show of strength.

At this moment there came to us from without the prolonged note of a horn. Silent, we waited to learn its significance. Then the sound of voices, raised to carry across a distance, told us that a parley was in progress, and presently, while we waited, there came a guard to announce the approach of a pursuivant from the Comte de Rainemont.

"Let him come in," said the count.

The messenger, who was now admitted, wore the gaudy blazonry of his office, with a tabard upon which was embroidered the arms of Rainemont. For the trumpery of heraldic device I have little regard. It has served its day, and it now maintains a pomp which I think is little needed to conduct the business of courts. The king, my master, has much contempt for it. But to the Count Guillaume and his vassals this showy figure was an object of respect.

The pursuivant advanced through the hall with a measured step, and paused midway of the line of vassals, who had made way for him.

"Who are you?" demanded the count.

"I am Rouge Croix," the pursuivant replied, "a junior officer of the Heraldic

College of Toulouse, and now in the service of Guy, Comte de Rainemont."

"What is your message?" The count put the question grimly.

"In the name of Guy, Comte de Rainemont, I require that you set free from custody the person of your brother, Hugues, Seigneur de Cornay, with no condition of release."

Guillaume looked about at his men, then, turning again to the messenger, asked briefly: "Are there any further demands?"

"My master requires that you deliver to him as prisoner, Jehan, Seigneur de Tarroloys, who now abides in your castle."

"And further?" The count was impatient to have all said.

"There is no further word. Failing your compliance, the Comte de Rainemont gives notice that within the day, he will besiege and attack you. He bids me add that in this matter the nobility of the country stand with him, and that their arms will support him."

In the silence that followed, the count seemed to be casting about for the best words in which to frame his answer. I noted that Rainemont had shrewdly left apart from the issue the disposal of the hand of the Lady Clothilde. But his malignity against Jehan was manifest. The ignominy of his defeat by my beloved youth would fan his proud temper to a whiter and whiter heat. Yet I had no fear for Jehan, who was so far above the hurts of envious pride.

And now, while Rouge Croix waited and the count pondered, through the entrance at the far end of the hall came Jehan, and by his side was the Lady Clothilde. Hand in hand they stood, gazing on the scene before them. So lost had they been in their own happiness, as I could guess, that the sounds of martial preparation had scarcely reached their ears. There was exalted peace on the face of the youth, and the lady's eyes glowed with a tender pride.

Swiftly I moved to the side of Guillaume.

"Pardon me, sir count," I whispered. "I must have word with you."

He frowned at me, amazed at the interruption, but, doubtless recalling the importance of my position as the king's

agent, and noting the earnestness of my expression, he leaned toward me.

"Well," he muttered, "be brief. It is not proper that I should be approached at this moment."

"Sir count, do you remember what I have said to you regarding your lady sister and the Seigneur Jehan?"

He nodded.

"Then let the match quickly be brought to pass. It will weaken Rainemont's case. See, where the lovers stand."

His eyes followed my gesture, and as the relation between Jehan and the lady became clear to his mind a deeper flush spread over his face.

"Bid the pursuivant and your vassals retire for a while," I went on, "and then do you question the Seigneur Jehan and the lady."

He nodded, and clearing his throat, required all to leave the room except Jehan and the lady and myself. When this order had been obeyed and the youth had moved forward with the Lady Clothilde, he gazed on them long with his heavy eyes. In his dull way he seemed to read their hearts.

Finally he spoke: "Seigneur, is this true?"

"Sir count, it is true," replied Jehan, with noble directness of utterance. "The lady, your sister, has given me her heart."

The count turned to her.

"Sister, is this true?"

"It is true, my brother," she answered in a low voice.

The count brooded.

"Well," he muttered at last, "the *seigneur* has already saved her from shame. He is brave and loyal. I am growing older and I have no children. Let it be as you will."

Jehan bent over the lady's hand, while she cast down at him such a graciously loving smile as I had never seen.

I spoke to the count.

"Make this known to Rainemont," I said, "and summon your chaplain and have the marriage celebrated this very evening."

Already committed to the course, he offered no objections. The pursuivant and the vassals were called back to the hall, and the count delivered his answer.

"Return to your master," he said,

"and tell him that Guillaume, Comte de Mescun, denies the authority of his demands. The Comte de Rainemont has no cause to demand the release of our brother, Hugues, Seigneur de Cornay, who is held here until he shall consent to withdraw from our appanage, the forest of Jolin, which he has wrongfully seized.

"The person of Jehan, Seigneur de Tarroloys, we will not surrender, first, because the Comte de Rainemont has no claim upon him, and, second, because he has this day become the affianced husband of our sister, the Lady Clothilde de Mescun. Say, further, to your master, that his aggression against us shall speedily be punished as it deserves. And now depart."

The pursuivant took his leave. A narrow foot-bridge had been placed across the moat for his entrance, and, after his departure it was drawn back, so that the castle offered no approach for the enemy.

Meantime the vassals were crowding about Jehan, pledging him their fealty. They had liked the youth from his first appearance among them. His easy and simple ways had won their hearts, and I doubt if there was a man among them who was not glad that he was to become the husband of their lady.

"The quicker the wedding, the better," I whispered to the count. "Will you not send for your chaplain?"

"Your advice is sound, Master Foucart. First, the wedding, then the fighting." He chuckled at his own joke. "Moreover," he added, "I would not delay the happiness of those two. See how they look upon each other."

Indeed, now that the vassals stood aside, Jehan and the Lady Clothilde conversed together softly, and their eyes betrayed their words to us.

But, suddenly, the lady's brow became troubled. She turned to the count.

"Brother," she said, "is it right that I should be happy while Hugues remains a bitter prisoner? If you will grant me a boon, it is this, that you let him keep Jolin."

"What? To tell the world that he has beaten me? That I have yielded to save my castle from assault?"

"Why do you care what he tells the world?" she asked gently. "You would

still be rich and strong. Peace is uppermost in my mind to-day."

I intervened.

"Lady," I said, "whatever the concession made to him, the Seigneur de Cornay would not yet be satisfied. His mind is frenzied." This may sound as if it were opposed to the plan which I had formed; but I had changed my tactics quickly, having seen that Rainemont must be disposed of before Hugues could be broken. "He thinks," I went on, "that this attack upon the castle will not only free him, but set him high. Therefore, he will await the issue of battle. Let us first drive off the enemy: then we may the better deal with the Seigneur Hugues."

An approving murmur arose among the vassals. As soldiers they favored my seemingly bolder course.

"But," said the lady, "if my brother Hugues should agree—"

"Lady," I said truly, "I have talked with him, and know his thoughts. He is too far committed for compromise."

The lady sighed. The count, nodding his acquiescence in my words, which indeed offered him the road most saving to his pride, exclaimed: "First, the wedding, sister." Then he sent a varlet to summon Father Ambrose.

I felt the elation of success, for already I saw how Rainemont might be dealt with, once the marriage ceremony was performed. I reflected that the king would have to admit, however grudgingly, that I had done well at Mescun.

And then there was a commotion at the door. The varlet had returned, but without the priest. He came forward tremblingly.

"My lord," he said in an agitated voice, for he knew what was forward—"my lord, Father Ambrose was called this morning to the town to receive the confession of a dying man, and he has not returned. It is feared that he has been stopped by the enemy."

We looked at one another in dismay. No priest, no marriage.

From a door at the back of the hall came a sneering laugh. I turned.


There, one hand clutching the arras, a heavy mace in the other, stood the Seigneur Hugues.

(To be continued.)

PLANS THAT MISCARRIED.

BY THEODORE ROBERTS.

A SHORT STORY.

HEN Jack Chant came home to Harbor Grace from his foreign voyaging, he found the winning-back of Polly Walsh no very difficult matter. Polly's affections had wavered—or strayed, to be more exact—during his absence; but on the very day of his return her heart forgot that it had ever forgotten, and poor Tim Figg was dropped from a sweet ecstasy to a bitter despair.

Tim should have known that the only chance of perpetuating the ecstasy was the very slim chance that his rival might never return to Harbor Grace—that he might drown at sea, or be arrested by the police for disturbing the peace of some tropical city, or fall in love with a Spanish girl somewhere down among the islands of delight.

But Jack Chant did not drown at sea. We have no proof that the other accidents did not befall him. However that may be, he came home and married Polly within a fortnight of his arrival; and, scarcely a month later, he set out for St. John's, from there to sail for Brazil as boatswain of the barkantine Hope. From the tides of the seven seas he took his bread. Married or single, his hazardous wage was not to be earned by staying ashore.

Tim Figg had been a stay-at-home all his life, never having ventured even far enough afield to follow the shore-fishery. He had worked about the harbor, now with a shipwright, now in a merchant's sheds, and for a time as cook in a sailors' boarding-house; but when Jack Chant stepped aboard the Hope, in St. John's Harbor, there was Tim Figg in the galley, polishing a copper.

Not once, since his marriage, had

Jack exchanged a word with Tim, though he had caught a fleeting sight of him on several occasions. Now he stepped forward to the door of the galley.

"Good mornin' to ye, Tim," said he. "I didn't know as how ye was shippin' for a foreign v'yage."

Tim looked straight at him with his dull and colorless eyes, but did not answer a word. He gave the copper a few finishing rubs, hung it up against the bulkhead between the galley and the sail-room, and spat indifferently on the deck within an inch of the toe of one of the boatswain's sea-boots.

Jack returned the ugly stare, at first wonderingly and then sardonically. The meaning of it came to him, plain enough.

"So ye feel as uncivil about it as all that, do ye?" said he. "Well, b'y, ye can goggle me wid them fishes' eyes until ye dies o' old age an' 'twon't help ye none."

Jack Chant, though bright enough where his wits were concerned and a fine seaman, was dull of vision toward some of the subtler issues of life. For his own part, he possessed a thin skull and a thick skin—figuratively speaking. It did not dawn upon him that in Tim Figg the thickness and the thinness were exactly reversed. He could not see how such a dull, ugly lump of a man as Tim could possess abnormally sensitive feelings.

But he was remarkably good-natured, was Jack Chant. He laughed at Tim's ungracious attitude toward him—as he could well afford to. He laughed about it to the men in the fore-castle and to Mr. West, the mate. He even joked of it to Tim himself—a one-sided joking, in which Tim did nothing but stare at the light-hearted boatswain with dull

eyes, in which cores of red were beginning to glimmer.

Anxious to stand well with the boatswain, and being of a merry turn of mind into the bargain, an A.B. named Denis Stroud asked Tim, one morning, why he hadn't invited him to his wedding. He was posted in the galley-door at the time, holding his tin mug and tin platter extended toward the cook, who was about to fill the one with hot coffee and the other with hot porridge.

"Weddin'?" queried the cook. "Sure, lad, I never had no weddin'!"

"Then the more shame to ye for sayin' so, cook," replied Denis. "for whatever became o' that fine girl what was so sot on marryin' ye?—Polly Walsh was her name."

It was altogether too bad. How was Denis Stroud to know that the cook was such a hot-tempered fellow? He had never so much as even answered a word back to the boatswain. It caused quite a commotion, anyhow; and as soon as the porridge-pot was removed from the A.B.'s head and the oatmeal and coffee-grounds scraped out of his wig and whiskers, both men were led before the captain.

The captain was of an easy-going temperament, and nothing more came of the rumpus than a warning to Denis and his fellows to mind their own affairs and let the cook mind his. Then Mr. West bandaged Denis's head in rags and sweet-oil and gave him two days in which to recover from the scald of the misapplied breakfast.

II.

AFTER that, neither Stroud nor any other out of the fore-castle ever referred to the subject of Tim's unfortunate love-affair anywhere within possible range of Tim's ears.

Jack Chant, however, treated both the captain's warning and the more evident warning of Stroud's scalded head as matters in no way concerning him. He saw that, for a reason which he believed to be the cook's fear of him, he could badger the poor fellow without risk of receiving a reply. So, being thick of skin, he treated the man of pans and coppers to unkind witticisms whenever the whim moved him.

This remarkable state of affairs between the boatswain and the cook lasted for about twenty days—and not once, in all that time, did the cook answer the boatswain by so much as one word. But there was a red light in his eyes that would have meant more than a hundred words to any one of less dulness of spirit than Jack Chant.

The Hope was twenty-one days out of St. John's when Mr. West drew the boatswain aside one evening for a private word.

"Look 'e here, bo's'n," said he, "yer goin' a bit too far wid this here plaguin' o' Tim Figg. Take my advice, an' belay it. Belay it, lad, an' stop up the slack. If I was the cook, by Jerry, I'd have stove yer face in long afore this. I tell ye this, bo's'n, in the manner o' a friendly caution; but if ye don't take the caution, then I'll be puttin' it to ye a trifle less polite, by the livin' flinders!"

"Sure, sir, Tim don't be mindin' my little jokes," replied Jack.

"If he don't mind 'em, will ye tell me why he let out so savage at Denis Stroud?" inquired Mr. West, in a caustic voice.

"Denis be's a stranger to him; but I be's a old friend, in a manner o' speakin'," replied the boatswain.

"A friend!" exclaimed Mr. West. With an air of solemn displeasure, he poked a thick forefinger against the front of Jack Chant's shirt. "Bo's'n," he said, "ye'd best take my word for it—ye've turned the knife round an' round a dozen times too often. D'ye think he fears ye? Then ye be a foolin' of yer-self, bo's'n! He's kep' his hands off ye so far—why, I don't know—but I tell ye, John Chant, 'twill not be for much longer. The worm will be a turnin' of himself round one o' these days, ye may lay to that. The red devils shine in his eyes every time he looks at ye. Again I warn ye to mind what ye're about, bo's'n."

That night, in his berth in the outer cabin, the boatswain thought over what Mr. West had said to him. He considered it all to be the veriest moonshine. He had a poor opinion of Tim Figg. He did not believe for a moment that he possessed either the courage or the gumption to resent the heart-

less joking of the past three weeks, or to think of ever obtaining satisfaction for it.

To a certain extent, he was right. His cruel jeering meant little to the cook, in itself. But it served to keep red-hot the coal of hate in that dull heart. A man who makes elaborate plans before leaving home, and undertakes a voyage of thousands of miles—in spite of an inborn fear of the sea—to carry them to a sure finish, is not the one to lose his self-control and throw everything out of gear because of a few superfluous, minor injuries.

The cook knew what he was about. His reason for shipping aboard the *Hope* was as clear as glass in his slow mind; and he meant to accomplish his work all in good time, according to his own careful plans.

The boatswain sank into slumber at last, still thinking of what Mr. West had said to him. His berth was on the port side of the mess-room, beside that of the mate, and opposite the cook's berth and a small pantry. In fair weather in the low latitudes it was his habit to leave both his door and his port-hole open all night. So it was on this night.

The boatswain awoke suddenly. A gray light was in his berth—starshine reflected from the sea through the open port. He had felt no physical touch: his bodily ears had heard no sound: but there, standing close beside his bunk—not nine inches away from him—and gazing down at him with dull, sinister eyes, was Tim Figg, the cook. For a second, Chant's only sensation was one of astonishment. Then the mate's warning flashed into his mind and fear knocked at his ribs. But he was a brave man. Though he felt the chill of fear as readily as any man, he had the tough spirit that could hide it—that could keep the white flicker of it out of his eyes and the rasp of it out of his voice.

"What d'y'e want, cook?" he asked quietly.

Without a word, and without a shadow of any change of emotion on his broad face, the cook turned and moved slowly and silently from the berth. The boatswain lay as still as stone, listening, for a full minute.

Then he slipped from his bunk, passed

round the table in the mess-room, and went stealthily to the door of the cook's berth. He looked within very cautiously. The cook lay in his bunk, flat on his back, with his eyes shut and his mouth open.

The boatswain touched him on the shoulder, but he did not stir.

Jack Chant spoke to Mr. West of what had happened next morning.

Mr. West went straight to Tim Figg and asked him what he meant by entering the boatswain's berth at such a suspicious time.

"If I was in the bo's'n's berth, sir, I's not to blame, for I's cursed wid the weakness o' walkin' in my sleep," replied the cook.

The mate did not believe this; nor did the boatswain when he heard it, for he had seen a light in the cook's eyes that was not of slumber. However, they did not mention their doubt of the truth of the cook's statement; but after that, throughout the long days before the vessel reached Rio Janeiro, Jack Chant left the cook in peace.

In Rio the captain issued an order that no man was to go ashore. He was afraid of fever and the effects of bad rum—for the crew. It was evident from his actions that he had no fear of these things for himself. The boatswain was not one to have his fun spoiled by a stupid order of the captain's. He had been refused shore-leave many a time before, and in many a port, but had never suffered serious inconvenience from this whim of selfish ship-masters.

So he went ashore in Rio on the first night after the barkantine's arrival at the consignee's wharf. True, he went very quietly, and in the shadow of darkness, intending to return as quietly, and well before sunrise. He did not make his departure absolutely unobserved, however. Tim Figg noticed it, and followed him over the side within ten minutes.

When a sailorman skips ashore for a few hours of fun, he does not, as a usual thing, carry his extra clothing and his valuables along with him. But Tim Figg stole away from the barkantine with the entire contents of his sea-chest in a bag on his shoulder. It looked as if he did not intend to return.

The cook spent a hard half-hour in getting a sight of the boatswain; but at last he caught a glimpse of him in a native rum-shop, seated at a liquor splashed table with three mariners who did not belong to the Newfoundland barkantine.

Evidently a glimpse was all that Tim Figg wanted at the time, for he did not enter the shop, but moved along to a shadowed corner about five yards away from the open door, lowered his bag of clothing to the ground, and seated himself stolidly upon it.

Though the stars burned white overhead, the streets of that poverty-stricken quarter of the city were unilluminated. Crooked shadows filled the narrow thoroughfares. Here and there issued yellow light from an unshuttered window or open door. The air was hot and stagnant, and freighted with all manner of odors foreign to Tim Figg's stay-at-home nostrils—the scents of reeking sugar, molasses, and jerked-beef from some near-by warehouse, of bitter Brazilian tobacco and white rum from the window and doorway beside him.

But Tim seemed to take little interest in his strange surroundings. He filled his pipe, lit it and sat quiet. From somewhere along the crooked street came the clipped, strumming note of a banjo and the liquid tinkle of a guitar. But the music was muffled and fitful. Now a dulled sound, like the voice of the whole great city, composed of the rolling of wheels, the clatter of hoofs, the busy stir of pleasure-seeking feet, laughter, argument, and song, wafted into that narrow alley, filled it softly for a moment and as softly withdrew. But Tim Figg lacked imagination, and his spirit remained unmoved by that romantic sound.

From the shop at his back he heard, though indistinctly, a voice of assurance which he knew to belong to Jack Chant. It stirred him to a slow, unpleasant smile.

A man in white cotton, smoking a cigarette, passed close in front of him, walking noiselessly on naked feet, and entered the shop. A woman laughed shrilly in a house across the way.

Tim sat quiet for more than an hour. Sometimes his head nodded, heavy with

sleep; but he always waked quickly, with an apprehensive start, and listened eagerly for the boatswain's voice in the shop at his back. Now they were singing in the shop, and some one was playing on a mouth-organ. The husky voices bellowed and quavered, each for itself, with little regard for time or tune, and none whatever for harmony. Higher, louder, and more devil-may-care than all the others rang the voice of Jack Chant. The cook swore with unspeakable hate and disgust.

Suddenly the riotous discord ceased, and the bumping and scraping of pushed-back chairs took its place. Following this came a brief silence, broken quickly and clearly by the striking of all the ships' bells in the harbor. It was midnight. Tim got alertly to his feet, and at the same moment the boatswain and his companions issued from the wine-shop.

The cook followed his enemy and the other roisterous mariners out of that street and into another, and to a larger and more busy drinking-place than the first. He followed at a discreet distance, unobserved. Again he took up his post outside. This was a more lively street than that in which he had kept his former vigil, and he was jostled more than once by careless wayfarers.

He had not waited for more than twenty minutes when something happened that he had not anticipated. Within the house of entertainment there arose, of a sudden, a tumult of shouting and cursing in English and the language of the country. The clash and tinkle of breaking glass reached the cook's ears. From the doorway issued a dozen people of unheroic spirit.

III.

TIM FIGG pushed his way to the door and looked inside. By the light of the one remaining lamp—two had been overturned and extinguished—he saw a hurly-burly of human figures revolving, struggling, closing, parting, separately and collectively busy with the desperate work of attack and defense.

He stepped across the threshold, the better to make out what was going on. Mixed as the combat was, he soon saw that the struggle was between Chant and

his former companions, supported by two seamen from an American cable-ship, and ten or a dozen dark-skinned mariners from a Brazilian cruiser.

The Anglo-Saxons were using their fists and convenient articles of furniture as weapons of offense and defense; but more than one of the Latins had knives in their hands. Tim had no more than ascertained this much, and was about to retreat to the open, when he was seized upon by one of the Brazilians. He caught the glint of a knife, held low and curving upward.

Quick as lightning, a chill of fear went through him, followed and obliterated by a hot twinge of anger. Forgetting the weapon hidden upon his own person, he hurled himself against his antagonist and clutched him by the throat and the right wrist. The little fellow was like a fly in his grasp—like a poisonous fly with its sting drawn. The cook got rid of him by cracking his head against the wall.

Now the rage of battle was red-hot in Tim Figg's breast. The bitter, private hate was forgotten—for the moment. He hurled himself into the thick of the struggle, and was instantly engaged by two of the enemy. One he clasped so tight and close as to deprive him of the use of his knife; but the second would surely have accomplished a fatal stroke had not a mahogany stool, in the hand of Jack Chant, descended upon the darting arm.

The Brazilian dropped the knife with a yell of pain and made a side-long leap which won him clear of the center of combat. Again the stool was swung—and the little man in Tim's grasp went limp as old rags and slid to the floor. For half a second Tim and Jack Chant stood foot to foot and eye to eye.

"Mind yourself, lad! Turn round!" cried Chant.

The warning was too late. An empty bottle struck the back of the cook's head and plunged him forward on hands and knees, fair between the boatswain's feet.

The cook felt too weak and sick to move; but his mind was clear. He crouched there on the floor that was wet with spilled liquor and spilled blood, and felt, on either side of him,

one of the boatswain's sinewy legs. He was struck by booted feet and naked feet. He heard and felt the sanguinary conflict twisting around and above him; and, though his eyes were closed, he knew that the whirling mahogany stool in his enemy's hand kept a zone of comparative safety around his helpless body.

It was bitter knowledge for Tim Figg. Here was the man whom he despised and whom he had intended to kill, standing unharmed and undismayed above him, defending him from fearful injury and death—the better man and the better fighter. In agony of spirit, and with a fumbling hand, he drew a knife from some hidden place under his belt. And then the black mist settled upon his brain.

When Tim opened his eyes, he found himself in his berth.

At the moment, Mr. West looked round the edge of the door.

"So ye be alive again at last, be ye?" said the mate.

"Be's the bo's'n aboard, sir?" asked the cook faintly.

"'Twas him lugged ye aboard, ye worthless puddin'-maker—aye, an' wid a knife stickin' into his back all the while," replied the mate tartly. "Ye'd be a dead man this very minute but for him."

Shame filled the cook at that—a sudden, hot shame that made him regret that the boatswain had not left him to die in the hell of the wine-shop.

Then something twitched in his brain, and fear flashed through him. He strove desperately to remember what had happened after he had drawn his knife.

"Did ye say a knife?" he queried.

Mr. West stepped close to the edge of the bunk. "'Twas a Brazilian knife; an' ye'd better be thankin' God for that, Tim Figg," he said.

"Be's he dead?" whispered the other.

"No," said the mate.

"I sees things different now," said the cook slowly. "Wid all his ungodly ways, he be's a better man nor me—a better man on the sea an' a better man in a fight. Maybe 'tis the woman I'd ought to hate, not Jack."

"If I was a poor fool wid a busted skull, I'd quit hatin' anybody for a while," said Mr. West dryly, but not unkindly.

THE KNIFE AND THE PAINTING.

BY ARTHUR STANLEY WHEELER.

A SHORT STORY.



MONG the acquaintances of Majinton and Oltarsh, it was commonly reported that the original cause of the hatred which existed between the two men was the photometer that Oltarsh invented and that Majinton stole—laying therewith the foundation of his fortune; but their friends said that the hatred might easily have arisen without the assistance of the photometer.

Majinton and Oltarsh, the friends averred, were so dissimilar that, granted a meeting, they must almost inevitably have come to hate each other. Oltarsh was ugly, clever, and passionate, while Majinton was handsome, calculating, and cold. Oltarsh resembled a gargoyle and believed in the Deity; Majinton looked like a god and professed to believe in nothing at all except himself.

To give the details of the warfare which they waged—always, of course, according to strictly civilized standards—would be tiresome, as well as immaterial to the story of the Knife and the Painting; suffice it to say that Majinton won and Oltarsh lost. The latter, after many ups and downs, found himself facing, at thirty-four, a foe even more relentless than Majinton. He fought disease for a year and a half, then, aware that he was dying, sent a messenger to Majinton's bachelor apartment. The messenger carried a slip of dirty paper, on which was scrawled an address and these words:

Come to me as soon as possible, for the sake of our old and cherished enmity.

Oltarsh knew his man; it cost Majinton some trouble to discover the wretched lodging indicated by the address, but less than an hour after the delivery of the

message he entered the door of the sick-room. He gasped involuntarily as he stepped into the foul air, and an expression of disgust crossed his face at sight of the squalid surroundings; but his self-control reasserted itself quickly, and he advanced to the side of Oltarsh, who was propped up in a chair because he could breathe most easily in that position.

"What can I do for you?" asked Majinton ironically.

Oltarsh motioned for the woman who had admitted the visitor to leave the room; then, turning his haggard eyes upon his enemy, he said:

"I have sent for you to warn you of your death."

Majinton, after an instant's surprised silence, replied grimly:

"You had better be thinking of your own."

"I'm quite aware," Oltarsh went on, as if he had heard no reply, "that you think me either a fool or out of my head. But what you think, at the present moment, is of no consequence whatever. Listen: one year from the date of my death, you will die by violent means. The instrument will be a Malay kris, and on the wall of the room in which you meet your death there will be a painting of a man whose throat has been cut. Remember those two things: the knife and the painting."

"If I remember them," said Majinton, "it will be only as the aberrations of a weak and dying mind. Do you expect me to believe," he added with a sneer, "that you have the second sight?"

"I expect nothing—I *know*. What I've told you is the truth, and I've told it because I want you to suffer as you deserve. All you atheists are superstitious, and the fear of death comes to you by night. I have visualized that fear

for you—given it a name and a form. Now, go."

When his command had been obeyed, Oltarsh, twisting with pain, smiled a distorted smile. Shortly thereafter he died, the date being January 22, the hour close to midnight.

Majinton thought little more of the incident until a week later, when, chancing to dine at his club with some friends, and being a trifle mellow—a condition into which he seldom allowed himself to fall—he spoke of Oltarsh's death and, with sardonic humor, of the prophecy.

"It was the last effort of an ill-balanced mind," he concluded. "Having failed to injure me in any other way, he thought to frighten me with a painted horror. He might as well have threatened me with a ghost—his own ghost, say, clad in sheet and pillow-case, jumping out at me from a dark corner."

The friends laughed dutifully, but when the rich man's departure had freed them from the necessity of being agreeable, they rehashed the history of the feud, and one of them, Farley by name, remarked:

"I'm not so sure that poor Oltarsh was off his trolley, after all. That observation about atheists was shrewd enough, and he knew Majinton, if ever a man did."

"Majinton is certainly superstitious," Edmondson chimed in. "Did you ever hear him talk about the thirteenth of the month? He scoffs at the idea of lucky or unlucky days, but at the same time calls attention to the fact that most of his good luck has come to him on the thirteenth. That's the strongest kind of superstition, the kind that scoffs and yet believes."

"Then you think that Oltarsh's prophecy will have an effect on him?" asked Quintard, the third man.

"I think he'll remember it, and that as the 22d of next January draws closer, he'll remember it more and more often."

"He can scarcely fear assassination," said Farley, laughing. "He's not enough of a public character for that."

"He can fear murder. No man is too obscure to be murdered."

The statement came aptly, for all three immediately remembered a man, well-

known to them, who had been struck down on his door-step less than a week before, and in search of a clue to whose murder the police were helplessly floundering, while the papers advertised the case in red head-lines. The remembrance brought to them—to Quintard and Farley and Edmondson—a feeling of life's uncertainty; and because this feeling was genuine they were ashamed of it.

Quintard, to relieve the tension, declared that they had been talking nonsense.

"I have a brilliant idea," he continued. "By way of fixing the matter as a joke in Majinton's mind, let's send him a Malay kris, with our compliments. I dare say we can find one without much trouble."

"Oh, we can find one," said Edmondson. "But, suppose Majinton doesn't happen to take it as a joke? His sense of humor's peculiar, you know."

"We could provide for that by omitting the card," Farley suggested. "Just send the kris anonymously, and wait to hear what he says about it before letting him into the game. It would be rather fun to puzzle Majinton."

"It might possibly puzzle him too much," Edmondson said.

Farley made no response, but Quintard, after lighting a fresh cigarette, glanced from one to the other of his companions, and observed:

"Well, so far as I know, none of us owes Majinton any special consideration."

II.

THEY waited a month before sending the kris, lest Majinton should guess at once the source of the gift; then they had it sent by express, in a plain box, from a Western city.

Majinton found the box awaiting him one evening when he returned from his office, and on opening it and discovering the kris, was shrewd enough to suspect a joke. He balanced the short, snaky blade across his hand, and wondered who was responsible for its sending. Since broaching the subject at the club he had told three or four people about Oltarsh's prophecy. They had doubtless told a dozen others, and any one of twenty people might have sent the thing.

But, on the other hand, Majinton's life,

like the lives of most other successful men, had been full of strange coincidences; and the twist of his skeptical mind had led him to attribute these coincidences, perversely, to the Destiny in which he pretended not to believe. He liked to point out—as Edmondson had noted—that good fortune had often come to him on the thirteenth of the month; he rarely failed to walk under a ladder when the opportunity presented itself; and there were several other small superstitions which he observed by going contrary to them.

Thus, he had become accustomed to see a mystery even while, laughing, he explained it away; and thus, as he wondered which of his friends had been putting up a joke on him, the possibility suggested itself that the arrival of the kris might be, not a joke, but a mysterious coincidence. He tried the edge of the blade, and found it sharp.

"A good thing to kill a man with," he said to himself. And, then, a moment later: "What rot! I'll say nothing about the matter, and, in due time, my jocular friend will betray himself."

But this course produced exactly the opposite effect, for Farley, Edmondson, and Quintard, thinking that their humorous effort had fallen flat, preferred to keep the secret. A month passed, and Majinton himself, busy with speculations, was in danger of forgetting the kris.

But it happened that one of his speculations, which resulted successfully, involved dealings with a man in the Western city from which the kris had been sent; and when, the richer by some ten or fifteen thousand dollars, he congratulated himself upon his sagacity, this new coincidence flashed into his mind. He took the knife from the corner into which he had carelessly thrust it, drew the blade from the scabbard and looked at it, smiling, and thumbing the edge.

"It has brought me luck," he thought; and, as he remembered the scene of Oltarsh's death, the query came to him: "If the knife has been lucky, wouldn't the painting be lucky, too?"

The sequence of thought was natural enough, but the idea itself was bizarre, and appealed to him.

"A painting of a man whose throat

has been cut"—it would be an odd thing to possess, whether it proved a talisman or not; he did not remember that he had ever seen such a painting. Moreover, to go out and order it deliberately would be effectually to show his contempt for Oltarsh's prophecy.

"I'll see Dalmeny to-morrow," he said; for Majinton was a man with whom to decide was to act.

He fixed at once upon Dalmeny because the latter was the only painter he knew. He had the business man's vigorous scorn for artists and writers, judging them worthless loafers, and had regarded his commission to Dalmeny for a portrait, some years before, in the light of a charity. He had given the portrait, by request, to a fraternal organization, and had paid Dalmeny fifty dollars for the job.

The painter, he recollected, had demurred at the smallness of the payment, but he had said: "Take it or leave it," and Dalmeny had done the sensible thing, though muttering that the portrait was worth a good five hundred. No doubt such a painting as he now wanted could be obtained for another fifty, or, perhaps, even for twenty-five.

When he entered Dalmeny's studio the following afternoon, the artist was engaged upon the portrait of a lady, who, while posing, had apparently been clad chiefly in diamonds and a black velvet shoulder-strap. The studio, he noted vaguely, had a rather prosperous appearance, and Dalmeny himself had a comfortable look, as if he had been indulging in at least two full meals per day. He was a little, nervous man, Dalmeny, with long-fingered hands, and sharp gray eyes shot with specks of yellow. Enthusiasm was absent from his reception of Majinton, who stated his business briefly.

"A picture of a man whose throat has been cut," the artist mused. "It's not exactly in my line, but I suppose I could do it." He sent through Majinton a glance of the yellow-specked eyes. "What sort of a man?"

"Oh, any kind." It had not occurred to Majinton to chose a definite subject. "I'll leave that to you."

"Very good," said Dalmeny. "You shall have it in three weeks."

The little man's assurance amused Majinton, and he was punctual. Returning to the studio three weeks from the day of the order, he found Dalmeny working on the scarlet coat of a gentleman in hunting garb. The gentleman's face had the vacuity that is frequent in the faces of the idle rich, and the artist had evidently taken a fiendish joy in emphasizing this vacuity.

"Well, is my picture ready?" asked Majinton.

Dalmeny went to the side of the room, and lifted the cloth from a canvas on an easel.

"Here you are."

Majinton looked, stared, then swore.

"You fool! I gave you no order for such a thing!"

Dalmeny shrugged.

"You made no restrictions. You said, if you'll remember, that I might paint any kind of man I chose. Was there any reason why I shouldn't choose to paint the able and excellent Mr. Charles Majinton?"

Fascinated in spite of himself, Majinton glared at the painting. There he was, with blood streaming from a gashed throat, his face, up-tilted, bearing an expression of mingled horror and stupid surprise. The knife, one knew, had scarcely been withdrawn from the wound; it was the instant of the first jet of blood that the artist had depicted. A few seconds later, the head would fall forward, a greenish pallor would overspread the face, and there would be ghastly twitchings and convulsions.

"It's clever work," was the admission wrung from Majinton. "I'll take it, pay you for it, and never employ you again."

He sat down at a table and wrote a check, glancing twice over his shoulder at the picture while he did so.

"Here," he said. "It's more than you deserve."

Dalmeny looked at the check, which was for seventy-five dollars, and tore it up.

"My price for that picture is an even five hundred," he remarked.

"*What?*"

"Five hundred. I usually get a thousand for a portrait, but, considering that it's you, and that, as I told you, the thing

is out of my line, I've made a low figure. Take it or leave it," he added, grinning. "I shall be happy to convince you of the justice of my claim in a more public way, if you prefer. I can either appeal to law or exhibit the picture—and I don't know which way would be the more enjoyable. I have a reputation now, you see."

Majinton, after due consideration, wrote another check.

III.

THE mere fact that he had paid so large a price for the picture would have given it a value in his eyes; but, in reality, he began to lose thought of the money which it had cost him as soon as he had got it home. It was a thing so grotesque, so abominable, that it had a unique charm. He tried it in various places on the walls of his apartment, but none seemed to suit it; the light was too strong, or not strong enough, or it clashed with the other ornaments in the room.

"I shall have to contrive a special room for it," he told himself. "Yes, a special room for it and the kris, with 'Majinton's Luck' for an inscription on the door."

This scheme, conceived in jest, assumed a serious form when Grange, his partner, made fun of it: Majinton always became obstinate under ridicule.

"I see nothing absurd about the idea," he protested. "I buy a picture, and want to place it advantageously, that's all."

Grange looked at the painting contemptuously, yet with a shudder.

"Oh, throw the infernal thing away," he said. "It's gruesome."

"On the contrary, I find it very amusing. I'm growing fond of it."

His partner changed the subject, but suggested, shortly before leaving, that Majinton take a vacation.

"Why not go up into the mountains for a couple of weeks? You're looking pretty well fagged out."

"Nothing of the sort," Majinton returned. "I'm as fit as a fiddle."

"Treating me as if I were a kid," he added, when Grange was gone. "Well, I'll soon show him that I'm over twenty-one."

Whereupon, he set about constructing a kind of shrine for the picture. In the apartment there was a room which he had been accustomed to call his library: it was expensively furnished, and on the shelves stood many books, most of them with uncut pages. Though he cared nothing for reading, he had found it convenient, for purposes of show and entertainment, to have a library, and had bought the books because he could not well have a library without them. This room he now re-decorated, choosing a dark stain for the woodwork and black hangings for the walls. He hung black curtains across the windows, so that outside light could be entirely excluded; and the bookshelves, also, had black curtains.

The lighting from within was changed in such a way that a powerful illumination could be thrown, by means of reflectors, upon a single spot on one wall. At this spot he hung the painting; and under it, just within the circle of light, the naked kris. Thus, when one stepped into the room and pressed a button, the spectacle of a murdered Majinton, with the instrument of murder close at hand, seemed to leap out at one from the darkness.

The first result of this performance was that his servant, a person of Celtic inheritance, gave notice, saying that it was enough to give a brass image the creeps to live in such a place. Majinton laughed, and hired a phlegmatic German. He began to take pleasure in showing to visitors this picture, which he would not have allowed Dalmeny to exhibit publicly for any amount of money; and soon it was noised abroad that Majinton was getting a bit queer.

People remembered eccentricities of his to which previously they had attached no significance. One man recollected how, walking near a cliff one day with Majinton, he had seen the latter attacked by dizziness. Another said he had heard that there was insanity in the Majinton ancestry. Farley, Quintard, and Edmondson debated whether to reveal the joke about the kris, and decided that they would not; for, as Quintard sagely observed, the matter was rather old for a joke; and if Majinton chose to take it seriously, he might be

inclined to make things unpleasant for them.

"Yes, he might," Farley agreed. "And if he got the notion, he could do it. Why, he could buy and sell any one of us half a dozen times over. The fellow has the devil's own luck."

It was quite true that Majinton was making money fast: if he were crazy in other ways, at least his financial sense was sound. Even Grange, who came nearer than any one else to having a genuine affection for him, was silenced when he gave exhibitions of almost uncannily keen judgment.

And Majinton himself believed implicitly in his own luck. Since he had bought the painting, the luck had never turned—or if there had been losses once or twice, he had retrieved them easily. He often went into the black room, turned on the light, and looked at the horrible picture cheerfully, as if it had been a friend. But he no longer showed it to visitors, or mentioned it in conversation, for he was irritated by the side-glances which a sight or mention of it provoked, and some of the gossip about him had reached his ears.

"Let them gabble," he thought. "I can afford to laugh at them."

Nevertheless, he became more and more secretive.

IV.

THE winter was now approaching, and it was on a chilly November evening that the thought first took definite shape in his mind that there might really be something in Oltarsh's prophecy. The end of the year always brought thoughts of death to him; death was the thing he feared—the thing he could not fight—and the short days were dark with it.

"It's preposterous to suppose that Oltarsh could foresee my death," he argued. "And yet, if the kris and the painting have brought me good luck, why shouldn't they bring me bad as well? Or, maybe Oltarsh knew of some plot against me, had talked with some other enemy of mine. It wouldn't be the hardest thing in the world to murder me."

The painting, with its gaping throat, seemed to support his opinion; and the next day, reflecting on the ease with which an assailant might gain entrance

to the apartment, he gave the order for an intricate system of burglar-alarms. He also purchased a revolver and kept it under his pillow; and one December night he awoke to find himself in the black room, pistol in hand, facing the picture, which leered back at him horribly from its circle of light.

Under the influence of his nightmare, he resolved to cut the canvas into shreds in the morning; but when the morning came he dismissed the resolution as childish.

"For," he said, "if I am to look for danger in a room which contains a painting of a man with his throat cut, the room had better be my own, which I can watch. If I should destroy this painting, who knows that I mightn't find another in some strange room when I was unprepared?"

And thereafter his chief care was to watch the painting. As the 22d of January drew nearer, he watched it still more carefully. He was familiar with its every line—could close his eyes and see it as clearly as if it had been actually before him. It was difficult for him to imagine an existence unshadowed by it.

On the morning of the 22d he forced himself, by a strong effort of will, to go to his office. But his thoughts constantly reverted to the picture, and at noon he returned to his apartment.

A dozen times during the afternoon he opened the door of the black room and turned on the light; and when the

early winter darkness fell he shut himself up there, to await the passing of the last hours in which the prophecy might be fulfilled. In one corner there was a reading-lamp, with a shaded globe. Beside this he sat, having taken down from the wall the Malay kris, so that, in order to attack him with it, an intruder would first be obliged to wrest it from him. He had brought with him a clock, and in the absolute silence its ticking sounded unnaturally loud.

At half past ten, wearied by the constant strain of looking at the picture, he went to one of the black-curtained shelves to find a book with which to beguile the time. His hand fell upon a volume of Poe's tales, containing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Attuned to horrors, he read this story eagerly, and went on to others no less ghastly. Every minute or two he looked up from the book, now at the picture, now through the semidarkness into the recesses of the room, where vague shapes seemed to gather and disappear.

Eleven o'clock passed, and the hands of the clock wore around toward twelve. At last there came the premonitory click which a timepiece sometimes gives a few seconds before it strikes. Majinton rose, a little unsteadily, and fixing his eyes upon the painting, exclaimed:

"Oltarsh, you are cheated!"

Then suddenly, with a firm hand, he seized the kris and drew it across his throat.

THE BIRTH OF THE YEAR.

Music of spheres rolling by,
Soughing of wind in the pines,
Clouds flying low in the sky,
Stretching away in long lines.

Ages the year day by day—
Travail and pain of the night—
Naught can restrain it, or stay
Time in his masterful flight.

Fast comes the old to its close,
Soon will the new one be here.
Born in the midst of the snows—
What will you bring, O New Year?

Francis Livingston Montgomery.

THE WILD GESE.*

BY STANLEY J. WEYMAN,

Author of "The Long Night," "A Gentleman of France," "Under the Red Robe," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

COLONEL JOHN SULLIVAN returns to Ireland, in a ship which is a smuggler. Blown into Skull Haven, her cargo is seized under pretext that revenue must be paid. Among the looters are the colonel's ward, Flavia McMurrrough, and her brother. Flavia's favorite mare is stolen. The colonel promises to recover it, if they restore his cargo to the French skipper. This he does, and receives only the curtest thanks from Flavia. Meanwhile Flavia's brother and a suitor of hers, Luke Asgill, are planning to get the colonel out of the way. That night the colonel sees unmistakable signs of an impending insurrection. Distrusting him, they imprison Colonel John and his servant, Bale, in a tower. Later an armed guard takes the prisoners in a small boat out to a Spanish ship in the harbor. The small boat capsizes and all are drowned except Colonel John and Bale, who swim to shore. They go aboard Captain Augustin's sloop, in which Colonel John came to Ireland. The captain and the colonel join issue to make reprisal on the McMurrroughs.

Colonel John takes the ringleaders of the uprising prisoners and ships two to France in Captain Augustin's sloop. He protects Flavia and her brother on condition that they insure his life's safety at Morristown. For a second reason the brother dares not let harm come to the colonel. The colonel has made a will diverting the property from his and his sister's possession. The brother proposes, however, to give false information about the colonel to the government through Luke Asgill. Flavia urges against such treachery. Luke Asgill is denied admittance to the house by the colonel. Flavia and her brother are furious in resentment. Asgill and the brother persuade Flavia to entice the colonel to a round tower, where they imprison him to force him to change his will in favor of the brother. The colonel remains obdurate, although on the verge of starvation. His plight is the more pitiable because he realizes that he is in love with Flavia, whom Asgill wishes to marry.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.



LITTLE before sunset on that day, two men stood beside the entrance at Morristown.

They were staring at a third, who, seated nonchalantly upon the horse-block, slapped his boot with his riding-switch, and made as poor a show of hiding his amusement as they of masking their disgust. The man who slapped his leg and shaped his lips to a silent whistle was Major Payton of the —th. The men who looked at him, and cursed the star which had brought him, were Luke Asgill and The McMurrrough.

"Faith, and I should have thought," Asgill said with a clouded face, "that my presence here, major, and I a justice—"

"True for you," Payton said with a grin.

"Should have been enough by itself, and the least taste more than enough, to prove the absurdity of the castle's story."

"True for you again," Payton replied. "And ain't I saying that but for your presence here, and a friend at court that I'll not name, it's not your humble servant this gentleman would be entertaining"—he turned to The McMurrrough—"but half a company and a sergeant's guard."

"I'm allowing it."

"You've no cause to do other."

"Nary a bit I'm denying it," Asgill replied more amicably; and as far as he could he cleared his face. "It's not that you're not welcome. Not at all, major. Sure, and I'll answer for it, my friend, The McMurrrough, is glad to welcome any English gentleman, much more one of your reputation."

* This story began in THE SCRAP BOOK—Second Section—for August, 1908. Copyright by Stanley J. Weyman, 1908.

"Truth, and I am." The McMurrrough assented. But he had not Asgill's self-control, and his sulky tone belied his words.

"Still—I come at an awkward time, perhaps," Payton answered, looking with a grin from one to the other.

Partly to tease Asgill, whom he did not love the more because he owed him money, and partly to see the rustic beauty, whom, rumor had it, Asgill was courting in the wilds, he had volunteered to do with three or four troopers what otherwise half a company would have been sent to do. That he could at the same time put his creditor under an obligation, and annoy him, had not been the least part of the temptation; while no one at Tralee believed the story sent down from Dublin.

"Eh! An awkward time, perhaps," he repeated, looking at The McMurrrough. "Sorry, I'm sure, but—"

"I'd have entertained you better, I'm thinking," James McMurrrough said, "if I'd known you were coming before you came."

"Not a doubt of it," said Asgill, whose subtle brain had been at work. "Not that it matters, bedad, for an Irish gentleman will do his best. And to-morrow Colonel Sullivan—that's more knowledge of the mode and foreign ways—will be back, and he'll be helping his cousin. More by token," he added in a different tone, "you know him of old."

Payton, who had frowned at the name, reddened at the question. "Is that," he asked, "the Colonel Sullivan who—"

"Who tried the foils with Lemoine at Tralee?" Asgill cried heartily. "The same and no other. He is away to-day; but he'll be returning to-morrow, and he'll be delighted to see you. And by good luck there are foils in the house, and he'll pass the time pleasantly with you. It's he's the hospitable creature."

Payton was anything but anxious to see the man whose skill had turned the joke against him; and his face betokened his feelings. Had he foreseen the meeting he would have left the job to a subaltern. "Hang it!" he exclaimed, vexed by the recollection, "a

fine mess you led me into there, didn't you, Asgill?"

"I did not know him then," Asgill replied lightly. "And, pho! Take my word for it, he's no man to bear malice."

"Malice, begad!" Payton answered ill-humoredly. "I think it's I—"

"Ah, you are right again, to be sure!" Asgill agreed, laughing silently. For already he had formed a hope that the guest might be maneuvered out of the house on the morrow. He knew Payton. He knew the man's arrogance, the contempt in which he held the Irish, his view of them as an inferior race.

He was sure that if he saw Flavia, and fancied her, he was capable of any outrage; or, if he learned her position in regard to the estate, he might prove a formidable, if an honorable, competitor. To hasten the man's departure and to induce Flavia to remain in the background, became Asgill's chief aims.

James McMurrrough, on the other hand, saw in the unwelcome intruder an English officer; and, troubled by his guilty conscience, he dreaded above all things what he might discover. True, the past was past, the plot spent, the Spanish ship gone. But the colonel remained, and in durance. And if by any chance the Englishman stumbled on him, heard his story, and lived to carry it back to Tralee, the consequences might be such that a cold sweat broke out on the young man's brow at the thought of them. To add to his alarm, Payton, whose mind was occupied with the colonel, sought to evince his indifference by changing the subject, and in doing so hit on one singularly unfortunate.

"A pretty fair piece of water," he said, rising with an affected yawn. "The tower at the head of it—it's grown too dark to see it—is it inhabited?"

The McMurrrough started guiltily. "The tower?" he stammered. Could it be that the man knew all? His heart stood still, then raced.

"The major'll be meaning the tower on the rock," Asgill said with a warning look. "Ah, sure, it'll be used at times, major, for a prison, you understand."

"Oh!"

"But we'll be better to be moving inside, I'm thinking," he continued.

Payton assented. He was still brooding on his enemy, the colonel. Curse the man, he was thinking. Why couldn't he keep out of his way?

"Take the major in, McMurrrough," said Asgill, who feared Flavia and Morty O'Beirne might arrive from the tower. "You'll like to get rid of your boots before supper, major," he went on. "Bid Darby send the major's man to him, McMurrrough; or, better, I'll be going to the stables myself, and I'll be telling him."

As the others went in, Asgill strolled toward the stables. But when they had passed out of sight he turned and walked along the lake to meet the girl and her companion. As he walked, he had time to decide how he might best deal with Flavia, and how much he should tell her. When he met them, therefore—by this time the night was falling—his first question related to that which an hour before had been the one preoccupation of all their minds.

"Well," he said, "he'll not have yielded yet, I am thinking."

Dark as it was, the girl averted her face to hide the trouble in her eyes. She shook her head. "No," she said, "he has not."

"I did not count on it," Asgill answered cheerfully. "but time—time and hunger and patience—not a doubt he'll give in presently."

She did not answer, but he fancied—she kept her face averted—that she shivered.

"While you have been away something has happened," he continued. After all, it was perhaps as well, he reflected, that Payton had come. His coming, even if Flavia did not encounter him, would prevent her dwelling too long on that room in the tower and on the man who famished there. She hated the colonel, Asgill believed. She had hated him, he was sure.

But how long would she continue to hate him in these circumstances? How long if she learned what were the colonel's feelings toward her? "An unwelcome guest has come," he continued glibly, "and one that'll be giving trouble, I'm fearing."

"A guest?" Flavia repeated in astonishment. She halted. What time

for guests was this? And unwelcome?" she added. "Who is it?"

"An English officer," Asgill explained. "From Tralee. He is saying that the castle has heard something, and has sent him here to look about him."

Naturally, the danger seemed greater to them than to Asgill, who knew his man. Words of dismay broke from Flavia and O'Beirne. "From Tralee?" she cried. "And an English officer? Good Heavens! Do you know him?"

"I do," Asgill answered confidently. "And I can manage him. I hold him, like that, not the least doubt of it; but the less we'll be doing for him the sooner he'll be going, and the safer'll we be. I would not be so bold as to advise," he continued diffidently; "but I'm thinking it would be no worse if you left him to be entertained by the men."

"I will," she cried. "Why should I be wanting to see him?"

"Then I think he'll be ordering his horse to-morrow."

"I wish he were gone now," she cried.

"Ah, so do I!" he replied from his heart.

"I will go in through the garden," she said.

She turned aside, and for a moment he bent to the temptation to go with her. He was sure that she had begun not only to suffer his company, but to suffer it willingly. And here, as she passed through the garden, was an opportunity of making a further advance. She would have to grope her way, a reason for taking her hand might offer, and—his head grew hot at the thought.

But he thrust the temptation from him. He knew that it was not only the stranger's presence that weighed her down, but her recollection of the man in the tower and his miserable plight.

As he went on with Morty, he gave him a hint to say as little in Payton's presence as possible. "I know the man," he explained, "and where he's weak. I'm for seeing the back of him as soon as we can, but without noise."

"There's always the bog," grumbled Morty.

"And the garrison at Tralee," Asgill rejoined dryly, "to ask where he is. And his troopers to answer the question."

Morty bade him manage it his own way. "Only I'll trouble you not to blame me," he added, "if the English soger finds the colonel and ruins us entirely."

"I'll not," Asgill answered pithily. "If so be, you'll hold your tongue."

So at supper that night Payton looked in vain for the Kerry beauty, whose charms the warmer wits of the mess had painted in hues rather florid than fit. Nevertheless, he would have enjoyed himself tolerably—nor the less because now and again he let his contempt for the company peep from under his complaisance—but for the obtuseness of his friend, who, as if he had only one idea in his head, let fall with every moment mention of Colonel John.

Now, it was the happy certainty of the colonel's return next day that inspired his eloquence; now, the pleasure with which the colonel would meet Payton again; now, the lucky chance that found a pair of new foils on the window-ledge.

"For he's ruined entirely, and no one to play with him," Asgill continued, a twinkle in his eye. "No one, I'm meaning, major, of his sort of force at all. Begad, boys, you'll see some fine fencing for once. Ye'll think ye've never seen any before, I'm doubting."

"I'm not sure that I can remain to-morrow," Payton said in a surly tone. For he began to suspect that Asgill was quizzing him. He noticed that every time the justice named Colonel Sullivan, the men looked furtively at one another or looked straight before them, as if they were in a design.

If that were so, the design could only be to pit Colonel Sullivan against him, or to provoke a quarrel between them. He felt a qualm of apprehension, and he was confirmed in the plan he had already formed—to be gone next day. But in the meantime his temper moved him to carry the war into the enemy's country.

"I didn't know," he snarled, taking Asgill up in the middle of a eulogy of Colonel John's skill, "that he was so great a favorite of yours."

"He was not," Asgill replied dryly.

"He is now, it seems," in the same sneering tone.

"We know him better. Don't we, boys?"

They murmured assent.

"And the lady whose horse I sheltered for you," the major continued, spitefully watching for an opening. "Confound you, little you thanked me for it—she must be still more in his interest than you. And how does that suit your book?"

Asgill had great self-control, and the major was not a close observer. But the thrust was so unexpected, that on the instant Payton read the other's secret in his eyes—knew that he loved and knew that he was jealous. Jealous of Sullivan! Jealous of the man whom he was, for some reason, praising. Then why not jealous of a younger, a more fashionable rival? Asgill's cunningly reared plans began to sink, and even while he answered, he knew it.

"She likes him," he said, "as we all do."

"Some more, some less," Payton answered with a grin.

"Just so," the Irishman returned, controlling himself. "Some more, some less. And why not, I'm asking?"

"I think I must stay over to-morrow," Payton remarked, smiling at the ceiling. "There must be a good deal to be seen here."

"Ah, there is!" Asgill answered in apparent good humor.

"Worth seeing, too, I'll be sworn!" the Englishman replied, smiling more broadly.

"And that's true, too!" the other rejoined.

He had himself in hand; and it was not from him that the proposal to break up the party came. The major it was who at last pleaded fatigue. Englishmen's heads, he said, were stronger than their stomachs: they were a match for port but not for claret.

"You should correct it, major, with a little cognac," The McMurrough suggested politely.

"Not to-night; and, by your leave, I'll have my man called and go to bed."

"It's early," James McMurrough said, playing the host.

"It is, but I'll have my man and go to bed." Payton answered with true British obstinacy. "No offense to any one."

"There's none will take it here," Asgill answered. "An Irishman's house is his guest's castle." But knowing that Payton liked his glass, he wondered, until it occurred to him that the other wished to have his hand steady for the sword-play next day.

The McMurrrough took a light and attended his guest to his room. Asgill and the O'Beirnes remained seated at the table, the young men scoffing at the Englishman's conceit of himself, Asgill silent and downcast.

His scheme for ridding himself of Payton had failed; it remained to face the situation. He did not distrust Flavia; but he distrusted Payton—his insolence, his violence, and the privileged position which his duelist's skill gave him. And then there was Colonel John. If Payton learned what was afoot at the tower, and saw his way to make use of it, the worst might happen to all concerned.

He looked up at a touch from Morty, and to his astonishment he saw Flavia standing at the end of the table. There was a hasty scrambling to the feet, for the men had not drunk deep, and by all in the house—except her brother—the girl was treated with respect.

"I was thinking," Asgill said, foreseeing trouble, "that you were in bed and asleep." Her hair was negligently tied back and her dress half fastened at the throat.

"I can't sleep," she answered. And then she stood a moment drumming with her slender fingers on the table, and the men noticed that she was unusually pale. "I can't sleep," she repeated, a tremor in her voice. "I keep thinking of him. I want some one—to go to him."

"Now?"

"Now!"

"But," Asgill said slowly, "I'm thinking that to do that were to give him hopes. It were to spoil all. Once in twenty-four hours—that was agreed. It is not four hours since you were there. If there is one thing needful—not the least doubt of it—it is to leave him thinking that we're meaning it."

He spoke reasonably. But the girl labored under a weight of agitation that did not suffer her to reason.

"But if he dies," she cried in a woful

tone, "of langer! Great Heavens, of hunger! What have we done then? I tell you," she continued, "I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!" She looked from one to the other as appealing to each in turn to share her horror, and to act. "It is infamous, it is wicked!" she continued in a shriller tone and with a note of defiance in her voice; "and who will answer for it, if he dies? I—not you! I, who tricked him, who lied to him, who lured him there!"

For a moment there was a stricken silence in the room. Then, "And what had he done to you?" Asgill answered with spirit—for he saw that if he did not meet her on her own plane, she was capable of any act, however ruinous. "Or, if not to you, to Ireland, to your king, to your country, to your hopes?" He flung into his voice all the indignation of which he was master.

"A trick, you say? Was it not by a trick he ruined all? The brightest day that ever dawned for Ireland! The day of freedom, of liberty, of—"

She twisted her fingers feverishly together.

"Yes," she said, "yes! Yes, but—I can't bear it! It is no use talking," she continued with a violent shudder. "You are here—look!"—she pointed to the table strewn with the remains of the meal—"but he is—starving! Starving!" she repeated, as if the physical pain touched herself.

"You shall go to him to-morrow! Go, yourself!" he answered in a soothing tone.

"I!" she cried—"never!"

"Oh, but—" Asgill began, perplexed but not surprised by her attitude. "But here's your brother," he continued, relieved. "He will tell you. I'm sure, that nothing can be so harmful as to change now. Your sister," he went on, addressing The McMurrrough, who had just descended the stairs, "she's wishing some one will go to the colonel and see if he's down a peg. But I'm telling her—"

"It's folly entirely, you should be telling her!" James McMurrrough replied curtly and roughly. "To-morrow at sunset, and not an hour earlier, he'll be visited. And then it'll be you, Flavvy, that'll speak to him! What more is it you're wanting?"

"I speak to him?" she cried in distress. "I couldn't!"

"But it'll be you'll have to," he replied roughly. "Wasn't it so arranged?"

"I couldn't," she replied in the same tone of trouble. "Some one else—if you like!"

"But it's not some one else will do," James retorted.

"But why should I be the one—to go?" she wailed. She had Colonel John's face before her, haggard, sunken, famished, as, peering into the gloomy, firelit room, she had seen it that afternoon. "Why should I," she repeated, "be the one to go?"

"For a very good reason," her brother retorted with a sneer, and he looked at Asgill and laughed.

That look startled her as a flash of light startles a traveler groping through darkness. "Why?" she repeated in a different tone.

Neither her tone nor Asgill's glance put James McMurrrough on his guard, for he was in one of his brutal humors. "Why?" he replied. "Because he's a silly fool, as I'm thinking some others are, and has a fancy for you, Flavvy! Faith, you're not blind," he continued, "and know it, I'll be sworn, as well as I do! Anyway, I've a notion that if you let him see that there is no one in the house wishes him worse than you, or would see him starve with a lighter heart—I'm thinking it will be for bringing him down, if anything will!"

She did not answer. And outwardly she was not much moved. But inwardly, the horror of herself which she had felt as she lay up-stairs in the darkness, thinking of the starving man, choked her. They were using her because the man—loved her! Because hard words, cruel treatment, brutality from her would be ten times more hard, more cruel, more brutal than from others! Because such treatment, at her hands, would be more likely to break his spirit and crush his heart! To what viler use, to what lower end could a woman be used, or human feeling be prostituted?

Nor was this all. On the tide of this loathing of herself rose another and a stranger feeling. The man loved her. She did not doubt the statement. Its truth came home to her at once. And

because it placed him in a light in which she had never viewed him before, because it recalled a hundred things, acts, words on his part which she had barely noted at the time, it showed him, too, as one whom she had never seen.

Had he been free, prosperous, triumphant, the knowledge that he loved her, that he, her enemy, loved her, might only have revolted her; she might have hated him the more for it. But now that he lay a prisoner, famished, starving, the fact that he loved her pierced her heart, transfixed her with the most poignant feeling, choked her with a rising flood of pity and self-reproach.

"So there you have it, Flavvy!" James cried complacently. "And sure, you'll not be making a fool of yourself at this time of day!"

She stood looking at him with strange eyes, thinking, not answering. Asgill, only, saw a burning blush dye for an instant the whiteness of her face. He, only, discovered, with the subtle insight of one who loved a part, of what she was thinking. He wished James McMurrrough in the depths of perdition. But it was too late, or he feared so.

Great was his relief, therefore, when she spoke.

"Then you'll not—be going now?" she said.

"Now?" James retorted. "Haven't I told you, you'll go to-morrow?"

"If I must," she said slowly, "I will—if I must."

"Then what's the good of talking, I'm thinking?" The McMurrrough answered. And he was proceeding to say more when the opportunity was taken from him. One of the O'Beirnes, who happened to avert his eyes from the girl, saw Payton standing at the foot of the stairs. Phelim's exclamation apprised the others that something was amiss, and they turned.

"I left my snuff-box on the table," Payton said, with a sly grin. How much he had heard they could not tell. "Ha! there it is. Thank you. Sorry, I am sure. Hope I don't trespass. Will you present me to your sister, Mr. McMurrrough?"

James McMurrrough had to do so—looking foolish. Luke Asgill stood by with rage in his heart, cursing the evil

chance which had brought Flavia downstairs.

"I assure you," Payton said, bowing low before her, but not so low that the insolence of his smile was hidden from all, "I think myself happy. My friend Asgill's picture of you, warmly as he painted it, fell infinitely below the reality."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE KEY.

COLONEL JOHN rose and walked unsteadily to the window. He rested a hand on either jamb and looked through it, peering to right and left with wistful eyes. He detected no one—nothing, no change, no movement, and, with a groan, he straightened himself. But he still continued to look out, gazing at the pitiless blue sky, in which the sun was still high.

Presently he grew weary, and went back to his chair. He sat down, with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. Again his ears had deceived him! How many more times would he start to his feet, fancying he heard the footstep that did not fall, calling aloud to those who were not there, anticipating those who, more heedless than the face of nature without, would not come before the appointed time. And that was hours away—hours of thirst and hunger, almost intolerable, of patience and waiting, broken only by such a fancy, born of his weakened senses, as had just drawn him to the window.

Colonel John was a man, sane and well-balanced, but even he had succumbed more than once during the last twelve hours to gusts of rage, provoked as much by the futility of his suffering as by the cruelty of his persecutors. After each of these storms he had scolded himself and grown calm. But they had made their mark upon him, they had left his eyes wilder, his cheeks more hollow, his hand less firm.

Notwithstanding, he was not light-headed. He could command his faculties: he could still reflect and plan. But at times he found himself confounding the present with the past, fancying for a while that he was in a Turkish prison,

or starting from a waking dream of some cold camp in Russian snows—alas, starting from it only to shiver with that penetrating, heart-piercing, frightful cold, which was worse to bear than the gnawing of hunger or the longing of thirst. He had burned, in fighting the cold of the past night, all that would burn, except the chair in which he sat.

He had not eaten for more than seventy hours. But the long privation, which had weakened his limbs and blanched his cheeks, had not availed to shake his will. The possibility of surrender did not occur to him, partly because he felt sure that James McMurrough would not be so foolish as to let him die.

Partly, also, by reason of a noble stubbornness in the man, that for no pain of death would have left a woman or a child to perish. More than once Colonel Sullivan had had to make that choice, amid the horrors of a retreat across famished lands, with wolves and Cosacks on his skirts; and, perhaps, the choice had become a habit of the mind. At any rate, he gave no thought to yielding.

He had sat for some minutes in the attitude described, when once more a sound startled him. He raised his head slowly, and turned his eyes on the window. Then he faltered to his feet, and once again went unsteadily to the window and looked out.

At the same moment Flavia looked in. Their eyes met. Their faces were less than a yard apart.

The girl started back with a cry, caused by horror at the change in his aspect. For she had left him hungry, she found him starving; she had left him haggard, she found him with eyes unnaturally large, his temples hollow, his lips dry, his chin unshaven. It was, indeed, a pale, staring mask of famine that looked out of the dusky room at her, and looked not the less pitifully, not the less wofully because, as soon as its owner took in her identity, the mask tried to smile.

"Mother of God!" she whispered. Her face had grown nearly as white as his. She had imagined nothing like this.

And Colonel John, believing that he read pity as well as horror in her face,

felt a sob rise in his breast. He tried to smile the more bravely for that, and presently found a queer, husky voice.

"You must not leave me—too long," he said.

She drew in her breath and averted her face, to hide, he hoped, the effect of the sight upon her. Or, perhaps—for he saw her shudder—she was mutely calling the sunlit lake on which her eyes now rested, the blue sky, to witness against this foul cruelty.

But it seemed that he deceived himself. For when she turned her face to him again, though it was still colorless, it was hard and set.

"You must sign," she said. "You must sign the paper."

His parched lips opened, but he did not answer.

"You must sign!" she repeated insistently. "You must sign!"

Still he did not answer: he only looked at her with eyes of infinite reproach. She, a woman, a girl, whose tender heart should have bled for him, could see him tortured, could aid in the work, and cry, "Sign!"

She could, indeed, for she repeated the word feverishly. "Sign!" she cried. And then: "If you will," she said, "I will give you—see! You shall have this. You shall eat and drink—only sign! For God's sake, sign what they want, and eat and drink!"

And, with fingers that trembled with eager haste, she drew from a hiding-place in her cloak bread and a bottle of wine. "See what I have brought," she continued, holding them before his craving, starting eyes, his cracking lips, "if you will sign."

He gazed at them, at her, with anguish of the mind as well as of the body. How he had mistaken her! How he had misread her! Then, with a groan, "God forgive you!" he cried. "I cannot! I cannot!"

"You will not sign?" she retorted.

"Cannot, and will not," he said.

"And why? Why will you not?"

On that his patience gave way and, swept along by one of those gusts of rage, he spoke. "Why?" he cried in hoarse accents. "Because—ungrateful, unwomanly, miserable as you are—I will not rob you or the dead! Because I will

not be false to an old man's trust! Because"—he laughed a half-delirious laugh—"there is nothing to sign. I have burned your parchments these two days, and, if you make me suffer twice as much as I have suffered, you can do nothing." He held out hands which trembled with weakness and with passion. "You can do nothing," he repeated. "Neither you, who—God forgive you—have no woman's heart, no woman's pity; nor he who would have killed me in the bog to gain that which he now starves me to gain! But I foiled him then, as I will foil him to-day—ingrate, perjured, accursed—"

He faltered, steadying himself against the wall. For a moment he covered his eyes with the other hand. Then: "God forgive me!" he resumed in a lower tone; "I know not what I say. And you—go! for you, too, know not what you do. You do not know what it is to hunger and thirst, or you would not try me thus. Yet I ought to remember that—that it is not for yourself you do it."

He turned his back on her, and on the window. He had taken three steps, when she cried, "Wait!"

"Go!" he repeated, with a backward gesture of the hand. "Go!"

"Wait!" she cried. "And take them! Oh, take them! Quick!" He turned about. She was holding the food and the drink through the window, holding them out for him to take. But it might be another deception. He was not sure, and he took a step in a stealthy fashion toward the window, as if, were she off her guard, he would snatch them from her. But she cried again: "Take them! Take them!" with tears in her voice. "I brought them for you."

The craving was so strong upon him that he took them then, without answering her or thanking her. He turned his back on her, as if he dared not let her see the desire in his face; and, standing thus, he drew the stopper from the bottle of milk and drank. He would fain have held the bottle to his lips until he had drained the last drop, but he controlled himself, and when he had swallowed a few mouthfuls he removed it. Then he broke off three or four small fragments of the bread and ate them one by one, and slowly—the first with difficulty, the

second more easily, the third with an avidity which he checked only by a firm effort of the will. "Presently," he told himself. "There is plenty; there is plenty." Yet he allowed himself two more mouthfuls of bread and another brief sip of milk—milk that was nectar, rather than any earthly drink. At length, with new life running in his veins, and a pure thankfulness that she had proved herself a very woman at the last, he laid his treasures on the chair and turned to her. She was gone.

For while he had eaten and drunk he had felt her presence at his back, and once he was sure that he had heard her sob. But she was gone. He staggered—for he was not yet steady on his feet—to the window and looked to right and left.

Flavia had not gone far. She was lying prone on the sward, her face hidden on her arms; and it was true that he had heard her sob, for she was weeping without restraint. The change in him, to say nothing of his reproaches, had done something more than shock her. The scales of prejudice which had formerly dimmed her sight fell, and for the first time she saw him as he was.

For the first time she perceived that in pursuing the path he had followed he might have thought himself right. Parts of the passionate rebuke which suffering and indignation had forced from him remained branded upon her memory, and she wept in shame, feeling her helplessness, her ignorance, feeling that she had no longer any sure support. For how could she after this trust those who, taking advantage at once of her wounded vanity and her affection for her brother, had drawn her into this hideous, this cruel business?

The sense of her loneliness, the knowledge that those about her used her for their own ends—and those the most unworthy—overwhelmed her.

When the first passion of self-reproach had spent itself she heard him calling her by name, and in a voice that stirred her heart-strings. She rose, first to her knees and then to her feet, and averting her face: "I will open the door," she said humbly, and in a broken voice. "I have brought the key."

He did not answer, and she did not

unlock. For as—still keeping her face averted that he might not see her tears—she turned the corner of the tower to gain the door, her brother's head and shoulders rose above the level of the platform. As The McMurrrough stepped onto the latter from the path; he was in time to see her skirt vanishing. He saw no more, but his suspicions were aroused. He strode across the face of the tower, turned the corner at her heels, and came on her as she was in the act of putting the key in the lock.

"What are you doing?" he cried in a terrible voice. "Are you mad?"

She did not answer, but neither did he pause for her answer. The imminence of the peril, the thought that the man whom he had so deeply wronged would in another minute be free to avenge himself and punish his foes, rose up before him, and he thrust her with violence from the door. The key, not yet turned, came away in her hand, and he tried to snatch it from her.

"Give it me!" he cried. "Do you hear? Give it me!"

"I will not!" she cried. "No!"

"Give it up, I say!" he retorted. This time he made good his hold on her wrist. He tried to force the key from her. "Let it go," he panted furiously, "or I shall hurt you!"

But he made a great mistake if he thought he could coerce Flavia in that way. Her fingers only closed more tightly on the key. "Never!" she cried, struggling with him. "Never! I am going to let him out!"

"You coward!" a voice cried through the door. "Coward! Coward!" There was a sound of drumming on the door.

But Colonel John's voice and his blows were powerless to help, as James, in a frenzy of rage and alarm, gripped the girl's wrist and twisted it. "Let it go! Let it go, you fool," he cried, "or I will break your arm!"

Her face turned white with pain, but for a moment she endured in silence. Then a shriek escaped her.

It was answered instantly. Neither he nor she had had eyes for aught but one another, and the hand that fell, and fell heavily, on James's shoulder was as unexpected as a thunderbolt.

"By Heaven, man," a voice cried in

his ear, "are you mad? Or is this the way you treat women in Kerry? Let the lady go! Let her go, I say!"

The command was needless, for at the first sound of the voice James had fallen back with a curse, and Flavia, grasping her bruised wrist with her other hand, had reeled for support against the tower wall. For a moment no one spoke. Then James, with scarcely a look at Payton—for he it was—bade her come away with him.

"If you are not mad," he growled, "you'll have a care! You'll have a care and come away, girl!"

"When I have let him out, I will," she answered, her eyes glowing somberly as she nursed her wrist. In her, too, the old Adam had been raised.

"Give me the key!" he said for the last time.

"I will not," she said.

The McMurrough turned his rage upon the intruder. "Deuce take you, what business will it be of yours?" he cried. "Coming between us, eh?"

Payton bowed. "If I offend," he said airily, "I am entirely at your service." He tapped the hilt of his sword. "You do not wear one: but I have no doubt you can use one. I shall be happy to give you satisfaction where and when you please. A time and place—"

But James did not stop to hear him out. He turned away with an oath and went off in such a manner that Flavia could not but see that the challenge was not to his taste. At another time she would have blushed for him, but his brutal violence had done more during the last ten minutes to depose his image from her heart than years of neglect and rudeness.

Payton saw him go, and blessing the good fortune which had put him in a position to command the beauty's thanks, turned to receive them. But Flavia was not looking at him, was not thinking of him.

She had put the key in the lock, and was trying to turn it. Her left wrist, however, was too weak, and the right was so strained as to be useless. She signed to him to turn the key, and he did so, and threw open the door, wondering much what it was all about.

He did not at once recognize the man

who, pale and haggard, a mere ghost of himself, ascended the three steps and, exhausted by the effort, leaned against the door-post. But when Colonel John spoke and tried to thank the girl, he knew him.

He whistled. "You are Colonel Sullivan?"

"The same, sir!" Colonel John murmured mechanically.

"Are you ill?"

"I am not well," the other replied with a sickly smile. The indignation he had felt during the contest between the girl and her brother had been too much for his strength. "I shall be better presently," he added. He closed his eyes.

"We should be getting him below," Flavia said in an undertone.

Payton looked from the one to the other. He was in a fog. "Has he been here long?" he asked.

"Nearly four days," she replied with a shiver.

"And nothing to eat?"

"Nothing."

"The deuce! And why?"

She did not stay to think how much it was wise to tell him. In her repentant mood she was anxious to pour herself out in self-reproach.

"We wanted him to convey some property," she said, "as we wished."

"To your brother?"

"Ah, to him!" Then seeing his astonishment, "It was mine," she added.

Payton began to understand. He looked at her, and, no, he did not understand now. For if the idea was to constrain Colonel Sullivan to transfer her property to her brother, what part had she in it? He could only suppose that her brother had coerced her, and that she had given him the slip and tried to release the man. The rest he knew.

One thing was clear. The property, large or small, was still hers. The major looked with a thoughtful face at the smiling valley, with its cabins scattered over the slopes, at the lake and the fishing-boats, and the slate-roofed house with its sheds and peat-stacks. He wondered.

No more was said at that moment, however, for Flavia saw that Colonel Sullivan's strength was not to be revived in an hour. He must be assisted to the

house and cared for there. In the meantime, she was anxious to give him wine and food. To procure these she entered the room in which he had been confined.

As she cast her eyes over its dismal interior, marked the poor handful of embers that told of his long struggle with the cold, marked the one chair which he had saved—for to lie on the floor had been death—marked the beaten path that led from the chair to the window, and spoke of many an hour of painful waiting and of hope deferred, she saw the man in another, a more gentle aspect. She had seen the heroism, she now saw the pathos of his conduct, and tears came afresh to her eyes.

Her old grievance against him was forgotten, wiped out of remembrance by his sufferings. She dwelt only on the treatment she had meted out to him.

When they had given him to eat and drink he assured them, smiling, that he could walk. But when he attempted to do so he staggered. "He will need a stronger arm than yours," Payton said with a grin. "May I offer mine?"

For the first time she looked at him gratefully.

"Thank you," she said.

"I can walk," the colonel repeated obstinately. "A little giddy, that is all."

But at the end he needed the help that both could give him. And so it happened that Luke Asgill, standing at the entrance of the courtyard, looked along the road, and saw the three approaching, linked in apparent amity.

The shock was great, for James McMurrrough had fled, cursing, into solitude, taking no steps to warn his ally. The sight struck Asgill with the force of a bullet. Colonel John released, and in the company of Flavia and Payton! All his craft, all his coolness, forsook him at that sight. He slunk out of sight by a back way, but not before Payton had marked his retreat.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SCENE IN THE PASSAGE.

UNDER the shadow of the great peat-stack, whither he had retired that he might make up his mind before he faced the three, Asgill cursed The

McMurrrough with all his heart. It must be through his mismanagement that the thing had befallen, that the prisoner had been released, that Payton had been let into the secret. Now, how was he to get rid of Payton? How prevent Colonel John from resuming that sway in the house which he had exercised before? How nip in the bud that nascent feeling for him which Flavia's outbreak had suggested the night before; or how, short of all this, was he to face either Payton or the colonel?

In council with James McMurrrough he might have arranged a plan of action: at least, he would have learned from him what Payton knew. But James's absence ruined all. In the end, after waiting some time in the vain hope that he would appear, Asgill went in to supper.

Colonel Sullivan was not there; he was in no condition to descend. Nor was Flavia; whereon Asgill reflected, with chagrin, that probably she was attending upon the invalid. Payton was at table with the two O'Beirnes and three other buckeens. The Englishman, amused by the discovery he had made, was openly disdainful of his companions; while the Irishmen, sullen and suspicious, were not aware how much he knew. If The McMurrrough chose to imprison his unpopular kinsman, it was nothing to them; nor a matter into which gentlemen eating at his table and drinking his potheen and claret were called upon to peer too closely.

But for his repute as a duelist they would have picked a quarrel with him there and then. And but for the presence of his four troopers in the background they would have fallen upon him in some less regular fashion. As it was, they sat, eying him askance; and without shame, were relieved when Asgill entered. They looked to him to clear up the situation and put the interloper in his right place.

"I'm fearing I'm late," Asgill said. "Where'll The McMurrrough be?"

"Gone to meet your friend, I should think," Payton replied with a sneer.

Asgill kept a steady face. "My friend," he repeated. "Oh, Colonel Sullivan."

"Yes, your friend who was to return to-day," the other retorted. "Have you seen anything of him?" he continued with a grin.

Asgill fixed his eyes steadily on Payton's face.

"I'm fancying you have the advantage of me," he said. "More by token. I'm thinking, major, you have seen that same friend already."

"Maybe I have."

"And had a bout with him."

"Eh?"

"And faith, had the best of the bout, too!" Asgill continued coolly, and with his eyes fixed on the other's features, as if his one aim was to see if he had hit the mark. "So much the best that I'll be chancing a guess he's up-stairs at this moment, and wounded! Leastwise, I hear you and the young lady brought him to the house between you, and him scarcely able to use his ten toes."

Payton, with his mouth open, glared at the speaker in a manner that at another time must have provoked him to laughter.

"Isn't that the fact?" Asgill asked coolly.

"The fact!" the other burst forth. "No, I'm cursed if it is! And you know it is not! You know as well as I do—" And with that he poured forth a version of the events of the afternoon.

When he had done, "That's a strange story," Asgill said, "if it's true."

"True!" Payton rejoined, laying his hand on a glass and speaking in a towering rage. "You know it's true!"

"I know nothing about it," Asgill replied with the utmost coolness.

"Nothing?"

"And for a good reason. Sure. I'm the last person they would be likely to tell it to!"

"And you were not a party to it?" Payton cried.

"Why should I be?" Asgill rejoined. "What have I to gain by robbing the young lady of her inheritance? I'd be more likely to lose by it than gain."

"Lose by it? Why?"

"That is my affair," Asgill answered. And he hummed:

They tried to put the comether on Judy McBain:

One, two, three, one, two, three!

Cotter and crowder and Paddy O'Thea.

For who but she's owner of Ballymacshane?

He made his meaning so clear, that

Payton, after scowling at him with his hand on a glass as if he meant to throw it, dropped his eyes and his hand and fell into a gloomy study. He could not but own the weight of the other's argument. If Asgill was a pretender to the heiress's hand the last thought in his mind would be to divest her of her property.

Asgill read his thoughts, and presently, "I hope the wound is not serious?" he said.

"He is not wounded," the major answered churlishly.

Meanwhile the O'Beirnes and their fellows grinned their admiration of the bear-tamer; and went out one by one until the two men were left together.

They sat some way apart, Payton brooding savagely with his eyes on the table, Asgill toying with the things before him. Each saw the prize clear before him; each saw the other in the way. Payton cared for the girl herself merely as a toy that had caught his fancy; but his mouth watered for her possessions. Asgill cared little for the inheritance, but he swore that the other man should never live to possess the woman.

"It is a pity," Payton meditated, "for with his aid, I could take the girl, willing or unwilling. She'd not be the first Irish girl who had gone to her marriage across the pommel!" While Asgill reflected that if he could find Payton alone on a dark night, it would not be his smallsword would help him or his four troopers would find him! But it must not be at Morristown!

Each owned, with savage reluctance, that the other had advantages. Asgill was Irish and known to Flavia, but Payton, though English, was the younger, the handsomer, and the better born, and he flattered himself that, given a little time, he would win, if not by favor, by force or fraud.

But could he have looked into Asgill's heart, he would have trembled. For he would have known that, while Irish bogs were deep and Irish pikes were sharp, his life would not be worth one week's purchase if he wronged this girl.

And Asgill suspected the other; and he shook with rage at the thought that Payton might offer the girl some rudeness. When Payton rose to go, he rose also; and when by chance Payton sat down,

he sat down also. At once the Englishman understood; and thenceforth they sat with frowning faces, each more certain with every moment, that, the other removed, his path to the goal was clear and open.

There was claret on the table, and the major did not spare it. When he rose to his feet to retire he was heated and flushed, but not drunk. "Where's that young cub?" he asked.

Asgill shrugged his shoulders. "I can't hope to fill his place," he said with a smooth smile. "But I will be doing the honors as well as I can."

"You are very officious, it seems to me," Payton growled, and then more loudly, "I am going to bed," he said.

"In his absence," Asgill answered with mock politeness, "I will have the honor of lighting you."

"You needn't trouble."

"Faith, and it's no trouble at all," Asgill replied in the same tone. And taking two of the candles from the table, he preceded the Englishman up the stairs.

The gradual ascent of the lights and the men's footsteps should have given Flavia warning of their coming. But either she disdained concealment, or she was thinking of other things, for when they entered the passage beyond the landing they espied the girl standing outside the colonel's door. A pang shot through Asgill's heart, and he drew in his breath.

She raised her hand. "Ah," she said, "he has been crying out! But I think it was in his sleep. Will you be making as little noise as you can?"

Asgill did not answer, but Payton did. "Happy man!" he said. And he said it in such a tone, and with such a look, that a deep blush crimsoned the girl's face.

Her eyes snapped. "Good night," she said coldly.

Asgill continued to keep silence, but Payton did not take the hint. "Wish I'd such a guardian!" he said. "I'd be a happy man then!"

Asgill's face was dark with passion, but "Good night" Flavia repeated coldly. And this time the displeasure in her tone silenced the major. The two men went on to their rooms, though Asgill's hands itched to be at the other's throat. A moment later two doors closed sharply.

Flavia remained in the darkness of the passage, no longer listening, but thinking. Presently she went back to her room.

There she continued to stand, and to think. And the blush which the major's insinuation had brought to her cheek still burned there. It was natural that Payton's words should direct her thoughts to the man outside whose door he had found her: nor less natural that she should institute a comparison between the two; should consider how the one had treated her when he had held her struggling in his arms, when she had beaten his face with her hands; and how the other had treated her in the few hours he had known her.

And so comparing, she could not but find in the one a nobility, in the other a coarseness. For, looking back, and having Payton's words and his manner in her mind, she had to own that, in all his treatment of her, Colonel Sullivan, while opposing and thwarting her, had always respected her.

Strange to say, she could not now understand that rage against him which had carried her to such lengths. How had he wronged her? She could find no sufficient answer. A curtain had fallen between the past and the present. The rising? It stood on a sudden very distant, a thing of the past, an enterprise romantic, but hopeless. The contemptuous words in which he had denounced it rang again in her ears, but they no longer kindled her resentment, they convinced.

As one recovering from sickness looks back on the delusions of fever, Flavia reviewed the hopes of the past month. She saw now it was not with a handful of cotters and peasants that Ireland could be saved, or the true faith restored!

She was still standing a pace within her door, when a foot stumbled heavily on the stairs. She recognized it for James's footstep—she had heard him stumble on those stairs before—and she laid her hand on the latch. She had never had a real quarrel with him until now, outrageously as he had treated her she could not bear to sleep without making an attempt to heal the breach. She opened the door and stepped out.

James's light was traveling up the stairs, but he had not himself reached the

landing. She had just noted this when a door opened and Payton looked out. He saw her, and still flushed with claret, he misunderstood her presence and her purpose. He stepped toward her.

"Thought so!" he chuckled. "Still listening, eh? Why not listen at my door?" He shot out his arm and tried to draw her toward him. "Then it would be a pretty man and a pretty maid. But I've caught you, my beauty! And so—a kiss for a forfeit!"

The girl recoiled, outraged and angry. But, knowing her brother was at hand, and seeing in a flash what might happen, she did so in silence, hoping to escape before he came upon them. Unfortunately Payton misread her silence and took her movement for a show of feigned modesty. With a movement as quick as hers he grasped her roughly, dragged her toward him, and kissed her.

She screamed then in sheer rage—screamed with such passion that Payton let her go, and stepped back with an oath. As he did so he turned, and the turn brought him face to face with James McMurrrough.

The young man, tipsy and wearied, smarting with his wrongs, saw what was before his eyes—his sister in the man's arms—but he saw something more. He saw the man who had thwarted him that day, and whom he had not at that time dared to beard. What he might have done had he been sober, matters not. Drink and vindictiveness gave him the courage he needed, and with a roar of anger, he dashed the glass he was carrying—and its contents—right into Payton's face.

The Englishman dropped where he was, and James stood over him, swearing, while the grease guttered from the tilted candle in his left hand. Flavia gasped and, horror-struck, clutched James's arm as he lifted the candlestick and made as if he would beat in the man's brains.

Fortunately, a stronger hand than hers interfered. It was Asgill who dragged the young man back. "Haven't you done enough?" he cried. "Would you murder the man and his troopers in the house?"

"Ah, didn't you see, curse you, he—"

"I know, I know!" Asgill answered hoarsely. "But not now! Not now! Let

him rise if he can! Let him rise, I say! Payton!"

The moment James stood back the fallen man staggered to his feet, and, though the blood was running down his face from a cut on the cheek-bone, he showed that he was less hurt than startled.

"You'll give me satisfaction for this!" he muttered. "You'll give me satisfaction for this," he repeated between his teeth.

"Ah, by Heaven, I will!" James McMurrrough answered furiously. "And kill you, too!"

"At eight to-morrow! Do you hear? At eight to-morrow! Not an hour later!"

"I'll not keep you waiting," James retorted.

Flavia, leaning almost fainting against her door, tried to speak, but her voice failed her.

Payton's livid, scowling, bleeding face was hate itself. "Behind the yews in the garden," he said.

"Ah, I'll meet you there!" The McMurrrough answered, pot-valiant. "And more by token, order your coffin, for you'll need it!" Drink and rage left no place in his brain for fear.

"That will be seen—to-morrow," the Englishman answered in a tone that chilled the girl's marrow. Then, with his kerchief pressed to his cheek to stanch the blood, he retreated to his room and slammed the door. They heard him turn the key in it.

Flavia found her voice. She looked at her brother. "Ah, Heavens!" she cried. "Why did I open my door?"

James, still pot-valiant, returned her look. "Because you were a fool," he said. "But I'll spit him, never fear!" In his turn he went on unsteadily to his room, disappearing within it and closed the door.

Flavia and Asgill remained together. Her eyes met his. "Ah, why did I open my door?" she cried. "Ah! why did I?"

He had no comfort for her. He shook his head but did not speak.

"He will kill him!" she said.

Asgill reflected in a heavy silence. "I will think what can be done," he muttered at last. "I will think! Do you go to bed!"

"To bed?" she cried.

"There is naught to be done to-night," he answered in a low tone. "If the troopers were not with him—but that is useless. And—his door is locked. Do you go to bed and I will think what we can do!"

"You will save James?" She laid her hand on Asgill's arm.

He quivered.

"Ah, you will save him!" She had

(To be concluded.)

forgotten her brother's treatment of her earlier in the day.

"If I can," he said slowly. His face was damp and very pale. "If I can," he repeated, "but it will not be easy to save him honorably."

"What do you mean?" she whispered.

"He'll save himself, I fancy. But his honor—"

"Ah!" The word came from her in a cry of pain.

EDUCATING MARJORIE.

BY ELIZABETH NEWPORT HEPBURN.

A SHORT STORY.



IN the characteristic room—cool, spacious, book-lined—Kate and Marjorie Peyton faced each other with that vital interest, accompanied by a curious veiled antagonism, begotten of their complete unlikeness.

Marjorie was nineteen, but so mature of figure, so calm-eyed and reposeful, that she might everywhere have passed for twenty-two. Whereas Kate, at forty-three, looked younger than her years, thanks as much to her modern, alert, even brilliant, mind as to her slim body and her smooth, fair skin. She was staring at the girl now with a little puzzled frown.

"But, Marjorie, you are such a child; nineteen is terribly young, sweetheart! How can I let you decide your whole life now?"

Marjorie smiled that inscrutable slow smile of hers. She leaned a little forward and touched her mother's strong white hand; then she spread out her own beside it.

"Mother, darling, we're as different as our two hands—look at them!"

Kate saw her own hand—thin, almost virile in its expression of energy—artistic from slim wrist to tapering finger-tips; it might have been the hand

of a painter or of a musician. Marjorie's hand, lying beside it on the older woman's knee, was round, deliciously plump, wholly and obviously womanly.

Marjorie laughed softly.

"Your hand is young and clever and eager, *Mütterchen*. Mine is already quite grown-up, but commonplace—just a little, old-fashioned feminine thing!"

"It's very pretty," said Kate gravely.

Marjorie's head tipped judicially. Her warm brown eyes laughed.

"It is pretty. But it can't write or paint, or do any clever stunts like yours. It just advertises me for what I am—nothing but a woman."

Kate captured the brown, dimpled scrap of a hand.

"Marjorie, you're not a woman. You're a girl—a little, unsophisticated goose of a girl—and you're mine. I'm going to keep you like this for *years*."

But Marjorie drew back. Her lips straightened, her eyes flashed a sudden warning. Her full bosom under its muslin bodice rose and fell with her quickened breathing; she spoke no longer with her usual deliberation, but with a growing intensity of feeling.

"Mother, I tried it for a year because you wanted me to do what you did. But I hate it, every bit of it—basket-ball and 'math' and English, and the tiresome,

hackneyed professors, and the tomboy girls all talking their eternal slang. I hate the very atmosphere of the place; the only time I really lived during the whole long year was when I was out on the lake by myself, drifting along and telling myself stories of what life would be like away from college—”

She flushed a little, but went on bravely.

“I’m not like you, mother. I don’t care for a lot of other women. Individually I like them well enough, but in the mass I am afraid of them. I want to know men. I want to have friends among them—I even want lovers—while I still feel so young—so alive.”

Kate Peyton flung out her hands with a little laughing gasp.

“But, Marjorie, you’re barely nineteen! And you will be only twenty-one when you graduate. Child—the lovers will come then, and you will know better how to discriminate, how to choose your real mate. Why, kiddie, I met your father the year I left college, when I was twenty-two; four years before. I wouldn’t have realized that he was exactly what I wanted and needed.

“Even that was too young. I have since thought, except that your father was five years older and very mature, strong and sane and competent. But then my mind and tastes were developing.

“At the end of a college course a girl usually finds herself, knows what she wants, what she can do, the men and women who are for her, who speak her language.

“And all this apart from the duty of women as well as men to fit themselves to become economic factors in this modern world.”

Marjorie shrugged.

“I know, mother. You made me read ‘Woman in Economics’ last summer. I didn’t like it, or understand it, either. But I’m perfectly willing to study bookkeeping and stenography—something practical. I don’t want to stay idle until”—she hesitated, then ended up bravely—“until I marry.”

Kate suddenly broke into reluctant laughter.

“That’s it—the difference between us, Madge. I belonged to the group of girls who say ‘if I marry.’ I have noticed

before that you always put it ‘when I marry.’”

Marjorie’s soft cheek went from pink to damask, but her eyes met her mother’s eyes unflinchingly.

“It’s true. I do expect to marry. I can’t imagine any interest in life as keen as one’s own share of love for a particular man—and for—babies.”

Kate laid her hand on the girl’s shoulder. Her voice had in it no hint of amusement. In spite of her disappointment, she held to her privilege of comradeship.

“Dear, I think you are very sweet to talk to me like this. I wanted to understand, and I think I do now. Also, I am grateful to you for the one year. I think the experience has developed your mind as well as some of your prejudices. But I can see that you oughtn’t to go back, and you shall not. I will talk to Don about a business course here at home. And there will be compensation to me, little daughter, in the joy of having you around.”

Marjorie gave a sigh of relief. Unaccustomed tears stood in her eyes.

“Oh, *Mütterchen*, thank you! And I’m glad that *you*, anyhow, are—modern. It’s what makes you tolerant even for my hateful difference. I know. But am I a changeling? How can I belong to you and dad?”

II.

THAT next winter Peyton and Kate and their intimates were relegated to the study on the second floor, where Kate had formerly done all her writing. She now wrote in a tiny chamber at the top of the house, furnished from left-overs long in possession, and used the study as living-room for herself and Peyton. The drawing-room Marjorie calmly appropriated, in the late afternoon to pour tea for her friends and Kate’s, in the evening to receive the young men who called singly or in groups, apparently possessed by an ungovernable enthusiasm for the young person’s society.

After their return to town in the autumn, Kate had been somewhat uneasy lest Marjorie, busy during the morning with her business course, should find the afternoons and evenings dull; for Kate, full of her own work, had gone out very little among smart New York women.

Her one or two successful books and the Peyton stand among old New York gentle-folk assured her excellent social opportunities, which for years she had systematically neglected. Now, with Marjorie at home, she wondered how and where the girl was to meet desirable men.

But she soon ceased to worry. The sons of her old friends, of Peyton's Yale classmates, had but to see Marjorie once. After that, the young woman could pick and choose among them. And youngsters Marjorie had met during the summer at Lenox or Newport inevitably appeared in her stately little drawing-room. For even the look of the house, save for Kate's sanctum, was rapidly changing; Marjorie's taste for an old-fashioned dignity was metamorphosing the pleasant, sunshiny house; it still remained a cheerful place, but here and there its artistic wholeness of aspect was yielding to Marjorie's passion for antique brocades, spinning-wheels, crystal chandeliers, gilt-framed mirrors.

Peyton laughed at the expense of these new-old belongings.

"They make a fascinating background for her, Katy. She's like some *grande dame* of Colonial days. She ought to wear powdered hair and old China crape shawls and crinoline."

Kate turned from her desk and looked up at him with a gleam in her eyes.

"You will ruin her, Don. She hasn't an idea of the value of money. Her dressmaker's bill last month was scandalous. It more than balanced all that I've made from my short stories in three months. I let you pay it, but I counted the cost."

Peyton kissed a little ring of hair on Kate's white neck.

"She's a terrible young person, Kathleen. She's extravagant and anti-modern and over-sexed, and all the rest of it. But she's the prettiest thing I have seen in years. And she seems to stick to her business course heroically, considering her temptations to play with Heaven knows how many eligible young men possessed of automobiles."

Kate laughed unwillingly.

"I know now what my Virginia great-grandmother was like—the one who went on riding horseback and dancing at balls in velvet and pearls after she had had

five babies. She died at thirty—but she must have had a gay life of it, judging by that old diary of hers and the belongings which have come down to me and Marjorie. Don, those pearls made the child into a tearing beauty last night at the Van Costs'."

"She doesn't need pearls," said Marjorie's father. But he added after a moment, as he tumbled the sheets of Kate's manuscript: "She's fascinating, Katy, but I wish she had a mind a bit more like her mother's. I honestly don't know what to talk to her about when we're alone. She's not interested in my law or your literature or everybody's politics. She doesn't care a hang about the world of thoughts or action. When all's said, she is just an obstinately obsolete creature with a beautiful face."

Kate's head drooped a little; then she drifted into sudden laughter.

"But, Don, your clever wife was never, in her maddest, merriest years, such a belle. The child has had half a dozen proposals since June—and now Bobby Prendergast, with his mines and his yachts and his motor-cars, is hanging on every word she utters. He's young and clean and handsome—and no man's fool, even if he hasn't what you and I call a mind."

Peyton nodded.

"Bobby's all right—if you don't happen to be bored to death by him. If she just fancied Peter Cartwright, now, or Léon Mercier!"

He sat down on the arm of Kate's chair and rumbled her loosened hair into a distracting bronze mass. Kate leaned against him with a little sigh.

"Peter is a wonder—and Léon is the wittiest creature I know. I've tried to steal Marjorie for a talk with them up here now and then. Peter brought back that story of mine last week to discuss the love-letter. He said it was too realistic to be effective, and I called Marjorie in and asked her opinion before them both. She read it, then looked out of the window; she said: 'I don't believe in love-letters, mother. A man ought to propose to a girl face to face, unless he is just asking her out of politeness and doesn't want her to accept. And after he has proposed he ought to *stay around*.'"

Peyton broke into delighted laughter.

"She had you there, Katy!"

"She had me, indeed! Léon agreed with her at once, but Peter undertook to argue the question. They talked for half an hour, and Peter was brilliant, delicious. He cornered Marjorie a dozen times, but she stuck to her point even while she stayed in the corner; and then James came to announce Bobby and the machine, and she flew away like a bird loosed from a cage. We watched the start from my window—and I felt positively sorry for Léon and Peter. Contrasted with Bobby and Marjorie, they seemed centuries old."

"Why weren't you even sorrier for your forty-year-old self?"

"Oh, because!"

"Why, sphinx?"

"Don, you're demoralizing me, and I must work this whole chapter over so that Peter can have it to-night. You told me you had to read a lot of law this evening on that Thurbin case—so please go and do it. Oh, you know it, anyhow, egotist—I can stand being forty or any old age—*because of you.*"

III.

PETER CARTWRIGHT was a busy publisher and editor, widely experienced in men and things and possessed of the keenest and subtlest literary discrimination. For a good many years—indeed, since the appearance of Kate's first novel published by Cartwright & Chalmers—he had been a habitu  of the Peyton house, devoted to Kate and likewise a crony of Peyton's.

To Don he had once made a curious confession.

"I want you to understand my position, Peyton," he had said, with a direct glance out of his far-apart, honest eyes. Over thirty-five, he was still a boyish-looking man, well built, clean limbed, clear eyed, with a rare smile which his friends loved.

Donald Peyton had waited with some curiosity, and Cartwright went on deliberately:

"Peyton, ever since your wife first came into my office she has seemed to me the one woman on earth. I can't analyze my feeling, but I know that her friendship has long been dearer to me than the possible love of any other woman. She

makes them all seem tame, colorless. Yet I think I'm man enough to rejoice in your happiness—and hers. Only, you ought to know the truth. Now, do you want me around?"

And Peyton, the grip of his great hand on Cartwright's, answered briefly:

"Sure we want you around, Peter—and I may as well confess to you that I've never been able to understand why all sane men don't feel just as I do about Kate."

After which conversation the relation between the two men developed into a curious friendship, and Kate, delighting in their intimacy, never guessed how it had come about. She trusted Peter as completely as she trusted Don, and rejoiced in this triangular camaraderie with a laughing disdain of the future Mrs. Peter Cartwright.

"For when you get a wife, Peter, she will make you repudiate me and Don for all time."

"Don't worry about Mrs. Cartwright," said Peter. "She shall be as generous as you, Kate, or I'll have none of her."

This last conversation took place after Marjorie's return home. Kate and Peter had come up to the library after drinking tea with Marjorie and young Prendergast in the drawing-room.

"That affair is beginning to look like the inevitable end of Maid Marjorie," said Peter. "But Bobby is a good boy. He almost deserves even your daughter, Kate."

Kate's eyebrows lifted.

"I wanted a man for my son-in-law, Peter—a grown-up, analyzing, intelligent creature capable of developing Marjorie's brain as well as her emotions. The kind of man I've thought about would be a liberal education—considerably more of an education than any college—for Marjorie. But apparently she wants Bobby."

"And perhaps Bobby's little million?" suggested Cartwright rather meanly.

Kate flushed.

"Peter, Marjorie may not be clever, but she's incurably sincere. She wouldn't marry any man on earth for a secondary reason. It would be love with her—or nothing."

Peter apologized.

"Of course that must be true of your

daughter. But I can't always remember that she *is* your daughter. And though I see a great deal of her, I don't seem to know her very well."

"I doubt whether anybody does--unless it's Bobby," returned Kate.

Not long after this Cartwright and Bobby Prendergast were neighbors at a fraternity dinner. The older man was impressed by the boy's sense and simplicity. He had not liked him before, but a remark made between toasts riveted his attention and changed the current of his thoughts.

"Women either set men at sword's-point or turn them into comrades," said Bobby Prendergast, with unusual acumen. "Mr. Cartwright, seeing you at the Peytons' has made me want to know you. I'm not literary, and all that, like you and Mrs. Peyton, but I care a lot for Marjorie, and I want to count with Marjorie's people and their kind."

Cartwright liked the frankness of the boy. He also felt flattered. It looked a little as if Marjorie must care a good deal for her mother, and her mother's friends, if young Prendergast considered Peter's good-will desirable.

After this he and Kate went more frequently with Marjorie and Bobby in the latter's great touring-car. Spring came early that year, and the four of them would drive down to Wall Street, entice Peyton from his office, and then cross the Brooklyn Bridge and steer through crowded streets to the smooth, broad Long Island roads.

One April afternoon they turned in at the Country Club, and had dinner on the piazza. Kate thought she had never seen Marjorie so lovely. The girl, usually of a healthy creamy palor, was flushed, and even a little tanned by the fresh winds. Her fair hair curled back from her low broad brow, her eyes shone; she was the incarnation of lovely girlhood--innocent, yet curiously mature. Bobby's eyes watched her with an obvious adoration. The two older men, father and friend, seemed to concentrate their attention upon the girl's fresh charm for the first time. Kate watched them all dreamily. Her daughter's beauty made her glow with a half-breathless pleasure, and she had a whimsical consciousness of being outshone for the moment, even in the

eyes of these two men so long peculiarly her own.

Later Bobby and Marjorie were alone for a moment on the piazza, and when Kate came upon them in their moonlit corner she surprised a little scene which made her retreat hastily into the big living-room, with its open fire. She sat down between Peter and her husband, feeling a little lonely and aloof.

Bobby was a dear fellow, but not her kind. She felt that Bobby's wife would be no longer her Marjorie, and again she had that vision of Marjorie, as she might have been awakened by a man of a different type.

She hated, too, the idea of an early marriage: yet what could be more absurd than a long engagement with Bobby, who was rich, independent, steady, and ardently in love? She was half pleased, in a somewhat guilty fashion, when she discovered before they started home that Bobby's right hand had been injured by a golf-ball so that he could not manage the machine.

Marjorie, in the front seat, looked up with dismay.

"But how are you going to get home, Bobby? Father can't drive the machine, you know."

"Cartwright can," said Bobby briefly. And it was Cartwright who took the vacant place beside the girl, while the other three tucked themselves into the wide rear seat.

That ride through the crystallin night Kate long remembered. Under cover of the darkness Don held her hand--the old tense clasp of the one lover in her world whom she had long ago recognized and chosen. But she spared a thought for Bobby, bereft for the time of Marjorie--Bobby sitting very quiet and straight in his corner, only leaning forward now and then to direct Cartwright's course. Marjorie also seemed thoughtful, unwontedly silent.

To-morrow, Kate reasoned, might come the announcement of this very suitable betrothal which she must learn to like. She saw again the fleeting vision--the girl in the arms of the boy--and heard Bobby's low, passionate: "Marjorie, Marjorie!"

Thought the mother: "In temperament, taste, choice, Marjorie belongs to

some of her far-away ancestors rather than to Don and me."

IV.

KATE looked up from her desk as the girl entered the room, after a tentative pause at the door.

"No, dear; I am not too busy. You are much more attractive than my heroine—I made her hatchet-faced and homely by way of variety. And now I detest her!"

Marjorie dropped into a chair near her mother's. She was obviously embarrassed. Kate was sure that she had slept ill. She felt herself suddenly an ogre because she was mean enough to grudge this dimpled, lovely girl to Bobby Prendergast—good, kind, rich Bobby.

She took the girl's hand and gave it a friendly squeeze.

"I'm not merely your mother, kiddie; I'm your friend. Speak up and tell me all about it."

To her amazement the girl put her hands to her face and broke into a passion of tears. Kate withdrew her hand, with an instant realization that this was no time for caresses. As a child Marjorie had always fought out her troubles alone, averse to the most persuasive cuddling, the most tactful affection while her grief held sway.

Now she cried stormily for a moment, then dropped her hands and faced her mother, with wet cheeks and innocent, honest, grieved eyes.

"You'll think I'm crazy, *Mütterchen*, but I want to get out of it all. I want to go back to college, where I belong."

Kate sat and looked at her in amazed consternation.

"But I thought you were going to marry Bobby!" she cried.

The girl wiped her eyes openly, and that mysterious sphinx-like smile curved her lips for a moment, and made Kate feel like an ignorant girl. Would she ever understand this daughter of hers—who was not clever, and yet who puzzled her as no clever person had ever done? Marjorie's smile faded, but her eyes seemed to grow large and dreamy.

"I shall never marry Bobby, *Mütterchen*, although at one time I thought I might. I let him kiss me good-by. I was so sorry for him."

Kate waited. The girl sat with her hands in her lap, her eyes on the rooftops visible from the window of the little writing-room. Her face seemed to grow thinner, finer, more spiritual as she talked.

"I've had a good time all winter, mother. It's been very exciting—Bobby and the others; but I've had enough of it. I've found out how crude and ignorant I am, and I want to go back to college and really study, so that you and father may be proud of me!"

Kate made a little guilty movement.

"We are proud of you, darling. Your father and I feel exactly like the old duck that hatched the swan of the fairy tale. You are different, of course, but you are good and lovely and splendidly yourself. I have come to feel this winter that you will get your real education in a wider school than college."

But Marjorie flushed suddenly.

"I would like to go back, mother, really. I want to take a special course in English, and learn to understand and care about the things which count to you and father."

Kate's hopeless puzzlement was increasing every moment, but she kissed the girl gently.

"You shall do as you please, dear. And now we must freshen up for luncheon. Your father and Peter are both coming."

They went down-stairs together, and half an hour later Peter Cartwright entered the drawing-room, to find Marjorie alone, ensconced in her favorite lounging-chair near the low tea-table. A book lay in her lap, the sunshine burnished her brown hair and brought out the wonderful fairness of her face and throat, quite dazzling Peter's eyes as they rested upon the girl's fresh loveliness. He picked up her book after their informal greeting, only to drop it again indifferently.

"The classic 'Marius'! I never could read Pater," said the man of letters, with a shrug of his big shoulders.

Marjorie stared at him, and the color in her cheeks deepened.

"I thought Walter Pater was one of the great stylists—one of the masters?" she said slowly.

"He is, of course," said Peter. "But that doesn't make him human. Steven-

son's English is quite as mellow, and he says things about live people in a live universe."

Marjorie leaned a little forward, so that her face was touched by shadow. Her voice was curiously indifferent, as though she were covering with exquisite care all that marvelous youth of hers, so that she might appear quite an ancient and stolid person.

"Did you know that I have decided to go back to college next year, Mr. Cartwright?"

Peter stared much as Kate had done.

"Why, I thought you were going to marry Bobby Prendergast," he blurted out, with a man's impertinent directness.

"Well, I'm *not*!" said the girl, and as she spoke she rose from her low chair and faced Peter with such an effect of dignity that for the first time he saw Kate's little daughter as a woman—fair, vividly young, yet, in some new fashion, mature. She was looking at him with an expression which he found himself trying to interpret, without success.

"You and mother and father all seem to consider me quite hopeless, Mr. Cartwright. But, after all, I am my mother's daughter, and when she married father, and made a friend of you, it would seem inconsistent of me to be marrying Bobby, dear and good as he is."

"But if you love Bobby—" began Cartwright gravely.

He caught a flash from her burning blue eyes, suddenly like Kate's in expression.

"But I don't love him," she said indignantly. And then something in Peter's gaze seemed to paralyze speech for them. They stood still, in the middle of the room, staring at each other.

Then Peter took a step forward. His face was aglow: he looked young, amazingly alert: he laughed—a short, scornful laugh.

"College! You going to college? Not on your life! What you are going to do is something much more old-fashioned."

She was in his arms now, sobbing, shaking, a passionate woman and a tired little girl in one.

"You clever people are so *stupid*!" was what she said at last.

Peter kissed her again.

"I'm stupid, all right, and slow, and old. But I've found out that I love you, Marjorie, as I didn't dream a man could love."

Peter felt the butterfly movement of her eyelashes against his cheek. Some sense of the richness and promise of her nature, of her possibility for large development once her heart should be satisfied, revealed to him that Kate's daughter would be to him more than Kate could ever have become.

She was merely the type of old-fashioned woman, whose emotions develop before and not after the full flowering of the mind.

But she nestled closer to him.

"Peter, I can do anything, become anything, now that you love me. And if I go back and get my degree I may count to you more, you may love me better—the way father cares for mother."

But Peter laughed again, and his arms though tender were masterful.

"I can't spare you, darling. My own education has been horribly neglected. You are going to teach *me* the mystery of youth, the secret of happiness. And if there are any other things worth while, we'll learn them gradually—together."

THE CHOICE.

You loved the wind and storm,
The mad night's glee,
Your eyes were bright with flecks of fire
When wild the sea.

I chose the havens still,
Where waters sleep—
But, oh! my heart has gone with you
Out on the deep.

Wallace Arthur.

SMITHERS, STOWAWAY.

BY FREDERICK BARBOUR.

A SHORT STORY.



SMITHERS stowed away under duress. He was desperate. The hold of the Samoan, in which he found himself, was not the ideal place for the purpose, it is true. He would have had less irksome confinement on one of the fast mail-steamers. But Smithers was not at all fastidious. His first care was to get out of Honolulu; the rest could be considered later.

In those blissful Hawaiian Isles life may be far, at times, from the roseate for a man like Smithers. He had always been "no good." And when he arrived in Hawaii, where one cannot long live loosely within the law, he soon found himself amenable. Whatever Smithers was—and he had lived on and been driven out from the China coast—he had a feeling of repugnance at being permanently degraded as husband of one of the blowzy brown beauties with whom he had mixed himself up. Besides, such a thing hampers a fellow's liberty, and Smithers wanted to be foot-loose.

Consequently, when he found that a warrant was out for him, he decided to seek less precarious regions.

He lounged out to the old channel wharf and looked the Samoan over. He slunk away when he saw a police officer. But he hung around, watching his chance, and when it came he went boldly up the gangplank and crossed quickly to the off-shore side of the vessel.

It was simple enough at noon, when the stevedores went onto the dock to eat their lunch, to wander down into the hold and get lost among the piles of oriental freight destined for San Francisco. When he had found a comfortable location, he sat down, rolled a cigarette, and forgot

most of his troubles. Hours later the motion of the vessel told him that she was at sea.

Presently Smithers heard a noise—a most disquieting one. Coming out of the blackness of the hold about him, it was uncanny. He could have sworn that something animate was moving about among the bales and boxes. Several times he heard the noise—uncertainly—and at last quite near. Then he made it out distinctly; it sounded like some one stumbling about in the dark.

"Hallo!" said Smithers cautiously.

The noise ceased.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Who're you?" a hoarse voice returned.

"None of your business," Smithers answered smartly. "If you must know, I'm a stowaway."

"Well," answered the voice after a pause, "so am I."

So Smithers made the acquaintance of his companion in durance vile.

"Come over and sit down," he said. "Make yourself to home."

The man complied, after a good deal more stumbling about.

"My name's Smith; what's yours?"

"Jones."

"Have a smoke?"

"Thanks."

"Can you roll the pill in the dark?"

"Sure."

"Got a match?"

"Yep."

Two tiny lights glowed a moment amid silence, while the two men looked at each other from the corners of their eyes. Smithers saw a young man's face—an ingenuous face—smooth-shaven and frank.

It was the newcomer who broke the silence.

"Say," he asked, "ain't it time we go on deck and get in line for something to eat?"

"Eh? Do you want to work your head off?"

"Don't mind it."

"What?" asked Smithers incredulously.

"I say, I don't mind workin'."

"Then, why did you stow here?"

"Had to."

"Uh!" Smithers ruminated over that in silence.

"Had to git away?" he finally asked.

"Yep."

"Well, so did I."

The other made no comment.

"Do you want to git shipped back to Honolulu, or git jailed?" Smithers queried.

"By Heaven, no!"

"Then, take my tip, an' don't go on deck. See? I ain't."

"You don't mean to say they'd reship me?"

Smithers laughed long and loud.

"Would they? Oh, no! Well, I guess you're pretty green at this business. Reship or a term in the pen, my boy."

"Then I *don't* go on deck. That's sure. I—I've *got* to git off this packet at 'Frisco, an' that's all there is to it."

"Git ashore? That's all good enough, but it ain't the point as I see it. Git *away* from Honolulu is the cry, I thinks."

"I've got to git to 'Frisco—ashore." Jones reiterated.

"Queer," commented Smithers doubtfully.

"No, it ain't," maintained the other, in some heat. "I ain't ashamed of it! I—I've just got to git home to my wife. That's it." After a pause, he finished: "I got this letter this morning, or maybe it was yesterday."

Smithers heard the rustling of paper in the darkness.

"I can't see, but it says something like this: 'Come at once, Bill. I'm sick, and can't get well, the doctors say, and I want you to forgive me everything. You'll come, won't you, Bill? You'll come, like the old dear you uster be before I was a fool, and there was any trouble? Come quick, before I die, and

tell me you forgive me, so that I can rest peacefully in my grave—for our children's sake.'" His voice was very husky. "An' I will," he said, "so help me God!"

Nothing occurred to Smithers to say, so he said nothing.

Being resourceful, he found food, and stayed successfully below hatches. Two days out of Honolulu he bribed the steerage steward with half of Jones's little reserve of cash, and after that the problem was simple, even if their position was a whit more precarious and doubtful than before.

While they lived down there in the darkness, Jones told, by degrees, all of his simple life-story. It was the old, old tale, but this time made sublime by the man's devotion, by his one idea of reaching home in time to forgive.

He had been "broke" when the letter came from San Francisco, and had been refused employment on this steamer, the only one to leave in days.

Deaf ears were turned to him when he told his tale, and he went away sore and aggrieved.

And so he became the companion of the fugitive, down in the cargo-space.

II.

BETIMES they learned from the steadiness of the vessel—and from the absence for a cruel period of the steerage steward and any food—that they had arrived at the Golden Gate.

"Now's time to watch our chance and sneak ashore," said Smithers. "I hope—that is—I sorter wish an' hope you find your wife a—er—waiting for you."

"Thanks," said Jones, swallowing hard. "If I don't—" He sighed.

"Well, anyway, there's something for you to look forward to," said Smithers. "You ain't all to the bad yet. You are going to make her happy for a while, you know."

"Yes, yes."

"And you're lucky."

"Me? Lucky? Good Lord!"

"Yes, you are," Smithers insisted.

"Now, look at me—just you look at me. I ain't got nothing to look forward to but a hunt for something to eat when I git ashore—if I git there. I'm just a no-account cuss, what never did nothing in

his life but make trouble. If you ain't lucky, then I don't know."

"But you haven't the pain," put in Jones, in his boylike way. "Think of that."

"Sure! But, even then, you are better off than I am. What am I but a loafer and a bum, that any cop in the country would be glad to lay by the heels at the first chance?"

Smithers was in a mood—a mood as gloomy as the hold in which the men were immured. It was hot and close in there; and the atmosphere seemed to enhance, if it had not induced, the mood of the man.

"I ought not to live," he declared bitterly; "and I'm too much of a coward to die. I feel's if something terrible was going on, though. It's ghostly down here." He shivered unaccountably.

"Don't," said Jones; "you give me a creep."

"I'm only a hobo that's better dead," went on Smithers gloomily.

"No, you ain't," retorted Jones warmly. "You have been a good fellow all through this, and I won't forget it, you can bet. You're going to be a man, if you take a brace—"

"No, I'm not! Not by a darned sight! I can't. Never did a good thing in my life, as I can think of—"

Suddenly he stopped, and rose slowly to his feet.

"What's that?" he asked.

Jones jumped to his feet.

"What?"

"That smell!"

It came to them plainly enough—a penetrating, insidious odor which might have been around them undetected for some time, or which might have just then invaded the part of the hold in which they were.

"Oh," said Jones, reseating himself, "I guess it don't amount to much. I won't bother about it, anyway."

Smithers sat down also, but stirred uneasily in his place.

"I don't like it," he said, coughing slightly. "It chokes up me pipes! I can't breathe!"

The odor came more strongly, and now Jones had a violent fit of coughing.

"A port-hole would help," he said. "This is blamed unpleasant."

The two men had had access through the voyage, at calm times, to a starboard port-hole, to which they had been shown by the steerage steward. Toward this they now began to grope their way.

"It ought to be about here somewhere," said Smithers, seized with a paroxysm of coughing. He tore his collar away from his throat: he was smothering.

Behind him Jones was breathing brokenly, between gasps and coughs.

"No," said Smithers; "we missed the place. We got to go round this way." His lungs felt as if they would burst.

"Hurry!" gasped his companion. "I can't—stand—this much—longer."

Smithers felt his head reeling. Suddenly Jones seized him from behind, with the grip of sheer terror.

"I know!" he panted. "They are—have the hatches—battened—fumi-gating!"

As the truth came home dimly to Smithers's reeling brain, he snatched himself loose from the clutching hand of his companion and dashed frantically forward to find the little opening which might mean relief from his terrible torture. He beat the sides of the vessel with his hands. He tore the flesh from his palms against the cruel, unyielding iron. He shouted and raved and swore and wept. His head struck against the side of the ship, as he staggered drunkenly, and he pitched forward on his face, stunned.

Then Jones found the aperture, and flung the port-hole open. Air! One rush—a barely perceptible relief to the man behind him, and then Jones thrust his head out, leaving Smithers—

But, no! Desperate, frenzied, Smithers rushed on the other, seized him by the shoulders, dragged him back, struggled with him, choked him, feeling his fingers sink deep into the soft flesh of the throat.

On the floor they rolled. Strangled by the poisonous gases, locked in a deadly embrace, turning and twisting on the deck with their last ounce of strength, they bit and clawed and struck viciously.

Smithers was the stronger. Flinging Jones from him, he rushed to the round spot of light which spelled life and thrust forth his head.

Ah, the air! The air! How the life-

giving flood rushed into his aching lungs! He drank it in deep breaths.

He was dimly conscious of a weak grasp on his shoulder, and of a gagging, gasping voice behind him, saying: "Oh—air, air—dead! My wife—never see me—to forgive—"

Strangely the words burned into Smithers's brain. His wife? What was it? Then he remembered, as clearly seeing the picture as if it were photographed by a strong lens. Waiting for him—lying on her white bed, yearning, watching, in vain—that she might at last rest peacefully from all her pain.

He hesitated, stepped back from the opening, lifted Jones in his arms and thrust his head into the aperture.

"You're married, Bill," he said. "You first. I am—going to find another port—"

Some one on the quarantine wharf spied the head protruding from the port-hole. A sling was put over the vessel's side, and a man sent down with an armful of oakum, that the opening between Jones's neck and the sides of the hole might be stuffed tight.

Half an hour later rescuers got down to the place. A lifeless body lay at Jones's feet.

Leaning on strong, sympathetic arms the saved man bent over the corpse.

"And he said he was better so," he murmured brokenly.

THE CLEVERNESS OF CARDILLAC.*

BY ROBERT BARR,

Author of "A Woman Intervenes," "Tekla," "Young Lord Stranleigh," Etc., Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

VICTOR DE CARDILLAC, of Gascony, comes to Paris, bearing a letter from Charles d'Albert de Luynes, favorite and master of the young King Louis XIII. Cardillac meets Tresor, confidential servant of De Luynes, who tells Cardillac the letter is a hoax. Tresor offers Cardillac a chance to meet De Luynes and prove his mettle. Cardillac goes to a rear gate of the palace, whence, as specified, a man, supposedly De Luynes, comes forth. Cardillac provokes him to a duel and is wounded. He discovers that his antagonist is not De Luynes, but the Duc de Montreuil, an opponent of De Luynes, though, for appearance' sake, his adherent.

The duke and Cardillac are suddenly surrounded by the guard. The duke reveals his identity to the sergeant of police, and pretends that Cardillac has been wounded by foot-pads. He invites both Cardillac and the sergeant to his house; and wheedles from the sergeant a *lettre de cachet* signed by the king. Then the duke proposes to furnish Cardillac with funds and all necessaries for six months, if Cardillac will undertake to recover his kidnaped daughter Thérèse, who is detained in a royal convent.

Cardillac gets into the convent by using the *lettre de cachet*, but the abbess divines his ruse. He is forced to flee to avoid arrest. In his flight he surprises a girl who has been cavedropping. He pursues her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE CONVENT.

IT is to be regretted that the flying girl, who possessed an appreciation of the grotesque, could not have glanced over her shoulder and seen the immediate result of her defection. In her escape, she had sprung to one side, and then,



speeding like a sylph, had placed the stone-curbed, iron-canopied well between her and him.

He precipitated himself head first under the iron arch and across the well, like a circus-rider dashing through a hoop; but, alas, his toe touched the stone, and headlong he sprawled, all fours, on the sward. Springing erect, he voiced an oath all the more deplorable because of the sacred precincts in which it was ut-

* This story began in THE CAVALIER for October, 1908.

tered; and now all his alertness was needed if he was to overtake so fleet a fugitive.

She needed but two seconds to escape; one moment was accorded to her by the well-club, the other was denied her by the small door she essayed to close, for ere she got it completely shut the foot that played traitor to him at the well now stood Cardillac's friend, and, although the girl exerted all her strength, she could not shut him out. Rudely he pressed the door back upon her. She turned, and made for the stone stair, but his forceful arms were round her waist before she reached the second step. She turned in their embrace and struck him again and again with her small clenched fists—ineffectual blows, which he took with the nonchalance of a Stoic.

Dragging her toward the partially closed door, he kicked it shut with his foot, then, holding her helpless with one hand, thrust in the stout bolt—an act she had hoped to accomplish alone, with him on the outside. Next, he seized her by the shoulders and pressed her back against the rough stone wall, and dim as was the light in that hallway, nevertheless he saw the starlike sparkle of indignation in those dark eyes which looked at him unafraid; and an emotion of admiration thrilled him as he remembered that during this assault not once had her beautiful red lips given breath to a scream for help.

When he spoke, it was very quietly; manner and tone and words impressed the captive in spite of herself.

"My girl," he said, "ordinarily I am a gentleman, but at this moment I am a wild beast at bay, I am a wolf trapped, and however cowardly the animal may be when at liberty, beware of the wolf when the death-call catches him. If I have hurt you, I am sorry; but believe me, girl, if you will not do exactly what I tell you, I shall crush you into pulp, or break you like a reed. Do you credit this from one who has just proclaimed himself a gentleman?"

"You are no gentleman, but a low-born *vaucien*, and because you are such, I quite believe you will treat me as you propose."

"I am no *vaucien*, as you would at once perceive if your eyes were as pene-

trating as they are beautiful. I am Victor de Cardillac, of Gascony, and will be Marquis of Cardillac in succession to my father (long may he live!), which is a remark I would not make of the king. And now, my girl, who are you?"

"I am Marie Duchamps, and will never be a *marquise*, because I could not bring myself to wed the title if such as you wear it."

"You are premature. Time enough to refuse when you are asked, *ma petite Marie*. But I have no time for amiable and complimentary conversation."

"Oh, yes, you have. They will never get down that door till they send to Beaugency for a petard, and they have not thought of that yet."

"You have told me who you are. What are you in this convent?"

"I am waiting-maid to Mlle. de Montreuil."

"Ah, my luck still holds! Where is she?"

"I shall not tell you."

His grip tightened on her plump shoulders, and she winced under his grasp.

"I think you underestimate your danger, Marie Duchamps."

"Oh, no; I am quite convinced that M. de Cardillac possesses sufficient courage to murder a woman, especially when she is helpless and unarmed. I underestimate neither my peril nor your valor, *monsieur*."

"*Basta!*" snarled De Cardillac, as he withdrew his hands from her shoulders. This time she made no attempt to escape, standing there shivering a little when his clutch was removed.

"Marie," he said, with a smile that should have given her some better knowledge of his character than she had heretofore acquired. "I see it is useless trying to frighten you; but consider, I beg of you, my dire dilemma. It is not so much the forfeit of my life—if I am caught—that I regret, as the failure of my plan; as to be discomfited by that fat-head of a lieutenant, who is not tenth part the man the abbess is; and, indeed, I shrink from that grim woman myself, and am cowardly when I think of her gloating over me once they have me pinioned. Now, my girl, is money any temptation to you?"

"Certainly; it is a temptation to all

women, if they can but get within reach of a town where there are things to buy."

"Very well, Marie, I will give you more money than ever you saw before if you will but procure for me a meeting with your mistress, and that upon the instant, for I would take her and you to a place of safety."

"We are in a place of safety now, *monsieur*. It is you who are not in a place of safety. But, aside from that, my mistress will never receive you."

"How do you know? I am as noble as she."

"She would not believe that."

"But I am her father's friend and emissary."

"She would not believe that, either."

"She must be a doubting creature."

"She is not a creature at all, but one of the highest ladies of the land, and I beg you, sir, to speak of her with respect."

"Oh, surely. I think of her and will speak of her with the greatest of respect. I am her father's friend, and hers, if she will but accept me as such, and I have come to her rescue."

"*Monsieur*, you hinted that time was precious, and I told you it would be two hours before they can gain an entrance. Nevertheless, I advise you not to waste time as you are doing."

"Very well, then, conduct me to your mistress."

"I tell you it would be useless; she would not receive you."

"Why do you say this so confidently?"

"Because you forget I was listening at the keyhole, and forget that I know all about you. You are an emissary of the king and De Luynes. You carry with you a *lettre de cachet* for the arrest of *mademoiselle*, with the object of placing her in a fortress."

"Now, the gods have patience with your brains, you simpleton! Think you if I were on the king's work I stood here in jeopardy from the king's soldiers? What have I to fear if I hold commission from the king? The *lettre de cachet* of which you speak was intended for the arrest of the father of *mademoiselle*. He has escaped from Paris. I came with him as far as Châteaudun. He drove on to Loches, and at this moment is safely within its walls, I trust."

The girl seemed staggered by this declaration, and gazed at him with wide-open eyes, which now he had the greater opportunity to admire.

"The Duc de Montreuil," she said at last, "would never have commissioned a young man like you to carry his daughter alone and unattended through the forest that surrounds this place, and in the depth of night."

"Oh, you heard the abbess say that; but neither you nor she realize the despair of a father who finds his only daughter whisked away from all his knowledge, as if she had vanished from the face of the earth. A man in such a plight will clutch at any straw. Not that I am a man of straw, as my simile would seem to indicate, but one whose lineage is as old as that of the duke himself. I have sat at the duke's table as equal with equal, and he entrusted me with this mission. It is maddening to think I have come within an ace of succeeding, to be baffled first by an ill-tempered old woman, and secondly by a chattering maid."

"*Monsieur*, it seems that you are doing most of the chattering yourself. I have remained silent. If, then, you hold any written testimony that will convince *mademoiselle* you come from her father, I shall take it to her."

"*Vrai Dieu!* How little you know the folly you are speaking. To carry a written document from the Duc de Montreuil through the country of the king would mean my own arrest, and the nullification of my plans, the moment I was searched and the letter found. The Duc de Montreuil is a middle-aged man of experience, and he trusted me without any letters, and without any credentials. If his daughter possesses but a title of his good sense, I shall convince her in half the time I have been talking to you."

"You profess great faith in your powers of persuasion, *monsieur*."

"If so, my faith is becoming less and less. If you object much longer, you will destroy it altogether."

The girl smiled, and the despairing Cardillac seemed to gather some hope from her change of expression.

"It would be a pity to dampen your self-confidence, *monsieur*. If you answer truthfully a question or two I shall

put to you, I may succeed in reestablishing it. How long have you known the Duc de Montreuil?"

"Not two days yet."

"You are not a partizan of his, then?"

"I never saw the man before until yesterday."

"Then, how came so conservative a man as he to entrust you with a mission so delicate"—Cardillac shrugged his shoulders—"on such short acquaintance, and with no credentials from you, as I understood you to say?"

"You ignore a father's love and his anxiety for an only daughter."

"True, so I do; but you, *monsieur*, if you could confess no loyalty to his highness, and could scarcely claim acquaintance with him, how came it that you undertook an expedition so dangerous? Although you have spoken convincingly of a father's love for his daughter, and therefore persuaded me that the Duc de Montreuil might have acted as you say, on your part there was not even friendship to enlist you. How came you, then, to run your neck into the noose?"

"For two reasons, Marie Duchamps. First, I am a young man with a name to make, so I fairly jumped at the chance offered me; second, I am a poor man, with my fortune to make, and the duke offered me a thousand pistoles in gold if I were successful."

"Ah!" cried the girl in long-drawn-out intonation, her eyes lighting up with intelligence. "Now I understand! The money that tempts a woman tempts a man also."

"But certainly, Marie."

"I will see my mistress at once, and report to her what you have said. Will you trust me to return to you?"

"Yes, if you say you will return."

"After your treatment of me?"

"It is not my treatment, but your word, that I trust."

The girl laughed, and ran half-way up the stair; then, with her hand against the wall, she turned round and looked down at him.

"*Monsieur*," she said, "while I am absent rebuild speedily your faith in your powers of persuasion. You have so far convinced me that, whether you are genuine or not, I shall connive at your escape. Unbolt the door, therefore; go to the tall

flagpole that rises from the courtyard and overtops our highest building; cut the rope that is riven through the pulley at the top, draw it completely away, coil it up, return to this hall, and wait for me."

With that she disappeared. Cardillac did not wonder at the obscurity of the hall when he had once more emerged into the courtyard. Night was falling rapidly, and before many minutes were past complete darkness would be upon the landscape; but he knew that, once clear of the convent, the gloom would facilitate his escape. Correctly he surmised that the girl intended him to descend from one of the small gable windows in the third story, if such windows were in existence at the back of the convent, as they were at the sides. All sounds of battering at the door had ceased, and Cardillac conjectured that some other plan was about to be adopted; so, he thought that the sooner he was quit of the place, the better.

Taking with him the long rope, he passed under the cloisters and reentered the hall, where, to his astonishment, he found Marie waiting for him. She had a cloak thrown over her arms, and some kind of covering on her head which the dimness rendered indistinct.

"You haven't been long away," he said in surprise.

"No; *mademoiselle* makes up her mind very quickly. She refuses to see you."

"What nonsense!" cried Cardillac impatiently. "You have not had time fully to explain to her the situation. I must see her."

"That is impossible, *monsieur*. You cannot enter my lady's apartment without her permission, and in such a crisis it would be folly to make the attempt. You should know by this time that the doors of the convent are not so easily broken down as an outsider might think. *Mademoiselle*, nevertheless, asks a favor of you, which is that you escort me forthwith to Blois, where I am to take service with the queen. This departure it was intended I should attempt, even had you not arrived, but my lady says if you will convey me faithfully and in safety to Blois she will guarantee that when her father learns you have obeyed his daugh-

ter's wishes you will be paid all the money he promised."

"Oh, the money! I'm not thinking of the money. What troubles my mind is the father's disappointment and the daughter's wilfulness."

"A father may forget, *monsieur*, that a daughter like *mademoiselle* is quite capable of making plans of her own. Will you then accompany me to Blois, *monsieur*?"

"What you suggest is impossible, Marie," said Cardillac despondingly. "I could take you to Montrichard, or perhaps through to Loches, but Blois is overrun with king's men and contaminated with De Luynes's spies."

"Mlle. de Montreuil does not minimize the danger of the expedition," said Marie in very subdued tones, her eyes modestly cast down as the young man peered at her through the dusk. "I gave to *mademoiselle* so vivid an account of the bravery of M. de Cardillac that she is quite confident he will accomplish the task if he promises to do so."

"Why, my girl, you haven't had time to give a vivid account of anything! What do you mean?"

"*Monsieur* has been longer in getting the rope than he supposes, and there was time for *mademoiselle* to say at least that she reposes perfect confidence in M. de Cardillac, and entrusts me to his guardianship with the utmost belief in his honor as a gentleman."

Cardillac stood very erect, braced back his shoulders, and drew a long breath.

"I should like very much to see this young lady," he said at last.

"I was to tell you, *monsieur*, that she regrets the deprivation as much as you, but I was to add that she lives in the hope soon to have the pleasure of meeting you in her father's hall."

"Oh, well, if, as seems to be the case, you have depicted my good qualities, whatever they are, as faithfully as you have convinced me of *mademoiselle's* amiability, I have been lucky in my messenger."

"And now, *monsieur*, if you will be good enough to follow me, I may be able to show you a path to liberty."

The girl turned and began mounting the dark stairway.

"*Mademoiselle*," said the gallant Car-

dillac, "I will follow you with pleasure, even if you lead me in the opposite direction, to imprisonment."

CHAPTER XIII.

A WILDERNESS FOR TWO.

Mlle. MARIE DUCHAMPS was evidently as familiar with every turn and corner of those corridors as was the blind girl with the darkened thoroughfares of Pompeii. Frequently Marie was compelled to pause and give directions to the stumbling young man in her wake. The vast building was oppressively silent, and seemed deserted. They mounted two more stairways, and finally a ladder, up which Cardillac preceded his guide, that he might push open the trap-door that led into a long attic. Here they found the obscurity less dense, because of a window at either gable end; the eastern one looking out upon a courtyard, while that to the westward gave a view over the dense forest. Toward the latter the two made their way.

The oblong aperture was unprovided with either sash or glass, and could be closed in stormy weather by a stout wooden door, which in summer, however, was left open for the sake of the light, as the raftered apex was used as a rough storehouse for odds and ends — boxes, bales, and what-not. Cardillac, with his hand against the side of the opening, peered down the cliff to the sward beneath, then, turning, shook out the coils of his rope on the floor. Next he unbuckled his sword-belt, wrapped belt and scabbard in his cloak, and flung the bundle to the ground. Picking up the end of the rope, he looked at the girl.

"You will not be frightened?" he asked.

"No, if the knot be securely tied."

"Where a handsome woman is concerned," laughed the young man, "I may be depended upon to tie a knot that will hold her."

The girl laughed in company.

"It is to your skill that the handsome woman looks for security, *monsieur*."

Cardillac threw an end of the rope over one of the rafters, drawing on the cord until the two sections were of equal length. He flung wide the loose ends,

and saw that they reached the ground, with plenty to spare. The flagpole from which he had taken it extended beyond the convent roof, and a double line had flapped against the pole. Pulling up the twin cord, he deftly and speedily tied their ends round the slim waist of the girl, while she held up her hands out of the way and watched him with a smile and a blush that were very attractive in the glimmering dusk.

"I think I shall toss my cloak to the winds also," said she when he had finished.

"And all fear with it," he suggested.

"And all fear with it," she repeated.

The cloak fluttered down to the ground, and Cardillac, picking up its owner, lowered her gently into space.

"The ledge is wide," he whispered, "and there is no danger of your striking the wall. Hold the rope tightly with your hands, and never mind if you whirl round two or three times."

An instant later she was safely on the ground, and had the knot unloosened before he could make the suggestion.

"A capable little person," muttered Cardillac to himself, and, drawing on his stout leathern gauntlets, he slipped down the rope almost as if he were falling, checking the girl's little outcry of dismay by landing as lightly as if he were a feather from his own hat. He now pulled the rope down from the rafter, coiling it quickly as he did so.

"It's just as well," he said, "to leave no trace of our descent. The guessing how we escaped may add some interest to the monotony of conventual life. You wait here," he continued, "while I reconnoiter. I must get my horse if I can."

He tiptoed to the southwest corner of the convent, and, holding his hat in his hand, peered round. No one was in sight along the southern flank of the great building. Without relaxing his alertness in the least, he skirted the southern wall, and so came to the southeast corner. Here he surreptitiously scrutinized the eastern front of the convent, where, free of the forest, it was still twilight.

He could not understand the silence, and wondered what had become of the besiegers. A glance showed him that the carriage and four horses had disappeared,

probably to take the lieutenant back to Beaugency, that he might return with materials for forcing an entrance into the courtyard. A solitary sentry was pacing up and down, a light, short musketoon over his shoulder, which, with his uniform, showed that he was a dismounted cavalryman.

The young man surmised quite correctly that it was a squad of mounted men the sergeant had brought up from Beaugency on the arrival of the messenger from Paris. The galloping horses had saved time, and this conjecture was confirmed, as his eyes became more accustomed to the obscurity, by seeing a group of horses far down the road that led to Châteaudun.

Evidently the lieutenant expected that if Cardillac escaped, he would make for Châteaudun, and thus to Paris along the route by which he had come, and these men were stationed to intercept him, or to follow him if he broke into the road farther beyond. The young man was convinced that no thought had been given to the Blois route, nor to the road leading back into Beaugency, as the fugitive was not likely to make in either direction, knowing that the country swarmed with the enemy.

What was more to the purpose, Cardillac saw his own horse, unattended, cropping the grass in front of the convent, less than twenty yards from him, yet he dared not steal out into the open and capture it, because of the watchful sentry. The horse was a stranger to him, ridden for the first time by its new owner that morning, therefore he feared it would not come to his call, even if he ventured to break the stillness of the evening; still, like all good horsemen, he had a way with animals.

The case was desperate, for at any moment the carriage might return, and even in the shadow of the wall he was in danger of being recognized. He marched quickly to the south a dozen steps, and stood where he could see his horse, but where he could not be seen by the sentry at the gate-house. He whistled very slightly, and at first the horse took no notice, but by and by raised its head and pricked forward its ears. Cardillac held out his hand and chirruped encouragingly.

The horse took a hesitating step forward, stood still again, then, with a little whinny that made cold chills run up Cardillac's back, it walked directly toward him, with signs of recognition and delight. He patted its neck affectionately, and led it round to the western side of the convent, and so to the waiting girl, where he shook out his cloak, buckled on his belt, then threw the cloak over the saddle.

"Do you think you can hold yourself on?"

"Oh, yes," replied the girl, "but aren't you going to ride? I can then sit behind you."

"I fear we cannot ride together through the forest. I will lead the horse."

With a little assistance, she sprang into place, sitting sideways on the somewhat difficult perch. He threw her own cloak over her shoulders, then, taking the bridle on his arm, led the way into the dark density of the wood.

The traversing of the forest proved to be not only formidable but sometimes dangerous. The great tract of timber land which extended from above Beaugency to Blois was no park-like pleasure through which horsemen might hunt the deer or the wild boar, but a primeval forest that seemed pathless, where great trees lay as they had fallen, blocking the way, while here and there were encountered extensive thickets of brushwood that seemed impenetrable.

The sword, not the ax, was claiming the attention of Frenchmen at this period, and the woodlands had grown wild. The place seemed desolate even of a chopper's hut or a charcoal-burner's camp. High above them the foliage of the somber pines shut out even an occasional glimpse of the summer night sky, and not a star could be seen. Now and then the girl made an outcry as she was nearly swept from her horse by low-hanging branches, and ever and anon Cardillac had to stop the animal and break through by another route.

But what troubled him most was that he had lost all sense of direction, and knew he might at any moment emerge near the convent. He said nothing to his frightened companion of his dilemma, but strode on as best he could.

At last she cried:

"I must get down and walk with you. Riding is impossible."

Horse and man stood still. Cardillac held out a hand to her, which she could not see as she sprang stumbling into the underbrush.

"I am afraid," he said, "we must stop here till daylight."

With an exclamation of dismay she said:

"How far do you think we have come from the convent?"

"I have not the remotest notion, Marie. You see, there has been little of woodcraft in my education, and while I could thread my way through Paris, these overgrown forest glades baffle me."

"You mean you have lost your way?"

"My dear sweetheart, there was no way to lose."

"Sir!" she cried, with a note of anger in her voice, "you must address me respectfully. I cannot allow you to speak to me in that manner."

"Tush, tush!" cried the young man impatiently. "I wasn't thinking of you at all, but of our quandary. I dare say many a hind has spoken to you more familiarly than I did."

"Now you insult me, sir!" cried the girl, with great indignation.

"My excellent Marie," rejoined Cardillac wearily, "if you mean to arouse my sympathy in that you are here helpless and alone with a stranger, somewhere in the forest of Blois, then, charming girl, consider it done. You possess my sympathy, and if I assure you in addition you are as safe as in that ugly convent we left a while ago, you would not believe me, neither would anybody else, nor would it be true. But, for your consolation let me present you with the proper view of our situation, and the proportionate peril in which we stand; and, talking of standing, may I offer you a seat, Mlle. Marie?"

In the darkness, while he talked, Cardillac had been fumbling about his horse, and now he lifted the saddle from the animal's back and placed it on the tangled, briar-grown ground.

"Marie Duchamps," he said, groping for her and not finding her, "is it possible that you have departed in dudgeon for your dungeon? I am searching the

empty air for your hand, that it may lead you a few steps to a place of comparative comfort in this bewildering wilderness."

There was a pause for a few moments, and at last the deep silence was broken by a contented sigh from the horse, who apparently accepted the situation with equanimity, and sank in the crackling bushes to his night's rest.

"Marie!" cried De Cardillac, then, after listening a while; "Marie!" he shouted more sharply. "*Ventre de ma vie!* has the girl vanished, and have I been wasting my eloquence unheard and unappreciated? This is the final calamity in a day of disasters!"

A ripple of laughter indicated that not only was the girl there, but that her critical mood had changed.

"I thought you were gone," he said.

"Are you sorry to find I am still on your hands, *monsieur!*"

"You are anything but that," he replied. "My hands are vainly searching the darkness for you. Ah, there you are! Just a step this way—be careful of the brambles. That's right! Here is my folded cloak for a cushion, the horse's saddle for a seat, and this ancient tree for the back of your chair. We are helpless for the night, and must make the best of it. It would be folly to tire ourselves further by fighting against the odds that confront us, for until dawn indicates the east, we cannot with surety travel to the west."

"In this gloomy circumstance you were about to offer me some consolation, *monsieur!*"

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten. If we were intercepted, surrounded, captured, our fates, Marie *carissima*, would differ. The stolen rope which, like a monk, I wear wound round me, would take on a smaller loop and a greater altitude. It would encircle my neck instead of my waist. Then short shrift, and farewell, France! Now, most beautiful Marie, you may not credit the fact, but from what I know of my own neck, it would certainly prefer to be encircled by the warm, soft arms of a fair girl than by the cold, taut environment of a rope. I hope my simile of the arms does not disturb that modesty which I have already received assurance you possess, *mademoiselle!*"

"Oh, no, *monsieur*: indeed, I am be-

ginning to understand you. I am from the north, but you are from the south. You speak, therefore, with poetical license, and view events through a romantic haze which is denied to us more practical creatures of the colder region. I dare say a man from Normandy might feel more deeply than a poet of Gascony, but the language of the latter would be as a rich and beautiful flower-garden compared with the bleak granite cliffs by the sea. I devoutly trust, *monsieur*, that you will speedily return to that soft pressure whose delight you have often experienced."

Cardillac laughed drowsily, but with a certain indication of content.

"Now, Marie, if a man had said that! Suppose this man sat at a wooden table opposite me in a tavern. I would raise my flagon and wink at him, or I might smite him in confidential manner on the back. But with a woman one may speak the truth."

"Is that your idea of women, *monsieur?*"

CHAPTER XIV.

BROKEN SOLITUDE.

"SURETY, surely. With woman falsehood is impossible, and so I will confess to you what no man's sword could draw from me—that when I raised my flagon I would drink to the one woman in the world whose arms have been around my neck, and that woman is my poor mother, whom I left in tears but a few short months ago. In daylight, Marie, I swagger and pretend I am a man: wo to him who doubts it! But in the dark and in the silence I confess that, after all, I am but a boy, and when a short time since I spoke carelessly to you, my thoughts were far away at my home in Gascony, and for the moment I was wishing you and I were safe within its hospitable walls, instead of being immured in this dismal but enchanted wood."

"I am sorry I resented your phrase," said the girl very quietly. "As I told you, I am from the north. You must make allowances."

"Indeed, you treated me as I deserved, Marie, and it is to reassure your mind I

am talking so much now about myself. I should like you to flatter me by believing that you are as safe in this forest as if you were in the Convent of the Sacred Heart."

"I am sure of it," she said almost inaudibly.

"You need not rest your confidence on anything so lofty and ethereal as my deep respect for women of all classes, but take it on the lower plane of my own safety. That is what I wish to show you. As I told you in the convent, I am a beast at bay. We are talking now in whispers. I dare not risk an outcry that might bring upon me an overwhelming force of my enemy. Do you not see, *mademoiselle*, that I dare not molest you if I would."

"Will you pardon a woman's caprice, *monsieur*, that, though even she may be from the north, she prefers to rest her content upon the higher plane you have mentioned?"

"Well, I am glad of that," said Cardillac simply. "And now, to complete your further freedom from care, I predict that, if you are captured, your sole disadvantage will be a chuck under the chin, or perhaps a kiss snatched by a gallant officer, who will furnish you escort wherever you wish to go, or, at worst, send you back to *mademoiselle* at the Sacred Heart."

Cardillac was now treated to one of those swift changes of mood which ever, in later life, baffled him where women were concerned. The girl cried out:

"Sir, you spoil everything you have said by your vulgarity. You are disrespectful to hint that any man should dare to treat me thus!"

"Merciful Heavens, Marie, what harm in a kiss?"

"Sir, you put me out of all patience, and, furthermore, I would have you know that I am not one of those persons who, selfishly assured of their own safety, would thus lead a man to his death with indifference. I could not have such a catastrophe on my conscience, therefore, sir, we part company here."

He knew she had arisen, and now he likewise got on his feet, wondering what evil fate had changed the softness of her voice to the clear, hard ring of almost tyrannical decision.

"Your way lies to the south, mine to the west. Untrammelled by me, you can swim your horse across the Loire, and reach Montrichard, where you will be safe. 'Tis less than seven leagues from here to Blois, and, as you quite truthfully point out, I shall be unmolested on the road thither."

Cardillac laughed quietly, and he felt that his ill-timed merriment increased the resentment of Marie Duchamps.

"Tempestuous nymph of the north, prove to me that you are indeed from that region. Marie, point out the north to me, and do not shrink if I come close enough to recognize the direction of your arm."

"'Tis no matter for that, so long as we take separate ways. It is your risk to find the south, and mine to find the west. You would have gone in safety to Montrichard had I not deflected your direction to Blois."

"You had nothing to do with the matter, my girl. I acted not on your command, but under orders from Mlle. de Montreuil."

"True; but nevertheless on my account. All that *mademoiselle* cares is that I should reach Blois and give her message to the queen. I am to enter the service of the imprisoned queen; that is *mademoiselle's* plan, and I hope to connive at her majesty's escape."

"How strange it is that a few moments ago we were speaking in whispers, and you seemed the most reasonable of women. Now you stand there, and actually command me as if I were your serf. I think you fail to remember that our positions are the reverse of what your manner betokens. I will entertain a request where I refuse to suffer a command. Pardon me for pointing out that I am a noble, and you are—"

"A servant," snapped Marie, with nevertheless a lowering of her tone.

"Precisely. Now, oblige me, Marie Duchamps, by not forcing such a comparison again. You are in my charge until you are safely within the walls of Blois. I shall take care of myself and you also. When I spoke of my danger it was not that I feared it but merely to allay your own apprehension, and, as I said in the convent, you will obey me, or—" He paused.

"You will crush me." Again she finished his sentence.

"You incorrigible termagant, you put me in the attitude of coercing a woman; a position I hate."

There was no answer to this, for the tense talk was interrupted by a deep boom like the report of a cannon, and the echo reverberated in low thunder through the arches of the forest. Man and maid stood there together a few moments in breathless silence.

"What was that?" whispered Marie, with a quaver of fear in her voice. "Is it a signal, do you think? Are they about to search the forest?"

Cardillac laughed quietly.

"I wish them luck of their task," he said. "No. I take it that at last they have blown in the convent-door, and a long time they have been about it. They will search the convent before they attempt the forest. Marie, either it is getting lighter, or my eyes have become accustomed to the darkness. I see you much more plainly than I did half an hour ago, and I can even recognize what I did not notice in the daylight, that you are very beautiful, Marie."

"Thank you, *monsieur*," said the girl demurely, with a low curtsy, "but you are not doing justice to your own powers of observation. You did notice it before, and were kind enough to mention it. 'Handsome,' I think, was the word you used, and, although you diluted your praise with such words as 'vixen,' 'termagant,' and 'what-not,' yet these expressions could not overcome my joy at your appreciation. But you should avoid committing yourself further until you have seen me in the daylight. This darkness which envelops us is very deceptive. I am beginning to see you quite plainly, and should be convinced by appearances that you are a noble and courteous young gentleman, did not my experience with you convince me of the contrary."

"Now, Marie Duchamps," cried the young man, piqued, "you let your tongue run away with you! You are too fond of hearing yourself talk. Your mistress should long ago have repressed this tendency to volubility, and not left to me that ungrateful task."

"Oh, *monsieur*, you are much more capable than she to effect such a trans-

formation, because it is well known that Gascony is the province of silence. It is as difficult to cause a Gascon to speak as to provoke him to fight."

"Marie Duchamps, you are uncivil! The Gascons have their good points like other people."

"*Monsieur*, you astonish me. Pray mention even one of those good points, and remove your ban of silence, that I may proclaim it to the world. France will be overjoyed at the news."

"You spiteful little devil!" muttered Cardillac with clenched teeth. "Your folly has almost driven from my head the important question I wished to ask you. From what direction did that sound come? Stretch forth your hand and indicate it."

The girl pondered with bowed head.

"I do not know," she said at last. "The report of the petard seemed to surround us; to come from every direction. All that I can be sure of is that we have not traveled so far from the convent as I had supposed."

Cardillac growled his disapproval of this inconclusive answer.

"If you did not scatter your wits in talk," he said, "but kept them about you, there might be some pleasure in your company and some assistance in your suggestions."

Marie raised her chin haughtily.

"As you have not spoken a word since we left the convent, perhaps you will be so condescending as to point out the direction from which the sound came."

Cardillac gazed around him helplessly, quite palpably nonplused.

"If I could do that," he said, "I should not have needed to ask you."

"To ask me was perfectly proper, *monsieur*, but not to censure me because I am unable to do what you yourself cannot accomplish."

"True, true, Marie. You are in the right, and I beg your pardon. You do hit the mark sometimes."

The only reply from the offended girl was a contemptuous sniff, head held very high in the air.

"It is strange," muttered Cardillac, "that so loud a roar in the forest at night should give such little indication of direction. I suppose a true woodman could not only point toward the spot, but might

estimate the distance as well. I seem to be a very fool of the forest."

A long, deep sigh came from Marie.

"At last, at last!" she murmured. "How cleverly you class yourself."

At this moment something engaged Cardillac's attention, causing him to ignore the uncomplimentary intimation, and give utterance to a cry of astonishment. "Look, look, Marie!" he shouted. "They have set the convent on fire! See the red light through the trees!"

"Oh, wise and excellent guide. What you see is merely a sign that I am in charge of a lunatic. That, *monsieur*, is the red and rising moon. I have watched it from our eastern window these three nights past. 'Tis Luna, come to look after her own, *monsieur*."

"Then indeed is she welcome, for she is at least a beautiful lady of silence. She gives us the east, Marie Duchamps, and if your guide is muddle-headed, ours will show us unerringly on our way."

"I doubt that, *monsieur*. When the moon rises a little higher the rays cannot penetrate the foliage above us, and we will sink into darkness again."

"Nonsense, Marie; the forest became lighter even before the moon appeared above the horizon."

"Hush," whispered the girl. "Listen! What was that?"

It needed, no necromancer to fathom the cause of her alarm, for they heard approaching the slow, measured tread of a man, not traveling through the forest, but pacing a hard, high road, and from the east came the distant, subdued clatter of horses' feet, also undoubtedly on the same thoroughfare. Cardillac grasped her by the wrist, but on this occasion his touch was gentle.

"Now, by the lead image that Louis XI worshiped," he said in a low voice, "we have come within a few yards of blundering upon the patrolled national road. We've wandered too far south. Do not breathe a word, Marie, I beg of you."

The girl shook his hand impatiently from her wrist, and sat down upon her saddle, with her back against the tree. The horse, lying full length upon the ground, raised its head and inclined forward its ears. Cardillac sank down beside it, patted its neck, ran his hand along

its forehead, and muzzled it so that it could not whinny.

The approaching man was whistling the bars of a drinking song. When, as Cardillac estimated, he was a dozen yards distant, whistling and tramping ceased, there was a rattle of a musketoon, and its butt for a moment touched the road's surface. The patrol was making ready for the rapidly nearing horsemen. Cardillac's own horse made a slight effort to move, but the young man leaned over upon him, and laid his cheek against the horse's head, and whispered in its ear. The horse subsided with a sigh of content. The red moon had climbed a tree. The girl, leaning back, seemed asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

ROMANCES OF THE FOREST.

"HALT, *messieurs*! Who goes there!" The two horsemen instantly pulled up at the challenge.

"Friends," came the answer.

"Advance, friends, and give the word."

"The word for the night is 'Montoire.'"

Again the butt of the musketoon came to the ground.

"Pass, Montoire," said the patrol.

"How far westward does your beat extend, soldier?"

"About half a league, *monsieur*."

"How long have you been on duty?"

"Since complin, *monsieur*."

"Has any horseman passed you on the way to Blois?"

"Not one, *monsieur*."

"You have seen nothing of a young man rather gaily dressed; a gentleman with a sword by his side, slight mustache, from twenty to twenty-two years of age?"

"No, *monsieur*."

"Thank you, soldier, we will not detain you any longer."

The stolid footsteps retreated toward the east.

"I think I sha'n't go any farther with you, François. You have a clear road in front of you, a charming night around you, and a full moon at your back. I'll return to Beaugency, and if there's any news, a courier shall be sent to you at Blois. But I am sure you are quite

wrong in thinking he would make for Blois. That would be a fool's trick, and Cardillac's no fool, as is shown by his treatment of Lieutenant de Four," and at the mention of this name, both men laughed heartily.

"I wish I had seen the young devil!" cried the man called François. "Then I should be better able to describe him. The very fact that you are all convinced he will make for Paris, and the chance that he knows this, inclines me to think he will be trying either Blois or Montrichard, where he said he was going. I believe that if he'd once got the lady, he would have made off with her somewhere else."

"You forget, François, that he had demanded and obtained an escort of four of our men."

"That's no matter, Pol. The four men would have been under his command, and half way to Montrichard, he might have dismissed them, and struck off for Gascony with the girl. You surely don't swallow that father story, Pol? Why, no father in France is such a fool as to send a gay young spark after a raving beauty like Thérèse."

In the darkness Cardillac saw that Marie Duchamps had abandoned her reclining attitude, and was sitting up very straight, listening intently. He could not see her features, but at times her eyes seemed to flash in the darkness like a pair of sparkling diamonds, and once or twice during the conversation a quivering gasp indicated a rising anger, until Cardillac feared the impulsive creature would speak out.

"Pe careful," he whispered. "It is nothing to you. They are speaking of *mademoiselle*."

"I tell you, Pol, it's a love story. Mlle. Thérèse and this young gallant have met before. I've seen the girl in Paris, and, upon my word, Pol, I sympathize with young Cardillac, that he should risk his neck on so dangerous but delightful an enterprise. Why, you people at Beaugency are as credulous as schoolboys. You are well led by a stick like Lieutenant de Four. To credit for a moment that the stern old Duc de Montreuil should allow his daughter to go dashing across the country at midnight with this young fellow, who knows all the villainies of Paris,

from the slums to the court, and is evidently the very devil among women—"

Cardillac sat up with a muttered oath, and now the girl leaned forward to him, pointing to his horse, which, too, evidently wished to greet the animals of whose neighborhood it was aware. The young man reclined upon the prone horse just in time, soothing it to a continuance of its quietude.

"Oh, no, my son, this graduate from the court of Venus in Paris isn't taking midnight trips with a charming girl simply to please the old man. He is equally against king, and father, and abbess, and I'll wager my sword that if Cardillac has got out of that convent, and is once more in his saddle, she is riding behind him, right glad to hold herself there, with her arm around his waist, and a sweet kiss passed over his shoulder now and then, as an instalment on account of raptures that are to come later."

"Oh, the brute! Oh, the brute!" muttered the girl, clenching her little fists in rage.

"Hush, hush, hush!" pleaded Cardillac. "Close your ears, and don't listen, you silly little jade, but in any case keep quiet. It has nothing to do with you, and I never saw *mademoiselle* in my life. I am the person they are slandering, so keep quiet!"

She leaned back against the tree, and put her hands up to her ears, but that seemed ineffective, for they came down very shortly after.

"You are romancing, François, and I have no doubt at all but that Cardillac is still within the walls of the convent. Your imagination runs away with you, or perhaps you did not know that just before we left Beaugency, further information had come from Châteaudun that settles the question. Another messenger from Paris came round by the road, and we learned that Cardillac and the Duc de Montreuil left Paris in a carriage together; that Cardillac himself was on the most intimate terms with the duke, and the cross-examination of the duke's own servants, now imprisoned in Paris, has revealed that the duke showed the utmost friendliness towards Cardillac, and furnished him with money and horse to carry out the project.

"I imagine that something very definite is going to be done by the queen's partizans, and that the duke will take any risk, no matter how desperate, to get his daughter out of the hands of the enemy, and into his own, before hostilities break out. There is no doubt that her father trusts Cardillac completely, and, indeed, from the air of the young man as I saw him, that trust is not misplaced. Cardillac is a gentleman, and he is too recently from Gascony to have been yet contaminated by Paris. The Duc de Montreuil must have had some striking testimony in favor of his honesty, and if it hadn't been for that old abbess, Cardillac would have made off with the girl, and at this moment would have been somewhere between here and Montrichard. It is also known that Cardillac and Mlle. de Montreuil have never met; so you see, my dear François, you must turn your romancing in another direction."

"You think he is still in the convent, then?"

"Yes, I do."

"Don't they know by this time whether he is or not?"

"I don't think they'll know anything definite until to-morrow. You see, her ancient royal highness, the abbess, is driving poor De Four to his wits' end. De Four wished her to take refuge for the night in the village, but she absolutely refused to budge. It was she who ordered the blowing in of the convent door, and he could hardly get her far enough away to be out of danger from the explosion.

"The moment the wood was rent, and the masonry crumbled down, she marched in over the smoking débris, like a conqueror entering a captured town, and she would not let De Four or any of his men come in to prosecute the search. She is going to have every nook and corner of the convent examined, and will herself take Cardillac, and march him through the breach to the custody of his executioners. It seems, in her present temper, she is like to hang the poor young man from the ironwork above the well."

"I suppose, Pol, that whatever happens, Cardillac is doomed. If he remains inside the convent, he falls into the hands of the abbess, and if he wins his way outside, he is sure to be taken by the

military. If I were confronted by such alternatives, I'd surrender to the soldiers rather than to that sinister old woman. I'd then be sure of a quick and easy death, but I suspect her royal highness of keeping a private torture chamber."

"Yes, and I'll warrant you she would enjoy putting it to use. By the way, François, did you ever hear the legend, which is quite in your romantic line, that in the days of her youth this lady was a favorite with the late king?"

"Oh, yes, every one knows that story, and it was the fickleness of Henri IV that turned her toward a religious life, and against all mankind."

"To look at her now, any love story seems incredible. Even you would find it impossible to weave a romance around her gaunt form."

"Oh, I am not so sure of that. When she was a young girl, I can imagine her very tall and dignified; yes, and I would not swear but she may have been beautiful. At any rate, Henri IV was a connoisseur, and he certainly succumbed to her charms. It is not for mere amateurs like us to question the decision of the great and amorous king. Cardillac is said to resemble him somewhat, but is much handsomer than ever Henri was. One might imagine that the old woman, seeing this resemblance, would be inclined toward mercy."

"Yes, or the reverse, if in the past the king deserted her."

"True, true. A woman is like a cat: you do not know which way she will jump. Whatever her former love-dreams may have been, I fancy poor Cardillac has little mercy to expect from that quarter. No, now that you have told me that he and Thérèse de Montreuil never met, I see another vision ending in tragedy."

"Out with it, François."

"Well, here we have Cardillac, fresh, as I have said, from the follies and frivolities of Paris; a youth who has already gone the pace; a cynic about women, crediting none of them with any good."

Cardillac, in his strained position, moved uneasily, muttering fierce imprecations under his breath. Marie, who had been regarding him intently, held up her hand in warning. François went dreamily on with his recital.

"And here, not twenty-four hours divorced from the boudoir of his gay Parisian *demoiselle*, he finds himself a prisoner in the strong courtyard of the convent. Instead of warm, soft, loving arms about his neck, he is environed by the death-cold embrace of stone walls. If he cannot unclasp this fatal grip, the remainder of his life is measured by minutes, rather than by hours. He searches hurriedly, but in vain, for an exit, and at last is interrupted by the footsteps of the nuns emerging from the chapel. He hides himself in a cell. Picture it, my dear Pol, and compare it with the luxurious, orient-scented bower he has so lately left.

"Here are bare walls, and a flag pavement instead of a floor. There stands the narrow bed, with its clean but common coverlet, and at its head an iron crucifix, black against the whitewashed stone. Cardillac hears slow footsteps in the passage outside, and springs to the wall, standing with his back closely plastered against it, in such a position that when the door opens it will for the moment conceal him. The door does open, and there enters a nun, perhaps twenty years old, whose pale beauty the white band on her forehead cannot conceal, but rather seems to enhance. She is of noble family, otherwise she had not been there, and I fancy her immured in this convent, not from choice, not from religious enthusiasm, but for some reason known only to her own family: a girl, let us say, who has seen nothing of the world; one devoted from her birth to the conventual life.

"Cardillac closes the door, and places his back against it. She utters a vague terror in her appealing eyes, while her open hand is laid upon her palpitating heart. They look at each other, a few steps apart, neither speaking. The contrast between the two is as great as the contrast between the cell and the boudoir in Paris, for her somber, badly-cut garment covers a gentle heart that has never harbored a wrong thought. His gaudy, gold-laced costume of silk and velvet, scarlet and blue, conceals a soul cankered with corruption."

"*Mille diables!*" groaned the real Cardillac in the wood.

"What was that? I thought I heard some one speak?" cried François.

"No, no," replied Pol, "it is your own vivid imagination. Go on with your story; you make me believe this thing actually happened. What becomes of your devil and your saint?"

"All sense of his critical position vanishes from the mind of the young man. Here before him is something all Paris cannot supply. This fair flower of sanctity seems to him more precious than all the rest of the world. Her sweet, refined, wistful face makes Paris seem tawdry and valueless. As for the young woman, some latent instinct tells her that here stands, concentrated in one man, the wickedness of the earth, and this disquieting knowledge at once repels and fascinates her. Can it be possible that evil should wear so gracious an exterior, and what is this strange, subtle, hitherto, undreamt-of influence which surrounds her; an influence that nullifies duty, and prevents the outcry which she knows she should raise?"

"A term of endearment bursts from Cardillac's lips; he strides forward toward her with arms outstretched. She does not retreat. Those sympathetic eyes are filled with a sorrow that daunts him. Slowly she raises to her lips the little wooden crucifix that hangs from her girdle. When she speaks, her voice reminds him of the soft whisper of a mellow organ at vespers.

"'Please!'" she says, and then, 'I am safe in your courtesy and chivalry, *monsieur*.'

"Cardillac's arms drop helpless to his side. He steps back to his former position against the door."

"Oh," muttered Pol, in accents of disappointment. "He is not so black as you have painted him, then?"

"No, there is good in the lad. He is at heart a Christian, and the emblem of his faith held thus aloft reminds him of his own peril. He breaks forth into self-accusation, and entreaties for pardon. He tells the story to the listening nun, and sees a film of pity obscure the luster of those entrancing eyes. Their colloquy is rent asunder by a shattering explosion that makes the very walls tremble."

"Ah, halt there, François, you are forgetting. It was long after dark the explosion took place, and Cardillac could not have seen those fascinating eyes."

"That's no matter, Pol, and merely an impertinent interruption on your part. I did not think it necessary to describe the descending of night. The explosion has caused a commotion in the convent.

"'Is there a secret passage to the forest?' cried Cardillac.

"'I know of none,' replies the girl.

"The search for the young man has begun under the dominance of the abbess.

"'Stand behind the door: it is your only chance,' says the nun, and Cardillac obeys. The nun herself occupies a position on the threshold.

"'Have you seen a man within the convent precincts?' demands the abbess.

"The young nun's head is bowed.

"'No,' she replies.

"For one long moment the penetrating gaze of the abbess is upon her, then her wrist is seized, and she is jerked out into the hall. The abbess enters, and before Cardillac can even make a motion or draw his sword, her iron talons are sunk in his neck, and he is pressed, breathless, against the wall, while the elder nuns rush in to the aid of their chieftainess.

"In less than five minutes Cardillac is tied stiff and helpless: the trembling young nun is dragged in, and the two are placed back to back, and they are tied rigidly together like a double-faced mummy. They stand there as inflex-

ible as a wooden statue, and as helpless. With a vehement push of her two sinewy hands, the abbess impels the breathing mummies with a crash to the floor. She draws the door shut, and sends for the masons, who are already at work by torchlight repairing the breach at the convent entrance. There, under the stern personal command of the abbess, the masons with stone and mortar seal the doorway, and plaster over their work until it takes on a semblance of the corridor wall. When the plastering is dry, there is painted on it in black letters: *'Mali principii malus finis.'*

"Thirty years later, when the cell is broken open, during some convent repairs, two skeletons are found upon the floor."

"Oh, Lord!" cried Pol, "I am glad I have but to go a short league to the lights and sounds of Beaugency. What I need at the moment is a jovial crew in a wine-shop, a large, full flagon in my hand. I shall dream of that story. What would you do, François, if to-night on your journey to Blois you encountered De Cardillac and *mademoiselle?*"

"I should glance in every direction to see that no one was looking, and then I should help them to escape."

"So would I, by St. Peter's keys! Adieu, François."

"Adieu, Pol."

(To be continued.)

A WINTER NIGHT.

WITHOUT, white earth and stark boughs bare,
Which weary creak and sigh,
A biting air, keen stars that flare
From out a hard, black sky,
The crunch of hurrying steps that haste,
By wolfish fangs pursued,
Streams steel-encased, a lea laid waste,
By cold and storm subdued.

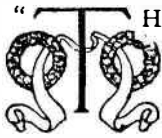
Within, a crackling fire, which sings
Its ruddy song of cheer,
A book which brings on tireless wings
Far lotus-lands anear,
A dish of apples; and above
A dark-dispelling light—
The glow thereof on one we love,
God bless a winter night!

Edwin L. Sabin.

THE VICAR'S WIFE.

BY I. A. R. WYLIE.

A SHORT STORY.

HERE'S them that grumbles," said Mrs. Gummidge, in tones of indignation, "and says as 'ow the gentry and haristocracy is halways a treadin' on us meek and 'umble. But I says—and I said it to Mrs. Jones this very mornin'—I says it's a downright perambulation, as your 'usband said in 'is last sermon, Mrs. Vicar."

"Prevarication, perhaps was the word, Mrs. Gummidge," said the little lady by the fire, raising a white hand to her forehead with a gesture of fatigue. Mrs. Gummidge nodded violently, so that the bonnet with the bedraggled ostrich feather assumed a more than usually alarming angle over one ear.

"May be, Mrs. Vicar, may be. Them words in 'ation' is that muddlin' there's only one I'm sure of—and that ain't either 'ere nor there, as the sayin' goes. What I mean is, that it's a downright thumpin' lie!" She snapped her lips together and looked defiantly round the room as though in search of some one to contradict her—possibly Mrs. Jones.

Seeing no one but her hostess, she went on. "I said to Mrs. Jones, I said, 'Call them 'ard-'arted brutes, do yer? I tells yer, if I goes to Mrs. Vicar to-day and tells 'er the 'ole truth, 'ow Jim's been out of work for a fortnight and dead drunk 'alf the time, and no food in the 'ouse and the rent owin' these ten days, I'll bet my last sixpence,' says I, 'that Mrs. Vicar'll up and say, 'Mrs. Gummidge, I knows your troubles. I knows your sufferin's, and 'eroic struggles against diversity—'ere's the rent and Gawd bless yer!' And I says to Mrs. Jones, who is a pert woman—'Say one word to the contrary and, good churchgoer as I ham, I'll give yer a black eye yer won't—"

The flow of eloquence was here interrupted by a yell of boredom from the child seated on the next chair. Mrs. Gummidge shook the peace-disturber and boxed both ears impartially.

"'Old your noise, Lizzie! She tikes after 'er father, Mrs. Vicar, halways making a row and no good to no one. There, look what the good lidy 'as giv yer, yer little varmint!"

Eileen Calhoun, otherwise known as Mrs. Vicar, had got up and produced a bag of sweets. The sobs ceased—a large peppermint bull's-eye putting an effective stop to further sounds of distress. At the same time Mrs. Vicar drew out her purse.

"There, Mrs. Gummidge," she said in her tired voice, "I hope this will help you with your rent." Mrs. Gummidge got up, made a curtsy, and took the coin into her grimy palm.

"Mrs. Vicar, yer proves me an hupholder of the truth, for I says to Mrs. Jones—'I ain't the woman to go round a beggin' and a whimperin' over me 'ardships, but Mrs. Vicar's a lidy. She knows our wants afore we says a word. It's 'er hinstinkt. There, Lizzie, kiss the kind lidy!"

Lizzie put up her pale and pepperminty face, and Mrs. Vicar bent down and performed the task required of her. Her own face was quite expressionless.

"Be a good girl and help your mother," she said as though she were speaking a formula. Then she opened the door and bade her visitors good-by with a smile which was as automatic as the rest of her movements.

She went to the top of the stairs and listened to Mrs. Gummidge's heavy descending step, the sound of a man's voice and Mrs. Gummidge's voluble reply. Then she went back and closed the door.

It was only four o'clock in the afternoon, but a dense London fog crept through the crevices of the ill-fitting window and filled the room with gloom and smut. There was smut on the white tea-cloth and, for the third time that day, Eileen Calhoun took it off and gave it a vicious shake into the fender. After that she took a duster out of a drawer and carefully removed the mud which Lizzie's boots had left behind them. This done she went back to the fire and, placing the kettle on the hob, knelt there, watching the play of the firelight with thoughtful eyes.

They were very pretty eyes and, though her dark curly hair was already streaked with gray, they had still plenty of life and energy in them—thwarted life and energy, if one might have judged from the line of bitterness around the mouth. She was dressed simply in black. There was only a wedding-ring on the white hand held out to the blaze, and other jewelry she had none. Everything about her was shabby, and yet she did not look altogether shabby. It was as though the spirit of a Redfern or a Worth had breathed over the cheap material of her dress and lent it an inimitable grace and elegance. Just so was it with the room whose furniture had never been beautiful, even in its youth. Still, there was a flower here, a flower there, and a gracefully arranged hanging, things which proclaimed a steadfast struggle against mediocrity and ugliness.

II.

THE door opened and a man in clerical dress entered. He was tall—very tall, but for a marked stoop, and his face, with the dark-brown eyes and finely cut features, was pleasant to look upon. Obviously, one would have said, this man is a dreamer. His dreams may be beautiful, but they will be impracticable none the less. At the present moment his expression was one of subdued sadness. His wife turned from the fire and greeted him with a smile half tender, half unwilling.

"You needn't tell me what you have been doing," she said grimly. "I know."

"Know what, my dear?" with great innocence.

"You have just given Mrs. Gummidge her rent."

"Well, the poor woman has been hard put to it, and—"

"The poor woman has had her rent twice over, once from me, once from you, and you have been taken in again. Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey!"

He laughed, and his laughter matched his young face rather than the premature gray hair. He came over to the fire and seated himself in the large chair, his arm resting on his wife's shoulder.

"You may laugh," she said faintly impatient, "but this folly of yours has made our to-morrow's dinner a problematic matter. Didn't we arrange that you should leave these people to me? They deserve their misery, for the most part. They are all cheats and humbugs, and so are we for pretending to love them. I had to kiss that Lizzie and call her a pretty child. Is it Christian to tell lies to please one's neighbor?"

"Hush, Eileen!" he interrupted quietly. "We must try and love them, that's all. And, if they are cheats and humbugs, we must remember that their lot is a very hard one. Our business is to give them what they want, both for body and soul."

She said nothing, and he bent down and kissed her. "Why shouldn't I give them what they want?" he went on whimsically. "I have everything I want."

She looked up at him with the old mixture of bitterness and tenderness.

"You mean me, I suppose? Yes, I am quite surprised that you haven't given me away with the rest of your goods and chattels before now. Geoffrey"—drawing back to see him better. "Dear, how dreadfully long your hair is! I shall cut it myself if you won't spare twopence for the hairdresser! And that waistcoat! No self-respecting man would ever wear such a thing! Were you like that when I married you? How could I have done it!" He shook his head.

"Oh, no; I was rather a smart young man in those days, especially when I began to—well—think life wouldn't be worth living without you." She leaned her elbow on his knee and returned to her contemplation of the firelight.

"Yes, I remember now. And I was the best-dressed woman in London, so they said." He pressed her shoulder.

"Those were light and foolish days," he said, as though to excuse himself and her. "You proved what a noble heart beat behind the trumperies, when you gave your whole fortune into my hands to help me in my work. There are many who bless your name, Eileen, and their blessings must make you happy."

She made no answer. The face turned to the fire was not altogether the face of a happy woman. So they remained for some moments, each of them deep in thought, then Geoffrey Calhoun started as though struck by a sudden recollection.

"My dear, how careless of me! These two letters were waiting for you downstairs. One is from Mrs. Langly, I think, and the other from a lawyer. What have you to do with lawyers, little woman?"

She caught the letters from his hand and, opening them, began to read them by the flickering light. She did not speak, but any one watching the changing face would have read breathless excitement in the wide-open eyes and parted lips.

Geoffrey Calhoun saw nothing. He was considering the financial difficulties of the Convalescent Home he had erected with his wife's money, and which was now threatened with debt. He saw no way out of the difficulty—except it were closed and the needy invalids sent back into the misery of the London streets. The thought made him knit his fine brows in sudden pain.

"Geoffrey!" he heard his wife say from afar off, "Geoffrey, read this." He took the letters from her and read them, the first, rather absent-mindedly, the second with an excitement almost equal to her own. When he had finished he leaned back and they looked each other in the face, half laughing, half overwhelmed.

III.

"Isn't it strange—almost fate!" she said with her hands clasped before her. "First the invitation and then the money which makes it possible to accept! Oh, Geoffrey, think what it all means! Six thousand pounds! I never thought I should be left so much! It's a lot of money! You could get a substitute. We could go away—perhaps forever—from

all this dirt and squalor! Let me see, first we could go to Rachel Langly's—they have asked us to their lovely place in Surrey. There, what does she say?"

She caught up the letter and read it again. She spoke incoherently, and her hand shook with more than ordinary excitement. Every tone and movement was that of a captive who begins again to breathe the pure air of freedom.

"She says—'Your husband must come, too; and bring all your pretty clothes—I am sure you must be tired of slumming!' Tired of slumming!"

She got up, crushing the letter between her hands. "Oh, Geoffrey, I never said it before to you because it couldn't be helped. But now it can be helped—and I am sick of it all—sick of it all! Only this afternoon I felt I could have murdered Mrs. Gummidge and her Lizzie and every one of them! I loathed the sight of them, and the ugliness of it all!"

She came behind his chair and took his face between her hands. "There, my darling old saint, don't be shocked; don't mind anything I say. I am only wild with excitement and joy. It has all been smothered and bottled up so long. Think, Geoffrey, what it will be to get away—our first holiday for three years! Say you are glad—say something!"

He patted her hand fondly. His face was still flushed with the reflection of her delight, and there was a far-off look in his dreamy eyes.

"Yes, dear, I, too, long for fresh, pure sunlight. Do you know, lately, I have had such a hunger for the smell of hay and the sight of roses and the song of birds. There are never any roses or birds here, are there?"

"I should think not!" she answered laughing.

"I wish we could import them!" with a sigh of regret. "It would do the poor people so much good."

"Never mind them for once. Besides, I don't suppose even Mrs. Langly will be able to supply us with hay and roses at the beginning of April, you silly town-fellow! But, there, we shall have the fresh spring green and the violets! Won't it be glorious?"

"Yes, wouldn't it be glorious?" He echoed her future tense with the conditional, but she did not notice it.

"Mrs. Langly says I am to bring my pretty clothes! Poor Rachel! She thinks we have been playing at poverty. She doesn't know how real it has all been. I haven't any pretty clothes—but I soon shall have. Just think of a pretty muslin dress, and not this"—she ran her hand over her skirt almost as though it were something repulsive—"this cheap serge, of all awful things. And you, Geoffrey, shall have a new waistcoat at last!" She clapped her hands, but, as though the sound awakened him from a pleasant dream, he got up, his face pale and resolute.

"My dear, we have been two foolish children wandering in a fairyland which doesn't belong to us," he said. "It was beautiful—but it isn't true, and we mustn't waste time with what isn't true."

He had folded his arms and gazed straight ahead of him into the gathering darkness.

"The money has come as a Godsend," he said with feverish enthusiasm. "All to-day I have been wondering how the Convalescent Home could be kept open—your home, Eileen—and there are so many sick and ailing who need its help. Now the problem is solved, for I know, dear, how you will wish the money spent."

"Geoffrey!" she said under her breath, but he did not seem to hear her.

"It is a Godsend!" he repeated fervently. "The poor creatures can still enjoy the country air, and room made for others there. It is a real weight from my mind."

Then she interrupted him. She came and stood opposite him with a face as resolute as his own, but paler, as though she felt the coming conflict of their wills.

"Geoffrey, it is you who are in fairyland now," she said. "You are dreaming of things that cannot be. No, dear, let me say what I have to say. I—we have sacrificed our all for these others—not money only, but the best years of our lives. Somewhere the sacrifice must stop—it must stop here."

"It is no sacrifice," he said sternly, more sternly than he had ever spoken to her before. "It is our simple duty." His tone stung her.

"Have we no duty to ourselves?" she demanded half-appealingly, but with growing passion. "Have we no right to

enjoy the fresh air, to laugh, to be glad and happy? Must we, our whole lives, sit and suffocate in this murky atmosphere, never meet our equals, never forget the pinch of our poverty? Is there no end to our sacrifice—"

"I have told you," he interrupted dogmatically. "It is no sacrifice."

She threw up her head and her eyes met his for the first time with hot defiance.

"Not for you, then, but for me! Geoffrey, I have borne it all these years. I have been patient through all the dirt and squalor of our lives. It was hard to be patient, for I wasn't used to such things. I have seen our money flung away on drunkards and humbugs who fooled you and laughed at you behind your back. I have fought out the problem of our daily bread. I have seen you ill. And I tell you, I have borne it all, and would have borne it to the bitter end but for this hope of salvation—yes, salvation, Geoffrey! It is like a breath of fresh air in a dungeon, a note of music out of an old song, a call from a world to which I belong, body and soul. It's true, Geoffrey. I can't help it. It's true!"

He looked at her coldly and critically. Even in her excitement his iciness chilled her into silence. She did not know that behind that iciness there burned a temper as hot, as obstinate, as headstrong as her own.

"I thought differently of you," he said. "I thought you would be my comrade to the end, giving in money what I give in actual labor. You have spoken very poetically, but in the simple language I prefer, you mean that you have been sacrificing yourself all through our married life, and that you are wearied of it. Let me tell you that I ask 'sacrifices' of no one—least of all, you."

He paused. He may or may not have known it—angry people are often consciously and willingly tactless—but he was aggravating her with every look and tone into hotter rebellion.

"The money is yours. You have already 'sacrificed' one fortune, and, no doubt, consider your duty done. Do what you please. Do with the money what you please. But, if you go away from here in this time of need and sick-

ness you go alone—and you will return only of your own free will. I leave you to make your choice.”

He went out, stiff and erect, and left her in a state of bewilderment, torn between anger and the desire to call him back. It was the first disagreement, the first time that their wills had broken asunder, and it hurt her. For a moment she hated the typewritten letter she still held—then she remembered all it meant, and her heart beat high with irrepressible hope. It meant freedom.

The walls of the shabby, ugly room faded away and she saw a bright, sunlit world spread itself out before her, filled with flowers and green pastures. She went mechanically to the writing-table, and having lit a candle, stood there looking down on the white note-paper. She was going to answer one of the letters. What was she going to say? What? She did not know. She seated herself and the pen hovered over the paper. The lovely gardens faded. The habit and love of a lifetime regained its old dominion over her, the strength of an iron will crushed her energy, the very room seemed to close in upon her like a prison.

She began to write. It was her death-warrant and she knew it, but she went on. She wrote just as she had kissed Lizzie's dirty face, as she had sacrificed the necessities of life, as she had listened day after day to the moanings of her husband's parishioners—without spirit, resignedly, submitting to the custom of self-abnegation and self-annihilation:

MY DEAR RACHEL:

It is good of you to ask us both to Sunningdean. There is nothing we should have liked better, but unfortunately—

The door of the little drawing-room opened and a disordered head, surmounted by a crumpled cap, made its appearance in the aperture.

“Please, mum, Mrs. Gummidge is 'ere. She says Lizzie has come hover hall a queer color and she don't know what to do. Will you come at once? And Mrs. Jones is 'ere, too. She says the bailiffs 'ave seized 'er furnitur' and she'd be glad if you'd see 'er for a moment. Her cough's awful troublesome, and she'd thank you for some of them lodgenses—”

Eileen Calhoun sprang up almost violently.

“Tell Mrs. Gummidge to go to the doctor, and Mrs. Jones that I can't help her. The lozenges are in the dining-room cupboard. And please don't disturb me again to-night.”

The door closed noisily, and with an exclamation that was half a sob Mrs. Vicar took up the letter of refusal and tore it across again and again.

IV.

THE Rev. Geoffrey Calhoun looked round the little sitting-room with somber, angry eyes. He had never realized before what an ugly place it was. The furniture was probably the same as it had always been, but he could not understand why it had never struck him as being so atrocious. It certainly looked no better for a week's coating of dust, nor for the decoration of long-dead flowers stuck about in extremely ugly vases. He rang the bell impatiently. The call was answered after a long interval by the maid of all work, now minus a cap, but considerably dirtier. Her expression was aggressive, and said more plainly than words—“*Noe*, wot are yer a wantin' of?” The Rev. Geoffrey's frown faded. He felt that his daily existence was at the mercy of this Medusa, and he felt equally sure that she knew it.

“Why is this room not dusted?” he inquired mildly. Mary Ann tossed a wisp of hair out of her smutty face.

“Taint my job. When the missus was 'ere she did it.”

“And the dining-room? I could hardly sit in it this morning.”

“Tain't my job, neither. The missus did it.”

“Oh! Might I ask what 'your job' actually is?”

“I washes hup and does a bit of the cookin'—wot I knows.”

“Oh!” The vicar shuddered in recollection of his last meal. “I suppose we shall have to have another servant to help,” he said with a sigh.

“We hought to 'ave, now the missus 'as gawn. She weren't no more than a servant—'cept that she did twice as much as I'd do on double wages.” The vicar sprang up. A hot flush had mounted to his pale cheeks.

"How dare you—" he began angrily, and then stopped, surprised and ashamed of his own lack of self-control.

"Well, it's true," with another toss of the head; "and please, Mrs. Gummidge wants to see yer, sir."

"Show her in here." The vicar seated himself again and drummed idly with his fingers on the pile of letters before him. There was a photograph of his wife on the table. It pictured her in the full bloom of her youth, and he noted, with a sudden interest, how gaily she laughed at him from among her rich sables. She had always been so fond of tasteful, expensive things; not because they were expensive, but because she had a natural love of the beautiful. Even in her wealthy days, when she could have had anything for the asking, she had been so grateful for some unexpected innocent pleasure. Innocent pleasure! Yes, he admitted it—innocent pleasure. There had been no unnatural craving in her pleasure-seeking—only she liked to laugh and to see others laugh. Of late she had not laughed much.

Now he came to think of it, whatever was there in her life to laugh about? Against his will he began to study the details in the little room. He remembered how he had refused to spend money on the furnishing, and the results of this economy were indeed awful. He began to understand how those plush chairs and cheap vases must have jarred on her nerves, seeing them all day long as she did. And Mary Ann had said she was no better than a servant. What did the girl mean?

The vicar grew hot and uncomfortable. He flung open the window to let in some fresh air, and was surprised to find that there is no fresh air to be had if you live in rooms looking out on a street little more than twelve feet across. He had just flung the window down again when his visitor entered. Mrs. Gummidge looked paler and thinner, but her volubility had not diminished.

"I 'opes I 'aven't disturbed you, Mr. Vicar," she said with a ponderous bob, "but I felt as 'ow I 'ad to thank you for gettin' me and my Lizzie into the Convolescent 'Ome in the country. We're both that poorly and we 'opes it'll do us a world o' good."

"That's all right, Mrs. Gummidge," the vicar returned kindly. "That's all right." He hoped that she would go, but Mrs. Gummidge had other intentions. She looked around the room and her gaze was critical.

"Lawks! 'Ow the place 'as changed since your missus went, Mr. Vicar!" she ejaculated. "Ain't it in a state! And the paw lidy always a tryin' to make it look decent, too! I remember them bits of flowers she 'ad about. One could see she weren't born to these sort of things."

The vicar asked himself, impatiently, how he had ever come to let his parishioners get so familiar, but he found nothing to say, and Mrs. Gummidge went on placidly:

"'Wot I says when I sees wot a 'iggledy-piggledy you lives in, sir, is that you were quite right to let 'er 'ave 'er 'oliday. You halways sees that us paw folk 'ave our turn in the fresh air, so you let your missus 'ave 'er turn, too. Quite right. Charity begins at 'ome. That's wot I says."

The Rev. Geoffrey turned scarlet. "The paw lidy was that pale and pecky," Mrs. Gummidge went on. "wot with her 'er workin' so 'ard and hall—"

The rest of Mrs. Gummidge's conversation was spoken to deaf ears. The vicar was looking at the faded picture, and for the first time in that bitter month of solitude he admitted to himself that his heart ached—with regret and longing. Had his charity begun at home? Far rather had he not poured it abroad on the hardy weeds and thistles, neglecting the delicate flower entrusted to his immediate care?

He had hardened his heart—he, the man of God, the preacher of mercy and pity, had hardened his heart against his own wife, the woman who had given up everything—comfort, pleasure, all the beautiful things of life—to follow him into the midst of dirt and misery. And he loved her! The knowledge of that love came with a blessed sense of relief. His own hard heart had tortured him. It melted now at the warm breath of memory, and the face he turned to Mrs. Gummidge was full of hope.

"Mrs. Gummidge," he said, breaking into that lady's category of woes, "my wife—my wife may be coming home soon, and I've been thinking—this place isn't

fit for her. I can't change just now, but I want to make it more—more as she would like it. I want you to help me before you go away; will you?" Mrs. Gummidge opened her eyes wide.

"That I will," she said highly flattered. "That there slattern down-stairs ain't no good. I knows." The vicar sprang up. His eyes flashed with the energy and eagerness of the "smart young man," whom he thought had died out of him years ago.

"We'll clear out all this hideous stuff," he said with a wave in the direction of the plush chairs. "We'll have it all re-papered—a pretty paper with roses. She loves roses. Everything must be fresh and clean. New carpets, new chairs, flowers everywhere. Come this afternoon and we'll begin turning out."

His excitement was infectious. Mrs. Gummidge was fairly agog, so much so that in her exit she smashed the hideous vase which Geoffrey had treasured as a family heirloom against his wife's wishes. He laughed light-heartedly, and then taking up a pen began to write:

MY DARLING WIFE:

This is the first real letter I have written to you. All the others were humbugs; cold, frozen things, born of my stubborn pride. I have thought it all over and I think I understand everything. I know how you must have suffered. I was such a selfish brute, so engrossed in my schemes for the good of others that I forgot my own wife! I am ashamed, but I'm afraid it's true. Can you forgive me? Will you let me try and make it up to you? Will you come home? Dear, you don't know what it is like without you—so dreary. The very sun seems to have forgotten to shine—

He stopped suddenly. He looked out of the murky window onto the miserable street. Despair crept over his face.

"I can't!" he said aloud. "I can't! It wouldn't be fair. She's gone away to the world where she belongs, body and soul—she said so. I can't call her back. I have been selfish enough already. She won't come back of her own free will—and I can't call her! I can't!" He pushed the letter roughly on one side and buried his face in his hands.

V.

EILEEN CALHOUN leaned back among the cushions, and with half-closed eyes

watched the water drip from the idle oars as their boat floated with the stream. She avoided looking at the oarsman and forced herself to listen to the woman at her side.

"My dear Eileen," the latter said, shifting her parasol to catch a troublesome sunbeam. "it's the very thing for you. You must come. Six months' traveling with us would set you up for a lifetime. You would be my guest, of course, and Captain Arnold will look after you when he joins us. Wouldn't you, captain?" The oarsman leaned forward as though to force Eileen to look at him.

"Mrs. Calhoun knows I will," he said significantly. As though hypnotized she returned his gaze for a brief instant. Something in his bronzed face disturbed her. She looked away again.

"It is very good of you, Rachel," she said. "I should like it very much." She spoke, however, without enthusiasm. Somehow, her thirst for pleasure and everlasting sunshine had been slaked to satiety. And still she felt unsatisfied—she could not explain why.

"Bravo!" Captain Arnold exclaimed with a triumphant tug at the oars. "Write that down as settled, excellent Cousin Rachel!" Eileen started.

"No, no," she said impulsively. "Nothing is settled. It can't be. Six months is a long time. I must consult my husband." Arnold stopped rowing and laughed.

"After your own showing, Mrs. Calhoun, your husband is too busy to bother about your movements," he said. "He will be only too glad to get you settled." She made no answer, oppressed with the bitter truth of his words. Geoffrey did not care; obviously, probably never had.

"Look here," Captain Arnold went on. "I have been indiscreet enough to see that the letter in your lap is from your husband. If there is a word in it asking your return or inquiring about your movements, I won't try and persuade you. There's a bargain!"

Eileen picked up the unopened letter. She had not cared to read it before starting. She knew so well what was inside—formal words, written out of a sense of duty and conveying no meaning to her but the one—that he did not care. These

letters came every Monday. Every Monday hope had been born afresh and frozen afresh.

Yet, what if to-day's letter were different? What if the barrier between them should be broken down at last by one loving word? What if in the nick of time he should hold out his strong hand to save her—perhaps from danger and temptation? She tore the envelope open and began to read. Then hope died as it had died before, and a smothered sigh forced itself to her lips. There was no difference, no change, or scarcely any. The sentences were jerkier, more stilted, less coherent, as if the writer had been in trouble or preoccupied. That was all. Eileen put the letter down. She was pale and her hand unsteady.

"You are quite right, Captain Arnold," she said. "There is no word about my return—so I suppose I must agree. It's Fate. Why!" she exclaimed, suddenly, pointing to a little house not far from the water's edge, "what a pretty place! To whom does it belong?" She had spoken more to put an end to the subject than for any other reason. Rachel Langly put up her lorgnette.

"That, my dear? Some Convalescent Home, I fancy, for the everlasting poor—" She got no further. Eileen laid an eager hand upon her arm.

"Put me ashore, captain!" she said breathlessly. "I see people I know. I want to speak to them—please!" Her eyes shone with eagerness and pleasure. Captain Arnold obeyed, though unwillingly.

"I don't see any one," he said as the boat bumped against the ground, "except an ugly old washerwoman and an ugly child in need of washing. I don't suppose those are friends—"

But Eileen had already sprung ashore and was running toward the despised pair with a delighted cry of "Mrs. Gummidge—Lizzie!" Mrs. Gummidge, who had just rescued the too venturesome Lizzie from a watery grave, gave such a start of surprise that she nearly fell in herself.

"Lawks! If it ain't Mrs. Vicar 'erself!" she exclaimed, shaking hands with a vigor which instantly dislodged the precarious bonnet. "Now, ain't that a treat, Lizzie? And in that pretty dress, too!

Wouldn't your 'usband be proud of you, even though 'e be a clargyman?"

Eileen seated herself at the foot of a tree and beckoned Mrs. Gummidge to do likewise. Mrs. Gummidge obeyed, having first, with town-bred care, felt the grass—"for fear of them roomatics," as she said.

"I was in a boat when I saw you," Eileen explained, "and I thought I'd come and hear all about you—and every one else. It seems such a long time since I left."

"Aye, that it is, mum. And a lot 'appears in no time, wot with them motors and such like. There's Lizzie 'ad the measles, me the roomatics, and Mrs. Jones a summons. We've 'ad lively times, I can tell you, Mrs. Vicar!"

Eileen smiled. The smile was meaningless. Her heart beat almost to suffocation. A question trembled on her lips and she dared hardly utter it, so much did the answer mean to her.

"And in Roburn Street—has anything happened there?" she said, striving to speak with great indifference. Mrs. Gummidge's small eyes twinkled knowingly.

"I 'specks there ain't much that 'appears there you don't 'ear of, mum," she said, "wot with hall them letters Mr. Vicar writes."

"Letters!" Mrs. Gummidge waved her fat hands apologetically.

"I can't 'elp seeing 'em," she said; "'e leaves them about 'is table, and 'as I come to do 'is dusting I 'as to see 'em. 'Me own darling wife,' they begins. Not that they ever gets posted, it seems," she added with vague wonder. "'Pr'aps 'e sends 'em off budgetwise, or 'e just writes 'em to relieve 'is paw feelings." There was a shout of admonition from the waiting boat, but Eileen appeared not to hear.

"Tell me more, dear Mrs. Gummidge," she said. "You know, my husband writes, of course; but, then, you are on the spot. Tell me, does everything go well? Is my husband all right—happy?" Mrs. Gummidge shook her head.

"'Appy? Naw, not particular. Old 'e looks and miserable—wants a woman to look after 'im, I says. Only, one day I saw 'im laugh—when all the noo furnatur' was a being brought in—"

"Furniture!" And Mrs. Gummidge thumped herself on the mouth.

"There now, ain't I a fool! Let the cat out, I 'ave. Well, I suppose I'd better tell you. 'adn't I?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, 'twas this way: Mr. Vicar, 'e sends for me and 'e says, 'Mrs. Gummidge, my wife may come back soon, and I wants things made fine for 'er—d'yer understand?—fit for 'er. None of this hold 'eathenish gear. You're a clever woman, Mrs. Gummidge, and I wants you to 'elp me make it hall prutty.' Well, I was doddering with them roomatics, but 'e's a kindly gentleman, so I 'elped 'im. We chose the d'intiest paipers you hever saw—hall roses—and wot with our two 'eads together we've made the place fit for a doocheess! And the flowers!" Mrs. Gummidge flung up her hands because no words of hers could convey the impression she intended.

"Every day 'e comes with 'is arms full of 'em and fills the vases. 'E ain't no good with flowers, but 'e does 'is best. 'She loves flowers, Mrs. Gummidge,' 'e says, 'and she may come 'ome to-day.' But 'e loses 'ope, paw feller. I was that sorry to leave 'im, but 'e sent me and Lizzie down 'ere. He said it was the place you 'ad built, Mrs. Vicar, an' 'ow grateful we was to be to you for making such a noble sacrifice."

Eileen looked back at the little house. Perhaps the words, "Cast your bread upon the waters," occurred to her in that moment of intense gratitude to the Power which had led her to this rough, simple woman. She got up, and the tears stood burning in her eyes. Mrs. Gummidge looked up at her, and a shrewd smile twisted the lined face.

"It may be pert, Mrs. Vicar," she said, "but I'm an hold woman, and I says to you—go 'ome. You and your 'usband looks as though you wanted one another." Eileen laughed brokenly.

"I'm going," she said, "I'm going." Suddenly she bent down and kissed, first the child, and then Mrs. Gummidge, with a warmth she would not have believed possible a month before. "God bless you, Mrs. Gummidge," she whispered, and ran back to the waiting boat. She looked at both occupants steadily.

"Row me back, please, Captain Ar-

nold," she said. "Rachel, I must take the afternoon train to London—home."

VI.

It was the beginning of May, but no one in Roburn Street would have known it except for the calendar. The rain poured down, the gutters had become miniature torrents, a piercing east wind whistled round the corners as if to prove that in this part of the world its authority was not at an end.

The Rev. Geoffrey Calhoun turned up his coat-collar, indifferent to the fact that the rain was trickling down his neck, and that he was standing in the midst of a large puddle.

He looked first to one end of the street and then to the other with a glance of expectation, as though he hoped to see some well remembered form. But there was no one in sight. A laden four-wheeler jolted round the corner, and he turned away with a sigh. Somebody was coming home to somebody—and, being a conscientious clergyman, he fought hard against the pang of envy which shot through him. No one was coming home to him. So he went his way and visited his sick parishioners and listened to their woes with the old sympathetic smile. They were too absorbed in themselves to notice how pale and tired he looked.

It was late in the evening when he returned. He took off his hat and coat in the dark hall, and stood there a moment with his hand pressed to his aching head. Then he opened the door of their little drawing-room and entered. A lamp burned on the table, the kettle sang merrily on the bright fire, his wife sat in the pretty armchair he had bought for her, and looked up at him and smiled.

"You are late, dear," she said. "Tea is ready." The half-merry, half-tearful smile grew more tremulous as he drew nearer. He saw that she was dressed in the old serge, and her lap was full of his neglected mending. It was all so peaceful, so homely, so like his dreams, that something caught him by the throat and a mist swam before his eyes. He had lived under a hard strain, and the revulsion was more than he could bear.

"You have made things so beautiful, Geoffrey," she went on, "so beautiful! But I would have been contented if noth-

ing had been changed. You see—I wasn't bound to that other world, after all. I haven't found any happiness there."

He sank down in the chair opposite her, still silent. But she looked into his face and was satisfied. There was more written there than mere surprise and welcome—there was a whole history of love and thankfulness. She flung her work away and dropped on her knees beside him.

"My darling," she said brokenly, "I have come home—don't you understand? I have come to the only place in the whole world which I love most—to my home!"

She buried her face in the shabby old coat, and he held her pressed to him. So they remained—at first silent, and then talking in hushed voices. What they said matters to no one. They were very happy, and the stormy world outside was forgotten.

TO STRUT IN THE CALCIUM LIGHT.

BY FRANK CONWAY.

A SHORT STORY.



At two o'clock on a winter's morning, in the Now-and-Then Social Club, there still stayed at play Lieutenant Tumulty, of the Fourth Precinct Police Station; Guidoni, of the quarry company of that name; Grant, president of the Acme Valve Company; Wilbern, of the *News*, and two others that were guests.

Wilbern breathed elation: the gods had been good to him on every draw of any consequence. Grant had been cleaned out.

The final round was fought out between Wilbern and Grant—with a pair of aces necessary to open the pot. Betting on money borrowed from Wilbern at the latter's suggestion, Grant stood nine hundred dollars to the bad with the newspaper man when the dealer boxed the chips. Something like this had happened before between the two, and over the grudge that Wilbern had seemed to nurse up no funeral had yet been held.

Wilbern left the table to get his hat and overcoat. "Say, Granty, you'll pay that before the fifteenth, you know!" he thundered to Grant belligerently, when he rejoined the group.

The lieutenant bit his lip and frowned. Guidoni and the others peppered Wil-

bern with dissuasives. "You'd better bottle that noise, Vick. Take my advice, and tap a different key. Slide another record on the cylinder, Vick."

Grant, a large, blond, mild-mannered member, forty-some years old, directed at the journalist a gaze that manifested neither resentment nor fluster. His bearing bespoke the man accustomed to taking the world with as little friction as possible.

"Maybe it's your idea," he conjectured placidly, "that a payment by me is the same sick possibility it couldn't help being if I were slated to shake hands to-morrow with Gabriel of the horn. I hope that isn't your idea," and his eyes appealed to Wilbern for an assurance that it wasn't.

Wilbern drew up his shoulders in a shrug indicative of a disinclination to commit himself.

"Anyway," Grant went on, "I must refuse to translate your instruction as a doubt of my integrity. I'm not searching for grounds for hostilities, and I recall now that I had a run-in with you before, Vick, through no wish of mine. I only tell that I acknowledge a value received—and I'll pay. That's all."

"That's all, eh?" There Wilbern, in a reflective pause, fingered his dark mustache.

He had the look, tone, and attitude of a man that habitually tried, just by look, tone, and attitude, to give himself the importance that his personality did not mirror nor his deeds confirm.

He jerked his flattened Alpine hat over his brow, hiding his eyes in the shade of the brim, and, "Granty," he continued, breaking out with a show of apathy, "there'll be no need for anything else if you lead that money to me before the fifteenth."

Grant received this with one of his peculiar explosions of silence.

Tumulty had lumbered to the fireplace of the card-room and had turned off the flaring gas log. Now, putting himself within the circle of light shed by the green-shaded electric over the table, from which the players had risen a moment before, and speaking with a half smile, he said to Wilbern:

"Vick, I figure you thirty years old. At that, you're old enough to know better than to do this."

"Do what?"

"Well, either you're showing off or you're running off your rails."

"How do you make that out?" was the second query of Wilbert.

"You're talking like a man at a rehearsal, and turning loose one word too many," replied the lieutenant.

"I'll let it go at that," said Wilbern magnanimously, as he poked his arms into his overcoat-sleeves, "but you fellows will hear me speaking out loud on this theme again, all right, if I'm not heckled with that nine hundred before the fifteenth. I won't be done."

On the call sounded by Tumulty's ungentle station-house voice, the old club janitor shook himself out of a doze and, puddering around, began to push back and cord the window curtains and to switch off the incandescent lamps.

Wilbern had a chance to say, in Grant's absence, whatever he might have hesitated to say to his face. Grant was the first to leave the Now-and-Then—and he left alone.

With the occupants of the card-room distinguishable only in the bluish luminance of the near-by street-corner arc-light, Wilbern tarried at the club for long, detaining the others. In the main, he requested them to wait and watch.

"Don't splatter me with talk about Grant's intentions," he said impatiently, as all were pounding down the stairs. "No matter what they are, it's a sure thing that Vick Wilbern will collect his due"

II.

As State House reporter for the *News* and Capitol correspondent for ten or more out-of-town papers, Wilbern possessed an acquaintance with many men. Among as many as he met within the next two days he spread the story of his win. He borrowed money on it. For as much as he got he thanked himself. He remarked at no time that his swinging loans on Grant's debt of honor to him signified that a few people rated Grant a man of his word.

Wilbern persisted in talking pretty audibly. Soon every frequenter of the up-town clubs and cafés knew of Grant's obligation to him.

The day after the game, Grant left town on a business trip.

"Even if I had thought to lie down on the debt," he said to Guidoni on his return, "I'd pay it now or eat a toadstool. I wouldn't welch on that poser and shouter for treble the amount he got me for."

When Wilbern heard about the valve company man's return, he telephoned him from his desk in the *News* office.

"Just keep your face quiet, Vick, and let me have a few days of grace, for I'm largely in hock at present." That was, in substance, all Grant would say.

An hour afterward, Grant telephoned Wilbern. "I'm at the bar of the Sheridan House," he informed the *News* man, "and more than one soul seems to be next to the exact amount for which you're holding me by the seat of the pants—and they all have it from you that you're afraid I'll stay away with the money. Now, Vick, if I don't intrude on you with a payment within two weeks, you can pass your claim on me to my friend Guidoni, and he'll spill the gilt to you. It's understood, however, that you'll cork up your holler. I don't want to be classified as a poker-beat."

"Oh, rats with all these smooth side-steps and somersaults!" Wilbern bawled back. At the same time, he remarked

to himself that, while not every eye in the office was on him, undoubtedly every ear was listening. "Cash down is the only thing that can talk convincingly to me," he told Grant. He added, with a laborious attempt at an accent of finality: "You'll find that money for me right away, or there'll be trouble."

The next minute, chewing a cigar-stump at one side of his mouth, he was railing at his distant auditor in his highest register and publishing his hopes ament that auditor's after-death destination.

He jumped from the telephone, on a sudden, and clapped a hand to his ear. The office knew that his caller had hung up on him with a bang.

III.

POKER debtor and poker creditor came upon each other that evening in front of the telegraph-office—crowded then, not so much with people seeking shelter from a heavy fall of snow, as with sports waiting for fight returns from San Francisco.

"Now, see here, Granty," Wilbern began, "you've got to make good, and make good quick."

A crowd pressed in on the two at the sound of Wilbern's noisy announcement.

The valve company man stepped back. His face had reddened.

"I'll square myself with you," he boomed irefully, "within my own convenience. I'll come across with your coin when I'm good and ready."

"Yes, you *will* come across—when you're raising grass on your grave, you welcher!"

Wilbern wasn't quick enough to shift from Grant's quick welt. It caught him clean on the tip of the chin. He felt a hot pain behind his ears. Slipping on the snow-covered lid of a coal-hole, he staggered against the window of the telegraph-office.

Somebody clutched him by the shoulders. The newspaper man was too dazed to unhitch a return cut. When he pulled himself together Grant had gone.

Just as the presses under the *News* reportorial quarters tuned up the next morning, an office-boy told Wilbern that he was wanted at the telephone.

Answering the call, he heard the voice of Grant.

"Wilbern," said the valve company man, "I'm going to tell you a few things, and then throw you. You've been too much of an actor in this business. You didn't try to drill that nine hundred out of me. You went after it as though you didn't care for it. I guess you simply wanted to cut an interesting figure—and you didn't scruple at putting my reputation on the blink. Remember—don't you—that you publicly branded me a welcher? Well, I estimate that I've been damaged to the extent of nine hundred dollars. If ever you get that out of me, Wilbern, you're a magician."

When Wilbern left the telephone, the office-boy overheard him say:

"I'll teach him that going to the monkey with me is a pretty dear frolic."

IV.

FOR a week thereafter Wilbern suffered the grievous agonies of the man whose self-esteem has been outraged. He knew that as far as his getting a cent from Grant went, their matter of dispute had been closed. The thought of his pecuniary loss, while it recurred to him time and time again, never smarted.

What scalded his heart were his recalls of the many words he had flung here, there, and everywhere about the facts that he had Grant for nine hundred, and that he, Wilbern, was not a man to be gouged with impunity. He remembered, too, the clenched-fist compliment that had sent him tottering, with a gashed chin.

On the fifteenth, which was to have been the day of Grant's last chance, Wilbern went into Jack de Camp's sporting-goods store and priced pistols. His was to be mining-camp conduct. He intended to look for Grant.

As may be supposed, he didn't keep that intention to himself. He vowed vengeance in the language of old Montana, and the more he drank the more picturesque became his proclamation that he'd get hunk with Grant before another frost-fall.

Grant was counseled to get on his guard or to talk business with the limbs of the law. Instead of going straight to the police, the valve company man

pooh-pooled the probability of Wilbern's shooting him.

"Stage conversation, I guess"—and he laughed.

One afternoon—a month after his encounter with Wilbern outside the telegraph-office—Grant hailed Guidoni on the corner of Wayne and Broad Streets as the latter's chauffeur, heedful of the street crowd's cries, steered the quarryman's auto to the curb and there brought it to a standstill.

The day was emissive of the fragrance of winter. Crystal-clear and electrically cold, it was such a day as stirs into the open the full-blooded and charges them with the life-zest.

A fire battalion chief had hissed by in his steam runabout. In his track came the chemical auto-wagon and hose-carriage of Company 10, and then its engine—with a little dog barking at the horses and a swarm of youngsters sprinting over its spark-strewn course.

Electric cars were braked. The curious of the neighborhood, hustling from stores and offices, packed the corners at the intersection of the streets named. The lone patrolman stationed there had an able-bodied man's maximum of work—trying at once to press sightseers back and to hunt vehicles out of the path of the fire-machines.

As Grant and Guidoni, with a hearty vigor, clutched hands, Guidoni, happening to half turn, caught a glimpse of Wilbern coming down the steps of the national bank across the way.

"I think your friend of the footlights is urging himself in this direction," Guidoni observed, with a rapidity of utterance that seemed to betoken some disquietude.

Wilbern had started across the street. He dodged an electric-car and approached them directly.

"How are you?" he snapped out. He nodded at Grant, and halted.

"How d'ye do?" Grant responded.

"Don't you think it time for you to say a little more than that?" Wilbern fiercely asked.

Grant answered with an easy promptitude. "No. I've no business with you, and I haven't any desire for another scene. Scenes make me sick. You'll oblige me if you pass on."

"Pass on? I'll see you pass *out* first!"

In a flash, he thrust his hand into his half-buttoned sack coat—thrust it, it seemed to Guidoni, down into a pocket of his waistcoat.

Also in a flash, Guidoni realized that neither he nor Grant had a ghost of a chance to grapple with Wilbern and smother him up.

"Look out, Granty!" the quarryman excitedly cried, and then threw himself flat on his front.

Even as he dropped, he saw the stampepe on all sides of men, women, and children, frantic with the dread of danger. He saw the spurting of flames. He heard the din of shots—one—two—three.

Grant whirled in a circle, swayed like a cripple suddenly jostled from his crutches, and reeled to the gutter. There he went down in a heap. His derby hit the asphalt with a hollow clatter, and the report of another shot rapped Guidoni's ear—ringing to him with the evil accent of a soberly sent finisher.

He sprang from his prone position and rushed to the side of his friend.

In the torture of mortal hurts the shot-torn Grant was dragging himself along the curb. "Tony," he gurgled distressfully, "I've a lungful. Tell my wife—"

A bloody cough stopped his utterance.

The corner patrolman by this time had reached Wilbern. With a blow of his billy, he knocked a black magazine pistol out of the newspaper man's hand and gripped his wrist.

Then, to some one in the crowd that quickly thronged round the prostrate man, he cried:

"Hey, neighbor, telephone from that drug-store for the police ambulance! Quick, too!"

The ambulance drew up at the scene of the shooting. Two policemen jumped from the driver's box.

One of them, on the street patrolman's sign, rushed off a camera man who was snapping pictures of the slayer and his victim. The other kept clear a space where lay a quiet form, all dust and dark-red stains.

Grant, stretched prone on the ground, had already breathed out his life.

V.

"WELL, I got my man, and I didn't hit soft," Wilbern blustered out in the police station.

Sergeant Katzenstein, who was then at the desk, warned him that anything he said would be used against him.

Wilbern smilingly nodded to the reporters who had pushed into the station. Till a reserve officer walked him to his cell and out of sight, he carried himself with all the swaggering serenity that the public slayer seldom fails to affect.

Like every other man, he had at least one winsome quality and more than one friend, and the members of his family loved him dearly. They, with his friends, retained for his defense a staff of splendid counsel, headed by State Senator Hanlon.

The People, in proving premeditation at the trial, introduced a letter that Wilbern had written before the shooting to Miss Ina Grant, a niece of the murdered man. It was ripped up that her father and the valve company man, though blood brothers, had been vindictive political foes, and that their families met only on terms of war. Every one wondered why "Your true friend, Victor." had tossed off that letter.

Senator Hanlon never for an instant saw an acquittal in prospect. When the jurors were being picked, he jockeyed into the box one James C. White, a groceryman, who—the lawyer knew, from private intelligence—held a prejudice against capital punishment.

Throughout the trial he addressed himself to the task of packing that man's head with misgivings. The acceptance of White by the prosecution marked Hanlon's first success at the trial—and his last.

Wilbern was convicted in five minutes.

Then followed a scene sadly unlike the scene closing the frontier drama of Wilbern's mental arrangement. At the price of Grant's license to live, the showy, romantic-minded Vick had indulged his greed for that "business" which, in the playhouse, usually is accompanied by a passage of agitated music. He had eaten of the glory of

killing a fellow man before an audience that would have overflowed the balcony of an ordinary theater. Yes, he had starred himself, but when he heard Judge Agnew pronounce sentence, locking him up for life, every memory of the lively attention he had drawn to himself went dead.

Could he *pleasurably* posture in the get-up of a walled-in bad actor? The self-put question wilted his nerve. His knees sank, and he cried like a calf.

VI.

SENATOR HANLON, who had fought ably and faithfully for him, went with him to his cell. All the way from the court-room the Senator dragged his brains to getting up a comforting by-speech.

"You're not desperate at heart, Vick," he said, intimately leaning his massive, frock-coated frame against the bars of the double steel cage, "and it grieves me to see you up against it like this. I tell you, old fellow, I strongly think there's something to that notion of the ancient Romans—that the gods have it in for us and do their best to make a torment of our lives, and that death alone foils them. A hurried notice of things almost uncovers it as a respectable proposition. Suppose it so. It would be vain to storm at these gods of grisly luck. Goodness only knows, it's vain to buck Fate."

Wilbern eyed him silently. It was now past sunset. Murderers' Row was gray in the fading light: but Hanlon, peering through the bars, discerned in Wilbern's pallid face a set expression of ill-disposition.

"You had only the average man's bundle of wonders and queer qualities," the Senator gravely went on, softening up with every word. "and if I didn't succeed in magnifying them into manifestations of insanity, I at least filled the jurors with the fear of going too far, and so saved you from the volts—eh, Vick?"

"You did beans, you did!" Wilbern snarled out, regarding the Senator with half-shut, sullen eyes. "The others got by on the insanity plea, and I turned my trick as they turned theirs—with as much crazy boldness—with as much sudden

passion. I'm here because my chief counsel is a copy of a bum lawyer. You and your gang of fourth-rate brain-storm sharps made the most of nothing. You made a mess of everything."

Hanlon, in the while it took Wilbern to declare himself, had been meditatively tapping his knee with his high silk hat.

Now, lifting the hat to his head, he turned on his heel. He, however, fetched a dead about-face, and again fronted the man-killer.

There was a tinge of scarlet in the Senator's cheeks, but no heat in his tone. "I'm not going to upset a wagon-load of abusive epithets on you, Vick," he said, "because you can't get at me—and I'm a man. But I will let you know just what put you here—if you haven't already doped it out."

"Sing on," Wilbern glumly mumbled. "Nothing you say can outrival the scolding old Agnew dropped from his perch."

"That's so," the Senator agreed, and he fumbled with his gloves. Then, like a whip-crack, came this question from him: "What kind of fiction have you been used to stocking up on?"

Wilbern answered nothing.

In the way of a man ruminating as he talked, "You wrote a letter to Ina Grant," Hanlon recommenced. "Did any one guess the purpose of that play? No—but I do in this minute—when it's too late to use in your defense. Now I hit upon its despatch as a move by you on the certainty that, were you to lug into the affair a young lady of engaging appearance and manners, she'd lend the case color."

The Senator continued, with neither sign nor sound of spiteful sarcasm:

"Vick, you might have been less theatrical, but you would have been considered more seriously if you had sent Grant poison and laid low when it bumped him off. That would have been businesslike, however, and the business-

like side never appealed to you. You were so anxious to assume a dramatic part that you didn't leave yourself a single loophole. For that matter, you never lived for yourself. You lived to be a spectacle for others, and whenever no one was attending to you or to your words, you were miserable. The fellow most conspicuous is the fellow that's in the biggest hubbub. You found that out, and you determinedly scared up a disturbance. You would have gotten that nine hundred from poor Grant if you hadn't followed your play-acting bent. It was yours up to the hour when you grossly insulted him and he stung you. By that time, you had bounced and bragged before the galleries so often—you had been so busy on the job of keeping well within the spotlight—that you had queered your every chance for a payment from the decent man you wantonly shot to death."

Hanlon took out a handkerchief and wiped his lips. As a tacit invitation to Wilbern to say something, the lawyer allowed a pause.

Wilbern said nothing. Either he was speechless in the stupor of despair, or was, for once, simply at a loss for words.

"However," Hanlon, soft-spoken and unruffled, delivered this as a belated expostulation, and not as a taunt, "you've enjoyed yourself. I think you enjoyed your own trial—so many people beheld and heard you."

Hanlon shook his head, as would a man saddened at a folly begotten in a fret for mere dramatic demonstrations. "*To think that you're where you are because you liked the lime-light too well!*"

With that he began to back away. "Your single consolation—well, Vick, while there's life there's hope. So long."

A volley of curses and ugly characterizations from Wilbern, and—

"These stage performers!" the Senator muttered as he tramped down the jail corridor.

FRIENDSHIP.

Nor gifts, nor earnest praise, nor kindly words,

Nor even do I ask your helping hand.

The sweetest thing between your life and mine

Is just to feel somehow you understand.

Arthur Wallace Peach.

THE WINGS OF MARS.*

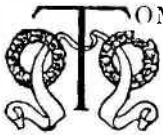
BY JOHN H. WHITSON,

Author of "The Castle of Doubt," "The Rainbow Chasers," "Justin Wingate, Ranchman,"
"Barbara, a Woman of the West."

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHASE.



TOM AMBERLY had awakened in his room at Wildwood. It was night, and the darkness and silence declared unmistakably that the hour was

not early in the evening.

"What the deuce?" he said, filled with a dim knowledge that for him a stitch had been dropped somewhere in the fabric of time.

Then with a bewildering rush it all came back to him: the search for the Japanese; the fight, and the coming of Betty Leighton; and—yes, he had actually told her, alone with her there in the leafy seclusion, that he loved her; and she—more wonderful still!—had given him to understand that there were conditions which might render his case not hopeless. What were those conditions? Oh, yes: he recalled them, marveling that he could have forgotten.

Then he remembered that he and Betty Leighton, with Jack Haviland and Teague McAlpin, had set out to return to Wildwood, Lionel Borden not having appeared; that he had been seized with a faintness on the way, had been put to bed as soon as the house was reached, and that a young doctor who was one of the guests had given him a sleeping potion.

Now he knew why he had felt so queer on waking. And yet it did not seem that the effect of the sleeping powder should make him feel so weak and dizzy when he lifted himself on his elbow to look out of the window close by his head, or make his neck throb so painfully and his head feel so big and hot.

Pondering thus, he reached the conclusion that he had been really hurt in his encounter with the Japanese, and was only now realizing the fact; he had been quite unaware of it during those palpitating moments when he told Betty Leighton that he loved her. That had been a sudden and rash thing to do, under all the circumstances; fools rush in where angels fear to tread! But there are times when the folly of fools is justified, and they reap the rewards which come to the doers of brave deeds.

Thoughts like these, galloping through Tom Amberly's tired brain with a speed which would have put to shame the fleetest gait ever beaten out by the iron hoofs of the Red Knight, were brought to a jolting halt by the sound of voices on the veranda near his window. There stealthy-footed men, coming together as if by chance, had begun to talk in low tones.

The discovery which crumbled Tom Amberly's thoughts, and caused him to sit bolt upright, was that the chief speaker was Borden and that the other was one of the Japanese. The brief talk began in what Amberly supposed to be Japanese, but it shifted to English, and then back and forth. Amberly got only scraps of it; but an electric light seemed to have been switched on in his brain so that the few words he heard told volumes.

Borden had reached the house later than Amberly's party, just how much later was not clear; but it was clear that there had been a meeting between him and this Japanese not long before, and that this present meeting had come about through a wish on the part of the Japanese for a further word or two of explanation. Borden growled something

* This story began in THE SCRAP BOOK—Second Section—for September, 1908.

about the danger of a talk there, though he seemed not to be aware that he was so close to Tom Amberly's window.

After a moment, Amberly was given further information. One of the Japanese had found the traveling-bag—when, how, or where did not appear—but he had set out for Washington with it, expecting to find Borden there, and deliver it into his hands.

Borden, on the veranda, was in a hurry to leave the house, as he intended to get a train which was nearly due and post back to Washington. What the Japanese wanted to know now was in what way he could serve the Englishman there at Wildwood. Even in that hurried, whispered exchange of words, it was clear in how high regard these Japanese held Lionel Borden as the secret representative of the Mikado in this country. They stood eager and ready to aid him however they might, for the power and glory of Nippon.

Tom Amberly was out of bed and dressing hastily as soon as Borden and the Japanese had left the veranda. Once more he forgot his dizzy head and his weakened condition. He was ready in three minutes, and ran from his room to the stairway without stopping to rouse Jack Haviland. Dim lights burned on the stairway and in the halls; he went down in great bounds. There were bright lights and the sounds of voices in the billiard-room, where the click of balls told him men were playing late; and the front hall, too, was brightly illuminated.

Rushing through the great doorway and the portico, Amberly ran out. An automobile had dashed away, and was roaring through the wood road. From near at hand came a crunch of wheels, and he saw Jimmy Minot swing up the graveled drive with his tandem. It would take time to rouse a chauffeur and get an automobile from the garage, or a horse from the stables.

"Minot," Amberly called. "could I induce you to get me to the station in double-quick? I want to make that train, and you're a good driver. If I weren't in a devil of a hurry, I wouldn't trouble you."

Thus addressed, Jimmy Minot sat more erect and drew back proudly on

the reins. He was a good driver, and he knew it, and liked to have people say so.

"Another fellow in a devil of a hurry, eh?" he said with a laugh. "Yes, I guess I can; but it will take quick work, and these horses are a bit blown, you see. Been over to Whitewater Bridge with a little party; they're to stay at the inn there overnight, but I thought I'd run back. Hop in; we haven't any time to lose. If you miss it, though, there's another along in two hours."

Two hours! The loss of that much time would be fatal.

Tom Amberly jumped in.

"Drive on!" he said. "It will be the biggest thing you could ever do for me. Minot, if you can get that train. With hard driving, we've barely got time." Then he laughed mirthlessly. "Too bad I can't offer you money for this, Minot; you don't need money, unfortunately."

"Fortunately, you mean," said Minot with a complacent chuckle, plucking up the reins. "The poor devils who do need money are the ones who are unfortunate." Then he added: "That's Borden, isn't it, ahead of us, in the auto? I passed him, and I thought he was going to run me down; his chauffeur was driving the old machine for all it was worth. By the Lord Harry, when they went by me, I thought they were going to tear out that stone post where the driveway swings into the road. They're going some. You can hear 'em roaring through the woods now."

His whip snapped and his horses plunged ahead, racing round the semi-circle of the wide driveway. As they took the dark road which plunged into the woods, the gravel flew. Then the sinuous road lay before them, summer-scented in the musky night, and the wheels whirred lustily under the stars.

Jimmy Minot was in his element. An excuse—any old excuse—for clever and daring driving was what he liked. The manner in which he swung his tandem team round the curves in the darkness might have brought a protest from any passenger less anxious for top speed than was Tom Amberly. Minot carried a light, and there was starlight; but even so, the way was dark in places, where the trees pressed close together.

Tom Amberly struck matches, which sucked and flared out, and looked at his watch from time to time; listened through the clatter of hoofs, through the snap of Minot's whip and the snap of swishing branches, for sounds of the auto ahead, and for the whistle of the coming train. Now and then he asked Jimmy if he could get on a little faster.

"You're sure no quitter!" Minot shouted back. "You're bound to break the record, or break our necks and kill the horses. But I'll get you there. Just hang on."

The whip snapped, and the galloping horses flew faster than ever.

Then across the woodsy distance came the sound Amberly dreaded to hear—the whistle of the train, and the station still a long distance away! Minot heard it; his lash swung out, and he yelled to his horses like a cowboy. He was drunk with the excitement of doing this thing he loved to do more than anything else—drive like a wild man or a maniac, regardless of roads and consequences. Amberly was toosed to and fro, as the wheels fairly left the ground at times. He had to hold on with both hands. But the speed was not too great for his anxious haste.

They heard the shrilling steam-escape and the chugging of the engine at the station, the rattle of trucks and trunks; the lights of the station flashed before them, and the train with its broadside of half-lighted windows. At one end of the platform stood the automobile that had borne Lionel Borden; the chauffeur was waiting to see if any one was to be taken over to Wildwood.

"We're going to make it!" Minot yelled, his whip cracking resolution.

But—the puffing bark of the engine was heard; the row of lights began to move.

Tom Amberly made ready to jump out and run for the train when the horses stopped. He balanced himself and struck the ground with a thud as the tandem swung round to a standstill. It was a wild dash he made, and he fairly hurled himself at the last car, though it was vestibuled; but it whisked past him. He stood, confused and dazed, staring as it zipped and clanked down the shining rails. He had missed it!

"Too bad!" shouted Minot. "Just a minute too late. But we made a great try for it."

His horses were steaming and panting. Truly, Minot had done his part.

Out on a siding a doddering old switch-engine was fussing lazily back and forth. The sight of it gave Amberly an inspiration. He ran into the telegraph-office. The next moment he was demanding of the telegrapher that the switch-engine be run out on the main track and placed at his disposal and the disappearing passenger-train held at the next station.

The telegrapher was accustomed to the eccentric demands of Wildwood guests, and lacked enthusiasm.

"See here," he said as a squelcher, "it'll cost you a thousand dollars to do that, do you know it?"

A long, flat pocketbook came out of Amberly's coat-pocket, and he began to count out some big bills; whereupon the telegrapher started.

"Say, I haven't any authority to do that!" he protested.

"I didn't suppose you had," said Amberly; "but the men above you have, and I want you to know that I mean business. I'm going to have that engine, if I have to buy it. Wire Murdock, the general passenger-agent—he knows me. Tell him I must have that engine and have the train held, and that I'll stand for the bill, whatever it is."

He scribbled his name and address on a card and shoved it to the telegrapher.

"Hustle this!"

While the telegrapher was putting the wire through, Amberly went out and inspected the switch-engine. It seemed to be an old rattletrap, but it was better than nothing—and all he could get, if he could get it. On the way, he tarried to speak to Jimmy Minot, who was waiting, lest Amberly should be obliged to return to Wildwood after all.

"It's all right," said the telegrapher, when Amberly came again into the office. "I got Murdock, and he says it's all right; you can have the engine, and the train will be held five minutes for you at the next station. That old switch-engine is a scrap-heap, but it can still go, all right, and I guess you can do it."

He came out of the office, and with

Amberly walked hurriedly over to the switch-engine, where he delivered the order in person.

Having brought his engine out upon the main track, with Tom Amberly in the cab, the engineer gave the old "scrap-heap" all the steam she could carry. Amberly had ridden in an engine-cab before, in the West, where the mountain curves threw the engine about in a frightful manner. This was a duplicate of that experience; for while the road-bed was in excellent condition, the switch-engine was not. But it held to the rails, screaming its whistle through the night at the frequent crossings, and trod down the gleaming rails in wild, exhilarating flight.

But swiftly as the old engine fled, it went none too fast to suit Tom Amberly, though the engineer and fireman, covertly watching him, were expecting him to show the white feather and urge a speed less reckless. Amberly's only fear was that the five minutes of grace in which the train was to be held would not be sufficient. He showed his increasing anxiety by holding his watch in his hand under the cab light as the engine tore on, consulting it almost every second as the station was approached.

The lights of the town flashed into view, and Amberly felt a sigh of relief when he beheld the ruddy light on the rear of the waiting train. With a squeal of its whistle, the rocking switch-engine began to slow down, and came to a stop just behind the train. As Amberly swung down from the cab he saw the impatient conductor walking to and fro on the platform, exasperated at the delay. From several windows passengers' heads were being poked, and questions as to the cause of the wait were being asked.

Fearing that the head of the Englishman was in one of those windows, Tom Amberly darted to the other side of the train and made his way along until he found an unvestibuled coach and could enter. The conductor had seen him, and the train began to move. But, after entering, Amberly walked back until he came to the parlor-car, behind which were the sleepers. Taking a bit of risk, he made sure that his guess was right by looking in — Lionel Borden was in the

parlor-car, and, fortunately for the plans of Tom Amberly, was at the moment peering out through his window. Amberly drew back unobserved, and retreating into the day coach, seated himself so that he could watch the door of the car in which the Englishman rode.

As the train rolled on toward Washington, Amberly had ample time to imagine the astonishment of Jack Haviland on discovering him gone; he had not thought, nor had time, to leave a word of explanation for his old friend. His mind turned to Betty Leighton, and to Borden, and ran vaguely ahead, questioning the outcome of this adventure. Uppermost was the stern determination to checkmate Borden and recover the aeroplane model.

It was long past midnight when the train pulled into Washington. Quietly shadowing the Englishman, Amberly saw him leave the station and enter a cab. He took another, instructing the driver to keep the first in sight, if possible without attracting attention.

Borden seemed not to suspect that he was being followed, though his cab went along at a rattling pace. Its course astonished Tom Amberly. It stopped finally, not before Borden's imposing lodgings, but in a shabby street, before a shabby house. Amberly's cab drove on past, yet Amberly saw Borden go up the steps and rap on the door with his gloved knuckles.

Just around the corner Amberly got out.

"Wait for me here," he said, giving the driver a bill.

As he turned back, he saw Borden's cab disappearing up the street. A bent negro was shuffling along the sidewalk. Borden had vanished into the house. Amberly lost no time in putting himself before the door which had admitted the Englishman.

The crucial moment had arrived, and what to do puzzled him. If he knocked, he might not be admitted; and even if he gained access to the house he might be thrown out, or, in any event, not be able to get his hands on the traveling-bag and the model. He could not expect to be permitted to carry them off without a protest. Certainly the situation called for careful handling.

He saw that the house was low, with two stories. The front was dark, as were the houses which flanked it. The neighborhood was poor, and had the qualities of a negro section, as he judged it to be; he did not remember having been there before. It was apparent that the Japanese who had brought the aeroplane model to Washington, having found that the Englishman was not at his apartments, had burrowed away in this place while waiting to hear from him.

At one side of the house was a dark opening, with a gate. After a moment of hesitation Amberly tried this gate, and when it did not yield quickly, sprang over, to find himself in a narrow, black passage between the dingy buildings. Some negroes passed the opening as Amberly disappeared, and he heard them stop and then go on again, talking. Then he turned earnestly to the work in hand.

Threading the narrow way, he came to the rear of the house, where there was a small yard filled with broken bottles and odds and ends. Here he saw a dark door blocking what was evidently a stairway. What was more inviting, a rusted fire-escape came down to within reach of his hands.

He caught hold of it and drew himself up, and soon was climbing toward a window which he saw above him. The sky was not bright, but from one of the houses came some shafts of lamplight, which aided him. This looked a good deal like burglary, he knew, and American courts do not look kindly on that offense; but he put thoughts of consequences behind him and climbed on—so rapidly that soon his nose was flattened against the panes of the window, and he was staring into a dark and dirty hall. The window moved when he tried it, and he pushed it up and crawled in, for he had caught the sound of voices—and one of them was Borden's.

Suddenly he stopped and shrank against the wall as a light flashed through a doorway and a man came out carrying a lamp. The man was a slippered Oriental in a garment of flowing yellow. Then the voice of Borden broke heavily and explosively; he was cursing the Japanese for hiding in such a hole, for not keeping the traveling-bag always at his hand;

anathematizing him, too, for not having a light in the lower hall—a failure which had caused Borden to stumble and bark his sensitive shins.

Then the voice of a negro woman was added, demanding what the "gemman" meant by making such a "howdy-do" at that time of night.

"Who's gwine sleep in dis heah house ef you all done kick up sich a helly-baloo?" she demanded petulantly.

"Be silent, good woman!" urged Borden, and threw her a coin.

Amberly heard the coin jingle and heard her scramble for it.

The woman came out, passing the Japanese, who was returning with the bag. Amberly, in the shadow by the window, saw it all distinctly. The Japanese disappeared behind the door, which was instantly closed and locked.

Tom Amberly was left standing in the darkness by the window, open behind him. The negress still lingered in the hall, beyond the door, grumbling and muttering, not at all mollified by Borden's coin.

Amberly hurried toward her, stepping lightly. And as he passed the door the voices within the room told him that, not having a key, Borden and the Japanese were finding trouble in starting the damaged lock of the bag.

"Here!" he whispered as the woman halted and turned toward him.

"In de name er Gawd, who is dis?" she quavered.

"No matter," said Amberly hurriedly; "here is a five-dollar bill. Run to the door there and tell the gentleman inside that a man wants to see him in the hall below. Say it is so important that he must come at once."

The woman crackled the stiff bill in her fingers and stared at it. Amberly could hear Borden and the Japanese talking beyond the door, and he trusted that the sound of their own voices would keep them from hearing his.

"Do it at once!" he said, when the woman hesitated.

"But dar ain' no man in de lower hall!" she protested.

"Tell him there is, anyway, and earn your money; hurry!"

She crumpled the bill and thrust it into the bosom of her dress, and, advancing to the door, rapped on it heavily,

stopping instantly the hum of talk. Entering, she did not observe that Amberly had followed her, and stood close behind her, near the wall.

Borden came to the door and inquired from inside what the woman wanted, and she delivered her message. Amberly had stepped quickly past her, and was now near the window which had given him entrance. There he stood wrapped in gloom while the woman, in reply to Borden's harsh objurgation and inquiry, repeated her message with much emphasis.

The door was pulled open, and Borden came out. He was fuming. He did not know what this meant, or who the visitor could be who insisted on seeing him in the lower hall. But he passed the woman, bidding her follow him, and demanding why the house was not better lighted.

He had barely reached the head of the stairs before Tom Amberly had crossed the space separating him from the door. The Japanese had advanced to it, and his brown face appeared in the narrow crack that emitted a beam of light; he was listening. Amberly hurled himself against the door, pushing back the Japanese, and was in the room, where a light burned on a little table beside the identical walrus traveling-bag he sought.

The Japanese had tumbled backward with a cry of alarm and fright as Amberly rushed into the room past him. Yet the now desperately determined young man did not hesitate. He was still acting on the impulse of the moment, and thus acting he caught up the traveling-bag and started for the door. The Japanese stretched forth a foot to trip him; then with a yell flourished a knife which he plucked from his flowing robe. He struck too late, for Amberly was already at the open door.

Borden was coming back, informed by the outcry that something had gone wrong, and he was at the top of the stairs again when Amberly leaped out into the hall and ran for the window and the fire-escape.

A round English oath burst from Borden's lips, followed quickly by a spitting tongue of fire and a sharp explosion. He had recognized Amberly, or recognized that the traveling-bag with its precious burden was disappearing, and in his ex-

citement and rage he had whipped out a revolver and fired. The bullet cut the window at the side of Amberly's head, just as he dived through to the outside.

Another shot sounded, and a bullet whistled over him as he dropped like a monkey to the fire-escape and began to descend. Still another came from the window as his feet struck the ground. But quite unscathed he ran into the narrow passage between the houses, and so gained the street.

This was deserted, but he heard voices and the creak of hoisting windows, and knew that the revolver shots had drawn attention. Without stopping even so much as to look round he ran as fast as he could to the corner, where he had instructed the cab to be held for him. It was there; but before he could get into it Borden, the chattering negress, and others, were in the street before the house he had left, and resounding footsteps showed that a crowd was gathering.

Seeing and hearing these things the cabman hesitated, as Amberly drew open the cab-door and began to get in. This looked suspiciously like a burglary or something of the kind, and the cautious cabby did not want to get into trouble. He heard men running toward the corner from in front of the shabby house.

"Drive on!" Amberly commanded.

There was that in the tone which caused the jehu to obey, and though Borden bowled into view, bellowing lustily and raised the cry of "Stop thief!" the whip of the cabman snapped, and the cab was off and away.

But when he had turned two or three corners the cabmen drew in.

"Where to?" he shouted, cocking an ear toward the sounds of pursuit.

Tom Amberly had been considering that.

"Let me out here," he requested.

He opened the door himself and leaped down. The street was unfamiliar.

"Drive to the Baltimore and Potomac station as fast as you can go," he said. "Answer what you will, if you are stopped and questioned. And here is something to pay you."

He held up a bill whose denomination the cabman's eyes shine.

"Correct; and you're a gentleman! It's none of my funeral, and I don't want

to know nothing about it; but I'm hopin' you get away with the swag."

He whipped up briskly, driving straight ahead, and Tom Amberly ran for the covert of a dark alley near at hand.

Less than five minutes afterward a cab, which he was sure contained Borden and the Japanese, went thundering by, in hot chase of the empty cab flying now toward the distant railway station. With a feeling of grim satisfaction Tom Amberly saw it pass. In his hand he held the traveling-bag. True, he did not know certainly that the aeroplane model was in it, but he believed that it was, and he had the immense satisfaction of believing that Borden had not been given even an opportunity to look at it.

"It's fighting the devil with fire; and I've won so far," he thought, as he considered his situation. "But the station will be watched for me, and the railway trains, and I'll have to hide a while, or get to Wildwood by some other way."

Then he began to walk through the alley, seeking another street, pondering the means to continue his present success to the end.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WINGS OF MARS.

TOM AMBERLY had given surprises, but none greater than that which he himself received the next day at Wildwood, after he had evaded Borden and arrived there safely by rail. He had turned the precious traveling-bag over to Betty Leighton, with an interesting and dramatic recital of the manner of its recovery—a recital which enabled him to say some other things equally interesting; and he was retelling the story, in his own room, to Jack Haviland, when the surprise came.

Chancing to go to his closet for a package of cigarettes in the pocket of a coat there, he let the package fall, and in trying to catch it as it dropped, knocked it into a corner. He burrowed for it—and put his hands on the legs of a man. The discovery gave him a decided start, but he grappled with the intruder, and when the fellow was dragged out he was discovered to be the identical Japanese last seen in Washington in slippers and

yellow robe, but now in American clothing.

Forced into a chair, with Jack Haviland squatting smilingly in another and flourishing a big revolver, the scared Japanese expressed a willingness to talk. His command of English was good, and his story, in some parts, astonishing. He said that when Amberly could not be located in Washington Borden had sent him on to Wildwood to get the traveling-bag at all hazards if Amberly appeared there with it. To that end he had concealed himself in the closet.

His confession revealed further that the chase of the traveling-bag began when a member of the Japanese troupe of jugglers at Wildwood overheard a talk between two young women which gave him a knowledge of Borden's wishes in the interests of Japan. That had stirred the patriotism of the whole band and created their determination to assist the Englishman, for they knew him and the position he held.

All this was credible. The unbelievable part was a statement that the traveling-bag which the Japanese took to Washington he had found secreted carefully behind a sliding panel of the closet in the room belonging to the young lady whose unguarded talk had first given the troupe their knowledge. He believed she had hidden it there to keep them from getting it. His description made it certain that the room he meant was Betty Leighton's.

Tom Amberly denounced him as a liar for this statement. And after cautiously releasing him, Jack Haviland kicked the cringing Oriental through the garden shrubbery and out of sight. The two young men did not know what else to do with him. The traveling-bag and aeroplane model were again in the possession of Betty Leighton, and they thought it best to let the rascal go rather than hold him and stir up troublesome questioning.

It was shortly after this that Amberly saw the Japanese talking with Borden—of whose return to Wildwood he had not been aware—and he saw them walk stealthily away together into the cover of the woods. Following promptly, he missed them, but after considerable wandering came upon a flat building sprawled in a vast extent of untimbered land.

Amberly stood hidden and looked at this building, wondering if Borden and the Japanese could have gone into it. Out of keeping with anything he had seen at Wildwood, it was in a section which he was sure few if any of the guests ever visited. It was surprisingly new, too; the rough boards of its unpainted walls had not even been given time to weather, but stared crude and raw in the sunshine.

As he looked he saw a door open and a man appear and disappear. The man's back was toward the trees; but he was short and thick, and wore baggy gray clothing. Plainly, he was not the Englishman or the Japanese. When he did not show himself again Amberly advanced boldly on the squat building. The door flew open under the propulsion of his knuckles as he rapped, and amazed him by revealing a huge aeroplane poised as if for flight at the top of a steel track. He knew instantly that it was the original of the model.

He had no more than made this observation when he was greeted by a roaring, angry voice, and the man he had seen at the door confronted him, jumping out from behind a huge vane of the flying-machine where he had been at work.

"Here!" he roared. "How did you get in here?"

"The door opened when I knocked on it and I walked in."

Then Tom Amberly stared, and the man stared; they knew each other.

"Why, hallo, Dunlap! I didn't recognize you, and I thought you meant to knife me. This your layout?"

But Mr. Archer Dunlap continued to stare in displeasure, for the moment ignoring Amberly's extended hand. Then he thought better of it.

"Glad to see you!" said Amberly as they shook hands. "This is your flying-machine, of course; seems to me I'd heard you were at work on one. Rumor, you know. And, lately, the past day or two, I've—"

"Sit down!" said Mr. Archer Dunlap ominously.

He pointed to a block by the door, and took a seat on another. But he got up nervously, thrust out his head for a look round, and when he came back he locked and bolted the door. His face wore an unpleasant, suspicious expression.

"Tell me just how you got here, and why, and all about it!" he commanded.

Tom Amberly laughed good-naturedly.

"That's easy. I walked here, through the woods from Wildwood."

"It's a long distance, and there is no road in that direction; the road cuts across below, and reaches the railway at Fount's Crossing. I brought my lumber in from there, and other things."

"You're right; it is a long way."

"You're a guest at the house over there?"

"Yes."

"And you wasn't trying to spy out anything—this, for instance?"

He jerked his hand toward the flying-machine, which loomed dim in the shadow like an enormous bat in a cave.

"Certainly not."

"Yet you said something—what was it—about a flying-machine? That you were interested in one?"

Amberly answered by a question which threw Dunlap into a rage:

"Does Jefferson Bland know you are out here?"

"Does he know it?" he asked, springing from the block in his anger; "does the scoundrel know it? He knows all about it; only I suppose he's forgotten me and my plans entirely, after his promises. That would be like him—forgetful and selfish; they're all alike, men of his kind. When I secured my privilege of him, months ago, he assured me that I could remain a year here without molestation, near as it is to Washington. He said he would be in Europe this summer and Wildwood would not be opened. It was what I wanted.

"I had the house built by men who didn't know what I meant to use it for. Then I sent them away and had my machine brought here by some people I could trust. But even those men I sent away before I began on certain secret work—the work which makes my invention different from all others. Bland lied to me, and has filled his house with a mob of gadding, gabbling fools, men and women. They wander everywhere. Two days ago I saw one on top of that hill over there. I'm compelled to watch, until I'm worn out. Why didn't Bland keep his word to me? Recently, I had to go to Washington, and if you will be-

lieve me, when I got back I saw a Japanese on the route between here and the railway!"

His heavy-lidded eyes stared and his cheeks twitched nervously.

"You'll think I imagined that Japanese," he said, "but I didn't. They've troubled me a lot lately. First, there was an Englishman named Borden, who got on track of what I was doing down in the Carolina mountains. He tried to see my machine—the one I made before this; offered to pay me well to let him examine it and see it fly, and then tried to bribe my men. I left there because of him. And then came that Japanese, Matsuki. He claimed to represent the Japanese government. That was two months ago, in Washington. He was willing to give me my price, he said, if I would sell to Japan my exclusive rights. I kicked him out. And now this Japanese in the woods!"

He stopped, breathless, and sat staring suspiciously at Amberly.

"So, when you appeared just now, walking right in on me, I didn't know but maybe you were in the same game. You are sure you didn't know that I was here?"

"Upon my honor, I didn't."

"Nor that my machine was housed here?"

"No; I didn't know that, either."

"I suppose you are all right, Amberly—you used to be; but I'll have to ask you to keep this thing a close secret."

"There's no reason why I shouldn't. You didn't see more than one Japanese?"

"No; one's enough."

"But there are others round here."

Dunlap gave a start of anxiety.

"You've seen them?"

"Yes."

"They were spying on me?"

"I can't say as to that. I followed one from the vicinity of the house, he came in this direction, and that is why I am here."

"You followed him?"

"Yes; his actions were suspicious. You will have to look out for that Englishman, too. He is at Wildwood, and he came in this direction to-day. In fact, he was with that Japanese."

"Lionel Borden?"

"Yes, Lionel Borden, the Englishman.

And I'm satisfied he is in the pay of Japan."

"If he shows his face here I'll kill him!" Dunlap declared angrily. "He's troubled me enough."

"He offered you a big sum?"

"He did. Enough to make me comfortable. But what of that? Can a man sell out his patriotism? I have just two ambitions—to make the first successful flying-machine, and then present it to the United States government for war purposes. If a man can link his name with the history of a nation he is immortal"

He stopped, listening, and sat breathing heavily.

"So you see why I want the American government to have it, and am determined that Japan shall not. There will be a war with Japan. You don't believe that; but many men do. The Japs believe it, and that is why they want my flying-machine."

He stopped and listened again; then resumed:

"The most disheartening thing," he dropped his voice impressively, "is the indifference of the American officials. But I expect that, and I must overcome it. Such indifference is nothing new; the benefactors of the race have always been ignored, scorned, ridiculed, condemned, tortured, crucified. I don't need to tell you that—it is history."

"You have tried the officials?"

Tom Amberly was intensely interested, and was hoping for revelations; already he had been given some blinding touches of light.

"Yes, I have," Dunlap admitted. "I don't mind telling you about it. I know you, and you're reliable; you're my friend—or always have been!"

He looked at Amberly in sharp questioning.

"And I'm your friend now."

"That's what I think. So I'll tell you about it. I took a small model of this aeroplane to Washington, and tried to get to see the President, or the Secretary of War. Its use in war would be invaluable to the nation controlling it. But the fool doorkeepers thought I carried an infernal machine, just because I wouldn't show the thing to them. The Secretary went out West on a trip, and the Pres-

ident flew the Washington coop, too. But the Secretary is due again in Washington. I had the good fortune to be well acquainted with a young fellow who has a position in the War Department. Maybe you know him; he belongs to an old Washington family, and his name is Leighton. I had a talk with him, and left the model with him, and he is to bring it to the Secretary's notice. I've written to the Secretary, too, and maybe that will hurry things up."

Tom Amberly managed to conceal his dizzy astonishment and breathless interest.

"Yes I know him," he admitted. "That is, I've met him. As to really knowing him, I don't; I've never talked with him ten consecutive minutes!"

"You know the family?"

"I—well, barely; yes, I know them."

"Fine old family. The old general is as square as a brick. So I put the model in the hands of young Leighton, knowing he would do everything possible for me that he could. And now I'm just waiting. The Secretary is hurrying back from the West, and—"

He noticed the red of confusion in his auditor's face.

Tom Amberly turned his head toward the door as if listening, thus diverting Dunlap's attention; he felt that he must have time to control his feelings, and to think. It seemed to him that he knew the whole story now—could see it from the very beginning. And—he caught his breath with a gasp—that was why Betty Leighton had been unwilling to give him a more definite promise! There was a shadow on that Washington home, and it shadowed the heart of this fair young girl.

But should he tell Dunlap of the model—what he knew of it? Would it avail anything, and would it be honorable, or proper, or wise? He came to the swift conclusion that it would be none of those things. Yet, there was something he could do, and ought to do—give warning against Borden and the sharp-eyed Japanese.

He gave the warning, making it strong; then added:

"Have you any reason to suspect that Borden may be aided in his efforts by a woman?"

"Why do you say that?" Dunlap demanded. "You have seen some woman with him at the house over there?"

"No, I haven't. Some time I may be able to tell you why I asked that question."

"A party of young women were at that little pond they call Silver Lake, two days ago. It's no more than a mile from here. You weren't thinking of that?"

He eyed the young man anxiously.

"No; I didn't know of it. Borden, in my opinion, is in desperate earnest. You want to keep a sharp watch against him. You ought to have some men here to help you."

"And spy on me! I'll get along very well alone."

Amberly looked absently at the big flying-machine, while adjusting his thoughts.

"I'd rather you looked in another direction!" Dunlap growled. "I'm trusting you; but why should I trust even you too far? Men have been known to walk about a fort, and then go away and write down in detail everything they saw."

"I'll not offend again," Amberly promised.

And he did not while he remained.

A half-hour afterward Mr. Archer Dunlap followed him to the door, and locked it securely after his departure.

Dunlap then went up into a closet-like place over the forward end of the flying-machine, and through some small holes bored there he watched the departure of Amberly.

While he still continued to look out, he uttered an exclamation, and then hurried down to unlock the door and place himself beside it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BORDEN'S DISCOVERY.

THE thing which so tremendously excited Archer Dunlap, which sent him hurriedly down to the door to undo its fastenings and then crouch beside it in the shadows of the gray interior, was that he had sighted Lionel Borden crossing the open ground from the woods.

Borden's advance was studied and cautious. He had seen Tom Amberly hurry away from the building. That was

enough to call for an investigation, even if the flat structure had not been so suggestively like one he had seen in the Carolina mountains.

When he came to the door and found it unlocked and ajar Borden peered in. Back in the dim light he saw the aeroplane, poised at the top of its steel track, its wings wide-spread. No sound came of workman's hammer, and no person was visible. Apparently, the flying-machine stood unguarded.

"How did Amberly know it was here?" was his thought. "No matter; I can circumvent him now, and get what I want. This is better than the model; here are the true dimensions—everything. This is blooming good luck. Not a soul here. I'll just hurry about it, and get away before any one comes."

He pushed the door open and stepped in.

As he did so he heard at his side a growl like that of an animal, and he was unexpectedly and viciously assaulted by Dunlap, who leaped out of the darkness like a madman and hurled him to the ground.

Though so astounded, the courageous Englishman put up a desperate fight; but he was helpless in the hands of Dunlap, who was transformed into a temporary maniac by the violence of his rage. He had all of a maniac's unnatural fury and strength. Nor did his rage pass until Borden lay helpless before him. Then with cords and rope he began to tie his prisoner.

Borden knew now the sort of man he had to deal with, and knew, too, his peril. So he lay quiet, submitting without protest while Dunlap bound him hand and foot.

"Now that you have tied me, what are you going to do with me?" he asked, surprising Dunlap by the question.

"I ought to kill you," said Dunlap.

"That would be useless, you know," Borden parleyed. He feared this wild man. "What could you gain by it?"

"I should not be hounded by you any more."

"I haven't hounded you," Borden declared meekly.

"You have hounded me for months, first in the Carolina mountains, and now here. You tried to buy my secret, and

then to bribe my workmen; and now you've turned sneak, in order to get what you can't buy."

"Pon honor, you are mistaken," Borden remonstrated. He lay flat on his back, helpless, with the figure of the inventor looming grotesquely and savagely above him. "You're wholly mistaken, you know."

"Why are you here, then?" snapped Dunlap.

"I am stopping at Wildwood. You know the place, I presume. It isn't far from here. I chanced to be walking through the forest, and I saw this building, and a man coming out of it. The man is no friend of mine—a puppy from Washington, who at various times has sought to injure me. The sight of him and of this house excited my curiosity. I came up to it and, thinking it unoccupied, I looked in."

"You know what is in here?"

"Oh, yes; now that I'm here. You have your aeroplane here. But I didn't know—didn't dream of it—until I looked in."

"You're a liar!" Dunlap's rage seized and shook him again. "You're a liar, and a sneaking scoundrel!" he screamed. "You knew my aeroplane was here, and you thought you could sneak in and get plans of it. But I'll fix you. I'll hold you here until—"

He lifted Borden and, half dragging, half carrying him, bore him across the room to a tool-closet, thrust him in, bound as he was, and locked the door on him.

In the pitchy darkness of the locked tool-room Borden listened silently to the movements of the inventor outside. Thus listening, he began to strain heavily at the cords on his wrists.

Half an hour passed, during which Dunlap seemed to be throwing timbers and tools about; then Borden heard him lock the small outer door and leave the building.

As soon as he felt sure the inventor was gone, Borden dexterously slipped his wrists out of the cords that had held them together. This feat would have surprised Dunlap if he could have witnessed it, but to Borden it was not difficult. Compared with his slender, bloodless hands, his wrists were large.

Besides, he had learned a good many things about ropes and cords and the tying and untying of difficult knots from the jugglers and fakirs of India. While the cords were being set he had expanded his wrist and arm muscles, had done this again and again afterward, as he strained at the cords in the darkness of the closet; so that in the end he found it no great task to slip the loosened bonds over his slender hands.

Having freed his hands, he sat up, listening; and, when he heard no sound, he applied himself to the work of removing the knotted cords from his ankles and in squirming out of the folds of the rope passed round his body.

"Tied up like a bale of goods!" he grumbled. "But I'm out of the things now. That was a surprise, to be sure—a great surprise, when he nabbed me. He saw me coming, and laid for me. Amberly visited him here, and they had a conference."

He tried the door, and found it locked. His revolver, his knife and his keys had been taken away by Dunlap, but in one of his pockets he still had a few matches. These he fished out and, by the light of one of them, looked keenly about.

"Ah!" he said, possessing himself of a screw-driver and a chisel. "Now, we'll see."

Five minutes' work let him out of his prison and into the room with the aeroplane, where the light, though not good, was as clearest sunlight compared with the black interior of the tool-room. Cool and crafty, the Englishman stood looking about. His nerves were calm, his heart-beats steady, yet in emerging from that prison he had half expected a shot. The continued silence assured him that Dunlap had actually departed. This act on the part of his captor was strange, but not unaccountable. His guess that Dunlap was hurrying to the railway station to send a telegram to Washington actually hit the truth squarely on the head.

When Borden went to the door by which he had entered he found it locked; but, with the tools he had in his hands, he was not long in opening it.

"I'd have made a blooming good burglar," was his humorous reflection. "But burglary is horribly low, and no more exciting than this. Here the game is

even bigger, and the danger quite as great."

Having opened the door, he reconnoitered cautiously, then went outside and looked about, walking round the building and out to the trees.

When he came back and went inside he was sure that no one was near, and he set about the task that allured him, his heart beating with elation. He had taken risks, of money and peril, to get definite information of this aeroplane which was now here within his reach.

He cast his eyes over the shadowy outlines of the machine, and glanced keenly at the steel track leading down to the ground from its platform. Near the point where the track reached the ground there was a wide double door, forming the end wall. It was closed and locked, but beyond it the steel track continued on into the open land which stretched away from the forest. Toward that open ground the ilier was pointed, and Borden did not doubt that out there more than once recently it had soared and dipped like a great bird.

With a twisted wire he picked the lock of the double door, which he partly opened, letting the daylight stream in. Then he set to work with pencil and paper, and with tape-measure taken from the tool-room, setting down carefully the dimensions and measurements, the peculiarities of axle, pinion and crank. He worked feverishly, yet with intelligence.

Now and then he went outside to watch and listen. The sun was descending, telling him that already he had been there more than an hour. Each time when he returned he toiled faster, quivering with the excitement and the joy of victory, the perspiration standing out on his yellow-pale face.

"By George, I'll be able to build one without any difficulty," was his conviction. "If only I don't miss some important thing now."

He stood off and looked at the aeroplane intently and critically, noting its great lifting vanes, its steering-gear, propellers, its tiny gasoline engine, and the shining rails, which seemed inviting it to run down them in the preliminary race for the speed which enabled it to soar aloft and fly.

"If I could take it to pieces and carry it away from here bit by bit, and then put it together again. Ah, that would be worth while!"

A thought so daring that it blanched his cheeks flashed on him like an inspiration.

"Why not fly it away from here?"

The huge aeroplane, which, in speaking to Sidney Leighton, the inventor had called the Wings of Mars, appeared all ready for flight. It was poised on its railway, ready for its swift preparatory descent; the gasoline motor needed only to be set in motion and the props knocked out to send it on its way. A wild desire not only to see it fly, but to have it fly away from this spot to some other where he could further test it, and verify the measurements and calculations he had made, stirred mightily in the breast of the venturesome Englishman. He was not deterred by any troublesome scruples of honor or conscience, nor very much by the danger which might be incurred.

With this new idea urging him to action, Lionel Borden mounted to the aeroplane and seated himself in the bicycle-like seat near the center, the expanded vanes above and about him. He tested as well as he could the mechanism of the motor without actually setting it in motion.

"Shall I try it?" he said, looking it over with bright eyes. "Why not? This is the Rubicon—perhaps! I shouldn't lose anything, unless it turned turtle and killed me. It's the chance in a million; and, by George, I will!"

He threw wide the big doors, cranked the motor into chugging life and removed the blocks, finding that an iron pin was now all that held the machine, and when he had mounted to the bicycle seat again he pulled this pin and applied the power.

The next instant it seemed to Borden that he was falling, so swiftly did the aeroplane glide downward. There was no jolt or jar. Out through the open doors it leaped, as a bird springs from a cage; and then, with a deafening whir, a very shrill whistle and shriek of wind and buzzing wheels, the strange mechanism rose from its rails and went flying through the air.

The aeroplane was carrying him with rushing, startling speed, he knew not whither.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WOMAN IN GRAY.

TOM AMBERLY had just left Betty Leighton, after a talk in a secluded corner of the drawing-room, empty at the time because of the dancing in another part of the house. There had been much to say; but at last Betty was alone in her own room, and was trying to recall all he had said, and all that Grace Travis had told her, and to adjust everything properly in relation to the important question of her present duty to Sidney. For Grace Travis had been of the unpleasant opinion that it would not be wise to restore to him the model; that it would unnecessarily involve him again in temptation. Betty wished she could have submitted the question to Tom Amberly—which was clearly impossible.

There was one other question clamoring for a decision, and it clamored so loudly that at times Betty could not even think of Sidney. She recalled the tremendous emphasis Tom Amberly had laid on it. He had urged almost imperiously that it should be answered at once. But a question like that, involving one's whole life, cannot be settled off-hand, even at the demand of so masterful a man as Tom Amberly.

Crouched forward in her chair, her hands clasping her knees, looking straight before her at nothing, her beauty enhanced by the bright color burning in her cheeks and by the pronounced brilliancy of her eyes, Betty did not know what an attractive picture she made. She was thinking with a speed that made her head ache. And though she knew she must attend to this question of Sidney, Tom Amberly was the center round which her spinning thoughts revolved.

She had feared to keep the traveling-bag and model in her room through the night, and so had asked Amberly to take charge of them again, which he had done, promising to watch them closely. Borden had not come back from his walk to the woods, so far as any one knew, nor had the Japanese again been seen.

But the Japanese were wily, and Borden seemed to be desperately and recklessly determined. There was, Betty felt certain, danger that night for Tom Amberly.

She was still wide-eyed, though the hour was now so late. The rhythmic swing of the dancing and of the orchestra had for a long time drawn her thoughts along as in a swaying dream measure. The many guests were ascending to their rooms. She heard them say "Good night" in parting; heard them pass her door. But when the footsteps ceased, when the latest straggler seemed to have reached his room, Betty Leighton still sat dreaming dreams which were filled with the soft flame of awakened love, yet troubled, too, with an anxious foreboding that would not let her rest. Borden's continued absence from the house, and the fact that the Japanese were supposed to be still lurking about, alarmed her unduly.

At times her fancy pictured the Japanese—those who had attacked Tom Amberly at the hut—creeping with deadly intent through the scented bloom of the garden. At other times she thought she heard stealthy feet slip through the halls. She became more wide-awake and anxious as the time passed. The house was at last quiet.

How long it had been so she did not know, when she roused stiffly in her chair, sure that she had heard a window fall and Tom Amberly talking excitedly with some one on the upper west veranda. Her limbs numbed by long sitting in one position, she rose quietly and opened her door. The hum of excited talk, in which Tom Amberly's voice seemed mingled, still reached her; and with a stirring of fear for his safety, and for the security of the traveling-bag, she left her room, hurried to the stairs, and began to ascend swiftly, her ungloved right hand gliding smoothly along the polished banister.

When she gained the upper landing, the sounds had ceased. Yet, with a feeling that something had happened which concerned her, she continued on until she approached Tom Amberly's room, when she saw that his door was ajar. All was now so silent, within his room and without, that her footsteps as she advanced were frightfully loud. At the end of the hall was a low-turned light, and she had

passed one at the head of the stairs. Midway in the hall, where she stopped, was another, casting its dull glow down on her white face.

She hesitated a moment, then advanced to the door of Tom Amberly's room and called his name. When no reply came, she rapped lightly with her knuckles. This summons, too, went unheeded; and with fears grown so strong that they choked her, she looked in through the half-open door.

No one was in the room. This certainty brought a swift burning of indignation, for the traveling-bag stood unguarded. She entered and crossed the room quickly, a flutter of doubt as to the propriety of her action mingling with her sudden, gripping terror for the safety of the precious bag.

The locked door of the closet refused to yield to her until she gave it a sharp wrench; then, the lock being out of repair, or broken, it flew open. The traveling-bag stood revealed. The flame of her indignation against Tom Amberly's negligence waxing hotter, she caught it up and made a hasty retreat, running toward the stairs as soon as she was out of the room.

She had seen no one, heard no one; yet, when she was in the lower hall, and approaching her own door, she became aware of a presence behind her—a presence that spoke to her, and then gripped her arm so tightly that she let the traveling-bag fall to the floor and staggered against the wall, reeling with faintness.

And then—she awoke!

Tom Amberly was standing by her, his hand on her arm, and he was speaking to her. Yet at first she did not know what he said, she was so confused by this sudden awaking, which was like being roused from a stifling dream. She did not know how she came to be there in the hall, fully dressed, and she wanted to scream out, the shock was so great and so sudden.

Then she saw the traveling-bag; it was on the floor, and Tom Amberly picked it up, thus drawing her attention to it. She observed, too, that as he did so, he looked at her with curious astonishment.

"This explains it!" he was saying.

"Explains what?" she asked.

Her voice sounded hoarse and strange to her ears.

"The disappearance of the traveling-bag."

"It hasn't disappeared; you have it."

"Yes, I know. I meant the first time. It must have disappeared then just as it did now."

He looked her over curiously, at her clothing especially. She noted this with irritated disapproval. What was there about herself, or her clothing, to call for such scrutiny? The gray dress she had on she had worn that day, and on other days.

"The Woman in Gray!" he said in a queer voice.

Tom Amberly told her all about it, after Grace Travis had been aroused. Taking the traveling-bag, the three went together down into the quiet of the deserted drawing-room, where Tom turned on the lights and then related all that he had seen and discovered. And it was a queer story.

He had been as wide-awake all through the night as Betty Leighton fancied she had been. Now and then he, too, had thought he heard stealthy footsteps and suspicious sounds. Perhaps his imagination played him tricks also. Occasionally he had gone out upon the upper verandas, watching and listening, but never for long was he out of his room.

It was when he was returning from the west veranda, where he had found all silent, that he heard soft footsteps in the hall, and then was amazed by the sight of Betty Leighton slipping out of his room with the traveling-bag in her hand. Though she came straight toward him, and passed him under the light at the head of the stairs, she did not see him; her eyes, wide open, looked straight before her. He observed her eyes and face, her manner, her dress; and then recognition of what he saw came to him.

"I understood it in a flash," he said, "and I knew, too, that it had happened in the same way before; I saw that Betty had been so intensely anxious for the safety of the traveling-bag that, after falling asleep in her chair, she dreamed it was in danger and set about to assure its safety. She slept and dreamed, and acted in her dream—that is all. Which shows that that Japanese didn't lie when

he declared he found the traveling-bag hidden in a closet in her room: she must have concealed it there very effectively, that first time. He said it was hidden carefully behind a sliding panel of the closet—that he had discovered it there when he gained access to her room in her absence. I should like to know about that sliding panel—if one is there."

The sliding panel was there, and Betty had known of it: one of the maids had called her attention to it when first she occupied the room. It had been there no one knew how many years, and a romance had been woven round it, which the maid also told. The romance had stirred Betty's imagination, but she could not remember that she had opened the panel once after her talk with the maid.

"It's all so very strange," she confessed, "it bewilders me. To think that I, Betty Leighton, am the Woman in Gray! And I never was known to walk in my sleep before in all my life—never!"

"You never before had anything that so strained your nerves, dear," said Grace Travis with quick sympathy and understanding.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TURN OF THE ROAD.

SITTING white-faced and haggard at his desk at home, Sidney Leighton looked at the telegrams he had received: one from Archer Dunlap, urging, commanding him to place the aeroplane model at once before the Secretary of War; the other from the Secretary himself, ordering him to present the model at once.

Leighton could not comply, because he did not have the model. He had, though, a sickening feeling that it had somehow got into the hands of Lionel Borden. And he feared that if search was made for it, there would come an explosive revelation which would shake him out of his place in the War Department. For if Borden had the model and, driven into a corner, told what he knew, Sidney Leighton's career in Washington, or anywhere, was ruined.

Worse than that, the revelation would crush his father, whom he honestly re-

vered. And his proud mother, whom he loved—she could never look man or woman in the face again. His fingers were cold as he took up the telegrams; and it was fear of these things which, like a cat-o'-nine-tails trimmed out with braids of cacti, lashed him until he writhed.

When only one road opens, and there is no way to go back, a man perforce takes that road, even though he has no wish to go forward in it. The one and only thing that Sidney Leighton saw to do was to wire both the Secretary of War and the inventor that the model had mysteriously and unaccountably disappeared. That would give him at least a breathing spell, and something might turn up. But the trouble was that it would start a search, both by the Secretary and by Dunlap. The machinery of the government secret-service would be brought to bear on the matter. And that meant personal subjection to rigid questioning, and the manufacture under compulsion of more lies to bolster those already told. It meant the traveling of a path which bristled with danger.

Young Leighton covered his eyes with his hands and tried to think. Telegraph blanks were before him, and his impulse had been to hurry the telegrams off at once. In retrospect, he saw the steps which had brought him to his present position. He tried to believe that he was the victim of cruel circumstances, and that in some villainous way the Englishman had mercilessly undone him. He had not meant to sell the model to him, but only to permit him to take notes on the manner of its construction; that seemed a very different thing from selling property which did not belong to him. Yet he could not blind himself to the fact that ideas are property, and that in trying to sell Dunlap's ideas he had offered his own honor wrapped up and tangled in the words and figures which Borden had been so desirous of putting in his note-book.

Sidney Leighton could not get away from the knowledge that he had escaped only because the model had vanished. His sister had taken it—his wrath rose blindly as he thought of that!—and then some one, who was said to be a woman, and was no doubt Borden's accomplice,

had taken it from his sister, or, rather, from that fatuous Tom Amberly. And now where it was no one knew. Should the secret-service agents throw out their nets, raking all waters, foul and fair, they would learn who that woman was, and what relation she held to Borden; and—yes, the part he, Leighton, had played in the great game! But the police might not make that final discovery; they did not always succeed.

He took his hand from his aching eyes and drew a blank toward him. As he did so, he looked round the room. It was a well-appointed place. He observed his pipes in their rack, and his tobacco-jars alongside; the crossed fencing-foils on the wall, and the Indian clubs on the floor at the end of his desk. He had once dreamed he might become an amateur athlete, and had swung and whirled those clubs assiduously night and morning. He glanced at his books, into which he had not looked for a long while, lately finding the newspapers and a magazine or two all he could get through with. He had lost his interest in stories, and he had no time for them; life was too tense, too strenuous. He had parted with the youthful zest and the feeling of youth which makes fiction so enjoyable.

When he had surveyed the room, much as if he feared he was never to see it again, he breathed deeply, steeled his heart, and, turning back to the desk, took up his pen. He was mentally wording what he should write, when he heard some one approach his door. He knew it was Betty.

Such was his dread of meeting her now that he got up and locked his door, then sat silent in his chair, hoping that she would think he was not in his room, and so would not trouble him. But he was mistaken. She stopped and tapped on his door.

"Sidney."

He did not answer.

"Sidney, I want to see you."

Still he did not answer.

"I know you are in your room, for mother said you were; and I must see you. Open the door, Sidney. It's very important."

He got up then and unlocked the door, his face pale and self-accusing. She

pushed by him into the room with her traveling-bag, and he closed the door.

"What is that?" he almost shouted, trembling.

"The model," she announced, flurried but triumphant. She set her bag on the floor and began to draw off her gloves. "Mother saw me, of course, but she had no reason to suspect anything."

"Of course not; why should she?" He dropped down by the bag. "Tell me about it—and unlock the thing. Where did you find it?"

Her quick glance, passing over his desk, noted and read the telegrams.

"You may see it as soon as I can get the key out of this glove," she said. "But I want you to take it immediately to the Secretary. Promise me you will do that."

He stood up quickly and looked at her. She knew everything, and he saw that she had read the telegrams.

"I was to blame for its loss when it disappeared at Wildwood," she said. "I'll tell you all about it later, and all about how it was recovered; but I have a feeling that it is not safe a minute until it is in the hands of the Secretary. Colonel Borden was at Wildwood, and he has followed me, I'm afraid; and I hurried here with it as fast as I could. I knew that I could trust you—your honor—Sidney."

His blue eyes, so like his sister's, that had filled with quick gratitude and a high, flashing hope, glinted a little at that. Yet thankfulness and relief, and the stirrings of aroused honor, were the emotions uppermost. And here was a way out. He could live again, face the world again, be a man again.

"I'll do it," he said with unaccustomed humbleness. "But I'd like to know how you got it back, and where it was, and about that woman."

"I'll tell you all about it later. It was—lost, at Wildwood."

He had been about to pick up the bag; but, glancing at her, he surprised an enigmatic look in her face.

"You're afraid of Borden! I'm not, in broad daylight. But I want to say this, Betty: you trusted me when you had no good reason to, and—well, I'll not forget it, and you will not regret it."

He caught up the traveling-bag; then, with a certain restraint and awkwardness, he kissed her, almost as if he were her lover instead of her brother; and then he went out and hurried away.

At the corner below the house he brought a paper, and read it as he hastened along. Some paragraphs on the first page, in a despatch from Wildwood Station, caught his eye.

"Great Heaven!" he said, as if frightened. "Colonel Borden killed by Dunlap's flying machine!"

The wrecked aeroplane, he read, had been found in the fields at Wildwood, with the body of the Englishman crushed under it.

Betty Leighton arose with a flutter to receive Tom Amberly at the first call he had made her in her own home.

"I've a surprise for you," she said roguishly as he came into the room where she awaited him. "Can you guess what it is?"

"You are going to be as good to me as I'm trying to be to you."

"That terrible, ogreish creature whom you thought equal to all kinds of dreadful duplicity—Grace Travis, I mean—has just told me that she is going to marry your very dear friend, Mr. Haviland."

Tom Amberly's clean-cut, handsome face took on more color, more eagerness.

"That's good," he said, smiling upon her; "but I had guessed it. And I—" He hesitated, holding tight the hand she had extended. "A certain mystery having been cleared away, I think I may perhaps claim the fulfilment of a certain promise."

"There was no promise," she said, drawing back as she saw the look in his gray eyes.

"No? I may have one now, then, I hope. You know what I mean?"

He bent toward her.

"I'm not a good guesser," she said; "I never was. I proved that at Wildwood."

"Then I shall have to tell you again; for you proved another thing at Wildwood—that there can be no happiness in life for me without you. I am here to claim that happiness."

THE CLOAK OF AN ANCIENT GRUDGE.

BY VIRGINIA TYLER HUDSON.

A SHORT STORY.



ANNABEL MASON, of Mrs. Small's fourth floor rear, hurriedly making her preparations for the day's daily grind, did a mutinous thing for any occupant of the top floor rear when she read her morning letters.

Letters is merely a complimentary term, applied by Esther, the maid of all work, for missives of any kind received by Miss Mason were few and far between. Usually they were only from the Woman's Exchange for whom she worked, hurrying her with some special order for the interminable menu-cards she painted for some of the exchange's wealthy patrons.

When she had read the special delivery that had been handed her by the awestricken but none too tidy Esther, Annabel Mason did exactly these irrational things.

First, she carried the pot of steaming near-coffee that was to have formed the better part of her breakfast into the hall, and gaily dumped its entire contents into the sink. Then she took the gay little earthen pot to her window, from which she threw it with all her might into the area below, where it lit on Mrs. Small's fat poodle, out for its morning airing. She laughed heartily at the wild wail of the pup, and followed the pot with two anemic raisin-buns. Propelled by her woman's aim, they knocked a scraggy geranium from a neighboring fence, and raised a wordy demonstration from the next door parrot.

"Police! Fire! Thieves!" he shrieked. "R-r-rotten!"

But Annabel only giggled again, a bit hysterically, and with unerring aim sent the alarm-clock after her breakfast. Then, pulling the curtain just in time to

escape the wild clamor of her emerging, outraged neighbors, the girl crept back to bed, fully dressed, and lay there, laughing and crying and clutching the letter that had caused it all.

One hour, two hours, she lay there—long enough to have finished the cards that were due at ten o'clock. Then she arose. She dressed herself carefully in the much-mended princess that had done duty a long time as her best frock, and placed on her curly amber head the hat with the green scarf that was to have followed the cards to the exchange.

Once outside, she began to wonder a bit at herself and at it all—but if one of Mrs. Small's other lodgers had followed the top floor rear, he would have been assured that she had in truth lost her reason. Only a moment did she stop—long enough to count the bills and coins in her flattened purse.

"Six dollars," she counted, "two dimes, a nickel, and my lucky five-dollar gold-piece. I won't need it any more to be buried with, so I suppose that will about do it."

In front of the St. Anthony, the smartest restaurant in the city, whose prices were only spoken about in whispers at Mrs. Small's, she stopped. Then, as if fully decided, and before her intention should waver, she fairly ran into the place, and found herself sitting at a table near one of the windows she had passed so often in the last few years on her trips to the exchange. It was the first time she had known the window from that side, however.

"Ah, let me see," she said languidly to the waiter who hovered over her. She felt uncomfortably that his eyes were piercing her disguise as an habitu e of such a place, and she knew that he saw the mended place in the yoke of her gown.

Her hat was all right, though, she knew, and people who were compelled to wear mended frocks never wore forty-dollar bonnets.

"Grape fruit, of course," she ordered, "with—er—sherry, a squab broiler, with *pommes de terre soufflées*. Yes, coffee. That's all."

It had been a long time since she had known the luxury of ordering a breakfast without counting the cost. The wonder of it all went to her head like old wine, as the years of privation and toil as an employee of the exchange and Mrs. Small's top floor rear came crowding in upon her. Her eyes were no longer tired, but sparkling, and, with the deep tints of the pansy in them that some one had said he loved in the old time, feasted themselves on the beautiful room—the soft white linen of the tables, the tiny shaded lamps with their dangling beaded fringe—and came back to rest caressingly on the little cluster of roses by her plate. She leaned forward to sniff at the roses, and opened the letter again.

Part of it was typewritten on the paper of Simmons & Simmons, attorneys at law.

DEAR MADAM:

It is our painful duty to inform you of the death of your respected aunt, Miss Mehetabel Mason, one of our valued clients.

By the terms of the will which was left with us, you will inherit her entire fortune, amounting to about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, after some minor bequests have been made. This, of course, is on condition of your fulfilling the requirements mentioned in the letter of instructions left by your esteemed aunt.

This letter we enclose. It will explain itself.

We suggest that you call upon us at your earliest convenience to further adjust the matter.

Trusting to be favored with your business, as we were for years entrusted with that of the lamented Miss Mehetabel Mason, we remain,

Yours very truly,
Per C. SIMMONS & SIMMONS.

In the crabbed hand she knew so well of the great-aunt she had never had cause to love was the following enclosure:

MY DEAR NIECE ANNIE BELLE:

I suppose I must call you "my dear niece," as long as I am going to die and

leave you the money my beloved relatives are itching to lay hands on.

I must say in your favor, that you have been the most independent of the lot, and have not come whining to me for money, even when you had to take to painting picture-cards for silly women's parties. Oh, yes, I knew all about it, but when you saw fit to disregard my wishes about marrying that estimable Dr. Black who has brought me this far, but says he cannot make me live any longer, I didn't care what became of you.

Besides, I needed my own money while I was alive. I am sorry I can't take it with me to save a squabble, but I can make you do what I have been trying to do for twenty-five years.

It's about the dolman. Yes, I capitalized it long ago, for it has been the cause of most of my troubles—even more so than my beloved, scheming grand-nephews and nieces. I have tried for a quarter of a century to get it out of my hands, but that pernicious old Lucinda Pierson, who is as obstinate as I, has made my life a purgatory by her refusal to accept it. But she must. She *must*, you hear! I leave it to you as a sacred charge and to make it one with you, you sha'n't have a cent of my money unless you force her. You must use every possible endeavor to get the thing in her possession, and *keep it there!*

They tell me she is about to die, too. Well, the world will be better off twice over with both of us gone, but if she does, you must force the dolman on her heir or heirs. You will have one hundred dollars a month for six months, to cover expenses in doing this. That ought to be long enough for any one to accomplish anything for a quarter of a million. But my lawyers must be satisfied that the Pierson tribe have given up the fight. Then you can have the money, for all I care. If you don't succeed, in six months from the time you receive this letter, then my money will go to buy young caribous for penurious Igorote children. I have always heard they knew what to do with caribous if they had them.

If you do get the money, spend it as quickly as you can, and get back to earth, where you can amount to something—maybe. You have acted as if you had the Mason grit, or obstinacy.

I suppose I might just as well do the whole thing up properly if this idiotic doctor is right in saying I'm going to die, so, for once, I'll sign myself,

Your loving aunt,

MEHETABEL MASON.

Annabel laughed so mirthfully when she had finished this extraordinary epistle

that the dignified head waiter wandered unobtrusively over near her, with a warning glance in his eye. She checked her mirth suddenly.

"It would be only right to pull a long face for a moment," she thought. "Poor lonely Aunt Mehetabel! But I suppose she would really prefer to have me see it as I do. A quarter of a million! I wish it were dinner, so I could have ordered wine!"

With a suppressed yawn she did not feel, so high with hope for the future beat her heart, the girl paid her score, surprising the waiter with an unusually generous tip.

"There go my new gloves," she laughed to herself, and made a little grimace at the pink-cheeked girl who smiled at her out of the glass at her side.

"Call me a cab—a taxicab," she added, to the bowing, obsequious head waiter. She had almost forgotten that taxicabs had become the favorite method of locomotion since she had been Mrs. Small's top floor rear.

II.

THE luxury of that swift-moving cab! She lay back dreamily, pausing only for a pleased look at her own changed appearance as she again caught a glimpse of her face in the cab mirror. This was not the poor, drab creature that had painted menu-cards all day for many yesterdays and most of last night.

"Why, I—I'm almost pretty!" she exclaimed aloud, "and the world is before me. If only Oliver—" But she put from her the thought which had only begun to form itself.

"That's all over," she said ruefully. "If he had really cared—had shown that it wasn't merely pity for me—but it's too late now."

At the office of Simmons & Simmons, old B. G. Simmons himself, mouse-gray man, solicitous and beaming, talked to the girl.

"So you think you can get rid of the dolman?" he asked her, with his bland, oily smile.

"I can try," stammered Annabel, who was somewhat overcome by the pretentious air of the place and the man.

"Your aunt was a—er—a rather determined woman," he went on, "but she

failed after twenty-five years of trying. However, I wish you luck. Just remember your First Reader's advice about 'try, try again.' Here is your first instalment of one hundred dollars. I believe you will find it little enough, but your aunt was quite strict on this point. Remember us if you need any legal advice. Your aunt depended much upon my advice at such times, as she wanted that of some one. Good morning."

To a girl of twenty-three, who had grown accustomed to counting the pennies in Mrs. Small's top floor rear, one hundred dollars was a princely sum.

"I might just as well buy that little dress at Stewart's I've wanted for so long," she thought as she emerged from the tall building in which the lawyers' offices were situated. "It surely won't take much to send that old dolman back to that cranky Miss Pierson. Why, I can carry it back myself, ever so many times, for that matter. I certainly have a long, varied experience as a bundle carrier. In fact, I believe I hold the long distance record."

When the wide-eyed Esther opened the door, on the girl's return home, it was on a totally different Annabel than the one who had started out in the morning. Not only had she purchased the coveted frock, but gloves, shoes, and a dainty parasol had been thought necessary to keep them company.

"Oh, an' have yez had a raise, miss?" exclaimed the maid. "How fine ye look! Just like the actor-lady that once had the first floor front—only more so!"

Annabel flushed.

"Tell Mrs. Small I think I'll be leaving her to-day," she vouchsafed without further explanation. "Give her this," counting out the money for her long overdue rent. "And here, this—this is for you," she added, and pressed a bill into the moist, flabby hand of the astonished maid.

"Oh, bless the pretty eyes of you, miss!" cried the dumfounded Esther. "An' sure, an' it was the fine big bundle that was left for yez the hour. You're the lucky one this day!"

Annabel's spirits, which had not flagged during the exciting events of the day, promptly fell to zero. She flew panting to the top floor rear, and fell wildly on

the ungainly bundle which lay there tauntingly on her unmade bed. Literally she tore open its wrappings. Sure enough, it was the dolman. Just as she had feared! But how, in the name of all wicked old women, had they found her so soon?"

The dolman's bugles and jet twinkled and laughed in the one ray of sunshine in the little dark room, as the bewildered girl sat gloomily surveying it. Pinned on one foolish grosgrained sleeve was a little note which she slowly opened and read:

MY DEAR MISS MASON:

My aunt, Miss Lucinda Pierson, who has just died and made me her heir, requested me on her dying bed to give to you, the heiress of her life-long friend, Miss Mehetabel Mason, this cloak which I am sending.

Not being a woman, I cannot fully understand the value of the gift, but feel assured that you will duly appreciate the kindness of my aunt, who even on her death-bed did not forget her friends.

I am sorry not to be able to deliver this last gift to you in person, but I am leaving almost immediately for a hunting trip in Canada, and it will be impossible.

Wishing you much joy in the wearing of such an exquisite garment, as my aunt assured me this one is, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

OLIVER PIERSON.

III.

So! It was a detestable man who could make fun of her misfortune, of which he undoubtedly knew. She would have to fight!

Well, she could show him, too!

It was some time before Annabel found out that Mr. Oliver Pierson's rooms were in the highly exclusive Arlington Arms. She really could not play the rôle of bundle-girl to that place, so two dollars more of her hoard, which did not seem so large after all, went toward sending back the dolman, after she had learned that Mr. Pierson had not yet gone on his hunting-trip.

Much thought was expended in writing a suitable note which might equal his own. If only she had not quarreled with Oliver—her Oliver, as she had never ceased to call Oliver Hastings, even when she had seen fit to send him away for his presumption in trying to marry her

out of pity, as she insisted on putting it, two years before—he would have known just what to say to the insufferable idiot.

Of course, he had said he wanted her for his wife because he loved her—but then he had said such pitying things about her mended gown, and had laughed at the exchange and her menu-cards. She had said she would show him what she could do; but he had never come back, and she had known that she was right in sending him away. Surely, if he had been truly in earnest, he could have found her even at Mrs. Small's.

Finally the note was written to her satisfaction:

MY DEAR MR. PIERSON:

I could not think of accepting so valuable a gift from entire strangers. My own aunt herself refused such a princely gift on many occasions during her lifetime, and I can but follow her example.

Of course, it is a temptation to keep a garment of such a rare vintage, and in such a miraculous state of preservation, but I suggest that you send it to the Museum of Natural History, where more people can appreciate its antiquity and beauty.

I am leaving immediately for an extended yachting trip, or else I would ask you to call in person to accept my thanks and regrets that I cannot accept your valued gift.

Sincerely yours,

ANNABEL MASON.

Like all of her family, Annabel knew the story of the dolman by heart. Its history dated back twenty-five years, when Miss Mehetabel Mason and Miss Lucinda Pierson, both rich, and set in their ways, had been boon companions. Then, one ill-fated day, they had gone to a fashionable watering-place for an outing together.

They had met the dashing Captain Waterbury, and each claimed him as her own. In justice to the captain, it must be said that he had showed no favoritism toward either of the two wealthy ladies, then past middle age. If he danced with one, he had sat for an hour on the moonlit piazza with the other. When he spent an hour at croquet with one, the other was sure of his company at dinner. And all had gone on serenely until the night of the straw-ride.

"You're too old for such affairs, my

dear Lucinda," said Miss Mehetabel reprovingly.

"You're jealous because the captain didn't ask you to go," retorted the other lady. "But I'll wear your new dolman, just the same."

All through the hours that followed, Miss Lucinda nursed her wrath. Her door was locked when her friend returned, so the dolman could not be returned until morning. Then, when it was, the irate Miss Lucinda declared it had been ruined by exposure to the night air, and would not accept it.

"I will make you a present of it," she declared bitterly to her erstwhile friend.

"I refuse to accept it, or to buy you another mantle, for that is just what you want for your old bugled piece of finery. It's worn out, any way," was the retort.

Then came the battle.

When Miss Lucinda went to her rooms, the first thing she would find would be the dolman, on the floor, where it had been thrown over the transom by the irate Miss Mehetabel. The latter, in turn, never answered the bell-boy's knock but what the hated garment was forced into her hands. Finally, a truce was effected, by which the thing was allowed to hang in the halls, where it became the jest of the hotel guests.

Miss Mehetabel awoke one morning to find that Miss Lucinda had fled. The dolman was delivered to her by a messenger with a note:

This is a token of my esteem, which I hope you will always keep in memory of me, as you will never see me again.

Miss Mehetabel promptly sent it back to her friend. So started the ramblings of the dolman which had continued for twenty-five years and now seemed in a fair way to be interminable. From ocean to ocean it had been flung back in hot pursuit of an owner, and even foreign trips had not sufficed to keep it from its game of battledore and shuttlecock between the hot-headed old women.

The captain? Oh, he eloped with a pretty widow the day Miss Lucinda went home; but, then, he was merely an incident in the life of the dolman, anyway.

Though death was so soon to come to both of the old friends, they never

forgot the dolman. That was why Annabel Mason, of Mrs. Small's top floor rear, was to have the battle of her life to be rid of the thing, with a fortune just out of her reach in case she failed. And that, too, was why she was sorry she had sent Oliver away. He would surely have seen a way out of it, for, if nothing else, he had always been resourceful.

But that was too late, and she had the thing on her hands alone.

On the day after Annabel had sent her note to the Arlington Arms, a messenger brought back to her the dolman.

"Compliments of Mr. Oliver Pierson," read the card that accompanied it. "Start for Europe to-day."

Two dollars more were necessary to send it back with "Lamentations of Miss Mason. Am on my way to Siberia."

A grinning liveried bell-boy from the Arlington Arms next sought Mrs. Small's top floor rear with the hated bundle, and a few scrawled words:

Protestations and insistence on your acceptance from Mr. Oliver Pierson.

IV.

ALTHOUGH the month was far from over, the hundred had dwindled to fewer dollars than Annabel had possessed when she made her first reckless fling after the news, but she unhesitatingly sent it back, thinking of the joy that her aunt would have, could she but know the new travels of the dolman.

Her own messenger brought it back with an added charge. Mr. Pierson had really left the Arlington Arms. She, too, would have left Mrs. Small's had it been possible, but she had long since gone back to the menu-cards, and her rent was again due.

The next day came a telegram from Mr. Pierson in Maine, and she thought of the reckless expense:

Your modesty toward accepting a valuable gift does you credit, but pray let me beg of you to take your present course no longer. It is useless. The hunting is fine.

With her last five dollars, Annabel expressed the dolman to the town in Maine from which the telegram had been sent, and sighed contently. At least, it would

le some time before it would jeer at her again.

Two weeks passed, and she received her second hundred dollars, but the dolman, like the fabled cat, without a word, came back.

Almost all of the six months time had intervened, when the girl saw in the papers that Oliver Pierson had returned from his hunting-trip. Even though she had almost given up the struggle and had brought herself to a point where she could only see a future of menu-cards, Miss Mason determined on a master-stroke.

"He does not need the money," she thought. "I will take the horrible thing to him, and see if he will not listen to reason."

The package that the pretty young girl carried into the Arlington Arms that evening was an unwieldy one, and the haughty clerk looked askance at her. She had walked all the way through the snow-storm from Mrs. Small's, and the snow clung to her stout little boots, and the damp curls hung about her face.

"Mr. Pierson would see her," the boy finally said, and she went up in the elevator clinging tightly to her weird bundle.

"First door to the left, miss," he told her, not deigning to show the way to a messenger-girl, as he thought her.

Her heart all but stopped beating, as the door was thrown wide, and there greeted her—not the ogre-like Oliver Pierson she had come to see—but Oliver! Her own Oliver—Oliver Hastings!

"Oliver!" she cried weakly, and the bundle dropped from her grasp. "You! Why are you here? Mr. Pierson—"

The man grasped both of the girl's hands, and drew her into the apartment.

"My precious little Annabel!" he cried. "I have found you! You have come to me, dear, just as I always knew you would!"

"Why did you wait so long, dear? Didn't you know that I have hunted high and low for you since the day you sent me away? Where on earth or under earth did you disappear to? But I knew the strength of my love was enough to bring you to me wherever you were. You didn't think I'd forget you for a silly quarrel, did you?"

Both had forgotten everything except the fact that they were together. The man drew the girl into his arms, where she nestled contentedly.

"Kiss me, dearest," he begged, "just to show that you have forgiven me for laughing at you. I never meant it—truly, I never did. And now, I won't let you go again. No matter what you say, we will go and be married to-night, so that I will have the right to care for you as I have always wanted to."

Neither of them thought it strange that the girl should have appeared at the door of the man's apartment as she had, until suddenly she remembered her mission.

"But I came here expecting to find Mr. Pierson, Oliver," she said. "I wanted to see him about a most important matter."

"Then you'll have to settle it with me," answered the man, as he drew her toward the wide open fire and placed her in an armchair, "for I am Mr. Pierson."

"You!" the girl fairly shrieked, as she jumped wildly to her feet. "You! The horrid man who has made me miserable for six months! Impossible!"

"Quite possible—and true," he answered. "I am Oliver Hastings Pierson, at your service. You didn't know, of course—how could you, since you have not honored me with your confidence in the past two years?—that my Aunt Lucinda Pierson made me her heir on the condition that I take her name, and another silly condition. It was to force on the relations of one of my amiable aunt's friends an old cloak that she had been fighting about for twenty-five years. Thank goodness, I soon settled them!" He chuckled merrily.

"And settled me, too," the girl choked, as she sank back limply. "Didn't you know that I—I am the Annabel Mason you have been sending that awful thing to, and with those horrid letters? This is what I came to see you about to-night."

It was the man's turn to stare.

"You!" he choked over the words. "But your name is Allison—or was," he added, a new fear beginning to creep into his heart and voice.

"That was only my stepfather's name," explained Annabel, "and when he and my mother both died, I took my own name—Mason."

"Then that explains why I could not find you, dear one," answered the man. "I have searched for you—oh, how I have looked and longed for only one look into your dear pansy-tinted eyes!"

The girl smiled sadly at the well-remembered phrase.

"And now we are enemies," was all she said.

"All for a miserable old cloak—never! Here, I'll tear it up now! Maybe it will burn well—it's well seasoned enough, surely. To-morrow I'll write old Simmons, your lawyer, and tell him you have been too much for me. You dear little child—in want, perhaps, through that miserable old women's feud—and I never knew!"

The girl leaped to her feet as the man tore open the neglected bundle.

"Don't you dare touch that dolman, Oliver Pierson Hastings, or whatever your name is!" she cried. "It's mine, and I'm going to keep it!"

With an inscrutable smile, the man placed the hideous bugled and jettied garment about the girl's slender shoulders.

"Antiques are fashionable now, I believe," he said. "This will make a first-class wedding mantle, turned from a grudge to gladness, after its wild career. Come on, sweetheart."

For the first time in its existence, the dolman felt itself pressed close to a manly breast.

GETTING A JOB.

BY J. J. BURNS.

A SHORT STORY.



LUKE STOMAN, after faithfully serving for fifteen years the big corporation that employed him, found himself worse off than when he started. The growth of his family, and, consequently, his wants, had far outdistanced promotion and the emoluments that accrue thereto.

When a vacancy higher up occurred, as it frequently did, some candidate with a shorter record, but a more aggressive disposition, was chosen to fill it. Luke was too good a man in his own humble position to be advanced to a better-paid one. He was irredeemably planted in the traditional rut. Too good and patient an ox was he to be entrusted with the duties of a thoroughbred horse.

He knew much but said little, and was of course set down as a mediocre plodder. The most of his coworkers knew much less, but said a great deal more, parading their little knowledge so skilfully that they had little difficulty in outdistancing Luke.

If opportunity had ever knocked at his

front door, Luke, expecting a bill or instalment collector, had, most likely, fled by the back one; and the caller, piqued at the lack of courtesy, declined to repeat the visit. On the other hand, "trouble" was a frequent visitor in one guise or another, such as sickness, death, debt, and doctors' bills.

Luke bore all patiently, though at thirty-five his locks were frosting, while his cadaverous face was lined with furrows. He and his faithful wife had tearfully followed the remains of two little members of the family circle out to the somber camping-ground beyond the city, where the silent dwellers reck not of human strife and struggle.

Luke's good wife, to her undying credit, had unbounded faith in her husband's ability. With the eye of love she saw beneath the plain exterior the heart of a lion and the soul of a master. Often she asked herself wistfully when would the genius of Luke be recognized and rewarded by the powers that controlled his destiny.

In the meantime Luke sadly contem-

plated the cheap, patched and made-over clothing of his children, comparing them gloomily with those of their more fortunate playmates. His wife's faded "best dress" was decidedly shabby, and, though Milly donned it as cheerfully as though it was new and bright, Luke's sensitive eye caught the thinly-veiled sneer of contempt leveled at it by their estimable neighbors. As for his own wardrobe, alas, his one pair of trousers, from many washings and pressings, had about reached the stage of disintegration. The saw edge of his collar gouged cruelly the neck it encircled, while hat and shoes were preserved to the world only by the tenderest nursing.

It was Sunday, and Luke, who was laboriously scraping the variegated stubble from his profound countenance, was momentarily checked by an exclamation from Milly, who, wife-like, was studiously scanning the advertisements in the Sunday paper.

"Oh, Luke, listen to this!" she cried.

"I'm listening," said Luke impassively.

Milly read: "Wanted—An energetic man capable of taking hold of the transportation end of one of the largest manufacturing concerns in the country. Must be thoroughly familiar with every detail of the business. Salary no object to the right man. Write, stating references and experience, to R. E. R., Box 1011, *Daily Newsgatherer*."

Milly laid down the paper and looked at her husband expectantly. Only the scrape of the razor replied.

"What do you think of it?" Milly finally asked.

"Punk!" he answered briefly, stropping his razor.

After a short spell, during which he reflectively tested the keenness of his razor, he went on: "In the first place, the largest manufacturing concerns in the country don't have to advertise for good men. They have 'em. In the second place, I wouldn't have a ghost of a chance against the multitude of 'good men' who will certainly apply. In the third place, I couldn't fill it if I was lucky or unlucky enough to get a 'look in' at it."

"Oh! nonsense, Luke, you good old dear! You're entirely too modest. That's your only fault. You could fill

this, or any other position if you only tried."

"No use, Milly," Luke replied, preparing to wash away the traces of his tonsorial ordeal. "It's only wasting good stationery and postage. Besides, I've got a job. Let some other fellow that has none try for this one."

"Yes, you have one all right," Milly admitted with a tinge of petulance, "and one where you are not appreciated. One where they advance younger men over your head; and almost forget that you are alive."

"Well, dearie," he explained, "a job's a job, you know, and in case I was to answer this thing, and by some funny chance get it, and then didn't come up to specifications, why down and out I'd go, and we would be worse off than ever."

Milly put a few more pounds' pressure in the strangle-hold she had secured round Luke's neck.

"Answer it, anyway. Just for fun, dear," she urged in Luke's ear. "You know what a lovely letter you can write, if you only half try."

Thus sweetly cajoled, Luke surrendered.

The letter was written and mailed forthwith. It was no false boast on Milly's part that her husband wrote a good letter. In this particular case he excelled himself.

Though encased in a shell of the most painful diffidence, Luke was far from being the fool that many thought him. Quietly and unobtrusively he had been storing away an orderly mass of practical and technical knowledge that would have been invaluable in his business to a man of more forceful make-up.

II.

GIVING but little thought to the letter, Luke went to work as usual Monday morning, and again on Tuesday morning. Tuesday night, on his return home, he was met at the door by Milly, and clasped in her arms in even fonder fashion than usual.

Luke, whose domestic senses were finely trained, divined at once some little stroke of good fortune. Perhaps Milly had struck a great bargain—such as a suit of clothes for Joe at the ridiculously low price of one dollar and ninety-eight

cents. Perhaps the landlord had reduced the rent.

Conjecturing thus mildly, Luke returned his wife's embrace and wondered what they were going to have for supper. As Milly released him at last, he felt the tickle of crumpled paper against his ear. A letter, clutched in her hand, was the cause of her jubilation.

"Oh, Luke, dear," she finally gurgled, "I knew our luck was going to turn. Your letter is answered, and to-morrow you're to go and take the position, and you never could guess where it is."

Luke, scarce knowing whether to rejoice or bemoan, reached out his hand for the letter, which Milly almost hysterically pressed into it.

The name of the corporation emblazoned across its head made him gasp. The letter was short and pithy.

MR. LUKE SLOMAN:

Please call at main office of The Blue Ridge Steel Company on Wednesday, the 8th inst., in reference to your letter of the 5th.

Yours, etc.,

ROBERT E. ROSCOE.

"Holy smoke!" was Luke's sole comment.

The magnitude of the concern, and the fame of its general manager, were only too well known to him. His audacity in approaching the one or the other was stupendous. As he sat limp, staring at the little piece of paper and the few curt words typewritten thereon, his wife stood by, her hands clasped in ecstasy and her eyes shining.

"Just think of it! 'Salary no object.' Won't it be lovely? Oh! I'm so glad, Luke!" she bubbled on.

"Thankful? What for?" asked Luke, a little testily. "Don't you see this letter is merely an invitation to call and show your goods. If you can't show 'em and show 'em quick—*bing!* down you go to make room for the next candidate. I don't think, Milly, that it's worth while even to lose the time to go and show the goods I've got. It ain't in me. That's about the size of it," he finished falteringly.

Milly, who could read her Luke as clearly as a red, white, and blue advertisement on the side of a six-story build-

ing, sat beside him, and took his hand in hers.

"Luke," she began, "you're the dearest husband, and the kindest father that ever lived. You deny yourself everything so that the children and I can have more. You think of yourself last, and then only a little bit. You help others at your own expense, and have been doing so for years; but you know, Luke, dear"—cuddling closer—"all that won't buy bread and meat or pay the rent. You know the five children are growing, and expenses are growing accordingly with no prospect of an increase in income. Now, dear, you have ability. I know it if nobody else does. All you want is confidence to succeed, and prove to others what I am certain of. To-morrow morning, Luke, for my sake and the children's, you will go bravely, and apply for this position, and get it, too."

She finished her speech with her head on his shoulder, to hide the salty rivulet that trickled from either eye.

That settled it.

Luke reported as usual the next morning, and, with some misgivings, asked for the forenoon off. His request was readily granted by his chief, who, intending to be funny, asked Luke if he was going fishing.

The suggestion apparently conveyed in the question startled Luke into replying "Yes" guiltily, but with no thought of lying.

He returned home to furbish up for the coming ordeal. It was almost a matter of life or death with him now, as he knew that Milly's heart and soul were wrapped in the success of his quest.

Shaved, washed, and brushed, and with Milly's God-speed kiss fresh on his lips, he set out to keep the appointment with the feelings of a condemned wretch on his way to execution. Milly watched him out of sight, with a fervid prayer for his success in her heart.

As Luke neared his goal, his legs began to tremble, and his heart beat with the qualms of a cowardly soldier approaching the firing-line. Cravenly he prayed for something—he cared not what—to happen that would prevent him keeping the tryst.

Nothing happened, and a few minutes

before ten o'clock, he arrived—a limp imitation of a man—in front of the offices of the Blue Ridge Steel Company. The plant itself covered the landscape for acres around, but here in the foreground, like a corpulent sentinel before the citadel, stood the company's office.

With nervous trembling he staggered in. He was stopped by an outer guard, who demanded his business. Dumbly he presented his letter of invitation and was passed on further. Finally, a doddering image of his real self, he was ushered into the presence of Roscoe, who swung around expectantly from his desk as his visitor ambled slowly toward him.

The terrified Luke, almost blind with apprehension, saw only a round bullet head covered with a thatch that resembled new rye straw, and two bright little lamps shining questioningly beneath. Unable to emit one intelligible word Luke handed over the letter to the man beneath the head. The ogre glanced at it cursorily and laid it down, his snappy eyes reading, criticizing, and, apparently, condemning his terror-stricken visitor. Roscoe, like Napoleon, had the reputation of selecting his lieutenants from the ranks of the men of backbone. Luke dimly remembered this, and quailed as the steely eye raked him up, down, and across.

III.

ROSCOE finished his scrutiny and reached into a pigeonhole, from which he extracted Luke's carefully written letter of application.

"Did you write this?" he inquired shortly.

"Yes," faltered Luke guiltily, realizing to the full the enormity of the crime and wondering what sentence was to be imposed.

Roscoe glanced at the letter, and then at the culprit again, as if weighing one against the other.

"Where are you employed now?"

Luke told him.

"What salary do you get?"

Again Luke replied truthfully—the amount had never appeared so contemptibly small before.

By the curl of his interrogator's lip it was evident he was measuring Luke by the proposition: "A man is worth what he can get."

"How long have you been employed there?" was the next crisp inquiry.

"Fifteen years."

"Rapid advancement," sneered Roscoe contemptuously. "You must be a wonder."

Luke neither affirmed or denied the accusation.

Suddenly changing his tone, Roscoe asked him a half-dozen shrewd questions, pertaining to his knowledge and fitness for the responsible position to which he aspired.

Under ordinary circumstances Luke could have met them all with convincing rejoinders. As it was he knew not what he said, but was certain that he was making a jackass of himself.

In the midst of his stammering, a visitor was announced, and, to Luke's consternation, who should walk in but Van Glew, the arbiter of his fate—the manager of the concern that employed him—the man who had ignored his claims many times, when promotion seemed to be his just due. Van Glew—the man for whom he had drudged thanklessly these fifteen years.

Van Glew recognized him, and, doubtless divining his errand, greeted him with a satirical smile.

Roscoe turned to greet Van Glew and, after shaking hands, remarked dryly, glancing at Luke:

"Don't seem to advance your help very rapidly over at your place."

"Oh! I don't know," replied Van Glew easily, "guess they get their deserts there about as well as at other places."

He threw a withering look at the wretched Luke, who stood by, the most vivid picture of dejection that mind could conceive. Roscoe and Van Glew put their heads together, and paying no further heed to Luke, engaged in a whispered conversation that apparently had no connection with him, as they entirely ignored his presence.

He backed away, his one idea being to efface himself and make his escape. He was neither obsequious nor cringing, only diffident, so infernally diffident that he would have fled there and then only for fear he might offend somebody.

He almost cursed the temerity that had led him into such a predicament. He foresaw that Van Glew, in revenge,

would certainly arrange for his prompt dismissal. He thought of his wife, but far from blaming her, the poor fellow's heart nearly broke when he contemplated her sorrow and disappointment at his failure.

As he backed slowly away from the vicinity of the desk, he bumped clumsily against the office-boy carrying an armful of books. The books were, of course, thrown to the floor, and the boy, whose fine perception informed him that Luke's standing in the place was not high—insolently grumbled at him to get off the earth. Luke would have gladly profited by the advice had an avenue been open. He did the next best thing, which was to side-step hastily.

Swinging down the floor, with jangling bangles and nodding pompadour, swept the lady typewriter, self-conscious and blooming.

Luke, with characteristic anxiety to keep out of everybody's way, moved in the wrong direction to give her the road, and, accidentally, touched one of her dainty feet with one of his clumsy ones.

A supercilious stare smothered his stammering apology, and as the vision swept by, his sensitive ear caught her ladylike comment: "Dub!"

He flushed to the ears. He still had no thought of malice or rancor. He just wanted to obliterate himself from human view.

The two men finished their conversation and Van Glew took his leave, shooting a glance at Luke that appeared to be weighted with malevolence.

Roscoe presently looked up and perceiving Luke, smiled grimly. "Ho! ho! You here yet?" he asked.

"Yes," whispered Luke.

"Still want that job?" asked Roscoe tantalizingly.

Luke, not knowing whether he did or not, refused to answer. In fact, the power of speech had well-nigh deserted him.

"So you think you could fill it, eh?" went on Roscoe, ignoring Luke's silence, or perhaps taking it as a sign of assent. "How much salary do you expect?"

Luke looked at him dumbly and shook his head helplessly.

"Hope your expectations ain't too big," pursued Roscoe sardonically. "This

position pays five thousand a year! Think you're worth more?"

Luke, with just about enough wit left to realize that he was being made sport of, managed to gasp, "No."

"Modest, eh? That's good. Have you got any sand?" Roscoe demanded quizzically.

"I guess not," stammered Luke, praying that his cruel tormentor would order him out and have done with it.

"No? Well, I doubt that. I want a man with sand—also a versatile one. Suppose I give you a try-out," he continued, gazing abstractedly out of the window.

Suddenly he started up. "See that broom over there?" he inquired, pointing to a corner of the room.

Luke, much mystified at the sudden change of tone, intimated that he did.

"Well, get hold of it and go over there across the court and dust off that brick wall," commanded Roscoe without the least trace of a smile.

Dumfounded, Luke gaped at him, and asked himself hazily if the man was crazy or merely a cruel joker.

"Go ahead!" cried Roscoe impatiently. "That's one of the preliminary try-outs." He fixed Luke with a steely eye, in which lurked no sign of a joke.

Like a man hypnotized, Luke obeyed. He picked up the broom and, opening the door, stumbled blindly across the dusty court into which fell a perpetual shower of black dust from the surrounding stacks.

IV.

In the meantime Roscoe sat chuckling at his desk, taking an occasional sidelong look at the poor devil undergoing the "preliminary try-out."

Embedded here and there in corners of the wall on which Luke was exercising his executive skill were numerous little harmless-looking lumps of mud. To the initiated they would have appeared sufficiently ominous. Luke, almost ready to collapse with the various emotions rending his soul, heeded them not.

The inmates of the little mud houses, surprised and hurt by the invasion of their homes, fled out, and made a concentrated attack on their innocent enemy.

It is no joke to be stung by a wasp—still less of a joke to be stung by a dozen

or so. Luke, whose feelings had already been sadly lacerated, now experienced the double misfortune of having acute physical pain added to his moral hurts.

After a sting or two, he grasped the nature of the new vicissitude that beset him, and perforce instituted a vigorous campaign of retaliation.

Industriously he swung his broom in widening circles, but in vain. Nimbly the little torments penetrated his guard, and carefully planted their venomous shafts in the exposed portions of his anatomy. He was so busy that he did not have time to be surprised when he caught himself enunciating a good, hearty swear word. It was a long time since he had used profanity.

Actively employed as he was in repelling boarders, he caught the sound of a laugh. Several grimy faces, thrust from near-by windows, grinned in unison, and Luke, through half-closed eyes, perceived them and grew still warmer. If the wasps stung his flesh, the laughter stung his feelings.

"You bunch of boneheads!" yelled Luke, as he circled round, "what are you laughing at?"

His outburst, of course, provoked more laughter, which in turn provoked more curses, heartier and sincerer than the first. To the curses he supplemented a challenge to any one or all of the smiling window gazers to come out and be licked. None accepted.

Roaming about in a far corner of the yard was Billet, Roscoe's pet dog, a canine pleasing neither in feature nor in disposition. Attracted by the unwonted noise on his own territory, he trotted over to the scene of action. Luke perceived his new enemy in time to brush aside his initial attack with the working end of the broom.

Billet, not to be denied, returned to the attack with the persistence of the thoroughbred. Luke met his second rush with such a satisfactory kick in the ribs that the beast was hoisted several feet in the air.

"Hey! What do you mean by kicking that dog?" came the truculent inquiry from a husky workman, emerging from the mill-door on the run.

Luke, whose habitually pacific soul had been stung and harassed beyond en-

durance, was overjoyed at the approach of a human foe.

"I'd rather kick the man that owns the dog!" he shouted, flinging down the broom and starting eagerly to meet the newcomer.

Billet immediately attacked him from the rear, and this time made successful connection with the calf of Luke's leg.

Unmindful of the clinging dog and the swarming wasps, Luke rushed furiously at the man. He had never classed himself as much of a fighter, and in consequence had never indulged in any fighting. Hence, he put all the strength and sincerity of a lifetime into the blows he delivered on the jaw of his hairy-chested opponent.

So swift and precise were the smashes, that the mill-hand, who had taken it upon himself to defend his master's dog, had never a chance to return or evade them. He went down and stayed down.

Luke, standing over him—seemingly unconscious of the snarling dog fastened to his leg—cast a wild-eyed look at the row of heads protruding from the windows.

"Come outside here, now, and bray, you drove of grinning jackasses!" he screamed, the red fire of battle in his veins. "Come out here and enjoy your laugh good."

The men at whom his challenge was hurled, had at first taken him for a harmless clown. They now judged him a bloodthirsty maniac, and unanimously declined the chance to joust with him. Also they quit laughing and drew in their heads. Luke was indeed infuriated to the point of madness. Reaching down, he seized the snarling dog by the throat, and tore him loose, carrying away flesh and trousers-leg without a wince. He flung the beast savagely against the brick wall, at about the spot where the wasps' nests were thickest. The impact rendered Billet temporarily, at least, a noncombatant. Bent on vengeance on the author of his humiliation, he dashed full speed across the yard toward the door, through which he passed into the building.

V.

THE observant Mr. Roscoe, who had missed nothing of the drama in the courtyard, beheld Luke's approach and pre-

pared for defense. From an umbrella stand he selected a sturdy walking-stick, and stood on guard.

Piery-eyed and hatless, Luke burst in; with his swollen face and disheveled appearance he was transformed from a timid nondescript to a spectacle fearsome and grotesque.

The lady typewriter took one look and fled, screaming.

Roscoe, though he quailed not, felt a pang of remorse as he contemplated the man before him.

"You red-headed pirate!" yelled Luke. "I'll teach you to play your two-cent tricks on honest, inoffensive men. This company will be looking for a new general manager in about a minute." He advanced with murder in his gleaming eye.

"Hold on a minute! Go slow! I want to explain," soothed Roscoe, tightening his grip on the stick.

"Explain after I get through with you—if you're able!" roared Luke, making his rush.

Down came the bludgeon. Perhaps Luke's head was club-proof. Perhaps its wielder did not put his accustomed vigor in the stroke. At any rate, it hit the mark, but was brushed aside unheeded.

Luke closed in relentlessly, tore the weapon from Roscoe's hand and flung it through the window. With demoniac strength he seized Roscoe by the shoulders, and with a sudden forceful jerk brought his head toward him, at the same time ducking his own head so as to strike his victim between the eyes with his skull. The general manager fell limply to the floor as he was flung backward.

All was uproar. The frightened clerks flitted here and there in excited fear. One of them finally plucked up courage to telephone to headquarters for a squad of policemen to come and round-up a murderous madman.

Never in his life had Luke created such a furor. Pausing a moment to view his work, which appeared to be sufficiently well done, he started for the way out. His lust for war was nearly satisfied.

The minion who guarded the outer door, with unexpected valor, sought to intercept him at the threshold. Futile attempt. Luke was resistless. The reck-

less sentry was overthrown with such ferocity that a stout chair was wrecked in the overthrow.

The way in front was clear; but there was an enemy in the rear who still had to be reckoned with. Billet was on his trail.

As Luke pressed through the outer door he encountered still another adversary. It was one of the mill-hands, armed with a monkey-wrench. If his first impulse had been one of hand-to-hand fight, the fierce look that Luke threw at him caused him to modify it. Stepping aside, he let the wrench fly at the unfortunate fugitive.

The missile went true, striking Luke on the side of the head and cutting a companion gash to the one inflicted by Roscoe's stick, thus enhancing his already terrifying appearance.

The marksman fled for his life—but not quickly enough. Luke was after and on top of him like a flash. Even as he lit on the fellow's shoulders and bore him to earth, Billet again injected himself into the proceedings, by fastening himself to Luke.

Dealing the wrench-thrower a few lusty blows, Luke again turned his attention to Billet. Tearing him loose at the cost of more flesh and trousers, he strangled him with both hands, and then, with one prodigious kick, actually punted him through the open window into the office.

As Luke turned to resume his interrupted retreat, he ran fairly into the arms of a policeman. Down went the two in close embrace, the policeman carried underneath by the force of Luke's rush. His head met the pavement with a resounding crack. For the moment he was out. Releasing himself, the conquering Luke again sprang to his feet, and broke into a long sprint for home.

VI.

PEOPLE along his route marveled at the spectacle of a wild man, hatless and bloodied, with fluttering, torn trousers and streaming hair, tearing like mad down the middle of the street, pursued by a yelling throng of men and boys, and a couple of puffing policemen.

Following close came a red-haired man with two blackened eyes, and a hand-

kerchief pressed to a bleeding nose. As in the fistic trials, so Luke came off victor in the running match. He reached his door a good hundred feet in advance of his nearest competitors, who happened to be the two policemen. The door was open, and he rushed in, almost frightening his poor wife to death.

"Oh, Luke!" she gasped, pallid to the lips. "What, in Heaven's name—"

"Oh, nothing much," Luke panted grimly. "Only I didn't land that job. But I wouldn't be surprised if I got another. They are at the door now trying to coax me to take it."

The police were clamoring for admittance, and Luke signed for his trembling wife to admit them. The intrepid cops entered cautiously, as they realized they had a desperate criminal to deal with. Their quarry, his flash of rage abated, sat calmly awaiting them.

"Surrender!" shouted the officers with weapons ready.

"My hands are up," said Luke quietly. "I suppose I may as well go along now as later. But, if I wanted to make a fight of it, I kind of think I could make it interesting," he added with a tightening of the lips.

Milly was now clinging to him, weeping bitterly. She had no idea what horrible calamity had befallen; but was sure that Luke was the innocent victim of some devilish machinations.

"Come on," urged the police nervously, fearing another spasm on the part of their intended prisoner.

"Let go, Milly," said Luke gently. "Things will come out all right, I guess."

He was dubious about things coming out all right, but hesitated to make them worse by another outburst, and rose to go.

Through the crowd that filled the street before the door a sturdy red-haired man cut a path. Both his eyes were black, and with a bloody handkerchief he wiped his face. It was the great Roscoe. With characteristic push he threw aside the idle onlookers, and without knocking, opened the door and entered the house. He strode into the room just as the policemen were leading their unresisting prisoner out of it.

"Hold on!" he commanded with the voice of authority. "What are you going to do with this man?"

"Take him to jail, of course," answered the officers in unison.

"What for?" demanded Roscoe.

"For assault, I suppose, and maybe worse, for all I know," replied one of the policemen impatiently.

"Who's the complainant?" inquired the steel man insistently.

The policemen looked at each other questioningly. Neither could say.

"What is it to you, anyway?" asked one of them gruffly.

A returning gleam of passion shone in Luke's eye at the appearance of Roscoe on the scene. It was purely out of regard for his wife that he restrained himself from reopening the conflict. As for Milly, she knew not whether to regard the newcomer as a friend or foe.

"Well," said Roscoe, replying to the question of the officers, "I guess it's something to me, considering that I'm the only complainant in the case with any ground for complaint. I haven't much ground at that," he finished, smiling queerly at Luke out of his damaged eyes.

"If you've got anything to say, come along, and say it at the station-house, and let us get out of here," returned the spokesman of the two.

Again he started to move toward the door.

"Oh, no," said Roscoe with determination. "I'll say it right here, and I guess it will go, too. This man has had about enough; but in case he happens to be wanted, I stand responsible for his appearance. My name is Robert E. Roscoe. Is that good enough security?" he inquired coolly.

The policemen, who had not recognized him before, were now perfectly willing to leave their prisoner in his custody, when he produced sufficient proof of his identity. This he did in the shape of cards and letters.

The officers made their exit, leaving him alone with Luke and his wife. As they walked out, Luke remembered their associate whose head he had banged against the pavement, and shudderingly wondered if he would be able to put in a complaint.

Roscoe and Luke faced each other for a moment in silence, the former with an inscrutable grin on his battered face, the latter with a sullen look of expectation.

"Well," said Roscoe at length, "you came through the preliminary try-out with a few scars, I see."

Luke, not seeing the point, and not being sure that there was one, stared at his questioner and remained silent.

"Got sand, too," went on Roscoe. "I thought you had it."

Milly, whose early terror had given way to mystification, began to suspect that things were not so bad as they looked.

Luke still refused to commit himself by opening his mouth. He wondered vaguely if Roscoe had followed him home for the purpose of continuing the torture.

"Now, then," pursued Roscoe, "the thing is—do you want that job? I asked you before and you refused to tell me."

"I don't know," answered Luke, "whether I do or not."

"Do you think you're capable?" asked Roscoe with a peculiar smile.

"Yes," almost shouted Luke. "As capable as you are for that matter."

"That's better," smiled Roscoe, with no sign of annoyance. "I believe I mentioned a figure, didn't I? Is it satisfactory?" He turned to Milly with a bow. "Five thousand a year, madam, I'm offering your husband."

Poor Milly gasped and nearly swooned; but could find no word to reply.

As for Luke, he tried to crack a smile. But the wasps had built neat little knolls and mounds about his face, so that smiling was a punishment.

"How about you?" asked Roscoe, turning again to Luke. "Are you on? It's a *bona fide* offer. I want you."

"I'm on all right," answered Luke, with surprising nerve. "And I want to tell you that I can fill that job, too."

"I know it," retorted Roscoe. "There's a look about your eye that I liked right from the start. Then Van Glew told me a thing or two—against his will—that didn't do you any harm. But I confess I was undecided and sent you out in the yard against the wasps, hoping to wake you up and put a little ginger into you. Of course, I never figured on the other things that happened. All the same, the more of you I've seen the better I like you."

"I forgive you these black eyes. I deserve them. But you will have to reciprocate a little and forgive me for all the battle scars you are carrying." Roscoe held out his hand with the abandon and cordiality of a boy. Luke grasped it heartily.

"When you get in shape, come down to the office, and we'll talk over the details," concluded Roscoe.

"Any more preliminary try-outs?" inquired Luke, his sense of humor returning with improving fortune.

"No. We'll get right down to the finals," called back Roscoe as he passed the portal.

He glanced back and saw Milly fall sobbing on Luke's shoulder.

Between sobs she said: "Oh! Luke, dear, think what we can do for the children now. And you can get a new suit!"

She didn't even think of a new dress for herself. Womanlike, motherlike Milly!

DEFINED.

"Love is a lark," quoth he,
 "That boldly rises on intrepid wings,
 And from the zenith blue
 Impassioned preans to his mistress sings."

"Love is a rose," quoth she,
 "That coyly shrinks with modest, humble mien,
 And from the shielding bower
 With subtle perfume claims her place as queen."

"Love is a dream," quoth one
 More wise than both—"a golden dream of youth,
 That yet may oft come true
 When friendship stamps it with the seal of truth."

Elliot Balchier.

A WATCH IN THE NIGHT.

BY AUGUSTA HUIELL SEAMAN.

A SHORT STORY



PRISCILLA DUNSCOMB drew back the curtain and peered incuriously into the night. The action was purely automatic; and the discovery that the fine drizzle of an hour before had turned to a drenching downpour alone restored her to a consciousness of her movements.

"It's going to be a bad night," she half whispered, and stood watching the trickling streaks on the small panes with an intentness that betokened sheer absence of mind.

In the dull light of a single kerosene lamp her sharp features were blurred and softened, but the haggard, work-chiseled lines were still visible. At the back of her head the knot of hair was wound so tight as to lend her face an almost drawn appearance, yet the gray-shot strands would have been soft and wavy had they not been so uncompromisingly restrained.

Priscilla Dunscomb stared into the rain-soaked darkness, but her mind was busy with many thoughts. For her hour was approaching—the hour of release from a thralldom dating back over twenty years—and she was striving hard that her joy be not too apparent, even to herself.

Something stirred in the great four-poster, and she turned at the sound, stepping with the mechanical caution natural to service in the sick-room. After slightly adjusting the patchwork cover and shifting the screen before the lamp, she stood looking down at the prostrate figure.

There was no softness in her eyes as she noted the gray, deathlike pallor, the piteous pinched features, the alternately sharp and muffled breathing. There was no softness in her heart at the knowledge of Daniel Dunscomb's approaching

end—only a grim, unrelenting exultation that the hour of her freedom was at hand.

Presently she sat down in a wooden rocker by the bedside and resumed her vigil. At certain intervals she moistened a cloth in a bowl by her side and bathed the unconscious man's forehead and wrists. Her manner of performing this soothing act suggested an indomitable repugnance, fought down by sheer will-power. In the interim she sat with averted eyes, one hand shielding her face from the light—and waited.

A clock somewhere below struck the hour with two rasping, wheezy strokes. Priscilla Dunscomb started slightly, and glanced at the sick man. It was the hour the doctor had told her to watch for—the crisis, the turning-point, the mysterious moment where the scales of life and death hang evenly balanced.

"I wish I could be with you, Mrs. Dunscomb," the physician had ended kindly, "but I could not do anything more for him if I were, and you are an excellent nurse. You see, I've got that critical case in the village. There isn't one chance in a hundred that he will live, and if he does it will only mean hopeless invalidism for another year—so perhaps it would be more merciful to have it all ended now."

Dr. Brewster had the good taste not to condole with Priscilla Dunscomb. He knew—all the village knew, for that matter—the incompatibility of those two ill-mated lives, the twenty years of slavery to the demands of a man who had crushed every atom of joy out of Priscilla Dunscomb's existence. And Priscilla inwardly rejoiced that the doctor could not know how madly thankful she was to be alone when the great moment arrived.

She recognized absolutely no fear of

death, experienced no physical shrinking at the nearness of the great mystery. Five times had she fought with it a losing battle for the lives of her children. On occasions innumerable had she "sat up" with a stricken friend or neighbor, watching while the flame of vitality flickered out. Death was very familiar to Priscilla Dunscomb.

At the stroke of the clock a faint, scarcely perceptible tremor quivered through the form on the bed. Almost involuntarily she bent forward, her hands clasped on her knees, to watch the struggle more closely. Some deep instinct warned her that there would be a moment of consciousness before the end. She was curious to see just what that moment would disclose. With steady intensity she regarded the deathlike mask. For many years she had systematically avoided scanning her husband's face. It drew her gaze now, in spite of herself.

Suddenly, as she looked, she caught her breath. Something in the pinched, haggard features recalled the face of her eldest child, and stinging memories surged over her like a torrent. Again they came before her—her children—the only beings she had ever really loved, all snatched from her in the early years of life. Priscilla Dunscomb had been a woman of passionate maternity. The mother-love she had expended on her little brood of weaklings had crushed down and stamped out every other emotion.

She bent nearer. Yes, there was certainly a resemblance. She felt as though she ought to resent it fiercely, but for some reason, as yet occult, she could not.

"Daniel was pretty proud when little Dan came along," she found herself remembering. "I suppose because it was the first one. He didn't care much about any of the others. Never came near me for a week after little Hetty was born. I wonder why Daniel didn't love the children? His own children! But then I don't believe he ever loved me—even in the beginning. Used to act as though he did, at first, but that soon quit—after little Dan came. Then he changed round like a shot. I wonder—"

She broke the thread of her thoughts to moisten her husband's lips. He was breathing more heavily. The indentations in his pinched nostrils were deeper.

"He isn't going to last much longer," she told herself as she resumed her seat. "He's getting weaker." Unconsciously she took up her train of thought where she had broken off.

"I wonder—if he'd have cared more—if I hadn't given so much time to the children?" The suggestion startled her. Not only had she never put it into words before, but it had never so much as occurred to her.

"I have always done my duty," she reminded herself sternly—which, being interpreted, meant that Daniel Dunscomb had never lacked for clothing, food, and a home properly conducted. "Even after—he began to make it very—hard for me, I did my duty."

A tingle of self-pity almost brought the tears to her eyes at the remembrance of how difficult that duty had finally become.

"I wonder—if he was *jealous*—of the children?" She was amazed at the possibility. That he was a man of violent and lasting emotions she had always known, but she realized now for the first time that, stung to a continual jealousy, he might easily be capable of—all that had occurred later. She began to experience a strange, embryonic pity for the man.

"I wonder—if—I did right?" she asked herself.

II.

THE sick man stirred uneasily, and moved his head from side to side. One hand reached out blindly, gropingly, and grasped her sleeve. The action brought vividly to her memory how her last, littlest baby had passed out into the Beyond, clutching pitifully at her hands.

In that moment something broke within Priscilla Dunscomb—something hard, icy, and unforgiving that had bound her in its iron grasp for twenty long years! The man before her appeared no longer the hateful being who had embittered her life. He was weak, he was helpless, he was less than a child in every faculty; he was *dying*! A great, pitying tenderness swept over her, instantly augmented by a deep, soul-scorching terror. She slipped to her knees by the bedside in an ecstasy of unwonted prayer.

"Oh, Lord, don't let him die!" she

stumbled. "I haven't done right by him all my life! Give me another chance! Give him back to me, if it's only for a year, and I'll try to make up for it. Don't let him go, Lord! I'll give him my *love*!"

She held herself rigid, gripped by the thought that slid into her consciousness. He was going to come to himself for a moment—soon! She searched his gray countenance intently. It might come now at any time—she knew by familiar, infallible signs. On that moment of consciousness, she felt, hung the answer to her petition.

"I wish he could see me as I used to be—before! It might make a difference!" she groaned. Getting to her feet, she went across the room and scanned herself feverishly in the little cracked mirror over the bureau.

"I'm changed—dreadfully changed! I wonder—" With trembling hands she loosed the tight knot of her hair, and fluffed the waving strands softly about her face. In the dim light the effect lent her a strange, illusively youthful appearance. Hurriedly she groped about in a drawer and found a piece of old and yellowed lace, which, unfastening and throwing aside her stiff collar, she folded about her throat. For a moment she regarded the metamorphosis steadily.

"It's better!" she said as she turned away. At the bedside she resumed her vigil, placing herself in such a position that the opening eyes should rest on her alone. Then she waited.

When the change came, by that strange perversity of expectation, she was as unprepared for it as though her whole being had not hung upon it with heartrending intensity, and she shook like a frightened child. It was only a rolling up of the eyelids: the look was one of blankness. She was on her knees again, bending over him. Gradually the slow light of dawning intelligence kindled.

"Dan!" she breathed.

The marvel at her resurrected youth deepened in his sunken eyes.

"Prissy! Why, Prissy!" It was his old, endearing pet name for her, unused these twenty years!

"Dan—oh, Dan!" she whispered. "Are you going to leave me?" He struggled weakly to speak again:

"Do you want—me to stay—Prissy? I didn't—think—you did!"

"I do—I do! I—I *love* you, Dan!"

"Then—I'll try!" he said simply.

With a smile he closed his eyes, but his hand groped for and found hers, and he yielded himself up to sleep like a tired child. Hour after hour she sat, with his hand in hers, watching the regular breathing of his health-giving sleep. The whole wretched past between them was wiped out—banished by the resurgence of her forgotten youth.

"It turned the balance!" she told herself. "It was the only thing that could."

And when the dawn broke, she lifted her face to meet the year of her reparation in the peace that passeth all understanding.

THE THREE SAILS.

THREE little sails speed into the west,
Afar on the distant blue—
And one is my love, and one is my hope,
And one is my trust in you!

Three little sails of silver-white,
To the pitiless winds unfurled,
To bear a thought to a lonely lad
On the other side of the world.

Three little sails speed into the west—
God grant that their course lie true!
For one is my love, and one is my hope,
And one is my trust in you!

Martha Haskell Clark.

KING OSCAR THE SILENT.

BY JOHN FLEMING WILSON.

A SHORT STORY.



WAS not always a bank-clerk. Once upon a time I was the prime minister of a kingdom. True, that kingdom is not often mentioned in the daily journals, and one never hears of So-and-So being accredited to Hibiscus as minister extraordinary and envoy plenipotentiary. But I was prime minister to a king who ruled for many years over a whole archipelago—chief servant to King Oscar, known throughout his part of the world as The Silent.

No historian, probably, will celebrate Hibiscus, nor will the events of my period of dignity find place in any written record. But my master was a great man. Retrospect takes nothing from his splendor. As I look back upon Hibiscus and its people, as I remember the activities of the day, the glitter of the night sky, the commerce that came to anchor in the bay, the pomp of festivals and the ceremonial of our society, it seems impossible that that realm has passed, leaving no trace upon human history, thrust aside into the appendix of civilization as a mere geographical fact.

Years ago, as I traveled on the trading-schooner *Constance d'Arvers* from the Sandwich group to the Lower Archipelago, Captain Surrennes told me, among a thousand items of little moment, of Hibiscus. "It is ruled," he said, "by a philosopher. All Germans approach philosophy by the way of science. King Oscar studied birds, and by degrees, pursuing his profession, he arrived in the South Seas. Here he became a philosopher. He has not spoken for a dozen years."

Silence is recognized as one form of wisdom; but I failed to see the great

achievement of this German scientist in conquering speech until I landed on Hibiscus and fell under his personal sway. In order that this silent king's superiority may be apparent, I shall narrate, briefly, the course of his latter years, and the *coup d'état*, supreme triumph of his sagacity—and *finale* of his reign!

How shall I detail my emotions that first day I landed on Hibiscus and saw that huge figure sitting under the shadow of the palm—just beyond the white road that marked the thoroughfare of his chief village? Fancy to yourself me, a young and quizzical fellow, ready for adventure, in love with life, with song, with the warm breath of the tropics, coming gaily ashore from a little schooner, turning to wave farewell to Surrennes, laughing at the tumbling children on the water's edge, and then suddenly coming out of the throng into the presence of a silent, inscrutable, motionless king.

It was morning. The shadows were still long, and the breeze, not yet wearied by the sun, swept softly through the frondage of the palms and shook the scarlet flowers of the hibiscus in a sparkle of flame. Under my feet the white path ran sinuously to the very steps of the king's house. And there, in front of me, appeared suddenly a Presence.

Grossly, he was a mountain of a man; he sat in a cumbrous, massive chair. His pillar-like legs rose from the ground to his huge knees; the span of his thighs was that of a cask, and his portly, rotund girth filled the chair. Vast shoulders, surmounted by a round head, dominated the whole figure.

As I came to a stop, this tremendous being opened his eyes and gazed at me. In that rough-hewn, immense countenance

it seemed as if, for an instant, two windows had been opened and the master of the edifice had looked forth.

Careless as I was, in those days, I took off my hat.

"I have come to trade," I said, by way of introduction.

The eyes, serene, deep, and composed, looked a moment more. Then they closed. My errand was understood. I was dismissed.

I had traveled here on an errand of pure commerce. I stayed to become the servant of this philosopher.

I cannot explain how it was that, seeing him in his eternal repose in that chair under the palm, viewing the daily miracle of his silence, I fell under the yoke of his despotism, abandoned bright prospects of wealth, and was content to be at his right hand, minister of his kingdom, interpreter of that slow glance, reader of those changeless features. But so it happened.

Years passed. Each dawn saw the king seated in his chair. Each noon passed over his head without eliciting a single movement; night settled down from the hills and cast over that immutable, gigantic figure the majesty of obscurity. I went about the business of the island; I trafficked and ruled: I was the Providence of a thousand natives under his invisible scepter. Wealth poured in by every schooner. Hibiscus became rich. My duties multiplied. And still each day I was conscious of that huge Presence seated there under the palm.

You demand to know how it was that we obeyed when there was no order.

I cannot tell. We went our ways, transacted our business, lived, loved, hated, went up the hill for our last journey with the mourners chanting, and all under the spell of that silent master. I only know that, in my frequent perplexities, I went up the path to the king's house, came before that immense figure, bore the brief gaze of those eyes—and my difficulties were dissipated into air. And each time I took away with me a new conviction of the infinite wisdom that reposed in that unwieldy body of flesh.

II.

WE were a strange society: traders, adventurers, natives, gay women seeking

obscurity, missionaries seeking souls, soldiers fighting for pay—all the tangle of humanity that could gather on an outlying, unpublic island of refuge. There were dances in the pavilion, flirtations on the Prospect, intrigues, plots, murders, jealousies—all the paraphernalia with which we dress our lives. Over all, the Silent One.

And he was human—had been—too. A wife sat in the verandas of the king's house, eternally busy over some trifle. And far away, in Honolulu, we knew there was a son, the heir of the philosopher. But no one can picture the remoteness of the events of which these were the sign. For centuries, one would think, the king had sat in silence under the palm.

So the years passed, and the mountain of flesh reigned in eternal repose. But on the horizon the cloud shaped itself.

One can easily imagine that, where there was a kingdom and an heir, intrigue was not absent. Heirs return and claim their heritages. Philosophers die. Therefore, a hundred mothers preened their daughters' plumage and gossiped of the time to come. A hundred girls wove wreaths and anointed their faces with oil to enhance their beauty against the day of the home-coming.

As that day drew—inevitably—near, the great question came more and more before my mind. What was to end this silence? What word was to break from this eternal rumination—message of wisdom, of meditation, final determination of the problem of life? Curiosity grew upon me. I came into the Presence with thoughts anticipating the day: I watched the slow lift of the eyes, felt the vast import of the closing lids, departed with my head over my shoulder for fear that the moment might have arrived.

This is a world where we ask one another: What do you make of it? and pass on, shaking our heads. Each dawn has its great interrogation. At the last moment, in the ear of Death our lips form a question. Think what it was to live in this Presence, under the eyes of this man who knew, who had solved, the problem in that silence of years! By Jove! the balance of my ledgers, to-night, held not certainty such as we were assured lay behind this wordless immobility.

I swear to you that, commercial as I am—as we all were. God knows—I never forgot, in the glamour of the day, amid the clangor of business, or the soft murmurs of the women at nightfall, the portent of this kingly philosopher, this philosophic king. We played like children in Hibiscus; but ever conscious of that watchful, serene spirit looking out of the windows in that unwieldy, gross habitation of flesh. Hence this story, *dénouement* of silence.

As prime minister, it fell upon me to speak, as the king's mouthpiece, of the heir. Never was such a questioning: sly women besought me at morning, as their daughters passed down, flower-wreathed, to bathe in the surf: bold mothers sung praises of their offspring to the tune of flattery; the maidens themselves posed before me, that my ministerial eye might be entranced and a match made.

For this heir was wealthy—oh, very well-to-do, indeed. He would have all the islands, the army to exploit them, the schooners to carry his toll to Australian ports, the treasury bursting with gold—all the hereditaments of the King of Hibiscus.

I kept a splendid poise. In two years I dashed no hope and promised nothing. These intriguers, when they suspected me, passed secretly up the path into the Presence. There they saw the king—silent, his slow lids half raised over his inscrutable eyes. And they came away—hushed, afraid, forgetful of their aspirations.

But it could not go on forever. It was decreed that the youth should come home to Hibiscus, where he had not been seen for a dozen years. His coming was announced. I myself promulgated the news.

Imagine the fervor of those days! Fancy the preening of plumage, hum of midnight confab, susurrations of scheming women, laughter of girls gossiping over the future.

Men are prone to mistake such gentle clamor for harmless trifling. I, the prime minister, made this error. I enjoyed the fever of preparation, the industry of coquetry making ready for conquest. I walked among that giddy throng, confident that when the time came I should brush to one side all this

fuss and accomplish a statesmanlike stroke—marry this heir to a worthy consort, do as the silent one approved.

I met the youth at the beach when he came. The steamer rolled outside the harbor, the town seethed inside; a boat came spinning in through the reef; the people cheered; a natty officer sprang ashore, and trunks followed him. Then came the heir. Ah, the heir! When I saw him, I also saw, as if a shadow behind him, the great form of the king, that mountain of silence, inscrutable philosopher.

But the young man felt nothing of this. He kicked out his feet, settled his jacket about his narrow shoulders, turned away from the people of Hibiscus, from all of us who were come to receive him, and spoke to the steamship officer:

"Queer outfit, aren't they, Mac?"

Then he stared round at us.

"I'll bet I'll be bored inside of a day," he added.

So he arrived.

III.

No need, I suppose, to tell you that he was a *hapahaole*—half-white? His mother was a Kanaka.

Well, what is the use of reasoning about it? There he was, quite small, quite insignificant—in fact, with the traits of his mixed blood weakly upon him. I tell you, I was of two minds: let him purse his lips and go back: let him stay, take up the glory that awaited him, be the king's son.

But a prime minister has duties. I took the formal course and made him welcome.

"Your father is expecting you," I said, taking his arm and leading him up that sinuous path that led to the Presence.

He seemed much put out.

"I've heard the old man is sort of queer," he said uneasily. "I'll be hanged if I know why I couldn't stay in Honolulu and have a good time."

"One owes a certain amount to one's parents," I said.

"Oh, the mother's all right," he replied. "I'll be sort of glad to see her. Wonder why she didn't come down to meet me? Didn't she know I was coming?"

How could I explain that his mother

was but an apparition, a remnant of a past age engaged in infinitesimal tasks of domesticity, ignored of all, only finding timid voice when the prime minister caught her at some surreptitious motherly preparation?

"She is well," I said.

We walked up, the crowd following. The heir stared about him as we progressed, nodding as one after another called a shy greeting or flung a sharp glance upon him. Then, suddenly, Hibiscus drew back and we were alone. We turned into the open space where the king sat.

"There's the old man," murmured the heir, halting a little.

"Your father," I said.

Our feet ceased to move, involuntarily, and we stood before that great figure, filling that huge chair, surmounted by the heavy, immobile face. I confess that I looked one side, cocking my ear. I expected a voice, the words that had not come for so many years.

How long that pregnant pause lasted I am unable to say. I found myself quite strained. My neck muscles ached. And there was no voice.

The heir twitched my arm. I looked into the king's face.

In the silence of that little grove the greater silence pressed against us. The heavy-lidded eyes were open. Their gaze rested upon the young man, the heir to Hibiscus. It seemed to me—and I had read those darkling pupils for many years—as if they were dimmed. There was no message in them. They comprehended, but did not formulate. They saw, but there was no vision.

Scrutiny of scrutinies! I swear it seemed to me that at that moment the King of Hibiscus died, with his message unrevealed. And I was terribly angry. You see, I had awaited this answer to our great interrogation: What do you make of it all?

The heavy lids dropped slowly down. The eyes closed.

We went back hastily, the young man pulling at my arm. Once out in the path, with Hibiscus crying round us, he spoke.

"The old fellow's crazy—crazy as a centipede," he chattered. "Why in the deuce didn't he speak to me? Do you

call that a fatherly way to act? Let him keep his odd manners for common people. I'm no child, to be treated this way."

I soothed him as best I could. I told him that his father was a very strange character.

"He hasn't spoken since I've known him," I said.

"I hope mother isn't taking after him," he complained. "This is a nice way to welcome a son."

But his mother slipped out of the grove and claimed him, with gentle exclamations and kisses, and so I left him and went about my duties.

I have already told you what a mixed lot we Hibiscans were. And I have indicated that I made a mistake in paying little attention to the intrigues for the favor of the king's son. Had this young man been a strong spirit, or not one wholly unworthy, I believe we should have made out pretty well as it was. But you can easily imagine that the first woman that displayed the arts of finished coquetry took him—completely. So it came about.

The woman was a tall, very handsome person, with a striking complexion and blond hair. Where she came from, I cannot say exactly. Gossip had it that she was once well-to-do in the States, and had pinned her faith to a man who found civilization unhealthy. Whether he died or no, I cannot tell. But here she was in Hibiscus, the very incarnation of the single-handed freebooter. Not that I dare say anything against her moral character. So far as I know, she was a good woman. But she had no women friends. Children, dogs, and men liked her. I esteemed her myself as one of the few worth a serious conversation with.

Don't ask me how she picked this young fellow out of the crowd of flatterers and made him her own. She did it in two days. In three days they were on the Prospect together, and in four they had the town dining with gossip.

My position was unenviable. I was the prime minister, and responsible for the king's son. It was my place to see that he married fittingly, that he prepared himself for the onerous duties that would in time devolve upon him. Here

was a woman of no positive repute snatching my ward from under my very eyes.

Manlike, and most unwisely, I approached her on the subject. I have never forgotten that interview. It marked the beginning of that self-mistrust that has made me, from the practical ruler of a large and flourishing realm, a mere accountant, a bank-clerk.

"I am going to take you into my confidence," I said, finding her alone over her midday breakfast.

"That is odd," she replied. "I thought you had no confidence in me."

"Personally, I am afraid of you," I said, in the foolish hope that flattery might ameliorate her attitude. "And in the present case, I am afraid for another."

"Do you represent the eligible young women of Hibiscus?" she inquired. "I understand, of course, that it is about young Oscar. I believe there are a round hundred young women each thinking he ought to marry her."

"There is *one* whom he ought to marry," I responded with proper emphasis.

She pondered this gently. Then she said: "Is it possible that I am not the one? Do I understand that you are so ungallant?"

"That is my meaning," I said, gaining courage. "You see, his father has hopes of him. The business here calls for careful management. The young man is very wealthy. He is to be practically the king of all these islands. You see the point, of course?"

"I see but one point," she replied. "He is distinctly worth my while."

"You intend to marry him?" I asked bluntly.

"I intend that he shall marry me," she said, still gently.

I left, after a fruitless errand, feeling, indeed, that I had myself brought matters to a crisis.

In my anxiety, the following days I went often into the presence of the silent philosopher. Day after day his heavy-lidded eyes gazed at me, delivered no message, and closed again. I was left to fight the battle alone.

But there is a destiny above all speech and intrigue. That destiny brought about

the great *coup d'état* of which I spoke at first. Listen, and hear the story of the end of Hibiscus.

IV.

ONE day, when I had given up hope, and the mothers reviled me because the heir was going to marry a white woman from nowhere, leaving the beauties of the kingdom to furbish their coquetries for lesser game, a schooner hauled her wind off the harbor and a man came ashore. He was a straight fellow, very quiet, but of a determined and astute air.

What he came for I could not discern, until Colonel Tulliver, the head of the regiment that defended the flag and treasury of Hibiscus, sought me out and told me that this James Smith desired to take service with us.

"He's a useful sort of chap," said the colonel, wagging his head. "And if the French take a notion to turn this island over to some of their freebooters to plunder, we'll need men of his blood. He'll be worth the money."

"What do you know of him?" I demanded.

The colonel winked.

"As much as any one knows of any one on this island, or need know," he answered. "What does it matter why he comes here?"

"He doesn't look like that sort," I expostulated. "He seems to have some definite purpose."

"So have we all," was the retort. "Only we don't all talk about it."

"Neither does he," I said warmly.

"I can guess," said the colonel, filling his glass. "It's the woman that has young Oscar's ear that he is after, if I don't mistake."

I did not display my relief. In fact, I made some little difficulty about putting the James Smith on the pay-roll, eager as I was to offset the woman's influence. But, of course, I acquiesced.

I suspected that I had made a great stroke of policy when, two days afterward, the heir informed me that he was to be married to Miss Reynolds the next week.

"I think I've made a good match there," he enlarged on his hopes. "She'll make this town sit up, all right. Give me dash and beauty."

"What will your father say?" I demanded.

"Nothing—as usual," he answered flippantly.

"You'll have to tell him," I said. "I won't."

"That'll be all right," he replied easily. "Laura will see him to-morrow."

I took it as an idle vaunt. But my surprise was great, the next morning, to find Miss Reynolds and the king's son close behind me when I approached the open grove where the Silent King held his court. I was glad to see that the young man was hesitant. He used much strong language of an idle kind, and berated his luck.

"You can go first," I informed them. "Good news before business. I shall wait."

I stepped aside, and they passed me. I shall always remember the aspect of their backs: the young man's narrow shoulders working with irritation, and the young woman's squared haughtily, indifferently.

They came before that motionless, huge form, and the son fidgeted while the woman stared—as I could see from where I stood—insolently into the inscrutable eyes of the king.

"We came here on a pleasant errand," she said in her high, clear voice. "We came to ask your blessing. We are going to be married."

I waited for the response. I think we all waited, even the woman, spite of her high demeanor.

As we stood there the boom of the distant surf rose in my ears. I heard the sound of a woman's laughter. A snatch of song drifted in through the palms. As the fronds moved in the light wind, a ray of sunlight struck down across the rough visage of the king, and lighted for one instant a fire in his eyes. The frond swayed back and the gleam died. That was all. There was no word else, no response to this insolence—only silence.

I shall never forget the woman as she stood there, challenging this unspeaking being that ruled us all, whose presence alone had been our law for years, whose serenity held the content of all philosophy. She was superb. Even in her retreat she was defiant. She picked up

her skirts as she left, and refused to look back.

At the turn of the path the heir twisted his face over his shoulder to catch a glimpse of the inscrutable author of his being; but the woman passed on, head high, disdainful, confident.

V.

THAT night I called upon Miss Reynolds at her home up the Prospect. I found her and the king's son finishing their dinner on the piazza of the place. They received me cordially, as one still worth cultivating, though beaten.

"Have some pear salad," she said hospitably. "It will cool you off. Prime ministers should never get too warm. It's not good for diplomacy."

"I'm not here on a diplomatic mission," I explained. "It would be hard to say why I am in your house. But I think this is the time for frank speaking. I have not approved of this match; but that is past and gone. I only wished to know what you intended to do after the marriage."

I looked at the heir. He twisted in his seat and smiled irritably at the woman. She returned his smile very calmly. Then she said: "That is very fair of you. I suppose you want to know whether you will be left in charge of matters, as you have been."

"The king is still alive," I suggested.

"Do you come from him?" she inquired.

"I do," I answered boldly. "In fact, you see that after the marriage I shall have to ask him what allowance I may make you and what I shall do. He may determine that you are to leave the island."

I cannot justify my attitude otherwise than by saying that I had decided to take matters into my own hand. Here destiny steps in.

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when James Smith stepped across the lighted piazza.

"And here am I," he said quietly. "I must be counted in."

We stared at him, all of us. He returned the stare. Then he spoke to the woman.

"Laura," he said, "this farce must end."

Amazed as I was at the intrusion, I saw the admiration in her eyes when she turned to him.

"What farce?" she demanded.

"This farce," he answered. "You know you love me."

It was astounding, the assurance of his manner. I felt that he spoke with the knowledge of years. And my senses could not deceive me as to her heart. She responded to his tone with a flush—the first, I swear. I had ever seen on her creamy cheeks. But she turned from him to the king's son.

If ever a man had a chance to prove himself, he had. But he fumbled with his cuffs and stammered something about "impudence." Under her gaze, I thought for one moment that he would find his manhood. I tell you, he had his chance. One word of defiance, one movement to assert his rights, one generous impulse to strike for his own soul and the woman he had sworn to love and cherish, would have saved him. But he stammered weakly.

Slowly the woman's rich eyes turned back to the man who had spoken so boldly. I see him yet, destiny incarnate, the very magnet of her passion, master of her soul!

And then, in that tense moment, there was a shuffling sound on the steps, as if a heavy, unwieldy mass were being slowly moved toward the lighted circle on the piazza. I turned, we all turned, and saw—the king!

He came up with a vast heave that shook the house. His tremendous limbs seemed too great for the frail planks. His huge body loomed through the shadow. The noise ceased. He had come to a pause, his great eyes fixed upon us—upon the scene, upon its actors, upon his son.

In that portentous silence the history of Hibiscus was made and finished. Under those silent eyes we played our parts to the end.

The woman was the first to recover herself. She half rose, and bowed.

"Here is the king," she said gently.

The king's son twisted in his chair and stared, like one stricken with terror, upon this apparition. James Smith looked also, but distraught and without sign of recognition.

"I came for you, Laura," he said tensely. "You've played me long enough. You want power and money and position. But you love me. You need me."

Once more she turned to the other, to her betrothed. I could see that she hoped he would save her from herself; show a valiancy that would help her word of honor, and assure to her what she had so shrewdly intrigued to attain. But the heir was under the spell of the cold eyes of the Silent Presence.

I would have leaped to save that woman for myself. She was magnificent. But Destiny! We all cry out that name. It made me bank-clerk, instead of the prime minister of a king! Destiny held him in thrall, and the eyes of the woman turned away from him, irrevocably, leaving nothing to him but memory. She looked into the face of the man, and her heart ran out to him in a great flood.

"I don't care"—she swept her hand around superbly—"for all this. I'll marry you."

He received her surrender gallantly.

"You shall have all this, too," he said. "I am strong enough to take it."

I looked to the king as to a shrine, confident that at last the time had come for the word that was to break the silence of the years and give us the answer to our question: What do you make of it all?

In fact, we all looked—son, prime minister, woman, lover; and we saw, all of us, the answer to the world-old query. The heavy-lidded eyes were open upon us. Their message was clear. The years spoke. From that huge, silent figure flowed the ultimate doom of Hibiscus, of the weakling, of the prime minister.

And James Smith reached across the gulf and took the woman—took her with all her beauty, her passionate heart, her power for good and for evil to himself and the world; took her from the feeble, the inert—and with her, Hibiscus.

Thus I am become a bank-clerk. What did the king say? He said nothing. Not a word from out that silence of years. He had seen. And from the silence of that long rumination he passed into that final silence, leaving Hibiscus, leaving his son, me, life itself. Strange message! Ultimate solution of the whole matter—to see and to be silent!

A LEGACY OF TERROR.*

BY LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

A SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MASQUERADE.



HE took the bandages' carefully from my chest and arm. The wounds, though they were beginning to heal well, still presented a terrible appearance. The gendarme's heavy saber had all but severed shoulder and arm from the trunk. Nekrussov smiled at me kindly.

"That doesn't look as if you could bear hardships for a while yet."

"I must!" I cried. "There is no other way."

His eyes grew serious again.

"There is another way. Did you not yourself say the other day that I owed you and Olga reparation? So let it be. Let me do your work until you have the strength to take it up again."

He left me, but even on the next day came back.

"My informants have returned. She is in none of the nearer settlements. We must go farther afield."

"Is there no way of finding out through official sources?"

"None. To ask would be to destroy her. All the more liberal officials have been removed. If we were to inquire, Olga would at once be transferred into some wholly barbarous camp of the extreme north; or, what is worse, to the Tartar and Moslem south. No, we must use our own efforts. And I have done what has never been done before. I have sent out all my men. They will do their best. Derzavin is in the lead, and my rebuke has redoubled his zeal."

I bowed my head. What else could I do but assent? And I confess that I

was gaining a sense of this strange man's strength and wisdom. He sat down opposite me, as he had done on the day before.

"I have deserved some little rest," he said, lighting a cigarette, "and we were interrupted in the middle of our story. You remember that, while a great blow for freedom was to be struck, the rest of the comrades went, as a blind, to a masquerade. Ah, that masquerade! It was the maddest, merriest, most tragical thing that I have ever seen. We laughed and drank with a wild abandon. And if you had torn the masks from the faces of the men and women, you would have seen pale cheeks and drawn mouths and eyes unnaturally bright—with tears.

"We assembled in a public hall—the hall of an inn—and danced and laughed under the brilliant gaslights. There you could have seen masks of all ages and countries, and masks of the beasts of the field. And the wine flowed like water, especially as the hour approached in which we knew our brave comrades to be going to their glory and to their certain death. But, maddest of all, laughed and drank a certain slim girl, who was the betrothed of one of the two comrades who had drawn the fatal lots. You think that, in common decency, she might have stayed away from that wild and desperate revel? Not so. She was known to be his betrothed, and it was especially necessary for her to dance, as it were, beside his open grave. Even so she was taken and tortured; but, like a brave sister of the Cause, she suffered and held her peace.

"Our revel grew and grew in abandon. The hour of the deed was past. A while longer and we thought that we

* This story began in THE SCRAP BOOK—Second Section—for September, 1908.

could return and give ourselves to our sorrow in the quietude of our homes. And then there came to our notice a thing that froze our blood. Admission had been by ticket, and we knew the exact number of tickets that had been issued; we knew exactly who was there. Alas! we thought we had guarded ourselves so carefully. But here and there in the gaudy throng appeared a masked figure that we could not account for—a figure with unknown voice and strange gestures. These figures were all those of men. They danced and sang and drank with the maddest of us, nor did we dare betray our fears.

“Underwood had noticed it, too. He wore the costume of an American Indian and a red mask over his face. He came to me and whispered:

“‘There are ten strangers in the room; we are betrayed.’

“I nodded, and laughed boisterously, for one of the strange masks was behind us. Then I whispered back:

“‘Try to escape with Olga. She isn’t well enough to bear arrest.’

“He went, but in a few minutes again managed to speak to me:

“‘The doors are barred.’

“More and more strange masks appeared from the inner chambers of the inn, until they outnumbered the men who were our comrades. The hour grew late, the gas flared; our laughter shrieked with a note of agony in it—you would have thought yourself in a place of lost souls. Gradually the strangers managed to surround us. They came closer and closer; and we, in our gaudy costumes, stood huddled in a little group in the middle of the hall. Pretense was dropped. The strangers drew in upon us, and there fell a silence, sudden and terrible. At the same moment the strangers threw from their shoulders the crimson dominoes that most of them wore, and cast aside their masks. We stood quite still, surrounded by the officers of the Czar.

“The gendarmes drew sabers and revolvers. Resistance was utterly useless. But, mark you—they did not arrest us all, nor did they choose from among us with any seeming system. They took ten men and ten women. The rest of us were left free to betray ourselves fur-

ther, and by our lives to betray all the comrades. They tore from us cloak and mask. They drove us out into the night. Underwood, who was not arrested, fought with his bare hands like a madman. He was beaten into insensibility, and another comrade and I bore him to his home, where his little child was crying in vain for the mother who lay in some prison-chamber of the Kremlin.”

Nekrussov rose and walked up and down the room a few times. Then he resumed his seat. But, from this point on, his voice was tense with great though suppressed emotion.

“Yes; Olga Feodorovna was in prison. Heaven knows, it struck me to the heart, but I pitied Underwood as I have rarely pitied a man. Our two comrades had done the deed, and had met their death. But their success had infuriated the authorities, and we knew that it would go hard with the prisoners. Underwood wandered about among us in that maddening helplessness of which you must know something. For a time we thought that he would lose his reason.

“I see him still at the court-martial before which the prisoners were tried. He and I had gained entrance. The trial was a farce. The evidence of complicity in the deed that had been committed was worthless, but the prisoners—men and women—were condemned to death. And, as if to increase the torture of soul and body, the execution of the sentence was deferred for twenty days. Ah, I see still the glittering stars and orders upon the breasts of the judges; I see still the brave and wonderful smile with which Olga Feodorovna looked at her husband when the death sentence was read, and I see him—a strong man—fall insensible upon the floor of that chamber of terrors.

“Again I took him to his home, and another comrade and I determined to remain with him those twenty days, lest he be tempted, as we knew he might well be, to take his own life. But you may imagine our surprise when I tell you that he betrayed no violence of emotion, but went about with a brooding look upon his face that gave place at times to a look of craft. He assured us who watched him that there was no need for our constant presence, that he could bear

his suffering better without witnesses. I was relieved, for, in truth, other duties called me. My father was ill on his estates, and I went to him. And I was glad not to be in Moscow at the time of the execution of that intolerable sentence.

"I went, counting in my heart the days until the awful day on which Olga would have to die. And in those days came upon me that calm desperateness which has made it possible for me to be of some use to the Cause. After such an experience you can understand that one doesn't place any extraordinary value upon one's own life."

"I have heard," I said, "that you have had experiences even more awful."

He grew pale, and held up his hand as if he had been struck.

"Let us not speak of them, my friend. Those other experiences are too near. The story that I am telling you has withdrawn into the painless dreamland of the past. So, to return to it—"

"Three days after I had left Moscow, and eight days after the passing of the sentence, disquieting letters from comrades came to me. One comrade after another was being arrested in every portion of the country. The government picked out with deadly certainty all those concerned in the revolutionary movement—men and women upon whom until now no breath of suspicion had fallen.

"Courts-martial were held from one end of Russia to another, and all the arrested comrades were condemned to death. Each day brought news more fateful. The gallows were glutted; the swords of the executioners knew no rest; the roads to Siberia were populous with an army of exiles. The revolution was stamped out with a ferocious energy, with cruel vengeance.

"I held my breath, knowing that upon me, too, the blow would fall. It did. In the gray of early morning the officers of the Czar came and took me with them. My father lay dying, but they would not let me bid him farewell. I was taken to Moscow and thrown into a prison that overflowed with our comrades. We were asked no questions; we were not tortured, as was the custom, to betray our friends. The government seemed suddenly omniscient. No one could be

hidden: no one was spared. It was slaughter, grim and fearful, and exile at hard labor for the lucky ones.

"You know that we in the Russian prisons manage to communicate with the outside world in various ways, that a regular system of information—a chain of faithful comrades—was in use even in the years of which I speak. Thus, we who lay in prison knew of the fate of those who were still without, and were also told of the happenings in other prisons.

"The day approached on which Olga Feodorovna was to meet her fate. I spent it in an agony of silent grief. I could not bear to think of that dear face distorted in the horror of a felon's death—"

Nekrussov broke off suddenly. He rose and went to the window, speaking to me from there with face averted and in a low, steady voice.

"At the end of that day came the news that all the comrades arrested at the masquerade had been executed except one. That one was Olga. I could have wept with joy, but that a suspicion, fearful beyond belief, crept into my soul. In truth, when I reviewed all that had happened recently, it seemed to me that I had been blind indeed. It should not have needed the exemption of Olga Feodorovna from the lot of her comrades to teach me the truth that we had been betrayed by a sharer of our inmost secrets, by a keeper of our lists, by a guardian of our hopes. Why did we trust the stranger? He was a man of honor: he was the husband of Olga Feodorovna. He had betrayed us under unusual stress, it is true, but that was an empty excuse. Through his disclosures three thousand comrades died; eighteen thousand were sent to the Siberian mines; the revolution was crippled for fifteen years. The flower of the youth of a land was sacrificed by the traitor—to one life."

Nekrussov turned to me suddenly.

"Are you surprised that your name is a byword, that men stagger at its sound? In ten thousand families over the length and breadth of Russia it is the name of—Judas!"

I bowed my head before the awfulness of the things revealed to me.

"The suspicion," Nekrussov continued, "did not remain a suspicion long. Definite news came to this effect—that the government had sent half a regiment of troops to escort Underwood and his wife and child across the frontier into Prussia. They paraded the traitor before Europe. They tried to make it appear that our ranks were divided, that we were of the lineage of him who betrayed his Lord. Olga Feodorovna was carried across the country in a litter. Paralysis had struck her. Whether she ever learned the price at which her life had been bought—that we do not know, and are glad not to know. Often in the darkness of the night, to this day, I wonder whether the paralytic blow had not struck her when she learned what her husband had done."

Once more Nekrussov ceased and fell into deep thought, from which he seemed to rouse himself with difficulty.

"She died at Berlin two months after her liberation. Underwood and the child disappeared. That is the story of your uncle's life. The latter part of it, with the news of the death of Olga Feodorovna, was brought to me many months after it had taken place, at Akatui, where for nine years I worked in the mines. And yet, I suppose, the lash of the driver in Siberia was not so terrible as the lash of conscience in the soul of Anthony Underwood."

He ceased speaking, but he had not told me all.

"Your story is incomplete," I cried. "You have not yet told me of my uncle's death. You cannot leave me in darkness as to that."

"Heavens! Isn't that clear?"

"Not quite," I insisted.

"Very well, then. I told you that the revolution was stamped out for about fifteen years. Then a new generation had come to its own, a new generation felt the bonds of servitude eating into its flesh, and some of us older ones who hadn't died of the scurvy, and who hadn't been starved or beaten to death, came back from exile. Slowly the work was reorganized: it grew in strength. I need not tell you what it has achieved. It is true that our Parliament is dissolved to-day; that its leaders have been hounded; that some, martyrs to the Cause,

have been foully murdered. But our gains stand. You know that men of the highest classes—men like Prince Urussov—have joined us in the spirit of our endeavors, and that this spirit will not die.

"But we did not know all that at the beginning of the new time; we did not dream that the long years of discouragement would so soon be followed by partial victory. And some of the younger and more ardent spirits, remembering the great defeat and the great treachery that had caused it, vowed that an example must be made of all who had ever been faithless to the sacred Cause. These men were pitiless with the pitilessness of youth; they had not known Olga Feodorovna, they had not known Underwood, nor the circumstances that—from a merciful point of view—extenuated his monstrous crime.

"And so a court was organized at Moscow. The older judges, like Brodzinski and Asnyk, were overruled. Four men were condemned to death. First of the four was Underwood. The lists of the party were gone through, lots were cast, and to me was given the honorable office—the honorable office, mark you!—of executing the sentence of the court. Well, it was hard. I pleaded for exemption, but the younger men pressed me. I knew that the deed would inevitably be done, and I went. I went, too, because I was weary of life, and I thought that I might come to the laying of it down in this manner. But it is an old story. Death avoids them that seek it.

"I didn't have much difficulty in discovering the whereabouts of Anthony Underwood. In the United States it's easy to find people, because men are not accustomed to hide, and so the facilities for disappearance are few. But I saw Olga from afar, and was all but disarmed. She is so like her mother—so like!

"You can imagine what I did. I had one dwelling in Queenshaven, one dwelling in the village on the Isle of Palms among the Bohemian laborers. Hence when, on that last day, I set out from Queenshaven, it was simple enough to scuttle my boat, do the appointed deed—I entered through a window—go to the

village, disguise myself as a laborer, return to Queenshaven on the ferry, and join the Clyde Line steamer as a deck-hand. Oh, that was simple enough. But it was not so simple to strike the fatal blow at an old friend—a friend of other and of better years. You cannot deny, at least, that I took every means in my power to prevent you and Olga from learning the horrible truth and from going to Russia."

I nodded and held out my hand, which he took and pressed warmly.

"It is a strange fate that has brought us together here at the end of the world," he said; "a strange fate. Now, if I can only help you to find Olga—our Olga's daughter—and persuade you two to go to your own country and your own place and be happy—if I can do that—it will be some consolation to one whose life has known very little that is not desperate and tragic."

With that he left me, and I fell to thinking of the story that he had told. I could find little in my heart but a great compassion for my Uncle Anthony. No doubt he had died a thousand deaths in life. Small wonder that I had seemed to see upon his dead face a look of peace. I only prayed that Olga might be safe, and that, as Nekrussov said, she would let me take her home.

I gained strength hour by hour. My left arm would be permanently stiffened; but for that I did not greatly care. I was hot to set out, wherever the road led, to find Olga.

The opportunity to start on that journey came sooner than we expected. One night Derzavin came in to Nekrussov and me, who were sitting together. He was breathless with eagerness.

"The Ostiak who pawned Miss Underwood's knife came back to Prenzlau, the German broker. Prenzlau held him and summoned us. We have the fellow, but he refuses to speak. He pretends that he doesn't know any Russian. You know their talk, Paylov Sergievitch."

Nekrussov and I sprang to our feet.

"Where is the man?"

"At my house," Derzavin replied.

We walked through the dark streets of Tobolsk, high in hope. Derzavin's house was not far, and in a little room

at its rear we found the Ostiak squatting on the floor. He was dressed in his native garb; his brown skin was drawn tight over his high, Tartar cheekbones, his black almond-shaped eyes glittered weirdly. Nekrussov spoke to the man in his own barbarous tongue—spoke long and insistently. At last, shaking his head, he turned to me.

"The fellow lies. He says that he did not steal the knife. He says he knows nothing of any white woman such as I described to him. But he offers, for a consideration, to lead us to the place where he found it. If we could employ the methods of the government, we could torture him into a confession. But that we cannot do. So our best plan is to follow him and take up the trail from the spot to which he leads us."

"And where is that spot?" I asked.

"Far to the north, across the steppes, near the Obi River."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAND OF SHADOWS.

THE next day we spent in preparations for our perilous journey to the north. Strict watch was kept upon the Ostiak lest he escape. We intended—Nekrussov, Derzavin, and I—to travel on horseback, accompanied by one of the wooden carts common in Russia. This was to be driven by a trusty servant, and was to contain provisions, cooking utensils, and a tent for the night. The Ostiak was to travel in the cart. He protested to Nekrussov that he preferred to trot, holding the mane of one of the horses; but we thought it better to have him sit securely on the cart next to Simon, the driver.

The journey would be long and full of hardships. But one thing was in our favor. Spring was approaching, and the weather would not be intolerably cold, nor were we in great danger of starvation in case our supplies gave out. In winter, when the villages of the north lie in cruel isolation, it would have been practically impossible to undertake the journey.

The Ostiak was restive and required constant vigilance. Hence, upon the morning of the third day after we had

started our preparations, we set out. It was just after dawn that, desiring to avoid notice, we rode out from the city of Tobolsk into the desolate north. The sky was clear and pearly, dipping down like a vast inverted cup at the end of the immense plain that stretched far on all sides of us. Nekrussov hummed a song as he rode.

"This is life," he said; "life! Away from stuffy prisons and cities and carking care. Out into the open!"

I, too, felt the liberation of spirit which the journey made possible, and I was glad in my heart, for I believed that we were traveling toward my beloved, whom I had come so far and over such strange ways to seek. That night we camped out under the glitter of the chill stars, built a fire and slept, wrapped in our furs. We did not sleep all at once, but kept a watch, not only because there was possible danger from wolves, but more especially to prevent the escape of our Tartar guide.

Thus, camping at night and riding by day, we traveled over a country as desolate as any that God created. The Ostiak pointed still to the north, and still we rode over the expanses of that apparently endless plain. Five days passed before there was any sign of change. Then gradually we came in sight of great gray boulders that looked as if they had been hurled here in some catastrophe of the primeval world, to lie forever in this sterile plain. The boulders grew in size, but still we came upon no sign of vegetation or life.

A day more, and the great masses of rock grew to be hills and walls. The hills were craggy, misshapen, grotesque. They seemed to turn upon us leering and deformed countenances. Under the mighty walls between which we must pass we dared hardly to speak, so powerful and fearful was the echo. We whispered, and the whispers seemed to run with hissing repetition from one horizon to the other. The wheels of our supply-cart rumbled like thunder in those sounding passes.

Our hearts sank again in these places; the joyful hope with which we had undertaken our journey fled. When evening came, by our camp-fire, Nekrussov questioned the Ostiak again and again

with quiet and stern persistence. But the man's barbarous features remained impassive; his black eyes betrayed no emotion. And still he pointed northward, northward. I turned to Nekrussov:

"But are there exile settlements to the north of us?"

He nodded gravely.

"At the Obi and beyond."

So there was nothing for us to do but to keep on. Our water began to give out; we had to limit ourselves to a cupful each during twenty-four hours, and the consequent suffering from thirst was terrible. The Ostiak assured us that we would soon come to a country of running water and of the growth of green things; but still the garish sun of the long northern day dazzled our eyes, and still we peered into the horizon in vain.

In these days I learned to appreciate the wonderful courage and endurance of Pavlov Sergievitch. He never showed his own suffering; his only concern was to help us to bear ours.

And these sufferings increased. For a day came on which we had but little food left, and on which the last drop of water had dried in the last of our earthenware vessels. All that day we rode on in silence. We dared not speak, for each word spoken increased the terrible torture of thirst. The knees of our horses trembled with weakness, for in this sterile and desolate land there was not a blade of grass. Toward evening we were all but spent. And yet we feared to stop for the night. The strength to go on might fail both man and beast.

Then, in that extremity, came a glimmer of hope. As we rode by the walls of rock we seemed to perceive here and there in huge fissures a spot of moisture. We toiled on, and the spots became more frequent. At last we came to a place where a tiny spring gushed from the living rock, and where grew sparse grasses, at which our poor horses nibbled eagerly. The spring was but a tiny trickle, yet it sufficed. We drank a cup of water each, sweet and refreshing beyond words, and then placed our jars under the jutting rock and filled them slowly one by one. We turned in for the night, and not only were our bodies

healed by the good, clear water, but our hearts once more took courage.

Then the face of the country changed. It was still desolate enough. But now there were clusters of white birches and of fir-trees, and running water, and the expanse of great, still lakes, in which were mirrored the gray northern skies. Here and there we came upon a Tartar settlement, but still our guide pointed onward. It was then that, for the first time, Nekrussov lost patience. He clapped the muzzle of his revolver to the barbarian's head.

"When shall we reach the place?"

The man turned gray under his brown skin.

"To-morrow," he growled, deep in his throat.

We had hard work watching him during the night. His furtive eyes never closed in sleep for a moment. Again and again he tried to edge away from the camp-fire and slink into the darkness that surrounded us, until at last Nekrussov took the driver's whip and brought it down heavily on his back. He snarled like a dog, but lay still until morning.

We started early and let the Ostiak precede us by a dozen paces. The Tartar settlements grew thicker upon the road. Here and there we saw a miserable and dilapidated mosque, crowned by a crescent of wood or tin. The Moslem power had once been great here, but it had dwindled with the coming of the Muscovite. Not far from a long, straggling native village our guide stopped, looked round, and ran to Nekrussov.

"This is the place," he said in broken Russian.

Nekrussov fixed the man's eye.

"The place where the gold knife was found?"

The Tartar nodded. Nekrussov turned to me.

"We shall see."

He grasped the Ostiak by the arm, and we proceeded to the village. An old Tartar came out to meet us. He spoke a long salutation, which Nekrussov acknowledged with a silent bow. My friend leaned toward my ear.

"It's a strange dialect. I don't understand more than one word in five."

Sternly he regarded our guide.

"Do *you* speak to him!"

The fellow spoke, but the old Tartar shook his head. The two barbarians did not understand each other, and it was plain that our guide had lied and had led us astray. On Nekrussov's forehead a great vein of anger swelled out. He sprang from his horse, threw the Ostiak sprawling on the ground, and with Derzavin's and my help tied him with thongs. Then we threw him into the cart and went into the village.

Eight exiles lived there in miserable huts, and these men welcomed us with tears of joy. They were, with one exception, men of the cultivated middle classes who had agitated against the government. We stayed with them during the day, and in the evening, when we were assembled in the largest hut, Nekrussov told the story of our quest. Trazekin, one of the exiles—a man of middle age, with a white, ascetic, scholarly face—spoke eagerly as Nekrussov ended his recital.

"I've made a study of the native dialects. Nothing else to do, you know, and I'm here for life. If you'll let me talk to that scoundrel of yours, I can easily tell you where he comes from. I'm grateful enough to be able to put my knowledge to some use."

"Have you recorded it?" Nekrussov asked.

"I've written a book, and a useful one. The manuscript is complete, but every effort to send it has failed so far."

"Give it to me, brother," Nekrussov said. "I will send it to Austria to be printed."

Then we brought the Ostiak in and forced him to speak, and even to repeat certain of his tribal formulae. Trazekin listened carefully, and as he listened a light of comprehension came into his eyes.

"You must go to the west," he said. "Your man belongs to a more western group of Tartars. You will find her whom you seek at the very foot of the Urals—due west."

"Are there many settlements?" I asked.

"Very many. The country is not quite so cruelly barren there."

That night before I slept there came

over me a feeling that partook of the prophetic. I had come far and suffered greatly, and I knew that this journey to the west would be my last in search for my beloved. Either I would find her, or else all earthly journeys would be over for me once and forever. And, therefore, when morning came I set out in a calm and quiet frame of mind. I was going to the fate appointed me by the power of God, but to no more uncertainty and useless wandering.

Our Ostiak made a desperate attempt to escape, and we had to keep him in fetters, which was a stringency of treatment beyond our inclination.

The second part of our journey promised to be less full of hardship than the first had been. We had replenished our store of food. All we could get, to be sure, was dried fish and raw turnips—sweet but hard. Yet there was enough; and the turnips not only satisfied hunger, but quenched our thirst. Furthermore, we had received fairly definite directions of our route, and were no longer dependent on our Ostiak guide.

The country through which we fared was now, in the early springtime, pleasant enough. Still a barren region, it yet showed great tracts of greenery, on which the nomadic Tartars grazed their horses, whose smooth sides would often flash in the sunlight. Pure running water was plentiful, and the grateful shade of trees. We came upon one exile camp after another. In each dwelt men, and sometimes women, shut out from their kind. They were all glad of our coming—all glad of the blessedness of this penurious spring. In winter, which was intolerably long, they were blocked in by perpetual ice and snow amid the great loneliness and the great silence of these northern wilds.

We made inquiries in every place, although we did not expect to find Olga until we had gone farther still toward the setting sun. One anxiety constantly beset me, and I asked again and again whether exiles were ever ill-treated by the natives. The answer was invariably reassuring. It happened infrequently, I was told, and was never very serious. The natives were thoroughly cowed, the descendants of the ancient Huns having become a slavish and fearful people.

And so we journeyed on through the brightening spring weather, pushing ahead as swiftly as we could. At last we saw from afar the purple peaks of the great Ural Mountains stand out against the bright gray of the sky, and by that sign we knew that we were approaching the end of our quest. We knew it by another sign. The Ostiak could not, for all his Mongol stoicism, quite hide his perturbation. He made one desperate effort to escape, and thereafter sat upright in the cart, his black eyes alive with fear. We watched him closely, and one evening, as we saw afar in the late dusk the straggling huts of a large village, we knew by his behavior that we had come to the end of our journey.

Half an hour later we entered the village, and found almost half of the wretched huts inhabited by exiles. Several of them, having seen us enter the place, came to give us a greeting. They had not seen white men for years, except the occasional government inspector and spy, and they welcomed us with great emotion. Nekrussow at once explained the nature of our errand, and when he ceased speaking they all fell silent. The silence was ominous to me. I could hear my heart beat wildly. I thought of Olga, cold in death and huddled away in the indifferent earth of this ultimate outpost of the habitations of man. But I gripped myself firmly. Then through the silence I heard the voice of Nekrussow, sharp and clear:

"Tell us the truth at once."

An elderly man who had many years of exile behind him answered gently:

"We do not know the truth that you demand, Pavlov Sergievitch. But what we know we will tell you."

We walked slowly to the largest of the huts and sat down on the bundles of furs that lay upon the floor. Then the elderly man who had answered Nekrussow spoke again:

"In the depth of the last winter a caravan of exiles passed. Two were assigned to this village, Olga Underwood and Gregor Yermolov. The latter had consumption, and has since died. As for Miss Underwood, we received her in the heartiest manner. She was as kind and good as she was lovely, though

much emaciated and weakened by imprisonment and the consequent hardships. We did all that was possible with our poor means to make her lot easier to bear. She lived in my family under the protection of my wife, who has voluntarily shared my exile.

"At the time of the first thaw she wandered from the village to the edge of the wood, because an Ostiak had brought snowdrops to our house the day before, and she went in search of the flowers. She stayed long. We were as anxious as if she had been of our own blood. We hunted for days and found no trace of her. Then the thaw ceased, icy winds blew from the pole, snow fell and froze where it fell—an impregnable barricade. We have been since then mourners—all of us whom you see here. Since the coming of spring we have hunted for her again and again—to no purpose."

Nekrussov gripped my arm as if to reassure me. Then he turned to Derzavin:

"Fetch that scoundrel of an Ostiak, Gavriil."

We waited in silence till Derzavin returned, dragging the unwilling Tartar behind him. The old man who had cared for Olga sprang forward and held a torch in the Ostiak's face:

"It is the man who brought the snowdrops and told Olga where she might find others."

"And when she went away," Nekrussov asked, "did she carry a small gold-handled penknife of American make and bearing her initials?"

"She did." The answer came at once. "It was the one possession of which she had, accidentally, not been robbed in the prisons."

"Very well, gentlemen," Nekrussov said, "we will confer again in the morning. In the meantime we will withdraw to our camp and confer with this Hun—to some purpose, I believe."

We went back to our camp and surrounded the Ostiak. At a sign from Nekrussov, Derzavin fetched a rope, slung a noose, threw it over the Tartar's neck, and the end over a strong limb of the great tree at the foot of which we had made our encampment. Then Derzavin handed the rope to me, and Ne-

krussov spoke to the Tartar. The fellow was at first silent; then he whined. But mercilessly I pulled the noose tighter and tighter, until his eyes bulged and his tongue began to protrude. Then he made a sign with his hand, and Nekrussov signaled me to stop.

"He will lead us."

We now tied the rope securely about his middle and drove him before us, carrying torches to light us on the way. We thought the distance probably short, but we were undeceived. The Tartar strained on through the night, tireless, hour after hour. We followed him vigorously, although we did not possess his sinewy endurance. He led us through forests of dark fir-trees, through cold marshes into which we sank knee-deep, and still kept on. The cold dawn rose, and we seemed yet far from our destination. Hence we halted, swallowed a bite of food and rested for half an hour. I turned to Nekrussov.

"Do you think he is deceiving us again?"

"No. I told him that the slightest attempt to deceive us or lead us astray would be his death. He knows that I spoke the truth."

We started again. The Tartar never hesitated. He knew the road he was traveling with a certainty, an unswerving directness that was reassuring. But we were beginning to feel the terrible strain of that night's march, and were obliged to go more slowly. Toward nine we came upon straggling Ostiak huts, low and foul, tucked into the hollows of rocks and crags. Our unwilling guide looked back at us and blinked. Nekrussov commanded him to take us to his own hut.

In a few minutes we had reached the hut—a trifle larger than the others. In front of it grazed a mare. We permitted the Ostiak to go to the door of the hut. He gave a hoarse call, and a large-boned Tartar woman, with a baby at her breast, came out. The man snarled a question at her, and, in reply, she pointed to the left. Then she murmured a few words, at the sound of which I heard Nekrussov rap out a heavy oath for the first time in my experience of him.

The Ostiak beckoned us, and we followed him in the direction that the

woman had indicated. In a few minutes we came to a brook, the course of which we followed. Our guide looked swiftly to the right and left, as if hunting for some one whom he expected to find.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW ONE PASSPORT SERVED FOR TWO.

THEN he stopped short and fixed his eyes on a dark object straight ahead. We followed his looks and perceived a human being crouching by the brookside. The figure arose, lifted a jar of water to its shoulder and walked in our direction. I thought that my heart would stop. Then I ran as I have never run before in my life. The jar of water fell, and I held my beloved in my arms—at last.

Great Heaven! but it was a pitiful, clear figure that I held, clad in rags and mangy furs, thin and pallid, with a red cicatrice just over the left temple which was not quite covered by a wave of soft hair. But what cared I except to pity her? For she yielded herself to my embrace, her eyes spoke to mine, and she pronounced my name in a new tone. I led her to the others, for she was too dazed to speak. At the sight of Nekrussov she started.

"The man of the dunes!"

I laid a gentle hand on her arm.

"He is our friend, in spite of all, Olga. You will understand when I tell you."

Nekrussov took her hand and looked earnestly at her, and I knew that it was not herself that he saw so much as her mother. Then he asked her:

"Have you been badly treated here?"

"The man captured me," she said slowly, "but the woman fought for me and—saved me."

"And the scar on your temple?" I asked.

"He knocked me over one day with a club, but again the woman saved me."

"What shall we do to him?" Nekrussov asked.

"Nothing," she answered, and leaned heavily against me: "nothing. For the woman's sake—nothing. She even pleaded to have me sent back. I have been only—a servant here."

She was near to fainting with the shock of her sudden liberation. So we improvised a rude litter and carried her. Nekrussov assured me that nothing was wrong with her except great weariness.

The journey back to the village was slow. Olga was not heavy, but we had to be careful and rest frequently, so that we did not arrive until late in the day. We were met by our friends, who had seen us approaching, and their joy at beholding Olga was touching to me beyond words. We carried her to the hut of the excellent lady who had befriended her, and then went to another hut to rest.

I lay down on a bed of furs, but sleep, despite my weariness, did not come for long. A great joy held me. I would have counted the world well lost, as the old phrase goes, for Olga's sake. And the sufferings and hardships that I had gone through seemed but a very little thing to gain the prize of my life. I felt that it had been gained; that Olga knew how I had come to seek her in the uttermost regions of the world. I knew from the touch of her hand, from the yielding of her dear lips, that she had considered my love in our long separation, and had been glad in the thought of it. Late I fell asleep, and slept until the sun stood high on the horizon.

I sought Nekrussov, and together we went to see Olga. She was up, and looked refreshed, though so thin and pale. She had waved her hair over the scar on her temple, and her face held a Madonna-like air infinitely sweet and gracious.

We took breakfast together, and then I asked Olga if she had the strength to tell us what had befallen her during our separation, especially to explain to us the mystery of the telephone-message she had sent, and her sudden cry and interruption.

She smiled at me.

"Ah, Robert," she said, "so much has happened—so much! It will take months to tell it all. But a little I can tell you now." She seemed to collect her thoughts slowly. "The prison discipline wasn't very severe," she said: "only it was change, change, change. I bought little immunities everywhere, for by Titania's advice I had sewn all my

money into the lining of my skirt. From Moscow I was removed to Tula, from Tula to Kharkof, from Kharkof to Ekaterinoslav, from Ekaterinoslav to Kishinef.

Then the information came to us prisoners that we were to be taken to Siberia, and then, Robert, my heart almost failed me." She smiled. "I wished then that I had been kinder to you, for I found myself wishing that you were there. The journey to Siberia in the prison-cars was bad—very bad. It wasn't my own suffering that hurt so. I was always strong. But it was the suffering that I saw.

"At Yekaterinburg a strange thing happened. We were all in the detention prison there, and word was passed to me to come to the window. Fortunately I was on the first floor. I went to the grated window and looked out. A man stood there, muffled to his eyes. He threw a note to me, and I opened it. In it I saw these words:

"Your cousin is hunting for you. He is with Herzen in Kishinef."

"Was there no signature?" I interrupted her.

"Yes," she answered. "The signature was—Krylov!"

"He proved himself a true friend!" I cried, thinking of his tragic parting words to me, and wondering whether the great catastrophe of his life had come upon him.

"I thought and thought," Olga continued, "how I might communicate with you, but came to no conclusion. At last, on the day before we were to set out, I spoke of my perplexity to a gentleman who was in prison with me. He told me that there was a long-distance telephone in the building, but doubted if it would be possible for me to use it. He volunteered to help me, so when the keeper came to give us our food he approached him. But the man turned away with a snarl. When he brought the next meal, however, a curious thing happened. He turned round and held out a grimy hand. At the advice of my friend I had my money in readiness. I dropped a note into the hand, but it remained outstretched. Then another and another,

until all my little store of two hundred rubles was gone. Then the hand clutched and, without a word, the keeper left.

"I was deeply discouraged. But the next day, to my surprise, the keeper came in suddenly, took me by the hand and led me swiftly to the office. He asked me whom I wanted to call up. I told him, and he got the connection for me, pretending that it was on official business. Then he handed me the receiver. I spoke the few words that you heard, when I received a blow on the head. The chief keeper had come in unexpectedly. I was taken back, and the keeper who had helped me was, as I heard, punished." She stopped and sighed. "The rest you can imagine. It was hard on the march. The Cossacks whipped me—they whipped us all. Then I came here, and all the people were very good to me. And then—then—you know."

She ceased speaking, and looked toward Nekrussov.

"Robert," she said, "how do you come to be with this gentleman?"

Nekrussov gave me a glance. I understood, and withdrew to another part of the room, leaving him to tell his own story. From where I sat I watched Olga's face, and saw the sorrow and the shame pass over it. When Nekrussov had finished I turned toward her. She came to my arms.

"You know the story, Robert?"

"I know it," I said.

Her eyes shone.

"I am glad that I have suffered. I am glad that we lent our passports to Constantin and Titania, and by so little helped the cause that my father—"

She did not utter the fatal word, but tears came into her eyes.

"At least," she said, and looked appealingly at both of us: "at least he was among those who loved greatly, and to whom much will be forgiven."

We fell silent for a space, thinking of the strange life and death of Anthony Underwood. Then Nekrussov looked at both of us smilingly.

"And how do you young people expect to get back home with only one passport between you? Olga's is gone."

We looked at each other in perplexity. Then Nekrussov spoke again, and again he smiled his rare smile.

"There is one way."

"And that is?" I asked.

"Why," he said slowly, "a wife can travel on her husband's passport."

A deep blush suffused Olga's face as I put my arms around her.

"Will you travel on my passport, sweetheart?"

"I think so, Robert," she replied.

There is little more of this narrative of mine. We traveled back by easy stages to Tobolsk, and there Olga and I were married by a German clergyman of the Protestant faith. We did not dare to reenter Russia proper. But, on the strength of my passport, which had not yet expired, we were enabled to procure tickets on the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Vladivostok. Thence we proceeded to Seattle and San Francisco, and at last to New York.

(The End.)

There a letter awaited us from Nekrussov, wishing us joy, and telling us that he hoped to serve the Cause in the farther wilds of Siberia, and that we should not perhaps hear from him again. Nor have we, but we think often of that strange and devoted soul.

We thought of him especially when, a short space of time ago, we visited, fully reconciled now to the tragic events that had happened in it, the house on the dunes of the Isle of Palms. As, in those old days of terror, we walked across the sands to the shore, we saw the great breakers roll in, and came at last to the spot where, on that fatal day, Nekrussov had scuttled his boat.

But this time the sun was up, and the sea was blue, and nothing remained in that scene of the old horror. Peace dwelt there for us now — the peace of reconciliation and love.

THE REAL ROSAMOND.

BY S. CARLETON.

Author of "The Micmac," "Lastluck Lake," "The Corduroy Road," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE COINCIDENCE OF A HAT.



AT six o'clock in the morning Rosamond Webb sprang out of her ugly bed, ran across her ugly carpet, and looked out of the window, with her thoughts tumbling over one another.

The first was, that it was a fine day; the second, that after three years she was going away from Webbtown for the first time, and she waltzed across her room as if she were fifteen, instead of twenty-two and a widow, to bow to a little old photograph of herself that was stuck in her looking-glass.

"It was nothing in the world but you," she announced to it gravely. "that put into my head that I *could* go away

from ugly carpets and crape, and everything but Eliza, and be my real self; If I hadn't come across you in that old trunk I believe I'd have kept on forgetting that I ever was a girl named Rosamond Ford, who'd never heard of Webbs or Webbtown; nor," with a quick check to her gaiety, "of being Jabez Webb's widow."

She did not look in the least like any one's widow as she stood in her white dressing-gown, with her bronze hair streaming over her shoulders, but just a slim girl with peachy cheeks and long, curled-up eyelashes; and yet it was true that for three long years she had been Jabez Webb's most unhappy widow.

It was not from grief. When Jabez died suddenly, three weeks after his marriage, it had been nothing but a horrible trembling relief to the nineteen-year-old

wife he had brought to Webbtown, and a guilty shame that she could not be sorry. Perhaps it was because she was not sorry that Rosamond Webb did gladly all that Webbtown demanded of her—which was no small thing—in outward respect to his memory.

Not only did she stay indoors and swathe herself in crape, but she lived in submission to Eliza Webb, the stepdaughter, who was ten years older than she was, till she almost forgot she had a mind of her own, or that there was any other world than Webbtown. She had spoken the truth when she said it was nothing but the sight of her own old photograph that had brought both things back to her. It had been taken seven years ago, when she was fifteen.

Rosamond Ford at fifteen, immature, half-developed, still had something in her face that had stung Rosamond Webb, at twenty-two, out of the lethargy of her widowhood into rebellion against life, Webbtown, and even Eliza. The girl in the picture had had too much courage, and been too happy, to have borne being a slave to any of them. Rosamond stood looking at the vivid little face now, instead of dressing for the journey to which it had inspired her.

"No one would guess it was ever I," she said thoughtfully. "What a thin, long-legged little wretch I was, all eyes and energy. I don't believe even father ever thought I should grow up fairly good-looking, or turn into a slave to Eliza."

At the thought of the dead father, who had been proud of his fearless little daughter, she stooped and kissed the picture. It had been taken in the woods, where she was wont to go with him and—there came to her a rush of remembrance—with Dick Huntingdon. Dick had taken it; and Mrs. Webb wondered sharply what had become of Dick, even as she remembered that she had thought his snap-shot of her so hideous she had torn up the film when only two copies were printed. The one Dick had pocketed in spite of her was dust long ago, no doubt; and somehow she winced at the thought, though Dick had been only a kind friend to a hobble-de-hoy girl. It was nonsense to wonder if she would ever have had to marry Jabez if Dick had

been there when her father died and left her utterly alone, and utterly penniless. He might not have liked her at all if he had known her grown up.

"It's not Dick I'm really thinking of, anyhow," Rosamond reminded herself sharply. "I don't know what put him into my head. It's just the blessed fact that I'm going away for two months. Even if I do have to take Eliza, I can be out of Webbtown for two months."

The respite could not be for any longer; Jabez had seen to that. His will enforced on his widow residence in the Webb mansion, "except for any absence for the space of two months in the company of my daughter Eliza," just as it precluded remarriage. If Mrs. Webb broke either clause her punishment was the same—her inheritance from Jabez went to his daughter; and, despicably or not, Rosamond could not face poverty.

If she had had any friends it might have been different, but in all the world there was not a soul who even wrote to her. At the thought of marrying again, Jabez Webb's widow shuddered, but her two months of freedom she was going to have, and out in the woods for which the sight of her own photograph had made her hungry. They had to be modified woods of course, on account of Eliza, but a stray railway folder had shown Rosamond just the place she wanted.

"Though how I've got Eliza to go there I don't know," she murmured. "I don't believe I ever should have if I'd shown her the folder."

She surveyed reflectively the trunks which were to be checked to Luron Park, Canada. It might turn out to be dull for Eliza, but she would never have dared to take her obstinate, conceited, and simple stepdaughter to a gay summer resort. Even Eliza could not make a fool of herself in lonely woods. And at the thought Rosamond turned with a guilty start, to see Eliza standing behind her.

"I knocked four times," announced Miss Webb from the doorway. "What were you doing?" She was a stout girl, with a pale skin, and not looking her best in a shiny black shirt-waist suit, with her dull brown hair in crimps. Eliza's style was not crimps. "What's that faded little photo?" she added curiously.

"Just a snap-shot of myself when I

was a girl." Rosamond pushed it out of sight. Somehow she had no desire to have Eliza ask questions about it. "Are you all ready?" She longed to add a condemnation of the crimps, but it was not altogether easy to take the lead with Eliza after three years of submission to her rule.

"All but my hat," returned Eliza. "This Luron Park we're going to is just plain country, isn't it?"

"There's only one hotel," said Rosamond nervously. All she knew about Luron Park, in the wilderness, had been gleaned from her railway folder. "I—I think the place is something like the Yellowstone Park, only I believe the government lets it to a company. Why?"

"Nothing. Only, then, my new hat's just the thing to wear." Eliza drew a gray something from behind her back and set it on her crimps.

Rosamond stood appalled. It is not easy for gray duck to be startling, vulgar or rakish, but Eliza's hat had accomplished all three. In spite of her black dress it made her look loud and, somehow, disreputable—like anything but a spinster of thirty-two, who had never been out of Webbtown. Her stepmother forgot all caution.

"Good Heavens, Eliza," she gasped, "you can't wear *that!* Traveling isn't like Webbtown. Some one might speak to you—take you for—anything."

Eliza's upper lip set.

"If you can't wear a light hat, it's no reason I shouldn't," she said superbly. "If you don't choose to go with me in this, *we*," succinctly, "can stay at home."

Rosamond's heart turned over. She had never realized till now how desperately she was set on getting away from Webbtown. Her three years in it with Eliza had been like jail.

"Just as you like," she said meekly, blessedly unconscious of all that was to hang on that very hat. "Only, don't blame me if you're stared at."

Stared at they certainly were as they crossed the station at Toronto the next morning to change cars for Luron Park. People who looked admiringly at Rosamond's brilliant face and the waves of bronze hair her black veil did its best to hide, stared more at sight of her companion.

A night in the train had not improved Eliza's crimps, and the gray hat sat on them more rakishly than ever. If a woman or two smiled wonderingly at the sight of the incongruous pair, it was reserved for a tall man, who stood almost in their way, to start outright at the sight of them, so taken aback that unconsciously he spoke to himself out loud.

"Great Scott!" said he: "there's *the very hat!* and I thought I'd made it up, women and all." He stood rooted in front of Rosamond, his eyes moving from her veil to Eliza's hat, and staying there. "It's just them," he muttered: "them women I—*invented!* And they're turning up just when I can use 'em."

"Hurry, Eliza!" said Rosamond angrily.

There was an evil, triumphant quality in the man's voice that was oddly startling till she realized he had spoken not to her but to himself. Even so, his words stuck obstinately in Rosamond's mind. What on earth could he have meant by saying he had invented her and Eliza? She dismissed the problem smartly by deciding that he was crazy, and pushed Eliza on toward their car. She would have done a thousand times better to have stood where she was and listened with all her ears, but it is not a thing people do in real life. Rosamond swung herself into the train, with no idea she would yet be grateful for what little she had heard.

On the platform the red-haired man stood as if he were paralyzed till a hand descended on his shoulder.

"What were you shouting at?" demanded a shorter man wrathfully, and the red-haired one came to himself with a start.

"That," said he, pointing to Rosamond and Eliza. "Great Scott! Field, don't you see that hat?"

"What about it?" impatiently.

"What about it? Look at the two women—quick! 'Both in black; one mighty pretty, with a black veil all over her; other stout, with an awful gray cotton hat.'" he said, as if he were quoting.

"What?" There was no lack of interest in Field now.

The other nodded dryly.

"Just the description I gave to that

blank ranger in Luron Park of the two women who were go-betweeners to the fur-dealers in the fur-stealing business that's going on in the park. It was made up, lock, stock, and barrel, but by—" he swore rapturously, "I'm looking at live women, who answer to it, getting into the Luron Park car now!"

"If you are," said Field, "I don't see how it can matter."

"You bet it matters," the red-headed man held him fast behind a pile of packing cases that was hiding them from the car windows, "if you don't let them see you talking to me. That ranger's hunting for poachers, ain't he? And I guess if we can get him off on the trail of those women he's been looking for ever since he heard about them, it'll save us a deal of trouble looking for the ranger. He'll go by that description he has of them the second he sees them, and *we'll* go—"

"You can't go back into Luron Park," was the sharp interruption.

"I guess I can, with those women to take attention off me. Why, it's my chance"—his voice fell grimly—"to do a little detective work that'll get me even with the ranger, let alone the rest. I'm going to get my ticket now."

Field seized his arm.

"You're mad to go hunting for the ranger when once he's—seen you," he muttered significantly.

"This time he won't see me," returned the other coolly. "Hold your horses, now. Here's my scheme, if you haven't hit on it. These women that are going to Luron Park look like just the women the ranger's hunting for. It doesn't matter for our use that they aren't. The real ones won't be coming along, because there aren't any. I just told the ranger there were to get time. You get into the ladies' car now and do the polite. Tell 'em where's the best place to take in the beauties of nature in the park, and get 'em started *just where we want them to go!* Then the ranger'll get after them, and I guess we'll have our chance to get after the ranger. I owe him one, if you don't. I agree with him that it's about time that fur-poaching in the park stopped, for it's getting dangerous, but it goes against my grain to have him do the stopping. Let go my arm. I'll lose the train."

But for a second Field kept his grip, staring at the car that held the unconscious Rosamond and Eliza. It was quite true fur-poaching was going on in Luron Park, and true, too, that two women were being looked for in connection with it who answered to the descriptions of Rosamond and Eliza. If their prototypes had never existed anywhere but in the red-headed man's brain, it did not detract from the use that might be made of them, yet—

"What are you going to do while I'm herding the women?" he demanded.

"I'm going to get even with the ranger," said the other darkly. "I bet a detective could make a little trouble for him with the park superintendent. I guess like that we could kind of keep him busy at both ends, and"—he looked straight into Field's eyes—"it's about time that fur-stealing business in the park was stopped. It makes just seventy thousand dollars' difference who stops it—us, or that ranger. And it won't be him—if he follows those women."

For one instant Field's face changed to the face of a different man.

"Well," he said, as if he held down a quick excitement, "I dare say he will follow. Get into the train where I won't knock against you, and I'll—see to the women."

He turned, and strolled casually toward Rosamond's car.

CHAPTER II.

DICK HUNTINGDON.

THE parlor-car was empty, except for Rosamond and Eliza, and as he looked at them Mr. Field smiled, as with the knowledge of some hidden joke. If the red-haired man, for reasons of his own, had made a fancy description of two women he chose to say were engaged in the illicit fur-trade out of Luron Park, he had been inspired—not only as to the stout one's hat, but as to the good looks of the younger one. For more reasons than the business which was taking him to Luron Park, Mr. Field acutely desired Rosamond's acquaintance.

Beyond the sweeping glance which had taken in the newcomer, Rosamond never looked at him. She had settled Eliza

three seats off to avoid conversing with her on the perils of traveling without a gentleman, and was deep in her booklet regarding Luron Park when Field's voice at her elbow made her jump.

Perhaps she had been perfectly aware that his eyes had been on her ever since he got in, but as she encountered them at close range she took an instant objection to their owner. He was well-dressed, dapper, and rather insignificant looking, if it had not been for a curious suggestion of hidden activity about his bearing—but he was not a gentleman.

"Did you speak?" she said distantly.

Field held out a handkerchief of uncompromising cotton.

"I think you dropped this," he suggested.

"It is not mine, thank you." Rosamond had no need for a second glance at the handkerchief, which was plainly Eliza's, though she had no intention of saying so.

The man hesitated, swayed in the aisle, and said something tentative about the weather. Rosamond made no answer, but Eliza, three seats off, turned round and stared.

"Why, that's mine!" she exclaimed. Her hat looked more incongruous than ever as she sat erect in her Webbtown black silk.

Field really started. Rosamond saw him move reluctantly toward Eliza, pulled the blackness of a voluminous chiffon veil over her face, and opened her railway booklet. Ten minutes after she dropped it and stared. The stranger was seated opposite Eliza, deep in conversation, and Eliza, under her awful hat, was smirking. There was no other word for it. Her crimps blew unbecomingly in the draft from the window she had insisted on opening, and her voice reached her stepmother in mincing accents.

"Heavens, it's a flirtation!" thought Rosamond, surprised as people are surprised at earthquakes. "Eliza's *flirting!* I wonder what she's saying." She opened her lips to call Eliza to her, and thought better of it. "I don't want her to think every strange man she meets is Arizona Bill, with a revolver in his pocket," she decided sensibly. "I'd better let her alone. The man will probably be getting out before we do, and I don't really

care who he talks to so long as it isn't I." She left Eliza to her fate and, taking up her book again, began to read in earnest.

Luron Park, it seemed, was a vast, wild region belonging to a syndicate backed by legislation. Firearms were forbidden there, but fishing allowed to license-holders.

"Deer, moose, and bear," Rosamond read, "may be studied with a camera, but no animals may be shot or trapped. The waterways throughout the whole park are a contiguity of lakes and streams navigable for canoes, though some few lakes are connected by short and easy portages over good trails blazed through the forest. The best point of ingress to the park is at Canoe Lake Station, at section eighteen, where a hotel affords good accommodation and all requisites for the camper can be procured. The park rangers, a trustworthy body of men, have each in sole charge a section, the sections numbering from one to eighteen."

"Bah!" thought Rosamond, "what do I care about rangers? All I want is the life I used to lead with father, and it's all there in Luron Park waiting for me."

If it was also waiting for Eliza, she was not going to worry. Eliza would have to bear with Luron Park as her stepmother had borne with Webbtown. Besides, she could be left at the hotel. Cheered by this illuminating thought, Rosamond sank comfortably into the planning of a canoe-trip through the wilderness, alone with wilderness-bred guides. Entering at section eighteen, she could go from Canoe Lake into Little Tea, through the head-waters of the Ox-Tongue River into Smoke Lake, and thence into unknown rivers whose very names were a joy.

"I'll see them all—all," thought Rosamond, when a queer sense of strange eyes on her made her look up.

There was a man passing through the ear, and she had felt more than seen that he paused infinitesimally beside her. It was not the person she contemptuously designated as "the handkerchief man"; nor did the newcomer speak.

As she looked up Rosamond had caught only the most fleeting of glances from him, but something about that

glance took away her very breath; and it was not because the man who gave it was very tall and very good-looking, but because she knew him. Even the way he carried his head, and a certain hawk-like quality in the gray eyes that had for one moment met hers, smote on her heart with a sense of recognition.

"It's Dick—Dick—Huntingdon!" gasped Mrs. Webb. The thing was uncanny. She had hardly thought of Dick till she found that old snap-shot of herself, and here he was in the flesh. She knew the very length of his eyelashes, the way he would throw back his head when he laughed. It flashed across her that he was dressed oddly—in brown duck—but otherwise he had not changed in the five years since she had seen him. And he was passing her like a stranger!

For one wild instant Mrs. Webb was going to call to him, but sanity and the sight of Eliza's bobbing hat in close proximity to the man of the handkerchief restrained her. Train escapades were all very well for Eliza, but not for Rosamond Webb. She had no desire to scrape up old acquaintance with any man, even if he were the Dick Huntingdon she had known when she was Rosamond Ford, the Dick who had taken the snap-shot that lay in her purse now. Dick and she had never been lovers—Jabez was all Rosamond had known of lovers—but they had been friends, as friendship is possible between a girl of fifteen and a man of twenty-seven.

"And no matter what we've been, he's forgotten me," thought Rosamond forlornly, oblivious of the black veil she had pulled over her face after Field had spoken to her. "He didn't know me."

Somehow Dick, if it were Dick, looked very far removed from her and Webb-town, even in his odd canvas clothes. Mrs. Webb had not even courage to turn and see that he was lingering at the car door. If it could have dawned on her that besides being Dick and her old friend, Mr. Huntingdon was vice-president of the Luron Park Company, and at the present time actively engaged there on its business, she might even on the threshold of his territory have turned round and gone somewhere else. But all that came to her was that her glimpse of him was the last reminder of her girl-

hood she was likely to meet, and that even Dick had not known her. Her eyes were absurdly dim as she sat and stared from the car window.

The train was out of civilization now, flashing through heavy woods, and suddenly there came to Rosamond the choking-sweet scent of ripening berries and sweet-fern, like a welcoming signal from the world where she had known Dick. She had almost turned to see if he had noticed it, too, but she was saved from that humiliation by the realization that he had gone. She had heard him bang the car door.

What she did not know was that on the other side of it Mr. Huntingdon stood and swore. The slim, veiled figure in the car had not for one instant reminded him of a girl he had once known. He took out a scrawled paper, looked at it, swore again, and went reluctantly into the smoking-car; and, if the train had not been making time, would have preferred to jump out. Yet the one man who sat in the car started up in joyful surprise at his entrance.

"Hallo, Dick!" he exclaimed: "I'd begun to think you weren't going to make the train. When did you get on? Did any one seem to notice you?"

"I don't think so." Dick stared at the president of the Luron Park Company wonderingly. "Why, Mr. Howe?"

"Tell you in a minute. First," he broke off feverishly, "have you found out anything?"

Dick Huntingdon hesitated, looked behind him toward the parlor-car and grew red.

"I'd rather hear what you have to say before I talk," he said. "Remember, anything I've done here has been almost in the dark. I don't even know the real reason you wanted me to look into the park affairs personally. Your telegram wasn't too explicit."

Howe smiled crookedly.

"You make a mighty good imitation of a park ranger, for a gentleman and an official of the company," he returned irrelevantly, his eye gathering up that intangible quality in Dick's dress that had also struck Rosamond Webb. "Did you have any trouble about managing it?"

"No. I got your wire saying there was fur-poaching going on in the park.

and you wanted me to look into it quietly, so I sailed up there dressed like a tramp, and happened to run on Dillon, the park superintendent. He took me, by bull-luck, for what I seemed, and asked of his own accord if I'd do substitute for one of the park rangers who'd gone home sick. You suggested that I should keep myself as dark as possible, so I didn't inform Dillon I was his own vice-president, come into the park to play ranger and detective. Only what I'd like to know myself is why you wanted me to do it in the character of a guide out of a job, called Hunt? You didn't put any explanations in your wire."

"I'm not using the wires about the fur-poaching scandal in Luron Park," said Howe bitterly. "The position's this. Dick: When you and I and five other men got hold of the tract of wild land that's now Luron Park, built a hotel and opened the place to tourists, the government backed us up with absolutely prohibitory game-laws, which our guides and rangers were supposed to see kept. We gave our word, as you know, to police the place ourselves, and allow no animal to be destroyed.

"Well, we were comfortably turning in dollars while you were in Europe, when I began to hear some mighty ugly rumors about the park management. A couple of fellows told me that poaching of fur-bearing animals was going on with impunity, under our guides very noses, and pelts being taken every day, which was just what the company had given its word to prevent. I put in detectives, and they couldn't find out one thing.

"I was trying to keep the inquiry quiet even from the government, when suddenly the thing came out in the papers, with some very unpleasant insinuations about the park company for not having dropped on the poachers. I had a polite communication from the government that wasn't any pleasanter, and when I heard you were home again I sent you that wire to go up to the park incognito, and see what you could find out as a ranger there. I hadn't been able to find out anything as the company's president. But if you've been up there two weeks without seeing anything—"

"I've found out everything you want to know," interrupted Mr. Huntingdon

unexpectedly. "Beaver and otter *are* trapped in the park. They're taken out by go-betweens, sold to some unknown middleman, and finally land in Buffalo, with whom I don't know. But it's a regular, organized traffic, and the chief carriers between here and the middleman are—women!"

"Women! How d'ye know?"

"Caught a weak-minded brother in the corporation, and he ratted," returned Huntingdon dryly. "You needn't look round for him. He slipped me in the dark the night I caught him. But the women," he went on more dryly still, "are at present behind you in the parlor-car."

"What?" exploded Howe.

"Their descriptions are, if they're not," said the vice-president distastefully. "Listen: '*Both in black, one stout, with an awful colton hat*'—and the Lord knows that's true," he interjected, with scathing recollection of the respectable Eliza. "'*Other one quite young, and mighty pretty. Has reddish hair, and is usually wrapped in a black veil: has been in jail for shoplifting.*'"

Dick threw the scrawled paper over to Howe.

"Go in and look for yourself, if you like," he ended. "I'm done with the thing."

"Done?" questioned Howe.

He got to his feet and went softly down the narrow aisle to the door of the parlor-car. When he came back his face was set to grimness.

"They're the ones," he said in a hard voice. "But, *done* with it? You've just begun, my lad! We can't hold up two women on bare suspicion. You've got to catch them red-handed before you talk of being done."

"I!" Dick sat dumfounded. "I'm not going back into the park to be mixed up with any business about women. What's the matter with a paid detective?"

"Nothing, except that so far they've all proved lost babes in the woods; and that"—Howe pulled himself together—"the papers are saying I've been squared," he added, quietly enough. "Now, perhaps, you'll see where I stand if you throw up the detective business. I don't know who's at the bottom of the thing, but some one's using the fur-

poaching business to ruin me; and he'll do it, if you don't pull me out. I can't afford to put in another detective, who'll find out nothing. I'm suspected myself. Why, there's a government detective on the train this very moment, trailing me!"

"But you can show a clean sheet?" Dick sat aghast.

"It's just what I can't," replied Howe slowly, "unless you can catch those women. No one who doesn't know the place can do it. It's no good confiding in a government detective. The women are going to get out at your own section, for the conductor told me so. All you have to do is to sit there till you catch them. What's the matter?" He stopped nervously. "The train's slowing up."

"For me," said Huntingdon blankly. "I was going to get off and go back for my things." He had no taste for the business in front of him, but he had the sense to see that Howe's trouble was real, and that there was no time to do anything but assent or refuse to help him. "I'm hanged if I'd do it for any one else," he swore reluctantly. "I'll play ranger-detective for one more week, and that's all I'll do, even for you. I don't want to track down women, but I'll do my best to—*for a week.*"

"Well, look sharp, then," said Howe peevishly. "Don't let them see you getting out of the train."

Dick cursed concisely. He was not in a mood to care who saw him as he swung himself from the train.

But Rosamond Webb, still staring from the parlor-car window, started with amazement at the sudden sight of a lithe, familiar figure at the side of the road. The train had slowed till it nearly stopped, and she had time to see Dick Huntingdon get his balance without an effort, and vanish into the woods.

"Where one earth can he be going?" she thought dazedly. There was no station to be seen, though they had long been running through Luron Park. But where he went was no business of Mrs. Webb's. She glanced up, to see Eliza and her newly made friend staring out of their window as she had stared.

"That's not a station." Eliza's head returned into the car disappointedly. "I thought we must be arriving. Didn't I see a man get off?"

"I don't know," returned Rosamond stolidly. Dick Huntingdon was certainly no business of Eliza's. She looked up with annoyance, to see a man who had strolled into the car from the one behind stop dead by her, as if both question and answer interested him.

"What kind of a man?" he asked peremptorily. He was the same red-headed stranger who had been so enigmatically rude about Eliza's hat in the station, and somehow his presence gave Rosamond a start. She made no answer whatever to his question, and neither of the others happened to hear it. Field had turned detachedly away, and Eliza had clapped both hands to her eyes.

"Oh!" she wailed. "Do you suppose he was a train-robber? These awful woods look just like a place for one to hide."

"If he was, I guess he got all he came for," said the red-haired man. He grinned as he glanced covertly at Eliza's hat, and hid his mirth by leaning over Rosamond's shoulder to stare out of the window at the vanishing track.

"I don't think we should stop," exclaimed Eliza. "I don't believe it's safe."

"I should think it was perfectly safe for you to stop anywhere," said Field reassuringly, and only Rosamond caught the sudden insolence of his tone. Eliza did look safe, unless it was from a hungry wolf, but Rosamond did not intend to have an impertinent stranger tell her so. She turned to stare icily at Field, when suddenly Eliza giggled.

"Let me present you to my stepmother, Mrs. Webb—Mr. Field," said she, with Webbtown's best manner. "He's going to Luron Park, too." There was something in her voice that terrified Rosamond. She had always known that Eliza was simple, but she had never dreamed she would be infatuated with the first strange man who took any notice of her.

"My goodness!" she thought; "I hope I'm not going to have trouble with Eliza. She's quite idiot enough to have told this man she has half a million of her own, and he may be *any one*, for all I know." She gave Field the curttest of bows and turned away. It was not to be introduced to unwelcome strangers that

she had refrained from speaking to Dick Huntingdon. If she had to be worried with men, she wished it might be—"Anyhow," she interrupted herself, with injury, "Dick needn't have hurried out of the train." And in her illogical grudge against Dick for not recognizing her she did not notice the red-haired man leave the car.

She would have forgotten him completely if she had not been suddenly aware of his voice in the Luron Park station addressing some person unseen.

"So 'long," it said. "If I don't make good use of those fake ladies, I'll eat the stout one's hat!"

Rosamond turned her head sharply to see who had been addressed. There was no one visible but Mr. Field, languidly appearing from the baggage-room and possessing himself of the smiling Eliza's suit-case.

CHAPTER III.

HUNT THE RANGER.

IF Dick Huntingdon had hurried out of the train, he certainly did not keep on hurrying. As the roadside brush-wood closed behind him he lit a pipe, restrained himself forcibly from swearing and, instead of returning to his ranger's hut by a short cut of his own, cast himself down under a convenient bush and opened a newspaper. He had bought the paper from a newsboy in the train, and remembered now that he had heard nothing of the great world for a fortnight.

"I'm in no hurry to hunt women to ground, anyway," said he crossly. "Of course, if what Howe says is true, not only the president but the whole Luron Park Company's in a mess, but I don't consider their vice-president under any obligation to pull them out of it—except, of course, Howe. I do owe something to Howe. I—hallo!" He stared at his newspaper as if it were going to bite. "Luron Park" stood out on the first page.

LURON PARK SCANDAL. HIGH OFFICIALS INVOLVED.

And so on for five lines of big type, under which one small paragraph looked

insignificant. But it was not. Mr. Huntingdon found himself reading it dazedly over and over again:

Following up the recent rumors concerning the poaching scandal in Luron Park, it has been discovered that one of the company's highest officials looks anything but blameless. The beaver furs alone which are said to have been taken in the park come to a large sum, whose figures are an open secret to the well informed, as are also those of the larger sum said to have been paid to the gentleman in question for his silence or his assistance in the matter. His arrest may be only a matter of days. Indeed, the whole Luron Park Company seems to be in a position from which it cannot extricate itself too soon, or too openly—if either openness or extrication is possible. The government does not protect a tract of country with prohibitory game-laws for the benefit of either one man or a corporation which chooses to use its ownership for plain theft, and makes ill-gotten money by the murder of the fur-bearing animals it ostensibly protects.

There was absolutely no expression on Dick Huntingdon's face as he put down the paper. He rose, deliberately relit his pipe, and as deliberately addressed the deaf woods around him:

"That settles me," he said. "If I have to track sixty women through this place to do it I'm going to fish old Howe out of this mess—and myself, too, for that matter. I suppose I'm in with the company. The papers can throw all the mud they like at us, so long as I've time to arrange that none of it shall stick."

But, though he spoke easily enough, he gave his strong shoulders an angry shake inside his ranger's coat. It was not that he had any pity for either the young, veiled woman in black, or her stout companion in the awful hat. If they chose to play a man's game, they should be treated as men, and put in jail; but the doing of it was not alluring.

Huntingdon walked morosely onward through heavy timber, keeping some sort of line homeward more by instinct than anything else. He was angry and upset at the situation he was in. But he made good time, for it was bare sunset when he emerged from the thick woods upon a scrap of clearing and his own log hut, on the shores of the Ox-Tongue River. At sight of the man who came from the

but as he approached, Dick's brow cleared.

"Hallo, Andrews!" he said, with something of relief, for here was an ally in this distasteful business whom he had forgotten. Andrews, dour and silent, was the only person in Luron Park who was under no illusions as to Huntingdon's identity, being an old friend happily discovered there, and a person not to be despised in fair fight or otherwise. Dick sat down in the cabin doorway, and delivered himself briefly of the events of the morning.

"Women and newspapers," said Andrews slowly. He slapped a hard hand on the paper he had just read. "I guess catching the women's the only way to fight this," he went on. "Mr. Howe's right, Mr. Dick—"

"For goodness' sake"—Dick was ruffled—"remember I'm plain Hunt, the ranger."

"If you were," retorted Andrews, "I wouldn't be talking. If you take my advice you'll either clear out and be yourself as quick as you can, or else you catch those women—on the quiet, like Mr. Howe says—and have a clean face to show if any one comes round suspecting *you*. There's no knowing what guide in the park isn't making money out of furs, and ready to put a knife in you for stopping it. Dillon, the superintendent, is straight, because he's too big a fool to be anything else, but the rest may know who you are as well as I do; and it won't look well if they tell it to a government detective to save their own skins."

"I know," said Dick wrathfully. "But we can't do anything till to-morrow. The women will spend the night at the hotel. Let's have dinner. I'm starving."

"I guess I'll have more of an appetite after we catch the women," growled his subordinate. "I'll take care of this end of the trail, and I'd sooner have to fight wildcats barehanded. You mind yourself, Mr. Dick. You don't know anything about them sort of women."

The imitation ranger had no desire to, but his only response was a laugh.

To a casual observer it would have seemed that he occupied the next morning in idleness, but it was an idleness that took him and his canoe to the only places where women, even if they were

poachers' carriers, could come into his district. But there was neither guide nor stranger stirring anywhere, and for once there was not an illicit trap to be found. Dick had broken up about twenty traps in his first week as ranger. He supposed the man he had caught, and been fool enough to let slip, had set them, for certainly there were none now. At sunset Huntingdon decided wrathfully that his day had been wasted, and the women he had been looking for gone into some other district, where they would be as easy to lay hands on as a needle in a bundle of hay; also that there was going to be a thunder-storm that would catch him five miles from home. Dick had no use for the park thunder-storms, and Andrews's steaming clothes would be enough for one hut in one evening. He got down to his canoe and the river at a run, and on the shore stopped dead.

There were two canoes coming upstream in plain sight. More, they were even now drawing in to land in the nearest cove; and, at the look of the outfit, the sham ranger changed his mind about his wasted day.

"It's my ladies, and alone," said he grimly. He slipped his canoe into the water and wiggled it silently down toward the party, close in cover of the shore. The two men who paddled the canoes were guides. One, who wore a beard, he knew, though not by name. Dick checked his canoe behind a convenient rock to watch them and the two women, and the first cold blast of the coming storm swept over him unnoticed, for at close range one of the women was not the sort he had expected.

To the horror and rage of Eliza, Rosamond had "gone into colors." She wore a tan drill, plain and short-skirted; but if, thus attired, she reminded Dick of a child, it was not of any child he had ever known. For one thing, the seven years that had passed since he had seen her had filled out her figure to unrecognizable beauty, to a grace of which a wiry, long-legged girlhood had given no promise. Even if Rosamond Ford had been in his mind—which she was not—he would never have connected her immature girlish image with that of the woman she had grown into.

For another thing, he got no view of

her face. The green, unwholesome light of the coming storm showed out her height and liteness like a picture as she sprang from her canoe to the shore, and waited for the second woman to join her; and, even with her back turned to him, it rushed over Dick Huntingdon then and there—and afterward he was glad to remember it—that either his man had lied, or he had mistaken identities. This was not the sort of girl who could ever have been in jail for shoplifting. There was a sweet, brilliant security about her, even while she balanced herself on a slippery rock and shaded her eyes with both her hands from the light of the coming storm.

"I don't believe that girl ever thought of fur-poaching," Dick commented blankly. The party was evidently stopping where they were for the night, in open view of the river, a thing which no poachers' go-betweens would do. "That pair of guides she has must be idiots. Why don't they get the tents up? Any fool could see what's coming."

He closed in on the party, with disappointed interest, and as he came within ear-shot was aware of a bitter commotion. The two guides were standing sulky and uncertain, while the bronze-haired girl addressed the stout lady, who sat shawled in the second canoe. Rosamond had not dared to leave Eliza at the hotel, after all. It had been all she could do to drag her away from Field and Field's devotion; but she should stay away, even if it meant spending a night in the rain.

"You just *must* get out of that canoe, Eliza," she said firmly. "Hurry!" Her voice changed as she turned to the guides. "Please get the tents up now. This lady doesn't really mean what she said."

"I guess not," returned the bearded guide sourly. Eliza had evidently said a good deal. But he thawed as Rosamond looked at him. "We'll get you housed up out of the rain all right, miss. Don't you worry."

Rosamond nodded, and bent to the hunched-up figure in the canoe.

"Do be sensible," she said in a whisper Dick was near enough to catch. "I didn't mean you to sleep in a tent, but I couldn't foresee that we'd have a thunder-storm, and not be able to go on. Get out, do, and help me with the things!

If you don't, everything will be drenched before the men get the tents up."

"I won't move," said Eliza slowly, through the shawl that covered her head. "We were to go to the shelter hut at Smoke Lake. You know you arranged everything for Smoke Lake?"

"Arranged? What did I arrange that one night's going to matter about? Anything that I'm going to Smoke Lake for can wait," cried Rosamond, and the words staggered her unseen hearer.

"Well, I'm going on," snapped Eliza. "I won't sleep in the wood alone with two guides I never saw in my life. I"—she snatched off her shawl, disclosing her black silk and gray hat—"I said I would be at Smoke Lake to-morrow, whatever you did—and I'm going!"

The amateur detective behind the rock started. They *were* his women, in spite of the younger one's looks and her sweet voice; and if they had a rendezvous at Smoke Lake it was up to him to keep them from getting there. He shoved his canoe gently out into view, but Rosamond did not notice it. An awful suspicion about Field had come over her with Eliza's obstinacy about Smoke Lake—a suspicion that should not turn into fact if she died for it.

"Get out!" She spoke very quietly, but at something in the face of her once meek stepmother Eliza did begin to get out. She rose, staggered, and nearly fell into the water as she was aware of Dick behind her.

"Mr. Field!" she screamed. "Oh, Mr. Field, I thought we'd missed you!"

"Mr. Field!" gasped Rosamond. Then it was true that Eliza had planned to meet him. She stared, with abject relief, at the strange man who was landing, and then caught her breath. It was no stranger, but Dick Huntingdon again, still in the queer rough clothes that were so unlike him. In her surprise Rosamond stood speechless as Dick took off his cap.

"I'd better help you," he said bruskiy. If Rosamond had a good memory, he had not. No faintest thought of her identity came to him. Besides, the word "help" stuck in his throat, used as it was toward women it was his business to betray, and he did not look at her. "You've no time to lose, madam, if you

want to keep dry," he adjured Eliza sharply.

"I'm not going to be trapped into doing anything," snapped Eliza. Mr. Huntingdon's clothes did not recommend him to her, and she was unwilling to be ordered about by a strange guide.

"Be quiet," said Rosamond sternly. She turned to face Dick and recall herself to his memory. His name was on her very lips, when something in his face froze it back.

"My—my stepdaughter is nervous," she began to stammer instead.

"Your *what!*" Even to a man who could not help admiring her the girl was palpably looking for words, and to explain the stout woman as her stepdaughter was plain nonsense. Dick had no desire to watch her lie to him, even if she were a thief. He turned his gaze coldly toward the horizon.

Something hostile in the interruption, and the indifferent, averted face added to Rosamond's confusion.

"My stepdaughter is nervous," she repeated weakly. "She has not been used to this," waving her hand at a sufficiently forbidding landscape; "nor to tents and guides. She is afraid they may not be trustworthy."

"They're perfectly so," said Dick dryly, remembering that the speaker was not, "Much more so than the weather we're going to have. If your stepdaughter is wise she will let me help her out of that canoe."

"I won't," said Eliza flatly. "Oh!" and she screamed. A sudden violent stream of cold air had swirled her silks around her, the lightning seemed to fill the whole sky, and she flung herself bodily into Dick's arms.

Mr. Huntingdon, staggering under the impact, hauled her brusquely to dry land.

"Get under a tree before the rain comes," he ordered curtly, and shouted something to the guides, who were working frantically at the tents.

But it was too late. The flapping canvas flew from their hands, split to rags with a snapping crash, and was snatched away over the tree-tops. With the startling bellow of thunder down came the rain, white and solid as slanting swords.

"That settles it," said Dick grimly. Fate was certainly playing into his hands

as to catching his fur-carriers, but he had no pleasure in the job. "You can't stay here."

A tan figure flashed to his side through the tumult of wind and rain, flung a waterproof about the terrified Eliza, and paused an instant before it confronted him. An oilskin sheet, snatched from the canoe, swathed the girl's head and shoulders, muffling all but the vivid dark eyes and the bronze hair that blew out round them in little riotous locks. If this stiff, inimical man were her Dick, whom she had loved girlishly a hundred times over, Rosamond was not going to force herself on his remembrance. She would not even have spoken to him again if she could have helped it.

"What can we do, then?" she demanded as easily as she could. "We can't go back to the hotel: it's much too far."

Huntingdon would not look at even as much as he could see of the lovely, excited face. If the girl was going to turn out to be a fur-carrier, it was none of his business to think her pretty.

"You'll have to come home with me," he returned authoritatively. "I'm—one of the park rangers. I can put you up for the night. Your tents are no loss: I may be able to fix you up with better ones in the morning." And he might, if he did not have to send out for the police first. He bundled Eliza, now frightened to silence, into her canoe, shouted some orders to the guides, which sent them and their charges flying up the Ox-Tongue River, and brought up the rear in his own canoe.

"A ranger," thought Rosamond dumfounded. "*Dick* a ranger!" She stared back at him incredulously through the rain as he kept his canoe twenty yards behind hers. That explained his queer clothes. But what on earth had made Dick Huntingdon turn into a park ranger? He could neither have lost all his money, nor be hiding from the police, yet these were the only two explanations that came to her.

"I won't believe either of them," she thought angrily. "Dick would never do anything wrong, and if he lost his money he isn't the kind to sit down and let it stay lost. Besides, no matter what he chooses to be, he'll always be just Dick

to me—even if I never have the courage to tell him so.”

She discovered suddenly that her guide was speaking to her.

“I guess you knew Mr. Hunt before?” he said slowly.

“Knew *who!*” gasped Rosamond. Had Dick dropped even his name?

The man leaned forward where he knelt, facing her.

“Hunt, the ranger,” he said cautiously. “If you did, I wish you’d tell him something; it ain’t no business of mine. You tell him a man who came in on the same train you did was talking about him to the superintendent last night, and saying his name wasn’t Hunt, but only something like it; and that he wasn’t in here for any good, playing ranger. I guessed you knew Hunt the second you looked at him; and if you do—why, you tell him what I say.”

Rosamond sat staring. She had known Dick Huntingdon, but not the Dick who chose to be out in the woods, masquerading under a shortened name.

“What kind of a man was talking about him?” she demanded.

“A red-headed, long-necked cuss that said he was a detective,” answered the guide. “So now you know why Hunt ought to be warned. I haven’t got the face to do it—I know Hunt’s white—but you could just mention you seen the man in the train. You must have, anyway?”

“A detective!” Rosamond’s start nearly upset the canoe. Detective, or no detective, it made her boil with rage to think of a brute like the red-haired man, who had stared at her so in the Toronto station, daring to track a man like Dick. It did not dawn on her that either his staring or his words about inventing her and Eliza could have had anything to do with his pursuit of Huntingdon. It was repulsion for him, pure and simple, that put her on Dick’s side. For all she knew he might be a criminal now, but he had begun as a gentleman, and he had been her girlhood’s best friend. “And besides,” she concluded scornfully, “I don’t believe one word that red-headed man could say. I think myself that he’s crazy.”

And perhaps she did, but, all the same, her heart sank as her guide thrust the canoe’s head to the shore, and she saw

the hut Dick lived in. He must be in trouble to have come to a ghastly, lonely place like this.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

SUCH as it was, Mr. Huntingdon had given over his shack to his puzzling visitors. Andrews was no sybarite, and the place did not look inviting even with a fire in the stove and after a hot supper. Of the owner there was no sign. Unless he were in the tents that had been put up for the men, Rosamond did not know where he was, but she was going to find out, as soon as she had settled something with Eliza. And she frowned as she walked to that lady’s side.

“Are you dry?” she asked. “Because if you are I want to speak to you.”

Eliza roused from a doze by the stove.

“I’m nearly exhausted, and my head aches frantically,” she snapped. “If I thought that ranger man wouldn’t be in I’d go to bed—if you can call those things beds.” She indicated, with a scornful glance, the two bunks on the wall.

“He won’t be in,” said Rosamond shortly. “even if it means he has to sit out in the rain. He’s been awfully good, Eliza.”

“Well, we can pay him,” returned Eliza, yawning. “Though I don’t believe he’s much more trustworthy than those horrid guides. He can’t be a gentleman like Mr. Field; he has such common clothes.”

“We can’t dare offer him money,” flared Rosamond. “And as for his not being a gentleman, he’s—” But once more she bit back Dick’s name. “What did you mean,” she asked instead, “by calling him Mr. Field when we first met him?”

“I thought he was Mr. Field,” said Eliza in injured tones.

“Why? You knew we left Mr. Field at the hotel?”

“I know you thought we did,” returned Eliza with a giggle. “But he was going to join us as soon as he could catch up. He couldn’t get a guide when we started. I quite thought the ranger was he at first.”

Rosamond sat stumped. Her only reason for bringing Eliza on the canoe trip at all had been to get her away from Field, and her stepdaughter's lack of reluctance at the start had shed a new light on it.

"I don't see when you talked to him," she cried.

"I"—even Eliza colored—"I didn't go to bed when you did," she muttered. "I went down in the hotel parlor, and Mr. Field said he saw we should never be able to get on without a gentleman."

"Do you mean he calmly suggested joining us, without being asked—that horrid man?" asked Rosamond sharply. "Good gracious, Eliza, couldn't you see he was common?"

Eliza bristled.

"I consider Mr. Field a perfect gentleman."

"If he were he wouldn't try to attach himself to us," said Rosamond slowly. "I didn't come out here to be followed up by strange men. Why, for all we know, that horrid, red-haired man who spoke to us at Toronto might come along, too. He has just as much right to." It was spoken without a thought, but the sound of the words terrified her. Suppose he did come, before she had warned Dick about him? Quite suddenly Rosamond knew that whatever Dick had done she was on his side about it. She was not going to let him be taken unawares, even if he were a murderer.

"I'm sure Mr. Field was more than kind in offering to take charge of us," muttered Eliza, and it sounded so irrelevant that Rosamond nearly asked her what she was talking about. "And you can't stop him now, for he'll have started."

"I'm not worrying about him," said her stepmother absently. "Go to bed, Eliza! I'll come in a minute; I want some air."

She went out of the shack door, and stood in the soft rain that had succeeded the thunder-shower. She did want air, and time to think. It was not going to be easy to tackle Dick.

The simplest way was to tell him who she was, yet Mrs. Webb shrank from it. Dick had probably forgotten there ever was a girl named Rosamond Ford, or he would have recognized her; and, if he

were hiding in these woods to keep out of the way of a detective, he would not thank even a friend of his youth for calling him anything but Hunt, the ranger. And, besides all that, the girl who had been Rosamond Ford was ashamed to confess she had ever married Jabez Webb, or any one else, just for a home. Dick would despise her. Yet, despise her or not, it had to be done.

She looked up, startled, to see him at her elbow. It did not dawn on her that either he or Andrews had held her in sight ever since she came, except while the shack door was safely closed on her, yet her heart sank as he spoke. His voice was not the voice of the man she had once known.

"Did you want anything?" Dick inquired detachedly. He was angry with himself and the world in general. His fur-poachers' assistants had been betrayed into his hands, but there was nothing incriminating about them or their baggage. He supposed his only course was to let them go in the morning, and then dog them secretly to the rendezvous the stout woman had said was arranged for Smoke Lake, but it was a course that went against his grain with women.

"Yes," said Rosamond slowly. "I want to go anywhere else than Smoke Lake in the morning, and I wanted you to help me manage it."

The answer was so unexpected that Huntingdon started.

"You've only yourself to consult about Smoke Lake," he returned dryly. "I don't know how I could help you." Against his will he found himself liking the girl, and he did not want her to confide in him.

"It's not I," said Rosamond impatiently; "it's my stepdaughter. She arranged to meet a man—oh! a horrid sort of man—at Smoke Lake, and it simply means I won't go there. And she won't go anywhere else unless I drag her. But that's only a trifle. It's not what I wanted to see you about. Please come in here out of the rain."

She led the way into a leaky lean-to that ran out from the shack, and was well out of ear-shot from Eliza. It struck Dick oddly that she did it as casually as if she had known him all her life. With a curiosity to see her face, he picked a

lantern out of a dry corner and lit it. The light struck clear on his own face, and suddenly Rosamond grew frightened. Suppose the red-headed detective had got as far as this already, and was watching the man he sought!

"Put out the light!" she cried, with quick desperation. "You don't know who might see you. It's you I really want to talk about. You're in danger. Never mind how I know, but I do know! There's a detective looking for you. For all I know he may be here now. It's wet and dark and quiet. You could get out of his way if you went now."

For a moment Dick stood speechless. There was something oddly truthful in the girl's voice; and, besides, it was quite likely that if Howe was watched he was also, especially if he had been recognized in his ranger's clothes. But it was a cool move on the part of a fur-carrier to get rid of him.

Rosamond flung herself past him and put out the light.

"I suppose you think you're none of my business," she said faintly; "but you are, in a way. I don't want him to catch you, because—oh, you won't understand unless I tell you something about myself first! I'm not—I am—"

"Be quiet," said Dick. It had rushed over him that if he had been able to find and destroy twenty traps in the district of the ranger he had displaced, that ranger might very well have been employed in the illicit fur-trade; and this girl, who was in it, too, he taking him for his predecessor. It made her warning honest, and not an attempt to get rid of him; but he had no desire to hear her say things he might have to use against her.

"Look here," he added suddenly. "I don't want you to tell me one thing about yourself. I may know more than I choose to say. Haven't you thought of that?"

To a woman who had never heard of the fur-carrying trade, and thought only of the friend of her girlhood, the speech was like a blow in the face. It took all Rosamond Webb's strength to answer.

"Yes," she said slowly. "I have; but I thought perhaps you'd trust me. I'll go now." She could not talk any more to this man who knew her and would not say so, for his own reasons. "I've warned you. I can't do any more."

The flat disappointment in her voice startled Dick Huntingdon.

"Wait," said he roughly. "Why do you meet that man in the morning? You're a free agent." That much he could say to her.

"Free?" Since Dick knew her, and did not even pretend to be glad to see her, it could not matter what she said to him. "I'm not free," she cried with sudden frankness. "You don't know the life I've led for the last three years. I've never done one thing but what I was told to—I've just been in *jail*! Even out here I'm not free; I have to drag Eliza round with me."

"Jail!" The plain word startled him, though he had known the fact.

"Oh, I didn't mean to say that." She was not going to wail to Dick, of all people. "I just called it so to myself. But I might as well go back to it, if a man I never saw till yesterday is going to follow me round here. Why, I didn't even want to bring Eliza."

"Why did you?" he questioned bluntly.

"Because I had to. I can't go anywhere without her. But I never dreamed she'd want to tack on this horrible Field man, too. He frightens me."

Her voice rang flat and dreary in the dark lean-to, and Dick felt a sudden sharp compassion for her. Young, obviously brought up like a lady, utterly alone except for the stout woman, afraid of the man who followed her, and owning up that she had been in jail. He had not taken much stock in her disclosure about the detective, except to wish impatiently that he could hand the whole business over to him and get out, but he did now. He did not want any fool of a detective interfering with him, nor laying hands on this poor child of a criminal till he was sure she deserved it.

And quite suddenly he thought of a plan which might let her out, if she were honest, and catch her confederates at the same time. He had no pity for Eliza nor the man waiting for her at Smoke Lake. The plan was no more nor less than himself to oversee Rosamond's journey to Smoke Lake, secretly and unseen. He would be in a position then to drop on the stout woman and the man she was to meet; in a position, too, to keep the girl out of the meeting.

Mr. Huntington made no attempt to defend this line of conduct. He meant to follow it, and that was all. But he had no intention of confiding it to Rosamond. In common decency he must let her work out her own salvation and give him tangible evidence of her horror of the man at Smoke Lake.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "you wanted to go somewhere else than Smoke Lake, you said. That's the only place you *can* go to unless you turn back; only there are two ways to it. If you choose to take the right fork of the river it will take you straight to the lake and the man you say you don't want to meet; if you take the left fork you need never see him. I'm not advising you one way or the other. You can take your choice in the morning. But, if you really want help, I've given it to you."

Rosamond made no answer. In the dark Dick wondered if she were laughing at him, and, with an ungovernable curiosity to see her face, struck a match sharply. But all he saw was the back of her head, for at the scratch of the match she had wheeled instinctively away. Dick Huntington, who did not want to own he knew her, should not see that she was nearly crying with sick disappointment in him and the help he had flung at her.

As she stared out, however, into the dark, fighting down her tears, something that struck on her nerves more than on her senses thrilled her; a sense of the river that flowed so near them, and of something on that river that stirred.

"Hurry!" she muttered fiercely. "There's something—some one coming. Oh!"

So quickly that Dick was dazed she sprang straight at him and, with one motion, struck the match from his hand and dragged him from the lean-to door.

And she was just in time. A shot from an air-gun whistled past the very spot that had been occupied by Dick Huntington's head, and buried itself harmlessly in the lean-to wall.

But Dick did not wait to see where it went. He had marked the flash, and he ran for the place, but the wet darkness of the river was empty. When he came back, angry and breathless, the girl was crouched on the floor just where he had flung her aside.

"I thought he'd got you," she said faintly. "It was the red-headed man. I'm sure it was. Did you see him?"

These surprising words disposed of all Dick's doubts of her connection with the fur-carrying business. The man he had described to Howe as the weak-kneed brother he had caught and let go had fiery hair. It was more than coincidence if this girl knew him.

"Was he the man you didn't want to meet at Smoke Lake?" he cried.

"He," she answered scornfully; "no! He's the detective."

In the dark Dick stared. Firearms were not allowed in Luron Park, nor did detectives shoot at even disguised officials on sight. Either the girl was not in all the fur-poachers' secrets, or she had deliberately chosen to save his life from one of her own confederates. In either case he owed her a debt, and even for Howe's sake he would not trust to luck to pay it.

"Why did you pull me out of the way?" he asked curiously, in a voice so like that of the old Dick's that Rosamond's eyes filled.

"You said you didn't want to know," she whispered.

"Neither I do." For one moment Dick looked at the dim outline that was all he could see of her in the dark, but if he had a boxful of matches in his pocket, he made no move to light another one. It was bad enough to know that the girl was a thief, without having to carry about with him the memory of the face of her whom it was his duty to betray.

But he would not betray her till he had no choice, and he spoke on the thought, deliberately:

"All I want of you is to hold your tongue about yourself, and choose your own way to Smoke Lake to-morrow. But"—and he would not have said it if she had not saved his life—"if you want to be safe you'll take the left fork of the river. It's your only chance."

It was not till she had disappeared in the shack that he knew he had been a fool to say it, and that the girl inside was probably laughing at him. Probably the shot and she had taken his attention off the river, and left it clear for loaded canoes to go by. And yet—

"I'm hanged if I'll believe she did it for that," said Dick Huntingdon, with foolish faith in a girl's voice, for after all he had little more than that to go on.

CHAPTER V.
UNDER SUSPICION.

IN the white mist of morning Dick's heart was troubled as he stood on the river-bank, watching Andrews silently and surreptitiously loading a canoe with provisions.

Andrews looked up suddenly.

"I guess you're right to go," he said. "I believe a canoe passed up-river last night, and if it was the red-headed man in it you can't be too quick at catching him. But I wouldn't trust that girl too far. Mr. Dick, even if she did save your life."

"I'm not trusting her at all," returned Dick impatiently. "She may have known a canoe passed, and she mayn't, and I've got to know, just as I've got to find out where the poachers are. If I let her and her friend go apparently untracked to Smoke Lake I may find out; whereas, if you and I stalk them openly, the man they're going to meet may smell a rat and disappear. The red-headed man knows we're no friends to fur-poachers, and I suppose he has a tongue in his head to warn the other one.

"Four canoes coming up the river, where they only expected two, would be enough to frighten away both men, but the way we'll do it they'll never see the extra ones. I'm going to get into Smoke Lake now by the backwaters and the left fork of the Ox-Tongue, and be there before I'm looked for. You needn't know where I've gone. You can let the women start off with their guides just as if you didn't think anything about them. What did you say was the name of the one in the cotton hat?"

Andrews grinned.

"Miss Webb, of Webbtown; but I guess any other would do as well. Are you going to stop at Smoke Lake?"

"If my poachers do," said Huntingdon grimly; "and I've a good guess they will, but they won't see me. I'll make camp in Wolf Cove. It gives a good view of anything that passes on the lake,

and I'll be safe, anyhow, from being shot at, since nobody'll guess I could get there ahead by the left fork of the river."

Andrews nodded.

"Where do I come in? Am I to go with you?"

Dick looked behind him, but the guides were still slumbering in their tent, and there was no sign of life in the women's shack.

"You're going to be the other canoe the poachers won't see," he returned. "You're to follow Miss Webb at a safe distance, and out of sight, wherever she chooses to go. I won't be able to tell where it is if I go on ahead. I told the girl"—he had no belief in the step-mother business—"to take the left fork of the river to the lake, but I've no dream the stout woman's going to follow it, too. Once she finds herself alone and unnoticed on the way to Smoke Lake she'll take the quickest route to the man she's going to meet there—that is, if she doesn't suspect she's watched. If she does, she'll try to disappear, and you've got to prevent it, somehow. Ostensibly, of course, you're staying here."

"She'll suspect something right enough, if you've told the girl to go by the longest way," objected Andrews sensibly.

"I didn't tell her why," retorted Dick. "I said I wasn't trusting her. She'll start off in her own canoe with her own guide, and I'll be waiting at the fork of the river. If she takes the right one I'll know she lied to me last night for her own reasons; if she takes the left, it'll be that much for her instead of against her."

"I guess just plain following would be simpler," remarked Andrews dryly. He had no use for Dick's plan of giving the girl a chance.

"A good idea," answered Dick scornfully; "with the red-headed man waiting to pot either of us from behind the first convenient rock! No; I'm not doing any tracking openly after last night, and neither are you. I'm off now, and you can get the women started. Tell them casually that they can get to Smoke Lake by either fork of the river. If they choose to take the main channel, it's up to them."

"Does the girl know where you'll be?"

Dick put his canoe in the water.

"I've told you twice I wasn't trusting her," he said grimly. "If you're right, and I can't, she'll turn up the right fork of the river, and I'll be there to see her do it. But if I'm right about her, you'll find her sitting in camp with me at Wolf Cove when you turn up to report."

And he had felt sure that he was right as he paddled noiselessly away from Andrews and disappeared in the cold mist of the morning.

Toward eleven o'clock, with himself and his canoe safely hidden from sight in the underbrush of the point where the river forked, he was not so sure. The day was clear now, and hot. Under the sun the river sparkled in a thousand diamonds, dazzling and blank. Huntingdon dared not smoke, lest the point might hold other watchers than himself; and he had not thought he was thus to be devoured by a fever of anxiety as to whether the girl to whom he had given a chance was going to take it or not.

He had no anxiety as to losing his prey—Andrews would keep watch of them; but, as the morning wore on, disappointment bit him to the bone. The girl had lied; and whether she had chosen to save his life or not, she had also chosen to see no more of him.

With a dull and utterly unreasonable sickness at his heart, Huntingdon went down on all fours and crawled through the hot, sweet-smelling underbrush to the other side of the point, but the river was blank there, too. Not a living thing moved on it. He lifted his head to make quite certain, and ducked. The girl, or some one, was coming at last. There were paddles flashing down the river from one—no, two canoes!

Motionless in the bracken, Dick lay and watched them, and his heart thumped as they grew plain. In the first sat the girl—it was his only name for her; in the second he descried the stout woman's cotton hat. Were they both coming by the left fork; or were they, totally unsuspecting of eyes on them, taking their own way to their rendezvous and Smoke Lake?

"I haven't got anything to do with the girl," he reminded himself fiercely. "She's just a bit of driftwood I'm trying to save from smashing up in the rapids."

But he knew it was a lie as he thought it. He had an interest in her, whether she was good, bad, or indifferent. His heart had never gone evenly since first he met her eyes. Lying there watching the flash of her paddles, he knew that he would give all he had in the world to be sure she was what she looked—just a girl, innocent of fur-carrying and shoplifting, and all her miserable trade. Suddenly he had all he could do to keep in a shout.

The girl *was* honest—at least in wanting to avoid the man at Smoke Lake. Her canoe, without a pause, had taken the left fork of the river.

Eliza, watching Rosamond go, leaned forward and spoke to her bearded guide. No one had ever given Eliza much credit for intelligence, but she had it, of a kind. It had not dawned on Rosamond that her stepdaughter could have opened the shack door the night before to listen for snatches of conversation from the lean-to, nor that if she had heard nothing from there, she had heard a sound from somewhere else. Eliza had known that a canoe went by, and her upper lip had set doggedly as she guessed it was Field's. He could be going nowhere but to the shelter hut where she had promised to meet him, and, in spite of Rosamond, she would go too.

There had been more between them than Rosamond guessed at. No one had ever held Eliza's hand before, nor even talked of love. It had taken very little to turn Eliza's head, and make her ready to go through fire and water to keep her promise to Field. Her guide once given directions to take the right fork of the river, and go straight to the shelter hut, "unless they met a gentleman of her party on the way," Eliza leaned back on her cushions placidly, and forgot everything but Field. Whether Rosamond took the other way or not made no matter, since both led to Smoke Lake.

Miss Webb was not troubled by the awful thought that she would meet Field unchaperoned. Webbtown had not prepared her for meaningless flirtation. Remembering Field's whispers at the hotel, she had already arranged the details of her wedding and, with a thrill, saw it announced even in the New York papers. Rosamond would think differently of Mr. Field then.

But Rosamond had forgotten Mr. Field's existence, and likewise even her step-daughter's. The first thing that had met her eyes as she rounded the left fork of the river had been Dick Huntingdon's canoe, and Dick in it—Dick, who, coming out of the shack in the chill of morning, she had thought had gone away. Her heart had sunk at his absence, for it meant that he did fear the detective. Of course that was not surprising, after he had been shot at, yet illogically it shamed her to think he had run away.

"You!" she cried incredulously. She had taken the left fork of the river dully enough—she seemed to care very little now whether Eliza encouraged Field or not—and it had brought her to Dick. For a moment she could not believe her eyes that Dick should be here waiting in his canoe for her—eager, alert, splendid, with the sun shining on his dogged face, and the curious little smile of triumph on his lips.

"Yes, it's I," he said slowly. "I thought—somehow—that you'd come."

"You told me to," she answered simply. But her pulses surged riotously with the youth that had been dormant at Webbtown. Dick was not the Dick of last night—he *cared!* Whether he chose to recognize her or not, he cared; and they two were out in the wilderness together. Yet she would not have him know how glad she was, nor betray the foolish joy in her heart, when in five minutes it might suit him once more to trample on it. A hideous green-lined umbrella of Eliza's, that had somehow strayed into her canoe, caught her eye, and she put it up hastily. Anything for a shelter from Dick Huntingdon's eyes.

"I told you; I didn't know you'd obey me, though," said Dick rather flatly. Somehow he resented the shielding umbrella, though the last thing in his thoughts was the identity behind it. "You ass!" he reminded himself silently; "you ought to be glad of it. God knows, you don't want to look at the girl and have to remember all the time that she's a thief, and that you're low enough to be trailing her. If she has to go to jail, you don't want every line of her face to wake you up at night and remind you that you put her there. He bit his lip and hesitated. "If it suits

you," he found himself saying, "I'll take you up to Smoke Lake in my canoe. Your guide's got quite enough with the luggage. What do you say?"

Mrs. Webb only nodded, because she was pinching her wrist to make sure she was not dreaming. But when she was safely seated amidships of Dick's canoe a cold backwash of fear rushed over her.

"Oh!" she cried involuntarily; "ought you to be here? Is it safe?"

"What? You, or the canoe?"

"No." It must be said. "You! The—-the detective might come." The words came from behind the umbrella.

Dick started. He had honestly forgotten the red-headed man.

"He won't shoot at me this side of the fork," he said, sending the canoe forward sharply. "any more than you're likely to meet the man you don't want to here. This way to Smoke Lake isn't exactly traveled," he added, with a glance at the tortuous channel they were threading. "He'll take the other way if he takes any. Satisfied?"

"Yes," said Rosamond; but it was not quite true. She would never be satisfied till Dick spoke out to her about everything—himself, the detective, and his reasons for playing ranger. He played it well, though. Even Eliza had never guessed he was a gentleman. And at the thought Rosamond jerked aside her umbrella and stared at the fork of the river they had left.

"Good Heavens!" she gasped; "I forgot all about Eliza. And she isn't following. There's not a sign of her. Do you suppose she's gone the other way, after all I said to her? I'll have to go back or she'll get lost."

"She can't." Umbrella or no umbrella, Dick did not look up; he went on paddling coolly. If his heart ached for the girl, he would not make things worse deliberately. "Her guide's with her," he added; "and she'll make Smoke Lake more easily by the other way than this." Miss Webb was doing exactly what he had expected her to do, but he wondered a little how the girl was going to explain her companion's action.

Rosamond, however, had no intention of explaining; Eliza was too infuriating. Mr. Field had been her only object in coming on the canoe trip at all, and her

stepmother knew she had gone calmly in search of him.

"It just comes from her never having had any attention from a man in all her stupid life," she thought wretchedly. "The very first one who took the trouble to talk to her has turned her head." But all she said was: "You're sure Eliza will be safe if I don't go back?"

Dick winced.

"I sent a man after her in case she did take the right-hand channel," he said roughly. "I think you may make your mind— But he had not the courage to say "easy," when the stout woman was running straight into a trap. "She won't get lost or shipwrecked," he added instead. "We'll hear of her as soon as we get to Smoke Lake."

If he had dared to look at Rosamond he would have seen her face clear, but she had reinstated her umbrella before she spoke.

"It's the shelter hut she's making for," she returned more easily. "But I won't let her stay there if I can help it. I'm not going to any shelter hut with horrid tourists. I'm going to camp, if you'll show me a place. I can send for Eliza, can't I?"

Dick nodded, with a guilty knowledge of just how he meant to send for Eliza, and changed the subject with some relief.

"We get out here. It's the first carry, and I'm afraid you'll have some rough walking. If you'll sit down somewhere I'll come back for you."

Rosamond watched him in a whirl of mixed thoughts as he and the guide disappeared over the portage with the first canoe on their shoulders. Dick carried his end as if it were nothing. Even the second, packed with tents and stores, he swung up on his shoulder without effort.

If there had been no undercurrent of anxiety in her heart Rosamond would have been proud of him: but, as it was, a sudden choking lump rose in her throat. It was awful to think that Dick *had* to be out here, in such secrecy that he did not even dare trust her to call him by his name. It had been plain Dick and Rosamond between them when he had taken the snap-shot that lay in her pocket.

On an uncontrollable impulse she pulled out the little picture. As she looked at it she realized suddenly, and

for the first time, that Dick honestly might not know her. The photograph was of a thin, leggy girl—angular, not too graceful, with big eyes in too small a face, and the reflection of herself in the calm water at her feet was none of those things. Everything about her—lines, features, even expression—was changed from the immature girl Dick had photographed so long ago. It was no wonder, she admitted to herself, if he really did not know the woman who sat gazing at her girlhood's self. Seven years was a big gap to bridge over: but, even so, Dick's manner to a stranger had not been—been—

"If he doesn't know me—and he really mayn't—he's taking me for some one else," Rosamond thought sharply, and the idea startled her. She looked up, with the fright still in her eyes, and met Dick's, full on her at last, where he stood by her side.

Every bit of color had gone from his sunburnt face. He was looking at her hard enough now—mercilessly, like a judge—and from her to the discarded umbrella at her feet and the little picture in her hand.

"So," he said bitterly, "I didn't wrong you. I compliment you on your cleverness, though I can't on your hearing. I've been here for quite five minutes."

"I don't know what you mean," she returned confusedly. "Why shouldn't you have been here?"

"Oh, stop!" Disappointment in her had made Dick savage. "I was told all about you before you came—at least, I thought I was. But this accomplishment I hadn't expected."

"What accomplishment?" Rosamond looked up at him dazedly, but as she took in the hard contempt of his eyes her temper lit like tinder. "Tell me at once what you mean?" she cried imperiously.

Dick pointed to the photograph, half hidden in her hand.

"That," said he succinctly. "I've carried it in my pocket for seven years, just because I was fond of the child who's picture it is. She may be dead now, for all I know, but I carry her picture still. You might have taken something else, if you had to pick my pocket. Put it down, will you? A girl

like you," he ended cruelly, "isn't fit to touch it."

Rosamond stood paralyzed. She had been right, then, when she thought he took her for some one else, but she had not been prepared to have that some one a common pickpocket. Sheer rage gave her words.

"There were two photographs," she said very low. "If you carry yours in your pocket, it's there still. This one is—mine!"

"Yours?" Involuntarily Dick's hand flew to his pocket. The note-case he took out was not the kind that belongs to a ranger, but he had utterly forgotten his assumed personality. Out of the heavy leather case came what he would have sworn lay in the girl's hand—a worn, shabby photograph, old and faded, but kept these seven years close to Dick Huntingdon's heart. He stood looking from one picture to the other in dumfounded silence.

"Well?" Rosamond choked on the word.

"I beg your pardon," said Dick slowly; "I should have known better. But where did *you* get her picture?"

Rosamond turned her head away. This was the last straw.

"I never knew any one so stupid," she said, with a great sob. "Oh, don't you *know* me? I knew you the minute I saw you in the train."

CHAPTER VI.

ROSAMOND CONFESSES.

"**K**NOW you?" repeated Huntingdon dully. "No! And I don't know how you know me." But it had flashed over him distastefully that it made her behavior toward him quite simple, if she had recognized Dick Huntingdon, the vice-president of the Luron Park Company, in Hunt, the ranger. It was no wonder she had done as he told her, nor taken it upon herself to save his life.

"How could I help knowing you?" Rosamond had one last, forlorn scrap of courage. "Oh, Dick, I'm Rosamond—Rosamond Ford!"

"You're *who*?" said Dick; and his voice was hoarse.

"Just Rosamond. Oh, don't you remember the day you took those snapshots?" she pleaded wildly. "It was seven years ago, but I've remembered you. Don't you see, even now, that I'm the same Rosamond?"

It was truth, and Dick Huntingdon knew it. He stood exactly as if a bandage had been taken off his eyes and sudden sight was dazzling him, wondering first how he had ever *not* recognized the girl who had been his comrade, and, second, how he knew her now. He realized dully that the seven years between fifteen and twenty-two were just the years that could change a half-grown girl out of recognition, yet even so he had never dreamed his selfish, wilful Rosamond could develop into a woman like this.

The long plait of reddish hair had turned to shining bronze waves, the tanned skin to peach-color, the skinny little throat to a slender column of smooth whiteness. It was no wonder he had not known Rosamond Ford. And yet now his blindness was incredible to him. There were a hundred things about her that had not changed—her fingers, her eyes, the line of her cheek—and he could have groaned as he realized it. He had been so blind a fool! But there was no exalting that face now, nor his own responsibility. She *was* Rosamond, and the knowledge cut him to the heart.

He made one step to her, and caught her by both hands.

"Great Heaven!" he muttered roughly, "don't you know I'd rather never have found you than have found you like this—a fur-carrier, a poacher's go-between, mixed up with the sort of woman you're with and the man you say you don't want to meet? How, in God's name, did you come to it?"

"I don't know what you mean," cried Rosamond wildly. "I never heard of fur-carriers."

"What are you doing in Luron Park, then? What brought you here?"

"Just the woods. I wanted them." She let her hands lie lax in his, and she had not thought his grip could tighten.

"Do you mean to tell me you're not mixed up in this fur-poaching business that's ruining poor Howe?" he demanded. "And that the woman with you isn't in it, too?"

"I never heard of it or of Howe," she answered him with flat truth. "I'm just myself."

"Great Scott!" said Dick blankly. He let go her hands, and stood staring at her. "Have you thought I was mad, Rosamond?"

"I haven't known what to think. I don't yet." And then a flash of comprehension lit her eyes as she looked at his face. "I see some of it," she added slowly; "not all. I suppose it was because you really thought I was a fur-poacher that you stopped my telling you about myself; but I thought you did it because you knew me and didn't want me to call you by your own name."

"Know you?" Mr. Huntingdon deliberately put his hands behind his back that they might not snatch hers again. "How on earth could I know you?" he demanded vividly. "I left you half a child; I find you—" but his eyes filled in the rest, sweet and keen through his lashes on the bronze head, the exquisite face lifted to his. "Even I couldn't tell you were going to turn out beautiful." It came out as if it were his business to be proud of her.

"I knew *you*," said Rosamond hastily, something in Dick's eyes taking her breath away.

Dick laughed.

"My beauty hadn't a chance to grow on me much between twenty-seven and thirty-two," he said dryly. "I was just the same."

"The same?" The color went from Rosamond's face sharply at the reminder. "When you're out here, hiding from—" But at the amaze on his face she stopped. "Oh, Dick," she cried in confusion, "are you really being chased by a detective, or was that all a mistake, too—like my being a thief?"

"Hold hard," said Dick weakly, "till I go down on my knees to you for all I've said. Sit down—the guide can wait: I've got to thrash this business all out from the beginning. First, you know this park's run by a company?"

Rosamond nodded.

"Well, Howe, the president of it, sent me a wire saying the company was in trouble with the government for allowing fur-poaching to go on here, and that I was to come up as a ranger, and try to

discover who was stealing the furs. You can see it didn't look well for the company nor old Howe not to be able to find out, especially as the papers were saying it was done with their collusion. I came, of course, and I found a lot of traps; and then—I caught a red-headed, long-necked gentleman—"

"Red-headed!" gasped Rosamond. "But—"

"Wait," he interrupted grimly. "I caught him going past my hut with a bale of stolen furs in his canoe. I hauled him out of it, and he gave away the whole show. He said it was a regular traffic, though he didn't know who actually trapped the furs, and that two women were the carriers between here and the fur-dealers, and he gave me a description of them"—he pulled out his shabby, scrawled paper and put it in her hand—"before he got away."

"I've got to own he slipped me neatly, but when I boarded your train, to meet old Howe and confess it, the first thing I saw was the woman in my red-headed friend's document. There you and the stout woman sat—black veil, awful gray cotton hat and all! What had Howe and I to think but that you were the carriers in the traffic I was in the park to stop? I nipped straight out of the train and came back here to catch you. I suppose I've lost the real women by doing it, too, to say nothing of the fact that you'll never forgive me."

But Rosamond was not thinking of forgiveness.

"Dick," said she electrically. "Oh, Dick, how foolish I've been! Why, I knew all about it from the very beginning, only I hadn't the sense to put it together. There *aren't* any real women. All that was a blind."

"A blind!" Dick stared. "Can't have been," said he. "Why, the man described them."

"Made them up, you mean," Rosamond cut him off. "Listen, and I'll tell you why I don't think there are, or ever were, any real women in the fur-poaching. You saw Eliza's hat?"

"Yes, but what's her hat got to do with it?"

"Everything. I know your red-headed man. I saw him in the Toronto station coming here, and he saw me, though I

don't believe he'd ever have noticed me if it hadn't been for Eliza's ungodly hat. As it was, he stopped dead in front of us, and I really thought he was going to faint. He said right out loud—and I'm sure now he didn't realize it, he was so dazed—"Great Scott! it's the very hat. And I thought I'd made it up, with the women that I invented. And they're turning up, too, just when I can use them." That's exactly what he said, Dick; and—hush, wait. I heard him say it again to some one at the Luron Park station. I couldn't see who it was. He said, 'if he didn't make good use of those fake ladies he'd eat the fat one's hat.' And he *has* just made use of Eliza and me, Dick. We happened by luck to match the description he'd given you of two women who never existed. Do say you see it, for I know it's true. He thought you'd go off after us just as you have done, and leave him a free hand. That's how he's dared come back into the park."

"Back!" cried Dick. "Oh, he can't be back!"

"He is," she insisted. "He came on the train we did. And, what's more, he looked over my very shoulder to see you get out of it. Do you think he could be a detective, after all?"

"I know he's a poacher. But if you're right about his inventing the women carriers, and trusting to my being fool enough to believe in them, he's a pretty daring one. What on earth put it into your head that he could be a detective?"

"Johnson, my guide, said so. He told me to warn you," said Rosamond, with a laugh, "but you wouldn't let me. That was why I didn't say I knew you straight out. I was afraid of getting you into trouble."

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Dick blankly. "For Heaven's sake, Rosamond, what about the man you didn't want to meet at Smoke Lake? Is he a detective, too?"

"Goodness, no! He was just a man Eliza picked up on the train and took a silly infatuation for. Oh, Dick, she's so terribly simple! How could you ever take her for a fur-carrier? Why, she's never been out of Webbtown in her life till she came here."

Dick sat down on a rock and looked her in the eyes.

"Why on earth didn't you say so?" he demanded. "You might just as well have, instead of telling me stuff about her being your stepdaughter."

Rosamond caught her breath. It had got to come out now—Jabez, her marriage for a home, and all the rest of it. She had never quite realized the shame of marrying Jabez before, nor of living on his money after he was dead.

"She *is* my stepdaughter," she stammered. "She—I married her father, Dick!"

"*What!*" Dick sat up, electrified. "Why?" he shouted.

"Because father worried about me when he was dying, and Ja—Mr. Webb—was kind."

"Then why the devil," inquired Huntingdon slowly, "doesn't he take care of you?"

"He's dead," she answered simply. "Hush, Dick; listen. Since I've begun you may as well know the whole of it. I knew better than to marry him, but I did it, and only half to make father happy. There was no money for me, and I was afraid of poverty. I'd have done better, I'm sure now, to have scrubbed floors. I *couldn't* like him. I couldn't even cry when he died suddenly three weeks after we were married, but I hadn't the pluck to leave Webbtown.

"I hated it and my life there, and Eliza, but my husband's will said I had to live there. I told you it was like jail, and it was; and it crushed me, somehow. I got to be just a slave to Eliza, because I felt so guilty that I'd ever married her father and taken his money without caring for him. It wasn't until this summer that I seemed to wake up and want to be myself again."

"What waked you?" he asked her curiously. She had stopped and flushed.

"Nothing but that old snap-shot you thought I stole. You'd taken it in the woods, and it made me long for the woods again. I got Jabez's will, and he'd left one loophole for freedom in it. I could leave Webbtown for two months if I took Eliza. And, somehow, I found myself able to make Eliza come here with me."

"Didn't you remember that I lived in the world, that you had to marry a Jabez?" asked Dick irrelevantly.

"I didn't know where you were. And besides—"

"Besides what?" His low voice was dangerous.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of you for years till I found the snap-shot you took." But Rosamond had the grace to blush.

"God bless the day I did it, then," said the man slowly. He stood over her, straight, tall, confident, the old Dick who had been her friend. "Come along," he smiled at her. "We've got to make camp before dark, since you won't go to the shelter hut."

"I'll have to find Eliza first," observed Rosamond practically. "I can't just sit down and camp with you."

"Eliza! Good Moses!" ejaculated Mr. Huntingdon. He stopped short in horror. "I've made a fine mess of it about Eliza. Why, she may—"

"May what? You said she couldn't get lost?"

"Neither she can. But she could blunder into the fur-poachers."

"You don't mean they'd hurt her?" demanded Rosamond sharply.

"Oh, no," with some relief. "I—you see, when I thought Eliza was a fur-carrier, bound to a rendezvous with poachers, I sent Andrews to track her; and if she doesn't turn up, he will. I don't believe we need worry about your Eliza."

"Dick," said Rosamond, "why did you worry about me, and make me come the other way from Eliza? You must have thought I was as bad as she."

"I thought I'd help you out," he began lightly. But suddenly he caught her hand. "I suppose I was sorry for you," he explained unwillingly. "And, anyhow, I—couldn't hunt a girl."

"Are you sure no one's hunting you?" she questioned nervously. "You may be in a nasty place yet, Dick. You're here in disguise, and so far you haven't any reason to show for it. If a detective's tracking Mr. Howe, mightn't one be after you?"

"Oh, I dare say," he returned carelessly; "but the red-headed man isn't one, anyhow, and I'm going to get hold of him again before I leave this lake. I expect the first step I ought to take to it, too, is to send you and your Eliza over to the shelter hut and out of the way."

"I wouldn't go," she stated rebelliously.

Dick stopped, just short of the canoes and the waiting guide.

"You do go," he retorted firmly, "unless you promise to do exactly and precisely as I tell you if I take you to Wolf Cove with me; even if I tell you to get between two rocks and sit there all day, without so much as poking your head out. You're not to throw yourself between a gun and me as you did last night"—and he was pale in remembering—"if ten men shoot at me. Understand?"

"Yes," she answered, with an odd meekness. "But I don't think I'd mention shooting to Eliza, Dick—not if you want her to stop. And I can't stay without her."

Dick had no intention of mentioning one single thing about his business in Wolf Cove to Eliza. The bottom had pretty well dropped out of it, anyhow, with the reduction of his fur-carriers to simple Rosamond and Eliza Webb, and their supposed accomplice to a mere tourist with whom Eliza had struck up a flirtation, unless, indeed, the red-headed man had come on to Smoke Lake. That gentleman, whether by luck or good management, had laid a trap for the vice-president of the Luron Park Company, into which he had fallen like a lamb; but if Mr. Huntingdon had to air the situation to Andrews, he was hanged if he would to any one else.

Yet when at sunset the two canoes drew into the safe shelter of Wolf Cove, he was not thinking of even the humiliation of confessing his simplicity to Andrews. If it would have been joy to find a nameless fur-carrier worth saving, it was rapture to find her just Rosamond; a delight even to put up her tent. Dick let her take the lightest canoe over to the shelter hut for Eliza—she could paddle like a man—and he carefully pointed out the best place to cross the lake to the thin stream of smoke that showed where the shelter hut lay between them and the river.

He used her absence to turn quietly to Johnson, her guide.

"Look here," he asked, "what did you mean about a detective being after me?"

Johnson blushed.

"Just what she told you, I guess," he returned uncomfortably. "I heard the man talking, and—well, there's some funny things been done in the park this summer." he went on explosively, "but I'd sense enough to know they'd nothing to do with you. I'm sorry if I've made trouble, but I didn't guess you were a gentleman till I saw the lady knew you."

"So she did," returned Dick, "though she was a child when I saw her last. You're pretty observant, Johnson. What else do you know?"

But Johnson knew no more than he had told Rosamond.

Dick sat for a moment in silence. The red-headed man was bold to coolly turn the tables on his whilom captor, but it seemed to Dick that he was also desperate. There could be but one explanation for his conduct, and Dick found it swiftly.

In some place, that necessitated passing his ranger's hut to get it out, must be a big cache of furs, which must be moved now, at any risk—even that of shooting a too officious ranger. Intuitively Dick knew that if this load got off clear, it would be the last. Poaching would stop, for the red-headed man was frightened or he would never have appeared openly. And supposing it stopped, and the whole thing remained the mystery it had always been, Howe would be left with a black mark against his name he could never disprove. Dick frowned as he wondered if by coming to Wolf Cove on a wild-geese chase he had left the river clear for the red-headed man and his convoy; but he could come by no evidence for or against this idea. The brute had to be caught, and that was all there was to it.

"And, by gad," concluded Huntingdon uneasily, "there mayn't be too much time to catch him in! I ought to get Andrews down now to watch the river, while I do a hunt on this lake, but Heaven knows where he may have got to. It's growing dark."

He went hastily to the shore and scanned the dim water, but there was no sign of a canoe or of Andrews; no sign of Rosamond either, but about her Dick was easy. It was only a mile of clear water to the shelter hut and, if he had gaged Eliza's upper lip correctly, it

might take almost brute force to persuade her to cross it. Rosamond had told him something of Eliza's infatuation for Field. But Andrews should be here now. And with the thought there came to Dick the near cluck of a paddle.

"Look sharp!" he cried irritably. "What on earth kept you?"

He was not prepared for the voice that answered. It was not Andrews whose canoe nosed slowly out of the shadows to him, but Rosamond—and Rosamond alone.

"Oh, Dick!" she gasped. "Dick! Eliza—"

"What about her?"

"I can't find her." She jumped ashore and clutched his arm. "She isn't in the shelter hut. She's never been there. Could she," Rosamond ended frantically, "have gone somewhere else?"

"There isn't anywhere else to go," returned Dick blankly. For a moment the two stood and stared at each other in the gathering dark.

CHAPTER VII.

A PLAN OF FOUL PLAY.

"IT'S nonsense: it's—oh, crazy!" declared Dick energetically. "A woman and a canoe can't just suddenly disappear. Are you sure she isn't there? And didn't you see Andrews?"

"I didn't see anybody but the man who keeps the shelter, and he said there hadn't been a canoe up the river all day."

"Where was the Field man, then?"

"Oh, he'd never even heard of him." Rosamond spoke impatiently. "Don't let's worry about him, Dick. For all I know, he might never have left the hotel at Canoe Lake. I've only Eliza's word for saying he meant to. Can't you see I've got to find *her*?"

"Well," said Dick untruthfully, "that won't be hard. There's only one plain channel the way she came, and the guide and I'll just have to scout it till we find her. You won't be afraid to stay here alone?"

"I'll never be afraid of anything again if I can only get hold of Eliza," cried Rosamond guiltily. "I'm frightfully to blame, Dick. You don't—don't think she's *drowned*, do you?"

"Not she. I think," explained the man hastily, "that her canoe may have sprung a leak, and the guide had to take her ashore to mend it; while that fool Andrews is waiting behind a rock, thinking of a deep scheme of fur-poachers. And, if that's so, it's *my* fault for telling him lies about you. Make a fire and eat something. Oh, my dear, my dear," he broke off desperately, "don't cry!"

But even while he comforted her he bit down an oath, for in sober truth he did not know what to think. His explanation to Rosamond was plausible, but somehow he did not believe in it. He had sprung into a canoe with the guide, when he suddenly put down his paddle and ran back to the forlorn figure sitting dejectedly by the spark of fire.

He did not mean to do it, and he had no shadow of a right to, but Mr. Huntingdon put his hand under Rosamond's chin and turned her face up to his.

"Make up the fire, and be comfortable," he recommended. "I—may have to be gone till late."

"But the fur-poachers might see it."

"Hang the fur-poachers!" said Dick deliberately. "It's you I'm thinking of—*you!*" Then he vanished into the shadows as quickly as he had come out of them.

For one long moment Rosamond's heart beat with a joy it had never known. If it had not been for Eliza, lost in a night she would think full of peril, and with a steady guide she took for a brigand, the youthful stepmother would have been utterly happy. But she never could be happy, even with Dick, if anything had happened to Eliza. She sat and listened breathlessly, but there was not even the click of a paddle as Dick and Johnson slipped noiselessly out into the lake. They might not—if they had to go far, could not—be back till morning; and then:

"Oh, I pray, I pray, that they'll bring back Eliza," said Mrs. Webb wildly.

After that she grew slowly quiet, and alert to the soft sounds around her—the lip-lap of the lake on the shore, the faint rustling in the near treetops. There was nothing to see: the stars were dim in a warm haze, and gave no light.

Rosamond had her hand on fresh wood to light up the fire into a beacon

for Eliza's guide, when something stayed her hand. It was an impulse, nothing more tangible, that sent her up on the high ledge of rock which commanded the lake. But there was no moving blot on the dimness of the water, no sound but the breeze that blew fitfully in her face. She turned to scramble down, and stopped dead. In the very neck of woods she stood on, which separated the right and left forks of the Ox-Tongue River, and out of what must be a valley, shone a spark. It disappeared even as Rosamond saw it, but it came again. For a moment she thought vaguely that it was only a firefly; yet surely a firefly would have moved. And suddenly she caught her breath. The gleam was no firefly. For one instant it had shone out broadly, exactly as if some one had opened a door wide before shutting it, like a signal for some one else. Yet what door could there be to shut out here in the wilderness?

Whoever had built the fire must be out of hearing. Rosamond called at the top of her lungs for Dick. But she got no answer. Dick must be out of hearing, too. She climbed recklessly to the top-most point of the ledge and stared into the unresponsive dark. Suddenly, just as she had given up all hope of it, the gleam showed out again, and this time it was steady, so steady that she never thought of fur-poachers, who would not dare show a light, but only of Eliza.

Rosamond delved breathlessly in her mind to remember the lay of the land as it had looked from the shelter house opposite. Wolf Cove was above the shelter hut; this fire far below it, on the same side of the lake as herself. But it was not near the shore; it was in the woods. Eliza—lost, shipwrecked, anything—would never have taken to a camp in the woods.

"She would," gasped Rosamond, with angry enlightenment, "if she met that horrid Field, and he said he was going to camp there! She's like lots of people. She thinks you can do anything once you get away from civilization. And Dick can never see that light from the lake—its behind a bluff. He'll just go on hunting and worrying while Eliza sits and smirks. Oh!" she stamped in her exasperation, "I could kill her! Now, I

don't know what to do. If it were daylight I might reach her."

The thought put a mad scheme into her head. Daylight did not matter. She could go for Eliza easily, even through trackless woods in the dark, if only she had a star to steer by. And above her head—plain, like a friend offering help—shone the Great Bear. With that to guide her she need not leave Eliza another two hours in the Field man's camp, even though Andrews and her guide were there too.

Quite cheerfully Rosamond took the line of the flash that had dimmed now into a mere glow—a line that lay between the pointer and the north star—and scrambled down into the clogging underbrush and the thick trees. But twenty yards through the bush showed her that this way was impossible. She could not even see her guiding stars, and the rubber soles of her canoe shoes were being cut to pieces as she scrambled along blindly. She must get on high ground and stay there.

At her right the bluff between her and the lake seemed to run on without a break. She felt her way to it through a thicket of spruces, and paused to get her breath. It did go on—bare rock at first, which as she proceeded changed to blueberry barren, with neither underbrush nor trees. She could feel the wind off the lake. On her left, obliquely in front of her and in a valley, shone the faint gleam she had seen from Wolf Cove.

The stars were rapidly clouding over, but she had no more need of them. She hummed a tune as she threaded her way onward, but she hummed only three bars. It was so curiously silent on the barren, so crushingly lonely. Rosamond had been used to the wilderness once, but out alone in it now, with not even a star for company, she felt cowed. She realized, with a little shudder, that anything that might be stirring abroad in it was probably either a furtive thing in fear or the powerful enemy it dreaded.

Involuntarily she began to move furtively herself. Suppose the dull glimmer, which was all she could see now of the light that had been so vivid, was not Eliza and Field, but Dick's fur-poachers! What should she do then? Mad as the thought was, it sent Rosamond down

from what might be the skyline to possible watchers: and as she felt her way she started, for down in the valley she had struck a path. She followed it for some time, but was not prepared for the quick turn it suddenly gave. With the instinct of the hunted she slipped noiselessly to the ground and crouched there. For she had been right about the door.

Before her, black in the night, stood a small square shack. From a crack in the shutter of a window came the ray of light that had guided her on the barren. Otherwise the silent place was apparently untenanted. It looked too permanent a structure for fur-poachers—a spruce camp would have seemed more in their line. She had never asked if there were squatters in the park, but this place looked like squatters.

She had been very close to it when she dropped to reconnoiter. She was on the point of rising again, with shame at her own needless caution, to knock boldly at the door, when a sound brought her heart to her mouth—a woman's voice, choked and muffled, breaking out in a moan of pain.

"Oh," Rosamond thought wildly, "it sounded like—but it couldn't be—*Eliza!*"

But, brave as Rosamond Webb was, she dared not knock now at that door. She moved instead to the window, shaking in every limb. The shutter was closed, but its cracks were wide. She was nearly up to it, almost on her tiptoes to peer in, when another sound made her stand motionless. Some one was coming from the right, up from the lake. She dared not look round the corner of the hut to see who it was. That it was not Dick was all her ears could telegraph to her terrified brain.

For she was terrified now—sickeningly, rigidly afraid. She tried to think her panic causeless; yet to wait outside a hut where a woman had cried out like that shook her nerve. If she had to run for her life in the darkness she could never find her way; and Dick, her only hope, must be miles down the lake. At that moment her stiffened muscles gave a great leap, as if she had been suddenly roused from sleep. It was Field inside the hut—Field! She had heard his voice.

For a moment the puzzle of it kept

Rosamond motionless. If Field was there, why had Eliza cried out—if, indeed the voice had been Eliza's. She stepped softly to the window and stared through the crack of the shutter. Five minutes later she was staring still.

The only light in the place came from a half-darkened lantern that left one side of the hut in gloom, but one of the two men who stood full in its rays was Field. She had been right there! But it was not the Field she had met in the train. All his dapperness, his town vincer was gone from him. He stood in a flannel shirt and jean trousers—lean, active, oddly ruffianly, and listened in a fierce silence to some one who was speaking.

"It's the red-headed man," thought Rosamond. "It was he who just came in. And," with a great bound of her heart, "they two are the fur-poachers Dick's looking for."

She had been prepared for the red-haired man being a poacher, but Field! Yet there was no doubting the matter. Beside the two lay a pile of swedged and welted bales; round the walls lay deer-skins, bear-hides, and, at Field's feet, a mass of traps, old and used. Rosamond forgot Eliza—forgot even that a woman had cried out somewhere in the hut. Oh, if Dick were only there—and Andrews! But Andrews was lost, and she could never find Dick. By the time he got back again the men he wanted would be gone.

She could make out two more long bundles on the floor, which she supposed were bales, too; and suddenly she clutched the window-sill to keep from screaming. The red-haired man had turned the lantern, and the supposed bales it shone on were alive—were Andrews and Eliza—gagged, bound, motionless! Rosamond was not sure she *had* kept from screaming till the red-haired man swore fiercely at Field, as he pointed to the captives.

"What I want to know is what we're going to do with them?" he demanded. "Why on earth didn't you keep out of the woman's way after you'd got her started for Smoke Lake? There wasn't any need to bother with her after once the ranger had seen her and the other one."

"There's only one thing to do with

them." Field shrugged his shoulders. "As for its being my fault, you needn't get hot in the collar. You might have knocked me down when she came on me from the lake with her fool of a guide."

"You were knocked down, if I remember right," sneered the other, with a venomous nod at Andrews. "It would have been all up with you if I hadn't come in. I don't give a curse what you do with those two. What you don't seem to understand is that they've brought the ranger on us."

"What?" said Field, with sudden, ugly quiet.

The red-haired man nodded.

"If you'd either gone up the lake to the shelter hut or stayed here quiet without the woman seeing you, we'd have got out our furs clean and easy," he said fiercely. "But you've made a mess of everything. You left two of the ranger's own canoes on the lake shore for him to see—and he's looking at them now."

"Perhaps you'll explain how he got there?" There was no answering excitement in Field's voice, yet suddenly Rosamond knew it was he who was the more dangerous. "You said he was safe at home with the girl."

"I don't know how he came; I do know only two canoes came up the river. But, all the same, he's here. I tell you I was just going to try if it was dark enough to get by his house down-river with the load, when he came nearly on me—he would have seen me if he hadn't pulled up short at the sight of his own canoes. I did all I could; I crawled down the shore and lit a bit of a fire there to draw him that way instead of this, but he'll be on us if we don't hurry."

"It won't matter," said Field slowly. "He'll never hurry again after to-night." His voice was deadly level as he faced the other man. "Money," he said slowly, "isn't much use in Mexico—and that's where we'd have had to spend it if I'd listened to your fool scheme of trying to rush that half-ton of bales by the ranger. Who'll know what happens up in these woods—who'll ever come to see if he stays in them?"

"But they—them," the red-headed man stammered as he pointed to Andrews and Eliza.

"They're just where we want them, since they know so much; and"—at last there was excitement in his voice—"the ranger's where we want him, too."

"How?" The red-headed man whispered his question.

In the pause Rosamond stood sick and stupid. She could not see why the poachers were making no move to hide from Dick, or why they wanted him—and suddenly the translation flashed on her. Unless they killed him, they could never get out of the park clear and unsuspected.

A tingling thrill ran through her, this time not of fear. They should never kill Dick while she had sense and strength to warn him. She had meant to wait where she was till the two men left the hut, to cut Andrews loose, to rouse the inert heap that was Eliza; but now there was no time for all that. To save Dick she must get to him ahead of Field and the other man. But she dared not stir till Field answered.

"You get down to the fire you built and let him surprise you there," he ordered the red-haired man slowly. "He's got no gun. There's only one way to have no more trouble with him. I'll just circle round behind him." His hand fell dispassionately on the revolver in his belt. "See?"

He laughed, but Rosamond did not hear him. She had turned softly in her rubber-soled shoes and slipped noiselessly away into the dark.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REAL ROSAMOND.

SHE had no hope of finding Dick—in this strange place it would be like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay; but she could try. The hut-door was shut; if the man had not heard her, she was safe from pursuit. But she dared not go fast till, with a leap of her heart, she felt under her feet a narrow path which she knew must lead to the shore. There was no sign of Dick on it—no sign of any one. Rosamond began to run, so recklessly that in five minutes she pitched headlong over something that blocked the path—a man who lay there at full length. As she fell,

Rosamond expected him to cry out—to give the alarm to Field—but he was silent. His arm was under her hand, and at the feel of the rough canvas he was clothed in—the uniform of guides and rangers—her heart contracted.

"Dick!" she whispered. "Dick!"

There was no answer: the man lay as stirless as if she had not fallen over him. Sick with fear, Rosamond put her hand on his face, and recoiled, got somehow to her feet, and moved staggering away. It was not Dick; it was Eliza's guide—for his beard had pricked her shrinking fingers—and he lay stone-dead in the narrow track between the blueberries and the sweet-fern—as Dick would lie dead, unless she could find him. Then she remembered Eliza, remembered Andrews. It was not likely they would be left alive to tell their story to some chance comer unless Dick could reach them and save them. For herself, it would be easy enough to hide till Field and the red-headed man were gone; but Rosamond Webb was not thinking of herself at all just now. Once she stopped to listen, but the moccasined feet of the men behind her would make no sound, she knew, and she dared not wait to guess where they were. It was Dick she must find—Dick! And with the thought she ran full on him, standing quietly in the path. Like a child, Rosamond flung her arms round his neck, torn with joy and fear.

"Get back!" she pleaded wildly. "Quick, get back before they come!"

"You!" gasped Dick, in sheer blank surprise. "Rosamond, Rosamond, what are you here for? Is all the world crazy? What's become of Andrews and Eliza?"

"How did you know they were here?" She dragged him off the path.

"Ran on their canoes. Where in the devil are they gone? And where's your canoe?" The idea that she could have come through the woods from Wolf Cove never entered his brain.

Rosamond's hand flew to his lips.

"Be quiet," she said. "I walked here—never mind me. Oh, Dick, I've found the fur-poachers—and they mean to kill you! They saw you come on Eliza's empty canoe. They've got Eliza and Andrews, and they've killed her

guide. Oh, where's Johnson? You can't fight them alone."

Dick moved silently with her into a clump of bushes.

"I don't know who I've got to fight yet. Tell me all you mean."

Rosamond, in five sentences, told him, though she guessed rather than knew what had brought Eliza there.

Her story did not stagger Dick as much as she had expected. He had run on Eliza's empty canoe first, then on Andrews's; and when he found neither owner by the red-headed man's decoy fire he had smelled disaster. Instead of waiting near it, as the poachers had expected, he had quartered the woods till he came on the path that but for Rosamond would have taken him straight on his enemies unprepared.

He stood in grim silence, thinking. Johnson was in his canoe, searching the lake for the missing Andrews; neither he nor Andrews had a gun; and there was Rosamond to think of, if he got the worst of it in the coming encounter.

"What are you going to do? What can you do?" she cried despairingly. "Hurry, Dick! They must be nearly up with us, and they're two to one."

"I'll do the best I can," said Dick slowly. "If I could get hold of Johnson—but I can't. Lie down, Rosamond; and don't stir, no matter what you hear. If I don't come back for you, get to Wolf Cove the way you came, and tell them there what's wrong at the shelter house."

But as she would have answered, his hand gripped her shoulder. Two figures came toward them where they stood aside, two men who paused a moment before the taller of them struck off through the woods. It was the red-headed man, going to his fire, and whistling as he went. Field, left alone, turned sharply off to the right.

Rosamond felt Dick's fingers leave her shoulder when the red-headed man had passed. She turned her head to whisper to him—and grew cold in the warm night. Dick was gone. He had followed Field so silently that even she had not heard him go.

His purpose came on Rosamond sickeningly. As Field had meant to creep on him, he was creeping on Field; but

what could he do without a gun? The cold sweat of a terror that was not for herself started out on her forehead. Was she to stay quietly here and wait for Dick to be killed? No; whatever happened, she must be with him. Swiftly she stole after the two men.

The woods were deadly quiet; not a rustle, not a breath betrayed the fact she was not alone in them, yet at an impulse she could not name Rosamond stopped. Suddenly, just in front of her, a stick cracked; and then, quicker than light, came a thud, an indescribable choked cry and the struggle of men fighting. Rosamond broke through the bushes to the sound.

It could only be Dick and Field; but she could not tell who was over and who under as they fought, dimly outlined, now on the ground and now up again. This was no bout of fists, but a savage wrestling, brutally silent. Rosamond dared not breathe for fear of making Dick lose his hold. The two were evenly matched, except that Dick was the taller; she saw with terror that the shorter figure was fighting like a wildcat to get his hand down to his belt and his pistol.

Suddenly, without her own volition, Rosamond found herself unwinding the long silk scarf that was round her waist. She had often seen Dick wrestle for fun, and knew that at last he had got the hold he wanted. Fascinated, she saw him heave Field bodily over his shoulder with a deadly trick that landed him on the ground just where his spine joined his neck.

Dick stooped over him, panting, as he lay motionless.

"I hope I haven't broken his neck," he muttered. He snatched at the revolver in Field's belt and wheeled to the sound of Rosamond's breathing.

"It's I," she said sharply. "Oh, Dick"—she pushed her heavy silk scarf into his hand—"tie him up, even if he's dead!" She had no pity for the fallen man. Dick was the dearest thing in the world to her, and Field would have killed him.

Dick stooped over the silent form.

"Dead? No," he said. "He's only knocked out. I wish I could have got his other gun, but I had to knock it out

of his hand from behind. It was luck he had no chance to use this one."

There was no exultation about Mr. Huntingdon. He had had a close shave, and he knew it, just as he had known he must take his only chance to save three lives. He knotted Field's hands behind him, strapped his feet together as Field had strapped Andrews's, with his own belt, and stood up.

"There's only the red-headed man now," he said. "Get back to the hut, Rosamond, for God's sake! Either one of us might shoot you. Go!"

He was right, of course. Rosamond turned to obey him, but following him had confused her. Before she knew it she had almost come out on the red-headed man.

There was no doubt that he was a cool hand. He sat quietly by his dying fire with a beaver-trap at his feet, the very image of a solitary poacher whom a stray ranger might catch red-handed. At the first glimpse of him Rosamond sank quickly into the bushes, but she made a bad business of it. The man lifted his head and sat still, his face toward the sound she had made and his right hand in his pocket: but he sat just an instant too long. From behind him, not in front where he had expected an attack, came Dick's voice.

"Hands up!" it said, like the snap of a whip.

The red-haired man jumped, fired as he turned to the voice, and suddenly sat down again as if he were moved by machinery that had run down. Dick had been too quick for him. At the sound of the shots Johnson came shouting from the lake, but the red-headed man was not interested in Johnson. His right arm was broken at the elbow where Dick's bullet had caught it, but it was his own gun that had undone him. Dick's shot had jerked up his pistol hand, and his own bullet plowed the gash on his head that was stunning him.

Rosamond dared not wait to see what they did with him, for she thought guiltily of Eliza. She flew back to the hut, past Field and the guide he had killed. The shack-door was not even fastened; Field had been too sure he would win. Rosamond flung it wide on the mass of bales lit by the lantern the poachers had

not troubled to put out, and on Andrews and Eliza.

Rosamond Webb had never thought she could be so glad to see Eliza; she flung herself on her stepdaughter like a whirlwind, crying, laughing, and explaining as she cut away her gag and freed Andrews's hands till he could cut himself clear.

"You're safe!" she cried. "Eliza, dear, don't you understand me? The men are caught. Oh, how did they ever get you?"

For the first and only time in her life Eliza threw herself into her stepmother's arms.

"I came," she moaned. "I came. I'd promised to meet Mr. Field at the shelter house, but I never went there. I saw him here on the shore. He came out a little way in a canoe and went back again, and I thought he was waiting for me: he'd said he'd wait. So I landed to surprise him; but he wasn't there, and I—I came up here. Oh," she ended wildly, "I never dreamed he could look common! I thought he was a perfect gentleman."

"What happened?" demanded Rosamond. But Eliza only clung to her and sobbed.

Andrews, who was busy rubbing his numbed feet, looked up.

"Just murder," he said roughly. "She landed, and I followed her, with the guide between us. Both of them opened the hut-door and looked in. The guide got off a piece before Field shot him; and when I saw Field grab the lady back from following, I'd no more sense than to bounce in on them and knock him down. I knew the moment Field spoke to her that the ranger was mistaken, and she wasn't any of Field's gang. I guess he never meant her to come on him; his game was she should draw attention from him by going to the shelter hut while he got his furs out down the river. I guess she'd have got off clear if she hadn't seen the bales. I don't know."

"But they got you," said Rosamond stupidly.

"I wasn't allowing for any red-headed man. He got me down from behind. I don't know why he didn't kill me. I guess he would have in the end, if you hadn't come. Where's the ranger?"

"Here," said Dick from the doorway. "Are you hurt, either of you? Good Heavens, Miss Webb, can you ever forgive me? You're sure you're all right?"

"Mr. Field—" muttered Eliza.

"I've got both men, thanks to Rosamond." He did not realize he had used her name as he turned to Andrews. "I think we'd better get them over to the shelter hut till the morning; they'll be safer there, and we can get a sleep before we take them out to the county police."

"The county police'll have a nice jar," returned Andrews dryly. "Why, don't you know Field?"

"How should I?" Dick stared. "I hadn't been here for five years till Howe sent me."

"He's the county game-warden at Worrall, that's all," said Andrews succinctly. "I guess you can see now how it was worth his while to get the company blamed for the fur-poaching—it let out any suspicion of him."

Dick whistled. He did see; the blacker old Howe was painted the better it would be for the game-warden.

"I never even thought of him being in it," added Andrews, "till I saw him shoot the guide. I stood by at first, because I thought he was after the lady that we heard was a go-between with the furs. But I guess I'm even for that standing by now."

Eliza turned a slow scarlet. She knew just how she and her hat had been used—the red-headed man had boasted of his trick, had jeered at it and at her and Andrews, when they lay tied on the floor; but it was not that which was making her lip tremble.

"I thought Mr. Field was a perfect

gentleman," she repeated forlornly, "but I don't seem to have understood anything out here. Why is this common ranger calling you Rosamond?" She stared from one to the other.

"He isn't a common ranger, Eliza, dear," said her stepmother gently. "He's Dick Huntingdon, whom I used to know long ago. He only played ranger to catch the poachers."

"I don't care who he is!" Eliza burst into tears; even the aching of her body could not quite kill her feeling for the only man who had ever admired her. "I hate him. I didn't want to catch—Mr. Field," she sobbed. She pushed away Dick's arm as he moved toward her and clutched Andrews. "I want to go home," she said, "right straight back to Webbtown."

"So you shall," said Andrews, with unexpected gentleness. "I guess you were pretty brave a while ago; there ain't nothing for you to cry about." He took her arm and led her off toward his canoe.

Dick Huntingdon watched the incongruous pair move away in silence.

"Rosamond," he said suddenly, "*you* can't go back to Webbtown—not to stay."

"I must." She tried to laugh, and failed. "What else can I do?"

"You can marry me." Dick caught her hand as if it belonged to him. "I can't go back to looking at a snap-shot, Rosamond; I want *you*!"

"You can't," she answered him faintly, "when you didn't know I—was the real Rosamond!"

"I loved you all the same," said Dick simply. And Rosamond Webb knew beyond question it was true.

HOME-COMING.

WEEP not, my dear, although the seas divide us;
 Old words are true: the longest day must end;
 To some good haven God at last will guide us—
 Sweetheart and friend!

Our spring will come with olden bird and blossom;
 O'er placid ocean, void of storm and foam,
 I'll haste to lay my head upon your bosom—
 My true heart's home.

Ludwig Lewisohn.

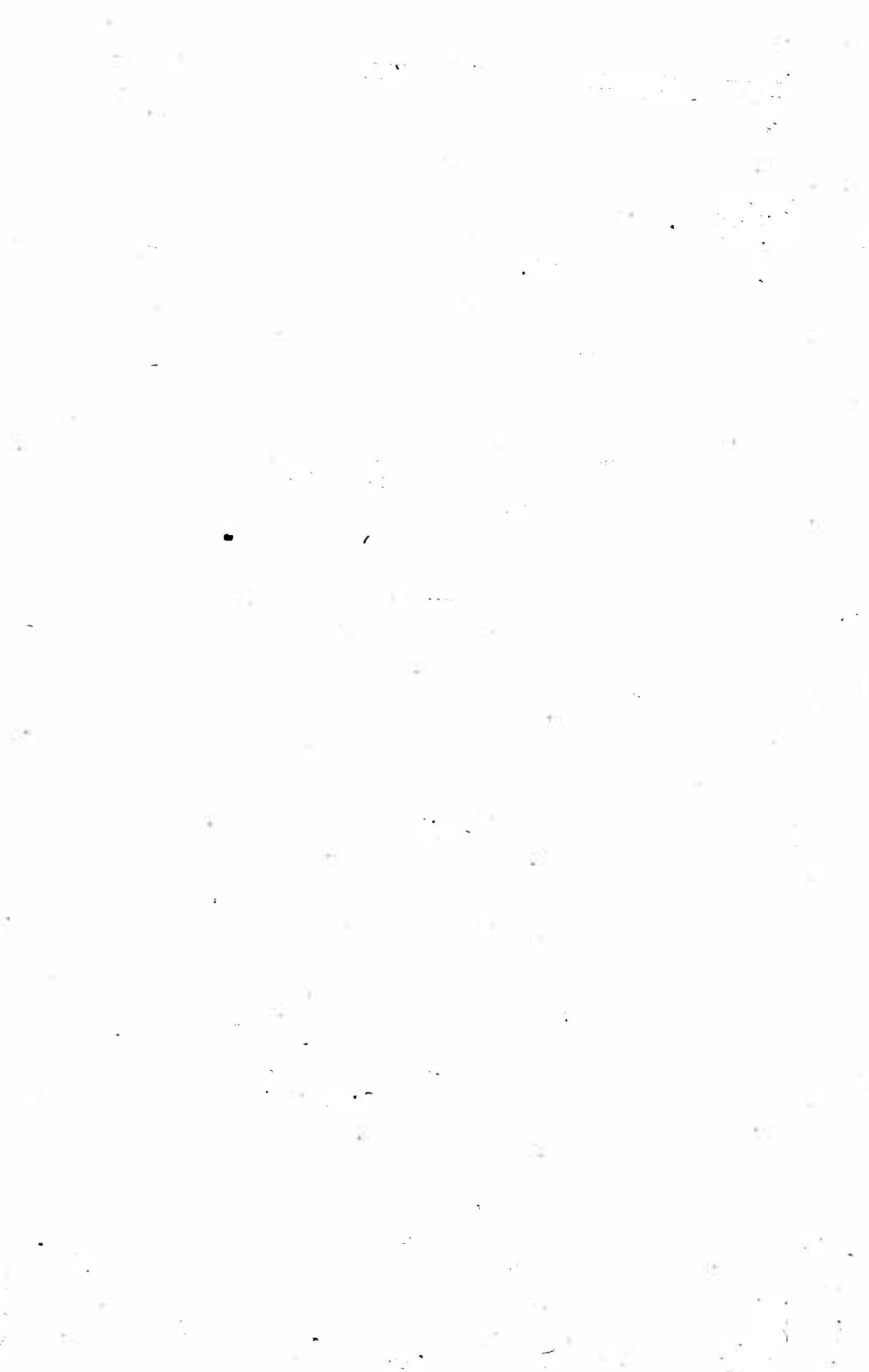
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