A FUGITIVE OF FATE CO... TH...

THE ARGOSY

AND

The Peterson Magazine

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Frank A. Munsey Publisher
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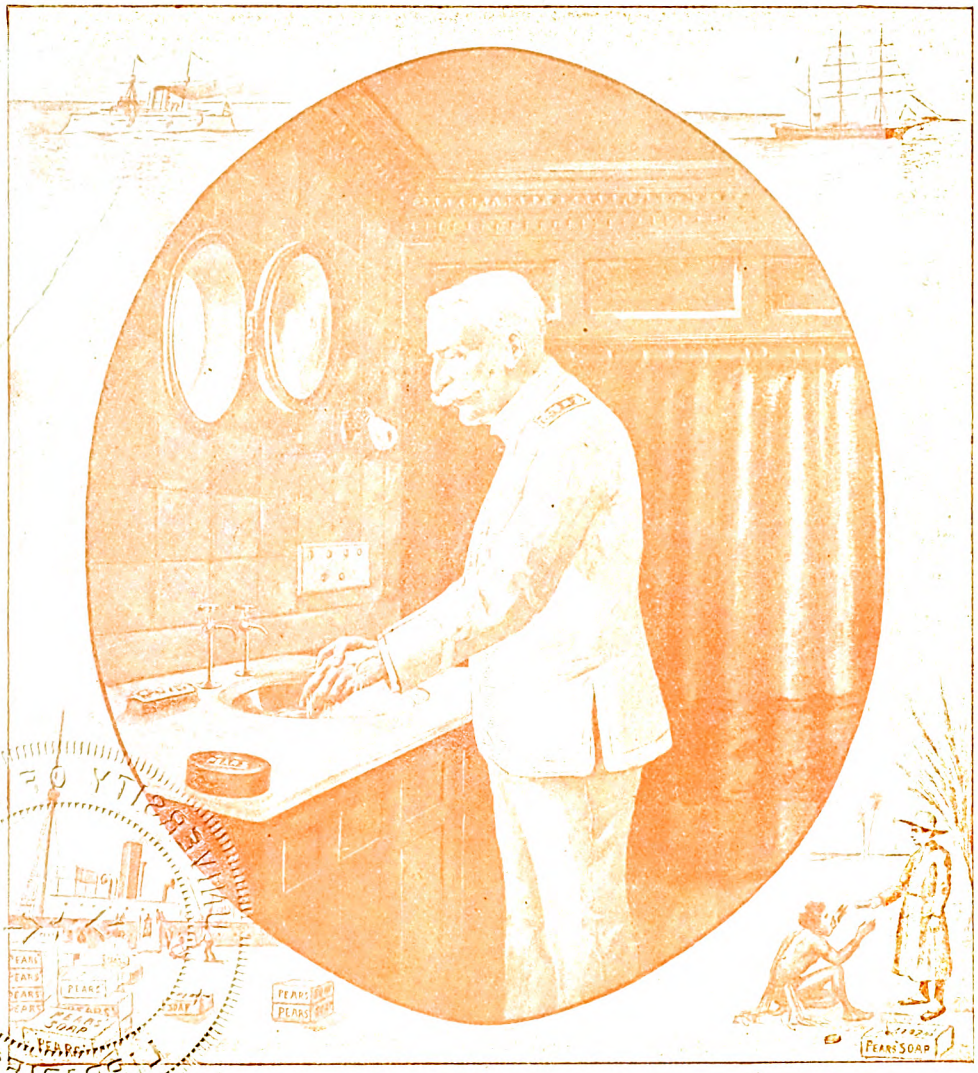

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THE ARGOSY.

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER, 1899.

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The Kola Plant.

FREE. A New and Positive Cure for Asthma has been found in the Kola Plant, a rare botanic product of West African origin. So great are the powers of this New Remedy that in the short time since its discovery it has come into almost universal use in the Hospitals of Europe and America for the cure of every form of Asthma. The cures wrought by it are really marvelous. Among others, Rev. J. L. Combs, of Martinsburg, West Va., was cured of Asthma of thirty years' standing, and Mr. Alfred Lewis, the editor of the *Farmer's Magazine*, of Washington, D. C., testifies that after eight years' continuous suffering, especially in Hay-fever season, the Kola Plant completely cured him. He was so bad that he could not lie down, night or day, for fear of choking. After fifteen years' suffering from the worst form of Asthma, Mrs. A. McDonald, of Victor, Iowa, writes that the Kola Plant cured her in two weeks. Rev. S. H. Eisenberg, Centre Hall, Pa.; Rev. John L. Moore, Alice, S. C.; Mr. Frank C. Newall, of the Market National Bank, Boston; and many others give similar testimony of their cure of Asthma after five to twenty years' suffering, by this wonderful new remedy. If you suffer from Asthma in any form, in order to prove the power of this new botanic discovery we will send you one Large Case by Mail entirely free. All that we request in return is that when cured yourself you will tell your neighbors about it. It costs you absolutely nothing. Send your address to **The Kola Importing Co., No. 1168 Broadway, New York City.**

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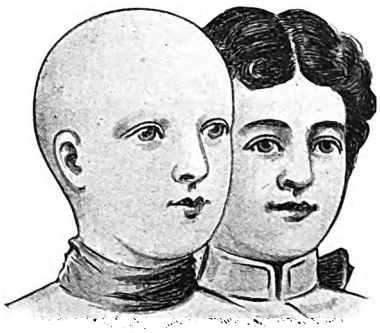

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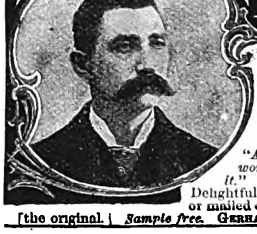

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THE PURITAN

DO you know that THE PURITAN made a gain in monthly circulation of 85,000 copies during six months last winter and spring, and that it bids fair to pass the 200,000 mark before 1900? And this without one cent spent on advertising, without one cent spent on canvassing or premiums, but solely on its merits. Circulation figures should be of interest to you, for they represent the intrinsic value of the Magazine.

"THE WOMAN WITH THE HOE."

The October PURITAN will be a better number than you have yet seen. It is bound to be better, or decline in merit. Nothing stands still in this world, and every month THE PURITAN will forge steadily ahead.

One of the most striking features of the October issue will be the photograph special, **"The Woman with the Hoe,"** which will embody a number of illustrations of woman out of her sphere, most interestingly and entertainingly told. Mr. James L. Ford's Satirical Series, Social Pests, will be continued in **"The Woman Who Must Live in New York."** The conversation of a boarding house table is herein portrayed in the cleverest manner possible, and cannot fail to appeal to all those who who have a keen appreciation of true humor.

A totally different, but none the less entertaining, article will be one by Mrs. E. S. Thompson, entitled **"A Woman Tenderfoot in the Rockies."** Mrs. Thompson accompanied her husband, the well known animal painter, on the most interesting and exciting of trips through the unbroken West, the very best incidents of which are entertainingly described in this article.

And the above are only a fragment of the attractions, as you will see from the Magazine.

On all news stands, or from the publisher.
10 cents a copy; yearly subscriptions, $1.

Frank A. Munsey, 111 Fifth Ave., New York

THE ARGOSY.

Vol. XXXI. OCTOBER, 1899. No. 3.

A FUGITIVE OF FATE.

BY J. FRED WINDOLPH.

The story of a strange prosecution which culminates in banishment to Siberia. The American reporter with the mania for finding the king bee Nihilist and the resulting misfortunes to somebody else.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.

AN ENCOUNTER IN PARIS.

"BY Jove! he'll be under the wheels. Hi, there, look——"

A tall, lithe limbed young man suddenly dashed into the roadway of the Quai des Tuileries at the entrance to the Pont de la Concorde, and collided violently with a man who was just in the act of stepping in front of a heavy automobile truck.

The force of the collision sent both sprawling in the dust, but the electric vehicle whirled past without touching either.

There was instant excitement. Crowds gather quickly in this busy part of Paris, and a great number of gesticulating and chattering Frenchmen soon surrounded the prostrate pair.

A gendarme hastened to the spot just as the two scrambled to their feet. He placed one hand upon the shoulder of the lithe limbed young man, but the latter shook it off lightly.

"No need of interference here, officer," he said in excellent French. "It is nothing. I simply knocked this man down to save——"

"See here," interrupted the object of his remark, "see here, I tell you. I want to know what in thunder you mean by attacking me. I'm no football to be kicked about by anybody who's looking for exercise. What did you mean, sir? Hey?"

He was short and angular. His face was thin, and a pair of keen hazel eyes peered from beneath two bushy brows. There was a snappy air about him—a hint of alertness that indicated strength of character and a man of the times. He spoke English with a strong American accent.

"I am from New York, sir," he continued aggressively. "New Yorkers aren't in the habit of taking slack from any one on this globe. I am a Weede, sir, Jimson Weede of the Weede family of Weede Street, and don't you forget it. Now, you apologize or I'll turn loose."

The lithe limbed young man smiled with evident amusement.

"An American, eh," he replied. "I thought so. You needn't be ashamed of it, my dear fellow. I am not a New Yorker myself, not even an American, at least by birth, but I am one by naturalization. Now let me put a case to you. Suppose——"

"I don't want to suppose anything," interrupted Weede. "I want an explanation, and pretty quick, too."

"That is what I am coming to. Suppose you were walking along Broadway near the post office, and you noticed a man in imminent danger of being run over by a cable car. Suppose you felt that you might save him by a sudden leap. Would you think it fair if the man accused you of attacking him?"

Jimson Weede glanced blankly at the other, then looked at the jam of vehicles whirling past. He involuntarily brushed the dust from his knees, then held out one hand with a gesture.

"I see it now," he exclaimed. "I am a dod gasted fool. I apologize, sir. I thank you from my heart. What's your name?"

The crowd dispersed. The gend'arme, with a shrug of his shoulders, strolled toward the river parapet, leaving Weede and his companion to their own devices.

The latter received this last query of the American with a laugh. He was not over twenty three; he had an open, frank face and a mass of curly brown hair. He was clad in a well fitting suit of gray, but his hat was gone. A crushed bit of straw told of its fate.

"What's your name, if I may ask?" repeated Weede. "I would like to know to whom I am indebted for so signal a service. It was scurvy of me to bluster up to you in that manner, but since I landed in this parley voo town I've been like a frog in a dancing school. I don't know which way to turn."

"I have about the same experience. I have been here only a month myself. I know the language, however, and that is some comfort. My name? It is Langdon, George A. Langdon, at your service."

"Mr. Langdon, I am pleased to know you," replied Weede, cordially. "It seems that we both are strangers in a strange land. I am an American—what these people call a downright Yank, and you—did you say you were——"

"An American by naturalization," smiled Langdon.

"Not by birth?"

"No, my father was a native of Pennsylvania, but my mother was Russian, and I was born in Russia."

Weede gave a start, and eyed the speaker keenly.

"A Russian," he commented slowly; "that's peculiar."

"Peculiar? Not at all, my dear fellow," replied Langdon. "It is very simple. My father held a scientific position under the Russian government. He met my mother in Russia and married there. He still holds his position, but he is now on a visit to New York. But, say, this is going into family history on extremely short acquaintance, isn't it?"

Weede chuckled good humoredly.

"It's funny how a meeting in a foreign country will bring men of the same race—I consider you an American at heart, you know—together. Now, I feel as if I had known you a dozen years. I don't mind telling about myself. I am a reporter."

"A reporter?"

"Yes, for the New York *Hemisphere*. They sent me over to Paris to write up the coming exposition—that is, to tell their millions of readers just what is going to happen, and how the American side of it is coming along. Now, I——"

He ceased speaking and glanced at a card Langdon silently gave him. It bore this inscription:

GEORGE A. LANGDON,

HOTEL CASPARD, PARIS.

Representing
United Iron Work Exhibitors.
New York City.

"So you are a member of the show, eh?" said Weede.

"Unofficially. I am looking after a certain amount of space for our concern. But, I say, Mr. Weede, suppose we walk down town a bit. I have—er—lost my hat and——"

"You lost it through me, sir. I beg a thousand pardons for not noticing it

before. Come right along to my hotel, and I'll see that you get another thatch in no time. There's a shop in the vicinity. The idea of my letting you stand here in a public street with your hat gone! And my fault, too. Say, if I don't give you the best tile in Paris I'm a cub reporter instead of a special correspondent."

And talking volubly Weede caught his companion by the arm and started toward his hotel.

Many glances were cast in their direction by the passers by. The spectacle of a thin, dust covered, and evidently excited foreigner hastening along grasping a tall, athletic, bare headed young man, was not common even in the streets of Paris.

The oddly matched pair crossed the Place de la Concorde, and catching an omnibus on the Rue de Rivol, rode as far as the Théâtre Français. Then dismounting, they turned into the Avenue de l'Opera.

"Two blocks to walk, then we will get that hat," chattered Weede. "I would buy a whole case of tiles for the sake of meeting an English speaking person here. I declare, this infernal parley voo language makes my head ache. You know it very well, don't you?"

"I was taught French at school," replied Langdon.

"And do you speak Russian?"

"Oh, yes, as well as I do English. It is my mother tongue, you might say."

Weede was silent for a moment, then he said in a low tone, and with a sidelong glance at his companion:

"I say, Mr. Langdon, do you—er—do you know anything about the—the Nihilists of Russia?"

Before Langdon could reply, Weede suddenly jerked his hand from the former's arm and darted into the midst of a crowd gathered in front of a newspaper bulletin.

A man's voice was heard raised in violent objection; then, to Langdon's amazement, he saw the American reporter vanish at a great speed around an adjacent corner.

CHAPTER II.

THE INCIDENT OF THE RUE BOSPHORE.

One thought was uppermost in Langdon's mind. It came to him naturally and at once; and he immediately began to feel of his pockets and to investigate the condition of his watch chain. He found nothing wrong, and his amazement increased.

"It is evident he did not pick my pocket," he muttered. "By Jove! if that wasn't his dodge, what can it be? He must be crazy."

Satisfied with this last explanation, he hastened to the corner, and, as he swung past the crowd, almost plumped into the reporter, who was evidently retracing his steps with equal haste.

"Beg a thousand pardons for leaving you so unceremoniously," puffed Weede. "Guess you thought I was acting rather queerly."

Langdon forbore from telling exactly what he had thought.

"Fact is," continued the American newspaper correspondent, "I recognized an—er—acquaintance in that mob in front of the bulletin, and I chased after him."

"Did he get away?" asked Langdon drily.

"Ha! ha! yes, he escaped. But this isn't procuring your hat. The place is only a block from here. Come on, I won't feel at ease until I repay you in part for your service to me today."

He rattled on, relating bits of his experience in his profession, and making many humorous remarks about Paris and its people until the hat emporium was reached. Langdon was at leisure that afternoon, and he felt inclined to extend his acquaintance with the loquacious and rather eccentric American.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Weede, we'll

take a little jaunt down toward the exposition grounds," he suggested after the conclusion of their errand. "I would be pleased to show you what we are doing with our space, and perhaps you can pick up a few interesting items. What do you say?"

"Delighted, simply delighted, I assure you," was the ready response. "You could not have proposed anything more in accordance with my desire."

A cab was found at a near by corner and the two set out. The day was sunny and charming, and Paris seemed *en fête*. Some celebration was in progress in an adjacent boulevard, and the strains of the "Marseillaise" came to the ears of the new friends.

Before the cab started a gamin darted up and thrust an afternoon paper at them with the shrill cry of his species. Langdon bought one, tossing him a couple of sous.

"Hello," he exclaimed, after a glance at the sheet, "this is news."

"What's that?" asked Weede. "Anything about New York?"

"No. It's a telegram from St. Petersburg. Says the secret police of that city have discovered evidences of unwonted activity——"

Langdon's voice trailed off and he read in silence, evidently completely engrossed in the article.

"Say, don't keep it all to yourself," interrupted the reporter. "If it is anything about Nihilists I want to hear the news. I am interested in that subject. I have a theory—but translate the article, that's a good fellow."

"I beg your pardon," replied Langdon. "I forgot myself for the moment. This telegram is doubly interesting to me because it has reference to the place of my birth in Russia—my old home, in fact—and it is also of grave import for other reasons. But I will translate it for you."

He scanned the article again, then read rapidly:

"Official circles in St. Petersburg are exercised over the latest report from Maloigrod. The secret police of the capital have in their custody a man arrested in Maloigrod whom, they claim, has confessed to them complete details of a gigantic conspiracy against the Czar and members of the imperial family. It is impossible to obtain further information at present, as the authorities are extremely reticent."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Weede in evident disappointment.

"Yes, but it is important to me," replied Langdon gravely. "I intend to take a trip to Maloigrod next week for the purpose of visiting an old school chum of mine."

"Going to Russia next week?" cried the reporter eagerly. "By George! I would give a year's salary to be able to visit that country. It is the ambition of my life. Why, my dear sir, it is what I have been longing for since I made my wonderful discovery in 1889. I have a theory—but say, what difference will this discovery make in your plans? You can go to Russia just the same, can't you?"

Langdon nodded.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "There will be annoyances, though—searching of baggage and person, espionage, suspicions, and all that."

"Your passport?"

"Doesn't amount to a white rag in Russia when the Nihilists and police are pitted against each other. However, I have promised dear old Felinski—that is my friend—that I would pay him a visit next week, and I intend to fulfil the promise."

"Do you—er—know much about the Nihilists?" asked Weede, after a pause.

Langdon gave his companion a keen glance. Weede's face was imperturbable. He was watching a passing omnibus carrying a gay party of laughing girls as if his question interested him but slightly.

"I know very little about them," replied Langdon slowly, "and, with all

due respect to you, my friend, I have no desire to get better acquainted with them. Why do you ask?"

"It's this way. You see I have a theory about Nihilists. Back in New York they laugh at me, but I am sure I am right. All I need is one link—just a little link, and I'll confound those fellows."

"A theory on Nihilism?"

"Yes. It may sound peculiar to you, and you may laugh like my other acquaintances, but we'll see in time. All I need is the link, just a little link, and perhaps I'll find it here in Paris. The theory is simple enough. It is that Nihilism is a disease."

"A disease?"

"Yes, it is a growth pressing on the brain. This growth affects a certain lobe of the gray matter, you see, and the result is monomania. It's great, that's what it is. I am sure of it. Why, man, I've examined lots of Nihilists, and now I am looking for one whose growth is so large that it forms a protuberance on the skull. I'll find him, sir, you see if I don't. He'll be the biggest Nihilist, the chief of them, of course, and if I am not mistaken I'll find him right here in Paris. I caught sight of a man today—that fellow I chased in the crowd—who is probably the one I want. I met him in New York and I tried to feel his head, but he wouldn't let me. That's pretty conclusive proof, isn't it?"

Langdon was greatly amused. He was a man in strong sympathy with the humorous side of life, and Weede appealed to him from that point of view. He saw in him a chance for much enjoyment, and he resolved to cultivate the chance.

He also liked this peculiar product of the American reportorial field, and he realized that with all his eccentricities he was both harmless and a good fellow.

"When you left me so suddenly this morning, did you intend to feel that man's bumps in public?" Langdon asked, trying hard to control himself.

"Of course," was the prompt reply. "I almost caught him, too. I know the street he lives on, and I mean to go there this very day if I can find it."

"You say the fellow is regarded as a Nihilist?"

"Yes, the king bee of them. He was driven from New York, and is living here under an assumed name. He is hiding, too. Oh, he's the link I am after as sure as you are born. I'll bet a year's pay he has a protuberance on his head the size of a hen's egg. If I can only feel it! Say, Langdon!"

"Yes?"

"Do you know where the Rue Bosphore is?"

"Rue Bosphore? Humph! I have heard of it. I believe it is the worst street in Paris."

"Very likely. Well, I want to go there today. Do you think this cabby would drive us down there? I won't ask you to go, but all the same, if you would like——"

He hesitated and glanced at Langdon from the corner of his eye. The latter smiled, then replied:

"I have a mind to go with you, Weede. It isn't every day I can get a chance to see an enthusiast feeling the bumps of a lot of measly Nihilists. If you will promise me a little fun I'll accompany you."

"Fun?" returned the reporter seriously. "It is according to what you call fun. I may get into a scrap with some of them. The wretches object to my experiments sometimes, and they make things warm for me. I would like to have you go, Langdon, but——"

"I am more determined than ever now that you promise me a scrap," laughed the other.

Calling to the driver, he gave him directions that caused the fellow to stare in surprise. It was seldom he found two evidently respectable passengers with a destination like the Rue Bosphore.

The ride was long, and before Langdon and Weede reached the street they sought, they became acquainted with certain malodorous districts they little thought existed in fair Paris.

Alighting at a cross street, Weede led the way to a tumbled down old building somewhat similar in appearance to the worse examples of American tenements. The surroundings were disreputable to the last degree; frowsy women and sullen men lounged in the doorways, and a mob of fighting, squalling children played in the muck of the gutters. The very atmosphere reeked with squalor and crime.

"Looks pretty dubious, eh?" commented the reporter.

"It isn't the Champs Elysées," returned Langdon. "Seems to me a revolver would be good company for a visitor here."

Weede touched his side pocket significantly.

"I always go prepared," he said. "But, say, let's go in and beard the beast in his domicile."

They entered and, after traversing a passage, encountered a man whose unkempt beard and general air proclaimed him, as Weede whispered, "A genuine specimen of the genus Nihilist."

An inquiry directed to him by Langdon at the reporter's request elicited the fact that Morwoski, the man for whom they were searching, was not in, but that he was expected at any moment. A wait of half an hour produced no result, and finally Langdon announced his intention of departing.

"We can come another time," he said. "The day is too glorious to spend it in this foul hole."

"I think I will stay now that I am here," concluded Weede. "I am sorry to have troubled you."

"No trouble at all," was the hearty response. "Come to my hotel this evening, Weede, and we'll talk over the exposition. So long!"

On his way to the street Langdon was struck with a sudden thought. Never before in all his experience had he visited a section quite so evil as this place. For the first time since his resolution to accompany Weede he fully realized that to be seen on Rue Bosphore by any one knowing him—an employee of the American Iron Workers' Association or any attaché of the exposition — would mean suspicion, with the possibility of a report to his superiors.

So imbued was he with the thought that, as he stepped from the entrance, he turned up his coat collar, slouched his hat over his eyes, and slipped hurriedly to the nearest corner.

A man, roughly dressed, unshaven and lurching, glanced at him from the opposite side of the street. He caught a glimpse of Langdon's face, gave a start, and then as the apparent fugitive hurried away, eagerly scanned one of several unmounted photographs he had been carrying in an inner pocket.

Then he, too, slipped from the street.

It was a little episode entirely unnoticed by the inhabitants of the neighborhood, but it was destined to form the foundation of a series of important events.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARREST.

SEVERAL days had elapsed since the afternoon Langdon visited the Rue Bosphore with the reporter.

To his surprise Weede failed to call that evening as agreed, and when the next day passed without the American putting in an appearance, Langdon concluded that his chance acquaintance had left the city.

Professional duties at the exposition grounds engrossed him until Tuesday, on which day he had decided to leave for Maloigrod. Throwing a few things into his bag Langdon took a cab to the railway station.

Securing his ticket, he went to his compartment. A man in traveling cap and duster was in the act of entering

after him, when a voice was heard from in the direction of the gates. Several people turned to look as the tones grew louder.

Langdon recognized the voice instantly. It was the American reporter. A moment later he saw Weede struggling with a couple of guards at the entrance, and pushed his way through the crush surrounding the gates.

Weede gave a shout as he spied him and waved one of his lanky arms.

"I say, old man, how are you?" he cried, adding in the next breath: "Just tell these ticket punchers to let me pass. They are trying to keep me, a free born American citizen, from going where I am looking for a friend, but they only say '*Non comprend.*' The idea of any sane man talking only French when English can be had for the learning."

Langdon spoke a few words to the man, showed his ticket, and they passed the reporter through the gates, to the evident satisfaction of the onlookers.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, Weede?" inquired Langdon, as they shook hands.

"Keeping myself! Whew! Keeping myself! That's rich. Ha! ha! Wait until you hear my story. You remember that place in the Rue Bosphore, and the Nihilist I was looking for? Well, I didn't find him—but he found me. Durned if they didn't conclude I was a spy, and they kept me locked up in that measly old barracks two days. But I got away at last. And I am still looking for the King Bee Nihilist with the bump."

Langdon laughed; the speaker's brisk style and the real humor of the situation amused him.

"Well, Weede," he said, "I am glad to see that you escaped, and if you want to take a friend's—even a new friend's advice—just keep away from the Nihilists over here. They are bad people; and sometimes even to know them brings trouble."

Prophetic words!

A bell rang. It was a signal for departure. Langdon grasped the reporter's hand and wrung it warmly.

"We are off," he exclaimed. "I am sorry I haven't seen more of you. But I will be back Saturday. If you have time meet me here at half past ten in the morning. Good by."

He sprang into the carriage and the guard closed the door after him. Weede's voice came dimly to his ears above the grinding of the wheels.

"Time! I'll take time. I'll be here at half past ten. By by!"

"A good fellow that," thought Langdon, as he settled into his seat. "A typical American—clever, pushing, bright. I hope I'll see more of him when I return."

It is a long ride from Paris to Maloigrod, with several changes to make at different stations. The other occupant of the compartment looked a pleasant fellow. They exchanged salutations, and Langdon accepted a morning paper offered by his companion.

"Do you go far?" he asked courteously.

"Yes, I am going through," answered Langdon. "I have an all night ride before me; and you?"

"I have also. I am going to Russia on business."

The afternoon passed slowly. Langdon read a little, but thought more; especially of the peculiar character of the American.

The theory of Nihilism being a disease appealed to him as very funny, although the reporter seemed sincere enough.

It was with pleasant anticipation of a good time that Langdon was returning home after several years' absence. The family were in New York, where he had left them two months before, but his old school friend Felinski was expecting him, and would be at the station on his arrival in Maloigrod.

About daylight the next morning Langdon awoke, after passing most of the night in anything but a comfortable manner. His traveling companion of

the previous day had changed to another line early in the evening, and he now had the compartment to himself.

When the train arrived at Maloigrod that evening, Langdon fully expected to see Felinski hurrying to meet him. He recognized several old acquaintances on the platform, but Felinski was not one of them.

"I wonder if he received my telegram," he thought, as he handed his luggage to a porter.

It was early, and Langdon decided to wait a while, as Felinski might have been delayed.

He went over to the refreshment stand and ordered a cup of tea, and while waiting to be served, some one touched him on the arm; it was a boy and a stranger to him.

"Are you Mr. Langdon?" asked the lad, speaking almost in a whisper.

"That is my name," replied Langdon, surprised at the boy's manner. "What do you want with me?"

"I have a note for you," the lad continued, hastily extending an envelope. The next moment he was gone—vanishing in the gloom so quickly that Langdon rubbed his eyes.

"This is deuced queer," he muttered, glancing suspiciously at the bit of paper. "What can it mean?"

He tore open the covering, stepped under a swinging lamp, and read:

Do not come to the house. Return to Paris at once. Will write to you there.

F.

"It's Felinski," Langdon exclaimed aloud. "Has he gone daft? Return to Paris, eh; and without seeing him? Not much. If he is in trouble he will need a friend, and while I am able to walk I'll see that he has one."

Leaving the station, he rapidly threaded the familiar streets of his boyhood home, and finally gained a little cottage on the eastern outskirts. As he passed through the gateway, a man brushed by on the sidewalk and gave him a searching glance.

"Hope you will know me when you see me again," muttered Langdon grimly.

His knock at the door brought a tardy response. When it was finally opened it was by a rather tall, slender young man with a stoop and an intellectual face. Deep set eyes peered from behind glasses in a manner betokening the student.

"Felinski!" cried Langdon, extending his hand.

"George! You here? Good heavens! Didn't you receive my note?" hastily replied the other.

"Your note? Yes. But let me in, old fellow. This is a sorry welcome for a chum."

Langdon spoke good naturedly, but he eyed Felinski anxiously. His suspicion that something was wrong grew stronger with each passing moment. What could have happened?

"Let me in," he repeated, stepping upon the threshold. "Surely you——"

To his unbounded surprise he saw Felinski make an effort to close the door in his face. The young Russian exhibited every indication of distress and great mental excitement.

"Go back to Paris; go away from here. George, for your own sake, I beg you to leave at once," and Felinski attempted to force his friend away from the door.

Langdon resisted, and, thrusting the student aside, entered the house. He then closed the door and, putting his back to it, said sternly:

"Alexis Felinski, I demand an explanation. What is the meaning of this conduct? What has happened? Are you in trouble? Speak, old chum. Tell me and I will help you all in my power."

Felinski leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands. Langdon regarded him with softened eyes.

"You *are* in trouble, chum," he continued. "I see that plainly. Now, just tell me what——"

A faint whistle sounded in the street, and the gate slammed. Felinski gave a

start, wheeled around and bounded to the door.

Stooping, he gazed through the keyhole for a moment, then he sprang erect with a groan.

"Run," he exclaimed wildly; "run, George! Try the back way. Hurry, for God's sake! Get away from this house. You may——"

He was interrupted by a loud knocking. A tramping of many feet came from the little walk in front of the house, then a voice cried authoritatively:

"Alexis Felinski, open in the name of the Czar!"

"In the name of the Czar?" echoed Langdon, with whitened lips, turning to his friend. "Alexis! Alexis! What have you done?"

There was a crash, and the splintered panels of the door flew inward. A man clad in the gray uniform of the Russian police stepped across the débris. Behind him were others, a dozen or more.

The first officer stopped short on seeing Langdon, then holding up a lantern, he flashed the light into his face.

"Ha! a most fortunate encounter," he cried triumphantly. "We have caught two birds in one net. Alexis Felinski, and you, George Langdon, surrender in the name of the Czar!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE COLONEL.

It is doubtful if the barrier police station of Maloigrod had ever before held a prisoner so dumfounded and amazed as Langdon. His peremptory arrest following so closely upon Felinski's strange actions had set his brain in a turmoil.

He tried to secure an explanation from Alexis as they were being hurried from the house; but the police official sternly interfered. They were taken to the station and locked up in separate cells.

Within a few minutes after his incarceration Langdon cooled down and began to study the situation. He had no fear for his own safety—a line to the American minister would secure his release.

But what of Felinski?

There was one thought—one terrible dread uppermost in Langdon's mind as he paced the stone floor of his cell. He tried to evade it—to find some other reason, but the effort was futile.

"No, it is true," he groaned at last. "Poor Alexis, he has allowed those friends to draw him into their devilish schemes. He is mixed up in Nihilism."

* * * * *

Shortly after daybreak the jailer unlocked the cell door and ordered Langdon to follow him.

In the passage a couple of gray coated gendarmes stood with fixed bayonets. As the young man stepped out of the cell, they placed themselves one on each side of him.

"To the right!" said the jailer, and they passed along the corridor, and up a flight of stone steps into a sort of veranda that ran around the inner court of the building.

The court was a small yard, but over one of its walls ran a creeper, its leaves one blaze of red. Birds were twittering here and there, and in the middle of the yard a child was running about playing with a dog. Langdon took a full deep breath of fresh air. After many hours in a whitewashed cell, it was delightful to see even this much of the outer world.

From the veranda they turned into an office. A high desk ran along one side of it, and there a couple of clerks were turning over papers and writing. The officer who had made the arrest was standing near them, playing with the knot on his swordhilt and smoking a cigarette.

"Have you got all the papers of George Langdon's case complete?" said the officer to one of the clerks, as the prisoner was placed in the center of the room.

"Here they are, sir," said one of the

men at the desk, producing a large envelope.

The officer touched a bell, and, taking the papers, drew them half out of the envelope and turned them over one by one, to see if they were all right. Langdon interrupted this examination of the documents.

"If you are in command here," he said with quiet determination, "as an American citizen I demand my instant release."

"Impossible," replied the officer. "You are to be taken before Colonel Andreskoff at the central gendarmerie barracks. He will go into the whole case; you must ask him. I have no power in the matter. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied Langdon; "but I insist on going instantly."

"You will go to the barracks at once."

A sergeant entered as the officer spoke, and the latter handed him the letters.

"Sergeant Zamoskie," he said, "you will take the prisoner with you to the gendarmerie barracks, and hand him over with these papers to Colonel Andreskoff."

The sergeant saluted, took the papers, and beckoned to Langdon to follow him. The two big men with fixed bayonets left them as soon as they were outside in the passage. A carriage with drawn blinds was waiting at a side door, and in this the sergeant and his prisoner took their seats.

They had not been more than five or six minutes on the way when they drove into a large quadrangle, which Langdon recognized as that of the gendarmerie barracks. He had often peeped into the arched entrance to see the men drilling when a boy.

Langdon followed the sergeant through a great doorway, guarded by a sentry, and up a wide staircase into a passage, off which several doors opened.

They entered at one of these doors. A young man in dark green uniform was waiting at a table. He stood up as Sergeant Zamoskie saluted and handed him a packet of papers.

"Ah," he said as he turned them quickly over. "I understand. This is the Langdon case. The general is expecting him. Sergeant, you will wait in the guardroom; and you, Langdon, will come with me."

He opened a door at the further end of the room and drew back a heavy curtain that hung inside of it.

"Here is George Langdon, your excellency," he said as they entered, "and here are the papers."

Langdon looked around the large room and saw an old gentleman with a gray mustache, muffled up in a dressing gown and seated in an armchair, with his slippered feet on a rug near a great brass stove where a fire was roaring.

He could hardly believe that this old gentleman, who looked the very picture of kindness, was Colonel Andreskoff. The room, too, was a comfortable place, with its bright rugs and cheerful fire.

To make things look even more cozy, there was a little table close to the colonel's armchair with a cup of tea upon it.

The colonel's voice, when he spoke, was as kindly as his face.

"Leave us here, Captain Speran," he said, "and you, young man, take a chair near the fire. You must talk freely to me, you know. I am afraid you do not understand how serious the business is."

"Serious?" answered Langdon, still standing. "It certainly will be serious business if I am not released instantly. Do you know that I am an American citizen, and as such will receive prompt redress through our minister at the capital when he has been notified of the outrage?"

"Well," said the colonel, frowning as he spoke. "All in good time you will be permitted to inform your friends. You see, my dear fellow, you have been very foolish. This affair of yours is

really very serious—very serious, indeed. No one can say where it will end. But, after all, we must try to smooth matters as best we can. Now, in the first place, you shall write as you desire. You will find pens and paper at that table near the window. Write what you like and close the letter before you give it to me."

Langdon thanked him, and stepping to the table, wrote a few lines explaining his position to the American consul, and asking him to come at once to Colonel Andreskoff's quarters and secure his release.

He put this in an envelope and closed it, and then gave it to the colonel, who had rolled and lighted a cigarette meanwhile. The latter scribbled a few words in pencil across the envelope, and touched a bell near him. Captain Speran entered.

"See that this is sent off," said the colonel.

"Yes, your excellency," answered the officer, and took his departure.

As soon as the door was closed after him, the colonel took up the conversation at the point where it had been broken off.

"Sit down," he said, "and listen to me. You know you are pretending to be quite innocent and ignorant of the charge against you. Of course, you may please yourself. It is all very well for a man to stand on his rights and admit nothing until we make him speak out; but it would be wiser for you, and save you no end of trouble, if you would be straightforward and frank with me."

There was an air of kindliness still about him as he spoke, and his words were mildness itself; but as Langdon seated himself to meet the other's questioning, he made up his mind to be on his guard.

"I do not understand the circumstances," he said. "I assure you on my word of honor that it is all a terrible mistake. I am in Russia simply on a visit."

The colonel smiled grimly.

"Yes, I think you are right about the visit," he replied, wiping his glasses. "Your visit was to Alexis Felinski and you brought him some word from a certain Nihilist living——" He paused, adjusted the glasses, and glancing benignly at Langdon, added slowly—"a certain Nihilist living in Paris on the Rue Bosphore."

Langdon gave an involuntary start. The Rue Bosphore! That was the name of the street he had called at with Weede, the American reporter. And it was at a Nihilist's house.

"Ah, it seems you are recovering your memory!" broke in the colonel's suave voice.

Langdon paid him no heed. An unpleasant thought had taken possession of him. How had the colonel learned of that visit? Was it possible the reporter was really a spy? The very suspicion made Langdon sick at heart.

"I am not a subject of the Czar," answered Langdon, starting up from his chair. "I am an American citizen, and demand my release instantly. I refuse to answer any questions. I have nothing to conceal."

"In that case, why are you so indignant?" inquired the colonel. "Now, listen to reason. We have actual proof that you were working for men who are conspiring against the Czar. It will be easy to send you to Siberia, and you would probably be dead before any one could interfere. You can save yourself by telling what you know. The information will not be used to injure Felinski, but only to break up the plot. Why not speak the truth?"

In vain Langdon protested that he knew nothing. Finally the old colonel suddenly changed his tone. His face became dark with passion.

"You fool!" he cried. "With your American obstinacy you will not listen to reason. I have a good mind to see if we cannot flog the truth out of you!"

He half rose and rang the bell furiously.

"Here, Speran!" he said, as the cap-

tain entered; "take away this idiot. There is no use in trying to help him; but we shall find means to make him tell what he knows!"

Langdon was taken away and locked up again in a cell in the basement of the barracks. Despite the colonel's terrible threats, nothing happened to break the monotony of the long day except the arrival of the jailer with his dinner and supper. To all of Langdon's questions he made no reply.

The vague hope that the consul might arrive to liberate him gradually died away as the day went on, and when he rolled himself in a rug on the bed to sleep for the night, he felt utterly tired, but not discouraged.

He was dreaming of that interview in Paris, when he was aroused by the unlocking of his door. The light of a lantern was thrown in his eyes. He was hardly awake, and sat up on the bed staring at the group in the doorway of the cell.

There was the jailer, keys and lantern in hand, and behind him a number of soldiers, in long gray overcoats, with bayonets fixed on their rifles.

"Get up, and be sharp about it!" ordered a surly voice.

Langdon was only partly undressed, so had his clothes on in a minute. One of the soldiers muffled him in an overcoat, another put a cloth cap on his head; then he was told to come out of the cell. In the passage another jailer was waiting for him.

"Hold out your right hand, prisoner," he said.

Langdon obeyed in a mechanical manner, and with a sharp click a handcuff was fastened to his wrist, and one of the soldiers and the rest of the party closed around them.

"March!" said the sergeant in command.

Then, led by the man with the lantern, they tramped along the wide arched corridor, through a guard room, where a number of men sat drowsily by a fire, and issuing from a great doorway, passed into the open air of the central court of the barracks.

It was very dark, for only a few lanterns lighted up the great space. It was cold, and a thin, drizzling rain was falling. In the middle of the yard another group was waiting, and four of the dozen soldiers there under the command of an officer had other prisoners handcuffed to their left wrists.

By the dim light of the lantern Langdon looked eagerly at the faces of his companions in misfortune, expecting to see Felinski among them. But all the faces were strange to him. There were a few busy minutes while the party formed up, the prisoners in the middle, the guards on each side; and then the officer gave the command, "March!"

The soldiers stepped off smartly, so that Langdon had to keep pace with the big fellow to whom he was handcuffed. The doors of the gate opening on the street were flung back, the sentry under the arch shouldered his rifle.

"Good night, and a safe journey," said an officer who had turned out to see them depart, speaking not to the poor prisoners, but to his comrade in command of the escort.

They marched through the muddy street in rain and darkness. The town seemed asleep. As they reached the square before the railway station, the clock struck three. The sight of the station was the first hint the prisoners had received that they were about to be taken away from Maloigrod.

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE THE SECRET TRIBUNAL.

In the station all was darkness, except at one point, where a couple of lamps had been lighted, and showed a train of three carriages waiting, and an engine with steam up. A squad of soldiers was drawn up close by.

It looked as if the authorities expected that some attempt would be made to rescue the prisoners; but no

one even knew that they were on the move.

"Into the carriage in front," said the officer. "You may take off their handcuffs, as soon as they are ready to get in; but let any one who attempts to escape be shot down on the spot. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant of the guard, saluting.

"And you," continued the officer, "you prisoners, do you understand my orders? Any one who attempts to leave the train without permission is as good as a dead man."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, then, in with you! If you behave yourselves, you will not have a bad time of it."

As each prisoner came to the door of the carriage, one of the soldiers unfastened the handcuffs. The car was a long one, with a stove in the middle and benches along the sides.

The soldiers kept one end of the car for themselves. Most of them took off their packs, but the rifles were put away carefully in a rack, while three men, after ostentatiously loading their weapons, seated themselves between the prisoners and the firearms. Throughout the journey these three loaded rifles were always ready to enforce the commands of the jailers and make the idea of escape hopeless.

The other soldiers who were off guard turned out to be very good fellows. They talked cheerfully to the prisoners, and what was better still, boiled some water on the stove in their tin drinking cans and made coffee, which they insisted on the unfortunates sharing with them.

To add to the general good humor, one of the prisoners produced a hidden hoard of tobacco, and made cigarettes, repaying the soldiers for their kindness by sharing them all around. Then one of the students began to sing.

No one would have supposed them to be a party of prisoners and their guard; and yet all the time the three men with the loaded rifles sat grimly silent outside the merry circle.

Langdon did not join in the festivity. It was past midnight, yet he felt no inclination to sleep; but when the gray light of morning began to steal in through the small windows he became drowsy.

"Better lie down and have a good nap," one of the soldiers said to him. "Take off your overcoat and wrap it around you; and here is a knapsack for a pillow."

Langdon was glad to act on the advice. When he awoke they were still traveling steadily onward. The journey seemed endless.

Breakfast, dinner, supper passed, and darkness came down again, and still they went on. It must have been near midnight when the guard told them to be ready to leave the train, as they were approaching their destination.

They stopped on a siding just outside a large railway station where several lines joined. Some of the soldiers got out first and opened their ranks for the prisoners to march between them. They passed out of the station, and marched along a hard road until they crossed a bridge over a broad ditch.

Then they passed through a fort and across other bridges, and at last stopped before a low range of buildings. Their names were then called out, and, as each answered, he was told to pass through the doorway which opened in front of them and led into a vaulted room—one of the bomb proof casemates of a fortress.

In the morning Langdon learned that they were at Breast Litewski, one of the fortresses of western Russia. His companions were, two of them, tradespeople of Maloigrod, and two of them students; and they were all accused of being connected with the Nihilists.

Next day they were marched out of the fort and into a large building. In a room in the basement they were brought before a court composed of

five officers, who sat behind a long table covered with papers. Others sat at tables right and left, and an armed guard stood behind the bench on which the prisoners sat.

The proceedings of the court were closely followed by Langdon. A long document was read, implicating Felinski and others in the work said to have been done by a revolutionary committee at Maloigrod. It stated that they frequently met at Felinski's house, and much more to the same effect.

The reading of this paper must have taken fully an hour. When it was finished, Langdon was told to stand up, and was questioned by the president of the court.

Langdon denied that he had been to any secret meetings at his friend's house, or that his friendship for Felinski had anything to do with plots and conspiracies.

"Your denial is useless," sneered the president. "We have evidence of your movements when in Paris recently. Sit down now while we examine your accomplice. Bring in the other prisoner!"

The door opened and another prisoner was brought in between fixed bayonets. Langdon gave a start as he recognized Felinski. The latter glanced sadly at his friend and faced the court.

His examination was short. Under the close questioning of the court and especially when they produced some of his own letters, Felinski had to admit that he was as deep as he well could be in the conspiracy among the students.

"But as for my friend here," he protested, indicating Langdon, "he is innocent and knew nothing of my plots."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the president, "How could he be your friend without having some knowledge of the conspiracy? Any way we have other proofs against him."

"It is not only possible, but is the simple truth," replied Felinski. "If I admit so much against myself, it is chiefly that I may save my friend."

"You are very clever," answered the president. "But he can save himself by speaking out and telling all he knows. You have only told us half the story. Sit down while we question the others."

Felinski sat down beside Langdon and grasped his hand warmly.

"George," he whispered, "I have brought you into this trouble without meaning it; but, even if it costs me my life, I will try to save you!"

"Silence there!" growled one of the guards, and the two young men listened perforce while three of the other prisoners doggedly declared their innocence, and the fourth, whom Langdon had already suspected of being a police spy, told a lying story of how Langdon had been selected as the trusted agent of the conspirators at Paris.

"That is not true!" exclaimed Langdon indignantly.

"Remove the prisoners. The trial can proceed without them," ordered the president sternly.

The two were seized by the guard, hurried from the room, and locked up in separate cells. There was no opportunity for even a whispered word between the two accused as they were taken from the court.

Anxious and gloomy thoughts filled Langdon's mind as he paced the narrow confines of his cell. Why had he not heard from the consul? What chance had he of securing his release?

He was interrupted by the opening of his cell door. One of the officers of the court stood in the archway, a paper in his hand, and the bayonets of the guard gleaming behind him.

"Prisoner," he said, "attention, and hear the decision of the court."

CHAPTER VI.

STARTING FOR SIBERIA.

THE document which the officer read to Langdon as he stood in the arched doorway of the cell was a long one. It

stated that Langdon had been proved to have been engaged in a conspiracy to overthrow the government, acting as the agent of Felinski and others, both in Russia and France.

It further said that, in any case, his surroundings were so suspicious that, even if nothing had been definitely proven, there would be good reason for placing him under police supervision, or exile, as a preventive measure; but, seeing that he had violated the laws, he should be at once sent to some place in Siberia to be decided upon by the government.

Langdon could hardly believe his ears. He knew Siberia to be a land of hopeless misery—so wretched that, when all other ways of escape had failed, the exiles in its prisons had voluntarily starved themselves to death. And now, through no fault of him, he was destined for that terrible fate!

"George Langdon," exclaimed the officer, folding the paper in his hand, "the authorities are very reluctant to proceed to extremities against one in your position, and I give you my promise that if you will make a full confession of all you know, your sentence will no doubt be promptly canceled."

"I know nothing, sir," replied Langdon. "I assure you I am speaking the truth."

"Possibly," answered the officer, "but you will find it difficult to get people to believe it."

"I have not had a fair chance," replied Langdon. "My letter to the American consul may not have been delivered. I demand that you send for him at once."

"You may write again," was the reply, "but don't count upon any result. You shall have writing materials, and there is yet time enough, for you will be here some days yet."

With this Langdon was left to himself. That very afternoon he was allowed to write his letters. But even as he told of the sentence of exile, the whole thing seemed unreal.

It appeared to him that it could not happen; it surely was but a threat used to make him give evidence, and as soon as it was seen that he had nothing to confess, he would be liberated.

"Besides," he thought as he finished writing, "they must be already seeking the help of the American minister in St. Petersburg. I am not a Russian, and shall surely be set free."

The next day he was called out in the morning to take some exercise by walking up and down the parade ground. To his great pleasure Felinski was one of the party. Armed sentinels watched over them; but even though they had this stern reminder that they were prisoners, it was glorious to feel the fresh air, to see the bright autumn sunshine on the trees, and the blue sky, flecked with clouds, above.

At first they walked up and down in silence; but presently some of the prisoners drew together and began to talk. The guard made no objection to this, and soon Felinski was beside Langdon.

"My friend," he said, "I can never forgive myself for getting you into this scrape. I——"

"Come, Alexis," interrupted Langdon, "stop blaming yourself. It is all a misfortune we could not overcome. But hope is not dead yet."

"As for myself," continued Felinski after a moment, "it matters little where I am. But you, George—you must and shall be restored to your freedom. Some day Russia may be a fit place to live in; but I shall not see it. It will be enough for me if I can set you free, even at the cost of my life."

"No, no!" protested Langdon, "we will be patient, and we shall both be free again, and look back on all this as a bad dream."

At this point in their conversation the voices of the jailers called out: "Silence, and back to the cells!"

Their short hour of partial liberty was over.

A week after the trial they were con-

veyed by train to Nizhnee Novgorod on the Volga. It was a long journey, but rather more comfortable than Langdon's previous trip from Maloigrod.

There were only three prisoners, Langdon, Felinski, and another student. They traveled in a second class carriage, guarded by three gendarmes, who were not bad fellows, and, beyond taking care that they had no chance of escape, made their position as little irksome as possible.

After a tiresome trip they reached Nizhnee Novgorod in the dark of a moonless night. They were locked up for some hours in comfortless cells in the local prison, and next day were taken back to the railway station and put in another train, bound for Perm, on the border of European Russia.

Three more prisoners had been added to the party. They were put in a larger and less comfortable carriage, and their guard now consisted of half a dozen Cossacks—big, strapping fellows, in sheepskin caps, dyed black, with a row of brass cartridge cases across the breasts of their green coats. Three of them spoke Russian very badly, and they were all bad tempered.

In Perm the prisoners were transferred to another train on the railway that runs across the Ural to Ekaterinburg, and just before dark they reached their destination. It was a surprise to Langdon, with the ideas he had formed of what was before them, to alight at this outpost of Siberia at a handsome station, and, marching out of its arched gateway, to see around it bright flowers everywhere on the grassy slopes. It was a bright entrance to a gloomy place.

They were put into an open wagon, a mounted guard surrounded them, and they were then driven to the huge, barrack-like prison. The people in the street stopped in groups to look at them.

At the prison gate a little crowd had gathered. In the courtyard the governor of the prison met them, a tall, gray mustached soldier, with a pleasant, cheery voice.

"Courage!" said Langdon, in a low voice, as he parted from Felinski in the corridor. "It might have been worse."

Langdon found his cell clean and warm, although he paid but little attention to these details. He had noticed, as they were driven through the town, that two men, in an open carriage, followed them up to the very gate of the prison. Both were dressed in loose, light overcoats and soft hats, and one of them seemed to be drawing or making notes in an open book.

There was something familiar in the latter's figure, although Langdon did not get a chance to see his face. He puzzled his brain for a long time trying to think where he had seen him before.

While he was thinking of this, he heard voices in the prison corridor, and was surprised to recognize some English words. He could hear, outside his door, some one speaking in Russian; then a voice replying in the same language, but with an imperfect pronunciation; and then the same voice speaking English, and another voice replying.

"He says," came the words in English—"he says it is only by special privilege that we are allowed in at all at this hour, and that we had better come tomorrow."

"Well, I guess, now we're here," came the answer, in English, "I guess we'll go right through the whole shooting match, as General Miles said one time when I was interviewing him about what he was going to do about an Indian outbreak in the West. Nothing like fixing a thing up right away when you've got the chance."

Langdon gave a start of surprise as he recognized the speaker's voice.

"Jimson Weede, the American reporter!" he exclaimed half aloud, as the footsteps stopped outside his door.

He was filled with the sudden hope that the newcomer must be in some way connected with efforts made by

the consul to secure his liberation through the American embassy. He did not stop to consider whether the reporter would likely be upon such a mission. To hear English spoken in that prison in the depths of the Russian empire was like a foretaste of liberty, and he stood up, eager to see the newcomers.

But the jailer, instead of opening the door, merely drew back the shutter, admitting a faint light from the corridor. A face looked in at the opening.

"Looks like a decent chap to be in such a fix," said the visitor, turning his head to address his companion.

Langdon recognized the voice of Weede and called out quickly:

"I am an American—an American citizen. Weede——"

The visitor's face was quickly withdrawn from the opening, and the jailer, who had pushed him aside, told Langdon harshly to be silent, and closed the shutter.

"He says he is an American," Langdon heard Weede say. "His name's Weede or else he knows me. Now——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the jailer, "it's a delusion of the prisoners that if they tell a traveler that they are Americans it will get them out. He is a South Russian, who has learned some English. We had a little Greek brigand here last month who only knew two words, and he would say, 'Mer'can cit'zen! 'Mer'can cit'zen!' whenever he saw a strange face about."

Langdon shouted to the reporter, calling him by name, but the jailer had led them away; and the only sight he had of the American was a distant glimpse of him in the crowd that saw them off two days later.

The appearance of Weede upon the scene puzzled Langdon, and his ineffectual efforts to make his identity known to him was a source of bitter disappointment. He knew that the reporter had heard him pronounce his name, and thought he should have made a stronger attempt to find out what it meant, unless, as he felt was almost sure, the American was really a government spy.

This seemed incredible, but there was the fact that the Russian authorities knew all about his visit to the Nihilist's house in Paris. Altogether it added to the gloom and despair of his feelings.

The next morning the prisoners were assembled in the court of the prison, and the names of fifty were called, among them Langdon and Felinski. They were informed that next day they would begin their march to Tiumen, where they would be transferred to barges on the Tobol River. In the evening the jailer brought a bundle to Langdon's cell.

"Here are your clothes for the march," he said. "Undress and put them on, and be quick about it!"

The clothes were a gray woolen shirt, a pair of loose trousers of the same color, a belt, and a gray serge overcoat reaching to his heels. This ungainly ulster was ornamented at the back with a diamond shaped piece of yellow stuff sewn into it, as the mark of the convict's dress.

There were rough stockings and a pair of badly made shoes, and a gray cap. When he had arrayed himself in this prison suit, his own clothes were taken away.

At six next morning, after breakfast, they were again paraded in the courtyard. In the middle of the yard a portable forge had been erected, and a smith stood beside it, with a heap of iron rings and bars at his feet, while an assistant blew up the fire with the bellows.

One by one, the exiles, arrayed in the long gray coats with the ace of diamonds at the back, were called up to the smith's side, and he fastened an iron ring loosely around each ankle. A chain connected the two rings, and it was just long enough for the wearer to hold up the slack part in his hands as he walked.

At last all were thus painfully equipped for the journey, including Langdon and Felinski. Into one of the waiting carts a quantity of baggage was loaded, into another some wretched looking peasant women and their children, the wives and families of some of the captives voluntarily accompanying them into exile.

All was ready. The prison gates were opened. The order was given to "March!" and the wretched exiles filed out upon the unpaved street of Ekaterinburg between a double hedge of Cossack infantry, whose fixed bayonets gleamed in the early sunlight.

CHAPTER VII.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

Out through the scattered suburb they went, their faces towards the morning sun. In half a mile they were clear of the town, and entered upon a broad road, running between a double row of silvery birches.

After a steady march, they halted a little before noon for the midday meal and a welcome rest by the roadside, watched all the time by vigilant sentinels with loaded rifles.

During this halt Felinski was busy helping several of his fellow captives to wrap rags around their chains to prevent them from chafing their ankles as they walked.

One man had been taken ill, and had been laid in one of the carts among the baggage. Felinski was ready to help here also; and the officer in command of the Cossacks, on finding that he was a medical student who was nearly ready for his final examination, told him that he would count on him as the doctor of the party.

"It is not easy to do much without medicines and instruments," replied Felinski, "but I will do what is possible."

The march for the day was a very moderate one—some fifteen miles. Early in the afternoon they arrived at its end, the first of the prison stations, a low, wooden building surrounded by a stockade. They were divided into two parties, and each driven into a room which in America would hardly have been thought large enough for two or three prisoners.

It was poorly lighted, unventilated, and around three sides of it ran a wooden platform, black with dirt, on which Langdon found they were to sleep huddled together. The air was stifling, and to add to Langdon's discomfort, he was not only separated from his friend, but discovered from the conversation of his fellow captives that several were not political prisoners, but common thieves and perhaps murderers.

Amid these surroundings he passed a very wretched night, and could hardly stand the next morning; but after a little while spent in the fresh air of the courtyard he felt better. Still he was in an unfit condition for the road when they started out upon the day's march.

This proved an eventful one. It was near noon, and Langdon was beginning to hope for another order to halt, when they met a train of wagons moving westward for Ekaterinburg.

These four wheeled carts, without springs, each drawn by two horses, are the means by which a great part of the trade of Siberia is carried on. In this case the line of wagons, nearly half a mile long, met the exile party as they were passing through a stretch of woods, and where the road was narrower than usual. The wagons halted on the right of the track for the prisoners to go by, the teamsters sitting on their loads and watching them.

Suddenly Langdon noticed a confused movement at the head of the column. He saw that some of the prisoners had dashed through the line of wagons, and were running for the wood.

"Run, brothers! You'll never have a better chance!" cried some one.

"Don't mind if they fire! Prison fever is worse than bullets," shouted another.

At least a score of the prisoners darted through the wagons, some slipping between the wheels or under the horses. Like a flash Langdon made up his mind to risk everything in a wild dash for freedom, and was stooping to slip under the nearest wagon when he felt himself seized with an iron grasp. At the same moment he heard the ringing report of rifles, some of them so close as to be deafening.

Langdon struggled to free himself, but in a moment saw that it was Felinski who held him.

"Stand close to me, and neither move nor speak," said the latter, releasing Langdon's arm, "if you value both our lives!"

Langdon submitted quietly, and looked about at the scene with horror.

What a din there was! Shouting, shots, screams, rattle of harness as terrified horses plunged wildly, harsh words of command that no one seemed to heed. A prisoner, fighting desperately hand to hand, was bayoneted before his eyes.

Beyond the wagons he could see men stretched on the ground, and others holding up their chains and running, while the soldiers fired at them, a shot ringing out irregularly here and there; some of the prisoners were huddled together, with bayonets pointed at their breasts.

An officer rushed up to the two friends and shook a revolver in their faces.

"You need not threaten us, sir," said Felinski, calmly. "We have made no attempt to escape; and I shall be more useful to you alive than dead, for there will soon be a lot of wounded men on your hands."

The soldier lowered his pistol and turned away. He jumped up on one of the wagons and looked around.

"Stop that firing!" he called out. "Lieutenant Malaniz, take twenty men and search the edge of the wood! The rest of you get the prisoners together, and make these lazy teamsters get out of their carts and bring in the dead and wounded! Where's that fellow that does the doctoring? Let him look after them!"

The officer leaped down from the wagon, and Felinski walked up to him with a salute.

"At your service, sir," he said, "and may I have my friend Langdon to assist me? I cannot do the work alone, and we have often worked together. He will be useful."

"Yes, yes," was the answer, "but look first to the wounded soldiers. These murderers have nearly done for two of them."

Felinski beckoned to Langdon.

"Come along," he said; "do what I tell you and say nothing. You see now what comes of mad attempts to escape."

As he spoke he pointed to the stretch of grass between the road and the edge of the wood. It was dotted with little heaps of gray rags. Langdon shuddered as he realized that every one of them was a dead man, or one that was struck down by a bullet that would have been more merciful if it had at once ended his life.

He assisted Felinski as he washed and bandaged the wounds of those who still lived—stopping the bleeding as best he could, and putting shattered limbs into rough splints made with twigs cut from the trees. In all thirteen of the wounded were brought in, and almost as many corpses.

Only five prisoners had made good their escape. Those who had tried and failed cowered under the angry looks of their guards; and the others trembled at the prospect of being involved in the punishment of their more venturesome comrades.

At two o'clock the commandant came to the improvised field hospital where the two friends were at work, and told them that he was about

to march. Felinski suggested that all the wounded should be placed in wagons taken from those that were stopped on the road.

"We must have a wagon for the wounded soldiers," said the captain, "as for the rest, why should we burden ourselves with wounded? I think we had better shoot them dead and leave them here. At any rate, we may as well put the hopeless cases out of their misery."

"Under these circumstances, sir," said Felinski, "I shall refuse to give any opinion as to whether any case is hopeless or not. I will have nothing to do with killing prisoners in cold blood."

"Measure your words more carefully!" exclaimed the captain, clenching his fist angrily. "If I charge you with trying to escape and have you shot, no one will question my act!"

"Shoot me whenever you like!" rejoined Felinski. "If you did it, my only regret would be that I could no longer help this friend of mine, who is here through a stupid mistake, and who has just been helping me save the life of one of your men."

The officer was evidently impressed by this evidence of reckless courage.

"Have it your own way, doctor," was all he said.

The wounded were placed in a couple of wagons, and the dead were buried in a grave dug by the prisoners. Then, after the captain had warned all that another attempt to escape would be the signal for the massacre of the whole party, they took up the march again.

As they started, Felinski bent down and whispered to Langdon:

"Our chance will come soon. I am working it out already. Do what I tell you without a question."

CHAPTER VIII.

FELINSKI HAS A SCHEME.

It was a most melancholy procession that resumed its march through the woods. The dead had been left buried under a mound by the roadside. The wounded were moaning and groaning as they jolted along in the rough wagons that had been taken from the caravan for their conveyance.

In other wagons some of the women were bewailing aloud the death of their husbands, though the soldiers more than once silenced them with angry menaces. The unwounded prisoners marched along in sullen silence, afraid to diverge one hair's breadth from the track.

Felinski had done wonders for the wounded, and was still busy doing what he could to make the journey easier for them. In all this he kept Langdon constantly near him, and he took care that the latter should seem to be busy, even when he was not actually assisting.

"This is our chance," he whispered. "If we can keep together and get them to trust us, all will be well."

Felinski's plan was working, for the officer of the command showed his pleasure at the student's zeal for the wounded, and admired his resolute pluck. Once he even condescended so far as to offer Felinski a drop of brandy from his flask.

"Thank you, sir," said Felinski, "but if there is any brandy to spare, it will be more useful for the wounded."

"You are a fine fellow, doctor," went on the captain, unhooking the flask from the strap on which he wore it, and handing it to the student. "Take it all, and do what you like with it. When we get to our next halting place, I will see if I cannot make things more comfortable for you."

But the party could not reach the second *etape*, or prison station, that day, so seriously had they been delayed by the attempted escape. So they had to encamp for the night, and this was a source of serious discomfort to all the prisoners and great anxiety to the captain, who feared the captives would try another dash for liberty.

He chose for the halting place a

stretch of open ground, with only a few clumps of trees scattered about it. The wagons were drawn up at one side, and by stretching canvas and tarpaulin cloths from their side rails to tent pegs driven in the ground, and heaping grass under this shelter for the sick and wounded to lie upon, wrapped in their blankets and overcoats, Felinski arranged a fairly comfortable temporary hospital.

It was a strange sight to see him clanking about with the chains dragging at his heels, while even the rough soldiers spoke to him as if he were an officer in command, and, as they took his directions, saluted him just as they would their captain.

Big fires were lighted, and the other prisoners were told to lie down near them. They were warned that any one who arose without obtaining leave would be shot down. Groups of soldiers were stationed about, and escape was utterly out of the question.

Langdon slept under one of the carts in the improvised hospital. He rested but little. Towards morning he awoke from a troubled nap, nearly frozen with cold, and did not sleep again.

He was glad when Felinski, accompanied by a soldier, came and called him out to help in getting breakfast for the patients.

Soon afterwards the whole camp was astir, and within an hour of sunrise the march was resumed, another mound marking its site, for during that hour they had buried another unfortunate prisoner, one of the wounded who had been found dead in his blanket.

The march was a short one, as the prison station which they should have reached the evening before was only a few miles in front. Arrived there, the more seriously wounded were placed in the hospital under the charge of one of the local officials, and the rest of the prisoners were huddled together in dens like those in which they had passed the first night after leaving Ekaterinburg.

But a piece of good fortune was waiting for Langdon and his friend. The captain ordered the smith at the prison to cut off their fetters, and they were both told that instead of going with the rest to the cells, they should assist in the hospital.

The old man who was in charge of it had once been a kind of assistant in a hospital, but beyond what he had picked up there he had no knowledge of medicine, and was glad to obey Felinski's directions.

In an old cupboard in the corner of the hospital they found some medicines, and after doing all that was possible for the sick Felinski hunted up some small bottles and put into them some of the more useful drugs, giving two or three of them to Langdon to keep, and putting the rest in the pocket of his own coat.

"If any one questions you," said Felinski to Langdon, "say that you are carrying them for me, as we shall have to look after the wounded on tomorrow's march. I will tell the captain I have taken them. They will be worth more than their weight in gold to you and me later on. Don't ask me how or when," he added, as he noticed a puzzled look in Langdon's face, "I have my plans, but we cannot talk about them now. Simply keep yourself in readiness to follow my lead for the present."

Langdon said he would be ready when wanted, and the determined look in his face did not belie his words.

Next day, leaving the more seriously wounded behind, they continued their march towards Tiumen. Langdon and Felinski were still in charge of the sick, and by a piece of good luck the latter was able that day to prescribe and cure the captain himself of an attack of illness which, though a mere trifle, was painful enough to make him very miserable and ill tempered while it lasted.

When at last they arrived at Tiumen, they were told that the next part of their journey would be a voyage on

the Tobol and Iritsh rivers, and then there would be another march of several hundred miles to some mining settlements beyond Lake Baikal. It was so late in the year that probably the latter part of the journey would be delayed until the next spring.

On the fourth day after their arrival at Tiumen they, in company with some two hundred others, were marched down to the bank of the Tobol to embark. The river bank is high, and at the place of embarkation a kind of zigzag staging of wooden planks, supported on light scaffolding, leads down to a pier of heavy timbers.

At this peer were moored a steamer and a barge, the latter a long black craft, with a kind of cage erected on its wide deck, the corners of the cage being supported by deck houses painted in alternate stripes of black and yellow.

The Rusian flag flew from a staff at the stern. At every bend of the zigzag descent from the bank a sentinel stood with fixed bayonet. A double hedge of bayonets kept a lane across the pier to the gangway of the barge, and on her deck other soldiers guarded the open door of the huge cage, into which the prisoners passed in single file, after an officer had taken their names and checked them off his list.

This cage was to be their day quarters while on board, and besides being strongly constructed of heavy iron netting, was guarded on every side by sentinels posted on deck. This would have been fairly comfortable compared to the prison cells, if it had not been so terribly overcrowded. The exiles were huddled together like a flock of sheep in a pen.

But at night, in the hold below where the prisoners' beds were located, it was simply sickening towards morning. When Langdon rose from a troubled sleep in this vitiated atmosphere, he was almost ill. He told Felinski of his condition, adding that, all the same, he meant to try to keep on his feet.

"No, no," whispered his friend; "you must seem to be very unwell. Even if you were in perfect health, I should have asked you to act the part. It will fit splendidly into my plan. You must not try to go on deck with the others."

It was very wretched to stay below in the darkness of the hold, but Langdon knew he had his part to play; and he saw how well Felinski was arranging things when the latter came back accompanied by the captain and a couple of soldiers.

"This prisoner is ill, sir," said Felinski, pointing to Langdon. "They had better carry him up to the hospital at once, for he must not make the effort to walk."

"Certainly, doctor," answered the officer, "you are the only one on board who understands these things. There ought to be a surgeon belonging to the prisons department with us, but he is engaged elsewhere. Take the man up to the hospital."

Felinski's scheme was working beautifully.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE BARGE.

LANGDON was assisted up the steep stair into the cage, and through a lane of staring prisoners to the door which was opened by the guard; then along the deck outside and placed in a bunk in one of the black and yellow deck houses which served as a hospital. Two other prisoners were brought in later, and Felinski came and went during the day, acting as prison doctor, and having one of the soldiers to help him occasionally. Another stood sentry at the door.

Once the captain came to see how they were. Acting on Felinski's advice, Langdon answered him in a low, almost inaudible whisper.

"He is very weak," said the officer. "You must take care of him, doctor. It counts against me at headquarters

if too many prisoners die on the journey."

"I will do my best for him," answered Felinski, "but I am not at all sure of being able to save him. He may be dead this evening for all I can do."

Some time during the afternoon, Langdon awoke from a short sleep that made him feel quite well again. Looking out of his bunk, he saw Felinski bending over a bundle on the floor, which he was fastening inside a small keg that had contained some hospital stores. These he had taken out and piled on the floor.

When he noticed Langdon was awake he put his finger to his lips.

The former watched in silence as the other put everything away in the recess under his bunk, after having fitted the top into the keg, forced the hoop down tightly, and further secured it by driving into it the blade of a penknife, and then snapping it off. Standing up, Felinski came to Langdon's side, and handed him a small piece of paper. There was writing on it, and, while the student stood between him and the other sick men, Langdon read:

Our chance will come this evening, just before dark. As I leave the hospital I will put my hands to my face. That will be the signal. You will hear an alarm of man overboard in a minute after. Get out of bed, take the keg from under your bunk, rush out and jump into the river, keeping a hold on it and using it as a buoy. Push away from the steamer towards the right bank. The sentry at the door will probably run to see who is overboard; but if he stays at his post you can dash past him, for he will never expect a patient to try to come out. He thinks you and the others are dying. If he is in the way, shove him forward and fling yourself into the river.

Langdon read the paper and handed it back. Felinski crushed it into a small ball and put it in his mouth.

"You will be ready?" he whispered.

"Yes, at the word."

When Langdon was left to himself, he began thinking over the situation. It seemed such a tremendous risk. How were they to escape, he wondered, and where were they to go even if they did reach the river's bank? But he recognized fully that now was the time and that such another opportunity might never present itself again.

A bold dash for liberty had a charm for him, aside from the prospect of its success, and then the thought of being free again made him impatient for the hour to come.

The afternoon dragged along, and it seemed an interminable length of time before the room began to darken with the twilight. Finally there was a step outside, and Felinski entered.

He attended to the two other patients, and wrote down a number of directions as to what should be done for them during the night.

Then he turned to Langdon, and bending down, whispered, "Be ready for the signal."

He pulled the keg out from under the bed and put it near the door, then, raising his hands to his face, stepped out on the deck.

Langdon raised himself on his elbow, ready for a spring. He had on his trousers and shirt. His shoes were on a shelf near him. He got hold of them, and slipped them under his belt.

At this moment he heard a confused outcry on the deck. He leaped out of the bunk and seized the keg. Then plainly he heard the alarm of "Man overboard!" followed by a trampling rush and a couple of shots. The critical moment had come.

He pushed the door open and dashed upon the deck. It was nearly dark. The sentry had gone a few paces from the door, and, with his rifle grasped in both hands, was watching the broken waters astern.

A little further off, and more towards the stern of the barge, a group of soldiers were trying to get a boat out, but evidently something was wrong with the gear. From the roof of the deckhouse a shot was fired, but in what direction Langdon could not tell.

Without hesitation he pushed past

behind the sentry, sprang over the rail and plunged into the river.

It was fearfully cold, but in the wild excitement of the moment he hardly felt the shock.

The water closed over him, but he was speedily up again, holding firmly to his improvised buoy, and striking out with his feet so as to urge it towards the right bank. He heard more shots, but there was no sign that any had come near him.

After a dozen strokes he stopped and looked around. He was at first puzzled to discover at what distance the steamer was. He saw her tall black funnel throwing out a long stream of sparks, and behind her the dark mass of the prison barge with flashes of rifle fire coming from the rail and from the roof of the deckhouse.

Then he realized that, although he had only moved a few yards from the place where he had plunged into the river, the steamer and the barge it towed had gone away from him rapidly, for there was not yet time to stop the paddles.

But he could see nothing of Felinski. He must be higher up the river, and Langdon felt that he could only hope to meet him when he reached the bank, if ever he was to get there, unless, as was possible, his friend had become the target for some of the bullets.

He began to swim again, keeping the keg well under his chest. But he made very little progress, and the cold began to tell upon him.

The steamer had stopped by now, and a hasty glance told Langdon that she was turning round. His position was becoming decidedly unpleasant, but now he saw something coming along the surface of the water towards him. It was growing dark very fast, but as the object drew nearer, Langdon saw, to his great relief, that it was Felinski swimming to him with the current, and rushing through the water with long, powerful strokes.

"Here we are!" exclaimed the latter, as he reached the other's side and caught the barrel; "it has worked splendidly. Now help me push for the shore."

Between them they rapidly urged the barrel toward the bank. But the steamer had turned, and they could hear her coming nearer and nearer. How soon she would be passing them they could not say.

"Stop swimming!" suddenly whispered Langdon. "Make no noise and get as low in the water as you can."

They sank until only their lips, nose, and eyes were above it. The thunder of the approaching paddles came through the water with deafening effect into their ears.

Soon the steamer passed, but not as near as it seemed to the swimmers. The wash of the paddles swept over them and sent the barrel bobbing up and down like a cork, but this was not seen by those on board. A moment later Langdon felt his feet touch the muddy bottom, and found the bank rising above them like a black shadow.

In a few minutes he had grasped the projecting branch of a tree, and pulled Felinski toward him, and an instant later they were standing side by side on the shore in the dark shadow below the bluff, with the barrel containing their property between them.

They did not say a word, but instinctively grasped each other's hands and pressed them fervently. But they were not yet safe. Not four hundred yards away the steamer had stopped. They could hear shouts and orders that told them that at least one boat was out at last, and would perhaps search the river bank.

Slinging the keg between them, they stumbled along for a few yards, until they discovered a couple of trees overhanging from above. It was a struggle to make their way up the steep bluff, for, though it was not more than thirty feet high, it was composed of clay that broke away under hand and foot.

Slowly they ascended, an occasional fall of earth and stones marking their progress, and at last, by the aid of a projecting root, reached the top. As they did so, a huge rock gave way under their tread, and, crashing down the bank, splashed into the water.

Unseen by the fugitives, the pursuing boat had dropped down the river while they were climbing, and was now almost abreast of them.

"Halt there!" came a hoarse challenge from the river, and there was a splash of oars as the boat drove towards the bank.

"Keep beside me and run for it," said Langdon; and, turning their backs upon the bank, they ran as fast as their wet clothes and chilled limbs would allow, thinking only of putting as much distance as possible between themselves and the shore.

Suddenly a shot rang out behind them. Their enemies had also reached the shore, and were in pursuit.

CHAPTER X.

DANGER WITH THE DAWN.

THE fugitives had no thought of the direction in which they were going; but through the growing darkness they could discern ahead of them either a belt of trees or the edge of a forest, and made for it.

The ground seemed all hills and hollows to their feet, and once Felinski stumbled and fell, but was up in a moment. Yet, in that brief pause, they could hear the sound of footsteps behind, and men talking to each other.

Felinski was getting out of breath, and it seemed as if the trees were receding the more he struggled to reach them.

"I am done for," he gasped at last. "Leave me and go on by yourself."

"Not much," was the matter of fact reply. "But if you can't run we must manage another way. Stoop down and walk quietly behind me."

They turned sharply to the right, treading as softly as possible on the short grass that covered the ground. They could hear the pursuers closing upon them, but probably unaware that the fugitives had changed their direction.

"Lie down," whispered Langdon; and they threw themselves flat on the ground.

It was a daring venture, but fortune favored them. The soldiers ran straight forward, the nearest passing not forty yards off.

"Rise and follow me in the same way," whispered Langdon, when they were gone. "We are going towards the river."

It was a clever ruse; for they were increasing the distance from the soldiers, who were still making for the wood, and at the same time placed themselves on ground where the pursuers would never think of looking for them.

"Crack! crack!" came a couple of shots from the direction of the forest.

"They are well off the track now," said Langdon, with a low laugh. "They are firing at random in the woods. But we must keep walking, or we shall die of cold and wet."

They turned to the left, so that they were now proceeding parallel to the river. As they advanced they had a glimpse of the steamer's lights half a mile away. It would have been dangerously near in the daylight; but the darkness rendered it safe.

At last the steamer began to blow her whistle.

"That's good," said Langdon, under his breath; "that will probably be a signal to them to give up the chase. But whatever it is, we must be moving."

They set off again, following the same course, and after tramping for about twenty minutes, came to a halt.

"Now," said Langdon, "I think we may be safe for a little while to come. We must camp for the night in one of these clumps of trees.

"Of course we cannot risk making a fire," he added; "even if we had anything to light it with. But I am so cold that I almost think the danger of making a fire, if we could manage it, would seem not half so bad as the risk of being half frozen before morning. At any rate, we can get our clothes off and wring some of the water out of them."

"We can do better than you imagine," answered Felinski.

He tapped with his knuckles on the little barrel that they had dragged with them all the way since they landed. Without a word, he placed the keg on the ground, and bringing the whole weight of his body upon it, forced in the head of the barrel with a sharp cracking noise.

"What have you got in it?" asked Langdon.

"I have your overcoat," was the answer, "and another, that I think must have belonged to the other patient in the hospital on the barge. Then there are two shirts, and trousers, and a couple of pairs of shoes, and your cap. It's lucky they put such thin stuff in the prison clothes, or I should never have been able to stow so much in so small a space. Then there are some medicines and wax matches, and a little food and a tin drinking cup. I think that completes the list. So now the first thing to do is to get rid of our wet clothes."

Their supper of biscuits (of which they left a few in reserve for the morning) seemed like a feast, for they had magnificent appetites.

This modest meal disposed of, they hung their wet clothes among the trees, after wringing the water out of them, and lay down under the shelter of the spreading branches of a tall fir.

At first they intended sleeping side by side, but it occurred to Langdon that, as their enemies were so near, it would be better for one to watch part of the night while the other slept. Felinski hailed this as a capital suggestion, but insisted that the other should be the first to sleep, while he himself stood sentinel.

But Langdon did not find it so easy to get to sleep. He lay awake for at least an hour; then dozed a while, and finally sank into a deep, dreamless slumber. It appeared to him only a few minutes when Felinski woke him, but it was really about two in the morning.

"I would have let you sleep on," said his friend, "but unless I have my turn we may both break down in to-morrow's march."

The night was dark, but though there was no moon, the stars shone so brightly that the new sentry was able to distinguish by their light the clumps of trees and the general line of the ground.

Langdon had a peculiar feeling of loneliness, but as he turned over in his mind the incidents of their escape, he could but feel that they must yet reach a place of refuge.

It was true that they were far from it now. They were alone in the wilderness, with thousands of miles between them and safety; but somehow the thought of the dangers before them in their future wanderings did not now seem impossible to overcome.

Hour after hour went by, and at last, eastward, the sky whitened with the coming day. The increasing light showed Langdon a bend of the river shining not half a mile away.

Then the stillness was broken by a dull, heavy sound that he did not at first recognize. But a moment after he knew its import, and that it was the beat of the steamer's paddles, for he saw her tall black funnel appear around the bend of the stream.

Danger had come again with the dawn!

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURING A GUARD.

THE funnel of the steamer moving along behind the trees by the river bank showed that those on board the prison

barge had not yet abandoned the hope of recapturing the fugitives, for otherwise they would not have spent the night near the point at which they had escaped and come up stream again in the gray of the morning.

Langdon had little difficulty in arousing Felinski from his sleep.

"There is no fear," he said, after explaining the situation. "We are nearer the river than I expected, but we had better keep quiet here, unless they send a boat ashore. The moment they stop we can move away from tree to tree; and on this hard ground we shall leave very little track for them to follow us by. They will not go far from the river, in any case."

In order to be ready for instant flight, they made a bundle of the clothes they were not actually wearing, hid the empty keg in the bushes, and sat down, eating the biscuits they had reserved for their breakfast.

Langdon watched the steamer move slowly past them up the river, for about a quarter of a mile, when she stopped and blew her whistle.

"What does that mean, Alexis?" he exclaimed. "They must be whistling to some one on the shore."

"Yes," replied Felinski, showing considerable agitation, "you are right, George. They must have landed some of their people lower down, and doubtless they are searching the ground along the river. That will be a signal to tell them where they can rejoin the steamer. Heaven only knows where they are, or when they may come upon us! In any case we must get to better cover than this. Come along!"

He rose and led the way. He was evidently anxious and all but frightened over this new development. The pair left the clump of trees, and made for the larger masses of larch and pine-wood that stretched along the river further inland.

The steamer sent out every minute a shrill whistle, but the two fugitives saw no sign of any living thing, except a flock of chattering magpies that hopped and fluttered on the ground not far away. At last they reached the edge of the wood and felt fairly safe.

They pushed on through the trees, the view to the right and left being interrupted by the thick growth of young larches. A deer started up near them and plunged away through the bushes, giving both a start, because it lay close until they were almost treading upon it.

It bolted off to the left, but a couple of minutes later they saw it running back across a small opening in front of them. Langdon, who had something of the hunter's instinct in his make up, laid his hand on Felinski's arm.

"Keep still!" he whispered, "and listen. Something has turned back the deer."

For another minute they heard nothing. Then indistinctly came the sound of a voice. A man was shouting out some orders of directions to another away to the left.

"Move on slowly and quietly," whispered Langdon, now calm and resolute, nerved by the impending danger; and Felinski felt himself steeled against fear by his comrade's coolness.

Again they stopped to listen. In the thick wood on their left footsteps were approaching, branches cracked here and there, and they caught now and then the sound of some exclamation. Exchanging a silent signal, they crouched together in the thickest patch of bush that they could find.

Ten paces in front of them a soldier passed along, forcing his way through the branches of the little trees, and poking his fixed bayonet into them, now right, now left.

Turning his head, Langdon saw another, working in the same way, a little further behind them. They had evidently extended themselves in a long line, and were exploring the wood, like a chain of beaters at a hunting or shooting party; but they were, luckily for the two fugitives, diverging from each other in the wood. and just where they

lay the gap in the line was a very wide one.

Langdon held his breath as they passed; then, to his great relief, the footsteps and the rustling of the branches went further away from them.

"All safe!" he said. "Now let us move away to the left and inland, and we shall increase our distance from them every step we take."

But Felinski's ears were this time quicker than the other's.

"No," said he, "stay here. There is some one coming along the same way they came."

They crouched down again. Nearer, still nearer, came the step. The man was coming directly towards them.

Langdon quickly slipped off his long convict's coat, while Felinski watched him in silence, curious to know what was his plan, so that he might help him, but not daring even to whisper a question.

The footstep was within a yard of them; through the branches of the trees they saw the soldier make a sweeping shove with his bayonet into the next bush, and then the bright steel came around, bending aside the low branches that covered them.

"Catch the barrel, Alexis," exclaimed Langdon, and as he spoke he made a wild spring through the larch boughs at the soldier's head.

Felinski tried to get hold of the rifle barrel, but was only able to turn it aside. Langdon and the soldier rolled to the ground together at the same moment, the former having thrown the coat over the man's head and face and then grasped him around the arms, flinging him on his back among the bushes with the mere force of his spring.

Felinski rushed to his assistance, caught the man by the wrist, and thus helped to hold him down, while Langdon knelt on his chest and gagged him with the coat.

"Keep quiet," he said in a low, stern voice, "or we will stab you with your own bayonet."

The man ceased to struggle. Felinski secured the rifle. Langdon, again warning him not to move or cry out at his peril, gagged and blindfolded him with the coat, fastening it around his head with a piece of cord, and pinioned his arms with his own belt. Then he stood up, detached the bayonet from the rifle, and, with the bright steel in his hand, fixed his eyes upon their prisoner.

"Most men in our position would kill that poor wretch, to prevent him from telling any tales," he said.

"No, no," Felinski answered quickly. "Anything but that. Why not leave him here and push on?"

"You do not realize what you are proposing, Alexis," said Langdon. "If we leave him here, either the wolves will find him—and that would be worse than our killing him outright—or his comrades would come back to look for him, and get on our track again. But you are right in one thing. We must not kill the poor fellow if we can help it. He is doubtless the son of some peasant family in Russia, forced into the army, and sent here to do this work. If he will be reasonable, we will spare his life and take him with us, but if he is so foolish as to disobey our orders we shall have to make an end of him."

Bending over the soldier, with the bayonet pointed at his breast, he told Felinski to loosen the gag. The man gasped for breath as the coat was removed from his face, and then lay staring at the two men out of his large gray eyes.

"Listen, comrade," said Langdon, addressing the man. "If you speak above a whisper, I will drive this bayonet through you; but if you will obey my orders, as you would those of your captain, I will spare your life, and set you free later on. Do you promise to obey?"

"I promise, sir," answered the soldier.

"Then, rise," said Langdon, "and move on before us. Make no noise, and look neither to the right nor the left."

CHAPTER XII.

ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE trio tramped steadily through the bush, Langdon keeping the bayonet close behind the soldier's back, having warned him that on the least sign of resistance or flight he would be stabbed. They had taken his cartridges, forty in all, but did not dare to load the rifle, for a shot so near the river would have been a signal to their enemies.

After they had marched thus for an hour and a half, they halted in a small clearing beside a stream. They were now at least three miles from the river. It was broad daylight, and the bright sunshine streamed through the branches of the huge pines.

Their little stock of provisions had been exhausted by their scant breakfast, and now there was nothing for them to do but drink from the stream; but cold water is by itself a very poor meal.

The soldier produced from one of his pockets a pipe and some tobacco. He offered them to Langdon, evidently wishing to cultivate his good graces.

"Have a smoke, sir," he said respectfully. "It does one good even when one cannot eat."

"Thanks," answered Langdon. "I have something else to think of just now. What do you want from me?"

"I want nothing," said the other.

"Yes, but you do," replied Langdon. "You had better tell me at once and save time."

"Well, sir," said the soldier, slowly, "I dare not go back to the others now. I shall be half killed for letting myself be taken and losing my arms. Let me go with you both and help you."

"Oh, no," replied Langdon positively. "That will not do."

"But, sir——" began the soldier.

"That is out of the question," Langdon explained. "No doubt you mean well now, but how can we tell that you would not be tempted to make peace with the authorities by betraying us later on when we pass near some town or fort? No, no, you may be very glad that you are in the hands of men who would rather risk something for their own liberty than take your life. Most men would have put an end to you."

"But I dare not rejoin my company."

"Well, then, desert if you like, but don't think you are going with us. There are plenty of ways in which you can shift for yourself; but if I were in your place, I should get back to the river and be picked up by the next steamer that comes by in a day or two. Now, Alexis, we must march. Good by, friend; we have got a fair start, and are not going to be caught now."

The soldier looked dejectedly at the pair as they prepared to leave. He sat where he was, watching them until they had disappeared in the wood, Langdon in the lead with the rifle upon his shoulder, and Felinski following close behind.

"I hope he won't get back to the steamer by some mischance, and start them after us," suggested Felinski, when they were safe within the wood.

"Well," said Langdon, "it would have been dangerous to have him with us. We had to get rid of him in some way, other than killing him."

"Then," exclaimed Felinski, "I am heartily glad that we have chosen the risk. To kill a man in a hot fight may be right enough, but killing a prisoner in cold blood would seem like cruel murder."

"So it would be."

They marched on boldly, but as they tramped further and further through the wood the journey became more and more irksome to Felinski. Still, an hour later, when Langdon told him that they should begin to look out for the

track of a deer, he brightened up, and felt of a sudden very much better.

"Perhaps it is the prospect of getting something to eat," he soliloquized; "or else the chance of killing a deer, that has made me feel so much better all at once."

It was still early in the day, but they were a good six miles from the river, and considered that they might safely make a noise. They had not been looking very long for evidence of deer when Langdon saw several tracks across a clearing.

"Look, Alexis," he exclaimed, grasping his friend's arm. "There are some tracks in that swampy ground, sloping down to the stream. They must be those of a deer that came to drink this very morning."

Felinski agreed that this was very likely the case, after he had taken a good look at them.

"Why not wait a while in ambush on the edge of the clearing?" suggested Langdon. "Perhaps it will come back."

"A capital plan, George," said Felinski, and then they placed themselves in a favorable position and waited.

They were in this situation for at least half an hour with nothing stirring near them but the birds. At last they were just on the point of giving it up in despair, and resuming their tramp, when Felinski saw something brown among the trees on the other side of the glade from where they were stationed, and cautiously called Langdon's attention to it.

The latter held the rifle ready in his hands, and dropped to one knee. The two men hardly dared to breathe, for they had no food, and there directly opposite, wearing a pair of splendid branching horns, was their dinner; in fact, all their meals for some days to come.

The stag moved with a stately step out of the trees and across the swampy ground towards the stream. It looked a very easy shot, for the animal was not sixty yards away. Langdon pressed the trigger. There was a rushing burst of smoke that hid everything, and, as it cleared away, they saw that the glade was perfectly empty. The stag had gone.

"Missed! by thunder!" cried Langdon, "and such an easy shot!"

He was thoroughly angry for minutes after, and berated himself severely for his poor markmanship. So much had depended upon it! They had only forty cartridges, and could not afford to throw any away; and the deer were not always accommodating enough to appear within range when wanted.

"You try the next shot," he said to Felinski, but the latter was compelled to decline his offer through very weariness.

They tarried there a while longer, but no game came in sight. At last they resumed their march, both feeling the effects of exposure, exertion, and want of food. Even Langdon's step was no longer springy and elastic, and poor Felinski felt that he could hardly walk a foot further.

Fortune seemed now to be against them.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING ENCOUNTER.

THEY tramped along wearily until about noon, when they halted on the edge of a hollow, through which they could see the well marked tracks of several deer. There was almost a beaten path in the middle of the glade.

They decided to wait there in the hope of another shot, and lay down, sheltered by some bushes and wrapped in their overcoats.

Felinski tried manfully to keep awake, but soon dozed, and then slept —about the best thing that could happen to him under the circumstances. He was awakened by a thundering crash, and sat up, with the blue smoke drifting around him.

The first thing he saw was Langdon

dashing off through the bushes. In a moment another shot was heard, and then Langdon came back on the run.

"I have killed a fine fellow," he announced; "though it took two shots to finish him. Now, Alexis, wake up and make a fire, and we shall have something to eat at once."

The thought of the deer lying dead among the bushes put an end to all anxiety about food. They knew but little of the hunter's craft, but succeeded in cutting off a good deal of meat and cooking it on wooden spits, both making a hearty meal to their mutual satisfaction.

"How do you feel now, Alexis?" asked Langdon, turning to his friend, stretched at full length on the ground.

"All right as to my inner man, George," replied the Russian, "but I am awfully tired and don't feel much like another tramp today."

"Suppose we remain where we are, then. I will get a shelter ready for the night, while you look after the meat for our breakfast tomorrow."

They had no more than begun their preparations for camping when an incident happened that intensified the perils of their present position, and brought many adventures in the future.

Langdon had gone into the bush to gather brush for a protection over night, and was returning, when he heard voices; then he saw his friend talking to a stranger; the two evidently very much excited. There was something strangely familiar in the newcomer's appearance.

Suddenly there flashed into his mind that strange meeting in Paris, and the visit to the Nihilist, and he recognized the American reporter, the spy who, he felt, had caused all his trouble.

A dreadful feeling came over him—a desire for revenge; he dropped his load with a cry to Felinski to stand out of the way, rushed forward, and threw himself upon the astonished American.

The two men came to the ground with a crash, Langdon on top, his hands clutching the reporter's throat.

Felinski seemed too astounded to move at first, but a glance at the face of the under man told him that in a moment he would be choked to death.

"For God's sake, George," he cried, trying to pull Langdon away. "You will kill the man. Look! he is black in the face;" then Langdon got up without a word and stood to one side, while Felinski raised the gasping and almost insensible reporter from the ground.

In a few minutes the American was able to sit up with his back against a tree. He looked at the student, a peculiar smile coming into his face, and then turned to Langdon.

"I say," he began, "what came over you all of a sudden? Do you take such spells very often? If you do, just give a fellow the tip when you expect another one."

Langdon strode to his side, and said sternly:

"Look into my face for your answer, Weede." He removed his convict hat as he spoke.

"By all that is wonderful!" cried the reporter, struggling to his feet. "George Langdon, my friend! In that garb, too! What are you doing in this God forsaken country?"

"You probably know very well how I got here," Langdon replied coldly.

"I know? You are joking, my friend. By the gods, this is the most peculiar experience in all my career. What does it all mean?"

Both Langdon and Felinski remained silent; the latter eying the reporter with scowling brows.

"Explain this mystery," continued the American earnestly. "What move of fate has wafted you from Paris to Siberia? Speak, friend. What brought you here?"

"What brings *you* here is more to the point," replied Langdon.

"Came in one of those infernal *tarantas* most of the way, and hoofed it the balance," answered Weede. "I was

lost in the woods when I heard a couple of shots over this way and followed it up. Didn't expect to find you, that's certain, but wanted company of some sort in this infernal place."

"But what are you doing in Siberia?"

"Been investigating the exile system—for the New York *Hemisphere*, and that theory of mine, you know. Went through the prison at Ekaterinburg—a beastly place—got nabbed a few days after by one of the police who didn't like my style. Says he, through an interpreter, 'You can't stay in this country,' and he gave me twenty four hours to make up my mind what to do. Heard there was a curious colony of escaped convicts somewhere in this region, so I decided to take French leave to investigate the thing, and hired an infernal guide who brought me part of the way and then gave me the sneak."

"You looked into my cell at Ekaterinburg," began Langdon.

"What?" cried Weede. "Was that convict you?"

"You are a very clever actor," rejoined Langdon bitterly. "You probably know more about that whole affair than I. At any rate, you lied to your employers, the Russian police, about my interview with that Nihilist, Ivan Krasinoffski, which you arranged as a trap for me. You——"

"Russian police, my employers?" interrupted Weede in evident amazement. "You must be crazy, Langdon. And that interview was a harmless affair, as far as you were concerned. You——"

"Enough," said Langdon. "I know you to be a spy for the government, for how else could they have known about it if you had not given them a lying report of the affair? I——"

Just then Felinski broke into the conversation. Springing forward, he cried excitedly:

"I have blamed myself for your arrest, George, when this lying spy was the cause of it all."

"Never mind, I can fight my own battles," replied his friend.

The reporter stood before the young men looking from one to the other, not understanding a word, as they spoke in Russian.

Suddenly the student turned fiercely upon him and cried: "You, with your lying reports to the government, are the one who first set them upon George's track! And, by heaven, you shall pay for your treachery here and now!"

He sprang savagely upon Weede, who was taken by surprise, but quickly rallied.

"Hold on, you blamed fool!" he exclaimed, struggling with the infuriated student.

Felinski had no sooner grappled with the reporter than they were all three startled to hear the shouts of voices near by.

"You miserable traitor!" the Russian cried between his clinched teeth. "You have led the soldiers to us, but you shall pay for your treachery before they can help you!"

He suddenly freed himself from Weede's grasp, and bounded towards the rifle lying upon the ground. This movement was not lost upon the American, and, like a flash, he sprang upon the student before the latter could effect his purpose.

And then ensued a fierce hand to hand struggle among the three men. Langdon finally got possession of the gun, leaving the other two to fight it out, while the sound of approaching voices drew nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

LANGDON, rifle in hand, faced in the direction whence the voices came, and called to the two combatants to stop fighting, but Felinski was now thoroughly enraged and sought with all his strength to conquer his adversary. He

had no doubt in his mind but that Weede had acted as a spy for the Russian government, and he felt convinced that the newcomers were soldiers in pursuit of them.

The reporter seemed puzzled at the Russian's attack, but maintained his end of the contest with determined vigor.

"Hold on, you blamed fool!" he exclaimed, as the struggle began in earnest. "What are you fighting about, any way?"

Felinski's only answer was a sharp blow which he managed to inflict upon his adversary's head.

"You're getting too blamed familiar on short acquaintance, as the governor of New York said when——" began Weede as the blow landed.

It was plain that the American's fighting blood was now fully aroused, and he sailed into his adversary without further preliminaries. His long, bony arms flew through the air like a couple of flails, and savage blows rained upon the student's head. Felinski sent home a blow or two, but to no purpose. A few moments sufficed for the American to overpower his assailant and pinion him to the ground.

"There!" exclaimed Weede, as he held his prostrate enemy firmly. "Have you got enough? Don't you think you'd better ask for a suspension of hostilities until matters can be arranged?"

Felinski did not deign to answer this query, but struggled still to free himself from the other's grasp.

"It's no use, my boy," said Weede coolly. "You're outclassed, and that's all there is to it. Throw up the sponge, and I'll——"

He stopped short as he saw a couple of roughly dressed men appear within view around a clump of bushes not far away. They were still talking loudly, but the American and Felinski had been so intent upon their struggle that they had forgotten all about the approaching voices. A sight of the newcomers brought it all back to the reporter's mind.

"Hold on, you blamed fool!" hurriedly exclaimed Weede to Felinski; "stop your fighting and get up. Here comes a couple of your countrymen. We had better go and help Langdon. That would be a darned sight more sensible for you than pitching into a friend of his, for that's what I am, and don't you forget it."

Felinski still thought the strangers must be soldiers hunting for him and Langdon, but he was quick to make up his mind what to do. It was evident that he was at the mercy of the reporter, and if, as he suspected, the new arrivals were in league with the American, there was now nothing to be gained by further resistance. He resolved to give himself up, and wait for a better opportunity to have it out with the reporter.

"All right," he said shortly. "Let me up."

The reporter released his hold and Felinski rose quickly to his feet. He was surprised, upon looking at the newcomers, to find that they had not the appearance of soldiers. The latter had stopped short when they caught sight of the struggling pair, besides the appearance of Langdon standing in front of them, armed as he was, looked dangerous.

Langdon's quick glance showed him a couple of men, evidently hunters, armed only with bows and arrows, and clad partly in garments of rough cloth, and partly in skins. His first idea was that they belonged to some half savage tribe; but when he called out to them they answered in Russian, and, after some hesitation, came nearer.

When they learned that Langdon was an escaped convict, they hailed him as a brother in misfortune, and told him freely who and what they were.

"We have come on a long hunting expedition from our village, more than twenty miles away," said the older of the two, who acted as spokesman. "It is hidden in a glen in the woods and in-

habited only by escaped prisoners, deserters from the army, and such like, and has existed there unknown to the authorities for nearly twenty years.

"Many of these villages have been kept secret for a longer time, in the Siberian wilderness, and may Providence deal as kindly with us. But who are your companions?"

This question again brought Langdon face to face with the necessity of a quick decision. What should he say with reference to the American reporter? He had not had an opportunity to give the matter any thought, but now glanced at Weede, who stood by, not understanding a word of what was being said.

Should he denounce him to the outlaws as a police spy, as he firmly believed him to be, and thus contribute to the American's destruction? That such would be the outcome, should the outlaws know the truth, Langdon had no doubt.

"Even if they do not take his life," he thought rapidly, "they will become suspicious of us all, unless they think we are all escaped convicts. I must have their help, and must risk taking the American with us. The safety of our secret demands that I keep him where I can have my eye on him, and I'll do it."

He had hesitated but a moment before turning to reply to the speaker.

"This is my friend, Alexis Felinski," he said, pointing to the Russian. "We escaped together from the prison barge last night. This," he added, indicating Weede, "is an American whom I met in Paris, and who, finding himself by some mischance in our exile party, is also making his escape. We are strangers in Siberia and fugitives from the government. Can we go with you?"

The hunters hesitated, but finally discussed the matter with Langdon. The fact that the latter had a rifle and some cartridges seemed to interest them, for though they had a few guns in their remote settlement, they were without gunpowder, and were therefore forced to hunt with bow and arrow. But when they found that Felinski understood something of doctoring and had medicines with him, they quickly concluded that the party would be a welcome accession to the outlaw village.

They finally agreed to take the fugitives to the distant village upon Langdon's agreeing for himself and companions to throw their lot with the outlaws. Langdon explained the situation to Weede; at the same time, thinking it good policy, he gave the latter to understand that he now believed him to be a friend and that all else was a mistake.

"An outlaw village, did you say?" exclaimed the reporter, when he had been told. "Just what I'm looking for. Things are coming my way, sure. I can investigate the whole business for the *Hemisphere*, and study the bump question at the same time. I'm with you, up to the handle."

They were soon on the march again, but now with renewed hopes for the future and their ultimate escape from the dangers that surrounded them.

CHAPTER XV.

INTO THE UNKNOWN.

THE outlaw village was a group of some twenty huts. Land was tilled around it and there were some cattle. The people all obeyed an old man who was the patriarch of the place.

It was by his order that the new arrivals were intrusted to the care of Anna Rulanovna, the widow of a soldier, in whose hut they were all made comfortable on their arrival.

It was most fortunate that the hunters had found them, for the early snows of the winter were near at hand, and existence unprotected in the forests would have been all but impossible. Indeed, Russian authorities do not concern themselves much over the escape of a prisoner late in the year.

In the early spring he has some chance of making his way to a place of refuge before the hard weather begins. In the summer he can live in the woods; but as the winter draws nigh he is reduced to such terrible straits that in most cases he prefers to go back to his jailers and surrender to them in the hope of thus escaping a lonely death in the wilderness.

The three spent the winter in the outlaw village. Weede was an almost constant companion from the day of their arrival; although on the part of Langdon and Felinski there was still a feeling of suspicion which they were careful to hide from the others. They maintained towards their American comrade a sort of armed neutrality, which the latter endured without comment.

"Well, boys," he said, one day while they were out hunting, "Doc here has made himself very useful to these good people, and we are all quite comfortable, but what we want is to get out of here, as a convict up in Sing Sing told me when I went to interview him on the needs of prison life. Still, we've got to wait until this infernal winter is over, for no one can travel far in this intense cold."

Weede was right in that, but there was another and more serious obstacle to their taking their departure, as Langdon found out to his dismay. Even if the way had been open, their new hosts would not let them go; for, although the village had few laws, there was one which was regarded as the very basis of its constitution, the very first condition of safety for its twenty households, and this was the rule that once man, woman or child became a member of the little community he or she must not leave it again.

If any one went away he would be sure to talk of the place he had come from, and then others would hear of it, and the Cossacks would arrive, and, even if the jailer did not appear with them, the tax gatherer would soon appear, and the police, and their freedom would be a thing of the past. All who came were welcome to stay, and share like members of one family in the results of the summer's toil and the winter's hunting, but no one could desert the village republic once he had become a citizen of the little State.

In their case there was an additional reason for keeping them, for until Felinski's arrival there had never been a doctor in the village. The complete recovery of several fever cases had established his reputation, and when, for the first time for many years, the winter passed away without a death in the village, it was looked upon as a new proof of his unfailing skill and unbounded knowledge.

It was natural that Langdon should chafe at being thus bound to one remote spot in the depths of the northern forests, for his thoughts were continually going back to his work and the prospects so suddenly interrupted. But now it seemed as though everything had come to an end, and that he had, in reaching this haven of shelter, simply exchanged one form of bondage for another.

"I am getting tired of this," he said to Felinski, one day. "We cannot remain here always; it's like being buried alive."

They were talking together in the open air, walking in the snowy street, for they did not venture to speak of such plans before the villagers or even before the American reporter. It was dark and cold, but they were well wrapped up. The stars sparkled overhead, and northwards there was a mass of luminous cloud across the sky, from which wide streams of crimson light—the northern lights—would every now and then flicker up from the horizon.

"A long journey it must be," said Felinski, "if we are ever to leave Siberia. But what are your plans? Which way must we go?"

"The way those streamers are pointing," replied Langdon, looking up at the sky. "They come from the north,

and they point to the south. We cannot go back to Russia. It would be useless to make for the shores of the Polar Sea. Eastwards Siberia stretches to the ocean. We must go south, across the steppes, and over the mountains until we see some Indian frontier fort."

"It must be a thousand miles to India," said Felinski.

"A thousand?" exclaimed Langdon. "It must be nearer two, perhaps more. I wish I had even the poorest of maps, or knew the distance and the best way. But we must trust to Providence to guide us. This much I can see; we must get away from here as soon as the winter breaks, and then, avoiding the towns, we must make our way to the steppes southwards, and then try to join some Turkoman tribe that is moving south, or go from tribe to tribe, and trust to luck and your skill as a doctor to be our passport. How to cross the mountains into India will be a difficulty, but there is some going and coming of pilgrims and traders in that direction, and we shall join some of them. But it is useless to try to think everything out in advance. We must work our way as the chance offers."

"As for food," suggested Felinski, "we can live by hunting most of the time."

"Part of the time," said Langdon. "That is why we must join every hunting party while we are here, and try to get as much skill as we can with these old fashioned bows and arrows. A rifle is all very well in a country where you can walk out into the next street and buy cartridges, but I am afraid we must trust to a weapon that only wants a few arrows which can be picked up and used again. As for making our way, once we are out of the land where Russian is spoken, you know I was preparing for an appointment in one of the Asiatic districts before I went to New York; that was why I learned Persian from my father, and picked up a little Turkish. I wish I knew more."

"But when we get near India, your English and your connection with American interests will also be worth a great deal to us."

"I hope so," said Langdon. "And that reminds me of Weede. What will we do about him?"

"Leave him here," answered Felinski promptly. "We would be well rid of him, and he is able to take care of himself pretty well by this time. That would be far safer than taking him along."

From that time Langdon thought of nothing else but their plans for getting away from the locality. The main point at first was how to lull suspicion among those who formed the immediate circle of the village chief, and this they succeeded in doing by urging that, in recognition of Felinski's skill as the physician of the community, a house of their own should be built for them, and they should be allowed to have a garden and a share in the cattle.

They showed such interest in carrying out these plans as spring approached, that it was taken for granted that they had made up their minds to settle down in their new surroundings.

They planned it all out, and when the time for action came, they started ostensibly on a hunting expedition with the widow's son, who had agreed, through friendship for Felinski, to guide them on the first stage of their journey. Weede wanted to go with them, but they managed to elude him by leaving at an earlier hour.

They carried concealed about them the little store of provisions that had been prepared for the trip. As they left the village, they turned their faces southwards and marched steadily forward. They did not lose much time in hunting, but pressed ahead as rapidly as possible.

The three spent the night at a hunter's camp in the woods, and it was not until some hours after they had resumed their march the next day that their guide turned homewards. When the last farewells had been spoken and

his retreating figure had disappeared among the trees, the two wanderers faced towards the noonday sun.

An unknown world lay before them. They were about to make their way through the heart of Asia, living the life of wandering hunters and surrounded by a hundred perils.

Langdon pointed southwards.

"Courage!" he said, "we were among friends in the outlaw village, but they might have become our jailers. Far off in front of us is freedom, and the word is Forward—march!"

"Not by a darned sight!" came a voice almost at their elbows. "The word is, You can't lost me, Charlie!"

Turning quickly around, Langdon and his friend saw Weede, the reporter, smilingly surveying them.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FIGHT AT THE CAVE.

THE two fugitives were more surprised at seeing the American reporter at that moment than they would have been to find a company of Russian soldiers encamped in the woods. They had left him safely, as they thought, in the outlaw village, had traveled a long day's journey, and even now were some distance from the place where they had encamped for the night.

How the American could have divined their purpose, much less have tracked them so far, was beyond their comprehension.

"Oh, no, friends, it won't work," said Weede, banteringly, before either could utter a word. "You can't shake me as easily as that. I'm just as anxious to get out of this infernal country as you are, and, if there is any way of doing it, I want to know the when and how."

Felinski, taken completely by surprise, attempted some lame excuse, and tried to deny that such had been their purpose, but Weede would not listen to it.

"See here, my Russian friend," he exclaimed, with some show of anger, "we might as well understand each other before we go any further. This throw down is all your doing and not Langdon's, I am sure, and I don't intend putting up with any more of your foolishness. You've got some crazy notion into your noddle that I have been unfriendly to George, but I tell you now, if I hadn't seen what you have done to help all of us, I'd knock your infernal head off, and wouldn't be long about doing it, either. I'm going with this expedition, whether you like it or not, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"So you shall," said Langdon, with sudden resolution. "But how did you know where we were?"

"Followed you, of course," replied Weede with a satisfied smile. "I got all the points I needed in that village long ago, and only wanted a chance to get out. I got on to your little scheme, how I won't say, and sneaked away soon after you left the village, and hung close to you until our outlaw friend left you. Now, let us quit all this foolishness and cross purposes, and travel together like friends and brothers.

"One thing is sure as shooting," he continued, "there is something else we must not forget, now that we have finished our mutual explanation seance: those good convicts are not going to give up their doctor, or his friends either, without making an effort at recapture, and a determined one at that. Another thing, my disappearance from the village, so soon after your departure on the hunting trip, has no doubt caused them to be suspicious before this."

Langdon recognized instantly the truth of Weede's words. They were not out of danger by any means.

"It is all your fault, as usual," exclaimed Felinski, with a black look at the reporter. "You've been in the way from the start——"

"Action, not words, are more to the point, Alexis," put in Langdon before

Weede could reply. "We've got to stand together now and henceforth if we hope to get out of this scrape. Come, you fellows, shake hands and we'll be off."

"That's the kind of palaver for the occasion," chimed in the reporter. "Give us your paw, old man, and——

"Hello! Who is that?" he exclaimed, pointing in the direction they had come. "One of the boy convicts, as I am a sinner; now we are in for it for sure."

Langdon and the student turned and recognized the widow's son, who had left them an hour before to return to the village.

The boy was running towards them. He looked back every few steps, as if pursued. It was evident that immediate danger threatened.

"Looks as if he were anxious to see us," said Weede to Felinski, with a laugh; but Langdon, having started on the run to meet the guide, the student followed him without reply.

"Guess I had better join in the race," muttered the reporter, starting after Felinski.

As the three runners neared the boy, he was seen to stop suddenly; then, with a startled glance at the American, he turned in his tracks and ran from them at the top of his speed.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed the reporter. "What's the matter with the kid, any way? Took me for a ghost, I guess."

"Something wrong here," said Langdon, coming to a halt with his eyes on the boy, now some distance away.

"Then we will have to catch our bird and find out the trouble," answered Weede, sprinting after the flying figure while the two friends brought up the rear.

It was a short race and exciting while it lasted. The boy did his best, but the active American soon had him in charge, and was trying to quiet his struggles when Langdon came up, Felinski being yet some distance away.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Langdon, as he took hold of the boy's collar.

No answer. A sullen look came into the convict's face.

At that moment Felinski joined the group, somewhat out of breath, but eager for news.

"You'll have to pump this fellow, Felinski," said Weede in English. "He refuses to recognize George."

The student looked at his little convict friend standing between the two men.

"Come here, Orloff," he said with a smile. "What has frightened you, my boy?"

The sullen look left his face, tears came into his eyes, and with a cry he threw himself at the student's feet.

"Doctor," he exclaimed sobbingly, "I tried to warn you, to save you and your friend. You are pursued. I saw the men from the village on my way home. They had been following your trail with the wolf dogs. When I came near the hut where we stayed last night, I heard the dogs, and hurried back to tell you."

"How do you know they were looking for us?" asked Felinski.

The boy looked up to answer; a faint sound was heard. He listened intently for a moment. Then again came the sound, now more distinct.

It was the reply to the student's question. The dogs were on the scent and coming in their direction.

"It is a fact," exclaimed Langdon. "They are after us." Then turning to the young convict he asked: "How many dogs and men did you see?"

"Three dogs and seven or eight men; I am not sure about the men, but I heard them say something about two parties being out."

"There is a chance yet," said Langdon, a determined look coming into his face. "But come on, let's get out of this. Bring the boy with you, Alexis," leading the way to the right, followed by the others.

"Doctor," suddenly exclaimed the young convict, "in the hills yonder there is a cave. I know it well, as father and I stayed there one night before he died. We were out hunting, and became separated from the others. Tell your friend I will show the way, and if we can reach it before the dogs come, you will be saved."

Langdon was informed, and called to the boy, who took the lead, followed by the three refugees.

"This is a dog goned mean trick of our late friends," gasped the reporter, as he strained to keep up with the others. "I'll never see that noble animal again without giving him a kick for old time's sake."

They had not heard the sound of the dogs for several minutes, but now they were startled by the long drawn out baying, followed by the short, quick barks peculiar to the species, and they knew the pursuers were gaining.

Felinski lagged behind. His face was pale as death. It was evident he could not go much further without rest. Langdon looked back and saw the distress of his friend.

"Alexis," he said, "you are done for. We all need a breathing spell. We'll take it right here and now," calling to the boy and Weede to stop.

They all threw themselves flat on the ground utterly exhausted, but poor Felinski seemed almost insensible as he lay there panting for breath, with his head in the young convict's lap.

"How much further to the cave, Orloff?" inquired Langdon, getting up quickly as the sound of the baying dogs came down on the wind.

"Over beyond the first hill," he replied. "We must go to the right first, then through a narrow valley, and——"

"Come on, then," interrupted Langdon. "We've no time to lose. How do you feel, Alexis?" helping the student to his feet.

"Much better, George," was the reply. "I'm all right now—at least as far as the cave."

They started on the run again, with the boy in the lead as before, while the reporter brought up the rear for the purpose, as he expressed it, "of making sausage meat out of the first dog that put in an appearance."

Things were looking brighter for the pursued, as more than half the distance had been covered, and they were nearing the entrance to the narrow valley.

Langdon knew the dogs must be running loose a long way in advance of the convicts, from the way they had gained upon them. At least one of the dogs was leading the others by a considerable distance as well, judging by the sound.

It was evident they would not be able to gain the cave before this fellow had caught up with them.

Langdon had been looking out for a good place to make a stand, with the idea of trying to kill or disable the first dog before the others came up, and then to push on until compelled to make another halt.

"If I only had a good Smith and Wesson," he thought, "it would be easy; but with only a hunting knife and bow and arrow, there is a chance that somebody will get hurt in the fight."

They came to the entrance of the valley, and at the first glance Langdon saw a pile of stones at the base of the hill on the left hand side. It was just what he wanted, but he continued on for a hundred yards, then retraced his steps to the stone pile, followed by the others without comment, as they knew he had a plan.

"Now, boys," he said, "get back of those stones like lightning." He followed them as they jumped from where they had been standing.

"Get your bows ready," he ordered. "Weede, you take the lower end with Alexis and the boy. I will watch here at the head of the line to give you notice when the animal appears."

Every one was in position, crouching behind the stones with bow in hand and arrow at string.

The baying of the dog could be heard drawing nearer and nearer.

It was an anxious moment to Langdon. He felt the responsibility of his position, but was determined to meet it even to taking the brunt of the animal's attack upon himself.

Suddenly from around the corner at the head of the valley the dog came into view with muzzle to the ground, mouth open and dripping tongue hanging out. He threw his head into the air and gave forth a cry as the scent grew stronger.

Then Langdon whispered to his companions to be cool and to shoot straight.

As the animal came opposite to his position Langdon straightened up, drew an arrow to the head, and let fly, calling to the others at the same moment to shoot.

It was a lucky shot, its effect being apparent before another had left a bow. The dog, with a terrible cry, tumbled into a heap, snarling and biting at the shaft that now could be seen sticking from just behind his left shoulder blade.

"A bullseye for you, Langdon," called out the reporter; "but, I say, give us a chance at the next one, please."

"We'll all have plenty to do before this is over," was the answer; "and now let us get out of this and to the cave instanter before the other dogs come up."

They scrambled over the stones and ran down the valley, giving the dying animal a wide berth in passing.

A few moments later they reached the cave. The boy had run on ahead, and was seen to climb into a tree as the others came up.

From the branches he called to them to follow, leading the way along one of the limbs that had grown toward and against the cliff. Pushing aside the leaves and small branches, they entered what at first seemed a mere hole in the face of the rock, but later proved to be of considerable extent.

"Dame Nature is our friend this time," exclaimed Weede, as they settled themselves the best they could. "This is a regular made to order for the occasion cave."

"It could not be better, that is a fact," returned Langdon, striking a light with a flint and steel, "provided, of course, somebody don't investigate by climbing the tree; any way, the dogs can only track us so far, and then man will have to do the rest; that means only one at a time. But I hope they will be unable to find us."

The fugitives were now able to take a much needed rest. There was nothing that could be done for the present, except to wait for what might or might not turn up.

They were in a position of comparative security, and felt thankful things had turned out as well as they had done.

"I say, Doc," said the reporter in English, "just interview that cub for me, please. I'm curious to know what he saw in me to cause him to turn tail and run away a while back, before the dog fight. I've been thinking about it ever since."

Felinski put the question in Russian:

"In the first place," answered the boy, "I thought if the men found us together when they came up we could explain our absence easily, and return with them. I started back, and then I saw the American with you, and knew it would be impossible to explain that——"

"But why did you run from us?" interrupted Langdon, turning around from his position at the entrance.

"I intended to tell them you had disappeared from our camp during the night, and try to delay their pursuit as long as possible."

Suddenly the dogs were heard at the head of the valley, then came a cry, and then silence.

"They have found their dead brother, I guess," remarked Weede, "but——"

A howl of rage from human throats came floating down the wind, and then

those in the cave knew the convicts had arrived.

"Cheerful sound that!" commented the American, turning to Felinski. "Seems to me we're like rats caught in a trap, and there come the dogs to finish the business."

"Yes," replied the student, "but, like rats cornered, there is going to be a fight; that is, if they find the cage."

Langdon had cautioned all to be ready. "The dogs could be killed," he said, "but no harm must be done to the convicts unless in actual self defense to save life."

"I cannot think of shooting these men even to save me from capture," he continued, in reply to Felinski's objection to the order. "These people were friends to us when we most needed a friend. They are in the right even now from their own standpoint, and furthermore, it is not impossible to get away without bloodshed."

"That is good news, at any rate," spoke up Weede. "I had been thinking more of our getting out by hook or crook than whether to kill any of our late friends or not, but I am with George right up to the hilt just the same."

Meanwhile the dogs and their masters had not been idle. It was evident the convicts did not know, or had forgotten about the cave.

Many times the brutes had stopped at the tree, sniffing and growling, only to start off again, racing round and round in a circle. The men were now standing together where Langdon and the American could see them plainly. They were evidently puzzled at the apparent disappearance of the fugitives.

"They must have gone direct to that tree by the cliff yonder," said one of the convicts with decision. "The dogs followed them there, and ever since have not been able to recover the scent."

"That may be," replied another, "but they are not in the tree now is plain to be seen."

"We are losing time," exclaimed Platvaski, chief of the village. "If they are not here, they must be somewhere, and that means escape. I propose that we divide the party. Two of you with one of the dogs can remain here, while I take the others up the valley and make a circuit of the hill."

Langdon could hear every word spoken by the convicts, and when four of the men started, accompanied by one of the dogs, the chance to escape he had been looking for presented itself.

"What do you think of the situation, Weede?" he asked, turning to the reporter, who sat immediately behind him.

"Two men and a dog will be easier than double that number, I guess," was the reply. "But I say, why not rush things, now there is some chance? I'm getting tired of this rat hole."

"That's what we all think," answered Langdon, "but what are they up to now, I wonder?"

The two remaining convicts had approached the tree, where the dog could be seen sniffing and now and then jumping against the trunk, as if trying to reach the branches above.

"I am going to have a look," said one of the men, catching at a low limb and drawing himself up. "Just keep your eyes open and the dog ready."

Langdon had been expecting something of the kind to happen from the first. He whispered to the others to keep still, and prepared himself for the discovery that seemed inevitable.

The convict had reached the limb leading to the cave and called to his companion to look out below in case he fell, when an arm shot out—a hand clutched him by the collar, and he was jerked out of sight before the astonished eyes of his friend standing on the ground.

A brief struggle in the gloom of the cave followed, the man being too frightened to make an outcry, and there remained but one more convict to deal with.

Meanwhile, the man outside had come

to his senses. The mysterious disappearance had been solved in the most startling manner.

To him it meant death to remain; to go, life and a chance for revenge. He took to his heels, followed by the dog.

Weede happened to be watching at the cave entrance; he saw the convict start up the valley on the run.

"The man is off to call his friends," he cried. "I am off to block his game."

He swung himself to the limb and down the tree, followed by Felinski.

They reached the ground almost together, and the race was on, with the reporter in the lead.

The flying convict looked back and redoubled his speed, but the dog was made of different stuff—he faced around and ran towards his pursuer.

The American had held the lead. He received the assault of the brute, and they went down together, rolling over and over; the dog trying to reach the man's throat, while Weede fought to save himself from harm.

Felinski arrived on the scene just in time to draw his knife, and the fight was over as far as the dog was concerned.

"That's one on me, old man," said the reporter, giving the student his hand as he sprang to his feet, "and——"

"Hello! here comes the dead dog's master. Look out, Doc—he's going to shoot."

They threw themselves on the ground as the arrow came whizzing through the air.

"A miss is as good as a mile," cried the American; "but the next may be a winner; here goes for a regular Fitz knock out."

He made a dash towards the convict, who now had another arrow ready. The reporter managed to dodge the hastily aimed shaft, but the man threw away his bow and was ready to meet his enemy, knife in hand, before Weede could reach him.

"Throw down your frog sticker and put up your hands like a man," cried the reporter in English, forgetting in his excitement to speak Russian, but the convict only answered by a slash of his knife, which the American avoided by a side step, learned from one of his friends of the ring—at the same time sending in his right and left to the face in quick succession.

It was a clean knock down scored for Weede, which he was not slow to take advantage of, and the Russo-American fight was over.

Felinski arrived in time to help secure the convict. They returned to the tree, leading their prisoner between them.

"Well done, boys," was Langdon's greeting. "It is a good beginning, now for a like ending.

"We must get out of this before the other convicts get back. My plan is to leave the two men here at the tree securely tied. I have had a talk with Orloff, and we have decided it is better to tie him also—so the rest will not suspect. The others are sure to return soon—perhaps too soon for our safety."

In five minutes the thing was done, and the three wanderers were once more on the road to freedom.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WEARY JOURNEY.

LANGDON would not consent to rest until far into the night.

"We can take our time later on," he said in answer to Felinski's complaint of feeling tired. "But now is our chance to put those convicts off the track."

It soon became a toilsome, anxious tramp. Their scant supply of provisions was exhausted the first day, and lack of skill with their poor weapons prevented replenishing their larder with much frequency. To tramp all day, to kill what little they could, and to light a fire and cook the game, was their life for many weeks.

Their condition became pitiable.

Far from civilization, with worn out clothes and broken shoes, with unkempt hair and hungry faces, they struggled on, fearing to meet, not the wolves, but the Cossacks.

As their plight became worse and worse, Weede alone seemed to retain his spirit.

"Gosh, this is worse than living at a Bowery restaurant," he exclaimed one day, when their efforts at securing game had proved a complete failure. "I'll never kick at 'sinkers' again. I'm ready for anything that's filling, as Dr. Tanner said when I interviewed him at the end of his forty days' fast."

That evening, as they were dragging themselves along, barely able to walk, they at last saw lights of houses not far away. With the ever present dread of the Cossacks in their minds, they thought it must be some frontier fortification, and debated long whether, spent with hunger as they were, they might not as well give themselves up and face the worst.

"Let's risk it," said Langdon, supporting Felinski by the arm. "The chances are that's a farm and not a fort. Brace up while we walk that far. Here, Weede, help him along."

They at last reached the farm. The yard was empty. They looked about cautiously, hearing the barking of a dog and wondering where he was.

"Well, I'll be darned!" exclaimed Weede when he had at last located the animal on the roof of the house. "They give their dogs a high seat in the synagogue out here."

It seemed funny to the American, but at the lonely Siberian farms the watch dog sits on the roof to get a good view and to keep himself warm against the chimney. It was a relief to the weary travelers to see that this old dog was so fat and so comfortable that he had not the slightest idea of coming down.

They knocked at the door, softly at first, and timidly, then louder and still louder. The door was barred, the windows were shuttered, and the house was as the house of the dead. But there was some one inside who would not answer.

"I am fainting," said Felinski, weakly. "I can't stand any longer."

"Cheer up a moment," said Langdon. "Hello! What's this?"

He indicated a projecting beam of the house half way down the wall, upon which an earthen jar could be seen.

"There's food here," exclaimed Weede, who had hastened to it and looked in.

It is the custom in Siberia to leave such supplies for the passing wayfarer, who, in many cases, is an escaped convict, and who is expected, in consideration of such help being given him, not to compromise the giver by asking for shelter under his roof.

They all ate eagerly and continued on their way. It seemed to Felinski that his life had been saved by that supper.

At last they reached the upper course of the river, and the cultivated clearings, or the wide tracts of rough grass on which the cattle fed, gave way to a district of low hills covered with pine and larch woods. They were safer in that wilderness than in sight of farmsteads and villages.

They tramped for the next week, killing what little game they could, and camping out for the night beside a campfire in some secluded spot.

One night while Felinski and Weede were trying to kindle a fire to cook their scant supply of game, they heard the voice of Langdon calling: "There are tents down the valley!"

"Tents!" cried Felinski, starting up, not thinking of food.

"Yes," was the answer, "black tents!"

"Have we got to the Kirghiz at last?"

"Yes, the black tent means the Kirghiz; the tent of a European is white, more or less. These are of dried skins, you know."

"Let us go down to them," said Felinski, breathlessly.

"Not until morning," objected Langdon; "if we go in the dark, we shall run a good chance of being shot!"

They sat late over their supper and the night seemed long to the wayfarers, but they knew that friendly help was near. But what must have been their friendlessness and destitution, when they looked on the tents of this barbarous tribe as a refuge.

Next day they went to the camp. The tribe was not a numerous one. Their horses and cattle—some of them hobbled or picketed, but most of them free—grazed on the level ground beside the stream.

Spears stuck in the earth before the tent told of the number of the riders. Women were busy cooking at the campfires; children played and rolled about on the grass, enjoying the warm sunlight of the early summer morning.

What a pleasant sight this was to the little band of homeless wanderers!

One single horseman, the sentinel of the camp, rode slowly to and fro half a mile away, though no one could approach the spot without being seen even when he was still much further off.

Langdon and his companions drew near with confidence, for in Asia, the stranger who approaches a camp trustfully and quietly is presumed to be a friend.

If he were an enemy, he would not come alone, or with one or two companions; so they were received as guests, and, although their stock of words was small, they were able to explain that they could be of some service to their hosts.

"Though we look more like an aggregation of hoboes in hard luck," whispered Weede to Langdon, when he learned what had been said.

Langdon acted as spokesman, and announced that they were anxious to travel southwards. They found that the Kirghiz were bound in the same direction, having lately broken up their winter camp among the woods on the northern edge of the steppe, intending to make their way with all speed to the warmer lands and better pastures to the south.

They willingly took the wanderers into their fold when they learned of Felinski's skill as a *hakim*, or medicine man, and the next day the party set out upon their march.

It was here that Weede received his first rough lessons in riding. After a day's experience, the reporter would not have mounted again, if he could have avoided it; but, as some people learn to swim by being thrown into the water, so he learned to ride by having to remain in the saddle.

The rolling plain seemed endless, but at last, after passing through a land of many lakes and pools, hills began to rise upon the left, and in the early summer the tribe camped, with some hundreds more of their Turkoman brethren, in the valley of the Syr Daria, in sight of the famous river, and uncomfortably near a Russian post on the trade route that follows its course.

Langdon's skill in Oriental languages now came into good play. He circulated among the tribes, seeking quietly and unobtrusively to further their chance of getting to India.

One day Felinski heard him talking earnestly in Persian to a horse dealer who came from Tashkent, and that night in the tent he learned what had passed between them.

"It's all arranged," said Langdon. "We are to go with the horse dealer."

"Where?" asked Felinski eagerly.

"Near 'the roof of the world,'" said Langdon. "It will be the right way for us."

"What on earth do you mean by 'the roof of the world'?"

"I'll tell you," replied Langdon. "When they talk about the roof of the world, they mean the great knot of mountains north of the Himalayas. If we get as far as that, we're safe to get to India."

"Are we quite sure he is going to India?" asked Felinski.

"Not to India, but to the country north of it. I know who he is; I have learned all about him; his master is a merchant of Mashed. The man was anxious we should go with him when he heard you were a doctor. He seems to think your services may be required."

"You didn't tell him who we were, did you?"

"I told him we were exploring the country with a wealthy American—the reporter comes in handy this time—and the man has jumped to the conclusion that we are properly authorized. He in return has told me what his business is; he is buying horses for a caravan. There are risks to be run; but it's the best chance we have of getting away from here."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FELINSKI'S SKILL IS PUT TO THE TEST.

In the morning they parted from the Kirghiz with many expressions of regret on the part of the latter. Felinski's character as the *hakim*, gave him the credit of being an all powerful wonder worker, whose presence with the tribe was a security against every danger. Only that they feared it would bring them ill fortune to thwart him in any way, they likely would have resisted their departure.

And now began new dangers to the travelers. The road they followed along the course of the river, between a ridge of mountains on the one hand, and the fringe of the desert on the other, was watched by a series of military posts, and they soon found that the Persian was so glad to have Russians with him that he thought of presenting himself to the commanders of them as if he were traveling under the protection of Langdon's party.

But this would never do. Langdon explained to him that they wished to pass by every port and garrison as unobtrusively as possible. He said further that he knew it would be useless to ask for authorization to continue their explorations to the eastward. It was not for that purpose that they had been sent to Asia. They must defer to the wishes of Weede, whom Langdon represented as being a wealthy American tourist.

The only chance, he said, of carrying out their agreement with the American was to do it without asking any one's leave but his master's, the merchant.

This made the horse dealer a little anxious. He asked if they had papers for their journey into Central Asia. Langdon, ever ready, answered without moving a muscle:

"When we left Europe for Asia, it was with all our papers in order, and we were even provided with an escort of the imperial troops, but to bring them with us when we joined the Kirghiz would have defeated our object and alarmed our hosts. We wished to share the daily life of the men of the steppe. All our papers we left with our escort. If you do not wish for our company, say so, and we will return the way we came. If we are to travel eastward, it must be as I have proposed; but, if your master has any fear of crossing the frontier with us without a regular passport, we shall either give up the enterprise, or, at the risk of being turned back, we will apply for it to the Russian commandant at Khojend or Khokand. But all this your master Seyyid can best decide."

The proposed appeal to Seyyid quieted the man's fears and carried the day.

Luckily for the travelers, the shortest way to Ghinaz, where they were to join the merchant's caravan, lay not by the main Turkestan road, but directly south along the upper river. They had some two hundred horses with them, and a score of men to look after them, but food and water were found by the way, and a few pack saddles carried all that was wanted for the men.

They passed on without adventure, and were met about forty miles north of their destination by a couple of mounted scouts, from the camp of Seyyid, who were waiting for their arrival.

On the way Langdon had heard from the agent something about his master. Seyyid Ibrahim, he learned, was a merchant, originally from Meshed, in the north of Persia, where he still had his home, when he was not making one of his long trading journeys across Asia. At Meshed he had a warehouse where he accumulated various goods from Russia, for which his experience told him there was a good market in Central Asia.

He was a wealthy man, and a generous, open handed master, the agent said, and he hoped great things from the journey he was now about to make with a large caravan into the highlands of Kashgar and Yarkand, perhaps even into China, where he might open up a new market for his wares.

But the scouts brought bad news. Seyyid, they said, lay ill in the camp at Ghinaz, a fierce fever upon him; already men were talking among themselves as to what would happen when he died. There would be a fight among his servants for the wealth of the caravan and probably it would end in some high handed Russian officer seizing the whole of it in the name of the government.

They urged the dealer to leave the convoy of horses in their care, and to hurry forward and take command of the camp, in which, for all they knew, their master might then be lying dead, for it was two days since they had ridden forward to look for his coming.

"There is a Russian doctor here," said the horse dealer; and Felinski became at once the center of interest. "You will save him, if there is life in him, can you not?"

"I promise to do all I can," replied Felinski.

The three travelers, accompanied by the dealer, hastened towards the camp. As they rode forward, Langdon could but think of the desperate stake for which they were now playing.

If the merchant's life was saved, well and good; but if his case was hopeless, what then? Chinese emperors and Turkoman chiefs have an unpleasant fashion of putting to death the unsuccessful medical adviser.

They rode all day under a scorching sun, their cloaks pulled over their heads to partly shade them from its fierce heat. In the afternoon they saw the first signs that they were approaching a city, and it was getting dark when a couple of tall minarets, far away in front of them, showed where the town of Ghinaz lay.

It was actually dark when the barking of dogs, the neighing of horses, and the loud challenge of a sentinel on guard told that they had come upon the camp of the caravan.

They were led through lines of tents, past picketed horses and camels and piles of merchandise, to the richly decorated pavilion in which the master of all this wealth lay at death's door.

Guarded by a few of the most faithful of his servants, and watched by a native physician—whose trust lay rather in charms and amulets than in medicines—Seyyid lay stretched upon a pile of cushions, utterly unconscious of all that passed around him.

He was a tall, dark, sunburned man; but his face was pinched and thin, and, as he gazed up at the newcomers, it was with a scared, frightened look.

Felinski knelt by the cushioned couch, had a whispered discussion with the native physician, succeeded in sending him away, and opened his little case of medicines on the mat.

When Langdon looked at the merchant's drawn features, more ghastly in the lamplight of the tent, it did not seem possible to save him. Pulling his friend by the sleeve, he said in English:

"The man is dying now."

"He is not going to die," answered

Felinski, "He will get better, even if we let him alone; but I am going to doctor him and cover myself with glory! The native physician was only trying spells and amulets; so, if he did no good, he did no harm."

It was quite true that from that hour the merchant began to get better; still, the whites were in intense anxiety whenever he looked the least bit worse.

At last there came a day when he was able to sit up propped by cushions, at the door of the tent; and then he said to Felinski, in Persian:

"What shall I do for you, Wise Man from the West? If there is anything you wish for, it shall be yours, under the roof of heaven or on the floor of the earth!"

Langdon and Felinski looked at each other with questioning eyes; for the same thought was in both their minds. Weede was "left out of the shuffle," as he expressed it, when Persian was the language spoken. The merchant was full of gratitude; should they tell him their hopes?

"You have given me my life," Seyyid went on. "What shall I give you?"

"Our lives!" said Felinski.

The dark bearded merchant almost laughed, leaning against his cushions.

"My sons," he said, "I would not harm a hair of your heads on any consideration. Do you not know that if any man of mine were to hurt you he should die?"

"Our fear is not of you," answered Langdon. "We have enemies who, if they found us, would make life worse than death!"

Then, in a few words, he told the merchant his story.

Seyyid proved himself worthy of their trust. He was full of sympathy and indignation. He swore by all that he held sacred that he would take them safely as far as they wished to go with his people on their journey.

Very little change in their clothing made them look like the rest of the followers of the caravan, and three weeks later they were on the march for Khokand and the frontier.

At last, in the warm sunlight of a summer evening, they saw the towers and domes of Khokand, but decided that their best plan would be to keep at a respectful distance from the place itself, for they were warned that, being the last important garrison on the way to the border, the Russian military and police authorities were more than ordinarily active and inquisitive, and would certainly inspect the party and sign the passports for the frontier. So it became necessary that they should separate for the night from the caravan.

"Now, Langdon," said Felinski, as they were discussing their plans with Seyyid, "the time has come when we must rid ourselves of the presence of the American. With the Russian police so near at hand it would not be difficult for him to betray us, if such is his purpose. He must be watched to prevent his having the opportunity of doing so, at least until we are safely in India. How may we manage it?"

"Leave that to me," said Seyyid, who was apprised of their feelings towards the reporter. "I will arrange that. you have no trouble from that source."

So it was all planned that Langdon and Felinski should remain behind in concealment, while the reporter went into the city with Seyyid. There was some danger that if they were found spending the night in an orchard or plantation they might be regarded as suspicious characters and detained; but this was less risky than presenting themselves to a frontier chief of police who no doubt had by this time received a description of their appearances, perhaps even their portraits.

"Do not fear for the night," said Seyyid in parting from them. "Stay here, among these trees. Show no light, and trust me to be with you in the morning."

Leaving them by the orchard wall, Seyyid rode away, and it was with a

sense of loneliness that they watched the caravan, surrounded by a moving cloud of dust, wind through the trees towards the city gates.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON CHINESE SOIL.

WHILE Seyyid and his caravan wended their way to the city through the gathering darkness, Langdon and his friend struck off from the beaten track and chose a place to spend the night—in an orchard where the trees, while giving a certain amount of shelter, were near enough to the road for them to watch anything passing along it.

This was important; for they could not risk any mischance as to rejoining the caravan in the morning.

At the other side of the orchard was one of the irrigation canals which were numerous all round the city. A boat was fastened to a post about fifty yards from their temporary bivouac.

"If we are disturbed," said Langdon, as he pointed it out to his companion, "we can easily unfasten it, and put the water between us and any possible enemy."

After their camping experience in the Siberian woodlands, they thought little of thus settling down for the night in a suburban plantation. The merchant had left them food and drink in abundance, and though they feared to light a fire lest it should lead to their discovery and awkward inquiries, they slept comfortably enough wrapped in their heavy cloaks and a couple of rugs borrowed from Seyyid's abundant store.

The merchant had told them that he would not spend many hours in Khokand, and he was true to his word. Shortly before noon on the next day they saw the head of his long line of camels and pack horses on the road in front of them, and, hastily gathering their few belongings together, they made their way to the place Seyyid usually occupied in the rear of the line.

He gave them a most hearty welcome.

"Thanks be to heaven," he exclaimed, "you are safe, my children. I feared some mischance would come to you; but now that we have met again, our way will henceforth be straight and easy. See what I have done for you!" and he drew from his broad girdle a long envelope, from which he produced a document, headed with the black eagle and imperial arms of Russia. "You can read this," he added, pointing to the body of the document, where a few words were filled in in handwriting.

It was a passport bidding the Russian officers at the frontier on the road to Kashgar and Yarkand, to allow the merchant, Seyyid Ibrahim, and his thirty seven servants to pass unmolested. It was dated from Khokand that morning.

"I do not see how this will help us," suggested Langdon, for he knew that there had been thirty seven men with Seyyid when he and his companions joined them.

"This way," Seyyid explained. "I have left two of my men in the city, and with them your friend, the American. You are now safe from all possible mischief from him, for he cannot escape the vigilance of my men, but they are instructed to set him free in a few days, when he will have no difficulty in proving his American citizenship, if such be the case, and going on his way unmolested. For the rest of our journey you can count for those two servants in the passport."

Langdon hardly knew how to thank him for this new kindness, for though the merchant would not admit it, still he knew that it meant considerable loss to him, for he had already very few men for so large a caravan.

Now that they were rid of the perplexing presence of the reporter and that their passport was safe, our trav-

elers breathed freer, and they even ventured to enter the towns on the next stage of their journey; though, when they saw Russian uniforms at the gate, they both feared for the moment that in some mysterious way they should betray the fact that they were "unfortunates" escaped from a Siberian prison convoy.

After they left Khokand the country became wilder. The mountains on either side closed in nearer and nearer, and the road was often steep and difficult. Southward snow covered ridges gleamed like silver in the sun.

"See," said Seyyid, pointing, "there is the 'Roof of the World.'"

"Those snowy hills are the Pamirs, are they not?" asked Felinski.

"Yes," Seyyid explained; "there beyond, to the south, is a mighty knot of mountains. You see the outer ranges. All that over there is the 'Roof of the World.'"

The chief point of interest to Langdon and his friend was that beyond those lofty plateaus of the Pamir lay the mountain walls of Northern India.

Only a few hundred miles on the other side of that shining snow the English flag was flying, and brave men were keeping guard over it, who, though they had never heard their names, would be their friends from the moment they learned that they had made their way from Siberian prisons, and that one of them could claim American citizenship.

They told Seyyid that they should try to make their way across the Pamir into India. Accustomed as he was to traveling from one part of Central Asia to another, he received their proposal in the most matter of fact way; but, though he made no objection to their plans on the score of the possibility of the journey, he tried to persuade them to stay with him a little longer.

"You shall be as my own sons," he said. "You know many things of which I am ignorant, and you shall share with me what I have."

This offer of sudden wealth was, however, refused. It meant the giving up of civilized life for years to come, and, as far as Langdon was concerned, the abandoning of his long cherished hope of future usefulness in the world.

They sought of two of the merchant's men information as to the best way to start upon their venturesome journey over this mountain wilderness, and were advised by them not to try to penetrate into the Pamir until they had passed the mountains in front of them. So they continued for some days longer with Seyyid, much to his delight.

There was no difficulty whatever at the frontier fort.

Under its guns the caravan halted. An officer, with half a dozen Cossacks for his escort, came out, examined Seyyid's passport, counted the party, and let them pass without further question.

The caravan wound along the road beyond the fort, climbing a zigzag path that led to a narrow defile in the hills. Langdon and Felinski took good care to busy themselves among the horses and camels, for fear the Russian should remark how different their faces were from those of their companions; but they need not have had any fear, as they found later.

Seyyid called them to his side as he walked up the steep, stony track, leading his horse. He seemed in the best of humor and was laughing.

"That great man," he said, "that colonel or captain of the White Czar's army, is one of my men. He is as much in my pay as any of those grooms or camel drivers. Every time I pass I give him a little gem or some gold or silver, very quietly, and he asks no questions; and, when I come back, I do not pay one quarter of the tax on the goods I bring across from China. It is good for me and good for him, and only bad for the Czar's treasury; but which of us loves the Czar?" and he laughed again.

"As for me," said Langdon, "this is one of the happy days of my life. I look back at the fort in the valley; I

cannot see the black eagle on its flag, for there is not wind enough to blow it out; but I know it marks the Russian boundary, and I feel new life at the thought that we are out of that vast prison."

And so it was. As they rode up that rocky path they were leaving the uttermost bounds of the Czar's wide dominion behind them. They were entering another empire, the first sign of whose rule came in sight a few miles further up the pass.

Looking forward along the path before them, Langdon could see a group of thatched wooden houses, whose shape recalled something of the architecture that he had seen depicted on the willow plate and tea chest.

Close by there was a square stockade, with a flagstaff at each of its corners. From the flag staffs long yellow pennons were drooping. As he drew nearer, a breeze sprang up, and the long narrow flags were thrown out from their poles.

Indistinctly could be seen, as these rose and fell, the black dragon of the Chinese empire wriggling in their yellow folds.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE HILLMEN.

THEY camped for the night under the shelter of the Chinese stockade. The mandarin in command was a very model of friendship and hospitality; probably for the same reason that made the Russian officer at the fort in the valley below so ready to oblige his good friend, Seyyid Ibrahim.

The night was intensely cold, and it felt good to have a roof over one's head. During the next day's march they actually were riding through snow for at least five miles, and they were glad when at length the mountain road began to descend into one of the higher valleys of Kashgar.

Four days later they parted from the merchant. They asked him for a couple of his mountain ponies and a few useful things for the journey, including two pistols for their personal defense, and a fowling piece as well, promising that, if they reached Europe safely, their friends would send him the value of all they took to his home at Meshed; but he insisted on their taking everything as a gift.

"You have given me back my life," he said, "and you have made the days of my journey brighter. Take what you need; no man is ever poorer for helping the wayfarer on his way, and Allah has made me rich enough to spare what my friends may need."

Thus they parted from Seyyid Ibrahim. They had met a party of Turkoman shepherds driving their flocks before them to the pastures of the Pamir, and the opportunity of having their guidance was too good to be lost.

It was agreed that they should ride with them, leaving them to pursue their journey southwards when they thought fit, and paying them a fixed sum, Seyyid's Kashgar grooms arranging the bargain.

They marched for nearly three weeks with the shepherds. The sheep moved slowly, like a living sea, closing into a dense stream in the narrower passes, opening out again as they reached the wide plateau.

The shepherds—some on foot, some on shaggy ponies—kept the moving flock within bounds, a few dogs being used to chase in any stragglers by day and to watch the camp by night.

They could say very little to their hosts. One of the latter knew a few words of Persian. Langdon had picked up some expressions in Turkish, but conversation was impossible.

Somehow the shepherds learned from the caravan that Felinski was a doctor. They would gather around him, asking by signs for some medicine.

At first he had no idea what they meant, but the few words of Persian possessed by the tribe cleared up the mystery.

"I'll have to give them something to satisfy them," said Felinski to Langdon. "Something that won't do them any harm, and that will at least look and taste like medicine."

He used some of his little store of drugs to impart a bitter taste and a red color to a bowl of water, and gave the whole tribe a dose of it. They seemed to think it had done them good, and from that day the pair were very popular with the tribe.

The only trouble was that the process had to be repeated almost daily, and the danger was that their small stock of necessary ingredients would disappear, and with it their hold upon the favor of the shepherds.

"Here is my fee," said Felinski, merrily, showing Langdon a pair of sheepskin cloaks.

"The very thing we want," exclaimed Langdon; "I have been too cold to sleep at night."

"But we can't go on with this kind of thing," said Felinski, much as he admired his fee, and rejoiced in its comfort.

"Why not?"

"My dear fellow," he laughed, "this sort of thing is irregular. My practice is becoming large, but it is not of the kind the medical journals would approve of."

However, a more serious reason hurried their departure.

One evening the Persian speaking tribesman returned from a scouting ride to the northwestward, and told Langdon—though it was some time before the latter could understand what was meant—that there were Russian soldiers over there.

Langdon at first thought he had misunderstood him, or that the shepherd was mistaken; but the latter pointed to his girdle to show him that his knife was no longer there, and then showed him a silver half ruble. He had evidently sold his knife, which had a finely damascened blade, to one of the party.

Langdon spoke to Felinski about the new developments, and they decided that probably a Russian exploring party was on the Pamir, and that, on the whole, it would be safer not to meet them. They had already been preparing for their journey, and had laid in a store of dried meat for the purpose.

So they loaded their ponies, gave a few knives and other trifles as parting gifts to their friends, and, though it was so late, rode away southwards, leaving the shepherds happy in the possession of the purse containing the stipulated sum of Seyyid's money.

The two rode as long as they could see their way, and then bivouacked beside their ponies.

For the next few days they saw no human being. They marched by the sun southwards as far as possible, but had sometimes to diverge from the direct path, in order to get from one valley to another. They had no means of judging how much more country was to be traversed. They only knew that by keeping in that direction they must be drawing nearer to the borders of India.

Twice they camped with a shepherd tribe like that they had left, and renewed their stock of provisions at a very small cost.

At last the character of the landscape changed. Bolder ridges rose in front of them, and they found themselves on what appeared to be a beaten track leading to the south. There were traces of camps, and, here and there, the bones of a pack horse that had died on the road showed that they were on the regular route.

Next day the road ran into a narrow valley. There was more than one village to be seen on the hills on either side, each approached by a zigzag path, and they could see herdsmen with cattle near some of them.

But they were so eager to advance and so doubtful of their powers of communicating with the hillmen, that they did not turn aside to any of them.

It was late in the afternoon, when

the valley had narrowed to a mere mountain pass, that they came in sight of a larger village perched on a rocky spur that almost overhung the road. As they walked their ponies towards it, they were startled by a couple of shots fired from a stockade near the entrance of the village.

The bullets threw up a cloud of dust from the road not twenty yards from them. At the same time they heard wild cries from the hillsides right and left and behind them, and saw that a number of men, who had evidently until now being lying in ambush in the grass and among the bushes, had sprung up, and were waving long spears, or—what was more unpleasant—leveling guns at them.

"It's no use showing fight," exclaimed Langdon, springing from the saddle, and holding up his hands, after throwing the fowling piece which he carried upon the ground.

Felinski was not slow in following his example, and the hillmen lowered their guns, and began to close in upon them from all sides.

It was not a very pleasant situation; but they had come through worse dangers than that, and both hoped that it would end better than it had begun.

Down from the village there came a party, led by a tall turbaned chief, with a sword at his side. When he reached the road, all the others halted in a circle around the travelers, and he advanced, followed only by two of his people.

He looked at their faces, and to the utter astonishment of the fugitives, said to them in English, though with a bad accent:

"You are English! You see, I know you English people!"

"Yes," replied Langdon, "you have guessed right—I am English, or rather American; and who are you?"

"English or American, it is the same thing," answered the chief. "I am Ahmed Khan. I was once a soldier in the Indian army, so I know you English! I am chief of these Hunza hill folk. The English government is sending its soldiers here to destroy my fort because I take toll in the pass. Is it not so?"

"I know nothing about what is happening here," answered Langdon. "I am an American, and not English."

"Don't tell lies, sahib," replied the chief. "The sahibs boast that they tell no lies! I know that the soldiers are coming; you know it, too. You have come from them. You are their spies, but we will hang you both over the walls of our fort when they come!"

Then he spoke some words in a language which Langdon could not understand, and his people closed in and seized the pair, and marched them off towards the village.

They had fallen into the hands of a group of mountain robbers or of the chief of a revolted hill tribe, they knew not which; and the only consoling feature in the affair was that they must be close upon the Indian border, if not actually upon Indian ground.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN A ROBBER'S HOLD.

THEY were marched through the stockaded village, and up to a fort that stood perched like an eagle's nest among the precipices above. On the way Ahmed Khan told them boastfully that two attempts had already been made to break up the tribe that had accepted him as its chief.

"But," he added, "your people must learn to fly with wings before they take the fort of Nagur!"

At this point Langdon interposed.

"Your excellency," he said, speaking in English, "you have made a serious mistake. It is true that I am an American, but I have lived all my life in the land of the White Czar. My friend is a Russian, and we have neither of us anything to do with your enemies sent by those who rule India. We come from Russia, and our master, the great

White Czar, is the enemy of those who are fighting against you.

"If we had been spies, should we have ridden boldly down from the northwards to your village? If you want proof that we speak truly, take us each apart, and see if we will not be able to tell you, stage by stage, how we came here from the Czar's great city of Samarkand. I have come to give you information and advice that may be of the greatest help to you; but, if you treat us with this indignity, you may be sure that, so far from sending you help, or offering you protection, the White Czar will join with your enemies, to punish you for ill treating his subjects!"

The proposed test seemed to satisfy Ahmed. He sent away their ponies, and, having made them sit down some fifty yards apart, questioned each separately as to the route by which they had traveled for the last few days.

"Your words agree," he said after the examination was completed. "I believe that you have really come from the north, and not the south. You must pardon all my suspicions; war is war, and not like peace, and now what message do you bring from the soldiers of the White Czar?"

Langdon was prepared for this emergency. With the utmost gravity he said:

"Your excellency, we have come in advance of a force of Russian soldiers, who are now marching across the Pamir——" an allusion to the exploring party from which he and Felinski had made such a hasty flight.

"If a British attack upon the fort and village here does not take place for a month or so, there will be time for the Russians to come up. You would do well, your excellency, to send back a message to them; and if you wish, my friend and myself will go with the message, although we prefer to wait here; but if you expect to be attacked soon, it would be better to retire from the fort, and fall back through the hills upon the Russian camp."

"I expect to be attacked tomorrow or after," said Ahmed. "It is a pity your people are not nearer."

Langdon then did his best to persuade him either to retire, or to negotiate and gain time. He played so well the part of the friendly Russian agent, that Ahmed listened attentively to what he proposed, but finally refused to take his advice.

"No!" he said. "I will fight. If I hold out your friends will come. I will send them a message. Meanwhile you and the other will help us. I will give you arms, and you shall fight by our side."

"As you prefer," replied Langdon. "But we can do much better for you if you will allow us. If there is a fight, there will be wounded men, and we can save the lives of many of them, for my friend is a doctor and I understand medicine. But, if you wish, I will carry a gun instead, and the doctor can look after the wounded."

Ahmed agreed to this new proposal. That night "the Russian doctors"—as he called them—were his guests. He told them, as they squatted around the carpet that served as his dinner table, that an English column was moving through the hills, in hope of surprising him; and he insisted on their sleeping, not at the village, but in much less comfortable quarters at the fort, so as to be ready for the morrow in case the English should steal a march on him.

Langdon and his friend perforce lay down that night with the uncomfortable feeling that, unless they could escape from the fort, they ran a fair chance of being killed, or maimed, with shells fired from the guns of the very people whose aid they had come so far to seek.

Next morning, if danger was approaching, there was no sign of it to be seen. From the ramparts of the fort, where half a dozen little brass cannon were mounted, Langdon looked down the almost perpendicular precipice on which it stood, and saw below a long

valley, sweeping away southwards, filled with a sea of pines and deodars. A stream and mountain road ran down the valley; but both were hidden in the trees.

A red wall of rocks formed the opposite side of the gorge, about a mile away, and beyond rose blue, misty hill-tops, and white summits flashing in the sun.

The day passed without any alarm. Langdon ventured to propose that they be sent with a scouting party that set off to the southward; but this was denied them, so that chance of escape had to be abandoned.

Considering how quiet everything was, they began to hope that the report which had put Ahmed on the alert was a false alarm; that this would soon be acknowledged, and that then they would be able, one way or another, to take their departure.

They discussed this view of the case hopefully, before they went to sleep that night in the very uncomfortable and stuffy apartment allotted to them in one of the towers of Nagur.

Early next morning, when the first gray light was just stealing through the loopholes that served for windows, Langdon was the first to awake. He barely had time to note the form of his friend peacefully slumbering in his rug beside him, when suddenly he heard a crash like a peal of thunder—not the single report of a gun, but a long re-echoing roar, in the midst of which there was a harsh screaming noise, like the hoarse whistle of a giant. Then there was a single sharp report, and then for a moment all was still.

But only for a moment. Langdon had sat up, and Felinski was just opening his eyes, when all around outside in the fort they heard the rush of hurrying feet and confused voices of men calling to each other.

Then a brazen gong began to beat; then once more came the thundering sound, reëchoing among the precipices and seeming to shake the tower; and again came the loud whistling noise of something in the air.

Felinski had never heard such a sound before, but Langdon seemed to know it.

"That is the flight of a shell," he said. "The English are going to pay a morning call on our friend Ahmed, and they are sending in their visiting cards."

Up both jumped from their beds, and out they rushed on to the winding stair of the tower. Men, curiously armed—some with spears and some with long barreled native guns, some with European rifles—were making their way up to the rampart above.

Langdon and Felinski mingled with them, asking in Persian where they should find Ahmed.

Stepping out on the mud wall of the fort, and leaning on the stockade that formed its battlement, they searched valley and precipice for some sign of those who were at once friends and foes; for they were in the unpleasant position of being between two fires, and were more likely to be killed in the coming struggle by an English ball than by a Hunza sword.

The hillmen were gesticulating wildly and pointing to the highest part of the precipice opposite to them, fully a mile away, though nothing was to be seen there but the fringe of shrubs and tall grass that crested the great wall of red rock.

But, as they looked, there came a sudden flash like lightning among the bushes, and a long jet of white smoke rushed out and caught the first burst of sunlight that broke upon the valley.

Then came the whistling rush of the shell, and Langdon heard it burst somewhere below against the face of the rocks, and the rumbling fall of stones detached by the shock followed the explosion.

"That's not far short," said Felinski, in Russian. "They will soon get the range, and then it won't be very comfortable to watch them from here. Your friends have got one mountain

gun up on the precipice there, and where they have one there are likely to be more."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIGHT AT THE FORT.

EVERY year, along the north and northwest frontier of India, the English have to go to work in a quiet, businesslike way to turn rebel tribes and gangs of robbers out of their mountain holds, and in these little battles and sieges among the hills brave deeds are done of which little is heard; for the hillmen know how to fight, care nothing for their lives, and it takes a lot of hard knocks to convince them that they are beaten.

It was one of these fights that Langdon and his friend were watching from a dangerously prominent point of view. In fact, the place was such a good one for seeing what was in progress that before another shot was fired Ahmed Khan was at their side.

"They catch my scouts," he said in English, pointing to the hills opposite, "so no news last night. Plenty news this morning. Cannons there, and Ghoorkas come with cannons. But shooting won't turn us out. They must come up here and fight. Is it not so?"

"They may not be able to shell you out," answered Langdon, "but they will make the place very uncomfortable, and knock it about very badly. I don't see why we should all stick up here to be killed by their shells."

"But they fire slow."

"Yes; they are only firing to get the range. When they begin in earnest it will be different. Leave a lookout here and get under cover, if you don't want to waste life."

"My men are not afraid," said the chief, with just a little of a sneer in his voice.

"Neither are we," rejoined Langdon, "or we would not be here; but if you will not take my advice, so be it. The doctor will soon be patching up some of those fellows."

Never was a prophecy more quickly justified. Crash! bang! crash! crash! four guns roared out in swift succession from the hill.

Then it was as if a storm of fire had burst around them. They were deafened with loud explosions, splinters flew from the stockade, a great rift opened in the rampart, men rolled in the dust, others staggered about, moaning, with their hands to their faces.

Langdon felt a blow on the side of his head as if a hammer had hit him, and should have fallen with the shock had not Felinski caught him. Blood was running down his face, but happily it was only a piece of wood flying from the wrecked stockade that had cut his forehead.

Felinski's sleeve was torn with a bullet from a bursting shrapnell shell, and his cap had been knocked off.

When the smoke cleared, four men lay dead, with ghastly wounds in face and breast; four more were gasping and groaning on the ground. Ahmed Khan stood unhurt among the wreck, shaking his clenched fist angrily at the distant guns.

After this it was easy to persuade the hillmen that the ramparts had better be abandoned until the actual storming began. Felinski bound up Langdon's slight wound, and then, with the latter's help, bandaged and washed the wounds of the others.

A cellar was converted into a temporary hospital, and, working in its dark recess by the light of a single lamp, they could only know that the bombardment was continuing because they heard regularly every few minutes the roar of the four guns, the bursting shells, the falling wreckage of the fort, and now and then another wounded man was brought in to be laid with the rest on the floor of the cellar.

After an hour Langdon and Felinski slipped out to get a little fresh air, and to learn how the fight was progressing.

They found the inner court of the fort heaped with fallen rubbish, there was no one on its walls, and two of the brass guns that pointed towards the village had been dismounted and had fallen in front of the gate.

The shells of the besiegers were now flying high over the fort, as if the gunners were trying to drop them into the town beyond. Under the archway of the gate Ahmed Khan stood with a handful of his men, and the crackling sound of rifle fire towards the village told that an attack was being made on that side also.

Langdon was looking up at the wrecked stockade, where he had watched the first shots, when he saw something moving among the confused heap of timbers. At first he thought it must be some wounded man who had been left for dead; but, of a sudden, a man sprang up and stood erect among the debris.

He was a tall man, in a gray, dusty uniform, with a white helmet on his head, and a revolver in his hand, his sword looped up to his belt; and the first sight of his face told Langdon that he was no native, but an Englishman.

Behind him there rose up a crowd of little men in dark green, some with rifles in their hands, some with short, broad knives. They looked like a lot of Chinamen masquerading in uniforms.

There were not more than a score in all, and, led by the English officer, they had climbed the precipice after the fire of the guns had driven the defenders from the stockaded rampart at its crest.

"Hurrah!" shouted the young officer, as he came bounding down the ruined rampart, with the Ghoorkas racing behind him.

He fired his revolver as he ran, aiming apparently at Langdon, but fortunately missing him. His men sent one volley into the group in the gateway, and then rushed upon them with the bayonet and the Ghoorka knife.

Langdon and Felinski drew back out of the way of the wild rush, and watched —for they could not take their eyes from the scene—the deadly struggle under the arch. Hand to hand Hunza and Ghoorka fought; but one by one the hillmen fell, and then Langdon saw the officer calling back his men, and standing between them and the few unwounded men who had thrown down their arms.

But now was the dangerous moment for the two friends. The Ghoorkas had seen them, and were rushing back towards them, when Langdon called out to their officer:

"Sir, I am an American!"

The officer started and turned.

"Halt, there, you rascals!" he said to the Ghoorkas, who stopped, glaring at them, disappointed of their prey; for their rage for blood was now thoroughly roused.

The officer drew nearer to Langdon, his revolver smoking in his hand, and the blood on his face showing that he had taken his full share in the fight.

"You are an American!" he said. "I did not know the Hunzas held any American prisoners."

"They lie, sahib!" shouted Ahmed Khan, who, wounded as he was, had raised himself on one elbow, and was fiercely looking at them. "Save my life, and I can tell you something important; they are Russian spies sent here to help me against you!"

The officer looked in a puzzled way from the wounded chief to the man who had sought his protection.

"I tell no lie, sahib," cried Ahmed quickly. "They are Russian spies and——"

What more the wounded chief intended to say was lost in a startling incident that followed.

While the Ghoorkas were rushing upon the two friends, intent upon despatching them with their terrible knives, a short figure in civilian's dress was just creeping up among the heaped wreckage of the stockade.

He had followed the invading force

and reached the officer's side in time to see the objects of the Ghoorkas' demonstration, and to hear the vengeful accusation of Ahmed Khan. Langdon was startled to recognize in the newcomer the familiar figure of Weede, the American reporter.

"That's the darndest lie I ever heard, captain," cried Weede. "These are not Russian spies. This is my friend, George Langdon, an American"—advancing to Langdon and grasping him warmly by the hand—"and this one," he added, indicating Felinski, "though a Russian, has just escaped from Siberia, and therefore is not likely to be an agent or spy of the Czar. These are the ones I told you about."

"So these are the brave fellows who have endured such perils and privations in escaping from Siberian exile!" exclaimed the officer. "I believe you, but the matter will have to be explained to the general. But I have more work to do, and will leave you here under guard of several of my men."

Leaving two sadly disappointed troopers to take care of the prisoners, the officer called the rest of the Ghoorkas together, and dashed off with them down upon the rear of the village, where the fighting was all over in another ten minutes.

"Well, here we are again," exclaimed Weede, smilingly, when the officer and his men had taken their departure, "as a Tammany Hall politician said to me when I interviewed him after a sweeping victory at the elections."

Langdon and Felinski had not said a word, so amazed were they at seeing Weede, whom they thought they had left securely behind in Khokand. Now, however, Langdon managed to get his tongue, and asked:

"But how did you get here, and with the English forces?"

"Easy enough, for a fellow that's got push enough to be on the staff of the *Hemisphere*—the greatest paper on earth," replied Weede. "You fellows came near making a pretty fist of it tying me up in Khokand, didn't you? But, fortunately, the faithful servants of the great Seyyid Ibrahim were not above taking a little American gold, and putting me in the way of getting out of that blamed town, under care of a competent guide who talked a lingo that I could understand. He knew something of the direction you had taken, and after a time we fell in with a tribe of wandering shepherds and traveled with them.

"Finally I learned of a detachment of English troops that was about to have a scrap with some of the robber gangs around this section, and made myself solid with them for the purpose of seeing the fun. I had given up all idea of finding you, but was having heaps of experience that will make a good story when I get back to God's country. And to think that fate should lead me here in the nick of time to save you from that robber's lies! Langdon, I'm as proud as a pig with two tails to think that I have been of some little help to you."

"And we thought——" began Langdon.

"Yes, you fellows have had some darn fool notion in your heads about me," interrupted Weede. "But save your explanations, and I'll save mine. It's all right now. All's well that ends well, as my friend, Billy Shakspere, used to say."

With the storming of the fort of Nagur, Langdon's adventures ended. The story told by Ahmed broke down when the two friends gave their very matter of fact explanations to the general in command of the expedition, and these were reinforced by the assurances of Weede, who, it was evident, had made himself very popular with the officers and men of the English forces.

When the column broke up, they all journeyed back with the general across the snowy passes into India.

Langdon communicated at once by wire with his father and his employers, notifying them of his safety. He added

"See daily *Hemisphere* for full particulars," smiling as he did so.

Weede, with the enterprise of an up to date American reporter, had immediately filed a long description of their wonderful experiences in Siberia for his paper.

In due time the three friends embarked at Bombay for England. Langdon and Felinski went to Paris, where the former resumed his duties as representative of the United Iron Work exhibitors at the exposition.

Felinski perforce elected to remain with his friend. Explanations are awkward under any circumstances in Russia, and bitter experience had taught him that it would be well to fight shy of the Czar's domains for some time at least.

There was some diplomatic agitation in Langdon's case, but it is still slumbering in official pigeon holes. Langdon is himself satisfied to let it remain in *statu quo*.

As he often says to Felinski, "What little hardships I endured is amply paid for by the opportunity I had to travel through a new and most wonderful country.

"As for Weede," he added with twinkling eye, "he not only acquired a knowledge useful to his future career as a correspondent, but he also learned that there are others on earth besides himself."

"Yes," said Felinski, with a reminiscent glance at his hands, "and he had an excellent opportunity that time in the Siberian woods to study bumps on his own head instead of protuberances on the craniums of others."

THE END.

THE VOICES OF THE HILLS.

By misty glen and babbling rill,
In solemn chant, that ceaseth never,
The lonely voices of the hill
The solitudes with music fill—
That swells and falls and swells forever.

Today, the same as yesterday,
Where woodlands gloom and waters glisten;
Tonight, as weird and sweet the lay,
As heard a thousand years away,
The silent hills alone to listen.

Low, when the winds are still, they sing;
By sunlit brooks the mountains under;
By starry lake and glimmering spring,
When fairies dance in shadowy ring,
And moonlit peaks fantastic fling
Their shadows in a land of wonder.

Lo! when the winds are loud, they rise
From rocking woods and gusty hollows;
From craggy deeps, where darkness lies,
Along the moorlands to the skies,
Wild chorus echoing chorus follows.

Man's little din of work and war,
Man's fury and tumultuous fever,
Die on the bounding slopes afar
In silent air, and never mar
The song that heavenward goes forever.

By J. Huie.

BEYOND THE GREAT SOUTH WALL.*

BY FRANK SAVILE.

Being some surprising details of the voyage of the steam yacht Raccoon on a trip undertaken by her owner with a full consciousness of its foolhardy nature, but without the faintest conception of the extraordinary happenings that were to become part and parcel of it.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

CAPTAIN DORINECOURT and his friend known as Gerry are disconsolate over the mandate of the mother of the girls they love, Gwen and Violet Delahay respectively, which puts them aside as ineligible beside the Earl of Denvarre and his brother, the Hon. Stephen Garlicke, booked among the passengers on the steamship Madagascar for a winter's cruise around the world, and for which cruise Mrs. Delahay forthwith books herself and her daughters. While Dorinecourte is bemoaning the poverty which condemns him to his fate, he reads of the death of his uncle, Lord Heatherslie, which gives him the title and estates.

The uncle was a noted collector of coins and met his death while investigating an inscription on one of them pointing to the colonization of an unknown region by a certain people known as Mayans, a purpose which he leaves as a legacy to his heir. Dorinecourte is inclined to pooh pooh the idea, but finally is induced to seek out Professor Lessaution, a Frenchman with whom his uncle had been associated in his researches. Ascertaining that the explorations must be made in the neighborhood of the South Pole and knowing that the Madagascar is booked to call at Port Lewis in the Falkland Isles, the new Lord Heatherslie equips the Raccoon for the voyage and embarks with Gerry, the professor, and a picked crew, for the south.

Here their further advance is blocked by a gigantic wall of cliffs, where, after continued searching, and always in danger of the numerous icebergs, no entrance can be found, and no way discovered of scaling the giant heights.

CHAPTER VI *(Continued)*.

WE SAIL SOUTH.

THE little Frenchman was sanguine that a nearer investigation would show a means of scaling the heights, but try as we would, and strain our eyes, as we did, to the uttermost, no vestige of a split or any kind of crevice in those endless walls of rock could we see.

We rowed and rowed, but the result was ever the same. The sea lanes between the floating lumps of floe stretched endlessly across the sea like the meshes of a spider's web. We seemed to group in an eternal maze, which had no appointed outlet. Only now and again could we approach the wall of ice and stone that overhung us.

We had to be on guard continuously. The pack would spring and close like the jaws of a trap, and we had to back and row, and row and back, without cessation, to avoid its ever waiting grip.

One very sharp escape we had. We were lying on our oars, while the professor examined some of the lichen which covered the cliff in patches, when we were suddenly aware, that what a moment before had been a sheet of water, clear for an acre around, was a fast thinning streak of sea. There was a yell from Rafferty who steered, and then by backing furiously we managed to crawl into a pool between two sturdy bergs, and wind our way out into the less crowded channels.

But we saw the floe surge down upon

* *This story began in the September issue of* THE ARGOSY, *which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.*

the rock, and grate and grind upon it lingeringly, scoring away its own edges by the ton, and shuddered to think what an eggshell our boat would have been between that mighty hammer and that granite anvil.

That day was but the precursor of many. The yacht, with banked fires, perpetually corkscrewed her way along about a mile from shore, and day by day we took our boat and wandered continually in the shadow of the frowning wall.

In Lessaution's breast hope burned eternally, but only to be quenched at night. His plans were numerous, and some of them ludicrously ingenious. He suggested that a kite should be flown with a knotted rope attached, which might perchance catch in some crevice on the top, and permit him to give us a gymnastic display. He wondered if the carpenter could not manufacture a hundred foot ladder, and then anchoring the good ship Raccoon below the precipice, enable us to place the highest rung against the top.

He even proposed that Gerry should throw his cartridges into the common stock—this I am convinced was partly from jealousy at Gerry's owning these useful articles, which he had forgotten—that they should be opened, and that the resulting powder should be used to blast a way from point to point, and thus a path be won over these disgraceful rocks at which he shook his fist perpetually.

These futile proposals meeting the contempt they deserved, he became gloomy and morose, hinting strongly that our hearts were not really in this quest, and affirming that he, with his unquenchable French valor, was perfectly prepared to be left upon an iceberg with such provisions as we could spare, if we thought it advisable to give up the adventure through our want of spirit.

After about three weeks of this sort of thing I ventured to interpose. I explained to him carefully that I did not purpose giving up the expedition altogether, but that I must plead for an interval in it.

I affirmed mendaciously that I had arranged with the worthy Crum to call at the Falkland Isles in case there should be matters of importance to be telegraphed or otherwise sent—I had not the least idea if there was a telegraph station, and had a notion the post went once a year—and I must beg to be allowed to proceed there for this purpose, to recoal, and to get further store of provisions.

The unfortunate little man lamented desperately. Once let us get away when we were thus on the spot, and it was inevitable that we should never return.

Might we not have one more week—nay a day.

That very evening as we knocked off work he had viewed a break in the top line of those unbending crags, of which he had the brightest hopes. How could we find that spot again. He must implore—he must entreat.

For once I was adamant. I explained that if we were to be detained here by any accident with our slender supply of fuel and provision, things might be very awkward. I showed how necessary it was for a man in my position to be in touch with his lawyer every few months.

But it was a sorrow stricken face that the poor little man hung over the stern the next morning as we turned our prow northwards, and the cliffs drew down into the veil of the haze.

Gerry had at first shown unbounded astonishment at this sudden change of plan, but during my discussion with the professor a light seemed to strike him. He retired to the saloon, and through the skylight I saw him consulting a manuscript note or two which I could have sworn were in a feminine hand. He came on deck with an unclouded brow.

"Today's the 29th, isn't it?" he queried cheerily. Then turning to Waller he demanded, "How long shall we

take to steam up to Port Lewis, captain?"

"About a week, sir," responded that functionary readily, and my young friend faced me with a grin splitting his ingenuous countenance.

"You old humbug," he chuckled. "Coal, indeed; provisions running short, are they? Go on," and on we went.

CHAPTER VII.

A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

I RECEIVED Gerry's more explicit congratulations in private. The poor little professor continued to bemoan our desertion of the quest with such heart breaking insistence, that the merest suspicion that it was no stern necessity that bade us sail north, would, we felt sure, induce paroxysms of fury.

We cheered him to the best of our ability, by picturing our early return refreshed for deeds of high emprise in rock climbing, and with perfected means for their accomplishment.

It was about six days after we had turned our backs upon the great rock wall, that the wind began to get up strongly from the north, and we had to thrust our way slowly enough through the great surges that rolled down upon us mercilessly from the Atlantic, with four thousand miles of gathered impact at their back.

Our good little boat cleft her way through their white manes with a sturdy shove and shake of her prow, sending the spray swinging in jets before her cutwater, and flooding her decks as she dipped to the rollers and sent them roaring down beneath the bridge.

Two men had to be lashed to the wheel, and the crew took their stations between watch and watch, only by the activity with which they dodged the incoming billows. Two of our boats were swept from the davits, and half the deck house windows were smashed before we got them battened over. The cook kept a fire in the galley by the display of the most extraordinary agility, and our meals were snappy and disconnected.

We had twenty four hours of this sort of thing, and then it began to get monotonous. The wind dropped little by little, but the sea was nearly as high as ever, and the evening closed down upon us with our wretchedness still supreme, and the waves pervading everything from the cabins to the stoke hole.

We joined Eccles in the engine room, where, if not dry, we were at least warm, and toasted our steaming clothes before the red glow of the furnaces, while we took exercise by bracing ourselves to avoid being dashed into the heart of the machinery by the great heaves and struggles of the fighting ship. It was a way of passing an evening which came with some originality and freshness to both Gerry and myself, and we stayed there late confabulating over our prospects, and wondering whether our attempt at an interview with our young women would be successful, and what sort of greeting we should receive.

"It's all very well for you now," said Gerry despondently, "you're all right. You've got your title and an income, which might be worse by a long way, but where do I come in? I'm as badly off as ever. You'll have to work your new found influence pretty vigorously to get me any sort of billet to satisfy my ma in law."

"That sort of thing'll have to come later," I answered. "Probably we shan't get more than an hour with them, if that. Port Lewis isn't such an enticing sort of place, from what I've heard, that the Madagascar's likely to stay there long. They'll just coal and that's about all. But if Denvarre and his brother haven't settled matters by now—which the Lord forbid—I think it won't do us any harm to remind our young women that we're alive and still taking an interest in them. But with Denvarre for competitor I don't see

that you're worse off than I am. Don't let's brood, though, old chap, but let what will betide. If our chances are gone from us completely, then we've got the best possible counter irritant to depression handy. We can turn back and find our excitement still waiting for us at the foot of that stupendous wall."

Gerry smiled hopefully, bending forward for a light for his pipe. A dreamy look crossed his face as he swayed apathetically to the roll of the ship, and as he rose and braced himself with his arm around a stanchion I could see that he was musing mistily over the future.

I felt a little that way myself, and there was a silence between us for a time, broken only by the regular beat and clang as the great piston rods thrust themselves backwards and forwards, and the eccentrics jolted round clamorously.

Suddenly from the deck above came a hail, and Janson thrust his face, glistening with salt foam flecks, into the disk of light where the manhole gave upon the darkness.

"Light on the starboard bow, my lord," he bellowed, to make himself heard above the jar of the machinery and the shriek of the storm. "The skipper thinks there must be a whaler afire."

Gerry and I snatched at our oilskins, which we had doffed when we had descended from the sousings of the deck, and climbed the little iron ladder unsteadily.

We were still plowing our way into the trough of the head sea, we found when we gained the deck, but the great rollers did not come shooting over the bow and down the slippery planks as they had done an hour or two before. The sea was evidently going down, but was heavy enough yet to make us pity from the bottom of our hearts any poor wretches who had to battle with it in open boats.

Far away, very dimly and intermittently as we rose on the crest of wave after wave, a light flickered now and again away to starboard, shooting up occasionally into brightness as we and the burning craft stood out on the top of a sea together, lost utterly when both of us sank back into the trough between the sea, and evidently drifting towards us rapidly before the force of the northern gale.

I clambered up on the bridge beside Waller, and bawled into his ear.

"Shall we be able to help," I questioned stentoriously, "or is it too late?"

"Too late to do anything for her," he shrieked back, shaking his dripping head, "but we ought to stand by for her boats, if they can live with them, poor wretches."

The stress of conversation was too great to indulge in further. I grasped the rail before me and stood at Waller's right hand, straining my eyes into the night.

We needed all our strength, really, for the screw, but at Janson's suggestion the dynamo was set going, and our little searchlight streamed out in a thin shaft of light into the darkness. It tinged the frothy breakers with a dead white glow as of hoar frost.

So we rode forward into the storm, the wind shrieking through our strained cordage, the spray falling like the lash of whips on our glistening decks, and the thud and swish of the surges against our bows answering the regular thump and rattle of the anchor chains in the hawse pipe, and the racket of the groaning machinery that echoed up from below.

Far ahead the little zone of golden light flashed before us, dancing and winking amid the tossing of the seas, darting here and there, pulsing quiveringly down the shaft of brightness that fed it from our top, flitting like some brilliant petrel of the night from crest to crest, spurning the foam, glittering through the veils of hissing spray that fell behind it like cascades of radiant jewels.

And after it we waddled along steadily, fighting the rollers, flinching before the sting of the flipping drift, nosing into the depths of the green combs of angry water, rolling, pitching, jarring and quivering, but ever following like some trustworthy and attentive duck trailing after an evasive humming bird.

The sheen of the furnace upon the sea was gleaming nearer. At times the glimmer of its flames was hid from us, as some mountain-like wall of water flung itself in between, but the glow of it was never lost to us.

We could see the sparks stream up like puny rockets, as the gale planed them off the edge of the blaze, flying it in clouds to leeward, as the ungoverned hulk swung heavily between the seas. The masts were pillars of living flame, that streamed into the night in bannerets of fire.

Out of the main hatchway a solid white hot glow of light was projected, shot with red streaks as burning splinters floated up in the strong sea draft. From stem to stern the unfortunate bark was wrapped in a fiery sheet as the conflagration leaped and roared about it, devouring the seas that broke aboard into clouds of rosy steam.

"God help the poor wretches," I shouted to Waller; "there's no one left alive on that."

"No, my lord, not this half hour back. It's their boats I'm watching for," he answered, as, with the peak of his cap pressed over his eyes, he strained his gaze into the night. "It's a ten to one chance against any boat living in this sea, but—well, there's always a but, my lord."

Janson was flirting the searchlight about and about the blazing hulk, like a very will-o'-the-wisp. It fled round it questioningly, picking at and dipping to every floating piece of wreckage, but never a one showed the sign of boat or human being.

With our steam to help us, there was no danger in approaching the floating furnace as near as we thought well, and we slid up towards it as it lurched past us, till the heat of it blistered across the red seas on to our salt cracked faces smartingly.

The sparks skipped by us, and hissed like little adders on our streaming planks, but gaze as we would, nothing but charred timbers and leaping breakers met our eyes. We plunged forward into the darkness again, as she lumbered by before the wind.

"We ought to hang about in the direction she came from," explained Waller thunderously. "The boats, if they lived, wouldn't keep her pace. They aren't so much exposed to the gale."

I nodded, still gripping the rail before me, not wishing to waste breath that was twisted from one's very lips by the wind, before it could frame a single intelligent word.

So we plodded on for quarter of an hour or more, seeing nothing. I could but remember what agonies the unfortunate victims of this mischance must be suffering, if by any terrible hap they were swinging near us on those hungry seas, seeing help and safety at hand, and yet without a hope of rescue save by utter chance.

"I suppose the oil caught fire?" I asked Waller, as a slight lull gave one a chance to make oneself heard. "I shouldn't have thought any ship could have flared like that in this sea."

"She's no whaler, my lord," returned the skipper decidedly; "I can't quite make out her build. More like a liner, only no liner would be down this far south. She had big engines, judging by her funnels. Looked for all the world like one of the old Black Cross Line."

"The Black Cross Line," I repeated wonderingly; "why, that's a funny thing. Some friends of mine have gone cruising in one of their steamers round——" and then the frightful horror of it took me by the throat, and I could have shrieked aloud.

The Black Cross Line! The Mada-

gascar was one of their boats, yacht fitted for cruising. Oh, the thing was impossible! It was some coincidence that fate had raised up to frighten me. Waller just spoke in the haphazard way men do when they make comparisons. Of course, he had served on some vessel of the fleet, and his thoughts strayed back to it.

And yet—and yet—no ordinary liner would be sailing these seas. And the Madagascar was expected in these latitudes.

My God, it was a thing too wanton for even my luck to have conceived and brought about. No fate could be so devilish as to drag me out these weary thousands of miles to see my love's agony of death in these desolate southern seas. No; no God that ruled the universe could allow it. I wrestled with the cold reason that insisted that these things could be, and that it was stretching the limits of mere coincidence to say they were not.

Into my tortures of despair a hail from Janson broke, and he swung the leaping flashlight from before our bow like a lightning streak. It streamed a path of light across the billows, to port, and centered there on a tumbling, reeling object, buffeted by the bluster of the breakers, half hidden by the curtain of the spindrift. Together Waller and I tore at the wheel, and slewed the ship towards it.

Slowly, ever so languidly, the bows came round, and began to edge across to where the disk of light hovered unblinkingly. The dark object leaped up ever and anon, poised upon the dancing surge, only to drop back as if engulfed absolutely in the dark abyss behind the roll of the breaker.

A white object fluttered, as we could see between these intermittent eclipses, streaming out against the yellow light glaringly. Round this, as we drew near, we could distinguish a bundle of misty outlines, animate or inanimate we could not tell.

We circled heavily to windward, and Waller roared his orders to the crew. The oil bags were hung overboard, and as they dribbled lingeringly across the surface of the foam, the tossing died down as by magic.

Half a dozen seamen clustered at the side, and with uplifted hands, swayed coils of rope above their heads. The engines slowed and stopped as Waller screamed into the pipes, and we half stayed, and then with the blow of a great roller upon our lifting keel staggered on again.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE THE GALE.

STILL nearer we floundered, drifting broadside on, to the round yellow patch wherein the dim mass still danced uncertainly. Nearer still, and we hovered over it, reeling under the thunderous blows that the windward waves hammered upon us, and rolling nigh bulwarks under into the oily calm to leeward.

Nearer again, and the ropes lashed out like whipcords across the interval from the waiting crew, and were caught and hauled at desperately by the eager wretches aboard the pitching boat. Nearer now, almost under the churn of our wash, and the searchlight stared down unquiveringly into every crevice of its wild confusion, swathing each face in its glare.

And white and set, silhouetted haggardly against the blackness of the outer night, the face of my love—my own dear love—looked up into my unbelieving eyes.

I heard an exclamation from Waller as I flung myself from the wheel, and heard him grip his breath as he braced himself to meet the plunge of the ship alone, but I was but human, and who was I to stand unmoved beside him there when the light of my eyes was swayed in the grasp of death before me?

I took a leap on to the wet and slant-

ing deck, and fell upon my hands, but rose beside the bulwark unhurt and panting. Then a hail from the boat reached across to us above the raving of the wind, and I saw our men tug frantically at a rope that tautened suddenly. A dark body came swiftly flying up to the bulwarks as the men hauled, and with eager hands we seized it, fending it from the jumping list of timbers.

A single glance showed me Lady Delahay's face, sunken and shriveled with fifty new lines of haunting fear. Another hail, another strenuous pull, and Violet fell into the arms that Gerry held out to receive her.

And then—aye, then, and till I go out into the eternal beyond, the memory of it will be vivid in my inmost soul—out of the swirl and uproar of that black yeasty whirlpool came my love into my embrace, and lay upon my breast.

We bore them into the cabin, and poured cordials between their white lips. We chafed their frozen hands and fetched hot bricks from the engine room to place beneath their feet. We tore off their outer garments—for ceremony flies through the porthole when death is knocking at the door—and wrapped blankets round them and rubbed their limbs furiously.

We did everything that men can do, of a good purpose but unhandily, to bring them back from the edge of the eternal sleep whereon they hovered, and soon—in the younger women's case at least—with success. Then as their eyes opened, and the color began to creep back languidly into their cheeks, and they sat up in utter wonder at their surroundings, we left them, with every appliance we could furnish forth, to revive in her turn their mother, giving them but little explanation of their whereabouts, and being eyed by them with a surprise that we could but hope had pleasure at its back.

But this was no time for sentimental musings, and we hurried on deck to see what had betided to the others.

Eight men had been hauled by main force from the tumbling boat, which had reeled more and more tempestuously as her living ballast lightened, and the last poor fellow, with no restraining hand on the far end of the line, had been bumped fearfully against the bulge of the hull as we rolled back. But bruises were the worst that any man had received, and we hustled them into the smoke room unceremoniously.

Janson was still flinging the searchlight rays across the tumbling waste of water, but a word from one of the half drowned mariners made us stay him.

"Not another two spars are afloat together of the other boats," he gasped, as the blood began to flow again in his frozen veins; "every one was matchwooded against the side as they left. Ours was carried off half full by a wave that broke the painter, or I shouldn't be here, and thank God for it."

"How many aboard you?" I asked, shuddering to think what a toll the night had taken; "you're the Madagascar, aren't you?"

"Yes, we're the Madagascar," he answered slowly and with surprise, "though I don't know how you know it, seeing you've let the boat adrift. An hour ago she was the finest pleasure craft afloat, with a hundred and twenty passengers and fifty crew as jolly as could be. And now there's *us*," and he flung his hands out towards his fellows with a gesture of weak despair.

"An hour ago!" I demurred, "more than that, my man, surely. She could never have blazed up to a bonfire like that in the time."

"I tell you, sir," he answered obstinately, "that less than an hour ago six score of happy men and women were feeding theirselves as contented as could be in her saloon. And now," he added grimly, "they're feeding the fishes. And in that boat for three quarters of an hour we've been tossing over their dead, drowned carcasses, reckoning that every minute would see us join them. And captain—my captain, what

I've sailed with this ten years past—he's down there among them, and I'm here, and ought to be thankin' God, and I keep cursin' every time I give myself leave to think. And that's what comes of followin' the sea, sir," and he laid his rough, damp, grizzled head upon the table, and burst into a storm of hysterical tears.

The others were coming back to consciousness one by one. Baines touched me on the shoulder.

"There's one here that won't last long, my lord, I fear," he said, leading me towards the other end of the saloon, where another limp body was stretched across the table. "We can't bring him round at all."

It came as no shock of surprise to recognize Denvarre's face and drooping yellow mustache. His eyes were closed; his cheeks fell in limply against his jaws; the breath came in a thin, wheezy hiss from between his white lips.

He was in the last stages of cold and exhaustion. They tried in vain to force brandy between his set teeth. He had not the muscular power of swallowing left. It did indeed look as if Baines was right.

I won't stop to tell you the thoughts that seethed and ran riot in my brain as I saw him fighting for his life with the cold that had nigh mastered his pulses. They belong to the category of devilish inspirations that come to a man when some wild battle with nature furnishes forth a throw back to pure animalism; when self is uttermost and honor unborn.

They are monstrous phantasms of the brain too dark to materialize into wholesome words, and best forgotten save when the system needs a purge of shame. God forgive me my desires at that single moment—for a space of mere seconds saw me myself again.

Suffice it to say that with every aid we could devise we joined him in his wrestle with the death that was gripping him for the final throw. We fetched spirits, and rasped every part of his body with rough towels soaked in whisky.

We smote with our palms upon his rigid limbs, and bent and kneaded his unyielding joints; we thrust heated bricks against his feet and hands; finally, at Janson's suggestion, we collected handfuls of the sleet that was falling on the decks, and grated them furiously upon his skin. And at last the life began to flicker in him.

A tinge—faint and barely perceptible at first, but growing in strength—began to filter into his cheeks. A sigh burst from his throat and the tense lips parted. We tilted brandy drop by drop into his mouth, and heard his spluttering cough with joy. And as then of his own effort he stirred and whispered faintly.

"Gwen?" he queried in a faint, far away voice, and it was for me to answer him.

"Safe, and on board," said I cheerily, as my heart sledge hammered at my ribs, and my hands twitched to grasp his throat and tear the chords of speech away from him eternally. "Quite safe, old man, and coming round nicely."

He smiled a happy, drowsy smile that stayed and slept upon his face as he wandered back into consciousness. And then I left him to his brother—who was among the rescued—and to Baines, and went stolidly up on deck, the fires of hell burning in my heart, and rage—the insane, unreasoning rage of disappointment—astir in my blood.

"Gwen, Gwen," I repeated to myself, as I flung myself out into the gale that still flashed cuttingly down the deck. "Gwen, she is to him, and curse him, she's Gwen no longer to me."

I stood beneath the bridge holding on to a friendly stanchion, and gazing apathetically before me. I could see Waller's brawny figure outlined upon the bridge, every movement of his muscles showing up against the moonlit sky.

He wrestled strenuously with the bucking wheel as it fought in his grasp,

while above him the ragged clouds scudded fiercely, giving him the effect of rushing violently backward into space as they passed swiftly over him. The wind had increased with the rise of the waning moon, and the lull, which mercifully allowed us to rescue the derelict boat, was blotted out in a turmoil of foam and fury. The tumult of the night found an echo in my heart.

For, unlike my usual custom, I had allowed myself to hope. In my conceit of my plan for gaining an interview with Gwen—in my hopes and fears of our meeting coming off—I had not dwelt much on the fact that it might end in failure—in despair.

Gerry was partly responsible for this. For the last week he had continually dinned his sanguine reassurances into my ears till they had almost ousted my natural pessimism. I had forgotten to deceive Fate with a pretense of despondency, and she had turned to sneer wickedly in my face and to flout me for my inattention.

I gripped the stanchion savagely as I thought of these things, I turned a silent face to the hubbub of the night, while every passion of my body rioted in my brain. I took an infuriate comfort in the thunderous grapple of the elements.

For, look at it how I would, I was condemned to hours—if not days—of smiling torture. Here was I cooped up in the same ship with the woman to whom I had utterly given over my heart, and honor—bare courtesy, in fact—forbade me to so much as hint to her my love. Mere common kindliness bade me further the wooing of my rival.

And he—I gnashed my teeth as I remembered it—if my luck had only allowed, might have been a thousand fathoms deep in this shrieking whirlpool of a sea. If ever the temptations of Cain filled a man's heart, they crowded mine that tempest ridden night.

I fought with my passion, thrusting these ideas back from me, conjuring up to myself every thought of chivalry that my upbringing could give birth to. I remembered my apathetic renunciation of Gwen when we parted six months before—my calm and fatalistic determination to live down dispassionately the desire of my life.

None the more did it bring comfort as I told myself that now I had the right and the means to win her—that as before God, and not before a sordid, money worshiping world we were just man and maid, and had looked upon each other in natural love and liking. I cursed the narrow world of society with an insistence that gained power from the fact that I stood in the very candle of nature's wrath, and society was dimmed by the distance of three thousand miles—veiled behind a curtain of storm and dancing spray.

Thus during the long hours of the night I battled with myself in disjointed, hopeless argument, and the storm rattled round me with growing clamor.

It was about three in the morning when the climax of the tempest came. A shock quivered up from our stern, vibrating through every timber of our hull as if by electricity—a tremor such as no mere breaking wave could have caused. It was as if we had been smitten by some Titan sledge hammer.

Above the bellow of the storm I heard Waller's cry of dismay, and saw the wheel spin uselessly through his hands. He came headlong down from the bridge.

I sprang forward to steady him as he half stepped, half fell from the ladder, and he lurched into my arms. As the unguided ship swung round before the impact of the rollers, the deck stood up at an angle that shed our footing from it.

We gripped each other unhandily. The bow leaped and shook itself as if in pain. A ponderous surge charged into it. The ship gave before the shock, throbbing through every timber.

It swayed, hesitated, and then, defeated in the unequal struggle, broached to, and lay in the trough of the sea. A

great flood roared down the deck, snatching up the captain and myself in its green mane and dashing us stunningly against the deckhouse.

We spluttered and choked, gasping for breath.

"The rudder chains are broken," exclaimed Waller hoarsely, as he gulped and crowed, and he made a dash for the forecastle, roaring aloud for the watch below.

They never heard him till he thrust his face into the very door. Unsteadily they came tumbling out to scramble along the listed deck, and find and splice the sundered links. The rattle of their intermitting hammerings and draggings could only be heard if you stood within a foot of them.

The seas boiled over us eternally while this was doing, and for half an hour we were practically beneath the waves, the ship settling under the weight of water as she rolled broadside unto the seas. The engine still thrashed wearily round, but ungoverned as we were, our leeway was twice our speed of steam. We only butted our prow more and more under the combs of the great rollers.

Finally six men were stationed with ropes spliced to the broken chains, and Waller mounted the bridge again. By strenuous tugs they hauled upon the tiller as his hand motioned to them, and slowly we came round to face the gale again. As we did so there was a clang and a jar. The white wake faded from behind us, and came flying up past the sides. We were sidling back with gathering speed into our sternway. The cover was flung off the engineroom manhole, and Eccles' grizzled head appeared.

"The propeller shaft, my lord," he bawled, his voice rising screamingly in his excitement, "the propeller shaft's split. I daren't give her another turn in this sea."

As our way lost itself in the force of the contending waters, and died down into nothingness, we slowed, stopped, and a huge mass of ocean roared against our prow.

It lifted, lifted, lifted, soaring towards the very heavens. I saw it eclipse a red, angry planet that I had noticed high above the bowsprit stays a moment before. It hovered a single tense instant, and then with a swirl and a heave came flying round, reeling and staggering.

There was a rush of the crew to gain some hold or to brace themselves against some shelter. Then, with a frightful roll, we swung over, and lay on our beam ends, the hungry waves licking along our submerged decks like wolves ravening for their quarry.

Out of this hopelessness Waller led us like the brave man he was. After infinite research the carpenter produced a storm sail, which had not been buried beneath the weight of superincumbent wreckage. Under the captain's skilful supervision this was bent as a jib.

Slowly, as the wind gained force upon it, we dragged from under the weight of the waves that were thrusting us deeper and deeper under their piled thronging, and drew round to show our stern to the wind. As we plowed our way out of the trough of the sea, the waters rushed more and more from off our streaming decks.

We rose; the ship shaking itself like a dog. We gained speed. The men took up the rudder ropes they had flung aside, and in another two minutes we were riding—racing, before the gale, back—straight back—to the regions of the Great South Wall.

As we gained way the ship steadied herself. The keel sat more evenly in the hollow between the seas, cutting through their crests like a knife as the sail bellied out and tautened.

We managed to get another piece of canvas spread, and then like a thing endowed with sudden life the Raccoon began to tear before the wind, bursting aside the surges as she overtook them, as if she would revenge haughtily the shame they had put upon her helplessness.

There was an exhilaration about the fury of our rushing. It was like riding a mettled and tireless steed.

I left the crew to their work of reconnecting the broken rudder chain and went below. The saloon was a desolation. Every movable thing had been swept to port by the list of our sudden broach to. The table was leaning with its top against the side. A litter of glass and crockery filled the port corners. A mass of pantry gear had been shot across the floor. Smears of various sauces from the same locality stained the carpets.

Water had forced itself down through the hatchway—though this had been battened—and sparkled in puddles beneath the electric light. The knives and forks and splinters of glass jingled as they clustered and broke apart again at each heave of the ship. And in the midst of this conglomerate desolation sat poor Lady Delahay and her daughters.

The former rose hastily as I swung myself off the stairs into the doorway. She staggered towards me, her face white with anxiety. Her hand trembled as she dropped it unsteadily on my arm.

"Lord Denvarre?" she questioned, tugging insistently at my sleeve. "He's recovering?"

"Right as the mail," answered I; "he was a bit knocked out of time at first, but we've brought him round famously between us. And you?" I queried, "I hope you have been ministered to properly?"

"I could think of nothing—absolutely nothing," she answered, "while we were without news of him. Oh, Lord Heatherslie, supposing my darling had been practically widowed before my eyes?"

"It's been a terrible night for you," said I, "but I'm glad you were spared that crowning sorrow. Then I suppose I'm to congratulate Miss Gwendoline on her engagement?" I went on, looking across to where the two girls were trying to tidy up some of the worst of the jumbled disorder of the floor. "I'm sure she has the best wishes for luck and happiness from me."

"It's not announced at all yet," said the good lady hurriedly, "in fact, you see there was no one to announce it to. There were no people of any position on board, and it has only really been seriously taken into consideration the last few days. A little awkward, you know, under the circumstances, our being fellow travelers for so long. So we have decided that it shall not be recognized just yet. Just an understanding, you see, not a formal betrothal till we return to England, if we ever do," added the poor old thing doubtfully. "Oh, my dear Lord Heatherslie, shall we ever reach any port alive?" and she sank back on to the cushions of the locker seats with a groan.

"Well, at present," said I, "I must confess that we're flying away from the nearest port at the rate of about twenty miles an hour. Our engine's broken down, and we have to run before the gale. But it'll only be the case of an hour or two, I hope, and then we shall be able to beat up for the Falklands. But it'll be a long business at the best. You will have to put up with your bachelor quarters and our rough accommodation."

"Lord Heatherslie," she said brokenly, "when I think what might have happened, I should be less than a Christian if I didn't give thanks with a full heart. Even though we have lost everything in the way of clothes and property, I have my darlings safe, and their happiness is secured. That is sufficient for me."

"Oh," I said, "then I have to congratulate Miss Violet also. Mr. Garlicke, I presume?" I inquired with an air of savage festivity.

Poor Gerry, his optimism was to get felled to earth along with mine. Well, I felt, there was something in both being in the same boat. We could make our moans in company.

"Quite on a par with Gwendoline's affair," answered Lady Delahay, holding up a warning finger. "Nothing to be said about it yet, please. Is it possible I recognized Mr. Carver on the deck?"

"Quite possible," I replied happily, "you did. He and I and the Professor Lessaution—who is helping him tend the rescued men—are the only passengers aboard," and as the girls gave over their useless competition with the litter of the crockery, and came and sat beside their mother, I began to give them the whole story.

For a girl who had just been dragged by main force out of the blackest shadow of death, I never saw anything to equal Gwen. Her eyes were bright, her complexion was pink and shining, the sparkle of the salt spray was on her hair. She looked as smiling and content as if she had found the desire of her heart, instead of having just seen fivescore of fellow beings consigned to a frightful end.

Her gaze dwelt upon my face as she listened intently to my story. She looked as complacent as if we were at anchor off Monaco, instead of driving Lord knows where into an unchartered sea, before one of the fiercest gales that ever started a ring bolt. I reflected with internal wretchedness that a girl's horizon is bounded very narrowly when she is in love, and envied Denvarre under my breath furiously.

In their turn they told me of their adventure, and what had befallen them on that night of horror. How in the midst of light and life, and the friendly converse of the yacht's saloon, a disheveled lampman had appeared, grimy, hot, and with fear of death writ largely on his face, and beckoned out the captain from amidst the throng.

How, restless in his continual absence, one or two unquiet passengers had followed him, and returned with vague reports of a fire in the lamproom forward, and how on the word the whole mob of passengers had surged on deck. That then the iron sea discipline of a well ordered British merchant vessel had been closed around them instantly, and they had been marshaled in parties to the boats to which they had been assigned.

But the fire continuing to gain, and the sea to rise, they had been confronted by an awful death on either hand. When the captain had been obliged to abandon hope, he had lowered away the first boat, and within seconds they had seen it dashed to pieces like an eggshell on their bulwarks. The second and third boats had shared the same fate, and two more had been swamped in sight of the vessel.

Then as a last chance the captain had had a boat swung from the bow with a long tether, and they had been transferred to it one by one as the seas swung it backward and forward between their passing and repassing, but when but a dozen of them were aboard, the painter had parted—worn with the constant chafing to and fro against the timbers—and they had been swept to leeward as in a flash.

Five minutes later the flames had covered the ship from stem to stern, and they shuddered when they told what they had seen, as dark forms began to drop from her red hot decks into the merciful cold of the sea. And they ended the tale with the tears that are the due of utter terror and long despair, and I made no effort to stay this gracious relief of nature's pity.

As the ship began to steady her plunging, we made efforts to find accommodation for the ladies, to whom of course we gave up our cabins. They were absolutely destitute of everything beyond what they stood up in, and were robed as it was in such rugs and blankets as had been collected while their outer garments were dried in the stoke hole.

We got them at last to retire and find a much needed repose, a thing that their terror had forbidden so far, for the rolling of the masterless ship had been

enough to make any one believe that she would only find a resting place on the bottom of the furious sea.

I left them with good wishes for sleep and for forgetfulness of the horrors they had experienced. I sought the smoke-room to make inquiry for the rescued men, and found that they had all lapsed into unconsciousness, tucked up in the blankets which the crew had surrendered to their use.

Lessaution and Gerry were stretched upon the floor, sleeping heavily after their strenuous attendance on the half frozen folk, and I left them to their slumbers; amid my own misery I had a heartache to spare for Gerry's awakening of sorrow.

I climbed up upon the bridge again and stood beside Waller. White faced and haggard with the anxieties of the night, he was still at his post.

He watched with hopeful eyes the coming of the dawn, which was already tinging the east with an angry, lurid crimson. Still racing before the billows that hunted us we were plunging ever southward, returning swiftly down the track up which we had fought so ploddingly the last six days.

The captain's clothes hung about him in limp sodden clingings; he leaned wearily upon the wheel, guiding it delicately in the strong grip of Rafferty, who shared the toil of restraining it. There was weariness and exhaustion in his every pose, but his eye was still bright and his face set steadfastly upon his duty.

I watched him with admiration—the strong confident sailor who held our lives resourcefully in his unshaken grip.

I laid my hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"Take a rest, captain," said I; "let Janson come and have his spell. You've been at it twelve long hours already. Surely there's nothing left but to let her drive."

"Thanks, my lord," he answered, smiling back cheerily into my inquiring eyes. "Janson's only been two hours below. I'll give him an hour longer at least."

"But Rafferty's here, and I can hold the wheel, if that's all," said I reproachfully; "what's the good of killing yourself, man?"

"I've had many a longer bout in weather no better," and he shifted the spokes a point in his deft, unhesitating hands.

"But what's the trouble?" I answered, almost irritated by his unswerving determination. "Why can't we take her from you. We've got the sense not to let her broach to, at any rate."

"Ice is the matter, my lord. Ice—and acres of it. You forget we're racing back into the south at fifteen knots an hour. If the gale doesn't drop before evening, we shall be among the bergs again. We may meet outlying floes at any moment."

"Then we'd call you," said I argumentatively, "so just you skip along and take a snooze with a clear conscience."

"Thanks, my lord, I shouldn't sleep," he said dryly, wiping the spray from his beard, and there was nothing further to be said.

I shrugged my shoulders and left him there, vigilant, alert, eternally craning his eyes into the veil of the spindrift, a valiant warrior of the deep.

The presage of the lurid sunrise was fulfilled. All day long the gale shrieked and raved behind us, screaming through our taut rigging like some inarticulate storm spirit's agony. The sullen waves still thundered after us, lifting our stern, and burying our bows now and again in the crest of some laggard comber.

They broke thunderously across our bulwarks, dashing themselves into a very dust of spray. It glistened snow-like in the sun rifts, as they broke now and again through the leaden haze that hid the sky. The scud of the clouds kept pace above us, wreathing and twisting into a thousand fantastic shapes. The gulls screamed and ho-

vered, and the petrels dipped and scurried from crest to crest.

The roar of the surges and the shiver of the laboring timbers followed one upon the other monotonously. One got stupefied by their ceaseless, recurrent boom and thud.

About midday the stress of the night began to tell upon me. I remembered that during four and twenty hours of physical and mental excitement I had had no sleep. I staggered wearily down into the smokeroom, curled myself up beside Gerry's still motionless form, and before I had closed eye a minute, sank off into dreamless unconsciousness.

The dark was falling again as I woke. Both Gerry and Lessaution had disappeared, but I could hear the bellow of the tempest strong as ever.

I scrambled to my feet, and made my way uncertainly to the saloon. The remains of a meal stood uncleared upon the table, and I began to satisfy a hunger which had grown stupendous. Then back up the pitching companion steps I tottered, and strode out upon the deck.

The seas were still leaping along our sides, but not quite so strongly. Up on the bridge I recognized Janson's burly figure, and perceived with thankfulness that Waller had at last surrendered his post.

In the bow Gerry and Lessaution were clutching the foremost stays, and pointing excitedly before them. I wormed my way along the deck and joined them.

Standing out blue white above the froth of the boiling sea a great iceberg was rearing its head. It hung there haughtily and unmoved, despising the rage that made the breakers raven at its feet. The wind shrieked about its pinnacles, thrusting one here and again from its seat upon the ice buttresses, and sending them crashing into the deep.

But the main mass of the white mountain stayed motionless, a mighty breakwater sheltering the leeward surface into a rippling pool.

Janson raised his hand to his mouth, and roared some indistinguishable order to the watch on deck. The men came racing forward, and hauled at the sheets. The sails came lumbering down, and as we lost the steadiness of their grip upon the wind we began to pitch and tumble again.

Not for long. The wheel spun in the mate's hands, and with our way still swift upon us we began to turn. We nosed in towards the white pyramid. We swung past its leeward edge. Our cutwater broke a burnished line across the stillness of the sheltered pool.

In a very instant the travail of our storm hunted vessel ceased. We swung, heaved to upon the calm, gently swaying to the ripples, while outside the storm still bellowed for our lives.

Behind this sudden refuge we lay almost motionless, looking up wonderingly at the shining peaks above. Baines and the cook accepted the altered conditions with surprise and thankfulness, making immediate preparations for a meal which should obliterate the discomforts of the past eight and forty hours. The smoke began to curl anew from the galley, and various tinned victuals were disinterred from the pantry wreckage.

Within five minutes of our finding this unexpected harbor the door of the captain's cabin opened, and Waller strode forth, gaping upon our changed surroundings. The sixth sense that lies in the seaman's brain had warned him, sleeping as he was, that we no longer dipped and tossed amid the breakers.

A glance to starboard, and he understood, giving Janson a quick nod as the other pointed to the ice. He stayed still a moment, watching the edge of the berg curiously, and then climbed up and joined the mate.

I could not hear the words they exchanged, but I saw a shake of Waller's head as he jerked his thumb over his shoulder. They strode together to one

end of the bridge, and the captain gesticulated towards the giant iceberg again.

A half smile crossed Janson's face. He was evidently meeting his chief's arguments with a polite incredulity. Following the line of Waller's pointing finger, I was in time to see a strange thing happen.

The edge of the ice rose slowly, but perceptibly, mounting from the water level with a heavy swish. I looked up in amazement, and saw the topmost pinnacles bow slanting across the drifting clouds. There was a suck and a wash as the water rolled in towards the ice to fill the vacuum. The berg lurched slowly back again, and a big breaker gathered itself up, and crested out towards us. There was a line of foam across the pool.

An order roared from between Waller's lips, and Janson came at a bound from the bridge to wake the watch below. His face was white with terror. He shrieked into the forecastle in a shrill, unnatural voice.

The men came leaping up, and at the captain's shout dropped the two port boats over the side. A rope was passed to them, and with furious tugs they passed ahead, towing desperately. The men left on deck set the sails again, waiting for the first breath of the gale to catch them. They stared wide eyed over their shoulders, watching, staring, gluing their gaze to the mighty ice cliffs astern.

I scrambled up to Waller, full of unquiet surprise. I felt that something was imminent—some possible disaster that I could not fathom. I demanded explanations.

"Mr. Janson has committed a very serious error of judgment, my lord," said the sailor shortly. "A few minutes will see it repaired, I hope."

"But, good gracious!" said I with some annoyance, "you're taking us out into that whirlpool again just when we were comfortable. What on earth's the matter?"

Before he could answer me the first breath of the gale began to catch upon the sails. The sailors hauled upon the sheets to tauten them as he bawled his orders down, and the boats' crew were beckoned back. As they slipped alongside, and the davit hooks caught again upon the pulleys, Waller gave a great sigh of relief and turned to me again.

"That iceberg——" he began, and at the words no explanation became necessary.

We were both staring at it when again the edge of it began to lift. But this time there was no return. Up, up, it soared, lifting its dripping flanks into the air, and the seas poured back from it in torrents. The waters boiled behind our stern, heaving as if in the bath of some gigantic geyser. For one single moment we danced haltingly upon the turbulence, the wind fighting with all its strength upon our canvas against the under currents that tore at our keel. Then, thank God, the gale was victor.

We slid away from the grip of the backflow, out into the riot of the storm again. And behind us one of nature's dramas was enacted awfully. With a roar and a thunderous crash the iceberg slanted, swayed, poised itself one motionless instant, and then rolled completely over, dashing its topmost summit into the heart of the deep, and heaved up by its mighty fall, a huge wave rose and almost engulfed it.

The great rollers came clamoring after our flying bark as if in vindictive disappointment for the escape of their nearly won prey. But their fury defeated them. Their crests thundered on our stern, and flung us with growing force out into the ocean, while behind us the berg slowly emerged among the tossing, to point new pinnacles towards the clouds.

And out in the storm again we continued our ceaseless race before the seas, flying anew down the long trail south, buffeted, tempest driven, but

safe again by the favor of a brave sailor's quick witted knowledge.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEAPING OF THE WALL.

ANOTHER night of tempest succeeded, diversified by stinging showers of hail and sleet. I believe neither captain nor mate left the bridge the whole night long, for the floe and berg began to grow around us, tack as we would.

But the deeper we got into the heart of the multitude of island ice, the less grew the force of the wind. I rose the next morning after a few hours' restless slumber to find us floating gently in a calm untroubled sea, while around us, as far as eye could reach, the white pack stretched in uneven masses to the horizon.

We dawdled down the broad lanes of black water between, the little puffs of wind coming fitfully from behind the sheltering masses. Our range of vision got less and less as these increased in size, and about midday the sun came out gloriously, and Waller was able to take an observation.

He came towards me, smiling doubtfully, after he had worked out his calculations in the little chartroom.

"M. Lessaution will be enchanted, my lord," said he. "We are within a few miles of our original starting place. It is an extraordinary thing that we should have been driven back so exactly on the line we had come. I have only steered by the stars and dead reckoning."

"He may be pleased enough," I answered, "but he'll be entirely alone in his gratification. Do you mean to say we've got to wrestle back all those weary miles? What desperate luck!—but just the usual kind that dogs my footsteps. Why, it'll take weeks to do it sailing."

"I'm afraid it would," agreed the captain, "and that's why I have another proposal to make. Since we got among the ice, I have been interviewing Mr. Eccles. He thinks that if we were in a dead calm, that he could get the split of the propeller shaft riveted, and made tight enough for half steam. I would suggest, my lord, that we lie to and let him have a try."

"But not in this ice," I objected; "I don't want a repetition of yesterday's performance with a different climax. Suppose one of these great bergs turns turtle?"

"I have thought of that," replied Waller, "but I have a plan. If you remember we were under the lee of some islands when we left on our cruise north. I think I can find them again, my lord. We could probably make them an ice free harbor."

"Why, certainly, then," said I at once, glad to snatch at half a chance of curtailing a voyage that could be nothing but misery for me. "Search them out, captain, and let Mr. Eccles do his utmost."

He went back to the wheel, and began to nose our bows to starboard, taking advantage of every breath to slip delicately from pool to pool.

About an hour later a thin column of smoke showed suddenly as we rounded the flank of a mighty berg, and there, a short mile to port, the familiar islands showed up, gray and haggard in the sunlight, as we had left them eight or nine stormy days before.

Lessaution had joined me by now, his little eyes agleam with pleasure. As he recognized his surroundings, he turned and seized my hand.

"This time we shall not fail," he declaimed ecstatically. "Before twenty four hours are over, I shall have scaled the cliffs that keep the mystery of the south. I—Emil Saiger Lessaution—I proclaim it."

"My good sir," I said, "you'll have to be quick about it. We only stay here for repairs. You don't mean to say you imagined we were still pursuing our quest? You certainly are a pretty sanguine personage, if you did."

"M. de Heatherslie," replied the little man with dignity, "do you think that I have such little consideration for the distressed ladies of this party, that I would keep them a moment longer than necessary from returning where they can obtain what is needful for their comfort? No. But I have questioned the good Eccles, who assures me that not less than forty eight hours will be necessary to effect his work upon his engines. By then I shall have accomplished my desire, and will be able to show you such proofs that after we have landed the ladies at the Falklands, you will retrace your course here and pursue this adventure with me. But to think that I wish to inconvenience the ladies by a single instant!—I who worship the sex from the bottom of my heart!" and he twirled his little moustaches fiercely.

I did not attempt to answer these chivalric sentiments, and we drifted into other byways of conversation amicably enough. The Raccoon wound along the irregular canals amid the pack, and finally swung under the overhanging shadow of the summits.

The isles were high and sugarloaf-like, with great hollows on the flank that faced the shore cliffs not a mile away. We threw the lead in the channel between them and the cliff wall, and about the center found fourteen fathoms. Here we dropped anchor.

Great lean rocks ran up from the water's edge in buttressing ribs, crowning the gaunt summits. Here and there deep rifts showed in their sides. Curious twistings wound about them.

Scales of molten stones lapped over and about each other wherever a resting place was found. It did not need the black column of smoke that pillared up into the sky to inform me that these were volcanoes.

That day was given up to tidying the ship, lashing up what had run adrift of our various impedimenta about the saloon and smokeroom, and making things shipshape generally.

About noon the ladies appeared, bright, smiling, and cheerful. Gwen met me with the friendliest interest and unconcern.

She was dressed in a neat skirt of sail cloth, supplied by the carpenter, or rather the material for the same. She and her sister, I found, had been fashioning these in the privacy of their cabins, the dresses in which they came aboard being practically ragged pulp. They had wound thin strips of blanket about their shoulders most becomingly, and now wore these impromptu toilets before us by no means abashed, and with the certainty of producing a good impression undisturbed upon their faces.

We hastened to congratulate them upon their appearance.

They bowed their thanks, and began to ply us with unceasing questions. They were full of curiosity about their whereabouts, and their chances of a speedy return to civilized regions.

I assured them that no efforts of mine should be wanting to swiftly bring them back to the known world at the earliest opportunity, but explained the situation with regard to the engine.

Gwen flashed a look at me I hardly understood.

"You seem anxious to get rid of us," she said. "Is our disheveled appearance too much for you? We'll endeavor not to obtrude our society upon you more than necessary."

She looked so adorable as she said it, with the little curls just leaning down her forehead to peep into her blue eyes, that I could have seized her in my arms then and there, and dared Denvarre to so much as think of her again.

As things were, being at the end of the nineteenth century, and not in the middle of the tenth, I smiled apathetically, and answered with as much emotion in my voice as there is in a phonograph:

"It must be very uncomfortable for you, I fear. No clothes, no luxuries, no anything."

"Neither Vi nor I are made of Italian glass," she answered quaintly, "and mother's tougher than she looks. Truth to tell, I was getting bored on the yacht. This sort of thing suits me excellently—I adore adventure. But I'm sorry, of course, if our coming has put you about," and she smiled again, happily.

I suppose it is the nature of the sweetest of women to be merciless at times. I reflected this in excuse as I gazed seawards without finding an answer, and thrusting back the words that came bubbling to my lips.

The wretchedness must have been apparent in my face, for she suddenly changed the conversation as we strolled forward.

"So you're no longer Captain Dorinecourt?"

"Alas, no!" said I forgetfully.

She turned quickly to look at me with surprise.

"Good gracious, Lord Heatherslie, aren't you glad to have the title?"

"I only meant," I stammered, "that there have been many responsibilities and—er—disappointments accumulating for me since I succeeded."

"But surely that'll soon be over," she queried. "It's only a matter of lawyer's business, is it?"

"They're terrible people when they get you in their hands," said I vaguely. "But tell me, how you have enjoyed your trip so far?"

She looked back at me very straight.

"I told you when we left London I shouldn't enjoy it, and I can't honestly say I have. The monotony got to be terrible."

I had meant all references to what had happened in London to be forgotten. I did not think it kind to refer to them again in this outspoken way.

"But—but surely Denvarre and—and Garlicke made it pleasant for you," I hazarded. "It must have made it awfully nice for you having them all the time."

"Of course they have been attentive, if that's what you mean," she said, with a slightly contemptuous inflection in her voice. "But one can get tired of even undiluted attention. I'm sure I've done my best to quarrel with Lord Denvarre several times, but he's far too polite."

I didn't know what to think. Did she openly mean to give me to understand that she had accepted Denvarre for the position? Or were they simply indulging in the luxury of their first quarrel? Or was it just her off hand way of speaking of him? I found no answer.

"Now, if we'd only had the prophetic instinct and known that you were going to start on this delightful trip, we should have waited and come with you. You'd have invited us, wouldn't you?"

I smiled to myself as I reflected that Lady Delahay would have found an extremely polite but explicit refusal to any such proposal. But I answered courteously:

"It would have been too great a privilege. But my luck never permits arrant good fortune like that to be mine."

She looked at me curiously, and sighed a little restlessly, turning away to watch the cloud of mollies that skipped about our stern. There was silence between us for a minute.

"I prefer captains to peers," she said at last, with a little laugh. "I don't think you're improved."

"It's a prejudice you'll have to overcome, won't you?" said I. "Denvarre——" but as I mentioned his name he came on deck, and spying us, walked up and joined us.

The two smiled into each other's eyes pleasantly enough, but—but something was wanting. Gwen never had been what one would call a sentimental girl.

I left them to stroll off together, while I marched forward again, musing over the very level headed way in which she treated her engagement and her *fiancé*.

For I had imagined she would look at the matter differently. We had been such old—well, comrades, that I'd expected to be told of her happiness, and by her own lips too. It would have prevented all the sense of strangeness that had somehow got between us. I shouldn't have whined or referred to old times—she must have known that.

I could only repeat to myself that women were beyond my finite understanding, and continue to take a miserable and utterly useless pleasure in the fact that at any rate she did not worship the ground that Denvarre trod.

Gerry was smoking a gloomy pipe over the stern, and I joined him. He kept his face studiously averted from mine, and I had to lay my hand upon his shoulder before I spoke.

"Poor old chap," said I sympathetically. "Have they broken it to you?"

"The old woman has," he answered, adding a crisp execration which should never be used in connection with a lady.

"Well," said I, trying to look into his eyes, "it'll soon be over, old man. If Eccles can get steam, we'll be back at the Falklands in ten days' time. And we must buck each other up," I added, trying to be cheerful.

"I didn't think it of Vi," burst out the poor lad with an air of desperate aggrievement. "Not that I believe she cares the flick of a finger for him now. It's that old hag of a mother that's done it."

"My dear boy," said I, "we mustn't put *too* stupendous a value on our fascinations. Denvarre and his brother are good men all through. And you and I are detrimentals—or at any rate I only shave it by a short head," I added, as I thought of the collection which was to bring in a tidy trifle.

Poor Gerry. He just let himself loose upon the word. He cursed wealth and all that wealth brings with a sudden burst of passion that I had never dreamed he was capable of.

He railed at Lady Delahay; he condemned the name of Garlicke to the lowest pit; he anathematized every usage of polite society and every useless luxury that we are bred to consider a necessity, showing the aptest reasons for considering them the true creators of every vice and cruelty that is perpetrated beneath the sun. And I let him rave.

For, mark me, there are masculine moods where oaths and curses are the equivalent of feminine tears, and in neither case should you attempt to restrain them if they are the culmination of some great tribulation. They sweep out the bitterness in their stream, and though the ache be left in the wound, it has no longer a poisoned smart.

And that is why Gerry shook my hand a few minutes later, and let less haggard lines pervade his countenance, while he confessed himself a fool. And in this worthier frame of mind I led him aft, and into the conversation of his fellows.

As the dusk grew down—and you must recollect it was nearly midsummer in those latitudes, and the nights were but an hour or two long—we managed to get some sort of dinner. The cook evolved a meal which he would have considered unbefitting his dignity at another time, but which we ate on our cracked plates with great appreciation.

For the first time for over a week we fed at a steady table, and enjoyed the peaceable conversation of our companions. Gerry, under the influence of coffee and chartreuse, even rose to the lengths of chaffing poor little Lessaution.

The latter had spent the afternoon in unavailing effort. Supplied with a boat and a crew, he had set forth to fend along the great rock wall which seemed to stretch unbroken to the horizon, seeking, but with an utter want of success, for a means of ascending the same. And the poor little chap was taking it most seriously.

Gerry thought fit to twit him on his

futile adventure, and he was furious as a trapped rat. It was suggested to him that the quest was, and ever would be, hopeless, and that we had better give it up before we all got cricks in our necks staring up precipices we were never destined to climb.

We declared our conviction that we were in the wrong spot altogether—the responsibility for our position rested in the first place with the professor, I should explain, who had worked out by some intricate scheme of his own the probable route the storm driven Mayans must have taken—and that he must have entirely misjudged the wind, or the currents, or something.

Finally, that there could not possibly be anything worth seeing if he did happen to claw up the barren crags.

The little savant fell upon his adversary, foot, horse, and artillery. He demonstrated that he was a disgrace to the name of Englishman, and had of imagination no single jot. That it did not matter, in effect, what such an unsportsmanlike rascal did think, for fortunately our destinies lay with me—the good earl, let it be understood—who would be guided in this matter by the dictates of sense and practicality.

He himself would only give up the quest with his breath, and staked his reputation on his success.

Finally, in an access of irritation he flung from us to go on deck and compose his vehement mortification with a cigar, and to gaze hungrily at the cliffs which mocked him with cold white serenity.

Small talk and amiability were the order of the evening. Induced by our fervent representation, Gwen even went to the piano and enlivened these desolate solitudes with a song or two. We were settling into a thoroughly pleasant evening, though among us two hearts were still throbbing mournfully.

Suddenly a shrill yell resounded from above. There was the sound of hurried footsteps on the companion, and Lessaution burst back into our midst.

His eyes were agleam, his hair stuck up like quills in his excitement. He bellowed at us.

"The ice goes, the ice goes!" he hallooed. "It goes, it disappears, it draws itself off. The sea runs away. There will be nothing—nothing at all. You shall see. We sink to the bottom; no water shall remain at all. Name of a pipe, what is to become of us!"

Without exception we all jostled at his heels as he turned and fled up on deck again, even old Lady Delahay being carried away by the prevailing excitement, and when we all poured out of the companionway, it was a strange sight and no mistake that met our gaze.

The moon shone bright as day, almost, and lit up a scene of cold splendor, the like of which I have never seen equaled. But the strangeness of the matter lay in this:

There was not a breath stirring, indeed a close, dense stillness lay heavy over the sea, but the waters were pouring past our bows like a river in spate. They seethed against our sides like the rush of a mill stream, purring and rippling in oily fashion.

On the bosom of the dark tide the floe ice swirled along, crashing as it charged our stem, and butting at our timbers thunderously. Berg thrust at berg like the jostle round a street accident.

The pack ice split and worked in masses one against the other, lump grinding on lump. The crash of their striving was deafening. And at the tail of this turmoil came open water unflecked by the slightest ripple, and pouring past our stern in a steady, unfaltering swirl.

Our hands shook upon the deck rails as we gaped upon this icy chaos and the hurtle of the floe. The roar of the jostling ice, the ceaseless surge of the current against the bow, the black persistence of the tide flow—all these things seen under the glare—the scorching glare, I may almost call it—

of this pitiless moonlight, had an appearance of horrible unreality.

I pinched myself as it occurred to me that I might be dreaming, and felt the resultant pain with sorrow.

The whole crew had mustered on deck, and were staring upon this wonder with all their eyes. I strode to Waller's side and fairly had to bawl into his ear to make myself heard above the din of the fighting floes.

"What is it?" I screamed. "What are we to do?"

"Can't say, my lord. Never saw the like before. Nothing we can do, as there's no wind. Better get up anchor, though," and he beckoned to Janson.

The donkey engine sent a white puff or two up into the still air, and the capstan began to complain as the chains crept through the hawse pipes. Eccles' head appeared to announce that *one* rivet was on the collar he had fixed to the riven shaft, and he could venture on twenty turns of the screw to the minute if virtually necessary.

His offer was accepted by Waller with effusion, and the screw began to churn a slow, creamy wake upon the blackness. The last of the ice swung by and whirled seaward, the clamor of its striving melting into the sluggish beat of our lame propeller as we got way upon the boats.

And thus we ran landward for a length or two to find speed before we turned with the heeling tide.

Suddenly—swift as the cap of a port fire snaps—the white glare of the moonbeams reddened, died, then leaped again to a flame glow. It wrapped the whole expanse of rock and water in a flood of crimson.

The sea became blood. We spun round to face astern and see what this might be. We saw—as it seemed—a preposterous, Titanic travesty of a Crystal Palace firework exhibition. So near did the similitude run, that we listened almost with confidence for the following yawn of applause. The islands behind us were aflame with pyrotechnic devices.

They were swathed in a cloak of fiery mist, wherein great streams of falling fire darted headlong to the sea. On the summit of the central peak rose a monstrous tower of spuming, flaring, heaven smiting flame, vomited forth as by convulsions from an inner furnace, and this roared with thunderous echoes in the very heart of the hill—echoes that sprang and smote themselves in deafening chorus from crag to crag, booming across the smooth surface of the flood that bore down upon the isles devouringly.

Hell itself was spouting forth. On the crumbling heights the flames danced in wanton, merciless hunger. They toyed in terrible mockery with their own reflection in the swift tided sea. They shook with their fierce spasms the bursting rocks.

Before them the granite dissolved into a very paste. And over all crept slowly, gently, irresistibly, a fog of rising steam, where the boiling lava met the ice strewn ocean, wrapping the torn wounds in the cliff side as in a soft lint upon their bleedings.

Across this veil the shudders of the rending cliff played in the ruddy reflections, rippling across it like searchlight rays as the hot molten matter gouted from the crags.

For a second or two no one spoke, dwelling silently upon the grim wonder of it. Then a sob of terror broke across the tension of the stillness, and Lady Delahay sank to the deck. I raised her quickly, and placed her in a deck chair. Then I looked round me.

On my right Gerry, Denvarre, and Lessaution were clutching the rail before them in stiff, constrained attitudes. The responsive emotions worked across their faces as they watched the travail of the peak. As some gaping fissure spewed up a froth of vivid flame, their lips parted in automatic union to the sundering stone.

Vi Delahay, stretching an uncon-

scious arm, groped for something tangible to rest upon, and found Gerry's hand. One could trace the train of thought by which she buttressed her agitated soul in thus finding support for her body. Gerry remained unconscious of the honor done him.

Garlicke and Janson, silhouetted against the red gleam of sea and fire, stood with mouths agape, hands on hips, and eyes that stared unwinkingly —intentness personified. Waller and Rafferty, their grasp still upon the wheel, gazed over their shoulders into the crimson distance behind them, heedless of their charge, rigid as men paralyzed.

The crew, distributed each at his post where surprise had found and stiffened him, looked like so many mummies. Just in front of me, Lady Delahay, sunk upon her chair in a disordered heap, covered her face with her palms. I was beginning to peer round me uneasily for the one face I missed.

A gentle pressure upon my shoulder showed me Gwen at my side. She was facing the glare, one hand clenched upon her bosom, the other unknowingly poised upon my arm. Her little nostrils were dilated, her face was aglow, excitement was dancing in her eyes.

She never turned or stirred as I edged closer, sliding my hand dishonorably under her palm. Thus stood we all, agape, waiting, staring, wondering.

Suddenly the giant column swung sideways, rushed skywards again, and then twisted itself into knots and coronals of ravening fire. As if in agony it bowed and contorted itself seawards, and the roar of its anguish sped across the ripples towards us, with the shock of an Atlantic gust.

It was a bellow rung from the tortured throat of the very earth.

A sigh burst from Gwen's lips, and her grasp tightened upon my thankful fingers. She turned to face me, and I could read the new born terror in her eyes.

Her other hand she thrust with a repellent gesture towards the writhings of the crater, and rested her forehead ever so lightly upon the lapels of my coat to shut out the hideous sight. Being only a man and not a graven image, my arm slipped into its appointed place.

It clasped her waist of its own accord, though the wicked thrill that ran up it and settled very near my heart reminded me that I was exercising a right that was another's. But there was no getting it away by then.

Denvarre I could see still stood hypnotized into stillness with the rest of our company, who all kept to their rigid, constrained attitudes. Lessaution's lips were beginning to twitch with words for which he could find no voice, and a low moan broke from Lady Delahay. Of those who dared to look, not one could remove his concentrated gaze.

Another crash, sharp and strident as the crack of a thunderbolt, smote across the surface of the waters. It swelled with devilish crescendo into a roar that threatened to burst our ear drums. They throbbed and palpitated to the limits of tension.

A blare of yellow flame filled the horizon. The island peak seemed to leap bodily heavenwards, and the lower crags toppled and reeled swayingly. Streams of lava bubbled and boiled from a thousand rifts and rending of the rocks.

The mass writhed like a tormented monster. A yet greater cloud of steam arose, and through it the fierce conflagration played and twined itself, till all the sea and land seemed bathed in a fog of blood and fire.

As the liquid stone was vomited out in splashes, it rattled in a hissing patter round us. The eternal turmoils of the lowest pit seemed loose.

One more frightful shock and ear splitting roar. Then a mountain seemed to grow upon the bosom of the deep. Black and awesome it rose under that flaming pall; silent, dark, and threat-

ening it swung itself up from ocean's depths, screening from us by its awful stature the raging destruction behind.

High and yet higher it mounted and swelled and rolled upon us, smooth and swart as midnight. Oily and crestless billows rippled and webbed across it in festoons. The lurid reflections gleamed upon it like the flicker of swords ashock. In a majesty of resistless might it hung over us—a doom unavertable.

As the first slope of the hill of waters slid beneath our keel I tore myself from my trance of fascination. I dashed forward and raised Lady Delahay. With a kick I burst open the door of the companion and thrust her through, turning desperately for Gwen.

With the lurch of the rising deck I staggered, slipped, and fell backwards. My shoulder caught the door and slammed it to. With an oath I scrambled up to clutch her fiercely.

The whole scene was bright before me as I turned. Every soul on board stood out in a clearness like the day.

Against the mast stood Gerry, one arm round it, one round Vi's waist, while before, the two of them, Garlicke and Lessaution, had sprung, facing sternly the hill of death, jealously valiant in their pride of race.

To the left Janson and Denvarre still held the rail, staring aft with wide, fascinated eyes. Waller and Rafferty at the wheel stood expectant, their shoulders squared to meet and give to the coming shock.

The crew, distributed here and there in twos and threes, were bracing themselves against the deckhouse, mast, or funnel. In the utter quiet the last few wreaths of steam from the engine died circling into the still air.

Up, up we staggered, and little whirls and boils from the undercurrent shot creamy and foam flecked to the surface. Up—still rising fast, as the billows broke suddenly from the calm, and chased each other over its heaving bosom.

Up yet again, and the red glow of the volcanoes beat no longer upon the faces of the unconquered cliffs before us, but upon their very summits, and upon the wide waste of emptiness behind.

Then as the full surge of the reeling ridge of ocean swept us forward, the crown of the topmost rollers broke aboard. With a crash they roared white and foaming along our decks, and in a trice we were carried in a huddle of men and splintered spars into the deep bay of the forward bulwarks.

There, bruised and speechless, breathless, with limbs entwined in limbs, and ropes and timbers woven and splayed about our bodies, we lay helpless as kittens drowning in a bucket, and the ship shot forward upon the head of the great ridge wave straight for the cruel precipice of granite. Without a hope and stunned beyond struggling, we waited for the final crash and oblivion.

As we charged along that wild race into eternity, the great crags that five minutes before had hung mockingly above our heads sank below us, and we rode high above their cringing heads.

We realized as in a moment. that the growing bulk of billows would lift us cleanly over them. A hundred yards more at speed, and the cliffs were gone, and a broad wilderness of waters swarmed over their crannies, and into the rocky void beyond.

As by a miracle the skirting waves that ran before us filled the dry plain, and with half the weight of the sea torrent still behind us, we shot out on to the bosom of this sudden lake.

Like an arrow we swung across its turbid shallows, charging towards the far side where it was bounded by a second terrace of sheer stone. The foremost waves smote the rock face full. Charging back, their defeated fury met and foamed around us, catching us before we reached the cruel reefs.

The incoming and outflowing surges sprang together almost beneath our keel, and we tossed and reeled from one

to the other in the final throb of the great convulsion.

Then the fighting breakers spread abroad. Each spent its dying force upon its neighbor, and ere we could extract ourselves from the mass of wreckage that wedged us in below the bulwarks, the yacht was swinging masterless and idle upon a rippling, white flecked lagoon, showing less turmoil than a mid June day can raise on Windermere.

CHAPTER X.

BEHIND THE BARRIER.

GWEN was unconscious as I lifted her, and a bruise showed red and staring on her white temple. I laid her gently against the bulwark and made a dash for the saloon.

Lady Delahay lay in a dead faint at the stair foot, slipping there, I supposed, after her unceremonious bundling through the door. I snatched the whisky from the sideboard, placed the good lady on the sofa, and raced on deck again. Gerry was on his feet, and the rest gathered themselves out of the tangle one by one.

Lessaution was the first to break silence.

"Behold," he said triumphantly, "that we are on the top," and he spread abroad his little arms like a glorified cock a crow, reveling in the achievement of his hopes, and utterly ignoring the desperate result.

I shoved him impatiently on one side to get back to Gwen again. She was leaning white faced and motionless against the bulwark, and my heart gave a queer thump when I saw how still she lay. I put my arm around her, and ever so gently tilted a few drops of spirits between her lips.

A sigh and a gasp broke from her, and the color began to pass back into her cheeks. She opened her eyes, and looked at me dreamily.

A satisfied little smile edged her mouth, and she settled back against my shoulder with a murmur of content, nestling into the encirclement of my arm as happily as if I was Denvarre's self.

A blow fell upon my back, and I found Gerry standing over me.

"Give it me," said he shortly, and I handed over the flask.

He dashed across to Vi again and began to dose her energetically, not desisting till she coughed desperately and motioned him away with a weak gesture of her hand. The whisky began to circulate among the others rapidly.

"What's happened?" said Gwen's low voice from my shoulder, and she opened her eyes again wearily. "Ah, I remember—the wave—and the rocks and—and all that." Her voice died away indistinctly as her eyes closed.

"It's all right," I whispered into the little ear that shone so rosy pink against the dark sodden cloth of my smoking suit, "we're all here. Nothing's amiss with anybody."

Her hand fluttered out to me, and caught and felt my arm as if to satisfy herself that one at least was there with whole body.

"Mother and Vi?" she questioned.

"Right as the mail," quoth I cheerfully, "and Denvarre too," I added circumspectly, though I don't know why she should have been shy to ask for him.

"Ah, Lord Denvarre, and Mr. Garlicke, and the professor, and Mr. Carver, and everybody?"

"Everybody," I agreed, "though we haven't exactly called names yet. Nothing but bruises as far as I can tell."

"I'm—I'm keeping you from doing things," she said suddenly, scrambling to her feet, "and I ought to look after mother."

She tottered as she leaned against me, and I—well of course I had to hold her up. Then I heard Denvarre's deep voice at my elbow.

"Can I be of any use?" he asked, with extraordinary politeness, and I

got a look between the eyes which told me I was taking more than mere courtesy demanded.

She smiled sweetly at him, took his arm, and began to step uncertainly towards the saloon. Then she stopped suddenly and turned towards me again.

"Thank you," she said, looking over her shoulder, and went on.

But I never heard the words said quite like that, I think, for I could have kissed her feet for them, as well as have cursed her for a heartless coquette.

As they disappeared I began to look up the others. Rafferty and Waller were blinking like owls, and slapping themselves, inquiringly.

They had been tumbled off the bridge like shot pheasants, and had been flung down upon us as we spluttered and squirmed among the splinters. What with the fall and hitting hard wood they were pretty considerably knocked out of time.

Lessaution was gesticulating wildly, asserting that he had swallowed salt water by the hectoliter. Forgetting to close his astonished mouth when the wave struck us, he had engulfed it to the full extent of his capacity, and he condemned it as the most poisonously cold draft that had ever been forced upon him. But even this had failed to subdue his jubilation at having attained to the heights of his desire.

Garlicke, who had been stunned and overdosed with neat whisky, was coughing like a sick sheep, and the sympathetic Janson was slapping him on the back.

Poor Eccles was being slowly extracted from below the bowsprit with a broken collar bone, but was bearing up against his affliction with a Scotch impassiveness and a fat spirit flask. He, it appeared, was the only item in the list of casualties.

He and his underlings crept back to the stokehole and reported it three feet deep in water, but the fires not wholly drowned. The shaft was still workable, and by a little stirring of the clinker they gave us enough steam to stay our vague circlings on our lake.

We backed, as we drifted shoreward, and swung the lead. We found twenty fathoms. So there in the center of that new formed sea pond we anchored, amidst an arid expanse of rock bound desolation, and left discussion of our unpleasant situation for dryer circumstances.

All hands slipped below to find such changes of raiment as had been left unsoaked, and to rectify if possible some of the more desperate confusion of saloon and cabin. And thus ended that wondrous half hour of terror and upheaval.

The dawn was breaking when we reassembled on deck to look around us. Over the cliff top behind us we could still see the island volcano belching smoke and steam, but it was half the height it had stood the night before.

The lake on which we floated was about a mile long and half a mile broad. It was bounded on the landward side by huge basaltic crags that shot up ragged and desolate against a steel blue sky.

To the right a rocky plain spread flat and unbroken for a mile or so, terminating in uneven, boulder strewn slopes. These were gashed and riven in all directions by the clefts that ran black and shadowy into the depths of the hill.

To the left was a giant mountain, and down its flanks crept river-like a stupendous glacier, our lake lapping its blue crevasses at the nearer end. The water completely hid any moraine there might have been before the irruption of the whelming wave.

Between us and the tops of the sea cliffs was a narrow strand of rock, covered with the salt of the retreating waters. Among the litter the bodies of one or two sea lions and seals were visible, their fur shining wet and glossy in the light of the rising sun. On the shore beneath the far cliff a whale was stranded, thwacking his huge tail re-

soundingly upon the boulders as he vainly tried to thrust himself back into his native element.

Around us on every side great masses of sea fowl swung and wreathed themselves in white circles, filling the air with their cries, pouncing ever and again on the dead fish and garbage that covered the surface, fighting and hawking clamorously at each other for the spoil.

It did not need a critical examination to show that we were in a trap. The wave had borne us over the cliffs a hundred feet at least above tide level, and now they stood implacable between us and any chance of an escape seaward.

Here we were in a six hundred ton ship afloat in less than six hundred acres of water. It was not an exhilarating prospect.

Naturally I turned to Waller in this seeming impasse.

"Well, my lord, said the captain succinctly, "it's evident that before this southern summer's over we must send word to the Falklands. The ice will close down on us in March. We can't move the ship. We must send a boat. It is a question of finding a place to launch it. As far as one's eye goes there's nothing but a precipice for miles. We could perhaps arrange pulleys to let the cutter down, but it would be difficult. It would be easier to take her a few miles on rollers. I submit that the crying necessity at the present moment is an outlet to the sea."

"Well, then, of course, we must find one," said I cheerily, "and to find one we must get ashore. Let's have the launch out as soon as possible," and I walked away to announce his views to the others.

We breakfasted before we set out, while they were setting the boat afloat and getting up steam in her tiny boiler. The ladies had not yet reappeared, so we were all able to voice our emotions and hazard our opinions without fear of making them uneasy. Lessaution as usual led the conversational *mêlée*.

His knowledge of seismic effects and huge waves produced thereby seemed intimate. He demonstrated that it was an honor to have been associated in this astounding upheaval, whence few had formerly returned alive.

He cited instances from Portugal to Polynesia of similar disasters, giving gruesome categories of the demolished. He went into details that turned us from our food. It was only by the show of a universal unbelief in his theories, and a consequent rise of his sentiments to higher planes of passion, that we finally found quiet.

He departed on deck furious with our want of intelligence, which he designated as of the most hog-like. We found him all agog for adventure, though still contemptuous, when we rejoined him.

The little oil dingy was snapping and fussing away by this time, and Gerry, Denvarre, and I tumbled into her with the Frenchman, and were set ashore in five minutes.

First of all we ran up the slope between us and the cliff to look seawards.

But for the steam cloud that hung heavily over the ruined islands six miles away, and for the floating bodies of a few seals and smaller whales, there was no sign of the upheaval of the night before. The sea was lapping sleepily against the ice smoothed rocks below, gurgling in the crannies, and the sun glittered on a still and radiant surface.

A northwest wind was just beginning to touch the glassy surface, and the floe was swinging back almost imperceptibly towards the cliffs, returning from the distance to which it had been carried by the outsuck.

Terns and kittywakes were dipping backwards and forwards with shrill cries, hovering and quarreling over the lumps of dead fish and other remnants of the turmoil. Here and there a sea lion rose out of the depths to roll and play with soft splashings in the sunshine, or to stop and stare up the cliffs at us with stupid, innocent eyes.

The atmosphere was keen and clear as a winter's day in the Engadine, and we could follow the circling, unbroken line of cliffs to the far horizon. There was an exhilarating nip in the air, though the sunlight that poured back from rock and sea made it quiver hazily.

It was a glorious day, and would have been an uplifting one if things had not gone so perversely and entirely wrong. For instead of enjoying this heavenly sunshine on the yacht's deck in lazy contentment, we had to tramp weary miles in search of what might be unattainable.

There was no sort of doubt but that we were in a serious fix. The continuous and implacable wall of rock stretched, for all we could tell, to the world's end.

There was no escape for us except by sea, and we had no proper means of launching out into the deep. We were as surely held, perched up as we were on these desolate summits, as if we had been behind the bars and bolts of a prison.

We walked about four miles along that remorseless line of crags. Never a break did we find, never a vestige of a shallow at its foot.

Look where we would was green water unplumbable, and not so much as the suspicion of any shoal that could give us launching room for a boat.

We returned silent and depressed, the full significance of our plight just working into our minds. Even Lessaution, though he really concerned himself little about a departure, which he would willingly have deferred a month at least, was affected by the general dejection, and gave up attempting to instruct us further on our surroundings.

Gerry and I added this new weight to our desperation phlegmatically, feeling that the cup of our misery had been full before, and might, for all we cared, run over unstayed. The four of us had much the effect of hounds slinking home out of covert, having been left therein during the run of the season.

We slouched down the shores of our little lake, and somehow the ship seemed to have come nearer since we started. How or why Waller had considered it necessary to move her, I could not conceive.

Nor could we find the great boulder by which we had landed, though we felt sure that we had followed the same direction to it from the cliff top.

We waved listlessly with our handkerchiefs for the launch to be sent to us, waiting at the water's edge therewhile. Denvarre was still grubbing about among the rocks further up the stones.

Suddenly he gave a yell.

"Why, the water's sunk," he bawled. "Here's the rock we landed on. The absurd lake's running away."

He was standing forty or fifty yards above us, and we ran and joined him. As we looked higher up the sloping shore, we recognized what had been the water's edge when we landed.

There was no sort of doubt that the new formed lake was leaking out again rapidly, and that our ship would very shortly be in a regular dry dock.

We went on to consider that if the yacht took ground on that flat rocky bottom she would careen over, and probably smash in her sides. We should be left homeless amid that desolation—a pretty kettle of fish.

As soon as the dingy had snorted across and taken us aboard, we sought Waller and explained to him our discovery. Occupied with other matters, he had never noticed the shrinkage, and had the lead hove at once.

It gave six fathoms less than before, but—what was more satisfactory—showed fourteen still remaining. We knew the sea level could not be more than fifty feet below us, so unless the water was draining away into some unimaginable gulf, there would remain thirty feet or more for our good ship to float in.

This was cheering in some ways, though it detracted in no wise from the hopelessness of our situation from the point of view of a possible rescue.

We resolved therefore that at earliest dawn a select expedition should set forth to carry inquiry further into the land, taking with it arms, food, and the necessary accouterments for two days at least, that every portion of the seaward face of the cliffs might be examined for the greatest distance to which we could transport a boat.

The party was to consist of Denvarre, Gerry, one sailor—name of Parsons—and myself. Lessaution we judged it best to leave, as we felt sure that his build did not fit him for prolonged exercise across the boulder strewn confusion of this land of desolation. We felt, too, that he could amuse himself in delving around the foreshore of the lake, where antiquities were just as probable as further west; we said nothing to him of our project.

Garlicke preferred to stay and "protect the ladies," as he put it, and Waller's business was on his ship. We four therefore spent the afternoon in dozing, to make up for the exertions of the night, and to prepare for the toils of the morrow.

We rose for dinner, and endeavored to pass a cheerful evening, but Gerry took his cigar on deck at an early opportunity, unable to sustain the conflict with his natural passions which the sight of Garlicke's attentions to Vi provoked, and I fought down my overmastering desire to throttle Denvarre, with a stolid determination that made me extremely unsociable, and a most apathetic conversationalist.

So uneasily the after dinner period passed, and we turned in to dream of the undying fire of Erebus in collusion with the outbursting of an uncontrolled and ever growing Niagara.

Now behold us next morning setting forth into the unknown, with a great waving of handkerchiefs from the good folk on deck. We crossed the moat—as I christened it—scrambled ashore, and started along the incline of bare rock that led towards the cliff tops.

The going after the first half mile was desperately rough. Great, slab-like boulders, round and smooth faced, lay about in gigantic masses, and the clefts between them were wide and deep.

The slope that led up from the lake edge to the western hills was like a great moraine. It ran to the foot of ranged rocks that buttressed the lower shoulders of the peak. The quantities of pebbles were arranged in irregular ridge and furrow formation, growing in size and smoothness as we approached the cliff face.

We proceeded excessively slowly; half an hour's toil took us a bare mile.

As we paused and looked round, wiping our brows, a yell came sharply through the still air, and an extraordinary object staggered into our vision.

Round the corner of the basalt which hid the ship from us emerged a thing like a monstrous beetle. With frantic gesticulation it beckoned us to stop.

It was with some difficulty we recognized the familiar form of Lessaution, for he had done his best to disguise it.

His peaceful person had assumed the fantastic presentment of a medieval buccaneer. According to his lights, I suppose, it was the strictly correct habiliment of the explorer.

A blue cap, something like that assigned to statues of liberty, dangled from his poll, flopping with studied abandon over his left ear. He wore a baggy Norfolk jacket, with pockets erupting all over it like sartorial warts; huge gray worsted stockings came over his knees and half way up his thighs, and immense brown boots were laced over his skinny little calves.

In his hand was an axe; round his waist was a belt; from this dangled a sheath knife, flanked by an enormous Colt's revolver; above his left shoulder flaunted the muzzle of a shotgun, the butt of which seriously incommoded the play of his right elbow.

He was scrambling over the boulders frantically. Before he had traversed twenty yards of the uncertain footing of the moraine he fell upon his face.

We felt that Gerry was by no means inapt in likening him to a caterpillar on eggs. We sat down to smile, take our breath, and let him overtake us.

This he did in the space of about ten minutes, grunting like an overdriven cab horse, glowing with perspiration, and begrimed with unutterable dirt.

"You would leave behind your little Lessaution?" he queried accusingly; "me, who pant, do you see, to gaze upon the wonders of the land. Where had you the heart to treat him so?" and his brown eyes directed an upbraiding glance upon us that might have melted the very stones.

We explained that it was his comfort that had been our first thought, and that we had deemed the way too long and the work too arduous for him. We hinted that the ladies would be desolate deprived of his company.

"No," he replied; "when they told me that you had set forth, and unknown to me, I asked myself how I had offended you. Is it, I said, that there can be jealousy between two nations who share the responsibilities of civilization? Do they wish that France shall not have her part in this adventure? I could not believe it. I call for the boat. I accouter myself," and he pointed with pride to the armory that swayed about him, "and I follow with great speed. Let me offer my comradeship in this expedition. Give me my part in your perils," and he flung out his arms entreatingly.

How could one refuse a request so touchingly put forth; we welcomed him to our company with effusion, though with inward annoyance. We felt that our progress would of necessity be a great deal tardier in consequence, but in mere charity and courtesy nothing else was to be done.

He further imparted the information that he was not so young as when he was of the foremost runners of the Lycée, and that his little heart was going pit-a-pat. In effect, with this so great racing it quivered like an automobile.

But of what consideration was this when he was once again among his dear rascals, and accompanying them in their valiant purpose of research. One minute to regain the even tenor of his pulses, and then, forward! Let us press on to victories.

We counseled him bluntly to keep his breath for pure purposes of locomotion, and after a slight rest set forward again to our monotonous stumblings among the endless reaches of heaped stone.

(To be continued.)

THE SELF MADE CROSS.

PERSISTENTLY she carved a cross.
Her chisels were the words she spoke,
Her thoughts the mallets. Stroke on stroke
She wielded, till reluctant years
Disclosed the form she did invoke,
A shape of doom!—Today, with tears,
Humiliation, pain, and loss,
She bends, a sad browed penitent,
Beneath that self made instrument;
Its weight increasing at the thought
That she herself the cross hath wrought.

Mary E. M. Richardson.

A MOUNTAIN IDYL.

BY MRS. E. W. DEMERITT.

The story of a little country lassie who mounted the ladder of fame despite the apparently insurmountable obstacles in her pathway, and how, when her goal was reached, she found even greater joys awaiting her.

A FAMOUS prima donna had been giving a concert in the parlor of the large hotel at Mount Everest. The few last rich notes of song had died away on the air; the applause had ceased, and slowly the audience was breaking up into little knots, with the usual interchange of greetings and comments.

Outside, by one of the long windows that opened on the broad piazza, stood a young girl, bending eagerly forward. The hood of her waterproof cloak was drawn back, and the light from within fell on her fair hair, her wide open blue eyes, and her red, parted lips.

"Oh, Dick," and the words ended with a little shiver, "wasn't it beautiful? If I could *only* sing like that!"

Her companion, a tall, broad shouldered young countryman, was leaning carelessly against the window frame, with his dark, earnest eyes fixed as intently on the girl's face as hers were on the gay scene before them.

"I think—I am almost sure—I could do it, if I tried," she continued, without waiting for an answer. "Listen, Dick!"

She dropped her head slightly, and warbled, in a clear, flute-like voice, first softly, then louder, two or three bars of the song she had just heard, ending with a crisp little run.

"There, I knew I could do it!" she cried gleefully; "only, somehow, I do not exactly know how to manage my breath; and my voice seemed to run away from me. How pretty it is in there! The beautiful dresses, the long trains, the bright lights, and the flowers. How glorious it must be to stand there, with all those faces looking at you, and all those grand people listening, as if their lives depended on hearing every word you sang! And the applause, Dick—I don't see how any one could help singing after *that*."

A troubled expression passed over the young man's face.

"Let us be going, Milly," he said abruptly, "or some of these fine people will be coming out here, and find us peeping."

But the girl did not stir. Her face was still turned toward the parlor.

"No one will think of coming out here; the dampness would spoil all those pretty dresses."

She pressed her face, as she spoke, close to the window pane. "I believe I could stay here all night and watch," she added.

"Come, Milly." Dick spoke sternly now. "It's after half past ten o'clock now, and I promised Aunt Rhoda to bring you back early. The chances are that we will get caught in the rain, as it is; the sky is as black as pitch."

Milly yielded reluctantly to his grasp; but as they reached the edge of the piazza, and Dick sprang lightly to the ground and raised his arms to assist her, she cast a last, lingering glance at the window.

"There's the beautiful lady who sang, Dick," she said—"standing there, with all those people pushing and crowding, to get a chance to speak to her. I would rather be in her place than be a queen on the throne. How nice it would have been if *we* could have walked in at the front door—I with my long train, and you with your white

gloves, and have sat down with the best of them, instead of creeping up on the piazza, and standing outside in the darkness, listening——"

Dick lifted her to the ground. "Put this on, Milly; it's a chilly night, if it *is* July," said he, drawing the hood of the cloak over the girl's head, and allowing his hand to linger for a moment on the rippling hair, with a caressing touch. "What a flighty little Milly you are, after all! To think that a few fine dresses and gay people should be able to turn such a sensible little head as yours!"

"Not so flighty as you think, perhaps," returned the girl proudly, drawing away from him. "And it isn't the sight of the fine dresses and gay people; it is the thought of what I might do with my voice, if I only had the chance. There's trouble ahead, Dick. It is coming slowly, but surely. I've lain awake, many a night, thinking of it. Aunt Rhoda is old and feeble, and that trouble with Uncle Seth's eyesight is growing worse all the time. Ever since he had to pay those notes that he indorsed for a friend, and we had to put a mortgage on the farm, it has been very hard to get along. If his eyes should give out entirely—I hardly dare think of it—there is no one but me for them to lean upon in their old age."

"You're not the only one, Milly," said Dick, bringing his hand down heavily on his arm. "There is a good, strong arm—and a willing heart to back it."

"But you have your mother and your education to look out for. No, no—it's very kind of you to feel that way, but we have no claim on you. It wouldn't be right——"

"No claim?" echoed Dick. "*No claim?*"

His heart beat fast as he bit his lips hard to keep back the torrent of impetuous words that struggled for utterance.

He and Milly had reached the gate by this time, and in stooping to unfasten the latch he gained a little leisure for self control.

"What have I to give her but myself?" he thought. "And what am I but a great, hulking fellow who has not yet found out what his place is to be in the world? Better wait forever than come to her empty handed."

He opened the gate for her to pass through, and then, aided by his strong arms, she sprang into the wagon.

"No claim, Milly?" he repeated bitterly. "No claim! It's a pity if the girl I have known ever since she was a baby, whom I have drawn to school on my sled, and who has been to me first playmate, then friend—I say, it's a great pity, if the girl who is as dear—as dear—as dear——" Dick felt the blood mounting to his forehead, as he continued, stammering—"as dear to me as—as—a sister—cannot feel that she has the best claim on me in the world. And as for Uncle Seth, who in his prosperous days has done so many kind turns for mother and me, why, his claim is so plain that a blind man could see it. Oh, Milly, don't speak like that again! You don't know how the words hurt. Hold the reins for me a moment, while I look for the lantern. Where can it be?"

Just then there was a pattering of feet on the gravel walk, and a young woman ran down to the gate, swinging a lantern in her hand.

"Here's your lantern, Dick Ashley," she said, raising it so that the light showed her to be a bright, black eyed, rosy cheeked rustic beauty. "I thought you would be wanting it, so I came down and took it up to the house, to light it for you. And I should have been back sooner, only I was hindered, in helping with the supper. Well, how did you like the concert? You haven't thanked me, Milly, for getting you a place where you could see and hear it all."

"Thank you, Kate. It was a great treat. I shall remember that voice as long as I live. And all the time the lady

was singing, I felt as if I was going up—up—up—I don't know where."

"Well, Milly," and Dick laid his hand on her arm, "please *don't* go up—we want you down here just at present. You see, Kate, whenever Milly gets into her romantic flights, I am the weight to pull her down to sober common sense; otherwise we might lose her."

Kate's keen eyes caught the movement of Dick's hand, and a scowl passed over her handsome face.

"Milly loves music so well," she said, "and understands so much more about it, that she feels differently from us. Now, for my part, Dick, I think Milly's voice just as fine as the one you heard tonight; and I believe she could sing just as well, if she had the teaching."

"Milly doesn't need any teaching. She sings well enough as it is."

"Oh, Kate! Oh, Dick!" said Milly deprecatingly, while Dick held out his hand impatiently for the lantern.

"I do," reiterated Kate. "It's the solemn truth. I only wish I had Milly's voice. You wouldn't catch me settling down in a stupid place like this, when I might get to be rich and famous. There's no end to the luck a good voice brings. Why, there's Miss Brythwaite, up at the house—the lady who sang tonight; they say she was a poor country girl, and some one found out what a voice she had and gave her lessons, and now she is just rolling in money. She takes care of her mother—that gray haired lady, who sat near the door—and does so much good besides. And I can see, as I wait on her at table, how much every one, even those grand, stuck up people, thinks of her."

Kate was the daughter of one of the village farmers. She taught school the greater part of the year, and during vacation eked out her scanty income by waiting on table at the Mount Everest Hotel.

"Wait a moment, Dick," pleaded Milly, as the young man murmured something about its being time to go.

"How long will Miss Brythwaite stay at the hotel, Kate?"

"Only this week. Then she goes to Europe, to rest. She gave that concert last night to help one of the poor women at the hotel. She is a kind body, and seems to be always ready to do a friendly act."

The young horse darted forward, as he felt the sudden sting of Dick's lash. "Good night, Kate," called the young man. "You and Milly will catch your deaths, standing out here in the damp."

Kate stood for a moment, listening to the sound of the retreating wheels. "Look sharp, Dick Ashley," she said, with a mocking laugh, "or you'll lose your pretty bird. You think you have her safe caged; but for all your watchfulness, she may fly out into the world and leave you; and *I am the one who has unfastened the door*. I've seen that Milly has been uneasy in her mind this long while, thinking of the old folks' trouble, and wanting to earn something to help them. It only needed those words from me to start the thing. With Milly once well out of the way, Dick might have eyes for girls who are far more handsome than she. It's a game worth playing, at all events, and I am willing to risk everything on it."

Dick, alarmed and vexed at the turn conversation had taken, drove home in silence; and Milly was too busy with her half formed plans to say more than a word or two.

"Good night, Milly," he said tenderly, as he unlocked the door of the farm house for her. "I shall not see you again for three weeks. I am going to start tomorrow for Cousin John's. He is the one who has promised to give me a little help in my education; and I shall make him quite a visit. Don't borrow any trouble. There will be a way provided, without your putting your shoulder to the wheel; trust to me for that. So, go to sleep, without a thought of what is to come. 'The darkest hour,' you know, 'is just before the dawn.'"

The day after the concert Aunt

Rhoda sent Milly up to the hotel to tell the housekeeper that she could have "that week's churning" for the hotel table, if she wished it. The young girl had delivered the message, and was walking slowly down the broad, well kept walk, when she noticed that the great piazza was nearly deserted, it being the hour when almost all the ladies were dressing for dinner.

But one lady sat by the side of the front door, reading, and as she raised her eyes from her book, Milly saw that it was the singer whom she had heard the night before.

It was a strange thing for shy little Milly to do, but before she thought, she found herself standing before the lady, who was looking at her curiously.

"If you please, ma'am," said Milly, blushing, "I heard you sing, last night; and it was so beautiful. And I think I can sing, too; and we are so poor; and need the money so much at home. I wonder if you would tell me if my voice was worth anything."

The lady dropped her book. "What is it, my dear?" she asked kindly. "I don't quite understand."

"If you would only, *please*, see if I could sing, ma'am!" As she spoke Milly wrung her hands nervously.

"Oh, you want me to try your voice? Why, of course I will. Come into the parlor, and you shall sing for me, and then I will sing a little for you. Don't be afraid. There is never any one there at this hour. We can have it all to ourselves."

She led the way, and Milly followed timidly. The large parlor was deserted. Seating herself at the piano, Miss Brythwaite ran her fingers lightly over the keys, and then asked, "What can you sing, my child?"

"All the old hymns and songs. Uncle Seth likes the old Scotch songs best of all."

"Do you know this?"—playing "Within a Mile o' Edinboro' Town."

Milly nodded assent.

"Very well; now sing, right out."

Milly's voice trembled and hesitated at first, but the accompaniment gave her courage, and then it poured out rich and strong, filling the large room and echoing through the hall and corridors.

After the song was finished Miss Brythwaite tried Milly's voice in sustained notes and scales; and at the end of the brief lesson the delighted pupil found herself sitting by the teacher's side, pouring into her sympathetic ears all her troubles and fears and hopes and plans.

It was the talk of the whole town when, just a week from that time, Miss Brythwaite left for Europe, taking Milly with her. It had required much persuasion on her part; but when she had satisfied Uncle Seth that Milly would be in good hands he reluctantly gave his consent. Miss Brythwaite undertook to pay all expenses, and the only condition of the agreement was a solemn promise that Milly should not sing in opera, the good old man having inherited from his Puritan ancestors a horror of the stage.

When Dick came home he was stunned by the news of Milly's departure. Great, too, was his astonishment and grief when he found she had gone without one word of farewell.

"Did she leave nothing with you, Kate?" he asked, as he overtook that young woman on her way to singing school.

It was too dark for him to notice Kate's flushed face and confused manner.

"No," said Kate slowly; "the fact was, Milly's head was completely filled with her new friends and new life. And she did not have all the luck, Dick. I have been appointed postmistress. It will be far better than tramping through the snow to teach tiresome children."

But Dick hardly heard what she said. He was thinking of Milly. "It's but the beginning of the end," he murmured. "She will never be the same

Milly again. Oh, why did they send her out into the world, away from those who love her best!"

He wrote to her kindly, once, twice, three, *four* times, without receiving an answer. Then, in a fit of indignation, he wrote to Miss Brythwaite, demanding an explanation—and that too failed to win a reply.

They had letters regularly at the farm house, however, and Kate seemed to be the favorite correspondent. Dick began to look on her as the only link left between him and Milly. He left, after a while, for a neighboring town, to study for the ministry; but came home frequently, and never failed to pass a part of the time with Kate; for in spite of Milly's cruel neglect he found himself hungering for the slightest tidings of her.

For the first two years Milly wrote that she was studying hard and making rapid progress. Presents came to the farm house, and money to pay the interest on the mortgage. There were also pretty little gifts, sent through Kate, to old friends, Dick being the only one forgotten.

At last came the news of a grand triumph. Milly had sung in public and her success was assured. Various extracts from foreign journals were copied by the papers, lauding the beauty and talent of the young American singer. Then Milly pleaded for two or three years more, and accompanied the letter with a check to pay off a portion of the mortgage; and with this came a photograph of herself in *grande toilette*.

Meantime, the years went by. Seven had passed. During that time gentle Aunt Rhoda had been carried to her last rest, and slept in the village cemetery. Milly's money, however, procured a capable housekeeper for Uncle Seth in the person of one of his nieces.

Dick, too, had been fighting his way in the world, and climbing step by step. The Reverend Richard Ashley was beginning to be widely known as the able, earnest young pastor of the large and flourishing church in the city of Stockdale.

Uncle Seth finally placed himself in the hands of a skilful oculist, for an operation on his eyes. It proved unsuccessful, and the good old man was doomed to total blindness. Dick heard of the result, and hurried to the farm, to offer what comfort he could.

It was a beautiful day in June when he stepped upon the platform of the station at Mount Everest. In front of him stood a lady who had just left the forward car. Something familiar in the quick step and the carriage of the slender figure caused Dick to start violently. The lady was dressed in deep mourning and wore a heavy crape veil over her face. Handing a baggage check to one of the drivers, she passed into the waiting room. Dick felt strongly impelled to follow her; but chiding himself for his curiosity, turned on his heel, and walked away.

Across the track was a footpath leading to a short cut through the fields and woods to the farm. But Dick had a business errand at one of the houses near by, and he followed the main road. When he left the farmer's house he turned aside, and, crossing a field, reached the bypath to the farm.

How the old memories came surging into his mind! How often had Milly and he walked under those trees! Yonder was the little brook, with the broad stepping stones, which they had crossed a hundred times. He strode forward rapidly and stood by its brink. In the middle of the stream, on a large, flat stone, stood the lady whom he had seen at the station. The recent heavy rains had washed away some of the stones, and a wide space of rushing water rolled between her and the bank.

It was but the work of a moment to roll a stone into the stream, and to assist her to spring to the other bank. As she threw back her veil to thank him, Dick raised his eyes and saw—Milly.

"I came but yesterday," she explained, after an awkward silence. "Miss Brythwaite died suddenly, and her mother and I left at once for home. I did not telegraph because I wanted to surprise them at the farm. Are they well?"

"You have not heard, then?" returned Dick gently. "It is as you feared. Uncle Seth's eyes have given out."

"Oh, why did they keep it from me?" she cried. "I would have come at once. It is a mercy that I am able to take care of him."

They walked along slowly, talking of Uncle Seth and his affliction.

"It seems but yesterday that I left," murmured Milly. "Thank God, if *friends* prove fickle, there are some things that do *not* change. This path, this brook, seem the very same that I left years ago; and these trees are not altered. Even the little flowers are in the old places. How is—Kate?"

She spoke hesitatingly now.

"Kate?" he repeated. "Kate? I do not know."

"Do not know?"

"She left here four years ago—married a gay young clerk, and went out West to live."

"I—I thought she was married to you," gasped Milly. "In every letter she spoke of seeing you, being with you; and the others wrote in the same way. She told me she was going to be married, and I supposed, of course, it was to you."

For the first time Dick smiled. "I did see a great deal of her; it was the only way I could hear from you," he said.

They had reached the short lane, by this time, that led to the farm house.

"One word, Milly," said Dick. "I have a right to know. Tell me what I have ever done that you should answer none of my letters, that you should leave without one word of farewell?"

"It is the very question I have been longing to put to you. I left a long, long letter for you with Kate. I wrote again and again. I sent messages and gifts by her, until hope died in my heart. And all these long, weary years, poor, little, homesick, far away Milly has been waiting and praying for one word of encouragement from her old friend. Is it possible that Kate——"

"I see it all now," replied Dick. "She has very nearly made a total wreck of two happy lives."

The sound of a voice singing an old, familiar hymn came through the open door of the farm house. Milly lifted her finger to Dick, and hurried through the hall into the kitchen.

Uncle Seth, with a bandage over his eyes, sat in an arm chair, with his niece on a low stool at his feet. As the young woman arose, in surprise, Milly motioned for her to be silent.

"Why do you stop?" queried the old man impatiently. "That was one of Milly's favorite hymns. But you don't sing it as she did. Go on, Sophia."

The girl obeyed. But after the first line a clear, rich voice joined in the refrain. The old man started to his feet.

"Milly," he cried, groping with outstretched arms. "It is—it must be—Milly, come back again."

Milly threw her arms around his neck, and answered brokenly, "It *is* Milly, come to be eyes for you, in your blindness—to stay with you always—to share her good fortune with you—to leave you never, never more!"

A smile lighted the meek, patient face.

"I am content now. It is Milly, come back to me and—to Richard," he continued, hearing Dick's voice.

Dick could not speak, but his earnest eyes put the question that his tongue refused to utter.

Milly's lips parted in a happy laugh as she stroked the old man's silver locks.

"It is Milly come back to you—to you and to Richard," she added gently, placing her hand in the young man's eager grasp.

THE PRANKS OF DESTINY.*

BY FREDERIC VAN RENSSELAER DEY.

The terrible pass to which Felix Parsons finds himself reduced, the awful resolve he takes, and what swerves him aside from acting on it. The mystery about Rita Ortega and the great game of Pike Millington, played at double quick tempo.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

FELIX PARSONS, some time millionaire, finding himself at the end of his resources, determines to take himself out of the world rather than run into debt. He is engaged to Carla Trevor, and calling at her home before the time set for carrying out his intention, he finds that Trevor senior, who has always been as a father to him, is in sore straits financially and is depending on him, Parsons, to tide him over the crisis. Parsons undertakes to do what he can, and later meeting Pike Millington, son of the great Wall Street operator, Sam Millington, feels that fate has played into his hands when Pike asks him to carry through some deals for him during his absence in Chicago, giving him the keys to his strong boxes for the purpose.

Stooping to dishonor for another's sake where he would not even incur a debt for his own, Parsons turns over some valuable Millington securities to Trevor and saves him. Later, returning to his rooms, he finds there Rita Ortega, a beautiful Spanish girl, his ward, to whom he had written stating that he was going away and who has come to find out the truth. Edna Trevor, his fiancée's sister, who meets her there, places a wrong construction on the fact, and tells Carla of it. The latter, having received an anonymous letter concerning Felix and Rita, begs him to tell her all, and when he refuses, breaks the engagement.

Meantime Trevor, seeing Rita's picture, asks to meet her and goes to call with Felix. During the interview, Trevor, struck by some mysterious resemblance, behaves very queerly and tries to stab himself with a curious dagger Rita shows them. As Felix leads him to the carriage, they do not see Carla, who, with white set face, is making her way to Rita's apartment. A few minutes later she is standing face to face with the Spanish girl.

CHAPTER XIV.

A TERRIBLE ACCUSATION.

FOR two or three minutes the two girls—for after all, they were only girls—remained silently facing each other. Clarita's face was filled with surprised inquiry, polite deference and courteous patience, although it still showed some traces of the recollection of the scene through which she had just passed.

Carla's, on the other hand, was studiously calm, and her clear eyes surveyed the countenance of her companion with a scrutiny that would have been impertinent had there been less surprise in her gaze, for she had not expected to encounter such beauty and sweetness and goodness in the face of Clarita Ortega. Even then the Spanish girl was the first to break the awkward silence.

"You wished to see me?" she said again.

Her voice was soft and gentle, and expressed nothing more than she uttered. Plainly she had no idea who her caller could be.

"Yes," returned Carla, steeling her heart against the gentleness and purity that shone in the face before her, for she jumped to the conclusion that both were assumed. "That is the exact situation; I wished to see you."

"Will you be seated?" asked Rita, in some astonishment at the strangeness of the reply; but she did not manifest it.

* *This story began in the August issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.*

She remembered that she knew little or nothing of the customs of this country, but she wondered if that was the regular form of greeting between ladies when they met for the first time.

"No, I thank you. I will not sit down," said Carla coldly. "I suppose, Miss Ortega, that you have no idea who I am."

"No, I do not know you. Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me your name."

"I am Miss Trevor. Do you know me now?"

Rita uttered a little gasp of astonishment, and her face grew a shade paler. At the same time she took one quick step backward. But she recovered herself instantly, and again motioning towards the chair, she said slowly:

"It is very good of you to call upon me. Won't you please be seated?"

Carla laughed—a little, low, aggravating laugh which showed her white teeth, but which did not impart itself to her eyes, for it was devoid of mirth.

"No," she said, "I cannot sit down in your presence."

"Then why did you come here, Miss Trevor?"

"I have already told you; I came to see you."

"And is that all?"

"No, it is not quite all. I came here to say a few things to you, also."

"Will you, then, be kind enough to say them at once?"

"I will say them all before I take my departure," said Carla with cold scorn. "Are you quite sure that you know now who I am?"

"Yes. You are Carla Trevor, the lady whom Felix is to marry."

"You are mistaken."

"Mistaken!"

"I am Carlotta Trevor, but I am not the lady whom Felix Parsons is to marry. I have returned the engagement ring to him. We are nothing to each other now. Do you know why that is so?"

"Oh, I am so sorry! I am so sorry!" exclaimed Rita.

Carla laughed aloud.

"Sorry!" she cried out angrily. "You need not indulge in falsehoods, Miss Ortega; they can do no good. Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that the engagement between Felix Parsons and me is broken? Would you have me believe that he did not at once fly to you with the good news? I saw him leave here only a moment ago, in company with my father. Have you got him in your toils, also—my father? Is he another of your victims, Señorita Ortega?"

"I do not know what you mean, Miss Trevor," said Rita, with quiet dignity.

"You do know what I mean—you know perfectly well."

Clarita's eyes began to sparkle with rising anger, now, but she controlled herself, and permitted no outward sign of it to appear.

"I do not know what you mean," she said quietly. "I do not know the object of your call, but your manner is not at all in keeping with the descriptions I have had of you. But I am really very sorry for you—sorry that your engagement——"

"I certainly did not come here as a suppliant for your pity," interrupted Carla. "You may keep that for yourself, for you need it more than I. Perhaps"—with another low, ironical laugh—"perhaps, however, you think that now, I am out of the way, he will make you his wife; perhaps you think he will marry you."

Rita uttered a low cry of pain and started back, placing one hand against her heart. Her face became paler still, and her great pathetic eyes gazed piteously upon her tormentor.

"Marry me!" she gasped. "Marry me? Make me his wife? No, no, Miss Trevor, that is not for me. He does not love me."

"But you love him! I can see it in your eyes, hear it in your voice, read it in your manner. You love him."

"Yes, I do love him. Is there any shame in that? I have loved him ever since the first moment I saw him, when he was so good to me. I shall love him to the last moment of my life. Is there any shame in that?"

"You are frank about it, at least. And because you do love him, you have given yourself to him body and soul."

"I do not know what you mean by giving myself to him body and soul; I cannot pretend to understand you. I have given him my heart, for that is mine to bestow where I will, but he does not know that he possesses it. My soul belongs to God, not to him, nor to you nor to me. It is God's, and the Holy Mother has it in her keeping."

"You dare to say such things—you?" gasped Carla, aghast at what she considered to be downright irreverence.

"Why not? It is true. Is it wrong that I should love Felix Parsons? Very well, then, I have done wrong; but I could not help it. I did not know that I loved him until he told me about you, and I knew that a day would come when I would lose him. It was then that I discovered what my heart had done, all in silence and in secrecy. But he does not know that I love him. I have never told him, and I have tried, oh, so hard, to hide it from him. I look away from him sometimes when he speaks to me, fearing that he will discover it, and I am in terror often lest he will hear my heart beat when he comes near me. Ah, you do not know—you cannot imagine the pain. You do not mean all that you say and do now, for you are angry—mad with jealousy, but there is no cause. He does not love me; he loves only you. Believe me, it is true. I am nothing to him—nothing."

"You are——"

"Wait, please; let me finish. Then perhaps you will think better of what you were about to say, for I see in the expression of your eyes that it is not pleasant."

"Say on; I will hear you to the end."

"It is perhaps natural that you should feel as you do towards me, since he is—or was, and I trust will be again—your accepted lover. I do not know, but I think that I might feel the same if I believed that I had reason to do so. I might be angrier than you are, for I am very impetuous—I do not always think before I speak. But now, Miss Trevor, there is no cause; and for the harsh things that you have said since you came here, I forgive you. Can we not be friends?"

She put one hand out hesitatingly, and took a step forward. There was entreaty in her eyes and in her voice.

She really wanted to be friends with the woman whom Felix loved, for as yet she had not guessed the horrible conviction that was in her mind.

"Friends! With you?" exclaimed Carla with such withering contempt and scorn that Rita involuntarily shrank away again to her former position and permitted her hand to drop back to her side.

She understood now, and cowered as though she had received a blow from a whip lash.

It was a gesture which Carla misinterpreted, for she regarded it as an acknowledgment of guilt.

"Do you suppose that I do not know?" she continued, with emphasized scorn. "And why else do you suppose I broke the engagement? Who supports you? Felix Parsons. Whose money purchases the luxuries with which you are surrounded? Felix Parsons. Who hires your apartments for you? He does. Who has moved you about from place to place, from apartment to apartment, lest your address and your existence should be discovered? Why, Mr. Felix Parsons. And you dare to stand there with your baby face and innocent air, and ask me to be your friend! I would sooner fondle a snake than to touch your hand. You talk about your soul belonging to God! It belongs to Felix Parsons, for you sold it to him in return for jewels and

dresses, a luxuriant home, your comfort, your ease. You sold it to him for cash! And you have the effrontery to propose friendship with me!"

Still Rita did not speak. She could only gaze upon her tormentor in wide eyed horror, too profound for expression; and she shrank farther and farther away from her, until at last she placed her hands upon the back of an upholstered chair and leaned upon it, utterly overwhelmed by the accusing eyes and voice of Carla Trevor.

All this Miss Trevor regarded as evidence of guilt, and she followed up the advantage that she believed she had gained.

"I wonder if you realize how I despise myself for coming here," she continued. "It lowers me for the moment to your own level, and that is beneath contempt, but I wished to see you; I wanted once to see a woman who would sell herself for cash. I wanted once to see a woman, who, although devoid of heart and soul and decency, yet possesses the witchery to make men mad. I wanted to tell you that when you tire of him and seek another lover——"

"Stop!" cried Rita suddenly, and her voice rang out clear and steady.

There was no more shrinking in her attitude. Her slight form seemed to grow taller as she left the chair against which she had been leaning, and with firm tread approached quite near to Carla.

The pathetic tenderness and sorrowful sympathy were gone from her eyes now. The horror was still there, but through it sparkled indignant protest, righteous anger and unalterable resolve.

"You go too far, Miss Trevor. You are bad, cruel, bitter. It is you who should feel shame, not I. You come here, uninvited, to my house; and for what? To insult me. Is that the act of a lady? You accuse me of things which I cannot mention, and you know in your own heart that they are false. I will not discuss them with you; why should I? It is only you who say them.

"And what are you? Nothing. You come here to visit your scorn upon me. Very well; it is welcome. I care not for your scorn, for you I despise. It is not in English that I can well express myself, but I will tell you this: When you came into my apartment you left without something that Mr. Parsons valued more than he did your beauty. Do you know what it was? It was your dignity; and it would be well if you went out and searched for it again I will tell you one thing more, for that you should know—that everybody should know.

"It is not Mr. Parsons' money that provides this house, buys my dresses, and supports me; it is my own. It was my father's, and is now mine. For the rest, I will not argue with you. Such a thing would be to insult myself. That I should feel, but not your insults—oh, no! The shame is yours, not mine.

"At first I was sorry for you, and I would have forgiven, but not now. You have gone too far. At first I would have done all that I could to reunite you with Felix, for I love him and I would see him happy; but it would not be for his happiness to unite with you; it would be his despair—his undoing. No, I would not have him make you his wife now; it would not be best. You are not a good woman."

Her words came so fast, so impetuously, that Carla could do nothing but stand and listen to them. She tried several times to interrupt the torrent of rebuke that fell from Rita's lips, but she could not succeed. There was something in the manner of the girl that overawed her—that silenced her—that compelled her to listen, even against her will.

Neither of them had heard the door bell, although it rang out clear and sharp while Rita was speaking, and now, as Carla opened her lips to reply, the portières were thrust apart, and Felix Parsons stepped quickly into the

room, and paused, overcome by astonishment to see those two together.

CHAPTER XV.

DRIVEN BACK TO EDEN.

BOTH Carla and Clarita discovered Parsons' presence at the same moment, but the discovery affected them very differently. To Clarita his coming was a godsend; to Carla, it was only a confirmation of her worst suspicions. The former uttered a glad cry of welcome; the latter smiled contemptuously—and held her ground.

Felix looked from one to the other in amazement. He could not understand Carla's presence there at all. At first, the hope shot through him that she had repented of her hasty judgment, and had come to see for herself what manner of woman it was that she had questioned him about—that she had come repentantly; but one glance was sufficient to dispel that illusion; the attitude of each, when he chanced upon them, was anything but amicable.

"Good evening, Carla," he said calmly. "It is quite a surprise to see you here. Why don't you sit down?"

"Is the apartment and the furniture yours, that you are so quick to place them at my service?" she replied coldly, her lips curling with scorn.

"Would I be infringing upon your hospitality if I requested a lady to take a seat in your parlor?" he asked in return, speaking as calmly as before.

Then he turned to Rita, in whose face traces of her recent excitement were still plainly to be seen, although her anger was forgotten the moment that Felix entered the room.

"What is the trouble, Rita?" he said. "Is anything wrong?"

"Everything seems to be wrong, Felix—everything. I don't know what it is; I don't know what is the matter, but it is terrible. Miss Trevor came in unannounced; she has been very unkind—very unjust. Ask her. Perhaps she will tell you; I cannot."

And she turned away and walked to the window, crying silently, for her overwrought nerves, so sorely tried by the two scenes through which she had passed, could no longer bear the strain, and now that there was some one there in whom she had perfect trust—some one whom she knew would defend her honor with his life, if need be, she gave way.

Carla did not wait for Felix to question her. She seemed to have thrown all sense of discretion aside. She believed that Felix had admitted himself with a key, for she had not heard the bell, and in that moment she hated him as intensely as she had loved him in the past.

"Do you wish me to repeat to you what I have already said to this woman?" she demanded coldly, but with such suppressed wrath that it robbed her voice of its clearness and rendered it husky and unnatural.

"Carla, hush!" he said.

"I will not hush! Why should I? I only half believed it before; I know it now. I saw you when you left this house in the company of my father. You have returned; you enter the room with the air of a master—you are master here. Do I need a greater assurance?"

With a slow gesture she turned then and pointed one finger at Clarita.

"She has not denied it," she continued. "She could not—she dare not, for it is the truth. When I accused her of it, she could only cower down, like the guilty thing she is, but she could not say no. But she loves you; oh, yes, she admits that much; and I do not doubt that she will continue to lavish her love upon you, such as it is, until she finds another who has more money to give her—who is handsomer—who wins her fancy for the moment. And she thinks, now, that our engagement is broken, you will make her your wife—that you will——"

"It is false, Felix! Do not believe her!" cried Rita, turning and facing them and drawing several steps nearer.

Her cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes shone like stars. To have the love that she had striven so hard to conceal, revealed in that wanton manner was to her the climax of everything. So long as the accusations made against her were untrue, she could bear them, but when this one came that she knew to be the truth—and the holiest truth of her life, the most sacred thing in her life—it was more than she could bear, and she stood there trembling, not knowing which way to turn, wishing with all her heart that she could fly, that the floor might open and engulf her.

Felix stepped to her side instantly, and gently but firmly put one arm around her, and she nestled up to him and became calm at once. Then very quietly, but very decidedly, he spoke, and his face wore that same peculiar smile that it did when he struck Chapman down in the billiard room of the club.

"Carla," he said, "you have decided for me a question that I should have settled for myself long ago. I do not know what actuates you tonight. It is beyond me. You have said things and done things which may be forgiven, but which can never be forgotten. I regret particularly that it is you who have said them, for the day will come when you will repent them with much more bitterness than you use in giving utterance to them now; not on my account; don't think that I mean that; but on Rita's account."

Carla laughed scornfully.

"You mean, I suppose, that my repentance will come too late," she said. "I have said nothing that I regret—nothing. I am sorry that I came here for you have exhibited a depth of degradation to which I would not have believed that you were capable of descending, and I do regret such a spectacle. As for her——"

"Stop, Carla! Even from you, I will listen to no more. If you have no consideration for others, recall some of your own self respect, and go."

"You—order me out—like that?" she exclaimed, aghast at the extremity to which she had forced herself.

"I do not order you out. I have neither the inclination nor the right to do so, but it is best for you, and best for all concerned that you do go, and at once. Your presence has already worked harm enough to us all. Let it cease where it is. I ask it for your father's sake, for Edna's sake, for your own; not for Rita's or for mine. You cannot injure me, and I can and will protect her."

"By giving her your name, I suppose. It would be a fitting end to the story of your lives."

"Yes, by giving her my name, if she will accept it; and it will not be the end of the story of our lives; it will be the beginning."

"I—will go."

"Thank you. If you will permit me, I will see you to a cab."

"I came alone, and I can return as I came."

"As you will. My cab is at the door. It is at your service."

She did not deign him a reply, but with head erect, and without as much as a last good night, she crossed the room and disappeared through the portières.

Felix was still standing with one of his arms around Rita, and for a moment after Carla left the room, both were silent. Presently, however, he looked down at her, and saw that she was crying silently.

"Rita," he said softly, "is it true?"

"Is what true, Felix?" she murmured.

"Is it true that you love me?"

"Yes," she whispered, lapsing into Spanish, "it is true. I love you. I have always loved you, Felix, and I always shall love you."

"And tomorrow morning, dear, will

you stand before a minister, here in this place and say the words that will make you my wife?"

She broke away from him then and fled to the other side of the room, where, with the table between them, she stood panting, frightened, wondering.

"No—no—no!" she cried. "Not that! I could not do it. It is not possible. It would not be right. It would be a sin."

"Why, Rita?" he asked calmly. "If you love me, why do you refuse to be my wife?"

"Because—you do not—love me," she replied slowly.

"That is not true, Rita."

She shook her head and retained her place behind the table.

"You do not love me," she repeated. "I am very dear to you—I know that, and I thank God for it—but you do not love me. You have given all your love to Miss Trevor, and you cannot take it away in a moment and bestow it upon me. It is not natural. The heart does not conduct itself so.

"Hush! Do not speak, for I am not strong against you. Let me complete what I have to say. You offer to make me your wife, because of what has happened here—because you regard it as your duty—because it will forever put an end to the slanders which were provoked by my visit to your rooms. If you loved me—oh, God! I would fly to your arms. As it is, no—no! I cannot—I cannot—be—your wife."

"Rita," he said, stretching out one hand towards her, "come here. You need not run away from me, for you are entirely wrong. I do love you. I had determined to ask you to be my wife while I was on the way back here after taking Mr. Trevor home, and long before I had any idea that Carla was here. You certainly believe me now, do you not?"

"Yes, Felix. You have never deceived me; I have never doubted you."

"Then you will consent, Rita?"

"No—no, I cannot. Do not ask me."

"But I do ask you, dear. It is for my own happiness I plead. You will do that much to make me happy, will you not?"

"I would die, if it would insure your happiness."

"Live, Rita, and make me happy by consenting to do as I ask. Shall I tell you how I have planned it all out? Sit down and listen to me, and I will tell you."

He placed her in a chair, kissed her forehead tenderly, and stood before her while he continued:

"Tomorrow, early, I will bring two or three of my friends here, and in their presence we will be married. Then as rapidly as I can, I will finish up the business that detains me in town—it may take a week or two—and as soon as it is out of the way, we will go abroad. We will visit Spain, and the place where you were born, and we will travel until we get tired of traveling, and then we will settle down somewhere—anywhere that pleases you. Don't you think that will be nice? Is it not an attractive picture? You will not refuse now, will you? What time shall we say? Tomorrow at twelve o'clock? Will you be ready then? Shall it be so, Rita?"

Her eyes were moist with unshed tears as she looked up at him, but she did not reply; she could not speak. Her whole heart went out to him, and yet—and yet there was something wanting.

Had he seized her in his arms, had he covered her face with kisses; had he, instead of pleading, demanded, it would have been different. She would not have hesitated; but now—now she did not know what to say.

"Say yes, Rita," he urged; "it must be yes. Say yes."

For one moment more she hesitated, and then slowly her head drooped until it was bowed in utter humility before

him, and in a voice so low that he could scarcely hear it, she murmured:

"If you wish it so, yes."

CHAPTER XVI.

CLARITA'S FAREWELL.

WHEN Felix Parsons arrived at his own rooms that night, after he had won the consent of Clarita to marry him the following morning, he scarcely knew whether he was happy or not. He did know that his love for Carla had received a shock from which it could never recover, and he told himself that he had done right in offering himself to Rita; but his love for her was a quantity that he had never yet paused to analyze.

He was conscious of a sense of repose in the arrangement that had been made, and the pain that had been his because of the separation from Carla was gone.

He could not think of her as he had done before. He remembered her only as he had seen her during that scene in Rita's apartment, and he recalled it with a shudder.

There was a telegram awaiting him which caused him some disquieting thought. It came from Pike Millington, and was as follows:

"Correct was good news. Arrive New York tomorrow night, ten. Will keep dark few days in your rooms, if you can put me up. Funny cable from governor. Explain when I see you. Can you meet me at train? P. M."

"Funny cable from governor," doubtless referred to the hypothecated securities, and it brought Felix back with a sudden shock to a realization of the compromising position in which he had placed himself.

Again, young Millington was returning much sooner than he had intended, and that fact was embarrassing.

He put the message aside, lighted a cigar, and went to the club, and as he walked up the avenue, the burden of his thought was: "I wonder if I do right in marrying Rita while this confounded stock matter is hanging over me?"

But he could not reply to the question satisfactorily to himself, so he shrugged his shoulders and let it rest.

But it was to be answered for him in a manner that he could not foresee.

The morning broke bright, clear and beautiful. The air was cold but dry, and the sun cheered everything that it touched.

As soon as Felix finished his breakfast, he set about making arrangements for the event of the day, and started at a rapid walk for the rectory of St. Bartholomew.

Before he arrived at the house, however, something compelled him to hesitate. It came to him that he should see Rita again before he made any of the necessary arrangements for the wedding.

Twice he stopped to turn back, and twice he went on his way again; but at last he made the third pause, and then he did not hesitate, but wheeling abruptly, he retraced his steps, called a cab, and ordered the driver to take him to the Millington.

It was not yet ten o'clock; an early hour for a call, but he did not think of that, besides, there was sufficient excuse, for he had convinced himself that his only object in going there was to discover if she had not some suggestions to make regarding the ceremony.

Marie answered his ring, and announced that her mistress had gone out early to do some shopping, she thought —and so did he.

"Mademoiselle left a letter for you, sir. She expected you, I think, for she told me to give it to you as soon as you came. I will get it for you."

Parsons did not think there was anything strange connected with Rita's early departure from the house, so he passed through the corridor to the parlor and waited for Marie to bring the letter to him.

He broke the seal and read it, while Marie discreetly retired. As he read,

his face turned white and set, and his eyes took on that same pained expression—though there was more intensity to it now—that they had assumed when, on the preceding day he left Carla Trevor's presence with their engagement ring in his pocket.

The note was written in Spanish, and cannot be literally translated, for it was filled with idioms, and it breathed a tenderness which the English language cannot express. It began abruptly with:

I am going away, Felix. I know not where, but it is best that I should go, and I obey the mandate of my conscience. It is because I love you, dear one, that I go. If I loved you less, I should remain, for to remain would be happiness for me and misery for you. You love me—yes; that I do not doubt; but not as you should love one who becomes your wife. Do not think that I have wantonly deceived you. When I said "Yes" to you last night, I intended to keep my word, but almost immediately after you were gone from me, I realized the error that I had committed, and I understood that it could not be as you wished. I think that I love your happiness and your content even more than I love you. Can you understand how that can be?

If we were married, I should tremble always lest there should come a moment of regret into your life for what you had done, and that would kill me; so you see there is some selfishness in my going also.

You will be worried about my safety. That must not be, for I will be safe; and do you remember there is a column in the *Herald* that you used to laugh about sometimes? Very well; if it is necessary, I will communicate with you by that means; and as soon as it is best—when you have forgiven Carla and are reconciled to her, if you will announce it to me in the same manner, I will return. But not until then; no. It is Carla whom you love, and she is good.

I have forgiven her for what she said and did last night. She was beside herself—mad. I, myself, might have done the same, or worse. You should not hold her accountable for it. She loves you, ah, so madly, that when she lost you, it stole away her reason. She loves you as much as I love you, though I do not think it is just the same; but for that reason, I can understand better the condition of mind she was in, and it is because of that that I freely forgive her, and if I forgive her surely you can do the same.

Ah, dear Felix, it is bitter, this going away. To you it will appear unnecessary, but you do not understand. It is not from you that I fly; it is from myself. I cannot say more now; perhaps later the good God will make it all plain to every one. It is better, too, that I should go for another reason. If I had been differently situated, Carla would never have thought ill of me. God bless you and keep you, dear Felix; and will you pray for me and think of me, and remember that I love you? Though perhaps I should not ask you to remember that.

RITA.

He read the letter through twice. Then he folded it carefully and put it in his pocketbook.

Presently he walked to a window and stood for a long time looking out upon the street, and when he turned, he rang the bell for Marie.

"Your mistress tells me here," he said, without showing a trace of emotion of any kind, "that it is more than likely that she may accept an invitation to spend several days—perhaps a week or more—with a friend in another city. She probably had not fully decided when she went out, or she would have told you. If she does not return, you will understand."

"Yes, sir; and what am I to do?"

"Exactly as you would if she were here. Keep the place in order for her return. Doubtless she will write to you. In any case, I will see you again."

He went out then, jumped into his cab and was driven to the office of Geoffrey Trevor.

"Come in, come in," said the broker when he saw him. "I want to talk to you. You are late."

"I could not very well help it, pater. What is it? Anything new?"

"No. I want to talk to you about last night."

"Better not, pater. Leave the subject as it is."

"No, no, Felix, I cannot do that."

"Leave things as they are for the present, at least. Believe me, it is best."

"Felix, I must talk to some one, or I shall go mad; and you are the only one to whom I can speak."

"Then leave it until evening. You ought not to discuss it here. Interruptions may occur at any moment."

"True. This evening, then, at your rooms."

"No, not there. I will come to you right after dinner and stay till a quarter of ten."

"Very well. You need not mind coming to the house on Carla's account. She has gone away."

"Gone away? Where?"

"To Lakewood. She has friends there who have been urging her to visit them, you know. She went this morning. At least, I found a note on the breakfast table, telling me that she had gone. Did you—er—did you return to—to her last night?"

"Yes."

"How is she? How did you find her? Tell me that and I will be content."

"All right, pater. Rita had company when I got there and that fact turned her thoughts into another channel. Besides, she did not understand you, you know."

"Company! Who was it?"

"A lady who called upon her almost as soon as we left."

"Ah! One thing more, Felix."

"Yes, pater?"

"This quarrel between you and Carla; it is only a lover's quarrel, I hope. It is nothing serious, is it?"

"I am afraid, pater, that it is quite serious," said Felix steadily.

"Do you mean that the engagement is finally broken?"

"Yes. Carla will hardly recant now, and I am not sure that I wish her to do so."

"Felix!"

"Carla broke the engagement, and she believed that she had cause. Let us say no more about it."

"Will you tell me the cause?"

"No, not now."

A clerk entered at that moment and interrupted them. He had a card in his hand, and glancing at it, the broker read aloud the name, "Harry Chapman."

"All right," he said; "send him in."

There was another private office back of the one they were occupying, and when the clerk went out, Felix rose idly from his chair and strolled into the inner room. He said nothing, however, and he did not close the door between the two rooms.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" inquired Trevor, as Chapman entered the room.

"I am the bearer of bad news, Mr. Trevor," he said. "Your daughter has met with an accident. She——"

"My God! Which one do you mean? Edna?"

"No, sir, no; the elder one—Carla. We hope that it is not serious. She has been taken home. You had better go there at once."

The old man's face was ghastly. He staggered to his feet and gasped out:

"She is dead—she is dead—I read it in your face."

"You are mistaken, sir; believe me, you are. I regret that I was the one who had to tell you of this. I was present when it occurred, and I did all that I could to render assistance. Then I came here. She was conscious when I came away. The doctor told me if there was no internal injury, she would be all right."

"Where was it? How did it happen?" exclaimed the broker, struggling with his coat in agonized haste.

"At the American Line pier, where she had gone to see about her room for the voyage. She was knocked down by a team of truck horses, and one of them stepped on her, but I really do not regard the injury as serious."

"American Line pier—voyage?" muttered Trevor, not comprehending in the least what his companion was saying. "What the devil do you mean?"

"She was to sail today, you know—or had you forgotten it? I met Miss Trevor last night as she was coming

out of the Millington, on Central Park West, and I escorted her home. She told me then that she intended to sail today, but that you had neglected to procure her tickets. I volunteered to attend to it for her——"

"Coming out of the Millington!" exclaimed the broker, heeding nothing else that Chapman was saying. "What time was that?"

"Have you forgotten that she is injured, sir?"

"What time was it, I say?"

"About ten o'clock—perhaps a little after."

"Good God! What was she doing there?"

"She had been calling on a friend, I suppose. I did not ask her."

"Felix! Felix!" Geoffrey Trevor called out.

Parsons stepped through the door into their presence, but he did not turn his eyes in Chapman's direction, but Chapman, smiling cruelly, said coldly:

"Mr. Parsons can inform you whom she called upon, for he was also there."

Then he turned abruptly and left the office.

CHAPTER XVII.

FACE TO FACE WITH CONSEQUENCES.

"COME, pater," said Felix instantly, speaking before Chapman was fairly out of the room. "We will do our talking in the coupé;" and when they were seated and the driver was urging the horses almost to a run, he added:

"That man Chapman is my evil genius, I verily believe. I had almost forgotten his existence, and now it appears that he has been spying upon me all the time. You need not ask any questions, pater. I'll tell you all that there is to tell without it.

"Rita came to my room one day to see me. Carla heard of it. Later she heard other things, and she asked me to explain. Because I would not tell Rita's history, she broke the engagement. Last night, after we left Rita, she called there. She was there when I returned, and she left while I was there, refusing my escort, but it seems that she met Chapman, who performed that office. That is all there is of it."

"But why did she go to see Rita? Can you answer that?"

"No."

"Those two together! What next? Ah! If they had only known!"

The younger man placed one hand on his companion's knee, and gazing earnestly into his face, said sternly:

"Pater, neither Carla nor Edna shall ever know. Promise me that."

"Why, Felix, why? Why must they never know? Rita is their sister—they are all my children, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood. It is not Carla nor Edna whom I fear to tell; it is Rita; and God only knows how I can find the strength to tell her, for how shall I ever tell her about her mother?"

"You cannot—you must not—you shall not tell any of them! Pater, listen to me. There is a chapter of that history connected with your past which even you do not know. Silence is your only safeguard. Promise me that you will not speak."

"Not yet, not yet. I will not speak—yet. But Felix—tonight—you will not fail me?"

"Hush, pater. We are forgetting Carla. She needs you now. The other matter can wait. But I will come tonight, as I agreed. Here we are. I will remain in the library until you can let me know about Carla's injuries."

Edna came to him almost instantly, and told him all. The accident proved to be not a serious one. Carla's arm was broken, and she was suffering from shock, mental as well as physical, the doctors thought. They predicted a speedy recovery.

"And, Felix," Edna concluded, "I must see you immediately; that is, as soon as possible. I must run back to Carla now; but this evening—will you come here?"

"Everybody wants me this evening,

Ned. I already have two engagements. Can't you have it out with me now?"

"No. I wish I could. I must go right back to Carla. Tomorrow morning, then. Would it be terrible if I came to your rooms again?"

"Yes, it would; most decidedly; besides, I have company."

"Company! I don't believe you. Very well, here then. I must see you. Can you come at half past ten?"

"No; at four in the afternoon, if that will do. What is it all about?"

"Talk about the curiosity of a woman! I'll tell you at four tomorrow."

When Felix left the house he went directly to the office of the *Herald*, and in the personal column inserted these words:

RITA—It is very important that you return home at once, otherwise I may never see you again. If you consider my happiness, you will comply. Let your communication be dated from your home, for I will not search where you suggested.

He did not sign the advertisement; it was not necessary; but he believed that his message to her would have the desired effect.

"This was to have been my wedding day," he mused when he was again in his rooms, and there was a smile of irony upon his face while he reflected upon the mischances that had happened to him since that night when he burned the dollar bill. Truly, the day following that episode had been a day of fate for him.

Then he endeavored to analyze the effect that the rupture with Carla and the flight of Rita had had upon him.

He carried his mind back to the moment when Carla returned the ring to him, recalling the agony he had suffered then—and wondered at it, for the grief that he now felt over the disappearance of Rita was even more poignant than that had been. He could not understand his own emotions, and less than anything else could he understand Carla.

"I have worshiped a masterpiece of sculpture, and I have seen it step down from its pedestal and become common clay," he mused. "The transformation changes the identity; my worship ceases with the destruction of the idol."

He recalled, then, the reference that Chapman had made to Carla's intended departure for Europe, and wondered at it. Geoffrey Trevor had interrupted the man before he had had an opportunity to complete what he was saying, but Felix felt that he could tell the rest for him.

Maddened by her own mistakes, more than by anything else, and still beside herself when she left the presence of the girl whom she had so bitterly attacked, she was not responsible for what she had done, and impulsively determined to run away.

Outwardly calm and self contained always, she had permitted Chapman to see no sign of her excitement. Pursuing her idea of flight, she had invented the statement that she had neglected the purchase of her tickets, and had accepted the proffered aid of Harry Chapman to act for her. Then, knowing that those at home would not be surprised if they did not hear from her for a fortnight or more, if she announced her intention of going to Lakewood, she had left the house early, partly to carry out that impression, partly because she could leave a written message instead of delivering a verbal one, but really because she wished to board the steamer early in the day, with her maid, before the other passengers, many of whom were likely to be known to her, should make their appearance; and then, fate, chance, Providence, something, had stepped in and interferred.

That was the explanation as Parsons saw it, and he had no doubt of its truth.

Chapman, knowing her intention, had met her at the steamer to deliver the tickets, and had therefore been present when the accident occurred.

But how had it happened that Harry Chapman was at the door of the Mil-

lington when she came from the house? That circumstance was just as easily explained. He had been spying upon Parsons.

But for what purpose?

Felix shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. It was not worth serious thought, any way, he decided; but his reflections returned to Rita then, and he fell to dreaming about her, wondering where she was hiding, and just thinking—thinking—thinking, until he fell asleep.

The self imposed restraint, the constant worry, the continued excitement and the natural fatigue resultant from all had their effect—tired nature gave out and rested.

When he awoke, it was with a start of surprise, for he realized instantly that he had slept a long time, and a glance at his watch told him that it was even much longer than he had imagined; for the hour was half past nine.

He sprang to the telephone then and endeavored to get the Trevor mansion, but the call was not answered, so he gave it up, ran down stairs, hurried through to Fourth Avenue, leaped upon a car, and arrived at the Grand Central station just as the passengers were coming from the train that was to bring Pike Millington.

In a moment more the two were shaking hands most cordially.

"Hello, old man," exclaimed Millington, with his big voice and bluff, hearty manner. "I'm glad to get back—tell you that. Here! Let's dodge around this way and keep out of sight. I don't want anybody to know that I'm back just yet. Can you put me up as I asked in my wire?"

"Sure, Mill."

"How's Miss Ortega?" he asked suddenly, when they were seated in their cab.

"Eh?" inquired Felix.

"How's Miss Ortega?"

"Oh, she is well, or was when I saw her last."

"When was that?"

"Last evening."

"Every evening, I suppose?"

"Well, hardly that, Mill."

There was another period of silence, and the cab was just drawing up to the door of the house where Felix had his apartment, when Millington spoke again.

"How's the Cummings affair getting along?" he asked.

"Finely."

"How do you stand now?"

"Well, I haven't figured up lately, but your plan has worked very nearly as you mapped it out."

"Good. We'll go over it in the morning. I don't feel like going into it tonight."

"Nor I, so we're agreed on that point."

They were in Felix' rooms by that time, and Millington proceeded to make himself at home as he did everywhere he went.

"Where is my shakedown?" he inquired, peering into Felix' own sleeping room. "Is this it? No; this is yours."

"You can have it if you like, and I will take the other."

"Nonsense, any room will do for me, so long as I can sling things around and do as I please, and I know that I can do it here. Any more bother with Chapman, Felix?"

"No."

"Lord! but that was a facer you gave him at the club. Did you know that I wrote to the board of governors about it?"

"No."

"I did; told them that there were fifty of us who would leave the club in a body if they accepted your resignation, and a hundred who would go if they didn't get rid of Chap. Beastly cur, that fellow. He's out, I understand."

"Yes."

"He wrote to me while I was away."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, and he cabled something or other to the governor, too. Don't know what it was, but it set the old

man by the ears, somehow, and he sent me a hundred dollars' worth of words. He's coming over; be here in about three days, now, I expect. It's something about X. L., his pet stock. Hope you haven't had to use it for the Cummings deal. Something's wrong somewhere, and we've got to straighten it out before he gets here, or there'll be the devil to pay. Have a Chicago cigar?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAN BEHIND THE DOOR.

WHAT further might have been said on the subject was interrupted by the ringing of the doorbell, and while Millington dived into the room that he now called his, Felix went to the door and found that Geoffrey Trevor, greatly agitated and disturbed, was there.

"Come in, pater," he said, speaking rapidly. "I am awfully sorry that I did not keep the appointment with you tonight. The fact is, I stretched out on the couch for a little rest, dropped asleep and never woke up until it was time to keep another one that I had made. I tried to get you over the 'phone, but I couldn't get an answer. I hadn't much time, so I went out, thinking that I would explain in the morning. How is Carla?"

"Better," replied Trevor, staring a little, for Felix was not given to such profuse explanations. "But I did not come to talk about Carla. She is in no danger, and there are other things that are. I want to know—I must know——"

"Wait a minute, pater," interrupted Felix. "I don't want to talk business tonight."

"Well, I do. I must talk business tonight. That is what I came here for. It's about that——"

"Yes, yes! I know. That matter between us, eh?"

Again the old man stared. Felix was beginning to puzzle him; but suddenly an explanation occurred to him—the only one, in fact, that he could think of.

"Perhaps you also received a message," he said.

Parsons nodded, for he did not know what else to do. He felt that at all hazards, he must prevent Trevor from referring in words to the X. L. stock, for Millington could not help but hear everything that was said, and he was in honor bound not to warn his companion of the presence of a third person in the rooms.

"Well, here is mine. Read it," continued the broker, extending an envelope towards Felix. "After you have read it, I will show you my reply, for I did reply. Read it."

Parsons extracted the message from th envelope and spread it out before him. A glance told him that it was a cablegram, and here is what he read:

"Positive information you have block X. L. stock. Where did you get it?" The message was signed, "Sam Millington."

"Well?" said Felix, and he looked up inquiringly, and spoke with the utmost calmness.

"Now, read my reply, and then I'll tell you about it. Here it is."

Again Felix read in silence:

SAM MILLINGTON, Paris, France:
None of your damned business.
TREVOR.

"What do you think of it?" demanded the broker, smiling grimly.

Parsons laughed aloud.

"It's to the point, any way. When did you receive the message?"

"That's the devil of it. It came three days ago—or rather three nights ago, and was delivered at the house. Ned received it, and of course forgot all about it. She gave it to me tonight. Now, what does it mean?"

"Whatever it means, pater, it cannot affect you, can it?"

"I'm not so sure about that. It may, mightily. Anyhow, I don't want the stuff on my hands any longer. By the

way, did you wire your friend that he could come into the deal?"

"Yes; at once."

"Has he replied?"

"Yes. It is all right, and will be fixed tomorrow."

"Humph! I'm mighty sorry that I gave my consent, now. But I won't withdraw it. I'm half inclined to think that it's a job, his coming in."

"How do you mean, pater?"

"Young Mill's a mighty smart fellow—deuced sight smarter than the old man. Either of them would put up a game on me in a minute, if they could, and that cable makes me think that's his scheme. Old Mill's a terror; I don't need to tell you that. Look here, Felix, I want to know one thing."

"Is that stock your's, or did you borrow it of Pike Millington?"

"I have never borrowed anything of Pike Millington in my life. Are you satisfied with that answer?"

"Perfectly; and it relieves me greatly—more than I can say. I'm glad that I sent the reply I did to the old rascal. But won't he rear when he reads it? Eh? Are you sure about that matter with Pike tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"What in thunder do you suppose made old Sam send me such a cable as that? Don't you suppose that he knows you have got that stock. Or at least that he has not got it?"

"I do not think it worth while to suppose anything about it, pater."

"Where did you get it?"

"I might answer you in the same way that you answered him; and I am rather disposed to do it."

"Good, Felix! Serve me right, too. Any how, you've set my mind at rest. The devil seems to have got into things lately. I'm upset all around the track; that's a fact. Now, there's another thing."

"What now, pater?"

"Rita. Where is she?"

"Why?"

"Well, when you didn't come to the house tonight, I went up there to see her."

"You should not have done that. You had no right to go there unless I took you."

"No right!"

"No, sir, no right."

"I'd like to know who has a better right than her——"

"Stop! I will not discuss the question with you now."

"Where is she, Felix?"

"Isn't she at home?"

"No. She went away this morning. You knew that she had gone, for you have been there since she went. You know that she is not at home. Where is she?"

"Visiting some of her Spanish friends, doubtless. Certainly, her absence for a day or two is nothing to get excited about."

"Well, perhaps it isn't, but taken on top of Carla's call there, I was afraid—I don't know what I was afraid of."

"Your shadow, doubtless."

"Well, if you had a shadow like mine, pursuing you wherever you went, you'd get to be afraid of it, too. You have not told me all about that call of Carla's. What more is there to tell?"

"Nothing."

"Come, Felix, be frank with me."

"When the time comes to be frank, I will be so. Until it does come, there is nothing to be said, and if you continue this line of questioning, we shall quarrel. You have said too much already. We will drop both subjects, if you please."

"Felix, I do not understand you."

"Then don't try. Have a cigar and a glass of cognac. Until tomorrow wash your hands of everything that disturbs you. Will you do that to oblige me?"

"I suppose so. I'll do another thing, too; I'll go. Will you walk out with me?"

"No, not tonight. I'm done up—tired out. Perhaps, pater, I have my own worries, too."

"I'm a selfish brute, Felix; I know it. It's my training, I suppose. We call ourselves bulls and bears in the Street, but egad, we're all hogs, after all. You're worrying about Carla. I ought to have remembered it, but she'll be all right, my boy, and this lover's quarrel of yours will be fixed up so that things will be better than ever. Well, good night. What time will you come to the office tomorrow?"

"Before noon."

"Make it as early as you can; wish you'd get there at ten. Try it. Good night."

When he was gone, Felix stood in the center of the room with clenched hands and tightened lips. His face was pale, and his eyes wore a look of deep trouble that was entirely foreign to them, for he realized that Geoffrey Trevor had said enough to make Pike Millington, who he was sure had heard it all, entirely cognizant of everything that happened during his absence.

He would much rather have kept them from the young financier, had that been possible, and if they had to be told, he had hoped to tell them himself. Now he believed that he was in a much worse position than before.

But the thing could not have been avoided. It was done, and could not be undone. There was nothing to do, except to face the result, and there was no use in postponing this any longer.

(To be continued.)

THE PAGAN.

BY ROBERT SHACKLETON.

A story of the Indian reservation where an Indian and a white man meet in an affair of love. An Indian with a white man's heart who loses his sweetheart, but gains her love.

"YES, I am a reservation Indian. And because I am a reservation Indian you do not think it possible that I can have a heart that has burned like fire within me, and a brain that has reeled with fury and despair, and eyes that have glowed hot and dry through long, long nights of sleeplessness? Listen! I will tell you."

He paused, and the wild storm that had driven us to his cabin to find shelter howled and shrieked outside. The wind beat tumultuously against the window; the great river was writhed into waves, that dashed in a long line of white along the shore; the lightning flashed and glared; the thunder reverberated, crashing peal on peal.

"Ho! The God of Thunder speaks! Speaks of revenge—revenge!"

He quieted himself and looked at us with forced calmness.

"You see, I am a pagan. The gods of my ancestors are still my gods; their faith is my faith; their hope, my hope. True," and his mocking self scorn was stingingly bitter, "I do not look much like a pagan Indian, whose hope is in the Happy Hunting Grounds. A pair of trousers made of blue drilling—a flannel shirt—Bah! And even while the Thunder God has left his home beneath the Falls of Niagara, and stalks abroad——"

There was a still more fearful crash, and the Indian sternly frowned. We shivered, although the night was very warm.

"He came to me. Oh, the woful day that he came to me! The glory of the setting sun, as it streamed over the mighty St. Lawrence, was in his face. The glory of the setting sun—gorgeous splendor—gold and purple and orange and crimson! And the wind was caressing in its touch, and the water lovingly

kissed the shore, and I thought of Eltoona—Eltoona——"

He moaned and the wind moaned down the chimney in response; and the thunder, ceasing for a moment from its fury, moaned like a giant in pain. A giant in pain!—how like the Indian before us! Straight limbed, broad chested, arms of iron, muscles of steel; and suffering, even as any feeble woman might.

"Through the glory of the setting sun he came toward me, and the burnished steel of his bicycle glowed like silver, and the flying wheels whirled round. Atotarho! What made him break down here? Oh, for the snakes' heads of that war god, to strike and pierce and sting him! That would be joy indeed.

"A rippling collapse—for the rider, with his joyous, innocent seeming face, was fascinated by the view, and did not heed a sharp edged rock set firmly in his very path—a ripping collapse; and in a moment he and his bicycle were over the edge, along which he had been carelessly riding, and had tumbled to the bottom of the ditch.

"Never before, except at a distance, had I seen a bicycle. They had haunted my fancy. Such ease and perfection of movement did they show that my heart had often yearned to touch them, examine them, handle them. Yet no one had ever asked me, and I was too proud to seek a rider out and myself ask him. You think it a shame that I, an Indian and pagan, should be eager to look at a machine? It is well. Yet, look you!

"The traditions of my tribe tell me that my ancestors made the most buoyant of canoes, the most perfectly ground and chipped war clubs of stone, the most beautifully fashioned flint arrows; and it is the blood of those ancestors that makes me a mechanical Indian. Yet they were none the less famous as warriors for being expert with mechanical implements—and let Austin Hardee beware!"

The eyes of my friend and myself met in horrified surprise, for we had an appointment to meet Austin Hardee the very next evening at the village of St. Regis, the center of the reservation. He had told us of the quaint picturesqueness of the place; of the courteous men, the handsome women, the charming girls. Unheeding our exchange of glances, the Indian went on:

"Eyes that glistened with clear brightness, cheeks that were touched with innocence, a smile to winningly captivate and charm; thus did he appear to me, and I loved him.

"And it all began so naturally. Right out there, in front of this cabin, he sat down and cheerily set about mending his broken machine. With swift expertness he handled the collapsed tire, and soon he had it sound and once more filled with air. Then he examined a twisted pedal. It was badly bent—so badly that the machine could not be wheeled at all. He asked me how far it was to some blacksmith's, and where he could get a wagon to carry the bicycle, and I told him that I—even I myself—might perchance aid him to fix it. He looked at me in surprise; but when he saw how gently, how lovingly, I handled the machine, and with what a certain touch, he yielded it to me in pleasureable astonishment, and I bore it within this house.

"In the other room I have a few tools and a little anvil, and it was with pride and wonder that I began to work and handle and examine. You will smile, but you know not with what intensity my mechanical nature had yearned for the feel of a bicycle. It must have been witchcraft. The Evil Manitou must have had me in his power!

"I fixed it. It was almost dark. I saw that he would like to stay with me, and I asked him. Then he must have noticed how longingly I looked at his bicycle, for he said, 'Why not learn to ride? I know that you will not break it. Ride!' And he showed me how to mount and how to move my feet, and then he sat in the doorway and watched

me. And after he had gone to bed I kept on trying, in the bright moonlight, on a level patch, out there on the river's bank."

(How plainly did my memory bring up what Austin Hardee had told me. "Be sure to look up Yulett," he had said. "Queer kind of fellow. Get him talking and he'll interest you. Still believes in witches and manitous. Clever with his hands, and mended my wheel for me. Then tried to ride. Kept it up in the moonlight, and I lay in bed and watched him. Nearly died a laughing, for it was so comical to see such an Indian athlete toppling and falling around. He really learned, though; I must say that for him; and I went to sleep, with him still riding round and round the space of level rock. Look him up, and look up the pretty Eltoona, too!")

A new fury of the storm kept the Indian from talking for some moments, and we all listened in dread as crash followed crash in quick succession, and the lightning played in almost ceaseless flashes. I looked from the window, and it was gruesome to watch the foamy line of breakers and the broad expanse of water blazing with lurid light. And suddenly the fury seemed exhausted, and the thunder almost ceased, and the flashes came intermittently and then left the river veiled in pitchy darkness, and the wind died away, and there was but the dreary sound of a ceaseless downpour of drenching rain. It was in a quieter and drearier voice that Yulett continued:

"We talked of many things, and I opened my heart to him. He railed me on the absence of pretty girls in the reservation. I might have known that he was only joking, or that he knew nothing of us; but I hastened to tell him that there were as many pretty girls as he had ever seen. 'Really?' he said. And I felt taunted, and (may the Great Manitou forgive me!) I told him of the wondrous beauty of Eltoona."

He paused a little, and then went on with dreary, nervous haste: "A good and a pure girl is Eltoona, as well as beautiful. Pagan as I am, I respect her priest and her religion, and I know that she has never done aught that might dishonor them.

"But Austin Hardee's smile, face, manners, bearing—ah! they could at least turn her heart from her Indian lover; and she thought (poor, simple Eltoona!) that Hardee wanted to marry her. Ha! Marry a reservation Indian! But she was all in all to me, and he stole her love—stole it from me, deeming it would be a pleasant wickedness, and not knowing how honest and pure she was. And my heart still burns, and my eyes are often hot and sleepless, and I am sorrowful, sorrowful.

"And do you see, now, why I looked sternly upon you when you asked to come in out of the approaching storm? Do you understand how it was that I wished to break, to smash, to destroy the bicycles upon which you so gaily rode to my cabin? But the blood of my ancestors has not been so contaminated by civilization that I can turn a stranger from my door into the storm."

My friend and I slept but little that night. We conferred together in whispers, so that Yulett, who had retired to the adjoining room, would not hear us, and we talked of the strangeness of the happening and of how to avert a tragedy. We must try to keep Hardee from St. Regis.

True, the reservation was large, and Yulett lived a solitary life in a lonely part of it; but it was only too possible that something might bring about a meeting. My friend, as we finally arranged it, would ride in the morning to meet Hardee and make him turn back. Then he would rejoin me.

The morning dawned cool and clear. The storm and clouds had passed, but there was a peculiar quality in the air which suggested a tang of pain.

"A day for dying!" observed Yulett gloomily; and I noticed that he shuddered as he spoke. We made our fare-

wells, and acknowledgments of his courtesy; but it was with an effort that we spoke with cheerfulness, for we felt an intangible prescience of misfortune.

Leading our wheels, for it was too muddy to ride, we started for St. Regis, and there we parted, my friend going off in the direction from which we expected Austin Hardee to come. The ground had been drying rapidly as we walked, and by the time my friend left the village it was hard enough for wheeling.

I spent some time in looking about the town, with its oddly twisting streets, and in talking with such types as most interested me. It was curious to watch the darting back and forth of canoes; to listen to the ceaseless pounding of black ash logs, to obtain splints for basket making; to glance at the skilful work of the makers of lacrosse sticks; to watch the women washing clothes along the river bank; to gaze at some lissome girl hoeing in a field; to note the various buildings of the straggling town, and their colors of white or brown or pink or green or yellow, or that nondescript hue given by the beating of rain storms and the baking of the sun; to gaze at the dark eyed women, at every doorway, busily weaving baskets, but pausing from their work long enough to dart a glance at the stranger from underneath their darkly handsome brows.

And suddenly there came to me the sound of a bell, rung with slow, reverberating regularity. The sound had in it a sense of pain, as if it were the boding toll of a death bell.

And up the twisting main street, away from the home of the priest (an ancient building of stone, lead roofed, and massively thick walled), came a little group. Heading it was a youth of a mien so irrefragably funereal as to mournfully chill by his aspect alone. It was he that was ringing the bell; and in his other hand he bore a lantern, lighted and burning under the glare of the midday sun. Close behind him came the priest, stately and grave and impressively somber, in full canonicals —in robe and surplice and stole.

Behind these two followed a constantly augmenting group of men and women and children. Each man's head was bare and bowed; each woman drew her long shawl closely about her face and figure; each child walked silently, awed and still. I, too, joined the group and quietly followed, with that painful prescience of misery to come. Nor was it that I thought the misery would be personally my own; I felt that I was to witness the misery of some one whom I had met.

We stopped at a small house near the edge of the village, and the priest went inside, and the women silently followed; and the men stood at the door reverently, and reverently looked within.

On a bed, in the room immediately opening off the street, lay a young woman, hollow cheeked, large eyed, feeble, yet even in her feebleness displaying a striking beauty. The women knelt with reverential awe upon the floor. There was a little stand beside the bed, and upon this stand was a lighted candle, and beside the candle was a saucer, with holy water and palm sprigs.

And the priest solemnly administered the last communion; and then, with quiet fervency, he prayed; and then, in the Indian tongue, he began the Lord's Prayer, and the Indian voices chimed in with his own, and a few great tears rolled from the eyes of the dying girl.

There was a groan beside me. I started, for Yulett, unperceived, had joined the group. The agony on his face made me shiver. "I did not know she was sick," he whispered, more to himself than to me.

The priest came toward the door, and the men began to disperse. The women remained by the bedside to pray. To the priest, as he passed, Yulett spoke, briefly and in a metallic tone of insistent anguish.

"Is it hopeless?"

The priest well knew that Yulett was an unbeliever, but his voice was none the less full of profoundest sympathy.

"It is hopeless. God is taking her."

"Has she had a doctor?"

"Why, no. I believe not. But her family, of course, and the women have done all that could be done."

Yulett turned quickly toward me. "May I take your bicycle?" he asked.

"Surely."

And in an instant he was upon it and flying down the street and off into the country, in the direction of the nearest white man's town. It was splendid riding. His strength was enormous; his body was lithe and pliant; he rode with desperation and furious speed, yet there was perfect command of body and of motion.

"Poor fellow! He is going for a doctor," said the priest, joining me as I walked slowly away. "It is too late, though. The girl's sickness? Oh, worry and disappointment, first, I believe; then a bad cold. Refused to give it attention, and, ordinarily, none would have been needed; but the cold got worse, and still she didn't care, and, somehow, before any one suspected it, it developed into something very like pneumonia.

"They have been giving her some simple medicines, but today they wouldn't even give her that. The reason? Oh, the wind has been blowing all day from the east, and when it is from that direction neither Christian nor pagan Indian will take any medicine. Queer, isn't it? I don't suppose that her folks will quite like it that Yulett is getting a white doctor, but the young pagan is so highly thought of among the Indians that he can do things that in anybody else would be resented as impertinent interference.

"It seems to me, too, if I remember, that her parents would have liked her to marry him. Well, well! She is a good girl.

"Did you notice our little procession? Yes? The light, you know, is a memento of the times of the catacombs, when lights had to be used. The whole ceremony, carried out that way on the street, is never observed except in towns like this, where almost every individual is Catholic. But won't you come down to my home? I have interesting old records there, dating back to the founding of this old town——"

But I could not bear to talk with him that day. My mind was too full of a strange pain. And, too, it was more than ever important that I should remain to watch for Austin Hardee.

I walked restlessly up and down the streets. From time to time I went past the house where the dying girl was, and I saw that some of the women were still with her, and praying.

At length, as I paused there, my bicycle again came in sight, and Yulett was wheeling swiftly on. By the door he sprang from the saddle. He had no eyes for me, nor for the women inside. With an awful fixedness he gazed at the girl whom he loved. She opened her eyes. She raised herself on her pillow.

"Yulett!"

She opened her arms, and with a smothered cry he went to her. He seized her in a fiercely passionate embrace that yet was as gentle as the caress of a mother; and with a little sigh of loving content she lay back on her pillow—dead!

I left him and went down to the side of the river. It was nearing sunset, and I thought of all the misery and anguish that I had witnessed since sunset of the night before. Was it only a single day? It seemed like a long, long time.

A footstep—slow, but steadily firm—and Yulett was beside me. An unvoiceable anguish, an eternity of sorrow, gloomed in his deep set eyes. He spoke; and while it was pitifully apparent that his heart was sorely trembling, there was not a tremor in his voice.

"I wish to thank you," he said. "The doctor has just come—too late, of course, but it was good of you——"

"Don't! don't!" I cried. "Don't speak of such a little thing as I was able to do!" And then I would have striven to comfort him, but no word of fitting comfort came to me. In the presence of that bitter suffering I was dumb.

Standing beside me, he looked out over the beautiful river, and the glory of the sunset, its royal magnificence, seemed to mock him. Yet he did not take it so. In that splendid sublimity his heart found comfort, and he murmured words that seemed like a prayer —words that, in a moment, I remembered having come across not long before in an old book on the Indians, as those of an ancient heathen condolence in time of sorrow. Their rhythmic solemnity had impressed me; a solemnity as of a splendidly musical psalm; and it had appeared to me a strange thing that they were entirely heathen.

"You are mourning in the deep darkness. I will make the sky clear for you, so that you will not see a cloud. And also I will give the sun to shine upon you, so that you can look upon it peacefully when it goes down. You shall see it when it is going. Yea, the sun shall seem to be hanging just over you, and you shall look upon it peacefully as it goes down."

He paused a little. Then he repeated, very gently: "Yea, you shall look upon it peacefully when it goes down."

There was silence—a silence which was suddenly broken; for with a cheery laugh Austin Hardee wheeled up beside me and cried:

"Well! well! Here you are ahead of me! And you look glum enough for a funeral."

Just then he noticed who my companion was, and the fellness of Yulett's look made him tremble and grow frightfully pale. I wanted to speak. I felt that I must try to avert a tragedy.

Yulett towered above him. His fingers clenched and unclenched. It would have taken him but a moment, giant in strength as he was, to throttle Hardee or toss him into the stream.

"She is dead!"

The voice was hollow and dread; the words were chilled, as with the coldness of a tomb.

"Go!"

And Hardee mounted his wheel and rode fearfully out of the town.

For a few moments Yulett watched him. Then he looked beyond and over him, and his eyes rested on the darkly solemn blue of the Adirondacks, which arose in impressive majesty forty miles away. Then he turned again toward the river. He forgot that I was there. He forgot everything but that last embrace. His words had a wonderful sweetness.

"You shall look upon it peacefully—peacefully—as it goes down!"

AUREOLA.

THE stars fall down from heaven,
And leave no trail behind;
The roses blush on every bush,
Then scatter to the wind.

And dreams of childhood vanish
As sunshine from the day;
On every tree a bird sings free,
And lightly flies away.

But an unending glory
Has made my life divine;
For I have seen thine eyes serene,
And they have gazed in mine.

Thomas Walsh.

IN THE NET OF THE VISCONTI.*

BY UPTON B. SINCLAIR, JR.

A tale of the time of the Italian Renaissance. The thrilling experiences of Tito Bentivogli, son to the Duke of Bologna, who is captured while on a hunting trip by Galeazzo, the hereditary enemy of his house. Plot, counterplot, and a matching of cunning against cunning in a game of which one player's life is the stake.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE scene of the story is in Italy in the middle ages, when Gian Galeazzo Visconti is seeking to become master of the entire country. Tito and Vittoria Bentivogli, son and daughter of the Duke of Bologna, are betrayed into his hands by a faithless retainer, Aligheri, but Tito leaves Vittoria with a peasant family. He falls in with an Englishman, John of Salisbury, and they stop for the night at a wayside hut; Tito being recognized, a fierce fight ensues and John is killed. Tito flees, to be discovered later by Malatesta, Galeazzo's most dreaded general, but he succeeds in passing as John Salisbury and is taken to Milan where he has an audience with Galeazzo, who installs him as private secretary. He is thus enabled to save Vittoria, who, disguised as a boy, has been captured.

Malatesta plots against Galeazzo and Tito joins him; they are discovered and there is a terrible fight. Malatesta escapes, but Tito is dragged to the torture chamber.

Vittoria, who has escaped, learns her brother's fate from some troopers, and returns to Milan to save him. During her audience with Galeazzo, Vittoria explains all the incidents satisfactorily, declaring that proof for all is in the paper concealed in Malatesta's sword hilt which had broken in the struggle.

An officer is sent to bring it, and awful suspense fills Vittoria, for her own and Tito's life depend on this; but the officer returns—empty handed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING EVENT.

THE room fairly swam before Vittoria's eyes, but she sprang forward again imploringly.

"Your grace," she cried in an agonized voice, "I tell you it was there—some one must have found it. Have mercy!"

But there was no mercy in the face of Galeazzo; his eyes gleamed, and there was a set look about his mouth.

"You have lied," he said, "and your fate is sealed!"

Vittoria was almost overcome. But she had strength enough left for one word more.

"Let me look," she cried, "I know just where it fell, and I can find it!"

Galeazzo made a gesture of impatience; but again his daughter hung on his arm pleadingly. And from the murmur which went around the room he made out that Vittoria's suggestion was seconded by all.

He himself seemed to have no more doubt; but he granted this request.

He sat down, at the same time addressing one of the officers.

"Escort him there," he said, "and let him look for himself!"

There was no need for the troopers to lead the prisoner; Vittoria had sprung forward and bounded out of the room. Wild with anxiety, she dashed through one corridor after another, until at last she came to the fatal door.

It was open, and she sprang inside, followed by a number of the courtiers.

**This story began in the July issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.*

As she entered they halted and watched her anxiously. As for the girl, she rushed about the place, half wild with dread.

But a single glance was enough to show her that the sword was, for a fact, not in the room. She turned with a cry of dismay.

As she did so, however, it occurred to her to consider the relative positions of Tito and Malatesta at the moment when the furious general had flung the sword hilt at his opponent's head.

Vittoria had been a witness of the event, and as she recollected that Tito had been in the very act of retreating through the open doorway, she darted into the next room, where she gave one glance about her and then started back with a cry of delight.

"Here it is!" she called out. "Come and see it!"

A dozen men had bounded forward at her cry; following the direction of her trembling finger, they saw the precious sword hilt.

It must have gone through the doorway with terrific force, for it had stuck in the paneling at the other side of the room, where it had remained, the jagged edge driven fully an inch into the wood.

Her heart beating with delight, Vittoria sprang forward and snatched it down.

Then she whirled about and darted toward the door again.

"Quick!" she cried. "To Galeazzo!"

And with the soldiers and the court officers following, she hurried back to the dining hall.

All were awaiting her in anxious suspense.

With an exclamation of triumph she raised the sword in the air, and as she did so a cheer went up from every one in the place.

Even Galeazzo seemed pleased at the final result.

He turned to one of his court officers.

"Was it in the room?" he inquired, "or is this another trick?"

Every one testified to the fact, and then Galeazzo took the weapon.

He tried to open the secret spring, but he was unable to do so. Vittoria then volunteered; but though she had seen Malatesta do it, she, too, failed.

This difficulty was one which was more easily overcome, however. One of the Germans came forward, and after receiving a nod of permission from Galeazzo, seized the precious hilt.

He went to one side of the room, where he laid it out on the hearth; there, raising his broad axe in the air, with a single blow he chopped the hilt in half and held up the fragments in his hand.

The papers inside were given to Galeazzo, and he examined them carefully; they were all documents showing Malatesta's treachery, one of them being the precious despatch.

And Galeazzo read:

"Have attacked Bologna; can take the city at any time now. No reinforcements needed. Sforza."

At last the duke was convinced. Vittoria was so overcome by her long suspense that she almost fainted.

But though her relief was greater than can be described, her task was not yet fully accomplished.

Again she darted forward with an anxious plea.

"He is in the torture chamber!" she cried. "Save him!"

These words caused Galeazzo to start nervously.

"Sure enough," he muttered under his breath.

And he turned and gave a hasty command to one of his officers.

"Be quick!" he added. "Don't lose a second."

Vittoria's sharp eyes had noticed the look on Galeazzo's face; the tyrant actually seemed conscience stricken for a moment.

A dreadful conviction came to the girl.

"He is being tortured! I know it!" she cried. "Is it not true?"

Galeazzo did not answer, but from his look Vittoria saw that she had guessed the awful truth.

She turned white, and reeled where she stood.

"Too late!" she murmured. "He is dead!"

This possibility had been haunting Vittoria all through her long ride and during her desperate effort to save her brother, yet now that she finally learned the fact, it was almost more than she could endure.

She would certainly have lost her senses if it had not been for one all powerful thought which controlled her —that she must keep the secret of her disguise.

She clutched at the side of the wall, holding herself erect, but staring about the room with a look of horror on her face.

There was no one in the room who was not impressed by her suffering. Galeazzo bit his lip nervously.

Meanwhile dead silence prevailed; every one was waiting for the return of the messenger.

The suspense was long, almost unbearable. Vittoria stood gasping for breath, longing for definite news, yet dreading it. While the messenger was away, there was faint hope at least.

Galeazzo was pacing up and down within the limits of his circle of soldiers, twitching his hands impatiently; his daughter had shrunk back from him, as if in horror at what he had done.

Suddenly the tense silence was broken by the sound of footsteps approaching, and evidently on a run.

Every one bent forward; Vittoria clutched the portières by her side.

It was but an instant or two more before the messenger appeared.

Galeazzo sprang back with a cry anxiety he could no longer conceal.

"Well?" he demanded.

There was an instant of silence; every eye was fixed on the messenger; then there came a subdued murmur of horror, running around the apartment.

The man was slowly shaking his head; the meaning was plain to every one; even Galeazzo seemed horrified.

"Impossible!" he cried.

But the man once more shook his head.

"Too late!" he said. "He is dead!"

A shrill scream rang through the place, as Vittoria tottered and fell senseless to the floor.

Several sprang forward and raised the helpless form, for even the heartless courtiers of that corrupt palace seemed awed by the terrible event.

When Galeazzo spoke again his voice was low and husky.

"Go down once more," he said to the messenger, "and bring up Ben Ali."

The man turned and once more left the room.

In the mean time some one was flinging water in Vittoria's face to restore her to consciousness; and the girl finally opened her eyes and gazed about her dazedly. Again her first thought was to struggle free and stagger to her feet.

In two or three minutes more the messenger came back again. Following him was a strange figure, at which the occupants of the room gazed in awe.

Evidently, they had never seen him before; and the man himself was looking about with a half frightened, half defiant expression.

It was none other than the savage Turk, the chief inquisitor of Galeazzo's torture chamber. If possible, he was a more repulsive looking object than ever in the glare of light.

As he caught sight of Galeazzo he came towards him; he did not understand a word of Italian, but an interpreter was summoned, and Galeazzo put the question as to what had become of Bentivogli.

The man narrated the facts in a few words.

"He was not tortured," he said. "In some way he succeeded in getting his

hands and feet free; then he killed himself."

"But are you sure he is dead?" asked Galeazzo eagerly.

"According to your grace's orders in such cases," was the reply, "his head was cut off."

A shudder ran round the room, and Galeazzo paused for a minute or two, irresolutely.

For the first time the man's iron resolution seemed to have failed him. He was appalled at the consequences of his own rage.

"Are you sure it is the right one?" he cried helplessly. A moment later he added, "Bring the body up."

There was another delay of several minutes, during which several women rose and left the room, having already witnessed enough of the unpleasant scene. Vittoria turned away and hid her eyes in horror.

When finally the door was opened again and the Turk returned, he was followed by two of the German soldiers, bearing a litter.

It was Galeazzo himself who stepped forward and raised the cloth which covered the body.

Every eye was upon him as he did so, but Vittoria still kept her face buried in her hands, unable to gaze upon the dreadful scene.

There was a second or two of silence; then suddenly came an unexpected turn of affairs.

Galeazzo sprang back with a cry which caused Vittoria to turn in amazement.

"It is not he!" he cried. "It is the wrong one!"

Those were days when people were used to bloodshed in its most horrible forms; Galeazzo was not inclined to be squeamish, and before the entire assembly he lifted the head of the unfortunate prisoner.

"It is Vincentio," he cried, "the secretary who tried to poison me! He was sent down two days ago."

Vittoria had never heard of the man, but a single glance at the face was enough to show her that it was indeed not her brother.

"Oh, perhaps it is not yet too late!" she gasped. "Quick!"

Galeazzo whirled about toward Ben Ali.

"You have made a mistake," he cried. "This is not the man I mean."

When the sentence was translated a look of amazement crossed the Turk's face.

"This is the one that was sent to me this afternoon," he answered.

He reiterated his statement in spite of Galeazzo's denial; evidently there had been an error somewhere, but no one could imagine how it occurred.

"Did you put him in a cell with any one else?" demanded the duke.

Ben Ali hesitated for a moment, and then he answered in the negative.

"There was only a dead body," he said, "a man who was killed two days ago."

That offered no explanation to the mystery.

"Are you sure he was dead, though?" cried the duke.

"Most certainly your grace. He has been buried in the vault!"

"Find the body!" Galeazzo commanded, "and bring it here also!"

It was a gruesome scene which was being enacted in the diningroom of the palace, and was as little to the taste of the duke as any one else, but he was now determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

Again there came another long wait, during which Vittoria's breast was torn by varying emotions of hope and despair.

At last, the same door was opened, and Ben Ali returned with still another litter borne by two soldiers.

As they came in, the Turk raised the sheet with which the body was covered.

"This is the one!" exclaimed Galeazzo.

And sure enough, it was Tito who

was exposed to view, stretched out upon the bier.

There was a long and terrible silence, during which Galeazzo gazed on the face of his faithful secretary remorsefully, and then he turned away, shaking his head.

"Yes," he said, "it is too late. God help him."

Ben Ali stepped suddenly forward.

"Your grace," he demanded, "is this the man you wanted?"

The question was answered in the affirmative.

"But," protested the other, "this man has been dead for two days!"

"You fool!" muttered Galeazzo, angrily. "You have made a mistake; you never saw this man until today. And I only wish you had never seen him at all!"

Probably no one had ever heard such a confession from the lips of the remorseless tyrant before.

There was a subdued hush in the room; it was broken suddenly by a wild cry from Vittoria.

She had at last had courage enough to turn and take one glance at the remains of her unfortunate brother. As she saw the white face she tottered forward with agonized and incoherent exclamations and flung herself down on his bier, sobbing violently.

Again there was an awed silence, for every one respected the grief of the friend of the deceased. Galeazzo bowed his head.

The sounds of Vittoria's weeping were all that were audible for a time, then so startling and unexpected a thing occurred that one scarcely knows how to describe it.

The effect of it was to throw the room in the wildest confusion. The courtiers and officers bounded to their feet, and Galeazzo staggered back as if he had been shot.

For suddenly, and without an instant's warning, the figure upon the bier had risen to a sitting posture! It was indeed Tito in the flesh. He gave one glance about him, and then stepped out upon the floor.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WAY TO ESCAPE AND A SETBACK.

It was only when Galeazzo's voice was heard above the wild confusion shouting for silence that the courtiers managed to restrain their exclamations of astonishment.

The duke went up to the young man who had been so miraculously restored to him.

"Tell me," he cried, "in Heaven's name, how did this happen?"

Tito did not answer until he had led his sister to a seat at one side; and then he came back and faced the duke.

"It is very easily explained, your grace," he said.

"Then tell me!" gasped the other. "I had given you up as lost!"

"I had given myself up!" answered Tito. "In the first place," he added, "will you please tell me what has caused your change of mind?"

"You owe it all to your friend here," was the answer. "He has saved your life for the second time; he has succeeded in convincing us of your real loyalty to us; and you may rest assured that it will be appreciated."

Tito was of course unable to guess how his sister had performed this miracle. But he had presence of mind enough not to show his amazement.

"I knew that your grace would find out," he said. "But I feared it would be too late."

"I feared it *was* too late," returned Galeazzo. "But go on! Tell me the story!"

"I was carried down into your grace's dungeons," began Tito, "and flung into a cell. I was bound hand and foot, but I succeeded in cutting the rope that bound my hands by wearing it against the rough stone; and so I got free."

"Go on!" cried the duke.

"I had noticed a coffin as I came into the cell, with a dead body lying in it. The trick I tried was a very simple one, so simple that I had no hope of its succeeding; but I determined to make an attempt——"

Here Tito paused, as if the thought of his dreadful peril was too much for him. But Galeazzo made an impatient gesture.

"Go on!" he cried again.

"I took the body out of the casket," said Tito hurriedly, "and stretched it out on the floor; then I covered myself up in its place. In about half an hour two men entered the room, picked up the casket, and carried me away to one of the vaults; I was locked in.

"I had no hope of getting out until a few moments ago, when the door was opened again; and I had scarcely time to spring back into the coffin before I was carried up to this room. I of course lay quiet until I made out from what I heard that I was no longer the subject of your grace's anger!"

There was an eager murmur as this strange story was concluded.

Galeazzo was so much impressed with Tito's quick wittedness and so delighted with the sudden turn of affairs, that he reached out and shook his secretary by the hand.

"Truly," he cried, "your escape has been providential! And let me assure you that the loyalty with which you have served me will not be forgotten."

Tito bowed. Then he once more turned toward his sister, who was gazing at him in admiration and delight.

Every one was discussing the exciting series of incidents; and probably would have discussed them for the next two or three hours, if there had not come a sudden interruption.

Outside there was a sound of galloping hoofs. Then was heard a hail and a parleying at the gate of the castle. And a minute or two later an officer hurried into the room.

"A message from Bologna, your grace," he announced.

Galeazzo gave a start of delight.

"Bring it in instantly!" he cried.

Both Tito and his sister had heard the words; and they were fully as much interested and excited as the duke himself.

There was a minute or two of anxious waiting, and then the messenger was led into the room; he was hot and dusty, and flecked with the foam from his horse.

He hurried toward the duke, and passed in through the cordon of Germans a letter which Galeazzo seized and read eagerly.

Tito was watching him with keen anxiety. He could not forbear a smile of pleasure as he saw Galeazzo's action.

For a look of the fiercest rage suddenly swept over the duke's face; he muttered a wild oath and gritted his teeth, and at the same time crumpled the paper in his hands and flung it to the floor.

"What is the matter, your grace?" cried one of his chief officers, stepping forward.

Galeazzo's voice rose to a perfect shriek as he answered.

"Another attack on Bologna has failed," he cried, "and the reinforcements are within a day of the city! And what is worse, Bentivogli has killed Cardinal Camillo and flung his escort into a dungeon!"

Few in the room knew the full significance of that last piece of news; but Tito and his sister realized it, and their hearts bounded with delight.

That was one plot at any rate which they had succeeded in baffling.

Galeazzo was pacing up and down the room, clenching his hands and exhibiting all the signs of wrath which he had shown before to Bentivogli.

Those in the room were awed into silence, gazing at him in dread. Then suddenly he whirled about, and shouted to one of his officers.

"Send word to Milan," he cried. "The army will start for Bologna at sunrise!"

Then the furious man turned and gazed about him.

"Clear the room!" he ordered. "Clear the room!"

The order was obeyed promptly, and every one turned to leave. Tito rose, with his sister.

They were among the last to go out, and had just reached the door when suddenly Galeazzo's voice was heard again.

"Lorenzo Vecci will remain," he said; "I wish to speak to him."

Tito gave a start, and gazed at his sister with a look of alarm. But there was nothing he could do; there was no opposing Galeazzo's commands.

Vittoria was exceedingly curious to know what the duke would have to say to her, but she stood at one side, waiting with bowed head until Galeazzo's ebullition of wrath should pass.

He was still pacing up and down the room like a tiger at bay.

"How can the scoundrel have found it out?" he exclaimed again and again. "He must have known, or he would not have dared to murder Camillo. My plans are all ruined, and Bologna still not taken!"

Then he whirled about and stepped close to the supposed young man; he was silent for a minute or two, and then suddenly spoke. There was no one to hear him, but he lowered his voice instinctively.

"Do you want to make a fortune for yourself?" he whispered.

Vittoria gave a start, and then gazed at him inquiringly.

"What does your grace mean?" she demanded.

Galeazzo spoke nervously and rapidly.

"There is a chance for some one to make a fortune and earn my life long gratitude," he cried. "I want some one who has courage, and is willing to risk his life. You have shown that you are such a person."

Vittoria bowed and waited anxiously.

"Listen," went on the despot; "I have an enemy, a deadly enemy whom I hate beyond telling; do you know whom I mean?"

The girl hesitated, but the other went on without waiting for her to reply.

"I mean that fiend who governs Bologna," he cried. "He has foiled all my plans, and ruined everything! He must be killed! He shall be killed!"

And Galeazzo muttered an oath, again clenching his hands convulsively.

"Do you hear me?" he cried. "Some one has got to kill him! Will you do it?"

As Vittoria heard these words the blood surged to her face and she started back, fairly dazed; she was scarcely able to realize their full import.

"You are startled," Galeazzo went on, "but it must be done! You have the courage and the strength to do it, and it will make your fortune. Will you undertake the task?"

"I hardly understand your grace," stammered the girl.

"Listen," said Galeazzo; "there was a young man here a week ago—Francesca Piccini was his name—and he volunteered to do this very thing. Cardinal Camillo was on his way to Bologna, and he agreed to take this young man with him and help him in the plot. Bentivogli in some way has found it out and thrown them into prison. He has failed; but you will succeed, I know, for you have ten times his nerve. Now listen."

The duke bent forward, whispering eagerly into Vittoria's ear.

"If you do it," he said, "you shall be the Duke of Bologna yourself!"

It was little wonder that Vittoria was taken aback by these words; but she had already shown that she possessed rare presence of mind, and it did not fail her now.

As she grasped what this extraordinary proposition really meant to her, her brain was fairly in a whirl.

To be sent to Bologna with Galeazzo's safe conduct! Surely a more glorious opportunity could not have

been desired! Vittoria's mind was made up in an instant.

Galeazzo was leaning forward, clenching and unclenching his hands anxiously and gazing at her with his narrow, piercing eyes.

"Will you do it?" he demanded; "dare you do it?"

The girl's answer was prompt and decided.

"Yes," she cried, "I will undertake the task."

Galeazzo seized her by the hand.

"I knew it!" he said, "I knew it! Come, we will arrange everything immediately."

He hurried across the room to a sofa, beckoning his fellow conspirator to join him there.

"There is only one more thing necessary to arrange," the duke went on; "we must devise some plan for you to get into Bentivogli's presence; then you may either stab him or poison him, I don't care which. If he is dead within a week after you get inside, the prize is yours; you shall be Duke of Bologna for life."

"Not a very long life, I fancy," thought Vittoria.

But she kept this to herself, and looked pleased.

"But how am I to get in?" she inquired.

"That is what we must arrange," said Galeazzo. "Can you suggest anything?"

As it proved, Vittoria could indeed suggest something; she had to think over the matter a minute or two, however, Galeazzo in the mean time gazing at her intently.

There was only one thing which caused her anxiety in leaving Marignano Castle, and that was the safety of her brother. Any plan which was adopted must include him, and as the thought flashed over her it brought the solution of the problem with it.

"Yes, your grace," she cried, "I have it; let John of Salisbury go with me!"

Galeazzo looked surprised and puzzled.

"But why should John of Salisbury go?" he asked.

"We can easily arrange that," she rejoined. "The letter—the letter which he brought to you from Richard Plantagenet!"

On hearing that Galeazzo bounded to his feet.

"You have it! The very thing!" he exclaimed. "I have men in my court who can easily alter the letter so that it will seem to be to Bentivogli instead of to me!"

"Exactly," cried Vittoria, "and you can arrange it so that we can succeed in getting past Sforza into Bologna. John of Salisbury will take me, and I will do the work!"

Galeazzo began pacing up and down the room, chuckling with triumph.

"It shall be done!" he cried; "it shall be done tomorrow, as sure as I am alive. I will give you letters to Sforza explaining everything!"

He went to his desk, and wrote a few hasty lines.

"You have one safe conduct already," he said, "but this will be for you and John of Salisbury too."

Vittoria glanced at the bit of paper, her blood fairly leaping with delight. For the powers which it gave were almost boundless.

The two were to be allowed to pass any of Galeazzo's guards, and to have full aid in anything they might require.

Truly it would have been hard to see how the girl could have secured a more absolute victory over her father's remorseless enemy; and she could not restrain her impatience to tell the news to her brother.

Galeazzo did not detain her much longer, for he was anxious to see about the doctoring of Richard Plantagenet's letter; he therefore told Vittoria that she might retire, and called to his officers to return.

The girl hurried to her brother's apartment.

She found Tito waiting anxiously for her return, and paused only long enough to make sure that there was no one about to hear their whispered conversation, then she triumphantly produced her safe conduct from Galeazzo.

In a few words she told her brother of the almost incredible errand upon which she was to be sent.

"There is nothing to stop us now," she added.

Tito assented joyfully.

"I have accomplished everything I can by remaining in Marignano," he said. "After father's reinforcements arrive I do not think it likely that Sforza will succeed in taking the city."

The two spent some time in discussing the situation, and finally concluded that there was nothing more to be done.

"It is probable that by this time the letter I gave Malatesta has reached Sforza," said Tito, "so that he is on his way back to Milan in obedience to the order. It is especially important that I should be off before that news reaches here."

"But the letter will have been sent by Malatesta," interposed Vittoria; "no one will know that it came from your hand."

"Yes, they will," said Tito, "for Galeazzo knows my handwriting by this time; and I made no attempt to disguise it, for I expected to be away from Marignano long before he got any news. When Sforza brings that letter back there will be an awakening here."

"That is so," assented his sister. "All I have to wait for now is for that letter of the Englishman's to be doctored by the duke's men."

But so great was Tito's anxiety that he proposed to leave without it.

"We have the safe conduct," he said, "and we can get horses and ride faster than any of the duke's messengers. I do not think we ought to remain here longer than is absolutely necessary."

There was much to be said, pro and con, on that subject; but though Tito had no suspicion of the truth, it was to be some time before he had such another opportunity to make his escape.

The two were uncertain, however, as to which would be the best course, for there was a chance of awakening Galeazzo's suspicions by a sudden departure.

Presently Tito set to work to calculate the time it would take a messenger to reach Sforza and return.

"About eight hours each way by Galeazzo's post!" he exclaimed. "In that case word might come tonight!"

And that ended the discussion.

"We will leave at once," said Tito; "decidedly it would be a greater risk to wait for that letter."

They knew that they would have no difficulty in getting out of the castle with the pass which Galeazzo had given Vittoria, and accordingly they waited for no preparations, but hurried out of the apartment.

But they found to their dismay that they had discussed the matter too long; the golden opportunity had passed and they had not seized it. Now an unexpected barrier had suddenly arisen.

As Tito opened the door which led into the hall he heard footsteps coming down the corridor, and a moment later saw an officer with two men marching toward him.

The man approached until he was opposite the door, and then he halted and bowed.

"I have a message for Signor Vecci," he said.

Vittoria started.

"What is it?" she asked weakly.

"The Lady Olivia desires your immediate attendance upon her."

Vittoria was struck half dumb with consternation.

"Me?" she cried. "Impossible!"

"Your name is Lorenzo Vecci, is it not?" demanded the officer. "It is for you I have come."

Vittoria gazed helplessly at her brother, who promptly stepped forward.

"It will be impossible for the young

man to go now," he said; "he has just received an important commission from the duke."

And with the words Tito turned with his sister, and was about to hurry down the hall; but he was not to get away so easily.

The officer's polite manner changed abruptly.

"Halt!" he commanded.

And as the two turned and stared at him he stepped forward.

"When you are more familiar with the usages of this court," he said, "you will be aware that when the Lady Olivia issues a command she wishes it to be obeyed without hesitation. My orders are to escort Signor Vecci to her presence at once!"

Tito would have argued further, but he saw from the man's manner that there was no putting him off; and he dared not threaten an appeal to Galeazzo.

He was completely nonplussed, and was obliged to stand aside and silently watch his sister led away.

"I do not think there is anything to fear," Vittoria whispered in English as she passed him. "The Lady Olivia helped me not a little."

But this was cold comfort to Tito; for he dreaded every minute's delay.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DREADED MESSAGE COMES.

THERE was nothing left for Tito to do except to go back to his room and shut the door. Flinging himself down in a chair with an exclamation of annoyance, he prepared to wait for his sister's return.

At the same time he was racking his brain to think of any possible explanation of the strange incident; not having been present at the time of Lady Olivia's interference in Vittoria's behalf, he had no clue to the mystery, and gave it up in despair.

His impatience increased minute by minute as the girl failed to return; several times he got up and went to the door and opened it to listen, but there were no sounds of her coming.

It was late at night by this time, and the great castle had sunk into quiet. The silence was exceedingly oppressive to Bentivogli, and his impatience grew greater and greater.

Hours passed by, and still his sister failed to return, while the young man paced back and forth, unable to sleep, and quite incapable of remaining quiet.

He went to the window and gazed out upon the scene; a brilliant moon was shining upon the high wall of the castle and upon the courtyard within, casting strange shadows on the pavement.

The trees in the distance were waving in the night breeze, and a number of sentries could be seen pacing the wall; but otherwise there was no sign of life or motion.

Wearying of the scene, Bentivogli would turn and hurry out into the hall again, and begin anxiously to pace up and down there.

At last he could stand it no longer, and he determined to set out to hunt her up; he knew where the women's apartments were—in one of the high towers at the northern side of the fortress.

He hurried through the various halls and climbed several flights of stairs.

He passed a number of sentries, but they all knew him, and so none interfered. He soon reached the entrance of the place he was seeking.

To the Germans who there barred his way he finally managed to explain his purpose, and one of them opened the heavy iron door and went in with his message.

Bentivogli was by this time fairly desperate, and ready to take any risk in order to find out what had become of Vittoria.

He paced up and down, waiting anxiously for about ten minutes; then the soldier returned and shut the door.

"The Lady Olivia will not be disturbed," was the only reply he would vouchsafe.

And Tito was compelled to turn away in despair.

He made his way back to his own apartments again, which he found still silent and deserted. Vittoria had not returned to them.

He paced up and down his rooms throughout the entire night, suffering the most intense anxiety, every minute expecting to hear outside the sound of horses and a hail to tell him that the dreaded messenger from Sforza had arrived at the castle.

He knew that when it did, all would be up with him; however, he put away all thought of flight without his sister, for he would never be willing to leave her in Galeazzo's hands.

Finally, from sheer exhaustion, he fell into a doze, from which he did not awaken until the first rays of dawn were streaming into the room.

His first thought was of Vittoria, and he sprang to his feet, gazing about anxiously; but still there was no sign of her. Tito was fairly desperate.

With the return of day the castle was soon once more the scene of bustling activity; as Tito gazed out of the window he saw the troopers hurrying this way and that, and from the sounds of excitement he judged that preparations of some kind were being made.

He had an idea of what was going on, and he soon found that his guess was correct.

Every one seemed to be about and moving much earlier than usual. And before long a messenger hurried in to him.

"The duke desires your presence," was the announcement.

Bentivogli hurried into the audience chamber, where he found Galeazzo already up and surrounded by his Germans.

He soon learned what was wanted of him; it was Galeazzo's intention to review his troops as they passed on the road out from Milan, and he of course required the attention of his suite.

Extensive preparations were found necessary for so important a journey, and it was an hour or two longer before the expedition was under way.

A report had come in that Malatesta's troopers had ridden eastward, and were by this time a long distance from Marignano, and there seemed accordingly nothing more to be feared from them.

But Galeazzo was as cautious as usual in spite of this fact, and an escort of fully two or three thousand men was found necessary for his expedition.

It appeared that this was the first time the despot had ventured outside of Marignano since he had left the city of Milan.

"It is something after all to be a private citizen, without a hundred dukedoms to govern," thought Tito.

He was compelled to accompany the party, in spite of his reluctance to do so. He did not venture to ask Galeazzo's assistance in the search for his sister, for it would not do for him to show any distrust of the duke's daughter.

From one of the windows of the castle Tito watched a large body of troops from Milan approach and draw up on both sides of the entrance, after which a large force of the duke's German bodyguard passed over the lowered drawbridge.

Then he hurried down and joined the despot himself, with a large train of officers and attendants. Last of all there came a rear guard of fully as many of the Germans, and the entire body took up its march down the dark avenue through the forest.

Again the drawbridge was raised, and Marignano Castle lapsed into silence.

Bentivogli glanced up as he passed. He saw a number of faces in the women's portion of the fortress, but nothing of the Lady Olivia.

The trip which followed interested

Bentivogli very little, for he was too much troubled to notice what was going on about him.

He was certain that a messenger from Sforza must arrive soon and precipitate a calamity. And after that what was to become of him and Vittoria he dared not think.

That Galeazzo was nervous during his journey was evident to all; he was riding a splendid horse, but he had two squires to lead it. And he kept himself surrounded by a large force of his Germans on both sides of the road, and even then was gazing about him apprehensively.

It was only vanity and love of display which induced him to venture out to see his great army march away to the conquest of Bologna; for Galeazzo himself had never been known to lead his troops to battle. All his fighting was done by hired generals, and the duke ruled by the power of his brain alone.

The long cavalcade soon emerged from the forest and climbed the hill from which they were to obtain the view they desired.

Altogether there was a journey of only about five miles before they reached the road running south from Milan, and on the top of the hill Galeazzo halted.

It was a splendid scene which had suddenly come into view, brilliant enough, in fact, to make even Tito forget for the time his anxiety.

In the distance shone the gilded towers of Milan, and from the city stretched a broad road, which was fairly alive with hurrying troops.

The march of the army had begun an hour or two before, and as far as the eye could see the winding road was a mass of dazzling colors.

It stretched away until it disappeared in the valley several miles distant; and far in the opposite direction from the gates of the city the long train still issued forth, with waving flags and pennons.

It was a gaily colored and richly arrayed host, comprising soldiers of every description known in those days.

There were splendid knights, in burnished armor, and long trains of archers, with their cross bows over their shoulders.

There were companies of light armed infantry, and trains of men carrying axes to be used in attacking the city's walls.

Interspersed in the passing array were lines of white covered wagons in double file carrying the supplies for the great host.

Directly below, down the side of the hill, the troops passed within a quarter of a mile of the duke and his escort. As they recognized from his banners who it was on the hilltop, the crowds of soldiers cheered wildly, and after that the march was one long ovation.

As the different companies rode by, the officers turned and galloped up the hill to present their respects to their commander.

Galeazzo had learned caution, however, from the recent revolt, and not one of them succeeded in getting within yards of him; the impassive Germans were a living wall about him.

Tito's heart sank as he realized that all this magnificent host was destined to do battle against his own beloved city; truly, it seemed as if such an array must be invincible, for it appeared that the long train would have no end.

For an hour or two the party stood upon the hill, watching the host pass, and always as the different companies disappeared in the distance, others emerged from the city to take their place.

To be sure, they were not all fighting men, for in those days it was customary for a second army of camp followers to be taken along, usually outnumbering the fighting contingent.

But all helped to swell the grand total, and to raise the spirits of Galeazzo's party. They cheered until they were breathless; the sun rose to the

mid heavens and beat down upon them, but still they stood there, watching the train come out from the seemingly inexhaustible city.

But at last the time came when even Galeazzo's pride was satisfied, and he wearied of the sight; every one was relieved when he suddenly gave the order to turn back to Marignano.

Galeazzo, with his bodyguard, was making his way down the hill, when his progress was suddenly checked.

Some one of his officers was heard to give a cry, and was seen to point excitedly. A murmur ran through the crowd, as every one turned and looked in the direction indicated.

Galeazzo at the first sound had shrunk back with his usual signs of terror, but he plucked up courage when he saw what was the cause of the excitement.

The army in its march completely blocked the broad highway. It was seen, however, that one horseman was struggling to make his way in the opposite direction.

He had not been noticed until suddenly, finding it impossible to force his way through by the road, he urged his horse into the bushes, and started to gallop across country.

As he was making his way toward the duke he rose in his saddle, waved his hat, and there came above the sound of hoofs a faint cry.

Galeazzo halted, he and all his party watching the rider. "Evidently a messenger," was the word.

It was Tito most of all that the sight concerned.

At the very first cry he had started, knowing just what it meant. Beyond a doubt the crisis had come—for it was the messenger from Bologna!

And so it proved. Nearer and nearer swept the horseman, urging his foam covered steed up the hill.

Presently he was heard to cry:

"From Sforza!"

Galeazzo, half wild with impatience, rushed to meet him.

For once he was forgetful of his caution, for he knew that if Sforza sent a messenger so soon after the other one it must be because of some important event.

A second or two later the man had reached the top of the hill; he reined in his exhausted animal, and handed a despatch to the nearest of the Germans.

It was eagerly seized by Galeazzo, who tore it open with nervous haste.

Every one was watching him, and as for Tito, his heart was fairly in his throat.

Nor were his fears allayed as he saw the effect of that message upon the duke; it was almost indescribable.

Galeazzo had exhibited rage at the previous despatch. But it was nothing to this; he glanced at the letter, and then for an instant stood gazing in front of him with a look of blank consternation on his face.

He was dazed, and gasping for breath. Then suddenly, with an incoherent oath, he turned to the messenger.

"In heaven's name," he shrieked, "what does this mean?"

"Your grace," was the man's reply, "how do I know? I do not even know what is in the despatch."

"But what is going on at Bologna?" yelled Galeazzo.

Without waiting for the man to reply the duke opened the paper again and stared at it; several of his officers cried out to know what was the matter, and Galeazzo panted out the words:

"According to your orders have abandoned siege; army is on the way to Milan. Sforza."

Galeazzo repeated these words in a perfect howl of rage; then crumpling the despatch in his hands, he looked up and stared about him at his officers and attendants.

They in turn were gazing at him with open eyes and mouths; a more utterly amazed crowd it would not be possible to depict.

It is not necessary to describe Gale-

azzo's fearful ravings during the next half hour; the man was like a maniac.

He turned once more to the messenger and demanded to know what was happening, and the man finally stammered out the story.

It appeared that a messenger had arrived post haste from Marignano, and immediately after receiving his orders, Sforza had called off all his troops and set out under forced march for Milan, leaving the citizens of Bologna rejoicing wildly over their victory.

As Galeazzo listened to this it seemed that he was fairly out of his senses; his first action was to shriek out a command to one of his officers, in accordance with which the unfortunate messenger was dragged from his horse and hurried away to prison.

The rest of his attendants were trembling in terror. The only one of them who was at all in possession of his senses was Tito, who was indeed wild with delight, for he had scarcely hoped for so extraordinary a success as this. He had foiled Galeazzo this time, for a fact!

"In heaven's name, what can it mean?" shrieked the frenzied man. "Who sent him orders? I sent him none! The man must be out of his mind to obey such a message!"

At first the duke was too much beside himself to think of anything to do, but finally he yelled for a messenger, and to the officer who came forward he shouted a command which caused him to turn and ride down the hill, lashing his horse into a furious gallop.

"To Bologna!" roared Galeazzo. "Tell Sforza to send his army back to the siege, and to ride here post haste. And tell him to bring that message! I will find out who wrote it, and tear his eyes out with my own hands!"

No one dared address the enraged man during the return to Marignano. He set out hastily with his escort, all the way muttering furiously to himself and biting his lips until the blood flowed.

As for Tito, he had secured a new lease of life; the messenger had come, but had brought no evidence to convict him.

Yet the young man knew that his hours were numbered now; Sforza's return would be the signal for the final crash.

CHAPTER XIX.

A ROADSIDE INCIDENT.

AFTER descending the hill the long cavalcade passed across a broad stretch of open country. Along the roadside were the wretched hovels of the peasants, and once or twice half starved faces could be seen peering out at the passing troops.

They were people who seemed to belong to a different race than Galeazzo's splendid party, for they were burned black by the sun, and starved almost to shadows.

Theirs seemed more like the faces of wild beasts than of human beings, but Galeazzo's troopers paid no attention to them.

But there was one way which the peasants had of bringing all their wretchedness and misery home to those splendid courtiers.

The duke was passing a hovel which seemed, if possible, more wretched than the others; the roof had almost fallen in, and the walls were nearly hidden with moss and weeds.

From the broken door of this building suddenly appeared a figure. It was that of a woman, only half covered by her ragged clothing—such a hideous figure that one would not care to describe it—swollen and black with a loathsome disease.

As the passing cavalcade caught sight of it, there was instantly a cry of terror.

"The plague! The plague!"

Every one turned in horror and shrank back, but they were too late, for the woman had only a few steps to take to reach the roadside.

She was clutching in her arms the body of an infant, and there was a look of agony on her wretched face.

She must have recognized Galeazzo, for it was toward him she was tottering.

"Mercy!" she shrieked in a wild, piercing voice. "Have mercy, for we are dying!"

Galeazzo gave a cry of horror.

"Stop her! Stop her!" he yelled.

The stolid Germans would have faced anything but that; they gave way on either side, and an instant later the woman had reached the side of Galeazzo.

The duke was perfectly white with terror.

"Back! back!" he screamed.

But the woman was desperate; she flung herself forward, and as she fell clutched Galeazzo's foot.

"Food!" she gasped again, in a choking voice.

Galeazzo was wild with fear. As Tito saw what he was about to do, he sprang forward with a cry, but there was no time for him to interfere.

The duke had whipped his sword from its scabbard, and with a single blow struck the woman dead at his feet. Then, tearing himself free from her grasp, he forced his horse back among the crowd of awe struck attendants.

Galeazzo was the picture of fright, seeming scarcely able to keep his seat in the saddle. But though he reeled and clutched the bridle convulsively, no one came forward to aid him.

His soldiers shrank from him as from a thing accursed; it was not the deed which he had done; it was the dreaded plague!

Galeazzo at once noticed the move to avoid him, and his fear gave place to fury.

Again he broke out into his dreadful curses, while the entire party stood gazing at him in dread, but still no one ventured near. And when at last the march was once more taken up toward Marignano Castle, he rode as if in a charmed circle.

The man himself was a sight to inspire awe; he was quivering in every limb, and he crouched in the saddle as if anxious to hide from sight.

No one who is not familiar with the fearful character of the dreaded pestilence which ravaged Italy in those days can form any idea of the man's feelings.

All his exclusiveness, and all his watchfulness, and all his wealth had at last availed him nothing; the frightful pestilence had laid its skeleton hand upon him.

As he rode on, he seemed to those who accompanied him like a man who had been struck down by a judgment from heaven. And so it was in absolute silence that the party approached the castle once more.

The great drawbridge creaked dismally as it was lowered, and Galeazzo slunk away to his apartments, still trembling and still cursing his frightened courtiers.

As for Tito, he entered Marignano with a heavy load upon his mind. The situation in which he found himself was in deed an unpleasant one; he had but one thing before him, and that was to find his sister, but how to set about it, he had not the slightest idea.

There was no time to be lost. The young man's hours were numbered now, and at the end was the certain penalty of death unless he could get away before discovery.

Tito calculated as nearly as possible how long a time he might have; it had been about eight in the morning when the messenger started, and Tito allowed him seven hours to reach Sforza, and a corresponding time for the general to return.

Some time in the evening, accordingly, the climax of his adventures was due to arrive. It was just that much time that Tito had to find Vittoria.

As soon as he was able to get away from the train of courtiers, he made his way through the castle over the same course he had followed on the previous night, and in a short time he reached the

entrance to the apartments of the Lady Olivia, where he again presented to the soldiers on guard a request for admittance, and this time it was with more success.

The young man was kept waiting for several minutes in an anteroom, his heart beating with anxiety; then the soldier returned and announced that the Lady Olivia would see him.

The rooms through which Tito was escorted were fitted up in magnificent style.

He passed through several broad apartments, and finally came to a door at which the soldier knocked.

A voice bade him enter, and the man opened the door and stepped aside to allow his companion to pass in.

Tito entered, and found himself in the presence of Galeazzo's beautiful daughter.

She was reclining upon a couch, with several of her maids standing near.

She was a tall, graceful girl, with raven black hair which strayed over her shoulders.

As the young man entered she raised her eyes languidly and gazed at him.

Tito bowed, and then waited.

"What is it?" the Lady Olivia demanded, after scanning him closely for a moment or two.

"I have come," said Tito, promptly, "to ask you if your ladyship can tell me what has become of my young companion, Lorenzo Vecci; he was to start some time this morning on an important errand for the duke."

Tito watched her anxiously, and saw a look of surprise spread over her face.

"Why, what do you mean?" she exclaimed.

The tone of voice in which the question was asked caused Tito a thrill of alarm. The sudden possibility flashed over him that possibly the Lady Olivia had not sent for Vittoria at all; her name might have been used as a mere trick.

"Did not your ladyship send for him last night?" he asked.

The answer revealed a somewhat different state of affairs.

"Why, yes; but has he not returned?"

Tito started again.

"No," he exclaimed; "I have seen nothing of him since he left me to come to you."

The girl raised herself, with a look of still greater surprise upon her countenance.

"He was not here fifteen minutes," she said. "I sent for him to congratulate him upon his bravery in rescuing you."

"And do you mean that he left you then?" Tito cried.

"Certainly," said the Lady Olivia, "and that is the last I have seen of him. Can it be possible that he has disappeared?"

Tito's anxiety was now so great that he scarcely paused to make a graceful exit from the room.

"I must question the duke," he said, as he turned hurriedly away.

"By all means do," added the girl, "and let me know what has happened."

One possibility flashed over Bentivogli—that Vittoria might have used the safe conduct to make her escape from the castle—but he put that away from him immediately.

"She would never have gone without me!" he told himself. "Something serious has happened beyond a doubt!"

Tito was so anxious that he fairly ran through the corridors, and he soon reached the audience chamber, where he was at once admitted.

It was the hour when Galeazzo was usually busiest, and the room ordinarily crowded with persons bent upon obtaining a hearing.

Now, however, the room was almost deserted.

In the center sat the duke, as usual surrounded by his Germans. A few officers and courtiers were scattered about the room, but there was no one else to be seen.

Evidently the story of Galeazzo's adventure in the course of the morning had become known, and so great was every one's dread of the plague that none had ventured to enter the castle since.

It was noticeable also that even the Germans kept further away than before, but Tito's business was too important for him to consider this, and he hurried across the room and bowed to the duke.

Galeazzo saw the expression of anxiety on his face, and demanded to know what was the matter.

Bentivogli explained in a few words.

"Young Vecci," he said, "disappeared last night, and I have been unable to find anything of him!"

The circumstances were detailed, and a look of annoyance crossed Galeazzo's face.

"I expected to have that letter ready so that he could start in an hour or two!" he exclaimed. "Did he tell you about that?"

"Yes, your grace, he did," answered Tito, "and I was ready to go with him. I cannot conceive what has become of him!"

Galeazzo knit his brow thoughtfully; he was as helpless before the problem as was Bentivogli.

He hastily called an officer, and an inquiry was made which elicited the fact that young Vecci had not passed out of the castle during the night nor at any time since.

"I cannot imagine where he can be," said Galeazzo. "But perhaps he will turn up in the course of the day some time."

And that was all the satisfaction poor Tito could get.

He retired from the audience chamber completely baffled and sick at heart.

He felt completely helpless, but there was one thing he had made up his mind to do, and he stuck to his resolution.

He would not leave Marignano, no matter what the danger to himself might be, without Vittoria!

"She is surely in trouble," Tito reasoned, "and I will stay to the last minute, and if necessary, die with her."

Vittoria had proved faithful to him, and her brother was determined to show himself equally heroic.

There is no describing the agonies of mind he suffered throughout that day, during which he wandered about the castle, able to do nothing and able to think of nothing but the terrible fate which was slowly approaching.

He now began to see that his fate was inevitable. He felt like a man chained to a railroad track; every hour he knew that his doom was sweeping nearer and nearer.

The picture rose before his mind of Sforza and his staff galloping at whirlwind speed in the direction of Marignano, but the long hours wore on, and there was no sign of any tidings.

Several times Tito hurried out into the hall and made his way to the audience chamber, unable to remain by himself any longer; each time, however, he found Galeazzo seated in silent state upon his throne, and each time Bentivogli's question brought the response that there was no news—that nothing had been seen or heard of the missing man.

Galeazzo's court was still deserted, and Tito noticed that the tyrant seemed pale and uneasy; he, of course, knew what was the cause of the strange state of affairs, and could not help but be terrified by it.

It seemed to Tito that a doom was hanging over that gloomy castle; the courtiers and attendants seemed to move around as stealthily as ghosts, conversing with each other in subdued whispers and gazing about them apprehensively, as if they feared some hidden danger.

Not even at night had the great fortress seemed so silent.

Tito was no coward, but to be obliged to idle about the halls of the castle, doing nothing but wait for his fate to strike him down, was enough to unnerve the bravest.

But he still stuck to his resolution—that he would never leave Marignano without his sister.

Finally he found himself counting the minutes that were left him before Sforza must arrive.

CHAPTER XX.

A SCENE OF HORROR.

It was an exceedingly hot and oppressive day, and the air within the heavy walls of the castle seemed to choke Tito.

With all the other inmates of the place, he had the feeling as if the plague were hanging over them, but nothing happened, and the silence about the great castle continued unbroken. It was not until four o'clock in the afternoon that there was even the necessity for lowering the drawbridge.

Bentivogli heard the galloping of horses on the broad avenue, and instantly concluded that his time had come.

He rushed to the window, looked out, and saw to his intense relief that it was not General Sforza, but a messenger.

He had evidently ridden far, for both he and the horse were almost exhausted by the heat, and Bentivogli caught the word "Bologna."

Naturally he was all anxiety, and as the drawbridge came down and the rider hurried across, Tito turned and made his way once more to the room of state, and a minute later the messenger entered.

He was announced by an officer as bringing news from Bologna, and the duke sprang to his feet with an eager exclamation. He began pacing up and down, twitching his fingers, unable to conceal his nervousness and anxiety.

"Have you a despatch?" he cried the moment he saw the man.

"No, your grace," was the answer. "There was no time to write one. But I have terrible news."

Galeazzo turned white.

"What is it?" he panted, hoarsely, "what is it?"

"Bentivogli's reinforcements from Florence and the south arrived," continued the breathless messenger. "Sforza was in full retreat according to your orders——"

"My orders!" shrieked Galeazzo, with a furious oath. "That lie again!"

"Your grace——" protested the man.

"Go on!" yelled the duke in a rage. "Go on! What happened?"

"There was a battle," said the messenger; "Bentivogli came out with his troops, Sforza was beaten, and is in full retreat!"

Tito was by this time quite well accustomed to Galeazzo's bursts of wrath. But this message marked the climax of his reverses, and his rage was in proportion.

The trembling messenger was so terrified that he turned and made his escape from the room.

So infuriated was the duke, however, that he scarcely noticed the man. Forgetting his usual precautions, he burst through his German body guard and tore about the place like a madman.

He raised his clenched hands and hurled out one imprecation after another, at the same time gnashing his teeth wrathfully.

"Oh, if I only could get hold of the man who wrote that message!" he screamed. "It is some one in this court, I know it! Some one has betrayed me, and if I find him—oh, if I find him!"

Tito could not forbear a shudder as he saw this exhibition of rage, and knew that it would all be directed against him when Galeazzo learned the truth.

It only served to deepen his realization of the terrible calamity which was hanging over him. And in fact it was while he was watching this scene that he made up his mind to one thing.

He had a dagger at his side, and he would use it. Never again would he be taken to the duke's torture chamber!

Galeazzo had now apparently but one thought, and that was of the traitor who had sent that message to Sforza—the man who had betrayed him and baffled all his plans.

His courtiers trembled as they heard his imprecations against the guilty one, for none knew but that the tyrant might fasten his suspicions on any one of them.

Galeazzo continued his furious outcries until he was simply too exhausted to do anything more. Then he sank down, clutching the arms of his chair and glaring about him.

He was as white as a sheet after his spasm of wrath, and Tito was glad to get away.

He returned to his own room, and once more began his anxious wait; he had inquired of all the officials about the court, but he found none who had seen or knew anything of his sister. Not a word of tidings could he get, and he had now given up in despair.

The afternoon wore on, and the hour of sunset came. As Tito sat in the window watching the scene he was awed by the feeling that it was the last time in his life that he was destined to see the sun; for certainly Sforza would arrive before the morning.

It was, however, a splendid sight which was spread out before his view. A bank of heavy black clouds had gathered in the east and were slowly overspreading the sky.

They were glowing with color as the sun went down. But after that darkness came on with great suddenness, and it seemed an omen to the anxious young nobleman as he sat watching the scene.

Again and again he hurried out into the courtyard to gaze down the long avenue. Still, however, he saw no sign of Sforza; and a short time after dark he made his way into the broad dining-room, where he found the duke and his retinue assembled for the evening meal.

A more solemn festivity it would have been hard to imagine. The time was passed in absolute silence, the courtiers not even venturing to whisper to each other.

Every eye was fixed on Galeazzo. To Tito it seemed that the man was now whiter than ever.

He was trembling visibly, too, and he kept muttering to himself. There was still but the one thought in his mind —who had sent that messenger from the castle?

Galeazzo ate scarcely a mouthful, and finally pushed his plate to one side. He sat gazing in front of him for a minute or two.

The action had been noticed by all, and every one turned to stare at him.

The duke was seen to be gasping heavily for breath. His eyes were rolling wildly, and then suddenly he pushed his chair back and staggered to his feet.

He stood for an instant gazing about him, then he reeled, seemed to lose his balance, and tottered backwards.

He clutched with his hand at his chair, but missed it.

"Help! Help!" he gasped.

The room was in confusion in a moment. One of the courtiers sprang forward; but then the thought of the plague seemed to check him, and he stopped.

Meanwhile Galeazzo was staggering helplessly, and suddenly he fell heavily to the floor. And still no one made a move to help him.

Those in the room stared at each other in horror, and there was a minute or two of dead silence, during which the duke lay on the floor, gasping for breath.

Finally, however, he raised himself on his elbow, and then staggered to his knees; he got to his feet once more, clutching his chair for support.

With a violent effort he gathered himself together, pointing a trembling finger at the unfortunate courtier who had failed to help him.

"You dog!" he howled. "You shall die for that! To the dungeon with him!"

The soldiers gazed at each other hesitatingly, but there was no resisting the duke's imperious will, and the wretched courtier was seized and hurried out of the room.

At the same time Galeazzo turned and staggered across the floor, all giving way before him, and now, profiting by the example of the horrible fate of one of their number, several of the courtiers sprang forward to assist him.

"To my bedchamber!" he gasped; "I am ill!"

In a minute more he had left those in the audience room to gaze at one another in awe struck silence.

The thought that was in their minds they hardly dared speak; but they knew that the blow of Providence had fallen at last!

As for Tito, he was overcome with horror, and glad to get away by himself once more.

He hurried back to his own rooms and went to the window again and gazed out.

It was now dark, and over the trees of the forest the moon was just rising. The heavy clouds had spread across the sky, and a wind had risen, bringing with it that dampness of atmosphere which forebodes a storm.

The moon was only visible for a minute or two, with the swift clouds driving across its face; then it disappeared.

It was evident that a storm was brewing, and the silence preceding it added to the feeling of oppression which haunted young Bentivogli. He flung himself down on a couch in one of the rooms, and gave himself up to complete despair.

He had no longer any hope; there was a storm hanging over him, too, and he knew that it must break within an hour.

So wearied out was he by the strain and the suspense, that he fell into a stupor, from which he was aroused by the breaking of the tempest.

Without an instant's warning had come a dazzling bolt of lightning.

It had fallen upon one of the trees of the forest, and it was accompanied by a clap of thunder which seemed to shake every wall of the great castle. The building was lit for an instant as bright as day.

Tito heard a chorus of shouts and cries; above them all rang out one voice.

It was in a series of agonized screams, and Tito recognized instantly the tones of Galeazzo himself.

He rushed out into the hall. He found the place a scene of wild excitement, people running this way and that in confusion.

He himself took his way up a flight of steps which led to the stately apartments where Galeazzo slept.

And meanwhile the agonized screaming grew louder and shriller and more terrifying.

The first bolt of lightning had been the signal for the unloosening of the elements, and a fierce electric storm was now playing about the castle.

Clap after clap of thunder seemed to shake the walls, like the rolling of a great battery of artillery. And the light from the flashes was almost incessant.

Galeazzo's sleeping apartment was a magnificent chamber, as large as any in the castle; but it was almost entirely bare except for the bed, which was directly in the center of it.

The place itself was now deserted except for the corners and the doorways, where the timid courtiers were crouching, keeping as far away from the duke as they could.

A more horrible sight Tito had never seen in his life; he had known that Galeazzo was afraid of lightning, but he had not been prepared for anything like this.

The duke was lying upon the bed, writhing in agony, and still uttering the series of piercing shrieks.

The bedroom was not lighted, except by a single torch; but from the windows there streamed in an almost continuous glare from the lightning, so that Tito

could plainly see the figure of the terrified man.

He was clutching at the bedclothing, and his face was drawn in agony; it was impossible to say whether his terror was inspired more by fright at the storm or by the dreaded disease which it was quite certain by this time had attacked him.

Still the dreadful play of the elements continued; the thunder rolled and echoed throughout the great stone building.

A minute or two before the first drops of rain had fallen, and now what seemed almost a sheet of water was pouring in at the windows, and the single torch was suddenly blown out by the gusts of wind.

Not once did Galeazzo's shrieks cease. Again and again, however, he managed to raise himself, gazing around in terror, and finally he contrived to stagger from the bed.

He fell to the floor, and as no one stepped forward to aid him, he dragged himself up by the bed, and thus made shift to get to his feet.

Then, stretching his hands above his head and clutching wildly at the air, he tottered across the room, gasping and choking with rage and terror.

Tito made it out that Galeazzo was screaming for Sforza—for satisfaction upon the traitor. And then again as a blinding flash of lightning came, the terrified man crouched in a corner, convulsed with fear.

A more hideous figure could not have been imagined, and Tito turned back to get away from the awful scene.

Galeazzo was his enemy, but he could not bear to see him like that.

And his haste was considerably accelerated by what happened just then.

Galeazzo had gathered himself together and staggered across the room, shrieking:

"He shall pay the penalty! He shall die when Sforza comes! Yes, though I die before it! Bring me my secretary, and I will write it down!"

(To be concluded.)

JOHN JARDINE.

BY SHELDON CLARKE.

The sacrifice love prompted a poor clerk to make for the sake of the woman he loved. A pathetic little story in which virtue, and virtue only, seems to have been its own reward.

ON the doorstep of a little store on the main street of a town in western Pennsylvania stood a girl, bare headed, the flaming gas jets above the doorway bringing out points of gold in her bright brown hair, and showing to those passers by who looked about them, as they hurried on through wind and rain, a pretty little oval face, with rosy but sensitive lips, and brown eyes with a long soft fringe of darker lashes.

There were no customers tonight. The factory people, as they trudged homewards through the rain, heavily laden with baskets and umbrellas and doing battle with the wind, had no spirit to think of gay attire, and could contemplate even with resignation going ribbonless and featherless to church tomorrow.

No one stopped to examine the price and quality of the straw hats that hung, strung together, on each side of the doorway. They flapped to and fro in the wind, and grew limp as the rain beat against them, and every moment they became less desirable commodities.

The girl who stood on the doorstep drew back where the rain did not reach

her, and wrapped her arms well round with the skirt of her dress. She disliked cold and wind and rain and the peculiar odor of damp hats; but she found the flaring lights of the street and the sight of the passers by more pleasing than the gloomy sitting room upstairs, where her mother sought to circumvent Satan's plans by filling idle hands with stockings and darning needles, and her father was growling over the badness of business and nodding over his pipe.

Within the shop John Jardine, her father's assistant, was rolling up, gravely and silently, yards of lace of weak coffee hue, which had been exposed all day in the window in fascinating festoons.

He was not a young man. He was one of those men who have never been young. Even at twenty he must have smiled rarely and reluctantly, and stooped wearily over his work, and walked with a heavy, unspringing step, and spoken in a tone that had no joyfulness in it.

Now, at forty, his lips were stern and his eyes grave; his face was the face of a man who had never learned in his boyhood the way to laugh, and whose powers of happiness have died through long disuse. He was tall and gaunt, his cheeks were thin, his stern eyes sunken. He looked ill; but there was a certain strength about the man—the strength of severity and endurance.

Every few moments he glanced toward the doorway where the girl was standing. It was then, if ever, that the grim face grew gentle.

"Miss Winnie," he said at length, going near her to take in the string of flapping hats and bonnets, and speaking harshly, as was his way, "you're foolish to stay there in the draft and wet. Tomorrow you'll be laid up with cold, and then you'll be wond'ring where you caught it."

The girl looked up at him and laughed saucily.

"How you do scold!" she said.

She kept her place independently for a few minutes; then she came inside and stood, with her elbows rested on the counter, her chin propped up between her palms, looking up with laughing, bewitching eyes into the grave eyes bent down upon her.

"You're wanting something," said John tentatively. His Scotch habit of speech still clung to him in spite of his ten years in America.

"How horrid of you! Don't I ever come and talk unless I want something? I do want a bit of velvet, as it happens —not much, just a little bit for a collar."

John stopped wiping the hats and bonnets and brought down a wooden box from a shelf behind him. Winnie, without changing her attitude, continued to describe her wants tersely.

"Nice velvet, Mr. Jardine—satin backed. And you needn't enter it—father makes such a fuss. When I get some money again I'll pay for it. How horrid of you to say I never come and talk unless I want something! I like to talk to you—I do, really."

The bewitching, patronizing familiarity was very sweet to John. He would hoard up the amiable words and, by and by, go home and dream of them. His heart beat a little quicker; all the same he looked down with grim, unsmiling eyes on the girl whom he loved.

"Did father tell you about my new present?" said Winnie, looking up straight into John's gray eyes.

"No."

"It came this morning, just like the other things. There was no name or letter or anything. Ma and father don't like it; they say it's not respectable to have presents sent by mail without any name—but I'm going to keep it."

The pretty face was radiant. John feasted his eyes on the sight of her happiness, and carried away a picture, which, by and by, would

> **Flash upon that inward eye**
> **Which is the bliss of solitude.**

Winnie's joys were the only joys in John's life; love had given a touch of

poetry to the prosaic, matter of fact man who had no redeeming sense of humor, no noble discontent with unlovely surroundings and work that was not ideally heroic; to look into happiness through another's eyes was no longer a bitter thing, but the sweetest thing life held.

"I'll show it to you," said Winnie pleasantly. "It's a locket;" and she drew a little leather case from her pocket and opened it, displaying a pretty gold ornament, set with pearls and pink coral. She gazed at it lovingly, then held it near her throat and looked up at John for admiration.

"Do you like it?" said John.

"Like it?" repeated Winnie, a little crossly. "You always ask that. You never seem to think much of the presents I get. You don't know the value of such things—I dare say you think they cost nothing!"

John smiled one of his rare smiles as he went on silently with his work. He thought such pretty things cost nothing—so she said. He smiled at the mistake. Had he not measured their value in coats and shoes, in tobacco, beer and other things a man wants? Could any one calculate so readily, with such nicety, the amount of extra service which must be wrung from a threadbare overcoat, the little luxuries of life which must be renounced, to allow a poor man to purchase gold necklaces and lockets with pink coral?

Winnie maintained an injured silence for a minute. But her desire to be gracious, her need to win approbation, made her moments of displeasure short lived. Presently she was smiling again.

"It's strange, isn't it, that the person knows exactly the things I'd like?" she said.

"Very," said John.

"Nobody did know I wanted a locket—nobody but Milly Smith and Mr. Rowton and you—and you don't count."

"No, I don't count," said John almost eagerly.

"And Millie wouldn't be likely to send me lockets and necklaces and things," mused Winnie, speaking slowly.

John had no answer to offer to this. Winnie stood with her chin propped up between her palms, gazing out before her with meditative glance.

"And, of course, Mr. Rowton wouldn't send me presents," she said doubtfully, after a minute.

"Of course not," answered John, with great decision.

But the conclusive tone angered Winnie. "I don't know about the 'of course,'" she said illogically; "Mr. Rowton is very polite to me—very polite indeed."

John pushed a wooden box into its place beneath the counter, and did it with unnecessary violence. Winnie continued:

"Milly says he always comes to tea when he knows I'm going to be there."

"Does he?" said John grimly.

"And he insists on seeing me home in the evenings. That's more than he does for the other girls, Mrs. Smith says. And it's out of his way, too—this is. And he always wears kid gloves, even in the evenings."

John grunted in an ill humored way.

"I wouldn't take up with any of that sort, Miss Winnie," he said admonishingly.

"You've no reason to speak like that of Mr. Rowton," said Winnie, with an attempt at being dignified; "you don't know him."

"I know the looks of him," said John. "He looks a poor fop, and nothing else. He's not a man. I know a man when I see one—he doesn't wear a pink flower in his buttonhole and a cigar always stuck in his mouth and his hat put on one side to give him a dudish look, and he don't stare at the young girls he meets all along the street, and try to make them giggle and look foolish. Mind me, Miss Winnie, don't you give a thought to such as him; he isn't worth it—he isn't, Miss Winnie."

"He's very nice," said Winnie, hesitating between the desire to be sulkily resentful and the desire to argue the point with John and change his opinions; "and he's very good natured. You must say he's good natured, Mr. Jardine."

"How?" said John gruffly.

Winnie hesitated a moment.

"You know," she said, blushing a little, "that it must be him who sends me the things. There's no one else."

John turned away. For an instant the temptation was strong within him to tell her the truth—to tell her that it was he, John Jardine, who loved her and had pleased himself these six months in sending her, anonymously, pretty trinkets which her girlish vanity longed for and in feasting on the sight of her pleasure in the gifts.

It was a momentary impulse, no more. Love and deepest humility go often hand in hand; to John Jardine the girl Winnie was as much above him as a royal princess is above a poor servant of the court. He was a poor man in a poor position, with nothing to recommend him. How could he presume to speak of the love which was in itself presumptuous? The temptation passed at once.

"Miss Winnie," he said, however, speaking earnestly but with unusual gentleness, "'tisn't Mr. Rowton sends you them things."

"How do you know?" said Winnie quickly.

"I feel certain. Put the thought out of your mind."

"I don't see that you can feel certain," persisted the girl, with a childishly injured air. She lifted her arms from the counter, and moved back to the doorway and stood there silently for some moments. Then she began to reflect that Mr. Jardine might, perhaps, be thinking her less charming than usual, and she came into the store again and sought to be pleasant.

"How do you like your new boarding house, Mr. Jardine? Father says your landlady half starves you, he believes. Does she?"

"No," said John, who responded to banter with a gravity that befitted solemn discourse; "she's a good woman—honest, very honest, and very clean as well."

"How nice of her!" said Winnie, a little absently. "And how is your uncle? When is he going to die, Mr. Jardine? And have you found out about his will?"

"He's better," said John.

"That's a pity."

"I shouldn't like to say that," replied John a little doubtfully. "He worked hard enough for the bit he saved; I'd be glad for him to enjoy it as long as he can."

"How nice of you! But he can't really get well, can he? What will you do with the money? I'd spend it. Perhaps you'll be getting married; but you're not engaged, are you?"

"No, and not like to be."

"Why? Do you hate girls? That's like Mr. Rowton. Milly says he's always pretending to hate girls, and not to think much of them, and talking as though he laughed at them. And all the while, Mrs. Smith says, he's over head and ears in love."

John said nothing. He disappointed Winnie, who hoped he would express some interest and curiosity.

"She thinks he's in love with me," she added after a moment, with a little laugh.

"But you're not in love with him, Miss Winnie?" said John eagerly. "Miss Winnie, dear—he's not a good man; he's not the man to make you happy, I know—I feel certain of that."

"How seriously you take things!" said Winnie, in an irritable tone. "Who talked of being in love? I'm not in love with him, of course—but one can't help seeing that a person likes you when he sends you ever such expensive lockets and chains, and of course one likes a person who is so good natured

and nice. Good night; don't enter the velvet."

"Good night," said John.

* * * *

Winter was over. The April day had been warm and bright, but the air had grown chill towards evening, and John Jardine, walking homewards in the dark, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and drew up his shoulders high, that the collar of the frayed old coat might serve as a muffler.

Six months had made John a little thinner, a little shabbier, and much graver. His face was something more than grave now; the lines about brow and mouth were lines of intense suffering, physical or mental; and he walked heavily and with his eyes on the ground, as a man walks whose soul is oppressed with some great and heavy sorrow in which is no element of hopefulness.

A month ago his uncle across the seas had died, and now he was heir to the little fortune the old man had hoarded for so long. It was not much—three thousand dollars—but to John Jardine it seemed almost oppressingly great. What would he do with it?

He had left the brightly lighted streets behind him, and had turned into a little side street, dull, and with small drab houses on each side, and a foot or two of grass before each house carefully guarded behind iron railings. Before one of these John paused.

He stood, sheltered by a tree and hidden from the sight of passers by, and knocked and waited. No one came in answer to the summons, and he glanced up anxiously at the windows and listened for some sound within the house.

Everything was dark and quiet. His landlady had evidently gone out, and her servant, too. John drew his coat collar a little higher about his neck and settled himself to wait for their return.

Everything was very still. Away far in the distance the lights of the town were bright, and thence rose a dull murmur of wheels and voices which only seemed to make the silence greater. Now and then a wayfarer approached and passed, disturbed the stillness for a minute and left it more profound. John stood waiting patiently.

Presently, while he waited, a door some little distance off was shut sharply, a gate creaked, and two footsteps sounded on the stone pavement. A man and a girl came up the street together; the steps slowly approached, and a murmur of voices reached John where he stood. The girl was speaking—speaking pleadingly, entreatingly, with a sort of sob in her tone. John did not recognize the voice; it was low and frightened.

"Oh, Ned, promise—promise before you send me home!"

"All right."

"But seriously—oh, Ned, seriously, I mean."

"Seriously, I've told you already, it isn't possible. Don't be a fool, Win! Leave off crying like a sensible girl. I'll do anything you like that's reasonable, as I told you before—but one can't do the impossible, you know. You must have known I couldn't marry on the beggarly salary I get; but you were ready enough to let a fellow make love to you. You were so confoundedly grateful for the gimcracks I never sent you."

"You let me think you sent them! I asked you—you never said you didn't. And you promised—oh, Ned, you did promise."

The man laughed a little uneasily.

"All's fair in love and war," he said. "I can't come any further, Win; I'm not coming your way tonight. You must run home alone."

The steps had grown slower and slower, and just outside the house where John was waiting they stopped together.

"You didn't mean it, then," said the girl, and there was something in the voice that made John start suddenly. "Oh, but you did mean it, Ned; you

did. You said it would be all right, and we should be married by now. And now you put it off and put it off. You shan't put it off any longer. Oh, Ned, you must tell father, and let it be soon."

"For heaven's sake, Win, don't take on like that! I'd marry you if I could. I've told you so. But how can a fellow marry on ten dollars a week? I don't want to starve, if you do."

John moved suddenly, and the speakers were silent at once and went on their way. John heard no more. It was but a word or two he had heard; but it had been enough. He stood still for a moment, as one stunned by some sudden blow. Yet the blow had not come suddenly. For weeks past, the fear of this, which was now a certainty, had followed him every hour of the day, had turned life's sweetness into very bitterness.

There was no room for misconception, for happy self deception. Winnie's despairing, entreating tone had brought home to him the full import of her words. He understood. The waters of Marah swept over his soul; for a while he yielded himself to his misery. Then he began to think—how could he help her?

She must be saved! Here was a thing at hand to do—but how to do it? He paced up and down the lonely street, revolving the problem. An hour passed—two hours, three. Twelve o'clock; the night was still, and the church clock sent its clear voice far on the quiet air.

As the strokes died away, John's resolve was taken. He walked a little way down the street, and looked up at the windows of the house which Rowton and Winnie had left earlier that night. A light was still burning in the up stairs rooms and shining through the fanlight above the doorway.

John knocked. A sleepy little servant girl, a child in years but wearing a print gown down to her heels, and her hair drawn back and knotted tightly in grown up fashion, came in answer to John's summons.

"Does Mr. Rowton live here?" asked John.

"Yes, but he's not in yet," said the girl. "He gen'ly stays out late."

"I'll wait, then," John replied; and, although the child servant looked doubtfully at him, she admitted him, leading the way into a dusky little back sitting room, and lighting the gas.

"He'll be in before long, I reckon," she said, surveying him again. And then she left him to wait. He seated himself on the corner of a dusty, horsehair sofa, looking stupidly in front of him, seeing nothing, thinking of nothing, until at last the door reopened, and Ned Rowton came in. The two men stared hard at each other.

"You'll be wondering to see me here," John said slowly, realizing how difficult it would be to say what he had come to say.

"Well, since you suggest it, it does strike me as unexpected," said the younger man in a supercilious tone. He lighted a cigar and seated himself on a corner of the table, looking insolently at John the while, as much at his ease as his visitor was embarrassed.

John's grim severity of mien and tone were lost tonight; he sat nervously fingering his coat, gazing anxiously at the gay young man before him. It was for Winnie he had come to plead; her good name, her future happiness, lay in his hands, and the greatness of the responsibility oppressed him; he feared himself—feared his own discretion, his own powers of argument.

"It's about Miss Winnie," said John. "I've come to beg you to—to—to act rightly by her."

Rowton flushed angrily.

"That's my own business," he said. "If that's your errand, I'll wish you good night. Sorry to appear inhospitable."

"You'll hear me out," said John stolidly. "I don't mean any offense. I could kill you for what you have done, but I speak civilly. I've known Miss Winnie this many years, and I wouldn't

—I wouldn't, if I could save it, that she should come by any hurt. She's like—like a child of my own almost."

"Very much so, I should say!"

"You and she," pursued John, ignoring the sneer, "you and she can't afford to marry."

"So Winnie has made you her father confessor, has she?"

"It's your own words I go by," said John, speaking gently with a mighty effort. "I've got a little money—more than I've need of. I'd like to pass it over to Miss Winnie—if you and she can marry then. It's three thousand dollars honestly come by. It's not a favor to you I'm doing—no favor in it. It can be between ourselves. I wouldn't have her know—I wouldn't any one should know, least of all her."

There was silence for a few minutes. The young man moved away.

"It's an odd sort of bargain, this," he said. "You must have a wonderful lot of superfluous coin to be able to fling about your thousands so lightly."

"Lightly?" echoed John. "Lightly, do you say? Is Miss Winnie's good name nothing? A man doesn't stake his life lightly, but I'd give my life this minute to save one unkind word being spoke of her."

"She isn't worth it," said Rowton, with a little unnatural laugh—"no woman is."

John said nothing. The angry words that rose to his lips were words which, for Winnie's sake, he must not speak. After a minute or two, in a subdued sort of way he said:

"There is no need for much talking. You'll not send me away refusing me—for her sake, Mr. Rowton, for her sake."

Rowton stood with his back towards John, his cigar in his hand, one foot tapping the fender. He threw his cigar into the grate, and turned slowly around, leaning his shoulders against the chimneypiece and putting his hands in his pockets to prove to John and to himself how completely at his ease he was.

"Suppose," he said at last, not looking at John—"suppose I accept your offer?"

"You accept it?" said John eagerly.

"As you like. I think you're a fool—but, of course, that's your own affair."

A few minutes later John was walking slowly home. The night air was very cold; he shivered, but he did not hasten his steps. He passed the house in absence of mind and went patiently back again without wondering at his own mistake. The interview had been successful, his offer had been accepted: He had done his best for Winnie—poor though that best was—hard though it had been to do. He had triumphed.

There are triumphs that cost us dear; and John's was one of these.

TO A COQUETTE.

When you say you love me not,
You have plainly quite forgot
Eyes may traitors be.
Tell the wind that passes by,
Tell it to the summer sky,
Tell it not to me.

When their message I receive,
Blame me not if, by their leave,
I your words deny.
Tell it to the bird and bee,
Tell it to the summer sea,
They may heed—not I.

Clara Bellenger Green.

TRAIN AND STATION.*

BY EDGAR R. HOADLEY.

A railroad story in which the exciting experiences that befall a railroad man are related with vivid faithfulness to facts by one who knows whereof he writes. The quest of Dashwood Dykeman in search of a name that was more rightfully his and the strange happenings that marked his pathway to the goal.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WHILE traveling on the limited express from Chicago to St. Louis, with his parents, Dashwood Dykeman is made an orphan by their death in a collision. His paternal grandfather, who educates him, loses his money, and informs Dash that the latter's name is not Dykeman, and that he—his grandfather—does not know what it is, as his son married a widow, with one child, against his parents' wishes.

Dash looks for a situation, and, after learning telegraphy, secures one which is lost on account of a wreck for which he is not wholly responsible. He starts to St. Louis to learn his father's name; the train stops in a village where a hotel is on fire; Dash rescues a woman and subsequently meets her and her daughter, Dorothy Orloff, on the train. Mrs. Orloff dies in the night and Dash meets the expenses of sending the body home with Dorothy, who has but little money with her.

In St. Louis Dash goes to his mother's old boarding house where he learns that his name is Dashwood Orloff, and his father was the conductor of the train on which his mother was killed. He is no relation, however, to Dorothy Orloff, and here he loses all further trace of his father.

Dash obtains a position as brakeman on a freight train; and is asked to do some detective work on account of the repeated losses of valuable freight. On his first trip he notices many discrepancies in Conductor Cupples' reports, especially those concerning car No. 41,144. On the return trip while Cupples is riding on the engine, and Dash is in the caboose, the engine and three cars part from the rear of the train, and reach a station in time to be side tracked just before the remaining cars thunder wildly by on to a short branch spur, and off into the river with a terrible crash.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DOUBLE EXPLOIT AT BRANCHVILLE.

WE will now return to Dykeman, whom we left just after the local freight had passed through Dead Man's Cut.

When he was satisfied that he was not to have another glimpse of the spectral procession in the cut, or that there was nothing suspicious to be seen, he returned to the cushioned seat near the rear door of the caboose.

He had hardly taken a certain missive from the inside pocket of his coat, and begun to peruse it, when the call for brakes caused him to put it back and spring for the rear platform.

He threw the brake wheel around with desperate energy, the clog clicking with a metallic whir in the ratchet. As it tightened, he threw the whole force of his muscles and swinging body upon the wheel.

When he could not turn it another notch in the ratchet, he looked to see if their speed was slackening. He could notice no slowing up, and in fact it seemed they were going faster.

He then rushed to the forward brake and also screwed it up to the topmost notch to which it was possible to bring it. Still there was no diminution in their speed, and he wondered why the forward brakemen did not respond to the call for brakes. Certainly if they had, he told himself, the train's speed would be checked.

**This story began in the June issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.*

Then came the signal that no trainman likes to hear—that they had broken in two—for there were always chances of a collision between the two divided portions of the train; and such a catastrophe was especially liable on a grade such as that down which the local was rushing.

The first duty on such occasions is to stop the rear section as soon as possible, and the next, for the forward section to keep on out of the way, till assured the following cars are at a standstill.

As soon as he heard the "broke in two" signal, Dykeman felt confident a slackening of their speed would follow instantly, for if the brakeman had neglected to put on the brakes going down the grade, they certainly would not fail to do so in response to the last signal. He had done all in his power with the rear of the train to check it, but the caboose slid over the rails as smoothly as if no brakes were set at all.

This puzzled him, for the car usually trembled and ground over the metals with many a squeak when the brakes were screwed up.

For a few moments Dykeman watched for some evidence of the brakemen having responded to the call, but none came. The box cars flew along at a greater speed than ever they had when attached to an engine. Their velocity appeared to be increasing every moment.

He was astonished and dismayed at the situation. He remembered the north express passed them at the Flat north of Branchville, and if the runaway cars went beyond that point there would be a collision. He sprang frantically up the ladder on the car next to the caboose to seek an explanation of the non checking of the train.

The brake on the last car was not set, and he screwed it up. It was a precarious operation, for the car swayed like a ship in a gale. He had hardly accomplished this task, when the other two men, who had been running toward the caboose, reached the last car.

"Why don't you put on your brakes?" yelled Dash. "We'll go into the express if we don't hold these cars."

"It's no use, Dykeman; every brake on the train is set," responded the men in the same breath, and Dash noticed a scared expression on the faces of both.

"Set!" he repeated. "It can't be."

"It's so, just the same," asserted one, with emphasis. "You don't think we'd be crazy enough to let 'em go on this grade, do you? The train's bewitched, and we're bound for kingdom come."

Dykeman stared blankly at the speaker for a moment, ready to believe both declarations. The failure of the brakes to do their work was incomprehensible, and certainly smacked of the supernatural.

"Well, Billy," continued the brakeman to his companion, "shall we stick to the boxes, or jump for it? We're sure to strike the express, as Dykeman says."

"It's a toss up which is safest, Cass; but I'll jump if she slows up any."

"Don't do either," interposed Dash, realizing they could do nothing to avert the collision, but determined to make an effort to save themselves. "Come to the caboose."

"But we can't see when we're going to strike the express," objected Cass.

"The caboose shan't strike the express if I can help it. I've got an idea," explained Dash.

"All right; come on, Billy."

Dykeman quickly descended to the caboose platform, followed by his companions.

He reached down between the cab and the last car, and tried to pull out one of the pins, but the link was rigid, and held them solidly in place.

"Bully for you, Dykeman," cried Cass, who understood his object. "If we can uncouple 'em we can stop the old dog house any way."

But all Dykeman's twisting and pulling would not loosen either pin. He sprang to the tool locker and got a short crowbar. Leaning over he en-

deavored to drive out one of the pins, but it would not budge.

"Hold on, Dykeman," shouted Cass, who had been closely watching him. "I can help you loosen that thing. Here, Billy, help me with this brake, and when I say the word, let her go."

The two muscular young men swung to the wheel, and succeeded in twisting it up several more notches.

"Now!" shouted Cass, casting off the dog, and the two sprang back out of the way. The brake flew off with a whirling rattle.

As Cass had calculated, the extra pressure on the caboose brake had increased the tension of the coupling, and when it was thrown off the cab started forward, perceptibly loosening the bearing on the pins. At that moment Dykeman gave the pin in the box car drawhead a smart blow with his bar, and it flew up and dropped between the cars to the track.

Cass and his companion sprang forward to the brake again and set it. The caboose gradually slowed up, and the cars drew further away.

"Heaven have mercy on the express," cried Dash, as the caboose finally came to a stop, and he heard a rumbling crash of timbers.

The speed of the rushing cars was checked, but as he watched them, Dykeman was astonished to see the last car disappear from sight as if the earth had opened up and swallowed them all.

When he looked about him he realized that the caboose was standing on the Branchville spur, and that the box cars had gone into the river. It had all happened so quickly, and the change from peril and suspense to safety had been so sudden, he had hardly time to ask himself how it had been done, when the station agent, who had turned the switch to the spur, came running toward the caboose.

"Well, if this isn't the slickest thing I ever heard of," he cried in wonderment, when he saw the three brakemen were not injured. It was throw you off on the river spur, or let you go smash into the express. I was dead certain you'd all go into the river, but here you are as quiet and safe on the rails as if nearly all of your train hadn't gone to the bottom. How did you do it!"

Dykeman quickly explained and asked:

"Where's Cupples and the forward section?"

"He was on the engine, and yelled for some one to turn the switch as he went by. I suppose they went in on the other end of the siding, as the through freight filled up this end."

"Do you think they had time to do it?" asked Dash, consulting his watch. "The express is past due, and you know there is a curve beyond the other end of the siding."

"By George! you're right, they didn't have time. I'm afraid the express has struck something after all, and those cars were sent into the river for nothing."

The station agent, followed by Dykeman and the other brakemen, hastened to the depot to learn if there had been a collision with the forward section.

Meanwhile, Conductor Cupples, after he had shouted out to turn the branch spur, and the engine with its three cars had flashed past the station, glanced at his watch.

"Thunder! we've only got a minute to get into the other end of the siding, Jack," he cried, with a groan, into the engineer's ear.

At the same moment a whistle from the express was heard only a short distance away. Owing to a curve in the road, its engine could not yet be seen.

The engineer and fireman started from their seats, the same thought occurring to both of them at once—to leap for safety.

"Hold on, Jack, don't do that; we'll stop 'em yet," shouted Cupples, motioning them back.

"'Tain't nothing that can save 'em now," growled the engineer, but at the

same time resuming his position at the lever.

"Slow down, and don't go any further than the end of the switch," cried Cupples, who was peering out ahead.

The engine gradually decreased its speed, and before the engineer and fireman knew what he was about, Cupples sprang to the ground, and leaped to the country road which ran parallel to the track.

A boy, seated on a motionless horse, was watching the rushing train with much curiosity, and judging from his looks he was aware something unusual was going on.

It was a question which was the more astonished, the boy or those on the engine, when Cupples sprang at the rider, forced him from the saddle on the opposite side, and leaped into his place on the horse's back.

It was all done as quick as a flash, and before any of them could draw a breath, the conductor had forced the horse out upon the roadbed, and was flying up the track in the direction of the on coming express.

With many a slap and a kick, he urged the straining horse on. When he rounded the curve, the express was in sight. With frantically waving arms, he continued towards the approaching train.

The engineer must have thought he was a lunatic, for he gave a series of warning whistles, but did not signal he would stop. Cupples still held the horse straight for the train.

Then the engineer, seeing it was either stop or run the horse and rider down, or else realizing that something was wrong, threw on his brakes.

But not soon enough to check his headway before he should reach the daring rider. When he was within a few feet of the engine's pilot, Cupples shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Stop her! Stop her, for your life!"

At the same moment he pounded his horse's sides with his heels, and swerved him to one side.

The noble animal rose in the air, actually leaping over a portion of the pilot, and almost grazing the edge of the boiler head, and sank with his rider into a deep ditch by the side of the track.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CAR 41,144 AGAIN.

THE express did not come to a stop till it reached a point around the curve that revealed the straight track ahead and the local freight's engine blocking the way. Then the engineer quickly guessed the explanation of the man on horseback riding straight at his train to stop it.

He stepped down from his engine and hurried back to where the horse and rider had sprung from the track. Trainmen and passengers were already crowding to the spot.

Though considerably shaken up, Cupples was uninjured, and he staggered dizzily to his feet. The noble horse had broken one of his legs, and after several ineffectual efforts to rise, sank on one side with a deep and piteous moan.

"Cupples, is that you?" cried the express conductor, recognizing the rider. "What's the trouble?"

"Smash my headlight! so it is!" added the engineer; "but I'll be dished if I could make out if it was him when he came straight at me like he was going to ride right over me. I thought he was some crazy, country fool, who wanted to show off."

"It's what is left of me," smiled Cupples, as he brushed the dirt from his clothes, "and I'm glad of this kind of an end to a bad day's business. Fifteen of the cars in my train are at the bottom of the Branch by this time, and I'm afraid my crew has gone with them."

He thereupon hurriedly told of the break in two on the grade, and the means he had taken to clear the track for the express.

The passengers were profuse in their

expressions of admiration and gratitude to Cupples for what he had done, and the trainmen had an increased respect for their companion in service, though they gave utterance to no words of praise.

It was only another of the many exciting and perilous episodes on the rail that each expected, as a matter of course, though the manner in which Cupples had avoided two perils to the express at the same time, would be the talk among them for many a day afterward. They regarded it as Cupples did, when he replied to one of the passengers who suggested a reward:

"Much obliged to you. I don't want anything for what I've done. The company pays me to look out after my train and avoid accidents. It's enough for me to have your thanks and know you're all safe."

"It isn't every man who does what he's paid for, when he is placed in a position where presence of mind and prompt action is necessary to avert an impending disaster," rejoined the passenger.

"Then he hasn't any business railroading," said Cupples bluntly.

"Have any of you gentlemen got a revolver?" he asked abruptly. "It won't do to let this horse lie here and suffer. It will be a mercy to put him out of his misery."

A pistol was found and passed to him. There were many expressions of pity and protest from the ladies present, but as the latter retreated, and many heads were turned away, Cupples sent a bullet into the animal's brain.

It was a much to be deplored reward for the service he had rendered; but what was his life compared to the many human ones on the express?

The horse had already given its last expiring kick, when the boy, from whom it had been taken, came running up.

"Oh, you've killed him," he cried in grief and agony. "What did you do it for?"

"I'm sorry, young man," replied the conductor; "but he broke his leg, and I had to do it. It was your horse, or a collision of my train and the express."

"I wouldn't have lost him for any money. Who will pay me for him?" asked the boy, gazing sorrowfully at the animal.

"The company will; and it's not the only thing it will have to pay for that's destroyed this day. There's fifteen loaded cars in the Branch, but I reckon they'd rather pay for 'em and your horse several times over than had any one killed on the express."

"I move that we take up a collection and pay the boy for his horse, as our friend here will not take anything," suggested the passenger who had first spoken to Cupples.

The idea was quickly acted upon, and by the time the saddle and bridle were removed from the dead animal and put in the baggage car, more than a hundred dollars was placed in the boy's hands.

By this time the fireman on the local's engine had thrown the switch to the south end of the siding, and the local, with the three cars attached, was backed in out of the way.

Cupples boarded the engine of the express, and the boy was taken into a coach, to be carried to the station. A great crowd was there to receive the express, for the news of the exciting occurrences had spread quickly through the town.

Conductor Cupples was greeted with a cheer as he stepped to the platform, and when he looked around he saw Dykeman and the two brakemen forcing their way through the crowd towards him.

"Dykeman!" he cried in astonishment, a peculiar intonation in his voice that could be either pleasure or regret. "I thought you had gone into the river. Did you stop them?"

A close observer might have noticed something more than pleased surprise in his tones and looks—something,

slight though it was, that indicated disappointment.

"No, sir," replied Dash; "they're in the Branch"; and it struck him as peculiar that the conductor should take so much more notice of his safety than that of Cass and the other man, who had been running with him for some time.

"Then, how in the world did you get off them without breaking your neck?" interposed Cupples, in wonder.

"Stayed right in the caboose," smiled Dash, amused at the other's perplexity; and he continued with an explanation of the uncoupling and stopping of the caboose just as it rolled on the Branchville spur.

"Well, if this hasn't been a day of narrow squeaks," commented Cupples, and he briefly told how he had stopped the express.

"You've got the stuff heroes are made of, Mr. Cupples—presence of mind and plenty of courage. You saved both ends of your train and the express at the same time," remarked Dash, feeling that it was hard to believe that such a man could be guilty of theft.

"And you saved yourself and the other boys," added the conductor; "but what I can't understand is why you fellows couldn't stop the rear section, or even check its speed."

This was a question that others besides the trainmen had asked themselves when discussing the dumping of the cars into the Branch. But when the express steamed out of the station, and started to climb the first hill, the mystery was solved.

The train came to a stop just above the foot of the grade, and the drivers of the locomotive flew around with a whirr, having no tractive power whatever on the rails. A liberal dropping of sand on the track did not improve matters very much. The wheels climbed slowly forward a few yards and then stopped again. Much disgusted and perplexed, the old engineer finally got down from his machine to investigate.

"Smash my headlight!" he cried, as he stepped in front of the pilot and looked up the road. "I thought some country jay had soaped the track; but, smash me, the irons are greased, as far as I can see. I can't go up there with this weight behind me."

He reported the matter to the conductor, and the train was backed to the station.

"Did you have a car of oil in your train, Cupples?" inquired the express conductor, after explaining the cause of the backing up.

"Yes; a tank car full, and it's gone into the Branch," replied Cupples.

"I guess there didn't much of the oil go with the car; for, judging from the looks of the track up the hill, it must have pretty much all leaked out."

"Well, I'll be blowed! That explains why the brakes didn't hold, and the boys couldn't stop the cars."

The engine from the through freight was attached to the rear end of the express car to act as a pusher up the first grade.

By the combined power of the two locomotives and a plentiful sprinkling of sand, the train toiled slowly up the ascent. It was thought the pusher would only be needed to Eagle Flat; but when they got on the level they found that the rails were still slippery with grease, and the extra engine had to go to the top of the second grade.

When the freight engine returned and was attached to its train, the local's locomotive had to act as pusher to the through freight up the two grades. When this was done, and Cupples had made a full report of the accident to the trainmaster by telegraph, the caboose was switched out of the spur and attached to the three cars which had followed the local's engine when the train had parted.

When he checked over his bills, to turn those belonging to the wrecked cars over to the station agent, Cupples found that two of the cars that had been saved were loaded and the third was

empty. The number of the latter was 41,144.

As Cupples noted this fact for the first time, he thought, with a half smile of satisfaction:

"Young Dykeman was about half right. There *is* something lucky about that car. It would have been all up with me if it had gone into the Branch. I wonder if he has noticed it yet."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PERIL AT EAGLE FLAT.

As already related, Dykeman had noticed the taking on of the car with the mystic number at Burrsville, and had wondered at the despatch with which the agents there had unloaded it. But it was not until after the excitement of the stirring events following the break in two had subsided, and they had left Branchville, that he was aware the car was one of the three that had not gone into the river.

Then he discovered that the very next car to the caboose was No. 41,144. He was looking out of the glass window in the front of the cab, when the number was revealed to him on the end of the car.

He gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise at the discovery.

"What's the matter, Dykeman?" asked Cupples, who heard him.

"Nothing," laughed Dash carelessly; "only there's that car with the lucky number. Its charm still protects it, doesn't it?"

"Is that so?" exclaimed the conductor in feigned surprise. "It *does* seem proof against wrecks, as it has been in two in as many days. By the way, it goes out at Shufflers, as they need an empty there."

"All right," responded Dash, and he did not fail to recall that Shufflers was where they had picked up the car loaded the day before.

Shufflers was reached without anything occurring worthy of note. After car 41,144 was thrown on to the siding, Dykeman was detailed to check the freight that was to be unloaded out of the local car.

One of the bills was short two caddies of tobacco and a case of wine, and as he noted it on the face of the bill, he remembered the remark of the agent at the terminal that "it was always something like that which was short."

He knew that when such articles of luxury begin to disappear that it was a sure indication that stealing is going on somewhere. But he also knew enough of the system of handling freight to be aware that it was sometimes very difficult, if not impossible, to locate the pilferings.

He made a note of the shortage, to be reported to Mr. Rodway, though it seemed impossible that the goods could have been abstracted while the local car was in their possession, as it had been closed and sealed before leaving every station where it had to be entered, and the seals had been found intact when it was opened again.

On their arrival at the terminal, Dykeman again assisted the conductor in the clerical portion of his work, though his part this time was devoted to a detailed account of the accident and loss of the fifteen cars at Branchville, while Cupples made the car report.

When he had finished, he was ready to seek his bed; and when Cupples had spoken the word for him to Madden, the lodging house keeper, he was assigned to a neat and comfortable room, very different from the one he had been shown to the first night he had arrived at the terminal.

But before he went to bed, Dykeman did two things in furtherance of the mission for which Mr. Rodway had put him on the local freight. Without being observed, he abstracted Cupples' car report from the mail box.

And even if he had been seen by any one but the conductor it would have been supposed he was getting it to

make some correction, as he was already known in the agent's office as being the one who assisted Cupples with his reports.

As the reports were always inclosed in heavy, unsealed envelopes, with the printed address of the car accountant on the face, which were used over and over again for the service until worn out, he had no difficulty in getting at it, and returning it as he found it. It needed only a glance down the column of car numbers to tell him that the car 41,144 was neither reported as taken at Burrsville nor left at Shufflers.

Dykeman then made his report to Mr. Rodway, embodying the facts regarding the non reporting of the car and the shortage of wine and tobacco at Shufflers.

This time—for fear it would be noticed he was writing to the superintendent, and thus arouse some one's suspicions—he sent his communication by post.

The next morning the local freight, which was called No. 30 when north bound, left on time. As usual, the train consisted mostly of empties, to be distributed along the road.

"I wonder if we're going to have any more grief this trip," remarked Cupples, as he checked over his bills with Dash. "I'm getting tired of this smashing up of things, and the gold collars* will have me up on the carpet† if it doesn't stop."

"I'm sure I don't see how you are to blame. You deserve great credit for what you did yesterday," responded Dash generously.

"Don't make any difference, Dykeman. They'll think more about the loss of those fifteen cars in the Branch than of what I did, though they wouldn't say so. If a fellow is unfortunate enough to have many wrecks, no matter what the cause of them, he becomes undesirable, and stands no show of ever running on the varnished cars."‡

"It isn't likely we will have that 4-11-44 with us this run, and we'll be all right," laughed Dash.

"Why, I thought you said that was a lucky number," smiled Cupples.

"So I did, but I begin to think it was only lucky for the car that bore it, and that it was a regular Jonah for us."

"That's so, it looks that way," commented the conductor seriously, and he seemed to be thoughtfully reviewing something on his mind. He little imagined that the car would be ultimately a "Jonah," as Dykeman expressed it, for himself in particular.

As there was no work to be done at Shufflers, the local would not stop unless the signal was out for orders. A short distance beyond the station was a high trestle over a creek, and running into the main track, very near to it, was a side track.

As no signal was displayed, No. 30 was not slackened up in approaching the station. The train flew by, and the agent waved his hand to Cupples and Dash, who were standing in the side door of the caboose.

"There's that Jonah," laughed the latter, pointing to car 41,144 on the siding.

The words had scarcely left Dykeman's mouth, when there was a jolting, jarring of the caboose, and a crunching, splintering noise from the outside, and he and the conductor fell backward into the car.

"Yes, and here's more grief," gasped Cupples, in a jerky manner, as the car thumped along and he struggled to his feet. "We've jumped the track, and we will be in the trestle in two seconds!"

He staggered toward the end door, either to set the brakes or jump, and Dykeman followed him. They had hardly reached the platform, when the jolting ceased, and the caboose moved smoothly, as if on the rails, just as the end of the trestle came into view at their feet.

They gazed at each other, and the

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* Officials.
† Headquarters.
‡ Passenger Cars.

receding structure, in astonishment. When the caboose cleared the other end of the trestle, they realized they were safely back on the track again.

"That beats me," cried Cupples, as he leaned out from the platform and signaled the engineer for brakes. "I'm going back to look into it, and see if any damage is done."

The engine whistled down brakes, and the crew swung to the wheels. As soon as the train was stopped, Dykeman and the conductor hastened back and over the trestle.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed the latter stopping at the switch to the siding, "if the frog to this switch didn't throw us on again."

A further examination showed that the train had left the rails about three hundred feet from the switch. And an inspection of the cars told them that more than half the train had been off the rails. There was no serious damage to running gear, and the train was again started up.

"It didn't get us that time," remarked Cupples, smiling grimly.

"It? What didn't get us that time?" queried Dash, looking perplexed.

"4-11-44."

"Oh! that was because it wasn't in the train. Its nearness on the siding could only give us a narrow escape."

When the local reached Eagle Flat it was behind time, and had to take the siding there for the north bound express to go ahead of it. There were two sidings, one on each side of the main track, running immediately parallel to each other.

One of them was only long enough to receive the local's cars, and the engine had to go in on the other, which had a switch at both ends.

Dykeman had just turned the switch back to the main track, after the passage of the engine to the siding, when he stopped a moment to look down the main track at the express which was in sight and rapidly approaching.

A look of horror overspread his face, his heart almost ceased its beating, and he looked wildly about him.

The other end of the siding was turned to the main track, and the express was coming straight for the local's engine at a speed not less than thirty miles an hour.

CHAPTER XXX.

AT EAGLE FLAT AGAIN.

At the instant he saw the switch at the other end of the siding was turned to the main track, Dykeman realized that it would be utterly impossible for any one to reach it, much less right it, before the express was at that point. And once the latter had entered the side track, he knew it would not be possible for the engineer to stop his train, even with the air brakes, before it crashed into the standing engine with disastrous force.

Unless those on the express engine were particularly vigilant, it was not probable they would see the misplaced switch, and would not realize anything was wrong, till they were deflected to the siding; and even if they saw it, it would still be a doubtful problem if they could stop in time to avoid a collision, as the side track was very short.

These thoughts occurred to Dykeman in a flash, as he gave one wild look about him; then he sprang into action as if moved by an inspiration.

He clutched the switch standard, and sent it crashing over, setting the siding to the main track again. Then he started toward the freight engine, yelling:

"Start her up! Start her up, for your life! The express is behind you!"

But there was no response to his warning cry, and as he neared the engine he almost despaired on discovering that no one was upon it.

The engineer and fireman were standing at one side of the track, watching the on coming train. Whether they had seen the turned switch and the express and deserted the engine, or had simply got down from their cab to walk

about, Dash had no time to determine. At any rate, neither of them made a move to obey the shouted order.

To think with Dykeman was to act, and straining every muscle, he reached the engine in half a dozen prodigious bounds. He made a leap into the cab, without thinking of the foot plate, shoved the reverse lever forward, and grasped the throttle valve, pulling it open.

At the same moment he pulled on the whistle lever with the other hand, and holding it down, sent forth a continuous blast.

There was a hissing of steam, a succession of rapid exhausts, and the machine leaped forward. Dash looked fearfully backward for a moment. The express was almost upon him, when its engineer sent out a whistle, and he saw its speed slacken.

Would his engine gather headway enough, or the express come to a stop in time to avoid a collision? were the two questions he asked himself.

It was an anxious moment, evenly divided between watching his increasing speed and the stoppage of the express. But at last, when he felt sure the express would strike his tender, he was relieved to see the space between them rapidly increase.

The express was saved, but the reaction made him so weak and faint that his engine ran a mile before he thought of checking it.

He had just shut off steam, and was about to apply the brake, when the locomotive rolled to one side and then the other, almost jerking him from his seat.

Dykeman thought, with a shiver, the machine must be off the rails, and going over. He struggled back to the lever and sent the steam into the brake cylinder. With a grinding and shivering, the iron steed came to a stand. Placing the reverse lever on the center, he looked back.

The express was out of sight, and had no doubt stopped at the siding, or just beyond it. But as he could not plainly see the track back of him, on account of the mass of coal piled on the tender, he got down and walked back to investigate the cause of the lurching of the engine a few minutes before.

He had gone only a few rods, where there was a fill of considerable depth, when he found the waters of a creek had risen up on one side of the embankment, and were flowing over the track. The water had washed away much of the ballast from under the ties, which had caused them to sag when the heavy engine passed over them.

Looking further, he discovered the cause of the flood at a time when no rain had fallen for a week or more. The culvert, or tunnel, which carried the creek under the track, had become completely choked up in some way, thus making an ineffectual dam of the embankment.

As he looked at the washed track, he told himself that it was a miracle the engine had passed over it without being capsized, and that if it had been the express under full speed it would have been ditched with all its passengers.

The track was rapidly becoming undermined more and more every minute, and he saw it would be impossible to run the engine back to Eagle Flat until it was repaired. Returning to the locomotive, he took a red flag from the locker under the seat, and started back toward the express.

He passed over the washout on the ties, as they were still held to the web of the rail by the spikes. He soon met Cupples and some of the passenger trainmen coming toward him.

"Hello, Dykeman, another narrow squeak," exclaimed Cupples. "But what have you done with the engine?"

"She's on the track the other side of the creek. There's a washout there. She nearly went into it, and she cannot be got out of the way until the track is repaired"; and he added a detailed account of his run and the damaged track.

"It's a question which would have

been worse—to have run into your engine or the washout," commented the conductor of the express.

"It doesn't make any difference as long as you didn't do either, thanks to Dykeman," added Cupples.

"You're a hero, young man," continued the passenger man bluntly, "and there's the hand of Tom Blake, who has run on this road fifteen years and seen many close calls."

"We're a pair of them, then," laughed Dash, nodding to Cupples, as he took the proffered hand.

"Oh, yes, that affair at Branchville. It was certainly a fine piece of work, and here's a hand for both of you, though Cupples is an old bird, and you're just beginning."

As Dykeman gazed into the rugged face, with its clear blue eyes, he little realized he would very soon be associated with Conductor Blake in one of the most exciting and trying experiences of his railroad career.

Fortunately there was a section house near Eagle Flat, and the track laborers were working not far below it. They were soon at the scene of the washout, and when the obstructions had been removed from the culvert the water was quickly drained off. Then when the roadway was strengthened and leveled with new dirt and gravel, the track was ready for the passage of trains.

The local's engine was run on the siding again at Eagle Flat, and the express backed out. It came up the main track, and as soon as it had gone the freight followed.

"Look here, Dykeman, what's the matter with us? We've had more grief and excitement in the last four days than I've had since I commenced to run," laughed Cupples.

"Maybe I'm a Jonah," suggested Dash, with a smile.

"I guess not; nothing broken this trip yet."

In consequence of the washout, No. 30 was very late in arriving at Joyville Junction that night. Dykeman was completely exhausted by the day's labors, and he immediately prepared to seek his bed.

On his way there the agent handed him two letters—one postmarked Madrid from Dorothy Orloff, and the other with the plainly marked R. R. B. (railroad business) in one corner, from whom he could not guess.

With a flush of pleasure he deposited the former in his pocket, to be perused later, and opened the latter.

It was from Mr. Rodway, and briefly directed him to report in St. Louis by the first passenger train. A man had been sent to relieve him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER MISSION.

DYKEMAN was certainly surprised at the directions from Mr. Rodway to report in St. Louis. He had been but four days on the local freight, and had made but two round trips, and was not aware that he had as yet discovered any conclusive evidence of wrong doing on the part of Cupples or his brakemen, though there had been several suspicious circumstances connected with them that he could not understand.

Why did the superintendent recall him so soon, and what did he want? Was he displeased with his progress, and did he intend to relieve him, he asked himself?

But the only thing to do was to obey the summons. He looked at his watch, and felt disappointed to discover that he still had time to catch the up through express from the main line.

He felt so tired and disinclined to make an all night journey, during which he would get little refreshing sleep or rest, that he almost decided he would wait and take the morning train. But when he glanced again at the superintendent's letter, and noted that the words "by first train" were underscored, he changed his mind.

The business, whatever it was, must be urgent, and no doubt the official expected him on that very train, as ordinarily the local freight got in in ample time to catch it.

Dykeman hastened to his caboose for his satchel. Fortunately Cupples was there, so he did not have to hunt up the conductor to tell him he had orders to report in St. Louis, and was going to leave on the express.

"Dykeman, here's a fellow with a letter from the old man that says he is to take your place," said Cupples, a sort of protest in his tones. "Have you heard anything about it?"

"Yes, I received a letter a few minutes ago ordering me to report in St. Louis," replied Dash, glancing at the heavy set young fellow who was in the caboose. He regarded Dykeman with peculiar interest, and a half smile hovered about his pleasant but determined looking mouth.

Dykeman could not help thinking the man had been sent to relieve him for some other purpose than merely to brake on the local.

"I hope they are not taking you off to put me in," interposed the young man, addressing Dash.

"I guess not; the old man will take care of him," added Cupples. "Did he say what he wanted, Dykeman?"

"No; only to report in St. Louis by first train," replied Dash.

"And you're going on the main line express tonight?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet they're going to put you on the varnished cars for having saved that special near Shufflers day before yesterday," declared Cupples.

"I'd rather they'd give me something at a station—as operator or agent—and put *you* on a passenger run. I'm sure you deserve it more than I, after your long service and what you did at Branchville," responded Dash.

"It isn't likely they'll take any notice of it," rejoined the conductor, in a skeptical and dissatisfied tone, which Dash could not understand. "Maybe they'll do better by you when they hear what happened at Eagle Flat today."

"I don't want anything I can't hold down with perfect satisfaction to myself and the company, no matter how much I deserve it," protested Dash. "If they don't notice what you did, it won't be because I don't tell them all about it."

"Thank you, Dykeman; but it won't do any good. I'm glad to see you don't remember against me the unpleasant mistake I made in choking you the first night you were with me."

"No; why should I, if it was a mistake?" replied Dash.

Since the heroic conduct of the conductor, he had changed his opinion of him considerably. He admired Cupples' fearlessness, and was loath to be convinced that the man had deliberately made that savage attack upon him, of whatever else he might be guilty.

"I don't suppose you are very sorry to leave us," concluded Cupples, as he shook hands.

"And I can't say that I am glad, for I've had some valuable experience. Good by."

Dykeman stopped at the agent's office and requested him to keep the deed Dorothy Orloff had sent him, until he should write or call for it. As he still had a few minutes to spare, he hastily wrote a note to the young lady at Madrid, telling her of his unexpected call to St. Louis.

He was soon on the flying express, and by the murky glare of a badly trimmed coach lamp he perused the letter from Dorothy. For a few minutes he forgot his weary bones, and even the rushing train and his immediate surroundings. Under the spell of her words, a vision of the young girl came up before his mental eyesight, and made him oblivious of material things.

He showed the letter from Mr. Rodway, which served as a pass, and the conductor continued on down the aisle.

He was considerably more rested and refreshed than he expected to be when

the train reached St. Louis. He left the express at the yards, and, after taking breakfast at an adjoining restaurant, reported at the superintendent's office.

Mr. Rodway had not arrived, and Dykeman seated himself to wait for him. In the interval, he wondered over and over again why he had been brought to St. Louis, but he got no further than to conclude that if it wasn't on account of his flagging the excursion it was useless to surmise.

"Good morning, Dykeman; you are here, are you?" said the superintendent pleasantly, as he came in at the door. "Step into my private office."

"I congratulate you, Dykeman," began Mr. Rodway, seating himself at his desk, and commencing to open the pile of letters before him. "Sit down. It's truly remarkable how you did it. I thought it would take a month, and certainly not less than two weeks, to accomplish anything."

"I don't comprehend you," stammered Dash, coloring under the words of praise.

"Is it possible you don't understand the importance of the information you have sent me? But, hold on; perhaps you don't, as I didn't tell you what to look for."

"I really do not," interposed Dash.

"Then I can only tell you you have put us on the trail of what becomes of the missing freight, and the method of defrauding the company of revenue," said the superintendent slowly.

"How?" queried Dash involuntarily, though the official had said that was all he could tell him.

"I cannot explain for several days, but you will hear all about it."

"If I did it, it was all from blind luck. It all came in my way, and I don't claim much credit for it," protested Dash.

"You will be paid seven dollars a day for your time, just the same, which is the rate we pay special agents of the detective service. Counting the two nights on the train, en route to Joyville and back, you have made five days, which comes to thirty five dollars. Here's a check for the amount."

"Thirty five dollars!" gasped Dash, holding the check in his hand. "That's too much. I didn't earn it."

"Yes, you did; that's what we would have paid a detective. But it's very small to what we ought to do for you. I have received a report of how you saved the excursion train near Shufflers."

"It was a close call for me," responded Dash modestly. "I was only doing what was expected of me."

"Yes; every man is expected to do his duty, but he doesn't always do it," added the superintendent.

"Cupples did it in a double sense at Branchville," observed Dash, thinking it was a favorable opportunity to speak a good word for the conductor.

"Yes," was the short reply, and a frown contracted on the official's brow. "I have heard of that, too."

"He would make a good passenger man," ventured Dash.

"He will never run a passenger train on this road, and not even a freight much longer," declared Mr. Rodway.

"Is he implicated in the robberies?" asked Dash, again thinking of his suspicions of Cupples.

"He certainly is, if he is not really a ringleader; but do not say a word about it to any one."

"I will not. But it's too bad," and Dash could not understand how a man, who was capable of such heroism as Cupples had shown, could be a common thief.

"Yes; we're sorry, too, for he's one of our best men," rejoined the superintendent.

"And now, what do you want us to do for you, Dykeman?" he continued, after a pause.

"Give me a position as operator at some station, or in the despatcher's office. You know I have had some experience in the latter."

"Then you wouldn't care to under-

take another job similar to the one you have finished?"

"I'd rather not, that's a fact; the work is hard, and my hands are bunged up, so I don't believe I could send a word decently on the key," Dash replied, though the pay of seven dollars a day was a big inducement.

"But suppose it was on a passenger train?" added the superintendent.

"I might undertake it, if you think I'd fill the bill."

"All you would have to do would be to keep your eyes open, and I have no fear of your not doing that."

"All right. When do I begin?"

"Right away; and if you'll wait a few minutes I'll give you your instructions."

CHAPTER XXXII.

BAGGAGEMAN ON THE THROUGH MAIL.

SUPERINTENDENT RODWAY continued the examination of his mail some minutes.

"Ah, Dykeman," he said finally, pausing and looking up, with a paper in his hand, "I have here a report, from the trainmaster of the southern division, of the washout at Eagle Flat. That was a neat piece of work you did there."

"I couldn't help doing it," protested Dash.

"You seem to possess the faculty of doing the right thing at the right moment, and of having more adventures in four days than most men have in four years."

"I don't care about their being so numerous," laughed Dash.

"We shan't forget them, Dykeman."

The superintendent turned to his desk and resumed the perusal of his mail. He cast several sharp glances at the young railroader at intervals, in which were approval and a touch of admiration, and he seemed to be revolving something in his mind concerning the young man.

When the contents of the last envelope had been examined, and he had given directions concerning matters needing immediate attention, Mr. Rodway handed Dykeman a small piece of pasteboard and said:

"Look at that, Dykeman! There's evidence of rascality in that piece of cardboard."

Dykeman examined it closely, and with much curiosity. It was an ordinary local ticket, reading: "Good for one continuous passage from St. Louis to Madrid," with the usual name of the road, number, and signature of the general ticket agent on it. On one end was the punch mark of a conductor, a star, showing it had been used.

"I see nothing wrong, Mr. Rodway," he said, turning the ticket over, revealing the selling agent's stamp at St. Louis, and then handing it back to the superintendent.

"That ticket has been sold twice; once when the company received the value of it, and once when some one else did," rejoined the superintendent.

"How could that be when it is punched?" asked Dash.

"It was not punched by the conductor on whose train it was used first."

"How did you learn that?"

"It was purchased by one of our special agents, or detectives, and tendered for passage on one of our trains. The agent swears that the conductor to whom he gave it, punched it, and yet this same ticket was presented two days later, bearing no evidence whatever of having been punched, and was honored by the conductor whose punch mark is now on it."

"And your conclusions are?" queried Dash, beginning to understand the scheme of fraud.

"That either the special agent was mistaken about the ticket being punched by the conductor to whom he gave it—and the latter is a rascal, selling our tickets over again for his own gain—or——" and Mr. Rodway stopped abruptly.

"Or what?" asked Dash.

"We don't know what to think. The

conductor under suspicion is one of our oldest and most trusted passenger men, and we do not wish to accuse him until we have some more direct evidence."

"Which you wish me to get," added Dash doubtfully, for he had no idea how he was to go about to secure it.

"Yes, as the detectives are completely stumped, and do not know what else to do."

Dykeman told himself that if the professional spotters had given up finding a solution to the mystery, he did not see how he was to accomplish anything.

"Who is the conductor, and what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Tom Blake of the through mail."

"Blake," repeated Dash, the rugged, honest face of the veteran conductor recalled to him. "I met him at Eagle Flat. Surely he cannot be guilty."

"That's just what we think, but we are compelled to consider him under serious suspicion until proven innocent. We were just as confident of Cupples, you know. I am going to send you out on his train as baggageman."

"How can I learn anything there? Wouldn't it be better to go as forward brakeman?" suggested Dash.

"No; Blake spends most of his time between stations in the baggage car. It would be useless to watch him in the coaches, for if he deceived the detective so cleverly in apparently punching his tickets, you would discover nothing.

"Fortunately, Roberts, the regular baggage master, wants a vacation, and he will make the trip down and back to teach you your duties. Here's a letter to Roberts, which I have already written. Report for duty at the Union Depot in the city an hour before train time tomorrow morning, and let me have a report from you at the end of each trip. I wish you success, and hope you will prove that our confidence in Blake has not been misplaced."

As the superintendent had apparently concluded the interview, Dykeman pocketed the letter to Roberts and left the office.

He took a street car to the heart of the city, and as he thought of his new position and its mission, he told himself that if Conductor Blake was dishonest, he would never believe in appearances again. The revelation that Cupples was a criminal had made him skeptical of an "open face," and he was not so sure of Blake's innocence as he otherwise would have been, though his belief in Cupples' integrity had been based mostly upon his fearless conduct at Branchville.

He realized for the first time that a man may be a hero and a villain at the same time.

On reaching the city, he went at once to Mrs. Fedmore's, where he was received with every demonstration of pleasure.

As soon as he had exchanged a few words with the mother and daughter, and arranged for his accommodation at the boarding house on the days he would be in the city, he sought the room in which his trunk had been placed.

Securing writing materials from the landlady, his first duty was to write a letter to his grandfather, in which he intended to inclose the twenty dollars that had been sent him, as soon as he could get the check he had received from Mr. Rodway cashed. Then followed a letter of some length to Dorothy, in answer to hers received the night before.

When the letter was finished it was dinner time, and after an appetizing, home-like meal, Dash went out.

He first directed his steps to the general offices of the Consolidated Pacific. Here he had his check exchanged for cash, and put twenty dollars of it in the letter to his grandfather. Then, availing himself of the opportunity, he called on Mr. Hummon.

The latter had heard of Dykeman's recent exploits, and, after a pleasant interview, during which the superintendent of telegraph offered him an agreeable and good paying position, Dash

took his departure, promising to consider the offer as soon as he had brought his present undertaking to success or failure.

At the appointed time next morning, Dykeman was on hand at the Union Depot, and found Roberts, the baggageman, in his car, which was backed down to the station, attached to the through mail.

Roberts was a pleasant fellow, only too glad to initiate his substitute into the duties of his position, in anticipation of his own leave of absence.

Dykeman learned that the method of loading baggage was very similar to that in use with local freights. Pieces for the most distant points were put in first, followed in rotation back to those for the nearest points, which were close to the doors.

This was to avoid the rehandling of the baggage in the car en route, and to facilitate the delivery of the trunks at each successive station down the line. The trunks were ranked up, one above another, on each side of the car, with the ends having the checks on turned out, leaving an aisle in the center.

As soon as the baggage had been stowed in the above order, Roberts checked off the numbers on the way bill he had received from the station baggage master, to see if he were short or over. Finding it was correct, he entered them on his record book, giving the station received at and to be delivered to, which were designated by numbers.

He, in his turn, had to make a way bill for every piece of baggage delivered, which he gave to the agent receiving it, and also took his receipt for the same on a book provided for the purpose.

Dykeman soon realized that handling baggage was not the extent of the baggage master's care and trouble. He was required to fill the position of a sort of postal clerk in receiving and delivering letters on railroad business at the various stations.

If any of the letters were valuable, he was expected to give a receipt, and take one, for them also. In addition, he had to handle a large amount of supplies, necessary to the operation of the road, sent to agents and other employees by passenger train.

Dykeman quickly found he had no sinecure, and it was a question with him if the position was not harder than braking on the local freight. He felt like answering it in the affirmative that night, when he reached the end of his run, tired in every muscle, and under Roberts' direction made out a voluminous and detailed report of his trip.

Each baggageman had a tin box, in which he carried his books, way bills, report blanks and extra checks. Dykeman noticed another box—very similar—in the baggage car soon after they left St. Louis.

It had the initials "T. A. B." on the cover, and as Roberts seemed to have nothing to do with it, he asked:

"What is this, Roberts?"

"Oh, that's Conductor Blake's train box."

He was about to ask for further information as to the use of the box, when Blake came in.

"Hello, Dykeman; glad to see you again!" exclaimed the latter, heartily shaking Dash's hand. "Heard you were going to run with us for Roberts, and hope you'll like it. You'll be handling a punch soon."

"Thank you; I hope I will like it, but I'll leave the ticket punching to better men like you," laughed Dash.

"No soft soap, young fellow, or I'll put you off," threatened the conductor in mock resentment, as he brought a key from his pocket and unlocked the tin box with his initials upon it.

He transferred a large number of tickets from his pocket to the box, and then relocked it.

As Dykeman watched him an idea occurred to him. If he could gain access to that box, unknown to any one he could determine, beyond a doubt, if

Blake was punching all of the tickets he collected or not.

He could not open it without the key, and even if he had the latter, he would not have an opportunity to examine the contents while Roberts was with him. But how was he to get the key, was the first question.

While he was asking it, the train came to a sudden halt. Blake dropped the key in his pocket and rushed out.

The train was not started up for several minutes; but as those in the baggage car took no interest in the other trainmen's duties, they did not inquire the cause of the stoppage at a point other than a station.

The train had no more than regained full speed, when it was suddenly stopped again. This operation was repeated a third time, and Roberts was about to go out and ask an explanation when Blake came in, an angry and perplexed look on his face.

"Smash me, boys! I can't understand it. The spooks have got hold of this train, sure. This is the third time the air brakes have been set by the Lord knows who. The engineer and fireman swear it was not done there; the brakemen say they didn't do it, and are equally certain no passenger touched the air brake cord. It only remains now for you to say you're not responsible."

We will add that, in addition to the bell cord for signaling the engineer, there is, on most trains, another cord connected with the air brakes for use only in cases of emergency.

Roberts and Dykeman both instantly disclaimed any interference with the signal, and Blake continued:

"I have put a man on watch in every coach, and we'll find the joker, if he is flesh and blood."

There was no further interruption and no evidence of the "joker" till they stopped at the next station. While the car inspector was examining the brake gear, to arrive at a possible solution of the mystery, there was the usual sish of air, and the brakes were thrown on right before the eyes of the inspector and the watchers.

They looked at one another in blank amazement. The thing was mysterious and uncanny, and everybody was at a loss where to look for an explanation.

(To be continued.)

MR. PETTIGREW'S BAD DAY.

BY J. H. CONNELLY.

How a man past the prime of life was suddenly awakened to a realization of his advancing years, and how, in consequence, he first came to the conclusion that the life of the old was not worth living, and then changed his mind about it.

MR. ABNER PETTIGREW'S awakening, the morning after his return from that long Southern jaunt, was not joyous. His joints were stiff, his muscles ached; he had never been so tired. A horrid suspicion flashed upon him. Were his sensations merely those of ordinary fatigue, or had age anything to do with causing them?

Never before had he thought of himself as growing old, but the possibility was worth considering. It would be abominable if true, and he should get to looking like some old men he knew—or as he felt this morning. Perhaps he did, already! With nervous haste he scrambled out of bed—wincing from pain as he did so—and put himself before a mirror.

Heavens! What a lot of gray hairs had come all at once! And wrinkles! Even "crow's feet!" It made him feel older to stare at himself. Did anybody ever before, except in fiction, grow twenty years older in a single night?

Surely he did not look like this yesterday.

Could there have been a bacillus of old age in that Southern water, which seemed to contain all sorts of things it should not? Nothing else would have transformed him into an old man so suddenly.

He wondered if the change would be as apparent to others as to himself; if indeed he was not the only person who had failed to observe already that he was a doddering old graybeard—or very near to being so. William ought to know; William, his favorite barber, who had pulled his nose almost daily during fifteen years.

William's shop was just around the corner, and Mr. Pettigrew, presenting himself there as soon as he could dress, had the fortune, at that early hour, to find his man alone. "How do I look this morning, William?" he demanded abruptly.

The barber being cautious and, consequently, chary of tampering with truth, was diplomatic in his reply. "You seem to have had a rough trip, sir," he said.

That evasive answer confirmed his fears, and Mr. Pettigrew sighed, yet he persisted: "A change in my appearance is very conspicuous, is it not?"

"I should suppose you had been too busy to bestow the customary care upon your toilet."

"Don't beat about the bush, man. I want you to explain what has turned me gray all at once. Tell me the truth; I insist upon it."

Reluctantly William replied: "It only seems so to you, sir, because you haven't noticed. A little artistic touching up, that I have done regularly, without calling your attention to it, has been requisite for some time, sir."

"Ah! And now?"

"During the fortnight you have been away it has got the start of me. The lost ground can only be regained now with—hair dye."

"Bah! And facial enamel, I suppose. No; I'll have none of that, if I know it. Dye does not conceal, but emphasizes, age. Better wear a silvery poll than be a bedizened sepulchre."

When the barber had done his limited best—which was not much—to repair the ravages of time, Mr. Pettigrew went to his tailor's to order a light summer suit.

He found a cloth that pleased him, but the tradesman, who had clothed him more years than he could readily number, took the liberty of demurring at his choice.

"Don't you think," he said, "that's a leetle too young for you, Mr. Pettigrew? Here is something quieter that I find gives more satisfaction generally to elderly gentlemen."

Of course! Everybody could see it now! Mr. Pettigrew gnashed the teeth of his spirit, but, with an assumption of placidity, said he would think it over, and went away without giving any order.

At the restaurant, while waiting for his breakfast, he opened his morning paper, the organ of his party, and the first thing he saw in it was his own name.

Some friends, in his absence and without consulting him, had urged his candidacy for the mayoralty.

Well, why not? He had always voted the straight ticket and contributed very liberally in every campaign, never taking any prominent part in politics, but all the more deserving, therefore, of recognition at this late day; and the mayoralty would just suit him. And he did not doubt that as mayor he would suit the people, for he would institute reforms—real and much needed reforms.

Yet this poisonous reptile of an editor, evidently the base hireling of a corrupt clique, had the malevolent impertinence to sneer at him as "a nice old gentleman, well meaning enough and respectable, but quite unfit for the office, which should be filled by a younger and more progressive man."

Indignantly he flung the paper under the table, found his breakfast execrable, and soon started down town on a Broadway car.

Within half a dozen blocks Tom Garrabaut, a comrade of his schoolboy days, boarded the car and greeted him cordially.

"I've just been looking at a piece of property I think of buying," said Tom, "and wishing I'd had the sense to scoop it in twenty years ago, when I could have got it for one tenth of what it is held at now. Lord! What changes you and I have seen in this part of the city, Abner! D'ye mind how we got Fourth of July money, one year, by catching leeches in a pond, pretty near where the Fifth Avenue Hotel is now, and selling them to a Bowery druggist! Let's see; was that the year James Harper was elected mayor—'44? No; it must have been earlier."

Mr. Pettigrew gritted his teeth and writhed. Tom had a voice like a foghorn, and a pretty girl, sitting opposite, was evidently taking an abnormal interest in his excerpts from ancient personal and local history.

A monocled young exquisite, sucking the end of his cane in a distant corner, caught Mr. Garrabaut's eye and inspired what promised to be a happy diversion.

"Look at that thing!" he exclaimed. "D'ye know what it is?"

Abner shook his head.

"Well, that weak eyed, weak mouthed, weak chinned, weak brained thing, with its feeble legs, flabby muscles, and limp backbone, is Johnny Snaguilles."

"Indeed! Foreigner?"

"Naw. Grandson of hard headed, hard fisted, shrewd old Sam Snaggles who used to be in leather, down on Cliff Street sixty years ago. You remember him; he——"

"No, sir," exploded Mr. Pettigrew, exasperated beyond endurance, "I do not remember Sam Snaggles, of Cliff Street, sixty years ago! And I never dined with Peter Stuyvesant! And I didn't know John Bunyan! And—— Oh, pshaw! What's the use?" And springing up, he rushed out of the car, leaving Mr. Garrabaut staring after him in speechless amazement, and the pretty girl laughing so that tears stood in her eyes.

Before he had walked a block he overtook "Old Charlie" Wilkins, and, thinking how, as long as he could remember, that person had been so mentioned by all who knew him, was conscious of a profound sense of pity for a fellow man so heavily handicapped by an adjective.

"Old Charlie!" No wonder he was a bent little man, so wizened and bony that he seemed liable to clatter if rudely shaken. His nose and chin resembled a thumb and forefinger bent to pick up something; he was yellow as gold, and his scant hair was like a moldy thatch. But his beady little black eyes were bird-like in their alertness, and he was a merry little manikin for all his gaunt ghastliness.

"He, he!" chuckled Old Charlie. "Did you hear the news? Old Dick Fletcher popped off yesterday! Apoplexy! That leaves only three of the tontine now—Mr. Goshtell, you, and myself. He, he! Bet you anything you like, Goshtell goes first, and leaves us to play the game out. You look stronger than I do, though you're older; but I'm tough. Oh, yes, Abner, I'm tough. He, he! Bet you a new halo when we meet later that I outlive you and get it all, although if you take to one costume, you'll never die."

"How so? What costume?"

"Breech clout and scythe; nothing more. Death would never think of mowing down his own reflection." And the cheerful old gentleman chuckled so that he wobbled, like a loosely jointed automaton, clear down to his toes.

Mr. Pettigrew shuddered, and, to get rid of "Old Charlie," hurried into a store where he had no business, and bought something he didn't want.

At noon that day, taking his seat in the regular weekly meeting of the directors of the Investors' Bank, Mr. Pettigrew looked around upon his fellow members of the board, and realized, as he never had before, how old they all were. Silvery, or at best grizzled, heads; sunken, rheumy eyes; trembling hands, mouths full of unnaturally fine teeth, the habit of flirting up a concaved palm back of an ear when addressed, were common evidences among them of their affection by that "only disease which," as Madame Bonaparte said, "medicine cannot cure."

"Humph!" growled Mr. Pettigrew to himself. "No wonder I've caught the infection, sitting in this gang every week for twenty years." He gave little heed to the routine business, which was generally mere formal approval of executive action already taken or determined upon by the president; but a communication from the cashier, Mr. Witherspoon, arrested his attention. It was a request for retirement, on the plea of old age.

The president remarked that forty seven years of faithful service deserved recognition, and a director moved the granting of the retirement, with a fairly liberal pension. Mr. Pettigrew moved to amend, by doubling the allowance. All he said in support of his motion was: "We are old enough to sympathize with age," but that was sufficient to carry his amendment by a unanimous vote.

Afterward he reflected gloomily that, on the impulse of the moment, he had voluntarily, for the first time, classed himself among the aged. Well, why should he not, since fate seemed determined, in every hour, to find some new way of forcing him to recognize that as his proper corral? The mere fact that a truth may be revolting or horrible does not make it any the less true.

According to long established custom, he dined at his club, and, while still sipping his soup, was joined by Captain Wainwright, whom he had, for an especial reason, just been wishing to see.

When the captain had finished ordering his dinner, Mr. Pettigrew said: "I've been thinking over that invitation you kindly gave me before I went South, and wished to reconsider my declination. I feel a little seedy, and fancy a month in the woods, a period of modified reversion to primeval savagery, would quite set me up again."

"I'm sorry you didn't say yes when I mentioned it, for now I fear you are too late. When you said you would not go, we took on a couple of chaps who favored a more vigorous season than we originally contemplated, and, at their instance, but with the hearty and even enthusiastic approval of all, the whole programme has been changed. It now includes what will be practically an exploration of the wild and almost unknown country northwest of Devil Lake, and would be much too rough, I fear, for a man of your advanced age. However, if you say so, I will speak to the boys about it, and——"

"No, don't, I beg of you. Forget that I have said anything about it. You are doubtless right. It would probably be too severe for me." Then Mr. Pettigrew changed the subject of conversation, and affected a cheerfulness he was far from feeling, for he really was very keenly disappointed. And incessantly, under the lively lilt of pleasant chat, ran the low but irrepressible drone of question in his mind: "Did ever anybody else grow old so suddenly, and have the fact so cruelly rubbed in?"

Jack Van Pelt was one of Mr. Pettigrew's oldest friends, and his wife—a big, jolly woman—had long found amusement in pretending to consider it her mission in life to "find a wife for Abner," an assumed duty out of which they generally managed to extract some fun when her weekly "at homes" brought them together. But when he presented himself this evening, she said

to him, with mock seriousness, "I shall give it up. You no longer require my assistance."

"More than ever, I assure you. Farewell to hope, if you cease to be my ally."

"What nonsense! Your trouble henceforth will not be inability to find a wife, but just the reverse. Indeed, you will be lucky if you escape with only marrying one."

"I do not know why you should say so."

"Do you pretend to be ignorant of your advantages, your value? Are you not aware that a wealthy old bachelor, one of a certain age, is even a greater prize in the matrimonial lottery than the 'rich widower wot's got a cough?'"

Mr. Pettigrew affected to laugh, but said to himself that he had never before known Mrs. Van Pelt to show such bad taste in her jokes. Of course, her keen eyes saw how he had aged, but why need she have said anything about it?

After the reception a perverse appetite suggested to him that, before going home and to bed, he would do well to drop in at the club and have a bite of something hot, piquant; a Welsh rarebit, for instance; yes, an excellent idea —a Welsh rarebit and a mug of old ale. But when he gave the order to Henry, his favorite waiter, the man took the liberty, as an old and faithful servant, of remarking, "A rarebit! At this time of night! At your age, sir! Of course, sir, you know best, but rarebits are heavy, and, really, I shouldn't recommend it."

He was right. Mr. Pettigrew knew it, when he considered the question judiciously. Too old already to eat rarebits at night! And tomorrow no doubt something else he might have a desire for would be tabooed.

He had heard it said that the pleasures of the table were left to the old, after all else had failed them; but as far as he had got experimentally, that did not seem to be true. Well, then, if he might not even eat what he liked, what was the use of continuing to grow older, only to endure weeks, months, possibly even years, of such miserable days as this had been, or perhaps even worse? He went home, revolving that question in his mind.

The light over Mr. Pettigrew's center table burned low, and his large, sumptuous apartments, in which only the monotonous ticking of a dainty little clock broke the stillness, seemed lonesome and gloomy. Half undressing, he seated himself in an arm chair before a window, put his slippered feet up on the sill, lighted a cigar, and formally stated to himself the subject for debate: "Is the life of the old worth living?"

Ever since he could remember anything, old age had disgusted and horrified him. The sight of it had impressed him so before he had ever thought of apprehending it as a pitfall toward which his own steps were inevitably tending, when there was no leaven of personal feeling in his revolt against it.

But now it was his own fate that confronted him. It was in himself that, if he went on living, he would have to contemplate the progressive mental decadence and physical decrepitude which had always seemed so pitiful and offensive in others. Was that worth living for, merely to be able to say to himself that he still was, in some degree, alive?

Quite calmly, after due deliberation upon the question, from an exclusively personal point of view, he decided it in the negative, emphatically.

Yet, with a sense of wishing to evade something of the responsibility involved in so momentous a decision, he resolved to leave it, for the present occasion at least, to chance or fate. A neighbor on his right kept a mocking bird; another on his left, an Asiatic mina, and many times he had fervently cursed both birds for their pernicious activity and great vocal powers, on moonlit nights like this. Just at this

moment, when he had found a use for them, both were silent, but that, he knew, was only because of the exceptional stillness of the street.

Very soon some echoing footstep or other noise would start them in full cry. And this is what he determined: If the mocking bird's voice was first heard, he would endeavor, for a while longer, to bear the ills of advancing age; if the mina's infernal yell took precedence, this night would be his last. His affairs were all in order, his will made, a bottle of laudanum in his cabinet—the matter would be simpler than dressing for a ball.

A roundsman at the next corner gave a signal tap on the curb with his billy, which was answered by a patrolman's rap, and the alert mina whooped to the universe that he was wide awake and taking notice of everything that was going on.

Mr. Pettigrew threw the stump of his cigar into the street, arose, and, going to the center table, turned up the gas, that he might see to find the laudanum bottle in the cabinet. Then he saw, in the circle of bright light reflected down upon the table, a letter that had arrived during his absence and been placed there by the servant to attract his notice when he returned.

Its address was written in a big, round, school boy hand. At sight of it he smiled, sighed, and murmured, "Poor fellow! I had forgotten him."

DEAR UNCLE ABNER: I most can't wait for vacation when you're going to take me to Lake George. Old Mellington gives us awful hard lessons. Sometimes he calls me a fool because I can't learn algebra any better. I think he's a beast and when I am big enough I'm going to whip him. If dear mamma were alive, she would help me, as she used to, and then I would get along easy; but I've nobody but you now and you are so far away. But you will come for me in three weeks, as you promised, won't you, dear Uncle Abner?

Your loving nephew,
ABNER LENOX.

Mr. Pettigrew stood still for several minutes with the letter in his hand, musing. Then he unconsciously said to himself, audibly:

"I was wrong. It would have been selfish cowardice. I had no right to dispose of myself. Age may rob us of pleasures; but only when life's work is done, and done well, are we entitled to release by death. If it were only for the boy's sake, I should live. Yes, I will take him to Lake George."

GREATNESS.

GIVE me the life that animates the Oak,
Its calm, its depth of spirit and its power;
These, and its constancy would I invoke,
Rare things that pass not with the passing hour.
Whether it be in time of leaf and flower,
Or when all life endures the winter's stroke,
Nobly it rears its head; a deathless dower
Of grandeur aye invests it like a cloak.
Give me these gifts, and I shall ever fare
Untiring, far up toward the longed for height;
No more strong, dauntless, in the morning air,
When all the way is clear with lucid light,
Than when with folded pinions I must bear
Along the dreadful gloomèd gulf of night.

William Francis Barnard.

THE SIGN OF THE LIZARD.*

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS.

A story of adventure in Lower California, wherein Remly Sturgis and three companions search for hidden treasure. Their superhuman efforts in forcing their way through treacherous caverns, and their amazing combats with native tribes and native beasts. The guarded shrine, and the victory of sagacity.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHEN FOES MEET.

MUCH of the candle had been consumed in the prison. No one gave heed to this, however, for all were hastening down the long descent as rapidly as possible. Sturgis had been loading his pistols and those of the others as he walked, yet he watched the priestess with a solicitous eye, for he had been deeply affected by what she had done.

She was walking firmly, but he saw that she wavered; her face was blanched and drawn, as if with pain. Stepping beside her, he took her arm and made her lean upon him as once his mother had done when she was ill.

The woman smiled; it seemed to Sturgis that he had never seen a smile more beautiful, in spite of the fact that Kreela was old and ugly.

"Nothing can save me now," she told him. "It is never possible to do more than delay the action of the poison used by the fiends. But I wish you to listen to what I have to tell."

"You should rest," said the leader. "Wait till we reach the bottom of the steps."

"It is when we reach the bottom that you must work most rapidly," she replied. "The hordes will be upon us soon. There is no escape from this cavern for miles. But a little from the bottom of this descent is an opening, now blocked with stone, through which this nation ever dreads the entrance of the Chow Zambos, the red devils of the valley. Day and night a portion of this cannibal tribe remains about the base of the tableland, waiting for a chance to attack the people we have left."

"Well, I wish they would do it now."

"And so they must," replied the woman promptly. "You and your friends must tear down that barrier. Tear it down and let them in——"

"Yes, but ourselves? They would kill and eat us the very first of all."

"But they shall not. As you tear down the barrier you must construct another across the passage beyond the opening formed by pulling down the stones. At the last moment one alone must complete the breach and then retire behind the second barrier for safety. The red men will do the rest."

Sturgis realized that three helpless beings now depended on what he could do, while it seemed every moment as if he must hear the shrieks of the devils at the head of the steps and listened again to the whizzing through the air of poisoned clubs.

The priestess was leaning more heavily upon him, but presently she opened a bag she had brought along and produced a pair of stick-like things. "Lights," she said. "The one we have will soon be gone."

Sturgis took them wonderingly. They were like punksticks, except that

* *This story began in the April issue of* THE ARGOSY. *The six back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 60 cents.*

their size was greater and their composition oily. He stopped for Sandy to get a light.

The sticks ignited and burned with a pale blue flame which consumed them very slowly and yet threw a glare of twice the intensity given by the candle.

"In the bag you will find enough of the food such as I gave you before, to last all for two days," said the woman faintly.

Sturgis took the receptacle from her hands, for he saw that she was rapidly growing weaker. A few minutes later he gave the things to Dennis, and halting a second, lifted the priestess bodily up in his arms and bore her down the steps as if she had been a child. Indeed, she was far from heavy, being pitifully thin.

The party was subdued to the last degree. The echoes of their footfalls resounded in the cavern; their knees were trembling with the stress on their muscles, caused by the long descent; their hearts were still bounding from the effects of the pursuit.

The place was damp and somber, filled with shadows which were grotesque. To what new perils below they might be hurrying none dared speculate. All but the child knew the priestess was dying.

This was the more depressing as hers was the keen intelligence which had guided the group to safety. Thus through the gloom of that seemingly endless chamber they fled, with hardly a word spoken.

To all the stairs seemed to drop into solid rock for a depth of at least a thousand feet, yet less than half of that was the total of the climb. They had come to think there could be no bottom, when Sandy, who was leading, struck the level and called aloud in a voice of triumph.

"Stop there—don't go on for a bit, old chap," cried Sturgis. "We've a bit of work to do before we leave."

The priestess made a movement to get on her feet. He placed her down, but she staggered heavily.

"The barrier—there," she muttered hoarsely, and waved her hand to indicate the place as he caught her and laid her down. Then as he placed his coat behind her head, she added: "All must work, fast. Take me further in."

Wondering at the clearness and insistence of her mind, the leader carried her fifty feet ahead. He observed that the tunnel had narrowed down till its height was less than seven feet and its width no more than six. The cavern they followed had evidently been artificially enlarged in places and provided with steps by human agency.

Again making the woman comfortable on the floor, Sturgis hastened back to the barrier she had indicated, where he found innumerable boulders and fragments of stone built up crudely in a niche at the side of the chamber. One or two metal bars were lying there. With these he and Sandy assailed the wall, the others helping under his instructions.

Setting an example of furious endeavor, he directed not only the demolition of the bulkhead of rock, but also the building of a new barrier across the narrowest part of the chamber, between themselves and the others further in. This was quickly but powerfully made, a space being left through which the workers could slip when the moment should arrive, stones being placed conveniently inside to make the wall impassable when at length retreat should be essential.

Next the four wrought like mad to tear down the gate which alone forbade the entrance of the merciless tribe of red men in the valley.

Swiftly as they were accomplishing their end Sturgis spurred them to yet more superhuman efforts. His ear was bent toward the steps as he labored, but amid the thud and thump of falling stones he failed to detect an echo-like sound that now came traveling down through the chamber of darkness.

In a second it was repeated. This time he heard it.

"They're coming!" he muttered. "Steady, every man!"

Simultaneously a stone which Sandy was tugging to wrench from its hold slipped down, fell outside, and crashed below in a tangle of trees and brush.

Where but a chink of light had been a moment before, a great open window was formed in that second. A flood of light and a gush of air came to the four with exhilarating effect.

"Now! Now! Now!" urged the leader.

The sounds in the cavern were growing terribly clear and near. Sturgis knew the angry horde was half way down the steps. Stone after stone went crashing below. The branches of a tree waved in the outside light, nearly across the hole the four were forming.

Sturgis grabbed the tree branch nearest the hole and gave it a jerk that ripped it away. A second later Sandy bowled out a rock that struck the trunk of a palm and leveled it flat to the earth. Downward swept the torrent of yells and roars in the chamber.

"If only the cannibals were here!" exclaimed the leader.

Even as he spoke he leaped from the place. Attracted by the noise of the falling rocks, one of the red devils had suddenly appeared in view within a dozen feet of the hole, and was bending his stick with a button of fire clay at its end.

Like a flash Sturgis discharged his pistol point blank at the fellow's breast and forcing his companions back, as the fellow toppled, dashed to the barrier in the tunnel, pushed them through the opening purposely left, and commanded the men to work for their lives in filling the gap with broken stones.

A tumult had now arisen both within and without the cavern. Savages were leaping down the stairway, clambering devils were swarming into the aperture opening to the outside world.

Sparks struck out where the masses of rock were thrown to fill the narrow opening. It was closed and yet the four still piled up the stones to make it stronger. Through the chinks came a pandemonium of cries.

The uproar, increased as it was by the echoes of the place, suddenly became more fierce and penetrating. A hundred of the cannibals had met a hundred down leaping demons from above, and every second more were surging to the scene from either side.

Shrieks of death and agony were added to the cries which had been sufficiently blood curdling before.

Sturgis fancied he could see the fury of the battle between these tribes of inhuman monsters; see the hate in their faces, the bloody deeds of hand to hand encounter, the bursts of fire, which must spread from one to another of the fellows clothed in their blouse-like trousers and coats; and see the grimaces and stiffenings at the blows of death which the venomous clubs would bring to friend and foe alike in that battle on the steps.

In the midst of the terrors of it all, when he knew that the two opposing forces would annihilate each other, he felt the tiny hand of little Vera, who had come to his side like a shadow.

"Please, Cousin Remly, come to Kreela," said the child.

He knew she was weeping, but her womanly little way gave his heart a thrill. He took her by the hand and went to the priestess.

His uncle was kneeling at her side and striving to give the woman comfort, but he could hardly speak for his emotions.

Sturgis was down beside her in a second. He lifted her head to his arm and she smiled wanly.

"Kreela," he whispered. "Oh, isn't there anything I can do?"

"Take—good care—of my—darling little Vera," replied the priestess faintly. She closed her eyes and sighed wearily, and yet as one at peace. "How

happy—I—could have—been," she faltered, "if—you—could have—been—my—son——"

"You have been like a mother to all of us," said Sturgis. He kissed her softly on the forehead. A light, as if of divine content broke on the wrinkled face, a smile of sweetest womanhood played about her lips.

"Adois—my—children," she whispered, and closed her eyes forever.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TOMB OF OPALS.

To a dirge made by shrieking savages, the body of the priestess was borne away. The silent party, all of whom owed their lives entirely to this woman, moved ahead again swiftly, needing no special guidance now, for the passage was open before them.

It was Sturgis who carried the form of Kreela. He had no particular object, except to get the body away from the chamber of terrors beyond. He felt he could not bear the thought of leaving her in such a place alone.

Hardly more confident than before, fearing as they did that some of the savages might still be able to scale their barrier of rock and so pursue and kill them, the party moved on with every nerve at a tension.

The way was mysterious, the air musty and close. Along the side of the passage an earth jewel, like a garnet, gleamed in the light here and there, but no one paid the slightest attention.

Sandy had taken possession of Vera, as if she were his. She had fallen asleep in his arms, or rather had cried herself to rest quietly. Thus the tunnel was traversed for a considerable distance.

Again in the lead, though burdened, Sturgis was revolving in his mind the events of the few days past, and indeed of all the fateful trip. He had come for jewels; he had found priceless treasures in human form. He breathed his thanks at the outcome of his adventure, for a settled conviction was now upon him that all would get away.

Not a regret did he harbor at the thought of the riches he had come to seek denied him and doubtless lying far away in another direction in some fastness of the mountain.

Absorbed as he was, nevertheless his senses were acute. Thus it was that he stopped at a sound which now came faintly through the gloomy corridor.

"Boys," he said, "be on guard. There is something ahead."

His own steps were noiseless. From the sepulcher of stone came a repetition of the sound, something akin to a tinkle, and yet of more volume, and hollow—a musical sound which Sturgis soon made sure came at regular intervals. He believed it to issue from something on which a person was beating.

All were moving with the greatest caution. The sound grew more distinct; then others, less loud, and of a different tone, joined with the first till a regular rhythm floated along in the darkness.

The leader now approached a curve of the passage. His eyes were bent on the impenetrable darkness ahead, his faculties were concentrated to avoid letting an enemy surprise them. The body of the priestess he had given in charge of Dennis and Pablo.

Suddenly Sturgis started violently backward. The light had revealed the forms of two monster beings, one on either side of the tunnel and each erect next a pillar of stone.

The figures were images carved in stone—giants with faces diabolically fantastic with frowns, standing as if at a gate, their hands filled with singular weapons and punk sticks, their attitude full of menace.

"Look here," said the leader, "those fellows gave me a bigger scare than any I've had."

He laughed a trifle nervously and went between them and on to the chamber they guarded.

He found himself at once in the company of scores of the adamant guardians, standing in rows along the sides of the hall. All were precisely alike, all of terrible aspect.

The musical noises had now become so clear and withal so monotonously exact in beat that Sturgis was puzzled. He was sure that a human being was not making the sounds, although he was quite convinced that the same human agency which had provided the statues was accountable for the noise.

"The burial place of the tribe up above, I'll warrant," he muttered to himself, and issuing from the hall to a larger cavern he found his opinion strengthened.

A stream of water was trickling from the solid rock and into a crystal pool before it escaped through a subterranean channel, and its weight was falling on a peculiar water wheel, which it caused to revolve. This was the source of the musical sounds, for an arrangement of hollow lengths of bamboo sticks was so secured upon the contrivance that they were constantly raised and allowed to fall, thus giving forth each a musical note of extraordinary quality and richness.

Moreover, on the axle of the wheel was a scroll of paper or something resembling parchment, on which were printed innumerable characters.

"This does beat the Dutch," muttered Sturgis. "It's a prayer wheel, or I'm a fish hook. I hope that map will show us the way to daylight, for we are certainly near their graveyard now."

The others had paused about him in wonder not unmixed with awe. They made no remark, except Sandy, who grumbled at the wheel for causing such an alarm.

The leader again advanced, expecting to come upon a tomb. A large torch, fresh and evidently left there for use at the next visit of the tribe themselves, was resting in the hand of one of the giants in stone. This Sturgis took and lighted.

It burned with a brilliant glare, throwing a strong light far ahead.

Expectant as he was, Sturgis was not in the slightest degree prepared for the sight which challenged his gaze. It was a tomb, indeed.

He was standing in the tomb of opals.

Never, thought the man, had mortal ever looked upon a sight to parallel this. It was a chasm of riches—a world of petrified rainbow tints, indescribably brilliant, flashing from a million facets, blending in myriad corruscations the fires of rubies, the azure of fathomless skies, the emerald of matchless seas, the purple of velvet and the sparkle of diamonds without number.

Not the wealth of empires equaled this exhibition; not all the brilliants ever dug from the earth could compare to what was here. It was an opal quarry! And this was a sepulcher for the savage dead.

Like men of wood the travelers stood there. They were dazzled, stunned; it seemed as if it might have been a dream, for how could it be reality?

Sturgis struck himself on the cheek and bit at his fingers to prove to himself that he lived and saw with waking eyes.

Slowly he advanced, only to make of the show a more vitally wonderful thing than ever, as a score of new points shot forth their beams of color like the iridescence of crackled ice. Then the reality of all was impressed on his mind in a second, for on slabs next the wall sat scores of figures, dead, clothed, however, and gazing into vacancy from sightless eyes.

Each body was beneath an emblematic thing suspended above the head, from which there hung three rows of opal pendants, many of them formed exactly like the one which Sturgis had originally received with his map—slender pyramids two inches high and half an inch square at the base. Others resembled large drops of dew. In each of the three rows there were seven of these jewels.

So glossy and peculiar did the dead appear that Sturgis felt constrained to place his hand upon the face of one. It was hard, and he then discovered that the bodies were mummified by being painted entirely with something like lacquer, impervious to air or moisture, in which the corpses would endure till the end of time.

Such was the brilliance of the opals that the leader was glad to divert his attention for a time to these bodies. It seemed to him that he must "take it all in" by degrees—as if too long a gaze was more than his brain could bear. He therefore stole furtive glances at the riches of opal, but bent his gaze for the most part on the enameled faces.

Thus investigating, he concluded that only the great in life had been treated by the preserving process, for the place was not large enough in size to accommodate all who would die in a nation, even in a single decade. Yet he was puzzled as to what would be done with the commoner people.

He noted that hundreds of gleams came from under the slabs whereon the dead were sitting. Bending down, he discovered that beneath the shelf-like place provision was made for ashes, the space being sufficient for tons of them. And everywhere upon the level surface of the ashes the pyramids and rounded drops of opal were standing.

Clearly the common people were cremated, their ashes sprinkled here and a jewel placed there for each departed person.

"Look there," said the voice of Sandy. "If thet ain't a Josh, er some kind of idol, I'll eat yer hat."

Sturgis turned about, to behold a shrine cut in the opposite wall and a monster figure resembling Buddha, ornamented with strips of solid gold, seated on a throne of opal, and all the shrine beneath him a mass of carving completely veneered with the precious stone.

A thousand punks were about this figure, held in long, slender bamboo handles. The idol seemed not to be the god of life or death or anything human, but a god of jewels—the representative of the riches of the earth.

To the right of this was the quarry from which the supply was evidently mined. It was a shallow, irregular cave where opal and common rock met, blended and parted again. One of the sides of this mine gave evidence that the opal extended no further. But there was still an incredible quantity of the dazzling material, some of the pieces of which were half cut out.

It seemed as if the workmen might have quitted the place only half an hour before.

Sandy laid the sleeping child on Pablo's coat and then on the very shrine itself, as if she were the heiress of all this mine of wealth. Then, unobserved by the others, he took one or two of the bamboo sticks and thrust them in his belt.

The thousand lights were playing on the face of the priestess, as she lay with Sturgis' coat for a pillow.

It was Remly who first felt apprehensive for their safety, and suggested immediate retreat.

"Yes," agreed the leader, passing his hand across his brow, "we must take all we can and then hasten away. Can you tell me what it means—these dead and all the rest?"

"No, I can tell you no more than you see. In eight long years I have never been able to penetrate their secrets by the breadth of a hair. I doubt if even Kreela knew of this, or of what they do at the death of any person. But I fear they will find us here—and what could we do?"

"They will find us gone," replied the leader. "Great Scott! to think of our coming to the place after all—after we had given it up—I can't believe it!"

He had walked along the line of dead to the end. "I say," he exclaimed. "Come here and look at this!"

He was pointing to a body, mummified exactly as were the others, except

that its clothes were parted from the breast, revealing a rude sort of square where the skin had actually been taken off in one large piece.

"Gee whillikins!" cried the miner. "What do yeh make of thet?"

"Don't you know?" replied Sturgis. "As sure as the world, this fellow once was regarded as important, for that is the place where the map we had originally came from! This poor devil was once tattooed with our map, and somebody skinned——"

He never completed the sentence; it was too suggestive of horror. They all started toward little Vera.

"Boys," resumed the leader, "gather all you can of the cut opals, the pieces under the slab and the ones above the fellows' heads. I wish we could carry away some of the solid chunks, but we can't. Fill everything you've got and make some bags of the coats."

While his orders were being executed he quietly unfastened his little cousin's dress and made a mental sketch of the tattooed map on her neck. He realized then how wise had been the priestess, how keen when at last the truth had flashed upon her mind, for alone he would never have known exactly where to look for the entrance by which they had escaped, even with the map for a guide.

He discovered, however, than an entrance or exit from the chamber of opals was marked as if it were closed with stone. With this in mind and feeling that he knew the way, clear of doubts, he fastened the gown and gently laid the child in another place.

Climbing ruthlessly upon the shrine, he brushed off the punks and with a noose of the rope he had kept thrown over the head of the idol, gave him a jerk that rocked him violently forward and back.

Remembering then that a noise would disturb the sleeping child, he called Sandy to his aid and the two of them rolled the idol over and dropped him down upon his head on the floor with hardly a sound. On the jeweled throne thus provided he lifted the priestess with reverent care and composed the body as if in rest.

There she sat, a fitting goddess, as if she presided over the people she had conquered at last.

"Good by," said Sturgis below his breath. "God keep your soul in peace and happiness."

He now ascertained that the exit was located at the furthest end of the place, filled in with stone as he had expected. This barrier the four assailed, clearing the way sufficiently to admit them all to the tunnel beyond. This being done, they resumed the harvesting of opals.

At this task they were nearly made frantic, so great were the riches that they could not possibly carry away. As it was, they gathered a great quantity of the fiery jewels, cut already in splendid shapes to reveal their beauty.

More than ever the wonders of the place made each of them shake his head. It was still too much to believe, and it glowed and sparkled in its supernatural splendor till it seemed impossible for any to leave it as they must—forever.

Moving at last to the cavern they had opened, they took a last long look and started on again.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FREEDOM.

MILES and miles in that tunnel, winding like the bore hole of a colossal serpent through the rocks of the great eternal hills, walked the group of escaping people. Sandy and Sturgis took turns at carrying the child, but when she awoke she walked at the side of one and another holding fast to a friendly big hand and chatting sweetly till all were as homesick as children.

Yet, how endless were the turnings, the climbs, the descents; how weary were they all; how they longed for a sight of the smiling sun! In all their

trials Sturgis had never felt so restless, nor yet so depressed. This came from his worry for the bright little cousin at his side.

They ate of the food provided by Kreela, and thought of her with affection. The food gave them strength and filled the need of water as well as of meat.

"I never would do it again, not for all the opals on earth," said the leader to Sandy. "But I'd do it in a minute for the two we found!"

Caldwell merely reached forth his hand, and the two men gave a clasp that meant more than all the words in existence.

Thus marching, chatting, resting when necessary, but pushing steadfastly onward the party came, on the morning of a lovely day, in sight of a gleam of light, which crept through a covering of weeds across the end of their tunnel. Then they were soon stepping forth in the free open air.

They had emerged from the tunnel in a great trench with perpendicular sides.

Sturgis looked about a moment. "Eureka!" he cried. "We've come out at the boat!"

The trench was the one in which the four had originally started on their quest. They had missed the passage which led straight to the tomb of opals because the weeds concealed it completely.

In a minute the eyes of all were delighted by the sight of the trim craft lying at anchor in the snug little harbor.

Pablo had her up to the rocks in a hurry, for the thought of the red devils, encountered before unhealthily close to the place, lent speed to his movements. And all were so anxious to be starting away that the boat received the party in the briefest time; the anchor was weighed and Sturgis stood up with an oar to push her away from the rocks.

Before he could fend her off, and as if his motion had started some awful machinery of the universe, a rumble broke upon the air, the rocks about them began to sway and the very earth seemed about to crumple and collapse.

"*El tremblo! El tremblo!*" cried the Mexican.

An earthquake, indeed it was, shaking down the hills themselves. With deafening crashes mass on mass of the rocks that formed the walls of the channel and cavern toppled down and smote out fire, and ground themselves to dust.

As if the earth creature arched up its back and shook its body violently, the rocks continued to sway, the walls were buckling and the hills seemed to toss off their caps in the turmoil.

The boat was heaved upward on the agitated water.

The passage which the party had quitted such a brief time before became a scene of hurled in rocks that made a picture of devastation.

The awful spasm subsided, after a time that seemed like eternity. The waters still tossed, as though a storm had swept the gulf; anguish of the hills themselves was visible on every hand, and the thunderous booms that sounded through the trench testified in mighty language that nature herself had forever closed the paths that led to the tomb of opals.

* * * *

The boat was dancing merrily over the waves that sparkled in the sun, and the swash of the ripples from her bow was music divine to the group who made up her passengers. How fair seemed the world of purple waters and sky intensely blue!

Afar on the misty horizon a few white specks and gleams of light were all that yet appeared of the Mexican city, Guaymas—the very gateway itself to lands beyond and home!

On the deck of the boat and down in her cabin the various members of the party were resting. Pablo and Sandy alone were awake, the former calmly holding the tiller again, still stoic and unemotional; the latter busy with something which he dug at and whit-

tled with the only knife still in possession of the company.

Sturgis, the most exhausted of all, had been asleep in one position on the deck for hours. Between his arms little Vera lay, her sweet face nestled close to his, her hand on his big brown wrist.

Strewn carelessly in the bottom of the boat were hundreds and hundreds of the fiery opals, dazzling in their splendor now that they lived in the light of day. Some had been lost on the way, but a generous quantity was still in possession of the men, enough to enrich them all.

The child awoke at last and lay where she was, fondling the rough hand which had risked so much for her and her father.

Sturgis felt her and opened his eyes. He laughed as if he had never known so sweet a moment. She kissed him, and then he raised her up, and sitting erect himself, took her on his knee.

His eyes went from one delightful object to another. They rested in fondness on the forms of all his companions, and more so than ever on the great honest back of Sandy Caldwell.

For a time he was content to feel the lazy motion of the boat and to feed his senses on the beauties of the water and sky.

"Sandy" he finally said. "I say, old chap, what are you doing?"

The miner turned about, grinning like a lad who has just escaped from school. A light of affection and fun was beaming in his eyes.

In his hand he held one of the slender pieces of bamboo tube which had been employed in the tomb to hold the punks. He had whittled it to suit his fancy and now had finished boring a number of holes along its length. He placed it to his lips and blew a low, clear note.

"Ain't been doin' nuthin'," he replied, still grinning. "Jest been makin' another old whistle fer Dennis."

THE END.

ROMEO AND JULIETTE.

Translated from the French.

BY DARDELLO.

A tale of cats and lovers, a feline plot and a masculine rescue.

IN a large mansion on the Rue de la Paix, Paris, lived two cats called Romeo and Juliette; and without doubt they possessed something of the sentiments enjoyed by the lovers of Shakspere, for they ate from the same dish and slept on the same rug, always inseparable. In this house was also a young girl, and she had a lover who bore the name of Jacques Dupont.

The family of this young girl did not like Jacques.

The father was under the impression that a certain M. Vidocq would be the better *parti*. True, he was old and ugly, but what difference? He had plenty of money.

The monsieur came often to visit the pretty young girl, whom we will call Mlle. Jeanne; and after his departure she would take Romeo and Juliette and go to her chamber, where she reddened her beautiful eyes with weeping. She loved her two cats and caressed them, at the same time saying to herself:

"Oh, my poor Jacques! my poor Jacques, how I love you!"

This was very agreeable to Romeo and Juliette, but they could not comprehend why she sometimes called them Jacques.

Was it another name of theirs of which they had no knowledge? Often they thought of this strange notion of

their mistress, and talked of it while enjoying their evening promenades.

One warm moonlight night it so happened that they were walking under the windows of the salon. Everything was very still and they trod softly in order not to disturb the slumbers of their dear mistress. But hist! Who is there in the shadow of a tree? It is a figure! Yes, two figures!

It is Jeanne; Jeanne with her arms about the neck of a young man, and she is murmuring the same words that have seemed so strange to the cats.

"My dear Jacques," she says. "My dear Jacques, I love you!"

"Truly a great discovery!" said Romeo softly.

"Yes!" whispered Juliette, and at the same instant the young man stooped and caressed the head of Juliette.

"They are my only friends, my good cats," said Jeanne, sobbing, and he answered her in a voice trembling with emotion:

"My poor Jeanne! how I love you! and we are so unhappy!"

Romeo gazed in the eyes of Juliette and saw there a great admiration for this young man; then he thought of old M. Vidocq, and how often he had heard him say that he detested cats.

Ah, how different was this young man!

"Do you not think that he is very good?" whispered Juliette as they passed on.

"Yes," he answered sadly; "and it is true that our mistress loves him."

"It is necessary that we give them our aid, Romeo. Do not forget that we are happy now, and if old M. Vidocq is permitted to become the husband of our mistress, what will become of us? Then I fear death, Romeo, or, what is worse, banishment."

All night they talked over the terrible situation, and when the first light of the morning came they were on the gate posts with arched backs and eyes full of a fierce determination.

The same day there were many people in this house. They were guests invited to assist at the contract of marriage between M. Vidocq and Mlle. Jeanne Leroux. The young girl was in her chamber, and her face looked as white as her robe. Weak and trembling she awaited the summons of her father.

M. Vidocq had not arrived.

Time passed on.

A courier was sent to learn the cause of the delay.

The father of Jeanne began to show some signs of anger.

Her mother, smiling and graceful, amused the waiting guests, but her movements were a trifle nervous, and from time to time her eyes sought the window.

The return of the courier was at last announced. With a polite bow he stood before them.

"Pardon me, mesdames et messieurs, if I bring you bad news.

"M. Vidocq is the victim of a serious accident. When his carriage crossed the Bois de Boulogne, two animals, strange and fierce, attacked his horses and frightened them so that they ran away.

"M. Vidocq was thrown to the ground, and only saved from instant death by the bravery of a M. Jacques Dupont, who was passing at the time."

From behind the half open door Jeanne heard these words. She threw herself upon her knees. Her eyes were full of tears, but they were now tears of joy.

"Good God!" she cried, "pardon me, I pray, if I neglected to place my trust in Thee. Pardon me for the feeling of joy which the misfortune of M. Vidocq brings to me.

"It is a respite, and for this respite I thank Thee, O God, and I ask Thy blessing upon Jacques—my brave Jacques—and upon me, a naughty girl, quite unworthy of Thy blessing, but so happy."

Several weeks later *Le Petit Journal* contained the following notice:

It is with much sorrow that we announce the death of M. Vidocq. The gentleman never recovered from the accident on the Bois de Boulogne, where he was saved by the courage of M. Jacques Dupont. In recognition of this courage M. Vidocq, who is without family, leaves him the half of his fortune, and the rest to Mlle. Jeanne Leroux, who was, we learn, the fiancée of M. Vidocq.

Respectfully we offer our sympathy for the great sorrow of the family of Leroux.

A year later the house of Mlle. Jeanne was again full of guests.

This time it was a wedding they came to celebrate.

The bride was Jeanne, with a blushing, happy face, and by her side stood Jacques, smiling radiantly.

"Monsieur et Madame Dupont, I offer you my congratulations," said a guest, and in one corner of the salon Romeo and Juliette were purring.

"Where is our conscience, Romeo?" asked Juliette softly.

"Hist! say nothing!" he answered, "but our conscience reposes silent in the tomb of M. Vidocq. It was a terrible murder, Juliette! But we will have cream and a warm corner all our lives."

"Yes, that is true," responded Juliette, "and our mistress is so happy."

"THE TIDE ON THE MOANING BAR."

BY FANNIE HODGSON BURNETT.

The story of a girl's love and a man's nature, and the wreck made by the combination on the rocks of "The Moaning Bar."

I HAD never liked him. Much as I loved my lady, and long as I labored in her service, I cannot say that I ever knew the day when I had any affection for Mr. Jack, even the slightest. There was a hard look in his black eyes from the first, and the moment I saw him, as he lay, a day old baby, bundled up in lawn and laces, it seemed as if I saw into his future, and trembled. And as he grew older, the evil spirit grew with him.

He was cruel and selfish as a child, though his handsome face covered his faults, as handsome faces are apt to do; and even my lady, who was so gentle and kindly, could see no harm in him, and thought his wilful ways were only high spirit.

And perhaps she was the more blind to it, because his black eyes were so like his dead father's; and she had always clung to her husband's memory so tenderly. But Mr. Jack was not like his father, though my lady fancied he was. Mr. Lowther had never made an enemy in his life; and I am sure Mr. Jack never made a true friend.

People flattered and feared him, and pretended to admire his beauty and high handed ways, but no one ever liked him well enough to speak a good word for him behind his back. But, for my lady's sake, people bore with him, and for my lady's sake I bore with him among the rest; and when she lay upon her deathbed, it was me she gave the charge of caring for him, as I had cared for her.

"Don't leave Mr. Jack, Mallon," she said to me, when she could not say anything else. "Don't leave my boy. Take care of him, for my sake. I know he will always take care of you, Mallon. His father would have done it, if he had lived; and I know Jack will."

But though I promised, I knew better than to expect anything like gratitude from Mr. Jack. I had watched him all his life, and never knew him to show a thoroughly unselfish impulse.

But for my sweet, dead lady's sake,

I stayed with him as housekeeper, at the Manse, as the country house was called, and I tried my best to please him; so we had no disagreement, for he never interfered, so long as things were to his liking; and I may add, never even thought to give me the thanks his father and my lady had never spared.

However, I stayed and attended to the servants, and kept the house accounts; and when he came down from London with his friends, he never had to complain. And so matters went on, until the month after my lady's death, when he suddenly took a fancy that he wanted me to go with him to a little seaside town, where he had been staying for some whim or other; for, as he condescended to say then for the first time, he "liked my ways, and liked to have me about him."

So, remembering my promise to his dying mother, I went, without any words; though I must admit it was rather a trial, at my time of life, to make such a change all at once; and, moreover, I could scarcely see how it was that he could require me.

I found his chambers very fine and handsomely furnished; for it was just like Mr. Jack to have everything of the handsomest and best. There was a large suite of them in a big house, in the principal square, and the rest of the establishment was let to an Irish officer, whose regiment was quartered in the town barracks.

Major Clangarthe, the gentleman's name was, and his family consisting of a wife and three or four children, was with him. His rooms were not so handsome as Mr. Jack's, I discovered; and even the best of them had a queer, untidy look. Mrs. Clangarthe had been a great beauty in her day, and came of a very fine, very poor Irish family; and on the strength of this she used to lie on the sofa, or sit in an easy chair all day, joking with the major, and letting the children run wild.

They had made away with plenty of money in their time, shabby as things seemed now; and they were as carelessly happy, good tempered a set as ever I saw in my life. When they had money, it flew right and left, and when they gave their gay little wine suppers, I am sure people never enjoyed themselves more than they did; and there was never more hearty laughing than I could hear among the officers, who crowded into their drawingrooms, as if they would rather be there than attend the finest entertainment in the West End. But they were queer people for all that.

The first I saw of them was two or three days after my arrival, when, as I was sitting at my work, there came a rap at my door, and in answer to my "come in," it opened and showed me a young lady standing there laughing.

"Do you mean 'come in' really?" she said, good naturedly. "If you don't, I can run away again."

She was a very pretty young lady, indeed, and very young; not more than seventeen; but to my mind she looked queer enough. She had big, round, lovely gray eyes, and crinkling, silky black hair, hanging to a bit of a waist; but the crinkling black hair looked as if it actually needed brushing; and it was tied back with a purple velvet ribbon, which was anything but clean.

I had never seen a lovelier, more supple little figure; it was so lithe and soft and round; but her crimson cashmere morning robe was soiled and frayed; and the seam on one of her shoulders had come unstitched and showed the white skin through plainly.

Even her feet—such pretty feet—were not tidy. One of her slippers had burst out, and the other had lost its rosette. But she did not seem to care about her appearance, and drew up the chair I offered her close to mine, and began to talk with a careless freedom that made me almost catch my breath.

"I am Lina," she said, as unceremoniously as if she had known me for years. "Lina Clangarthe, from the rooms up stairs; and I thought I would

come to see you. Mamma said I might, because we know Mr. Lowther so well. You have been housekeeper in his family ever since he was born, he says."

I told her that I had, and answered all her questions as well as I could, though she asked a great many. The fact was, she asked questions all the time, and seemed so sweet tempered about it that I could not help liking the poor, neglected child.

And she was as ready to answer questions as she was to ask them, and to my bewilderment, told me all about the family affairs, speaking just as gaily about their family troubles as if the whole affair was a joke.

"And so it is a joke," she said, "and fine fun we have of it sometimes. If it wasn't for Lady Medora and her lectures, and the tracts she sticks in the boxes of old finery she sends us, we shouldn't mind it a bit."

Lady Medora was her father's sister, I found out, and a very rigid person. She sent them boxes of her cast off finery two or three times a year, and when they came, they were sure to herald a new lecture on family frivolity, and a new supply of tracts.

"I wore one in the toe of a slipper for a week," Lina said. "Her ladyship had stuffed it in, and I should never have seen it, but that Fergus' terrier was playing with the rosette and tore the kid and pulled it out."

I really thought I must be dreaming, it seemed so strange that the pretty, incomprehensible creature should be revealing the family secrets so frankly; but she rattled on as gaily as if there was nothing at all remarkable in her queer confidences.

"I am so glad you have come," she said. "I like old ladies, and you look so nice and good natured. I shall come in and see you often, if you don't mind. You won't mind, will you? Besides, I am glad for something else. As long as you are here, it won't be the least bit improper to talk to Mr. Jack when I come in to borrow things. I often come in to borrow things, and I can't help talking when he begins, though I suppose it is a tiny mite improper. And mamma says I must be discreet; but the fact is, my darling Mrs. Mallon, we are not a discreet family. I often think there must be the least taste of vagabond blood in our veins, if we are Clangarthes."

I was so sorry for her, so fearful of the danger her beauty and ignorance and high spirits might throw her into, that, even while she laughed, I felt heavy hearted.

What sort of a woman could she be, this mother, who let the pretty creature run in and out of a gentleman's private rooms to borrow things and listen to whatever flattering nonsense he chose to talk to her? In the liking I had taken to her I couldn't help speaking a word or two, which I thought might serve as a motherly hint.

"I am glad I have come, too, my dear," I said to her. "And I hope you won't take it hardly if I say I am glad for your sake. I hope you will come and see me often; and if you want to borrow anything, just run in here, right to me, because you are quite right in thinking it is not quite proper to apply to Mr. Jack. You are too young and pretty for such things to be quite discreet, my love."

From the bottom of my old woman's heart I felt that she was too good and innocent to be trifled with, and I knew Mr. Jack too well to hope that he meant to act honorably by her. But I did not think of the worst then. God knows, I never believed his heart could be as black as it proved itself.

I thought it quite likely that he might talk nonsense, and flatter her with hopes he never meant to realize; but I never went so far as to think he could mean to bring misery and despair on this pretty, ignorant young thing, whose heart was so fresh and childish.

She sat and talked to me for more than an hour, and the more she talked,

the more I liked her light hearted, affectionate ways, and the more I wished she had a better mother to guide her. It seemed a trifle curious, too, that I, with all my staid, old womanish notions, should have taken such a fancy; but somehow my heart warmed toward her, and she seemed to see it.

I knew that at first the innocent rattlebrain had only come to coax her way into my heart for Mr. Jack's sake, but I could see plainly enough in the end that she was quite honest in her liking for me, and would take any motherly counsel I gave her.

I could not help thinking about her when she was gone, and wishing that she was not so ready to admire Mr. Jack's fine ways and handsome face. He was handsome enough, it cannot be denied, and he was the very style of beauty to take a girl's fancy. He was slight and lithe limbed, and dark as a Spaniard.

Indeed, there had been, two or three centuries ago, a touch of Spanish blood in the Lowther family, and now and then it broke out again in a pair of dense black eyes, a slow, sweet smile, and a graceful languor of motion.

My lady's husband had possessed the dark eyes, but the rest had come to Mr. Jack, and it was easy enough to see how a girl like Lina Clangarthe would passionately admire his beauty and careless haughtiness.

That night, for the first time since my arrival, Mr. Jack paid me a visit, and the moment I saw him I knew why he had come. And, after he had talked about other things for a while, he spoke out, carelessly enough.

"You had a visitor this morning, Gorish tells me," he said.

The words were quiet sounding, to be sure, but I did not trust them, for bold and devil may care as he was by nature, he did not look me in the face when he spoke. He looked down at the half smoked cigar in his hand, so that his black lashes cast a curious shadow over his dark, half closed eyes.

"Yes, I had a visitor," I answered, as brief as possible.

He smiled languidly, as he smoothed a loose leaf round the cigar with his strong white fingers.

"A pretty one, too," he said. "However scandalized you may be with your recollection of lovely, untidy hair, and lovely, untidy figure, you will agree with me there, I am sure."

"Yes, sir," I replied gravely again. "A pretty one and a bright one. A bright, affectionate, loving one, with a fresh, true heart, I think."

He smiled again lightly, touching the ash of his cigar.

"Ah!" he said, in a low, half indifferent sort of tone; and then he put the cigar in his mouth again and went on smoking, as if he had forgotten all about what we had been saying. It was a way of his to pass things by and become indifferent to them in a moment. It had been so with his toys and pets as a child; and it was so even with his friends and his extravagant fancies.

He said nothing more to me about Miss Lina, and I was glad to find he didn't. It gave me some hope that he had not taken any great fancy to her, as I had at first imagined he had. His fancies were not pleasant things to cope with; and I knew such a fancy as this could come to no good.

But before I had been in the house many days, I found that the major and he were great friends, and that Mrs. Clangarthe admired him as much as her daughter did. She had a great weakness for beauty, and Mr. Jack's dark eyes won her from the first.

He spent hours in their apartments, passing in and out in the queer, informal way everybody who had dealings with them seemed to adopt; and it was plain that he was always welcome, for the major made a great to do over him, and Mrs. Clangarthe would laugh and talk to him in the good natured, light headed fashion which seemed natural to her.

The major was pretty deeply in his

debt, Mr. Jack's valet, Gorish, told me, and was continually borrowing fresh supplies; but for the matter of that, Gorish added, he was in debt over head and ears, and borrowed right and left wherever there was a chance.

As I have said before, there were plenty of visitors constantly coming to the house, most of them military men like the major, and all of them appeared to be of one opinion regarding Miss Lina. They all admired her, and all made love to her, and I must say that I believe some of the younger ones were really in earnest.

And no wonder. When she was dressed, as she was always of an evening, with her lovely figure, lovely face, lovely hair, and reckless high spirits, I am sure there was not a more beautiful creature in London. In spite of their untidy ways, the Clangarthes had a wonderful taste in dress; and what with Lady Medora's presents, and going into debt, they kept up in a way that was astonishing.

But with all the attention she received, and all the fine speeches that were poured into her pretty, ready ears, it was easy to see that Miss Lina cared for none of them but Mr. Jack. She gave way to him in an innocent, open, girlish way, and she tried to amuse him.

She was just the generous young creature to be a tender, willing slave through bitter and sweet. If she loved her husband, he might be her tyrant, if he had the will; and the more I saw, the less I fancied Mr. Jack's winning her warm, loving heart to play the tyrant over.

I saw a great deal of the family, and had the chance to watch, because in a short time I found that I might be of service in several little ways, and finally, partly through my liking for the girl, and partly at Mr. Jack's request, I fell into the habit of superintending things here and there and helping the servants when they had company.

And so the friendship between Miss Lina and myself was strengthened. She began to make a confidante of me in more ways than one. She told me about her admirers, and laughed at them in a hearty, enjoyable way which had not a bit of deceit about it.

She showed me her dresses and came to me for help when they wanted mending or altering, and when I did anything for her she would kneel on the carpet at my side, with her big gray eyes all alight with wonder and gratitude.

I never helped her in the least without getting an affectionate burst of thanks and an impulsive caress. It was her nature to overflow with gratitude and pleasure about small things and I was the last person in the world to try to restrain her.

They were having one of their free and easy little suppers one night and I had noted among the guests a gentleman I had not seen before.

He was not an officer, but a civilian, and though he was well looking enough, there was a stiffness about his manner and a haughty, pretentiousness in his blond face that rendered him by no means as prepossessing as the genial, finely made, epauletted men, who were so fond of thronging the rooms. "Sir Denis," I heard them call him, and I noticed that he seemed very much pleased with Miss Lina, and showed it pretty plainly in a certain stiffly polite fashion.

It appeared, too, that he was a favorite of Mrs. Clangarthe, for she took a great deal of trouble to draw him out, and evidently wished that Lina would be attentive. But I understood Miss Lina very well by this time and saw that she was rather uneasy. She was trying very hard to be obediently entertaining, but she was not getting along very well, and was not enjoying herself as she usually did. I had promised Mr. Jack to undertake the management of things that night, and in passing to and fro before the opened doors, I saw that as she danced with Sir Denis and talked

to him, there was a restless look in her eyes and a queer, little eager color on her cheeks.

She looked uncomfortable, and I guessed the reason why. Sir Denis had taken Mr. Jack's place so completely that the two had hardly spoken a word to each other, and the poor child was troubling herself about it and fancying that he was troubled, too. But he was bearing it very well, I thought. He was making himself agreeable to a tall young lady with a fine figure and an amber satin dress, and seemed to be enjoying himself pretty well, to judge from his face and the young lady's rather loud laughs.

He did not take much notice of Miss Lina, and after a while, I think, she began to notice it, for the color in her cheeks died out and the uneasy look in her eyes deepened. For my part I felt almost angry. I knew what his indifference meant.

He knew his power over her, and meant to exercise it. He took the tall young lady in amber satin down to supper, and he hung over her and talked nonsense in a half joking way that was torture to the poor child who sat opposite by the side of her ceremonious admirer, the uneasy color coming and going as she listened to the bursts of laughter from their side of the table.

But at last Mr. Jack got tired of the talkative young woman in amber, and handing her over to somebody else, made his way across the room as if he was going to leave it.

I was in a room on the other side of the hall and could see everything, and the hidden misery in Miss Lina's eyes told me that if she could not break from Sir Denis in one way she would in another.

And so she did, for in a minute more she was out in the hall and half way down the stair case after Mr. Jack, and was speaking to him all in a wild flutter, half frightened, half daring.

"Mr. Lowther!" she said. "Jack! Don't go."

I shall never forget how she looked just as she stood there at that minute, the troubled red on her cheeks, the eager girl's desperateness in her big eyes.

It is such girls as Lina Clangarthe who bear misery and shame because their hearts are tender and the chances are against them; it is such girls who need the world's pity and God's help when the worst comes to the worst. A woman less ignorant of the world's ways would have known better than to let Mr. Jack see she could not bear a shadow of neglect.

"Jack! Don't go!"

A little shiver ran over me as I heard her say it. I did not know before that they had gone so far as that, and my heart quickened forebodingly as he stopped and turned to look up at her. Cruel as it may seem, I was almost ready to pray that he might not hear her and would go on without answering.

She was so pretty—so pretty! The dazzling light seemed all to shine upon her full, soft, white shoulders and arms; even the shining white billows of her silk train could not make her look anything but a child. The light was so bright that the roses that drooped in her bosom and clung to her loose, soft hair, were as red as blood.

She was pretty enough to bring him back whether he cared for her or not, and he came, smiling, as if nothing had happened, and stood a few steps below her as she slipped into a sitting posture on the stairs, looking down at him with her soul in her eyes and her heart's blood in her cheeks, all in a flutter of joy at his coming and wonder at her own daring.

"Ah, Jack," she said, "you are not vexed, are you? Not vexed with me?"

They were so near me that I could hear every word they said and see every change in either face, and I saw the slow gleam of triumph grow into Mr. Jack's black eyes; the evil, handsome eyes he had inherited from that Spanish

ancestor. It was only a small triumph, but it was one, and the least of triumphs pleased him. So he stood looking up at her and smiling a little, as he leaned on the balustrade.

"You seemed to be fully occupied," he said. "I thought perhaps Sir Denis could fill my place, but, of course, I am not vexed. A man's not apt to be when he sees himself thrown over for another —is he?"

All the color fell away from her face and she broke out upon him almost piteously.

"Oh, Jack! oh, Jack, don't! You know—you *do* know it wasn't my fault. I have been miserable all night. And, besides," turning on him with a swift little touch of pathetic reproach, "weren't you talking to Norah Delamore?"

Perhaps her prettiness and the eager appeal in her lovely eyes touched him. At all events, after an odd little pause, he spoke to her in another tone.

"Where is your cloak?" he said. "Go and put it on, Lina, and come here to me again. I want you."

She sprang up in a minute as bright as could be and went without a word, and in less time than it takes me to write it she was back again with a bright rose pink opera cloak on, her eyes shining from under its hood like diamonds.

"Is it the garden?" she said to him, slipping her hand into his arm and laughing a happy little laugh. "Is it into the garden, Jack?"

"It is where we shall be out of the way," he answered, softening his cruel voice. "Out of the way and together and happy." And he slipped his treacherous arm about her little waist, and drawing her to his side, bent over and kissed her full on her blooming lips.

I knew there was little room for hope after that. Having gone so far, he would go farther, if the fancy held him, and as soon as he was tired he would fling her away without a pang of remorse. I could not help feeling a thought bitter against the heedless woman in the bright room near them.

I could hear her laughing and I could hear the Major laughing, too, and I could not resist an impulse of impatience at their blindness.

I never had children of my own, but I felt sure that no daughter of mine, if I had ever had one, would have been left thus helplessly to herself as Lina Clangarthe was.

And this was only one occasion out of a thousand such. Every day I saw more of an imprudence, which, to my mind, seemed actually terrible. The people who visited the house were as careless and easy going as the Clangarthes themselves, and Lina was wonderfully popular among both men and women.

She was pretty enough to have drawn the world after her, and her queer, bright, high spirits and reckless inclination for fun were the very things to please people who thought of nothing but how to enjoy life and amuse themselves.

"We take life easy," said Lina to me one day. "Where's the use of taking it hard and fretting like Lady Medora. It only makes people ill natured. We can't help being poor and in debt, but we can help fretting about it, can't we, Mrs. Mallon?"

There never was a lighter hearted creature on earth than she was then. It appeared as though she was overrunning with fun and life. There was never a dull look on her bright face or a hard word on her lip.

She had a laugh and a jest for every one, and there was not a servant in the house among all the ill paid lot who was not ready to do anything for Miss Lina. It is my opinion that but for her there would scarcely have been a servant on the place. When there was money in the house she always remembered them, and when there was none she coaxed them into a good humor.

Her maid got her dresses before they

were half worn and the cook borrowed her jewelry, quite secure in her good nature, even if she was found out. Ill regulated as everything was, there was something half comical about it all. They were so good natured and easy and life seemed such an enjoyable affair.

Even the ill used tradesmen, who dunned them from morning till night, went away somewhat pacified after an interview with Lina or the Major, though there is no doubt they afterward wondered at their own indiscretion in allowing themselves to be so soothed.

It is my impression that Lady Medora herself had a sense of her own unfitness to cope with them, for though she sent box after box of old finery and tracts enough to have converted a whole Fiji island, she never visited them.

"And all the better," said Lina, tossing over the contents of one of said boxes on its arrival. "It would only make her uncomfortable, poor soul. She wouldn't understand us, you know, and we shouldn't understand her. It's all the better, and we are very grateful to her, I am sure. It's a blessed thing for us, though, that there's one saint in the family to pray us all out of Purgatory. Lady Medora is a very good woman, Mrs. Mallon. Dear me! I wonder where she wore this rose colored satin dress. I am going to shake the tracts out of the trimmings and try it on."

I often thought that with a good mother she would have been far better than most girls. My pretty Miss Lina, she was better as it was, in spite of her wild ways. I never heard an ill natured word from her lips, queer as some of her speeches were, and she was generous and affectionate beyond measure.

The tribe of neglected children who tumbled about the rooms were fonder of her than they were of any living thing, and she would give up her own pleasure any day to romp with them when they asked her, which they were by no means chary of doing.

And through watching her and noticing little things, I saw that her feeling for Mr. Jack was love of the intensest kind, and I saw, too, that it grew stronger every day, and that he led her on. And just as far as he chose to lead, she followed and was ignorantly happy. He spent his evenings with her and the Major and Mrs. Clangarthe looked on in their usual amiable, irresponsible way. He rode out with her and the Major admired Lina's fine figure complacently as the two cantered away, while Mrs. Clangarthe nodded them a farewell from the drawingroom window.

"Lina is like Lady Anastasia Derry, my dear. Don't you think so?" Mrs. Clangarthe was fond of saying. "You remember Lady Anastasia Derry, Major, and she was Col. Enniskillen's daughter and her mother was a Wexford?"

The memory of her aristocratic antecedents was a great source of pleasure to Mrs. Clangarthe and she clung to it with whimsical pertinacity.

She was anxious that Lina should make a good marriage, though I often thought she went about managing the matter in a queer way. She forgot that gentlemen of position and title don't always choose their wives for a pretty face. They are a trifle more particular in these days than they were or else the old romantic stories have very little foundation.

But it was Mrs. Clangarthe's plans that cast the first shadow over Miss Lina's life. I do not think the girl had ever known a shadow before, but a cloud came at last and its darkness was too heavy for her.

It had first showed itself the night when the tall, stiff, young man they called Sir Denis followed her about and roused Mr. Jack to making love to the young woman in amber satin, and in the course of time this same shadow became the cloud.

The stiff young gentleman came to the house pretty often after the supper party and when he came he always fastened himself to Miss Lina and kept Mr. Jack in the shade. She bore it at first good humoredly, as she always bore disagreeable things, but after a while it began to trouble her.

Whether he cared for her or not, Mr. Jack did not care to have a rival, and when Sir Denis made himself unpleasant Lina always suffered for it. Mr. Jack did not quarrel with her, he was too wary for that; he simply let her alone and played indifference until the poor, warm hearted, impulsive girl was wretched and reckless enough for anything.

She was afraid of vexing him and afraid of vexing her mother, so between the two she grew desperate. She began to fret in secret and lost her reckless high spirits and was only gay by fits and starts.

Mr. Jack made it worse than it was. He knew how to manage her, and by a word dropped here and there, put it into her mind that her mother's foolish, blind persistence was unnatural cruelty and that she would be forced to make a sacrifice which would render her wretched for life. The fact was, Mrs. Clangarthe's persistence was only weak ambition, and if Lina had been left alone, the matter would have come to its natural termination smoothly enough.

But just as Mr. Jack had tortured his pets in his childhood, he tortured this poor child now and the trouble was too much for her. She was not used to heart pain and at last it broke her down and made her desperate.

She came to my room almost wild one day after Sir Denis had left the house. He had been more than usually pretentiously officious and Mrs. Clangarthe had encouraged him.

"I think he will propose to you soon, Lina," she had said after he was gone. "You are so lucky. Now, if Annette and Lucia only marry as well when they grow up I shall be perfectly satisfied." And when, a few minutes later, Mr. Jack came in, she poured out to him her delight at Lina's success, considering that as the friend of the family he was the person most likely to sympathize with her.

There was a spot of flaming scarlet on Lina's cheek and a dangerous, wild look in her eyes when she came to me, and she had not been with me five minutes before she broke out, tortured with humiliation and pain and fear, telling me the whole story.

"She must be mad," she ended. "She is mad, and she is driving me mad, too. I shall do something desperate and wicked if they don't leave me alone. They cannot see that—that nothing on earth could buy me from my love."

She was sitting on a low stool at my feet and her long hair almost hid her face, but when she said that she tossed the hair back and looked up at me with an almost defiant daring in her eyes.

"It is not right to say that I suppose," she said. "It's not right to acknowledge that I have a true love. Women are not allowed to tell the truth about such things. But you are not blind, if all the rest are. You can see how the truth stands." And then she broke down all in a sudden shame at herself and sobbed like a wronged child.

A strange alteration in her manner came about after this. She was not so frank, and even over her brightest moods there was a shadow. But her trouble only made her fonder of Mr. Jack than ever, and I noticed that she was feverishly anxious to please him.

I was sorry to see, too, that she put herself into his way a great deal more than was quite prudent, but she was too miserable and too ignorant of the ways of the world to be discreet, and so I could not blame her, though I knew she was working against herself.

She met him upon the stairs half a dozen times in a day and I knew very well that the solitary walks she took

were taken only in the desperate hope of seeing or speaking to him.

"I should die if I didn't see him," she broke out once to me. "Don't tell me he'll like me the less for it, Mrs. Mallon; men can't be so cruel as that."

She had always been fond of walking on the beach, and from my window I had often watched her strolling on the waste of sands that the fishermen called the Moaning Bar with the children and letting them pull her about as not one girl in a dozen would have done.

But she never took the children with her now. She walked out alone, though my old eyes were quite sharp enough to see she was not often alone long.

Day after day Mr. Jack would follow her down to their trysting place on the Bar and for hours I could see them as they sat sheltered by the rocks, Miss Lina's scarlet jacket, a bright bit of color, contrasted with sea and sand and sky.

And in her room up stairs Mrs. Clangarthe made herself comfortable over the success of her plans. She was fond of Lina, as every one else was; she was proud of her beauty and wished to see her happy; and fancying a good marriage the boon most to be desired, she worked industriously in her behalf in her own easy natured, shiftless style.

Mr. Lowther was the Major's friend and had lent the Major money; accordingly, nothing could be more pleasantly desirable than that he should amuse Lina and Lina should amuse him.

"I like to see young people enjoy themselves, Mrs. Mallon," she said, sweet temperedly, to me. "And Lina always enjoys herself when she is with Mr. Lowther. She wants brightening a little, too, now, though I am sure I don't see why she should when her prospects are so good, but she has not been in good spirits lately."

That evening Lina came in from her walk later than usual. It was so late, indeed, that the yellow fog curtained both sea and shore and the street lamps were beginning to twinkle here and there.

She did not go up stairs, but came into my room, and the moment she entered I saw that something was wrong. Her face was pale and haggard, but there was a spot on each cheek as bright as her scarlet jacket and in her hand she held a letter.

She sat down on a footstool as she always did. For a minute or so she did not speak, but all at once she began to tremble and cry and pull at the collar of her sacque as if it was hurting her.

"Oh, Mrs. Mallon," she cried. "Oh, Mrs. Mallon, just look here! What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" And then she tossed the letter into my lap and hid her face in her hands under her loose, fog damped hair.

"Do you mean that I must read it, my dear?" I asked, feeling faint at heart, for just at that moment a horrible thought flashed across my mind—a thought I had never even approached before.

She nodded her head without speaking, and so I opened it, and it was from no less a person than Lady Medora Darrel herself.

Lady Medora had heard rumors of Sir Denis's attention to her niece, and was so far pleased as to wish to encourage them. Sir Denis was the son of a friend of hers, and, of course, unexceptionable; and she discussed the whole matter with a queer frankness, which somehow reminded me of the Clangarthes themselves.

"A marriage like this is more than I ever looked for," she wrote. "Living as you do, you could hardly expect to make such a match. I shall write to your mother at once, and in the meantime you may tell her that I will extend to her all the assistance in my power as regards your bridal trousseau when you need it. After your marriage, I shall be glad to receive you at my house, and hope that a change will be effected in your hitherto frivolous life."

A strange sound, half a choked sob,

and half a bitter laugh startled me as I finished reading, and I looked up to find Lina in a white heat of scornful wrath.

"When I need it?" she said. "Good, that, isn't it, Mrs. Mallon? She forgets the old adage, 'first catch your hare.' Sir Denis isn't caught yet, and beside——" She stopped, and shut her white teeth together hard.

Then she broke out fiercely:

"Do you know what that letter will do?" she said. "It will drive me to despair. It was bad enough before, and now they will take that up, as if it was the best luck in the world. They laugh at her, all of them, but they are afraid of her, for all that."

I comforted her to the best of my ability, and she tried to listen, but I saw it was of no use. Before she went away I was in an agony of such doubt and fear as I had never known before in my life.

And this was not all. Just as she rose from her seat, I heard the hall door open and the sound of Mr. Jack's footstep, and from the flash that leaped into her eye, I knew that as she brushed out she was only hurrying to meet him. She was so excited and hurried that she forgot to close the door after her, and as it stood open, I saw her meet him at the foot of the staircase, with the letter in her hand.

"What is it, Lina?" I heard him say, half tenderly, half impatiently, as he caught sight of her standing in the bright light.

She glanced up at him with a troubled face, and then all at once the fire died out of it and left her as pale as death.

"Jack," she whispered, almost breathlessly, "if you are going to save me, you must save me now." And she dropped her head upon the hand she had laid on the balustrade without another word.

I shall never understand how it was possible that, through the long weeks that followed, a mother could be so carelessly blind as Mrs. Clangarthe showed herself. She seemed to enjoy life as much as ever; she was as sweet tempered and ready to be amused with trifles; she played hostess at the gay little suppers, and angled for Sir Denis in seeming unconsciousness of the change in the pretty, young face, hitherto so cloudlessly bright.

It made my heart ache to watch this change as it grew. It was no longer the face that had smiled down on Mr. Jack from the stair case. There was a feverish trouble in its eyes; its very smiles were feverish. I cannot describe the dumb pain and look of inward misery that took the place of the old light heartedness.

But the girl said very little, though she grew paler every day. She bore up against her trouble, almost defiantly, trying to make herself pretty in her lover's eyes, pretending to be gay, and even trying to tolerate Sir Denis. But she could not deceive me.

My love for her had made my old eyes too quick. I think, too, that she understood this, for it was only before me that she ever gave in, and sometimes, when she was with me, she seemed to break down, though she tried hard to make light of it, and always did it with a wretched ghost of a smile on her pale lips.

"Sir Denis was too much for me, tonight," she would say sometimes. "And—and I have a headache. It makes me look pale, I dare say. Do I look pale, Mrs. Mallon?" trying to laugh. "I feel pale."

But the time came when she ceased even trying to laugh, and would come to me looking as white as death, trembling and crying.

"Don't tell," she would say. "Don't tell. I am not well, you know; and Lady Medora has been bothering again. Let me have my cry out and then I shall be better."

I cannot put into words the horror of slow fear which grew upon me. I could not bear to think of it, and fought

against it bitterly, trying to think it quite natural that her girlish troubles should make her hysterical and nervous; but at last I began to see a change in Mr. Jack, and this change crushed all my hopes.

I began to see that he was getting tired of his amusement; and I knew him so well that I recognized the alteration as soon as it came about; as soon as Miss Lina herself did. He began to try to avoid her, as if by accident at first, but more openly in the course of time. In the end, day after day passed by, in which he never entered their rooms.

I wakened earlier than usual one morning, and, after dressing, went to my window to look out, as I had a habit of doing. The fog was just clearing away, and, as my eyes became accustomed to the then floating mist, I glanced accidentally toward the Moaning Bar.

Two figures were standing near the rocks together. It did not need a second glance to tell me whose they were. I knew them in an instant; one by its attitude, the other by the scarlet jacket and long, falling hair. It was Lina Clangarthe and Mr. Jack!

He was lounging carelessly against a rock when I looked and she seemed to be speaking to him passionately, wildly, desperately. She was holding out her hands and clasping and wringing them as she talked, and he was listening without a gesture, simply listening and watching her.

My heart gave one fierce bound and fairly stood still. For a moment it seemed that I scarcely breathed, and then I drew back behind the curtain, praying aloud:

"Lord, have mercy upon her! Oh, Lord, have mercy upon her!" I cried.

It was all over when I looked again. Mr. Jack had sauntered away and Lina was walking rapidly along the beach toward the street. She was walking hurriedly and seemed to steady her slight, girlish figure with some difficulty. But she was not crying, and there was not a tear in her eyes, when, a few moments later, she came into the room.

"I have been out walking with Mr. Lowther," she said, in a strange, steady voice. "And we have had a bit of a quarrel, Mrs. Mallon. Lovers always have their little quarrels, don't they?"

She had seated herself at the window when she entered, and she was sitting there as she spoke, and the minute the words were out of her mouth, she turned suddenly and looked at me.

"If you had been at the window you might have seen us," she said, watching me keenly. "I did not know before that any of these windows fronted the Moaning Bar so directly."

"I think I did see you," I answered, as calmly as possible. "But my old eyes are not as young as they used to be and I might be mistaken."

That seemed to satisfy her, and for a while she sat silent, but at last she spoke again.

"I am rather low spirited this morning," she said. "Quarrels always make me miserable. I don't think I am as strong as I used to be. I wish life wasn't so long. I was thinking this morning it would be an easy sort of a way to end it out there on the Moaning Bar when the tide comes in."

She spoke so deliberately and meditatively that I was startled into making a slight exclamation:

"Why, Miss Lina!" I cried out.

She started a little, looked up at me, and laughed faintly.

"Why not?" she said. "It would be easy enough if one had the courage, and it wouldn't need much. The tide sweeps round the Bar so suddenly. And then there is no help, and one wouldn't need courage. Don't be frightened, though, Mrs. Mallon! I am not going to drown myself. I am too fond of life for that; besides, I want to make up with Jack." And she laughed again.

I was blind enough then to be deceived by her light manner, but I

thought of her words afterward and remembered, too, her little shudder when she said: "And then there would be no help."

After that came a change again, stranger and more deceptive than the last. She regained her spirits too rapidly to seem natural; she never said anything against Sir Denis, and was even extravagantly gay in his presence. Her mother was fairly delighted and exerted herself to her utmost in the matter of dressing her and making her appear to advantage.

They gave the little suppers two or three times a week, and at such times, from my room, I could hear Lina's feverish laugh ringing out above everything. She had never seemed so reckless and light hearted, and as the guests passed out of the house I often caught snatches of conversation among the men, which showed me that even those who had known her the longest were dazzled afresh and puzzled a little.

But Mr. Jack's attentions were gradually falling off. His unceremonious visits were growing fewer and farther between. I was astonished to find that this did not seem to trouble Lina much, and was so far bewildered that I began to falter again.

She did not contrive plans to meet him any longer, and when by accident they encountered each other on the stairs, or in the hall, she would give him a careless little nod or a careless speech and pass on as coolly as she might have done in the first days of their acquaintance.

But one evening after she had passed him so and the hall door had closed upon him as he went out, I heard her feet flag somewhat in their passage up the stair case, and in a moment more there came to my listening ears the dull, dead thud of a heavy fall.

There was no other sound, nothing but the fall, and, strange to say, no one seemed to hear it but myself; and hurrying out, I found lying on the mat at the foot of the stairs, Lina Clangarthe in a dead faint, her white face like a stone.

I went to the kitchen door, and, calling one of the servants as quietly as possible, made her help me to carry the prostrate figure into my room and lay it on my sofa.

"Don't say anything to the others," I commanded the girl. "It is nothing but a faint and would only alarm Mrs. Clangarthe unnecessarily."

I sent her away before the poor child's eyes were open, and then I set myself to work to restore her alone. But before I began I closed the door. I think it must have been half an hour before she knew me, and when the great, speechful, gray eyes unclosed, they turned upon me in an agony, needing not a word to express itself. It seemed to me as if I could not bear it. I thought my heart would burst.

"You fell down stairs and fainted, my dear," I said, as cheerfully as I could. "I suppose your foot slipped."

She did not utter a sound, only looked at me and then all at once at the door as if she was frightened.

"Yes, my dear," I answered, for I guessed what she was thinking of. "Yes, my dear, it's locked. You see I thought there was no need to alarm the household and frighten your mamma. It was only a faint and you will be over it soon. You are almost over it now only, of course, you feel weak and tired and don't want to talk. Take a little of this wine and then I will sit down beside you and you shall try to sleep."

She took the wine, but her poor hands trembled so that I had to hold the glass to her lips. She did not speak even then, and, after she had swallowed it she slipped down on to the sofa cushion with her white, young face upon her arm and her long hair half hiding it as she lay.

As for me I set the wineglass aside and went back to my seat at the window, which faced the Moaning Bar.

For two long hours I sat there with

my work looking out at the sea and now and then glancing round at the helpless young face on the sofa. During those two hours this figure never stirred, but lay there without a movement, the white face half hidden by the heavy, loose hair. The silence was so heavy and terrible and the time so long in its dull, dragging by that I could scarcely bear it.

If I could only have helped her; if I could only have said one word of motherly comfort to her I should have thanked God for it to the last day of my life. If this was only a girl's heartache it was a bitter one indeed and one that called for tender words and comfort, but if it was worse there were no words that human tongue could utter that could be too full of pity and prayer for this young creature in her desolate strait.

I got up from my chair at last and went to her, kneeling down by her side and touching her hair softly.

"Are you asleep, Miss Lina?" I asked.

She stirred a little, but she did not look up as she answered:

"No."

"Do you feel better?" I said, falteringly. "Fainting fits are troublesome things, my dear; but there is not much danger in them, you know. I hope——"

I stopped there because I could say no more. It seemed as if the spell upon her was broken, for she was beginning to shiver and tremble and in a minute she was clinging to the cushion with both her little hands, sobbing in a wild, gasping, choking way.

"Oh, Mrs. Mallon!" she cried out again and again, "if you only knew what is in my heart tonight; if you only knew what is in my heart tonight! If you only—only—knew!"

I was trembling all over myself and crying, too, though I tried hard to speak quietly as I stroked her hair and patted her shoulder to soothe her.

"Tell me, my love," I said. "Tell me, if you can, and I will try to help you. I am an old woman, my dear, and the Lord may show me how I might help you best. The Lord never fails us, you know, my dear."

But she had lost all hope of controlling herself. She only sobbed and gasped and panted with her hand clenched hard against her heart.

"There is no help for me," she cried out. "There is no help. There is nothing but death! Nothing but death! Nothing but death and despair."

The tide had come in and gone down again into the darkness long before she was still, and then it was time for her to go up stairs, for Mrs. Clangarthe was inquiring for her. She got up from the sofa pale as death and with a strange, hollow look about her eyes. She had worn her wild grief out, but she had not uttered a word that might tell me surely whether my terrible fear had any foundation or not.

She gave a glance at herself as she passed the mirror and when she reached the door she turned all of a sudden in a wild, nervous way.

"You are not like other people," she said. "You are better some way. I wish you were my mother."

I wonder if the people who are used to reading stories can guess how this one of mine is going to end. I wonder, too, if the most experienced of them would not have started as I did that night on hearing Lina Clangarthe's laugh ring out among the voices in the room above.

I think they would, and yet I did hear it. I heard it threading through the bursts of merriment that came from the two or three of her father's fellow officers who were his guests for the evening, and as I heard it I trembled.

She was talking to them, and even rattling off gay little French songs for them, one after the other. She was filling the whole drawingroom with her mirth.

Sir Denis was there, too, one of the servants told me, and she was drawing

him on and dazzling him with her daring flashes of wit. And toward the end of the evening Mr. Jack came in and went up stairs to join the party, and a few minutes later, to my bewilderment, I heard her laughing and jesting with him, too.

They were always gay enough and sometimes a trifle boisterous in that light hearted way of theirs, but I had never heard them so merry as they seemed to be this night. Peal after peal of laughter came down the stair case to my room.

"It's Miss Lina is making them laugh so," explained the major's man. "Sure it's in high spur'ts she is in this evenin'. The ould fell'ys is houldin' their sides wid the fun in her. It's beyutiful she looks, too, Misthress Mallon, wid a color like a rose and a light in her eye like foire, an' me Lady Medora's ould dress lookin' new on her. Ah, but it's Sir Dinnis is the lost boy intirely."

Barregan was just like the rest of the servants; he fairly adored Miss Lina and noticed her every mood with as great an interest as if she had been a child of his own. The queer, careless ways of the family extended even to their free and easy intercourse with their servants.

It was later than usual when the company dispersed, perhaps because they had enjoyed themselves so well. I had sat in my room for hours listening and wondering and fearing by turns, and was just setting Mr. Jack's parlor to rights and bolting the shutters before going to bed, when I heard Sir Denis and Mr. Jack himself come out, Miss Lina following them on to the landing to have a last word. The parlor was quite dark and they could not see me, but I could see them plain enough, and you may be sure my first look was at Miss Lina.

She was standing on the stairs, just as she had stood the night Mr. Jack kissed her. Her soft hair was floating over her wide, white shoulders, down to her bit of a waist, as she had a girl's fashion of wearing it all loose and curly, and she had on the very dress Lady Medora had given her, the rose colored satin.

It was as Barregan had said, her eyes were like fire, but just at this moment as she looked down at the two men there was scarcely a bit of color in her face in spite of the light words she was speaking.

"And as you are going away," she was saying to Mr. Jack, "I suppose I may as well say good by to you and ask you to give my love to Lady Medora if you see her when you are in London. Don't tell any tales out of school though, or else she won't send me any more of her old dresses and what would I do without them."

"And you will try the sorrel mare with me tomorrow, Miss Clangarthe?" Sir Denis said, a sort of stiff confusion mixed with his admiration of her. "She paces well, I can vouch, and we can ride past the Moaning Bar and on to the Shingle Road after the tide goes down."

I saw her look down at his face for one second with a strange expression just as if she had forgotten herself, but it was only for one moment; the next she answered him as gayly as ever, only with an odd, feverish, short laugh. "Yes," she said, "I'll remember. When the tide goes down—if nothing happens from now till then. And what could happen? After the tide goes down then. Good night." And she gave him a bright little nod.

"Good night, Miss Clangarthe," he answered and went down stairs with his thin face all in a glow of pleasure.

In his momentary excitement he had almost forgotten his companion, but Mr. Jack called after him the next minute.

"Wait a minute, Dermot," he said. Then he turned to the bright robed young figure on the stair above him, and as he looked into the white young face held out his hand.

"Good night, Lina," he said.

She never stirred. Just stood there, white and still, looking right into his evil, handsome black eyes without a word. She did not take his hand or even notice it.

"Good by," she said at last.

That was all. Not another word, and after taking another look at her he turned away as if she had puzzled him a little and he was too indifferent to care about translating her.

She watched him down the stair case, through the hall, out into the street, without stirring, and then she turned round and walked slowly up to her own room and the last glimpse I had of her in life showed me that queer, calm look in her girl's eyes and that queer steadiness on her white face.

I have often thought since then of the wild desperateness that must have been in that poor wronged young thing's mad heart that dreadful night. I have shuddered and cried like a child over the picture that will sometimes force itself upon my mind—the picture of that steadfast face as it must have looked during the long hours that passed before daylight came.

I have fancied that I could see and understand the depth of despair and misery which this girl of seventeen years old must have struggled with in the silence of midnight.

There had never been a shadow on her life before and the blackness of death had fallen upon her almost in an hour. Did she pray one short, desperate prayer, or did she face her fate, remembering nothing but what she left behind and what life might have held for her?

I was sitting at my little parlor window just as I always did and the tide was sweeping back wave by wave over the sand and over the rocks and over the Moaning Bar. It had been a dull, gray morning and even now the sun was scarcely to be seen at all as it struggled through the banks of leaden clouds. I was feeling troubled and not very well.

I had not slept much during the night and losing rest always hurts me. But somehow this morning it was my mind that felt heavy and it was so heavy that I forgot my tired old limbs altogether. I was thinking of Miss Lina and had been thinking of her all night. I was beginning to fear something I had not thought of before, and the thought of it chilled me to the heart.

When first it struck me I turned to the sea with a quick, cold pulse beat and my eyes fell on the Moaning Bar in shrinking terror. The slow, creeping waves tossing over it now had such a cruel, hungry look in the gray light. The tide always crept round the low, barren stretch of sand just in a stealthy sort of way and no human being who chanced to linger there a moment too late need turn his face to the higher shore again, for he had met his doom.

It was a cruel place and I had always felt a dread of it even when the tide was down. The coast people feared it with something like superstitious horror and told fearful stories of the maddened wails they had heard and the stony, rigid forms that had been swept back to the shore once or twice at ebb of tide.

I could not bear to look at it this morning, but somehow it had a strange fascination for me, and I sat watching it until the tops of the rocks were bare.

The sea was not long in creeping backward then and before many minutes the water was falling rapidly and the rocks stood out bold and black in a little cluster that made a sheltered nook where the seaweed always lay in heaps tangled with white seashells.

There was a heap of such seaweed lying half out of the low water now. I could see it quite plainly as it lay caught among the rocks. After my first glance I found myself staring at it, fascinated—I could not say why—curiously. The little running waves were playing with it and lifting it lightly as they retreated.

A sound in the hall and a summons from outside roused me. I got up from

my seat restlessly, opened the door and confronted the major's man, who stood upon the threshold making his stiff, military salute.

"It's Miss Lina I was ordhered to ax about, Misthress Mallon," he said, a trifle uneasily. "The misthress sent me saa if she was here. Sir Dinnis is waitin' for her and the misthress thought mebbe she had stepped into your room whin she kem in."

I stared at him blankly for a moment. Then my startled mind began to take in vaguely the strange expression on the poor fellow's face. There was actually a shade of pallor on his sunburnt skin and his eye met mine restlessly. Something was the matter I knew and he was afraid to speak of it.

"Barregan," I broke out all in a tremble, "what is the matter? You are trying to hide something from me. What is it you are trying to hide?"

I saw him turn pale then in actual earnest, and when he answered me his voice shook.

"Might I step insoide, Misthress Mallon?" he said. "I'd like to have a wurred wid yez."

I motioned him in and shut the door.

"What is it?" I cried out sharply. "You are not afraid that——" And then I stopped short in spite of the terrible fear that rushed upon me.

"She—she went out early," he said, hoarsely, "an' she's not come in yet, though she promised to try Sir Dinnis' sorrel. There's a nasty bit of sand down on the Bar, ye know, and she always wint there. She was goin' there whin I met her, and someways she looked white and poorly, but she turned her purty, pale face to me and says: 'Good mornin' to ye, Barregan. I'm goin' for a little walk on the sands,' and then she looks over her shoulder at me two or three times before she was out of sight. I darn't say a wurred to the misthress. I darn't; I thought I'd come here first."

The sun had struggled through the clouds at last and as I turned to the window, shaken and strengthless, it burst forth in such sudden brightness that I could see nothing plainly. But little as I could distinguish my blinded eyes caught a glimpse of something that made me drop into my chair with hardly voice to speak.

"Look out there," I said to the poor stricken fellow. "There is a heap of—of seaweed, I think, caught on the rocks on the Moaning Bar. There is not a bit of color caught among it, is there? The sun blinds me so that I cannot see. There isn't a bit of scarlet there, is there? Look well before you speak, for God's sake!"

He did not need to look a second time. Just one glance and he broke away with a cry of horror that roused the whole household and brought servants and master and mistress hurrying out of the rooms with white, scared faces.

Just that one cry and a few wild terror stricken words and the cry was echoed again until the roof rang with its shrill horror as Mrs. Clangarthe fell prostrate upon the stair case landing with a face like the dead.

We raised her and carried her to her room, scarcely any one of us knew how, for the whole house was full of the cries of wailing, hurrying servants and wailing, terrified children. There was not one of them but had loved her; there was not one of them, from the best to the worst, who was not stricken as with the hand of death.

They were all crowded about the windows, weeping aloud as they watched the hurrying figures flying across the sands toward the bit of scarlet color caught in the nook of rocks.

Dozens of the coast people, men, women and children, catching a hint of the truth, left their work in boats and huts and ran, as it were, for dear life, through the shallow water the tide had left on the low beach, joining one another by twos and threes until a great crowd of strange figures stood about the rocks around Sir Denis and around

the man who had first bent over the something which was not seaweed, but a dead girl's body.

Perhaps among all the crowd of rough watchers there was not one who had not a kindly remembrance of the bright, girlish face and light hearted ways; perhaps there was scarcely one of them to whom she had not at some time spoken a careless, sweet tempered word of greeting. She had been used to speak to the roughest of them when she met them, and in the most unresponsive of their half savage moods they had felt an odd sort of liking for her and her bright beauty.

It seemed almost like Fate that they should bring her into my little room and lay her upon the sofa, where she had lain through the long, silent, wretched hours only so few days before.

But her face was not hidden now upon the cushion; it lay still and white, upturned to every eye, and the long hair that had veiled it was wet and dank with the salt sea and tangled with sea and sand and shells.

If she had died to keep a secret she had not died in vain, for no one but myself guessed that any secret existed. She must have forgotten the tide, until it had crept around the Bar, and it was too late to turn back, they said among themselves, and as they spoke I bent over her and smoothed her pretty, tangled hair, so that they could not see my face and guess that I had anything to hide from them.

But as I listened I understood quite plainly what the poor, desperate child had meant when she cried out to me: "Oh, if you only knew what is in my heart tonight!" I knew then, for her own dead lips told me, and I knew, too, what a terrible strength of resolution had kept the fire in her eye and the color in her cheek as she jested and laughed with the rest within the very sound of the waves which she knew would sweep over her dead body on the morrow.

"It would not take much courage when the tide came up," she had said, and I remembered the words, shuddering at the thought of how the waves must have looked as she watched them running up nearer and nearer until the gray, white line was all around her and it was too late to look back or repent.

But it was over now and it could not have taken long to hush her cries if she had uttered any; it could not have been many minutes at the most after the first gasp in the rush of surf before she was as quiet as she looked now lying on my sofa with the strange rest on her pretty face.

"She looks so calm, some way," poor Mrs. Clangarthe wailed. "And she was so pretty, too, and I was so proud of her. Oh, my poor, poor Lina! I don't think Sir Denis will ever get over it, Mrs. Mallon. He was going to propose to her this morning and Lina had promised me she would accept him if he did."

When the dreadful day was over and the house was dark and quiet I sat in my little room again thinking sadly of the still chamber up stairs, where the slender, quiet figure lay on the bed. As I sat brooding over the fire I heard the door open and Mr. Jack came in and stood on the hearth with the stealthy, evil look in his handsome, bold, black eyes.

Whether he suspected me or not he did not care to meet my glance, and as he spoke he carelessly struck a match on the mantel to light a cigar he held.

"I am going to London tomorrow," he said, "and shall not need you any longer. You can go back to Marshlands as soon as you wish. I shall not return here again."

I looked at his wicked, handsome face steadily, and for the moment hated it as I had never hated anything human before.

"Sir," I said, "have you been up stairs?"

He nodded carelessly, but changed color a little, nevertheless.

"Yes," he answered.

"And you have seen—her?"

He nodded again, flinching, I could see.

I do not know what held me up, but I felt that I must speak now or die.

"Do you remember what we said about that dead girl once before in this very room?" I asked. "About her face? Do you remember what I said about its being a tender, innocent face which knew no wrong and held none? Do you remember?"

He started slightly and turned, staring wildly at me.

"What the deuce——" he began.

But I stopped him. I rose up from my chair and faced him, trembling in every limb and sobbing in a grief that was too much for me. I remembered the pretty young face as I saw it first, with the innocent light in its eye, and then I thought of how the tide had gone down on the Moaning Bar, leaving the bit of bright color lying in the nook of rocks.

"Man!" I said, "you are a villain and God will never forgive you. The curse of a lost life will be upon you forever."

He did not say a word, fierce as was the anger that flashed into his cruel face. He had not a word to say. He knew that his sin had found him out and that there was no defense for him if he cared to make one. For one moment he stood and tried to brave me with a sneer, the blood flushing his dark skin and the flare of passion in his eyes. The next he faltered and turned upon his heel and so left me forever.

I did not see him again and was thankful that I did not. I knew that if my lady had been living she would have absolved me from my promise, and knowing this, I was not ashamed to break it myself. I had been his faithful servant and he had used me for an innocent creature's wrong, and so I could be faithful no longer. He went away, as he said he would, and I, returning to my home, carried in my own heart the secret which had been swept away and lost in the waves that went down with the tide on the Moaning Bar.

CHANGED.

LAST year, when Autumn's mellow days
Were fairest; when the amber air
Glistened about me everywhere;
When, o'er the hills a purpling haze
Hung low, I went in paths most sweet.
The golden leaves dropped at my feet;
And gladly, looking toward the west,
Lingered with her I loved the best.

This year, the Autumn lands are fair,
The distant hills with splendor glow,
And gold and purple mists hang low
About the landscape everywhere;
Yet as the lessening sun, to rest
Sinks down, beyond the crimson west,
Alone I wait, in vain I wait,
In sadness by the sunset's gate.

Charles Edward Pratt.

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