WAR IN THE CUBAN CANEBRAKES BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE

THE ARGOSY

AUGUST

The MAN on THIRD

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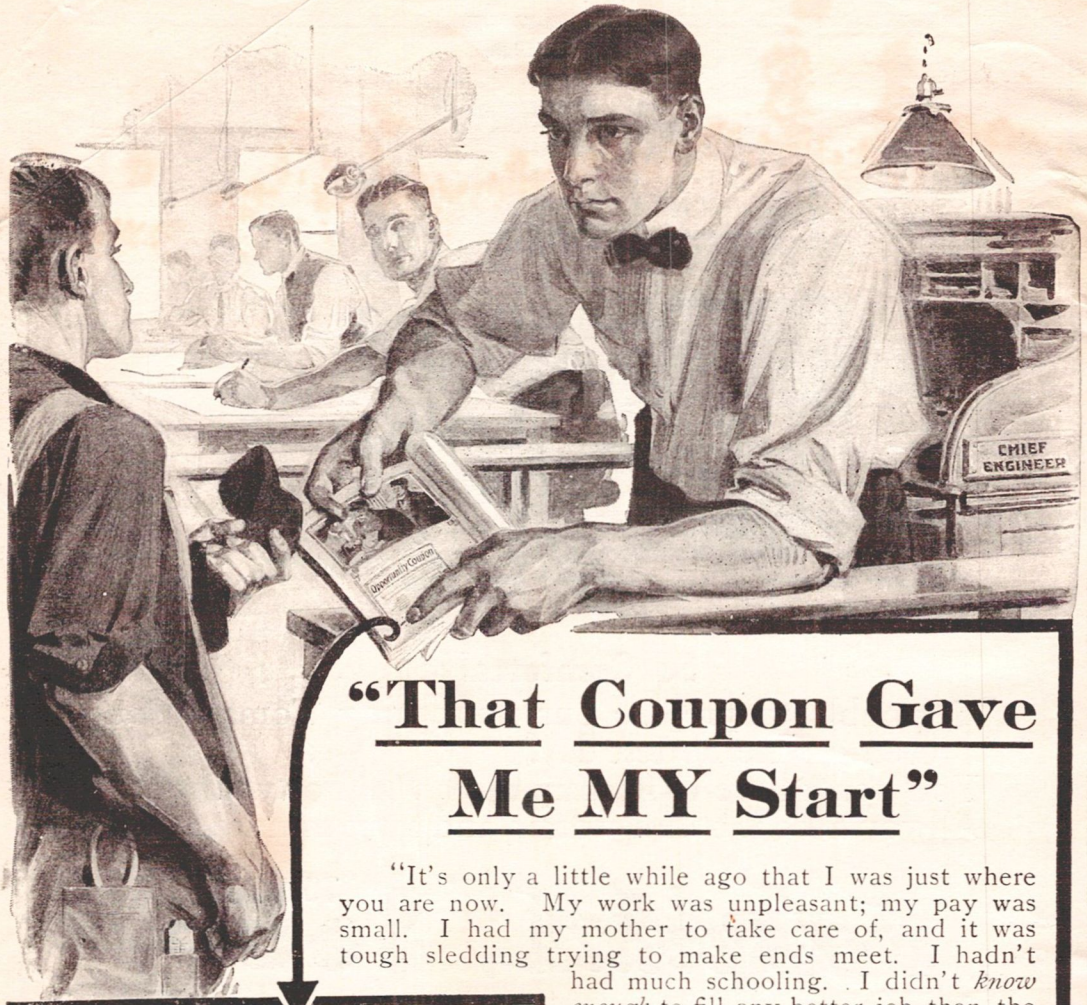

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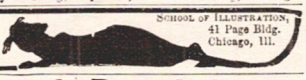

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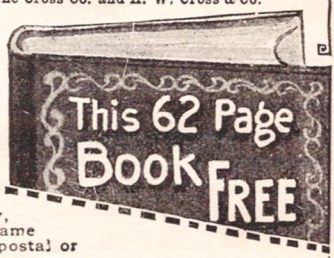

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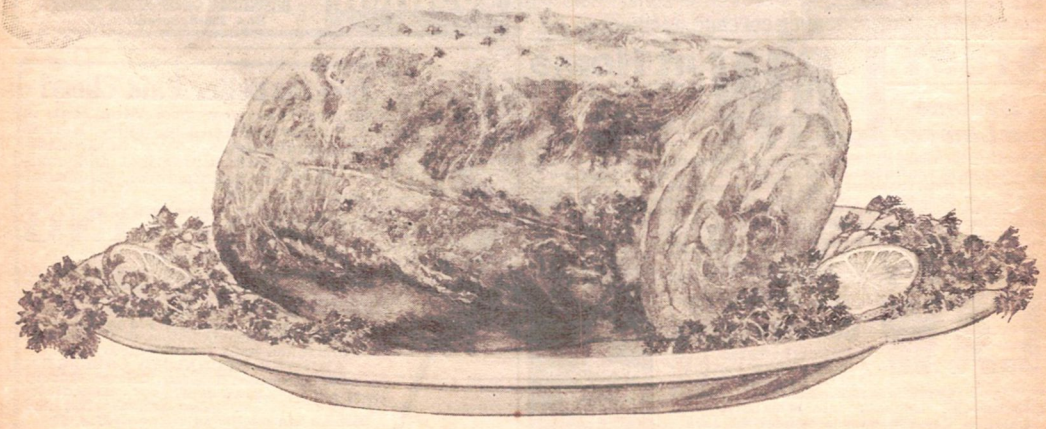


THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXVII AUGUST, 1911. No. 1

The Secret in their Captivity

By Louis Gorham

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

BOB WILLWOOD'S FIND IN THE WOOD.

"STOP!"

At the cry Turner's big touring-car came to a sudden halt. It had been speeding down the main street of a quiet little town in southern France. The cry in English had come from an unseen man, who had been standing just within the shadow of the arcade which bordered both sides of the long white street.

Mr. Turner from within the car called to the chauffeur: "What is it, Brooks?"

"It's Mr. Willwood," answered the chauffeur with surprise. "See over there, sir! He's coming to speak to you."

A handsome young man of athletic build now walked over to the car.

"Why, Turner," he cried, and his big blue eyes snapped with pleasure, "who would have thought of finding any other American in this out-of-the-way place, and you of all Americans!"

"Hallo!" said Turner, gripping the newcomer's hand.

"Get in and we'll take you for a spin," added a woman's voice which Bob Willwood recognized as Mrs. Turner's.

Bob Willwood took off his hat and hurriedly smoothed his thick, blond hair, preparatory to stepping up into the car.

His hostess greeted him cordially, and at once introduced him to Countess Le Blanc—an elderly lady—and to her son, Count Pierre—a young man of decidedly foreign appearance.

There was a woman on the far side, but she wore a pair of road-goggles, and though she smiled sweetly and extended her hand to him, Willwood had no idea who she was until she tore off her glasses.

Then he was more than delighted to see that it was the beautiful Miss Alice Chase, an old friend and sometime sweetheart of his.

"What are you doing over here, Bob?" she asked.

Willwood seemed embarrassed by the question and became suddenly serious.

"Well—er—I'm not doing anything. I'm on a holiday. There's no special place I'm going; just having a good time. Now you people tell me about yourselves."

"Why, we are touring southern Europe," said Mrs. Turner.

She had a charming voice and vivacious manner. "Chic" was the word that described her, but she was not pretty.

"You see," she continued, "Alice wanted to come over, so we brought her along. In Paris she fell in love with Count Pierre, so we had to bring him and his mustache (it was only a day old then). His mother dared not leave that mustache alone and unprotected in our hands, so she came, too."

Count Pierre blushed to the roots of his black hair.

"It is not my first mustache," he said. "I used to have a big one, and I did not look like the same person."

He was an extraordinarily handsome fellow of perhaps twenty-three.

His mother gazed fondly at him, and, smiling, said in good English: "Madame Turner, you do not say that the countess was so charmed by you all that she begged to become one of your party."

She was a little woman, but very much the grand lady. She found these Americans delightful, but their "outspokenness" sometimes scandalized her. All along the trip she had been in a constant state of admiration and horror.

Bob Willwood was looking the party over, and beginning to think his meeting with them most fortunate. He had been idling for some days, and was bored with his own society.

"I think you had better invite me along on your tour," he said at last. "I want to come, awfully—and I can be very useful, for I speak Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English—"

"All equally badly," interrupted Miss Chase.

"How long is your tour going to last?" asked Willwood, disregarding the interruption.

"About two weeks more."

"Well, I'm afraid I couldn't be with you all that time—"

"Who said you were to be with us at all?" asked Miss Chase.

"Oh! honestly, can't I go along?"

"You see, Bob," said Mrs. Turner, and her little brown eyes twinkled out at him from under great masses of brown, wavy hair, "Countess Le Blanc and Pierre are splendid linguists, so we don't need you."

"I want to come," Bob appealed. "May I, Mrs. Turner?"

"There is no room," she answered.

"Why, I'm in here now—"

"Yes, but I'm so squeezed I don't know which are my feet and which are not," interposed Alice, "and when we stop I may try to get out with the wrong ones—"

"Well, I'm going to stick, anyhow," declared Willwood.

"We don't want you," said Mrs. Turner.

But Willwood stayed, and Mrs. Turner did all in her power to make him comfortable.

It was now three days since he had joined them. Three very delightful days. This particular morning it was so mild that they had decided upon lunching in the open.

They were whirling through a wild, rocky, thinly populated country. Great trees massed themselves, keeping close watch beside the road, or came trooping down the gaps in the walls of mountain. Shortly after midday the car entered a little green valley through which wound a narrow stream.

"This is the place!" cried Alice.

As soon as they were across the bridge they left the car. The men carried the hampers, and found a beautiful spot where the stream curved into the wooded slope, but left a narrow bank of grass close to the water's edge. Here they spread their picnic.

It was a delightful meal, and now they sat and lolled about the white cloth strewn with the remains of their feast. Count Pierre had his violin and played for them. He was a remarkable musician, and kept them enthralled for more than an hour.

"What was that last thing you played?" asked Alice.

"'A Bandit's Love Song.' Don't you like it? It's mad enough—"

"It is wonderful!" she cried. "The notes throb with wild ecstasy! Did you ever know a bandit?"

Count Pierre smiled and stroked his tiny mustache.

"No—the nearest I ever came to a bandit was a young gipsy I found camping on our estate. He was wild and usually drunk, but a good fellow. He taught me that song."

"I was attacked once by banditti—" It was the countess who spoke. "We were in Sicily. My husband was with me—also Pierre—he was a baby. Truly, it was very awful!"

"If we were attacked, what would you do, Bob?" asked Alice, anxious to interrupt one of the countess's long-winded stories.

"Run as fast as I could," answered Bob promptly.

"And leave the 'helpless women'?"

"You bet! Now, I don't mean that is the way I would wish to behave, but down in my heart I know I should. I'm afraid I'm selfish and a coward. What would you do, Turner, if 'on a dark, desolate road—a man pointed a pistol at you and—'"

"Oh! Bob, don't," said little Mrs. Turner. "You give me cold chills."

"I would do something better than run, I think, Bob," and Turner smiled. "I would probably knock down the pistol and then beat the man into a jelly."

He rose and threw out his chest—a big man splendidly developed—he looked equal to his boast.

"I am sure I should faint," said the countess, shaking her beautiful white head. "Faint in a stupidly quiet manner and so be overlooked in the confusion. I can never scream when the time comes. I suppose I forget or my throat becomes paralyzed, or something."

"You bet I could scream," put in Alice. "I would raise the dead."

"Oh, let's not talk about it," said Mrs. Turner, "I'm getting nervous now."

"But, Pierre?" asked Turner. "What would he do?"

"Do what I felt like at the time," answered the count simply. "Heaven knows what that might be, but I don't think I should distinguish myself for bravery."

"Well," summed Alice, "three men, and two of them acknowledged cowards."

Bob Willwood jumped suddenly to his feet.

"Oh!"—Mrs. Turner gave a terrified scream.

Before any one knew what was happening Bob had dashed across the grass and disappeared into the woods. They all sat very still, staring and listening. What could it be, they wondered. They waited. No sound. Then a noise from the woods.

A struggle was going on, just out of sight. There came a human cry of mingled pain and terror. Turner started toward the place where Bob had entered, but before he had taken a dozen steps the bushes parted and Willwood emerged. His back was toward them, and he was dragging some one with him!

CHAPTER II.

A SLIGHT ALTERCATION.

It was a small peasant boy about twelve years old.

"What were you doing there, skulking in the bushes?" cried Bob, dropping the boy in the center of the circle.

The little fellow was stupidly wild-eyed like a rabbit, his nostrils expanded and contracted in a rapid and frightened manner.

"I have seen you for the last five minutes creeping about on all-fours and peeping," Bob continued. "Speak or I'll whack you!" he added, as the boy still kept silent.

"He can't understand you," suggested Alice.

"What is it?" she asked in French.

"Try Hindu, Alice," some one laughed. "We left France two days ago."

Count Pierre got up and came and sat beside the boy. The peasant gave him one timid look, and then kept his eyes on his legs, which were awkwardly stretched straight before him.

Pierre put his hand on the boy's arm and spoke gently in some foreign language. The little fellow shook his arm free and seemed embarrassed. Pierre continued to speak. The boy answered once or twice with monosyllables.

Finally, after much coaxing, he began to talk. Once started, he poured forth a volume of swift, musical sounds and gesticulated wildly.

Pierre turned to the party.

"He is hungry, he says, and was watching for us to leave so he could get the scraps—"

"What is he speaking?" asked Bob.

"Portuguese," said Pierre.

"I know Portuguese," Bob put in, "but I can't understand what he says."

"This is a dialect," the count explained. "He says he sings, and will, if we give him food."

While the count was speaking, the boy never took his eyes off him. He rose to one knee, leaned awkwardly over, and kissed Pierre's hand, speaking a few words almost in a whisper.

"He says he will sing before he eats," Count Pierre translated.

The count got his violin and tried two or three airs, but the boy showed no apparent interest.

"Would Miss Alice like to hear a cradle song? I think he'll know this; it is native to this province."

He played a few notes. The boy got up. One of his trouser-legs was twisted and hung, hitched up, in a ridiculous fashion, leaving his bare limb exposed. But when he sang, everything was forgotten except the wonderful sounds.

He sang clearly, freely—like a bird. The voice was alto and almost sexless, but the beauty and pathos of the old song became for the listeners a real delight.

They sat entranced. Count Pierre played on—other things—and the boy sang. When the count stopped he seemed not in the least tired. He said something which Pierre translated as: "He says may he eat now?"

The women bustled about and he had everything put before him. He seemed to hesitate until Count Pierre came over and reassured him. Then he fell to.

He ate ravenously. When he had finished he got up, and, walking a few steps, threw himself flat on his stomach in the soft grass, and closed his eyes.

The women were packing up. Turner had gone, some time since, to look after the car and allow Brooks to come and eat. The latter had finished, and was smoking, walking down toward the water.

Count Pierre settled himself comfortably against a tree, and, taking a small volume from his pocket, began reading, but Bob Willwood came over and spoke to him.

"M. Le Blanc," he began, "why did that boy always address you as he did—are you a prince in disguise?"

Count Pierre laughed, but he gave a quick, apprehensive look about him, then stood up and faced his interlocutor squarely. The contrast of his slightness was very marked as he stood beside Willwood.

"That surprised me, too," he said. "I am no more than I seem. The boy is a peasant and misuses his language."

"Why did he kiss your hand?"

"Because he wanted to. Oh! gratitude, I suppose—that meant nothing."

"What was it he said about his father being loyal?" Bob persisted. "You see, I cannot understand this patois, but some of it was good Portuguese."

"How much did you understand?" Pierre demanded.

"Enough to make me believe that you and he were speaking a secret language and not a dialect—"

"Mr. Willwood," Count Pierre burst in upon him. His dark eyes flashed. He was angry and spoke very rapidly. "I have been quiet and answered your numerous questions, though I considered them rude, but I see no reason to answer more. I am able to attend to my own affairs."

Bob had kept himself calm during the foregoing only by a strong effort.

He was about to speak when, without warning, the little peasant jumped up, and, darting across the grass, disappeared in the woods.

It was done so suddenly that he was out of sight before any one could speak.

"What got him?" asked Alice, joining the two men.

"I know how he felt," the count answered. "He probably wanted to get away."

Alice laughed.

"Well, I like that!" And she then started off.

"Where are you going?" Count Pierre asked.

"To walk in the woods. It is an hour before we leave."

"Alone?" asked the count anxiously.

"Unless you'll come." And she added hastily, "You, too, Bob."

"Thank you—no," said Bob stiffly.

He watched her and Count Pierre until they were out of sight.

CHAPTER III.

THE AMBUSH.

COUNT PIERRE and Alice walked in silence for some time.

It was wonderful in the forest. The

trees were not tall, but dense, and it was quite dark in places. They were unconscious of their silence. When they presently reached an opening, Alice gave a cry of delight.

Before them lay a tiny lake. On the far side towered the mountains.

"It is very beautiful," she said, and finding a low stone, she sat down.

Count Pierre settled himself on the ground at her feet and drew marks on the soft loam with a twig.

"What are you making?" she asked.

"Witch circles," he answered. "The fairies will come to-night and dance here. Do you believe in fairies?"

"Yes, sometimes I almost do—I mean seriously—when I am in the woods alone," she answered.

"'In the woods alone'—that's it," he cried. "If you are there long enough you can hear them—you can feel their presence. Oh! you need not call them fairies—not if you are afraid of being thought childish. But really there are things that live in the woods—things not human—not animal, but spirit-like. They are close kin to the flowers. They are sometimes mischievous, mostly they are good, though. They awe you—they fill you with a strange expectancy. Sometimes they snatch you up and carry you away to 'The Land of Heart's Desire.'"

Then there fell silence between them.

"Where is 'The Land of Heart's Desire'?" she asked after a bit.

"Maybe I'll some day lead you there, or some one will, you know," he replied softly. Then: "What's that?" he cried quickly.

"What?"

"I thought I heard some one there in the bushes—listen—"

"It *is* something."

He left her, and, pushing aside the underbrush, disappeared. She felt a little frightened. When he came back she ran to him with a cry of relief.

"What, what was it?" she asked.

"Nothing so far as I could see."

"I thought I heard you speak."

"I did, but I got no reply." He turned and looked intently into her eyes. "Let us go back," he said.

They started on the return to the others, and all the way she kept up a lively flow of talk. She was a little afraid of Count Pierre. When he talked she followed his dreams, and she was not sure where they led. She was not in love with him, but he fascinated her—opened up to her new vistas.

She had always known that there were men like him, but she had never come in contact with one before. He was a poet, an artist, a dreamer, but her ideal was not a man of this type. She thought Count Pierre interesting, but she bowed before another altar. Yet when he talked to her she somehow felt they were close kin. He seemed to be feeding her spirit food it needed—food which she had always denied it.

Suddenly she stopped.

"Some one *is* following us!" she whispered. "I have heard him twice—"

Before she ceased speaking Pierre was running back down the alley of trees. And she waited alone.

When he returned to her he said: "I thought I heard some one, but there was no trace."

She eyed him narrowly. He was lying to her. She knew it and wondered. While he was away she had caught a glimpse of him through the trees

He had spoken with the peasant boy who had sung for them. The boy had given him a paper. She had seen the count thrust it into his pocket and dismiss the boy with an imperious wave of the hand.

Her first impulse was to accuse him of his falsehood, but she did not. They walked rapidly and were nearing the edge of the forest.

"Well, we are safe now," she cried with relief. "I hear the voices of Bob and Mrs. Turner!"

Soon they came out upon the whole party. Count Pierre hastened to tell of what he termed their "near-adventure." "We thought we were followed," he cried, "but we could see no one."

Again Alice Chase was about to confront him with his lie, but she then decided otherwise.

"It's brigands," said Mrs. Turner. "I'm sure we are all going to be scalped."

The others laughed. This was on their way back to the car.

Soon, comfortably seated inside, they were speeding down the road. It was about four o'clock.

"Where are we to stop to-night?" inquired Alice.

"I forget," answered Turner. "I'll look. It's a funny place, with an awful name."

He took out his road-book and opened it.

They were nearing a clump of trees that marked a turn in the highway. Opposite the trees the road shelved off sheer into a gulch about two hundred feet deep. The car took the turn at half-speed. Suddenly there was a loud report.

"Oh, the fire!" said the countess.

But the car did not slow down as they had expected, and again there was an outburst of the same kind of sound. Pebbles seemed to be flicking against the car.

By degrees the truth dawned upon them. They were being fired on from the thicket! Those sounds were rifle shots and the flickings were spent bullets.

"Go like the deuce, Brooks!" Bob cried to the chauffeur.

The car dashed ahead. The firing continued. At any moment one of them might be killed. It seemed only a second before the chauffeur gave an awful cry, then writhed and twisted in agony. He had been struck—perhaps killed. He moaned, and letting go his hold on the steering-wheel, fell over into the bottom of the car.

He must have knocked against the wheel as he fell, for the car swerved madly from its course and made straight for the deep gulch on the left of the road. Death stared them in the face.

The automobile was going at terrific speed. They were already out of the road. Only a narrow strip of level separated them from the ravine. A giant tree was in their path.

They grazed it, and for a moment the car seemed to be stuck, then there was a grinding sound as part of its side was ripped off, but it jumped forward again, and dashed headlong for the precipice.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTURE.

ALMOST before any one could think, Count Pierre was at the steering wheel. He brought the car almost by a superhuman effort back into the road and stopped it. He seemed to be standing on the prostrate Brooks.

The poor tourists, however, seemed to have escaped one form of death, only to remain in peril of another, for the bullets of the unseen assailants were still whistling over and around them.

Blank amazement was written on every face. What could this attack mean? This was the twentieth century. They were traveling in a civilized country. It was broad daylight.

Every mind was working with the lightning-like rapidity born of imminent danger, but no one seemed capable of speech.

They sat like stone until the countess began screaming madly. This roused Turner from his terrified stupor, and he jumped out of the car.

He made for the woods—running blindly, with his head lowered.

A party of armed men (mostly peasants and a few soldiers) rushed from the wood and came toward the fleeing man. As soon as he saw them, he stopped, wheeled, and rushed back, past the car, until he spied a tree near at hand.

With catlike agility and with that animal's instinct when pursued, big, boastful Turner sought safety among the branches.

"A party of rough looking men, about fifteen of them, are running toward us," said Alice, as nonchalant as if she were at an afternoon tea. "I believe they are the men that shot at us," she continued. "They look as if they were now surrounding us."

The effect of her remarks upon the countess was manifested by such a frightful yell that even Alice jumped.

"Mother," said Count Pierre shortly, "if you could manage to scream a little less strenuously, perhaps we could think. Has any one a pistol?"

"Yes; I have," and Alice was already diving into her bag. "Here!" she cried.

"It's not loaded," announced the count, after a hasty inspection.

"Oh!" Miss Chase rejoined. "I didn't think it safe—and—and my cartridges are in my trunk outside."

Pierre gave her an amused glance.

"Then," he said simply, "there is nothing but to give up." Suddenly an idea occurred to him. "You sit still," he cried, and jumped from the car.

The crowd of strange men were now closing in about the car. As soon as they caught sight of the count, a cry of rage went up. He stopped short and spoke hurriedly, but so quietly that those in the motor could not hear him. He was constantly interrupted by hoots and cries from the crowd.

It seemed that they hated, but dared not

touch him. Finally one bolder than the rest caught at his arm. He tried to shake himself free, but other hands were laid on him.

A fat peasant, with a leveled pistol, now came over and jerked open the door of the car. The countess gave a wild yell.

Mrs. Turner began hopping and jumping around, then like a frightened chicken, made a dart for the open door.

She reached it so quickly that the fat peasant was unprepared for her. She flung herself at him, and with outstretched, clawing hands, struck him all of a heap.

He staggered back, leaving sufficient space for her to flutter through. And almost instantly she was out of sight and away.

Alice and Bob were commanded to descend. They did so. Bob had Alice by the arm. He was quiet, but his mouth and jaw looked like a fight.

The countess continued her deafening cries until Pierre called to her to stop. She subsided at once, and at the insistent gestures of the armed peasant got out of the car. Her appearance was greeted with derisive cheers by the crowd.

Bob Willwood tried to use his big fists. A fight ensued, but it was of short duration. He was overpowered and securely bound.

Alice Chase stood looking about her. She was dazed, and could not realize that she was actually in the midst of all these disasters. She seemed to be an onlooker at some badly managed melodrama; or was she dreaming?

She passed her hand across her eyes. She felt in no laughing humor, certainly, but the sight of Mrs. Turner hiding her head, ostrich-fashion, under the automobile, was too funny, and Alice laughed in spite of herself.

The peasant looked at the laughing girl, followed her gaze, and spied Mrs. Turner, whom he began to drag out by her projecting ankles. But when, at his first touch, the poor woman realized she was discovered, she raised such a sudden clamor that the fellow dropped her legs in alarm.

Almost instantly he recovered his assurance and returned to the siege. Then Mrs. Turner began to kick so violently that after a few attempts the extricator desisted, until reenforced with a cord.

He then lassoed the belligerent feet, and with the aid of another fellow, he began to pull the helpless Mrs. Turner out from her place of refuge.

"My hair! Oh, my hair!" she cried "It's caught! Help!"

But the captors were heartless. She was brought forth in a somewhat disheveled state. Indeed, her rat, puffs, etc., had remained where they had caught in something under the car.

Her feet were tied so tightly together that after a few wild clutching swings of her arms she fell over on her side. She was not hurt, but was so angry that she wept when she attempted to speak.

She put her hands to her head and realized why Alice Chase was so convulsed with laughter.

"Look!" cried Bob. "It's Turner!"

"Where?" moaned his unfortunate spouse. She had finally got her feet free, and arose stiffly.

"Up the tree!" Bob said.

It was true. Turner was now half-way up a tree, in which he had sought safety. A soldier sought to pull him down by swinging on to the seat of his trousers the while Turner beat viciously after him.

"They'll kill my husband!" cried the distraught woman, rushing to her mate.

She broke through the line of her captors and started across the road.

"Stop!" cried Count Pierre, and so commandingly that Mrs. Turner halted.

And none too soon, for several of the enemy's rifles were leveled upon her. She came back and gave herself up.

She and the countess and Alice were put under the guard of four awful-looking men, who led them away.

It was all done so suddenly that the convoy was started before any opposition could be offered.

When the countess realized that she was being separated from her son, she "raised Cain," but it was no use.

The other two women went quietly. Alice rather amused, and disbelieving; Mrs. Turner crushed.

"Where are you taking them?" Bob Willwood demanded. He was tugging wildly at his wrist thongs. "What is this all about?"

"It's no use, M. Willwood," said Count Pierre. "I have tried to get some information, but they will not answer. I think it is best for us to be quiet and obey now, then watch closely, and the first chance we have make our escape."

The women were disappearing around the corner of the road. Turner, who was also bound, watched them with eyes ready to overflow. He turned angrily upon the crowd.

They were all standing around Brooks, who had been overlooked until now, and Turner's anger died out in his anxiety about the man.

Some one with a little silver-mounted flask was bending over the recumbent form. The flask Turner recognized as Count Pierre's, who had doubtless directed where it could be found, and as a result of his humanity the contents of his suit-case were scattered all over the road.

Brooks was shot in the right arm. It seemed to be a painful, but not dangerous, wound. He cursed like a trooper while being bandaged, and when two men sought to bind him, with his left hand he smashed one of them in the mouth.

Count Pierre was the last one to be handcuffed. He submitted without protest, and the four prisoners were assigned an escort and started down the road in the direction taken by the women.

They marched in silence. It was growing dusk.

Turner looked backward just before they turned the corner where they had first been fired upon. He saw that the four or five peasants who had remained behind were shoving the motor off the road and into the cover of the bushes. He called attention to this.

"It is all the strangest thing I have ever heard of," he said. "They have taken nothing from us—make no charges—they haven't even searched us. It has all been so clumsy, and in broad day, too!"

"I suppose they knew that if we were armed we would have used our weapons at the start," commented Bob.

"If only some one would come past," added Turner. "This is what comes of traveling in such God-forsaken countries."

Their guards began talking excitedly among themselves and looked back apprehensively at their prisoners. Count Pierre noticed their uneasiness.

"We had better not speak," he said. "They do not understand what we say, and it makes them suspicious and unfriendly—perhaps might make them separate us, and we are better fitted for escape if we are left together."

They trudged on in silence, which Bob presently broke by whispering, in a voice which he vainly strove to keep calm: "I heard an automobile! Listen! It's coming toward us!"

CHAPTER V.

A MARCH IN THE DARK.

THE guards had heard the sound of the approaching car, and there was some confusion among them.

The automobile came nearer. Would it stop? Would it rescue them? These were the thoughts in the prisoners' minds.

The guards talked rapidly among themselves.

Then the car came into sight—a dark spot in the distance. The prisoners anxiously watched it grow larger and larger.

The guards now hurriedly marched their prisoners across the road and into the wood, where they were made to sit down in a row, while their captors stood over them with cocked rifles. Presently one of them spoke.

"He says," Count Pierre translated, "that if we make a sound we will all be shot—so we had better be still."

The automobile was soon upon them. Could not its occupants feel the wild, silent prayers of the four wretched prisoners?

It whirled by not ten yards from where they crouched. As it turned the corner there was a *honk*. The prisoners were wild with excitement, thinking the driver of the car had spied their wreck. But its noise grew fainter and fainter in the distance, and after a few seconds all was still.

Then the march was resumed.

After about fifteen minutes of rapid walking they cut across country, and from a slight eminence, where they paused, Turner saw a faint light in the distance. "I hope that's the end of our journey," he sighed, as he called the others' attention to the glimmer. "I'm tired."

It was now quite dark, and the field they were crossing had been plowed and the walking was difficult. The prisoners, not having the freedom of their arms, were unable to balance themselves, and almost fell at every step.

They came to a fence, where a halt was called. One of the peasants lit a lantern and held it high to illumine the proceedings.

The soldiers climbed over and waited

on the other side so as to be ready to receive Count Pierre, who was helped up first. It almost amounted to lifting him over, because of his tied hands.

Bob and the chauffeur followed, each in turn, covered by a gun until safe in the custody of the three soldiers on the far side.

Turner was the last to be put over. He was too heavy for the men to manage successfully. They got him up though, and there he squatted on the top of the high fence.

The lantern flared in his face and seemed to blind him. Perched there, he resembled some gigantic bird dissatisfied with his roost. He began to go sideways, lifting his feet, first one and then the other, quite high, like a parrot.

He finally lost his balance entirely. When he felt himself about to fall, his efforts to prevent the catastrophe were grotesque in the extreme.

One of the peasants tried to aid him by giving him a shove in the wrong direction.

Turner yelled "blue murder," and fell all in a heap on the wrong side of the fence. This caused an awful commotion, and everybody talked at once.

When things quieted down, the agony had to be repeated. Turner was very angry and made a great racket, but at last he was got over, and the party went onward toward the light, which proved to be a camp-fire. Several men were moving about it, apparently getting supper. Some words passed between them and the guards.

By the glare of the flames the prisoners could descry the outlines of a white house half hidden in trees, some distance away, and toward this they were marched.

The place was of two stories, but dark, and looked like a deserted farmhouse. A soldier marched up and down in front of it.

"Having a sentinel, looks like we are not the only prisoners," said Bob.

"Shuz!" warned the count.

The sentinel unlocked the door, and the prisoners were hurried along what seemed to be a covered passageway. But it was hard to see much, as the only light came from the guard's lantern.

From the passageway they emerged into an open court, all overgrown with dead weeds, and looked as though no one had cared for it in years.

A door on the far side was unbolted, and the prisoners were shoved inside a large room.

Here they found three women huddled together in the far corner, and much distressed by the sudden light.

They were the countess, Mrs. Turner, and Miss Chase, who were overjoyed as soon as they realized the identity of the new arrivals.

The women were not bound, and one of the guards produced a bloodthirsty looking knife and began hacking at the men's wrist-cords, and soon they, too, were free.

While this was going on, a peasant stood beside the door, ready to fire on any one who attempted to escape. It was the fat fellow, and he seemed to be giving most of the orders. There was quite a coming and going.

A pan with a great hunk of bread and some greasy fried meat was brought in, also a big wooden tub of water.

The lantern was left on the floor, and the guards filed out—the big peasant last. The door was shut, and they heard the great rusty bolts shot into the sockets.

"Oh!" said the countess, and flung herself, weeping, into Count Pierre's arms.

"Be careful not to wet my collar, mother," he warned her. "You see we may be here for days, and I have no change of linen and know of no laundry in the neighborhood."

"How can you be flippant when we all may be murdered at any moment," wailed Mrs. Turner.

"They evidently have no intention of killing us until we have been fattened," remarked Alice, glancing significantly at the food and water.

"From the looks of that stuff, I think they *do* mean to kill us at once," laughed the count.

The effect of this remark was a fresh outburst of sobs from the countess.

Bob, who had paid no heed to the foregoing, was inspecting the room. He noted with dismay that it was bare of everything except one chair and some rags.

The walls were solid masonry up to the heavy beams of the rather low ceiling. There was a big fireplace, through whose opening one could see the stars. It let in a lot of air, but seemed hopeless as a way of escape. On the far side was a heavy grated window, quite high up.

The captured party were worn out. Most of them sat on the floor or stood looking stupidly about them, and talked in subdued tones.

After his first little spurt of foolishness, even Count Pierre seemed unable to rouse himself from the depression that was settling down upon them all.

"How the deuce are we to get out of this, that's the question!" said Turner, chafing his wrists, which had been more tightly corded than the others.

"Shuz; be quiet!"

"What?"

"I hear some one coming!"

They all listened. Footsteps were approaching. Some one stopped before the door. The bolts were being drawn.

Who could it be? Was worse luck in store for them? Or was this a liberator?

CHAPTER VI.

HOW BOB WILLWOOD SAW DAYBREAK.

THREE soldiers entered.

One stood guard and the others came over and took Count Pierre and the countess by the arms and led them toward the door.

Their manner toward the count and his mother was commanding, but full of deference.

"What do you want?" asked the count.

The soldier near the door spoke briefly.

"What did he say?" asked Turner.

"He says they don't belong with us," Bob translated.

The count turned when he had reached the door. He was quite pale, and his voice broke nervously.

"Be careful—all—of you," he said, addressing his friends. "We'll soon know what we are up against."

Then he and the countess were led away. The door closed—and the bolts shot home. Soon the sound of their departing footsteps died away. All was silence and darkness, for the soldiers had taken the lantern.

After a while Brooks groaned miserably, and Bob groped his way over to him. The chauffeur was suffering considerable pain because of the tightness of his bandages, and gave a sigh of relief when Bob, with Alice's assistance, loosened them.

When they had finished ministering to the wounded man, Alice and Bob felt their way over to Mr. and Mrs. Turner, who were on the far side of the room, and sat down beside them.

Alice broke the long silence that ensued, speaking slowly and thoughtfully:

"Do you know, I believe Count Pierre is responsble for our imprisonment."

"I'm afraid I believe so, too," put in Bob.

"Why?" Alice demanded quickly.

"You see," Bob went on, "I angered the count—he stands in with all these foreigners—he may be getting even with me, regardless of you all."

"Good Lord!" cried Turner, "are you losing your mind, Bob?"

"But what were you going to say, Alice?" asked Mrs. Turner.

"Listen!" broke out Brooks suddenly. He was lying on the floor just under the window, and they had all thought him asleep. "Some one is climbing up to this window."

They sat like images of stone. Somebody *was* scratching against the outside wall. And slowly the sound mounted higher and higher. An eery feeling possessed the anxious listeners. Was it a human being that was climbing up? Whatever it was had almost reached the grating. There was a black mass against the blue of the opening. The "thing" seemed to press close against the bars, as though seeking to see within the room. A voice whispered.

Bob said one word in Portuguese.

The voice whispered back, and then began to sob wretchedly, and they could hear a scrambling down outside. Then silence.

"That was the peasant boy who sang," said Alice in suppressed excitement. "What did he say?"

"He asked where *he* was," Bob replied.

"Who did he mean by *he?*" inquired Turner.

"How do I know?" Bob rejoined.

"How do you know it was the singer?" put in Turner.

"I recognized his voice—yes, I am sure," Alice affirmed.

"Yes, I am sure, too," said Bob. "And besides—"

Alice gave his arm such a jerk that Willwood stopped short. She said something in a low whisper.

Bob made some reply in the same tone.

"I'm thunderingly hungry," Turner broke in on their confidences. "Where's that meat?" And he began groping around in the dark.

After a moment there was a cry and a splash. Turner had fallen into the water-pail. He made a few unmentionable re-

marks in regard to his wishes for the future abode of that particular pail. Alice laughed heartily.

"Yes, laugh!" Turner hissed at her. "Ha! Ha! It's funny, eh? But it seems to me I am coming in for more than my share of the disasters. There was that fence affair."

At this they all set up a great laugh, for Bob had told the women of the happening.

"Yes, all laugh! Darn funny, ain't it?" muttered Turner.

Bob gave another laugh.

"I was cold to start with, and now I'm wet through," Turner growled.

"Well, please stop shaking your water over this way!" cried his wife. "It's like a shower-bath!"

"I've found the meat, anyway," added Turner indistinctly.

He sounded as if his mouth was full.

There was a slight noise in the corner.

"What's that?" Alice cried.

It was dark as Egypt. A feeling of fear seized them. Was some unknown person in the room?

"It's rats!" announced Brooks.

"Oh!" shrieked Mrs. Turner. "I put my hand on one!"

"Are you afraid of them?" asked Bob.

"Well, no," she admitted; "but still I don't care to stroke one."

"There are worse things," Alice remarked. "There are vermin over here where we live."

"Really this is awful!" said Mrs. Turner.

"And think of a whole night of it," added Bob.

"It isn't the night I mind," said Mrs. Turner, and she sneezed once or twice. "It's the morning—no combs—no powder—and now, I suppose, there will be no water. Oh, Alice! It is terrible! And what can it all mean?"

Alice laughed.

"You shouldn't care so much," she said. "Your husband loves you, but me—why, I am still on the—"

And she laughed, but rather disconsolately.

Just here Mrs. Turner began to sneeze. She sneezed and sneezed, and every time she sneezed, Brooks groaned.

"Great Heavens!" implored Mrs. Turner, in a brief space between sneezes. "I'm hardly able to get my bre—"

And she went off into another sneezing fit.

Alice stood it as long as she could; finally she said: "Bob, if you or Mr. Turner would give the poor woman your coat, I believe she'd stop taking cold."

Turner groped his way over to the place where the sneezes were coming from.

"Here!" he said, but none too graciously. "Where are you?" for momentarily Mrs, Turner was quiet.

"Here," came a weak voice, which immediately swelled to a strong cry: "Oh! don't! That's wet!"

So, after all, it was Bob Willwood who had to give up his coat. Alice had been right, for, after a few dignified sneezes, Mrs. Turner subsided and gradually grew quiet and slept — her head on Turner's knee.

Alice and Bob talked until late into the night. They were comparing notes on Count Pierre and his extraordinary behavior. Frequently they were interrupted by Brooks, who was feverish and delirious.

Toward morning Bob noticed that Alice did not answer his questions. He listened, and caught her regular and rather slow breathing. She was worn out and slept.

He was sitting close beside her, and when her head drooped upon his shoulder, she gave a little drowsy sigh of content and settled herself comfortably. He kept perfectly still, and watched the little square of dark blue that was the window grow gradually lighter and lighter. He was very cold, yet after a time he, too, fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

WILLWOOD'S STARTLING SURPRISE.

ABOUT daybreak the sleeping captives were suddenly awakened by some one calling in wildly excited but subdued tone.

"He was there just now—here in this room—wake up! Wake up!"

It was Brooks who cried out. He was wild eyed. Bob, thinking the chauffeur still in a delirium, sought to soothe him.

The room was chill and gray. The women sat silent and shivering. Turner still slept.

"No—no! I am not out of my head!" cried the chauffeur. "He was there—right where you are standing!" The wounded man raised himself on his elbow and pointed at Bob. "And he went out when—just as I waked!"

"Who?" Bob asked.

"The boy—the singing-boy!" cried Brooks. "I saw him go through the door. He didn't lock it! Try the door! Try the door!"

He was so vehement in his command that Bob went over and pushed on the door. It moved slightly, and under pressure swung slowly open.

The deliciously fresh air of the new day blew into the room.

Bob peeped out cautiously. It was very early, the sun was not up high enough to dissipate the shadows that lurked in the corners of the courtyard. All was silent and drenched with the heavy dew. No sign of a human creature.

Bob turned and addressed those inside the room.

"It may be a trap," he said; "you remain here quietly. I'll go and investigate. No—Brooks, wait for my return."

The chauffeur settled back sullenly, while Bob removed his shoes, and in his stocking feet crept noiselessly out, closing the door behind him.

He went at once toward the covered passageway by which they had been brought in the night before. He wanted to see if that door also was unlocked. At the entrance to the passageway he paused and peered down its dark length.

The door at the far end was not open, but over it was a grated semicircular window. This admitted sufficient light for him to see that the passage was empty. Bob went rapidly down it, and with a hopeful heart tried the door.

It was fast!

He feared this door was the only exit from the house. If the peasant boy had unlocked their room door, why had he not unlocked this one also? And was it the singer, as Brooks had declared?

And why had their door been unlocked, anyway? Where was the person who had unlocked it? Had he gone outside and fastened the entrance door after him? Or was he hiding here somewhere within the house? And how had he got inside the court?

Bob stood there asking himself these questions, but he could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. Suddenly his ponderings were broken in upon by a noise from outside.

Some one was passing.

If Willwood only dared to call! He debated with himself as to the advisability of this, and had about decided to risk all by doing so, when he caught the sound of another person's footfalls.

It sounded as if the two persons passed each other just outside the door, behind which Willwood stood, for he heard one say in Portuguese: "All goes well!" and the other respond with the same words.

"It's the sentinels," Bob muttered. "Thank Heaven, I did not call."

He crept down the passage and began a rapid inspection of the desolate courtyard. He noted a stairway that led to a gallery running around the second story. Two doors opened on this gallery.

There were three other doors on the ground floor beside the one to the room where Willwood had left his companions.

Bob went toward the nearest door on the ground floor, and cautiously opened it.

The room disclosed was empty. It was similar to the one where he had been confined, except dirtier perhaps.

The next door he tried was locked. What was behind it? Perhaps the singer-boy, or whoever it was that had unlocked Willwood and his friends, but there was no sound to indicate a human presence.

The third door was at the far side of the quadrangle. Bob crossed to it, through the wet weeds and grass, and got his feet, only protected by socks, awfully cold.

This door was slightly ajar, and Willwood distinctly heard some movement within the room. Did danger lurk there? The door swayed slightly.

Bob stood irresolute. Then gathering courage, he went boldly forward and flung open the door. He saw no living thing. But there was a slight noise from behind the door—a sort of scuffling. Bob would have given all he possessed for a loaded revolver.

His heart seemed to turn over. But it was only a big rat that ran between his feet. Willwood ground out an imprecation and entered.

The room was empty. It had two grated windows, and in one corner was a trap-door which looked as though it might lead to a cellar.

Bob went over to inspect this, and found it securely fastened by a padlock. While he was bending over the trap-door he heard a creak, and turned just in time to see the outside door close as though pushed by some one on its other side.

Bob rushed across the room, his heart in his boots. After all, was this a trap? And had he walked straight into it? Was he again a close prisoner, and this time in solitude?

He put a trembling hand on the door and tried it. It opened, and Willwood stepped out into the air. No one was in sight. The wind had been his captor, and all this fright had been for nothing.

He looked about in a dazed fashion. At the far end of the courtyard, its top steps just touched by the sun, was the stairway leading to the balcony and the two uninvestigated doors. Bob went slowly across the quadrangle and ascended these stairs.

The episode of the rat and the closing door had shaken his nerves, and he felt "creepy." Danger seemed to be lurking behind every object, but regardless of real or suspected danger, he knew he must continue his investigations. And it was characteristic of the man that he never once thought of getting Brooks or Turner to accompany him.

Arrived at the top of the rickety steps, he found that the first door on the balcony was locked. Willwood put his ear to the keyhole.

This was Count Pierre's room, he could hear him whistling.

How could the fellow be happy when they were in captivity, unless he knew all the whys and wherefores of the mysterious affair, and stood in with the captors?

The other door which Bob was now trying, seemed to give at first, then held fast, making a loud clatter.

A woman inside gave a yell.

It needed no magician to inform Willwood that on the other side of that resisting door was the countess. She who never remembered to scream in times of danger.

"The poor woman probably thinks some one is coming to kill her," Bob told himself, but he was alarmed lest her cry had been heard by the captors, who might come to investigate at any moment, and then all would be lost.

He listened motionless, but no new sound came to his straining ears. He was relieved and took a deep breath. Evidently, if the guards had heard, they had ignored the noise, for Bob had waited long enough for them to come all the way from the camp.

He crept down the stairs again, to report to the women and Turner the fruitlessness of his investigations.

He thought he heard some one move just beneath the steps. He peered into the shadow as he was passing. He stopped short. There stood a soldier, and Bob found himself looking straight into the barrel of a revolver.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRIBE.

Bob threw up his hands. Neither man spoke for a few seconds.

Then Bob asked, in Portuguese: "Are you the sentinel?"

"One of them," the man replied.

"What brought you inside?"

"That woman's cry. I came in to see what was up, and seeing you creeping along the gallery above, I slipped underneath and waited for you here."

The fellow grinned with the pleasure his little surprise-party was affording him.

Willwood's mind was working rapidly.

"If you allow us to escape," he said, "I will give you all the money, jewels, and watches we have. It will amount to more than eight thousand dollars."

The sentinel's eyes grew big.

"What am I to do?" he asked.

"Go outside and be careful not to excite the suspicion of the other sentinel. I'll go and collect the things and bring them to you. Part of us are unlocked now; you must manage to get the keys so as to unlock the others." Bob indicated the rooms occupied by the count and his mother. "Then allow us all to slip out of the house."

"If the money is enough—I will," answered the sentinel, and started across the court. Bob called him back.

"Hold on!" he said. "How will I know when you are passing the big entry-door? I don't want to hail the wrong man."

The sentinel gave a wide grin.

"Every time I pass I'll give a light tap on the door," said he, "unless the other guard is too near for it to be safe for me to risk it."

"Good!" cried Bob. "But how about the keys to the upper rooms—can you get them?"

"I have them now," said the man.

"Then come, unlock them. I'll see that you get your money."

"And what about the other sentinel?" demanded the soldier. "I have had to leave the outside door unlocked all this

time; it will not lock on the inside. Any minute that other fellow—Ruy—may come in on us. He's a suspicious kind, anyhow, and by now he has made two rounds without passing me, and he'll be thinking something has happened if I stay in here any longer."

"Go! Go!" cried Bob in wild excitement, realizing the situation, and how every second he and the sentinel talked jeopardized the chance of escape. He fairly shoved the fellow toward the big door.

When he was gone and Bob had heard the bolts slipped into place, and the lock snap, he almost had to feel his way back to the room where he was anxiously awaited.

"Well?" cried the women and Brooks in chorus, as he entered.

"There seems to be but one exit to this place," Willwood reported. "That is watched by two sentinels. I have seen one of them, and I have bribed him to let us escape, but he demands everything we have —jewels—watches—money—all!"

While he spoke, Bob was shaking Turner, who still slept.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he cried. "Give me all your money!"

Turner roused slightly, but being yet half asleep, conceived the idea that he was being held up, or that the house was on fire, and so began calling loudly for the police and fire department.

"Don't be an ass!" Bob hissed, shaking him soundly.

This violent treatment produced wild cries of "Thieves! Murder!"

Mrs. Turner and Alice were stripping their fingers of rings they treasured highly, but not so highly as their liberty. Everything valuable they possessed was put on the handkerchief that Bob had spread on the floor. They kept back nothing.

Brooks had only a silver watch, and the equivalent of seven dollars, but he put the watch and the money with the more precious offerings.

Turner had finally come to himself, and when the situation was explained to him, he and Bob, between them, produced about two thousand dollars in cash. They gave up every cent.

It was a strange mass, this treasure heap. Rings, necklaces, fobs, watches, bracelets, some unset gems, a jeweled pencil, and a collection of bank-notes and some small change.

Bob gathered the corners of the handkerchief together and went out alone into the court, shutting the door after him.

He crossed to the covered passage and waited behind the big door that led to the outside world.

After about five minutes there was the measured beat of footsteps in the distance. They drew nearer.

A sentinel was passing. Was it Bob's man? And was the other guard far enough away for him to give the signal? Perhaps the man was going to play him false. Bob realized that by confessing to the possession of so much money he had aroused the sentinel's greed, and why should the fellow bother to keep his part of the bargain, since he himself was absolutely in control of the situation?

What was to prevent him from entering and possessing himself of the treasure and departing blandly, refusing to be accessory to the escape?

A thousand wild suppositions occurred to Willwood.

The steps approached the door.

There was a gentle tap.

Bob said: "Yes, I'm here."

The door was unlocked; then pushed slowly open.

Bob's heart beat so fast he felt he was suffocating.

A head was thrust through the opening.

It was *his* sentinel!

Bob gave him the handkerchief containing the bribe. The soldier examined it. His eyes glittered greedily, while he thrust everything hurriedly into his pockets.

"Good!" he said.

"Come quickly!" he continued. "We must hurry! Ruy is already suspicious!"

He led the way, and Bob followed closely.

It was Count Pierre's door the man first unlocked.

The room, Bob noticed, was better than that down-stairs, the windows were ungrated, and a fire burned cheerfully on the hearth.

The count was looking out of the window, his back toward them. But he turned quickly. Bob saw he was haggard and worn, as though he had not slept.

"This man is allowing us to escape!" Bob reported quickly. "Come! There is no time to lose!"

Count Pierre was at the door in an instant.

"Not so fast!" cried the sentinel, raising his gun. He had noticed the count's two

rings. "Fair play! Give me your rings, watch, and all your money!"

The count started back.

"Yes," said Bob; "I promised."

"The deuce you did!"

At first Pierre expostulated, but the sentinel was firm. The count refused to give up his possessions, but when he saw the door closing on him, he called: "Here! Here!"

He handed over all he had — watch, scarf-pin, two rings, and a purse. The sentinel was satisfied, and allowed him to pass out.

The three went immediately to the countess's room, where Pierre tapped lightly and called: "Mother, we are escaping; come at once!"

The door was quickly unlocked. The countess, looking quite fresh and well-groomed, flew to her son's arms.

"She must give up her jewels," said the insatiable sentinel.

The countess looked at Pierre.

"Yes," said the count, "you must."

The old lady did as she was told, but there were tears in her eyes when she parted with her wedding-ring.

"Come quickly," said the sentinel, pocketing the trinkets. And he led the way down the stairs.

"Wait at the entrance," Willwood called back over his shoulder, as he ran to fetch the others.

Almost the instant he was out of sight, and before his companions had got quite across the court, they heard a noise. Some one was entering from without.

"That's Ruy!" cried the traitor sentinel in alarm. "Get in there! Quick!" he whispered to the dumfounded countess and her son.

He shoved them in the direction of one of the empty rooms.

"Make no sound, or all is lost! I'll go and warn those others!" And the fellow started back across the yard toward the room where Willwood had disappeared.

Count Pierre and his mother had rushed in the direction indicated. They had barely time to get inside the room before the man entering from without came into view.

The count managed to close the door, but the latch did not catch.

Listening and watching through the crack, he saw the friendly sentinel stop before he reached Bob's door, and turn about. The cause of this was at once evident. Ruy had spied him and called out: "What's up?"

It was now too late to warn Bob and the others not to come out.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KNIFE.

"NOTHING's the matter, Ruy," answered the bribed sentinel in reply to the other's query.

"What did you come in here for then, Jose?" persisted Roy, walking rapidly to the center of the courtyard and joining the other.

"I thought I heard a cry, but I must have been mistaken," was the firm response.

The two then turned and paced slowly toward the entrance. At this juncture Count Pierre noted with dismay that Bob Willwood and the rest of the escaping party were emerging from their room and starting hurriedly across the courtyard, cutting through the grass.

The count was in such a position that he could give no warning sign without being seen by the departing sentinels.

"Hurry," said Bob, leading the way.

Ruy looked up to see the escaping party coming toward him! He gave a quick glance at his fellow guard, who, however, showed no signs of being an accomplice of the captives, for he followed Ruy's example, leveled his gun and stood silently awaiting the oncomers who did not look up until they could almost have touched the two soldiers.

Miss Chase saw them first.

"Oh!" she cried.

The advancing party stopped short, all except Turner, who made a dash for the passage. A shot rang out. It did not hit him, but almost the instant the rifle report was heard, he tripped and fell headlong.

This was too much for the distraught countess who, believing him to have been murdered, gave one of her blood-curdling yells.

"Stand!" Ruy called. He was now thoroughly suspicious, and putting his whistle to his lips, gave three shrill calls. In a moment he repeated them.

"If any one moves he's a dead man." It was the bribed sentinel who spoke.

In a surprisingly short time the yard was full of inrushing soldiers and peasants.

There was a general hubbub and the

talking was so rapid that even Count Pierre could understand only a very little of it. As near as Bob could make out, they were arguing the guilt or innocence of the bribed sentinel.

The fellow evidently made a good defense because they did not arrest him and it never occurred to them to search him. If they had, the contents of his pockets would have been evidence enough to get him shot.

Confusion continued and the prisoners stood helplessly silent. They felt sheepish and certainly looked like bad children caught in the act.

They were now in worse position than before, having given grounds for suspicions, and their treatment in consequence would probably be more severe.

An evidence that this would be the case was shown when the men, all placed together now in the room lately occupied by the count, had their hands bound behind them—even Brooks, despite his cries of pain. Each prisoner was then fastened by means of strong rope to iron rings set solidly in the masonry of the walls, and given just enough length of rope to allow for lying down.

All hopes of escape seemed to have vanished.

In the countess's big room, which was like a barn, Mrs. Turner and Alice Chase were put. It was so large that the heat from the fires burning in the two fireplaces did not warm it, and the women not being tied, went over and huddled close to the flames.

It was warmer in the men's room. The fire on the hearth still burned.

The same old tub of water and a platter of bread and meat was brought up from down-stairs. The singer boy helped do this.

He evidently had some message to communicate, but the soldiers gave him no opportunity. And though the boy's glances were eloquent, the prisoners were unable to discover their meaning.

"Well!" Bob sighed, "we can lie on our stomachs and lap the water, but how can we eat the bread and meat without hands?"

"Wait till you're hungry enough and you'll find a way," Turner growled.

There was a long silence and then Turner spoke again.

"What do you imagine is at the bottom of all this?" he asked. "Do you suppose they can be holding us for ransom? If so, who is the goat?"

No one seemed to be in a hurry to answer him, and after waiting a due length of time, he wriggled himself into position and drank some of the water.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "There's a knife in the bottom of this tub. That singer boy put it there, I'll bet. That's what he was trying to tell us."

CHAPTER X.

WHY WILLWOOD PUT HIS FOOT IN THE FIRE.

"THANK God!" murmured Brooks. "Now we can be loosed."

"Yes," said Pierre, "but first we must fish the knife out."

"I know how," laughed Turner, and he made a dive into the tub as if he were ducking for apples on All-hallow-e'en.

He attempted to seize the knife in his teeth, only to emerge dripping and gasping without it.

"Hang it all!" he muttered. "The thing's slippery as greased glass. Why on earth didn't the little fool drop the knife in the meat platter?"

"I suppose he put it where he could when the guards weren't watching," explained the count.

"Let me try," interposed Bob, after watching another of Turner's unsuccessful attempts.

He did so, with no other result than drenched head and shoulders. Thereupon each man in turn dived for the knife, while the others looked on in anxious impatience, offering countless suggestions, which had but the one result — that of irritating the ducker. The feat looked so easy of accomplishment that each man made at least six tries at it before he was willing to acknowledge himself beaten.

Finally, after about a couple of hours, they desisted and sat—a discouraged, dripping, forlorn set of captives, chattering with cold.

Suddenly an idea struck Willwood.

"You fellows *are* stupid!" he cried. "We'll simply upset the tub—like this."

He got as near to it as his rope would permit, and stretching out to his full length, placed one foot on the edge of the big tub and pressed down, but his strength was lessened because of having to stretch in order to reach the thing at all, and he could not overbalance the weight of the water.

"You fellows try to tip it up from the other side," he suggested.

Count Pierre and Brooks made several fruitless attempts to act on the idea.

"How can we tip it when we have only our feet with which to pry it up? Now, if we had our hands to work with, it would be another matter," said the count.

"Wait," cried Bob. "I'm going to press on this edge and that will lift the bottom off the floor on your side. Then you wedge your toes under."

This operation worked successfully. Having once got his feet under the tub the count began to lift them up. Brooks was helping. It looked as if the tub would be overturned at any moment and the knife poured out on the floor along with the water.

But the tub saved itself by revolving on the toes of the men's boots and slipping off, landing with an awful noise, where it was quite beyond the reach of everybody except the count, no matter how hard they stretched.

Some water had been spilled, but the tub had not upset, with the knife resting safely on the bottom and more inaccessible than ever.

"You are the limit, you are, to let it get away from you that way," said Bob angrily to the count.

But Pierre seemed in no way annoyed.

"I did as you directed," he rejoined.

He was again diving. He worked desperately for what seemed hours. No one was paying much attention to him. At last with a yell of triumph, he emerged with the knife clutched in his teeth.

But the prisoners' hands being bound, no one was able to pick the knife from the floor where the count had dropped it.

"Now we've *got* the thing, how the mischief are we going to use it?" asked Turner morosely. "We want it to cut our bonds, but we can't use it as long as we *are* bound."

"One of us can hold the knife between his feet," suggested Bob, "while another fellow backs up to him and gets cut free."

"Yes, the other fellow will get a cut—free—and that's about as far as he will get," laughed the count. "But I'm game; let's try."

The knife was small, and feet incased in heavy boots are not exactly a success in executing the function of hands. The knife slipped, turned, and dropped.

The man who backed up to be "cut free" could not see where he was going, and the directions and shoves given him by his fellow prisoners only made matters worse. Turner got a good slash on his wrist, but other than this nothing was accomplished.

It was mid-afternoon before the men gave up in despair. The fire had long since gone out and they were cold and wretched.

Brooks was restless, moaning; and once or twice he cried out in his sleep.

Bob Willwood and Turner sat dejectedly silent.

Count Pierre was trying to eat some of the meat, but his attempts were mostly failures and were laughable in the extreme, had any one present been capable of laughing.

At first the affair had seemed rather a joke, an adventure, fraught with danger, but soon to be over. Now things looked desperate.

One of them was wounded and ill. They were all wet, cold, hungry, penniless, and tightly bound and in a foreign country where they were unknown. And worst of all, their captivity was so mysterious. They knew not what to fear, and in consequence feared everything.

The day wore into early evening.

Suddenly Count Pierre stopped his chase of a refractory piece of bread about the platter.

"Some one is coming," he said.

Footsteps approached. The door opened and a soldier with hot food entered. A peasant followed with water and filled the big tub.

Count Pierre complained of the cold and asked for a fire. The soldier assented respectfully and sent the peasant out for fuel, himself remaining to inspect the prisoner's bonds. He appeared to be satisfied though he seemed surprised by Turner's freshly cut wrist.

But he only smiled and continued his investigation. Brooks was the last man he came to.

"He is ill?" asked the fellow, indicating the chauffeur.

Count Pierre answered that he had been wounded and should not be bound so tightly.

"It can't be helped," said the soldier shortly.

The peasant returned with wood and soon there was a good fire on the hearth and the room warmed up.

The soldier placed a lighted lantern on the chimney-piece and then he and the peasant went out, closing and locking the door.

About an hour passed in absolute quiet. Turner seemed inclined to sleep. Brooks was still drowsy.

The count moved over until he was as near Bob as his bonds would allow.

"M. Willwood," he began, "you see that the windows are not barred, and if only we could manage to get untied, I believe there lies a good avenue of escape."

"You mean through the window?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"Why, it's at least thirty feet above the ground."

"Yes," answered the count, "but there is a tree just beyond the window. The distance across to it is not great. I believe I could jump it, and catching at the top branches, climb to the ground in safety. I am light and active," he added, as he saw Bob's doubtful expression.

"Even if you made the jump you would be killed. The branches would break under your weight," Bob reminded him.

"I would not be afraid to attempt it," Pierre replied quietly. "I am a man. I know what I can do."

"What good could you do for us even if you were successful?" Bob inquired.

"Go to the next village and procure assistance."

"Do you know where the next village is?"

"No, but I could soon find out."

"You *talk* well," Bob said. Then: "Why didn't you jump when you were in here alone?" he asked mockingly.

"I was only put here last night. I could not jump in the dark, knowing nothing of the lay of the land. This morning I was considering it when you came to free me, but had about decided that it was safest to wait for the night."

Bob sat thinking for some minutes.

"I am tied nearest the fire," he said finally, "and I can just about touch it with my foot by lying flat and stretching out. I believe," he continued, "that if I get my shoe on fire I can burn off your bonds, Count Pierre, and perhaps then you will *loose* us," he added nastily.

He was lying full length, his toe just within the edge of the flames.

"What about your foot, though?" asked Pierre.

"It will burn, too," said Bob calmly.

His face looked hard in the firelight and he cast a contemptuous glance at the count.

For a long time Bob Willwood held his toe in the flames. He was suffering, undoubtedly, but the only evidence of it to be seen were his tightly clenched fists and the twitching of the taut muscles around his mouth.

When he finally took his foot out, his agony wrung a moan from his hard lips. But the toe of his boot glowed softly red!

"Come," he said to the count. "Back up quickly. I'll burn off your bonds."

The other moved as close as possible. Bob stretched his foot out, but lacked about two feet of connecting.

CHAPTER XI.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

Bob gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Come, Turner," he cried. "Wake up! I can free you. My shoe is on fire and with it I can burn off your handcuffs."

Turner opened his eyes sleepily.

"What?" he asked lazily.

"Turn around," Bob commanded.

Turner did so, half asleep yet.

"Keep quite still," Bob warned him.

Willwood then carefully applied the still glowing leather of his shoe to the thongs that bound Turner's wrists. They began to sizzle.

"Houghee!" yelled Turner. "You burned *me*."

"Be still," Bob commanded savagely, and again he held his toe to the singed bonds.

Turner *was* being burned, but he sat quietly. The operation of freeing him was slow for the bonds were new and damp and the fire was slowly dying out of Bob's boot.

Great drops of sweat stood out on Willwood's forehead. The effort was costing him dear.

Turner gave a tug at his wrists. The bonds snapped. He was free! He jumped to his feet with a cry of joy.

Bob groaned and fell back heavily. The torture had been too great, and he had fainted. Turner ran to him.

"Leave him and loose me," cried Count Pierre. "The knife is behind me. I know what to do for M. Willwood better than you do."

With hands trembling from long inaction and nervous with excitement, Turner fumbled for the knife and hacked at the count's bonds.

The latter, once free, rushed to Bob and began rapidly and deftly cutting away the hot shoe. Turner was sprinkling water on his face.

"Stop!" cried the count. "It is better

he should remain unconscious until I have finished. He feels no pain now."

Bob's shoe and sock were quickly got off. The toes were badly burned, so deeply, in fact, that it amounted to cauterizing.

Count Pierre divested himself of his coat and shirt, the piece of paper given him by the boy singer, the while slipping unheeded to the floor.

He tore his undershirt into strips and bandages. Then he extinguished the lantern, saturated the rags with the coal-oil, and bandaged the wounded foot.

Bob stirred once or twice, and opened his eyes just as Count Pierre, having completed his offices as doctor, was putting on his shirt again.

"So, count," Bob said faintly, "you decided not to jump?"

Pierre smiled.

"I'm just getting off my coat now," he answered.

"Jump where?" asked Turner, who was loosing Brooks.

Pierre explained briefly. Brooks roused while this was going on and slowly realized what was about to take place.

"Jump from that window to the tree? Why, it will kill you! Are you crazy?" the chauffeur cried.

Count Pierre ignored him. He was now tearing off his shoes.

"I'm going to do it all the same," he cried, and laughed in happy exultation as a boy of twelve might do.

There was a moment's silence, then, against the faint light of the night, flashed the silhouette of Count Pierre perched on the sill of the window. He paused a moment as if measuring his distance—gave a little cry, and disappeared.

Bob got painfully to his feet.

"God!" he cried.

The others were beside him. All looked out into the night.

There was no sound—no cry—only the rustle of the wind in the tree-tops. They could see nothing. Had the count made the leap in safety? Was he in the tree? Suddenly their ears caught the sound of the sentinel's measured tramp. He was just rounding the corner and would pass directly beneath them.

The captives drew back into the room, scarcely breathing in their fearful excitement. They peeped at the sentinel, who marched slowly nearer and nearer.

Now that their eyes had become accustomed to the night, they saw Count Pierre's white shirt. He was hurriedly scrambling down the tree.

When within about twelve feet of the ground, he either saw or heard the sentinel, and stopped sort. Hunters would say he "froze." If he had been a knot on the tree he couldn't have been more inanimate.

But the sentinel got a glimmer of the white. He stopped, and gazing looked attentively at the thing.

The men watching at the window above were petrified with dread.

"That looks like a funny kind of a bird," laughed the sentinel. "Think I'll just have a shot at him, anyway."

Deliberately he leveled his rifle. The white spot gave no sign of life.

Some one knocked against Bob's burned foot. He gave a half-suppressed groan.

The sentinel whirled and peered up at the window, but could see only blackness. He looked back at the tree. The white blotch moved slightly.

"Who goes there?" he cried, now thoroughly alarmed.

No answer.

He again leveled his rifle. From its mouth came a flash—a sharp explosion.

Almost instantly there was a cry, and Count Pierre fell heavily to the ground, where he lay quite still and silent!

CHAPTER XII.

PIERRE LOOKS DEATH IN THE FACE.

THE sentinel rushed toward the prostrate form. He dropped his gun and leaned forward, striving to see whom he had shot.

Instantly Count Pierre caught him by the throat. Then he sprang up and jerked the revolver from the belt of the astonished sentinel! Tripping him, he flung the fellow to the ground, where he lay on his back, while the count stood over him, the pistol pointed at his head!

It was all done so rapidly that to the agonized spectators in the window above it seemed little short of marvelous.

With the revolver still covering his prisoner, the count went over and secured the man's rifle.

"Have you the keys?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Get up," commanded the count. The fellow got to his feet.

But at that moment around the corner of the house came the other sentinel. He was on the run, having been alarmed by the shot. At his side ran a boy.

Count Pierre whispered fiercely to his prisoner.

"Tell that man you thought you heard a noise and fired, but that it was nothing. Make him go to camp and explain the shot. Speak or I'll kill you!"

The count, fearing lest his white shirt should again betray him, had got behind his man. Just then the running sentinel stopped. He was about twenty yards away.

"What's the matter, Luiz?" he called.

"Speak!" hissed Count Pierre.

The newly made prisoner did as he was told.

"I thought I heard something," he answered. "But all's well. Go down to the camp and tell them so. I'll go have a look at the prisoners."

Count Pierre was dictating all this to the fellow.

"I'll go with you," said the new arrival. "I'll send the kid to the camp."

Luckily it was so dark that the newcomers could not see that Pierre's prisoner was unarmed.

"Why *did* you shoot?" demanded the suspicious sentinel.

"I saw something and it wouldn't answer," replied the count's prisoner.

"What was it?"

"A tree."

The other laughed.

"Tell them at the camp," he said to the boy, "that Luiz is crazy—that is what the shot meant—and that all is well."

"Yes," said the boy, and was gone.

"Now you and he go into the house, where *you* are to unlock the prisoners," whispered Pierre. "I'll follow closely. If you make the slightest move or say a single word to arouse that fellow's suspicions, I'll kill you both, but you first."

The native made no reply, but joined the newcomer, and the two men, walking abreast, started toward the house.

The count was trusting that his friends at the window had grasped the situation, and were prepared to act accordingly. He now crept silently at the heels of the two sentinels. There was little danger of his being heard, as he was in his stocking-feet and the ground was soft and damp. Nevertheless he moved with the utmost caution, never taking his weapon off the men.

It was very dark, and the sentinels walked slowly. Arrived at the entrance, Pierre's prisoner fumbled with the lock, and finally opened the door, taking the keys with him. A lantern, hanging just beside the door, illumined a small circle, out of which Pierre was careful to keep clear.

"Bring that lantern, Luiz," called out the armed sentinel, who had already entered the passage.

The other complied. This Luiz was the count's captive, and the poor fellow's face was livid with fear. Evidently he saw perils on all sides of him.

Pierre crept after the men into the courtyard. Here their progress was more hazardous for him, for there were sticks, twigs, and débris lying about, and every instant the count expected to make a misstep and be discovered. But the lantern-light aided him, whereas it only blinded the sentinels, who stumbled and swore several times.

At the thought of ascending the rickety stairs Pierre was terrified. And after each step passed in safety he paused and breathed a prayer of relief. The sentinels were talking and so did not hear the creaking he made. But at any moment they might fall silent just when he had his foot in mid-air, and there he would have to hold it, scarcely breathing, until it pleased them to make a sound.

He was following them as closely as he dared, walking on his toes. Just at the top of the stairs he lost his balance and leaned heavily against the railing, which groaned under him!

Like a flash, the armed sentinel turned upon him.

They were not ten feet apart; both had stopped. Luiz was walking heedlessly forward, and his lantern cast fitful shadows over the two men as they stood facing each other.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLIGHT AND FIGHT.

COUNT PIERRE'S pistol covered the sentinel, but he did not fire, for, after an instant, the fellow turned away and walked rapidly off to join Luiz, who, having set the lantern on the floor, busied himself selecting a key.

Pierre was sure the man had seen him, but there had been no sign. What could this mean? Luiz unlocked the door leading

to the room occupied by the men, and, taking up the lantern, stepped inside, closely followed by the other sentinel and the count.

Turner instantly threw himself upon Luiz. Knocking the lantern from his hand, he pinioned the poor fellow's arms, Luiz making little protest.

Some one set up the lantern. It was still burning, and in its faint light the count was seen to be guarding the other sentinel.

"Be quick," the count said. "I'll watch this fellow if M. Willwood will help bind and gag him."

This sentinel also offered but a feeble resistance, and the count noticed a look of understanding that passed between him and Bob.

"It's the fellow I bribed this morning," Bob explained. "He's trying to play us fair, after all."

Count Pierre smiled; now he understood why this sentinel had refused to see him on the stairs. The fellow was a traitor, yet he had been so clever about it that he was not even suspected by his fellows.

"Now bind this one," cried Turner.

Pierre came forward with a cord. Bob had obtained the bunch of keys, and hobbled away to release the women. Turner possessed himself of a rifle and revolver.

"Get all their cartridges," he said. And when this was done he added. "Come, we must waste no time," and, snatching up the lantern, rushed from the room, Count Pierre and Brooks following.

They left the two sentinels bound and gagged.

Just beyond the threshold Bob and the women awaited them. All started toward the stairs, up which the little peasant singer now bounded and, rushing to Count Pierre, flung himself on his knees.

He was so out of breath from running and overcome with emotion that for a moment he could not speak. When he did it was in a whisper.

"They must not know," he said, waving his arm toward the room where lay the gagged sentinels. "They must not know that I am warning you. All of them are coming—from the camp—they suspect. And some one has come that they all obey. He must not find you. Quick! Quick! The keys. Come. I'll show you the way."

Alice had the keys in her hand The boy grabbed them from her, and, rushing toward the stairs, cried: "Faster! Faster!"

They all followed the little flying figure, down the stairs, and across the yard to where they could just discern him entering a room on the ground floor.

Through the open entry the fugitives heard the approaching crowd, and saw the flare of torches.

Count Pierre, closely followed by Bob, arrived first at the room where the boy had disappeared.

On entering, Bob saw that it was the same room where he had been so frightened by the rat.

Already the boy had the trap-door open.

"Go—go," he cried. "There is a passage here will take you to a little thicket. Those coming do not know about it. Hurry!"

The crowd had approached so close that now their voices could be plainly heard.

"Go—quick," cried the boy. "I'll stay and lock up after you. Go!" He was jumping up and down in his excitement.

"But you? They'll kill you," cried the count.

"No," answered the boy; "they will not know."

He held high the lantern, and he and Bob almost drove the bewildered party down the steep steps.

"Walk straight," called the boy; "it is all safe and level ground."

Count Pierre was the last to descend. The boy handed him the lantern and passionately kissed his hand.

The crowd had already entered the courtyard!

"Tell him—the one they call Bob—that it was I who came to their room this morning and left the door unlocked," said the boy. "I was looking for you, and the sick one saw me and cried out. I was frightened. I ran and locked myself in one of the empty rooms. Good-by!"

The trap-door shut between them, and Count Pierre heard the padlock snap.

He walked a few steps down the narrow passage and found his friends awaiting him. Together they began the tortuous journey, the count relating meanwhile what the boy had just told him.

It was very damp and cold in the passage, but after groping their way a bit the air grew purer, and soon they emerged into a dense thicket.

At last they were free, out under the open sky!

A consultation was held to decide the

advisability of going forward at once or waiting until early morning.

Bob, despite his wounded foot, insisted upon immediate flight.

And so they started. But it was too late! They had only gone a short distance when they heard cries from the oncoming crowd. Their escape was discovered. And soon the flare of the enemies' torches lit up the night.

The fugitives rushed back to the shelter of the thicket.

Their great hope lay in not being discovered, for they were outnumbered, insufficiently armed, and had little ammunition, and a fight would surely result in their recapture.

Their discovery became more improbable with each minute, as the hunt for them was moving further afield. Several searching parties had passed quite near without suspecting their presence.

The flames of the numerous torches were dwindling in the distance, becoming little specks of light scarcely distinguishable from the fireflies.

"I have been so afraid of making a noise that I haven't dared to take a good breath," whispered Bob.

"Do you know I believe we are out of their grasp," said Turner.

He stopped abruptly. All was silent—then, after a minute, way out in the night, was heard the faint cry of hounds!

The sound seemed coming toward them. It drew nearer and nearer.

"We are in for it now," whispered Turner, as the yelp of the dogs became unmistakable. "They have got hounds from somewhere and have set them on us! The hounds will lead them straight to us, and it will be a fight for our lives—not only a battle with men, but with fierce animals."

The fugitives began at once making active preparations for the struggle. Pierre distributed the weapons and cartridges, keeping a revolver for himself and giving the other to Brooks, and the two rifles to Bob and Turner.

The women were ordered to lie prostrate in the center of the thicket, and the men took up their position at the outskirts, crouching behind the bushes. Then in tense anxiety all awaited the onslaught.

The dogs were headed for them and drew steadily nearer. The distant searchers seemed to converge to where the hounds' cries were heard.

Bob Willwood spoke quietly. "I believe I can hit one of those dogs," he said.

"Better wait until they are almost on us," suggested Brooks.

The torches made the enemy plainly visible, but were not bright enough to penetrate the thicket and reveal the four men waiting, every muscle tense, their weapons leveled.

"There are only three hounds," said Pierre. "Try to get them first. When they are near enough, fire."

Intense silence followed. Then the click of Bob's rifle, an explosion, a flash, a cry—and one of the foremost torch-bearers staggered and fell.

Three other shots rang out. Two of the hounds dropped.

There was only one dog left!

In the ranks of the enemy confusion reigned, until some one with a commanding tone cried: "Fire into the thicket. Hold that dog back, some one."

But it was too late; the hound made a dash into the bushes, where Turner quickly despatched him.

"Put out the torches," the same voice yelled.

All was now in darkness except where, in the distance, a few stray lights were seen bobbing steadily nearer.

"Fire low," directed the count, "and try to make every shot tell."

The enemy had opened a rapid fire, but, not being able to see into the bushes, their shots fell harmlessly.

The night was dark, but there was sufficient light for the fugitives to see the black mass which they knew to be the enemy, and into which they directed their shots.

By the cries of pain that came occasionally from the swaying forms they knew that many bullets were effective. But this state of things could only last for a short time, and no one realized it better than the fugitives themselves.

They were on their last round of cartridges, and death seemed very near.

"Charge!" cried the voice of the enemy's commander from out the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEFT ON THE FIELD.

THE enemy made a wild sally, but found the volley that welcomed them too hot, and drew back in disorder.

The commanding voice from their ranks cried: "Surrender!"

"Cease firing," cried Count Pierre to his companions. Then, in a low voice, he continued: "Perhaps we can manage to obtain terms. How many more cartridges have you, men?"

"None," answered Bob and Turner in chorus.

"One," added Brooks.

"And I have three," the count continued. "You men get the women and run for it. I'll stay here and hold them off as long as I can. Go!" he cried passionately, as no one moved. "I'll follow. Go quickly!"

A scrambling in the bushes told him he was obeyed.

"Surrender on what terms?" The count's voice rang out clearly.

"Unconditional," answered the voice of the enemy's leader.

"Then you take us dead," cried the count. And though he was alone and with but three cartridges, he stood quietly waiting the result of his ultimatum.

The enemy were silent, and in the distance Pierre could hear his friends making good their escape.

Then out of the darkness in front of the count came the command to charge.

"It's all up with me, I suppose," muttered Pierre, but he stood his ground and fired his last shots, and more than one of them took effect.

The foe came upon him from all sides. He fought desperately in the dark, laying about him to right and left with the butt-end of his revolver.

He seemed endowed with fifty arms and superhuman strength. Cries of rage and pain resounded all around.

"How many are there of them?" one of the enemy cried.

It was about this time that Pierre's blows ceased to rain.

"Get a light," commanded the leader. "They've got away."

Almost instantly a torch was brought, and its smoky gleam illumined a strange scene.

A half-score of frightened soldiers and peasants stood blinking about a single prostrate form. A slim, boyish figure lay stretched on the ground, his face bathed in blood.

It was Count Pierre!

The fat peasant who had been so prominent at the first capture shouldered his way up to the leader, and cried:

"That is *he!*" And he pointed at the hapless form.

The other drew close and peered into the count's face.

"It is not," he said positively. This announcement fell like doom upon the ears of the bystanders.

"It *is* he, I tell you," insisted the fat peasant. "I saw him only last year."

"And I talked with him but last week," replied the other severely, "and I tell you it is not he."

Consternation bordering on panic spread among the crowd.

"What have you fools done?" roared the leader.

There was no answer.

"Where are the remainder of these people?" he cried in alarm, pointing to Count Pierre.

"They have escaped," some one said.

"Well, let us get away before they return, bringing the law with them. Run for your lives, you blunderers."

The men needed no second bidding.

"Hold!" cried the leader.

They stopped and waited, trembling.

"How many did they kill?"

"None," answered a soldier. "There are seven wounded, but only two badly."

"Carry those seven with you," ordered the leader. "And pray—all of you pray, that we escape this night's doings with our heads."

And he set off across the fields in the opposite direction from the farmhouse.

Presently the ground was cleared. The torches were gone, and silence settled down over the little thicket where Pierre lay as one dead, forgotten by all.

He, the man scarcely more than a boy, who had battled with a mob of armed men, and single-handed secured the escape of six people.

When he came to himself, it was still night, black and damp.

His head ached horribly, and he could not open one of his eyes. He put his hand up to it and found it glued to his cheek with clotted blood. He was only half conscious, and moved slightly and moaned.

Then the sickly darkness seemed to come down to cover him with a heavy cloth, and he knew no more.

When he next roused, Willwood was bending over him.

"Pierre!" cried Bob in an agonized voice.

The count smiled up at him in sickly fashion.

"Are the women safe?" he asked faintly.

"Thank Heaven, he's alive!" Bob cried excitedly.

Then he went on slowly and quietly:

"They are in the woods, half a mile away. When you didn't follow, we grew alarmed, and I came back. What is it? Where are you hurt?"

"How long have I been lying here?" asked the count, disregarding Bob's many questions.

"It has been an hour or more since I left you. What happened?"

Pierre got unsteadily to his feet. The pain in his head was terrible, and dizziness almost overcame him. He swayed, and Bob caught him.

"Come, I'll carry you," said Willwood tenderly, lifting him as though he were a child.

"No," said Pierre. "Give me your arm. There—about my shoulders—and go slow. I can walk."

And so they started.

At first it was only with a superhuman effort that the count was able to proceed, but his grit and determination supported him, and after a little he began to revive.

Then he insisted upon walking without assistance.

"Tell me about things if you feel strong enough," said Bob, breaking the silence.

"I fired all my cartridges," the count began, "and then the enemy came on with a rush. It was so dark they could not see me. I pounded right and left, using my pistol as a club. I am active, you know, and, by rushing from one place to another, they thought me an army. Then some one gave me an awful whack on the head, and all went yellow before me, then black, and I knew no more."

"But why did the enemy not take you prisoner, and where are they now?" Bob naturally wanted to know.

"I can't tell you that. It's very strange, indeed."

After a moment's thought Bob said:

"Count, it was a very brave thing, your staying there—and—and I honor you for it. I am proud—but—"

And he stopped abruptly.

"But what?" asked the other.

"I'm rather blunt," Bob went on, "so I'll speak out. I admire your nerve, but—I—I can't trust you."

Pierre made no reply to this, and Willwood continued:

"When you were taking off your undershirt to bind my foot, you must have dropped a paper out of your clothes. I found it on the floor. I read it."

Bob waited for the count to speak, but when there seemed no chance of his doing so Willwood went on: "You knew you were going to be held up."

"What?" cried Pierre.

"That paper was a written warning," Bob added.

"Oh!" cried the count, as though suddenly recalling a forgotten incident. "That paper—it must have been the one the singer gave me in the woods. I did not read it then. Afterward it slipped my memory. Things happened so rapidly. What did it say?"

"The writer was old and crippled," Bob replied. "He could not come to you himself, but was warning you that, having been seen and recognized in the last town, an attempt was about to be made to capture you. The spot where the enemy lay in wait was described."

"Believe me, *monsieur,*" exclaimed the count, "I did not know of the contents of that paper until this minute. My running into the trap myself is the best proof of that."

"Miss Chase saw the boy give you that paper, and you lied to her about it," said Bob, only half convinced.

The count was growing angry, but kept silent. Willwood went on.

"I want to like you. I believe in you, in spite of myself," he said. "Explain, will you—"

"*Monsieur,*" Pierre began, and all anger had melted from his voice, "I do not understand the situation any more than you do. I beg you to consider what I am about to say as strictly between ourselves. I am a member of a powerful secret order, from whom I was expecting a communication the day we were captured.

"That boy I believed to be the bearer of that message. I did speak a code language to him, as you suspected, but he could not understand. The singer's devotion to me, and the reason for the warning that was sent, are beyond my comprehension."

Bob was convinced by the sincerity that

rang in every tone of Pierre's voice. He gripped the count's hand warmly.

"I do believe you," he said earnestly.

CHAPTER XV.

A NIGHT IN THE OPEN.

AFTER some minutes of silent walking, the two newly made friends drew near the bank of a brook, close beside which awaited the other fugitives. Soon they were among them.

Alice was the first to discover that the count was wounded. She insisted upon bathing his bloody face and cleansing his wounds.

The count lay stretched out full length, with his head in his mother's lap. The blow he had sustained was of awful force, and it was only his remarkably heavy head of hair that had protected his skull from fracture.

While Alice was playing surgeon, Bob Willwood was nursing his foot, and recounting in glowing terms the count's brave fight.

The countess wept steadily, though very quietly, until her son remonstrated, announcing that her salt tears were "rather irritating" to his wound.

"Well, if you can make fun, you are better," cried Alice.

"No," said the countess. "My son is so deceptive. He would laugh if he were dying—and what is more, he would make the onlookers laugh, too."

"Anyway, I am sufficiently alive now to be able to go forward, as I think we had better do," cried the count, getting quickly to his feet.

Bob saw his hand fly to his bandaged head and he leaned heavily against a tree. Bob was beside him instantly, but Pierre was soon himself.

Willwood and he followed Brooks, who led the way out of the thicket and along the creek.

"I believe we had better strike for the open and get up into the hills," suggested the count.

And so they began the march toward the point where the hills showed a dark mass cutting the horizon.

It was rather a disabled crowd—Brooks with his arm in a sling, Bob Willwood limping, Pierre with a swathed head. Turner's cut wrist was beginning to smart; besides, he had numerous bruises from the fence episode.

Mrs. Turner was still unhappy when the slightest pressure was put upon her head—for the peasant had given even her natural hair an awful pulling. The poor countess, who had never walked so much in her whole life, was very lame.

There was little conversation. Rests were frequent, but before two hours Bob deemed further traveling inadvisable, because everybody was so worn out. He called a halt, and no one raised the slightest objection.

"I think we had better stop here for the night," he suggested. "It is not as far as I had hoped to get, but I believe we are safe."

It certainly looked safe and quiet; a nice spot under some cedar-trees. The ground was dry. The moon had risen, and bathed the opening beyond in soft radiance.

"Here's where I'll sleep," Pierre announced.

He let himself down carefully on a heap of soft, dry pine-needles, and closed his eyes.

It did not take the others many minutes to follow his example; and they "slept without rocking," as the saying goes.

When the count deemed all sleeping he rose noiselessly, and went to the edge of the woods. Here he flung himself down in the moonlight, and turned his face to the ground.

Alice had not been asleep. She saw the count leave the others, and was at once suspicious, and followed him.

He heard some one approaching, but did not look up.

"It is you?" he asked gently.

No answer.

"Mlle. Chase?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes," she answered sternly.

"You want something?" he went on.

"No," and she started to move away.

"Why did you follow me, then?" He spoke very softly, though they were well out of ear-shot of the sleepers.

She did not answer, and was still moving farther away from where he lay.

He raised himself slightly.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he said, "you came because you, too, do not trust me. It makes me sad. But if you will sit down, I will explain to you many things—things which you do not understand."

She hesitated.

"Come," he urged.

She came and seated herself near him. Propped up on his elbow, he looked like an Arab with his turban bandage.

"I am sorry it is needful to explain," he began, "but you see M. Willwood has told me about the letter you saw the boy give me. I thought you knew me well enough, after all these weeks together, and would trust me even when circumstances made my honor look doubtful. But I see now. So I must tell you about things just as I would a stranger."

She made a little movement as if to interrupt, but he continued:

"It is too bad that I am bandaged, because it makes an appeal to your sympathy, and I do not want that."

He looked her proudly in the eyes, and before his gaze hers fell.

She sat very still while he told many things. What they were no one will ever know, though one may guess in part from his confidence to Willwood.

But Miss Chase never spoke of what took place between them, and when the fugitives awoke next morning both he and she were still sleeping—he at the far edge of the woods, and she beside the other two women.

CHAPTER XVI.

CAPTIVITY PREFERRED.

It was Willwood who awoke first. And soon all were busy with their toilets. This proceeding had a decided element of the ridiculous in it. For with no soap, no towels, no mirror, and nothing larger than the women's side-combs to aid them, they were reduced to somewhat novel, and frequently inadvisable, expedients.

Mrs. Turner, in her attempts to see her reflection in the near-by stream, fell in, and was fished out, a dripping and decidedly dilapidated figure, by her heroic and half-drenched husband.

Indeed, the first day's sojourn in the woods was full of comic incidents, such as Bob's painful encounter with a swarm of wild bees and the entanglement of the countess in a barbed-wire fence. Yet, in spite of all the humor of the thing, and their transitory exemption from danger, they were beginning to realize more fully the seriousness of their situation.

They were lost. There was no denying that. They did not know in the least where they were. And the automobile was gone. The day had been spent vainly in a search for some one to direct them to the nearest village. For whenever, after much wandering, they did discover a human habitation, the door proved to be barred, and their cries met with absolute silence.

Once or twice, when their "dread" arrival had evidently not been properly heralded, they caught sight of a peasant woman or child, but only a glimpse of the wanderers caused the creatures to fly as if from the plague.

Late in the afternoon they came upon a hut. It was the fourteenth at which they had begged that day. The door, as usual, was fast. Knocks, cries, prayers, threats elicited nothing. They were by this time ravenously hungry, and the men attempted to break in the door, but a bullet fired out at them, though doing no hurt, caused a stampede.

Upon gaining the shelter of the woods, they held a council of war, but were too weak and starved to think coherently, having been without food all day, except for some honey, berries, and a few grapes they had found in a garden. Night was settling down, and it promised to be cold.

"Do you know, I feel as Alice in Wonderland must have when she was 'telescoped out,'" said Miss Chase, making one of her occasional attempts at lightness. "Just as if my nutritive organs were only ordinary size and I a giant."

"A giantess," corrected the count.

All day he had avoided Alice, but never failed to second her attempts to cheer the crowd.

"I think we were better off in captivity," remarked Turner. "At least we were *fed.*"

"Yes; it is this idea of escaping that was at the bottom of all our trouble," Brooks said sullenly.

He was remembering his lost seven dollars, his contribution to the bribe fund.

Since going through so much together, Brooks frequently lapsed, unrebuked, from his old attitude of servant, and became one of them.

"Yes," added Turner; "if we had stayed in confinement we wouldn't have starved, and by this time they might have released us."

"I wish I were back in prison," wailed the countess. "I had a feather bed there, and from sleeping one night on this ter-

rible ground I have developed trouble with my back-bone."

"Possibly a dislocated vertebra," suggested Alice slyly.

"More probably a broken stay," laughed the count. "But why not return and give ourselves up again, if you were all happier in jail?"

"I'll be hanged if I do," said Bob shortly.

"We'll starve to death here," Turner observed, tightening his belt.

Then they began to discuss the matter, and Bob was overpersuaded as they finally agreed that of two evils prison was the lesser.

"No time like the present," said Brooks. "Let's start. I believe I can find the way."

"Oh! I can't walk any more *now*," wailed the countess. "Wait for daylight."

"Think of hot food, mother," cried Pierre.

This remark decided the matter and soon they were off.

"It seems strange that all day we have seen nothing but backwoods roads," remarked Pierre, who was walking beside Turner.

"It's because this region is God-forsaken. No one ever comes here except the half-starved peasants. They don't need even roads."

"But where are all the peasants?" demanded the count.

"Shut up in their houses, I suppose."

"Why?"

"How in thunder do I know?" snapped Turner.

They tramped and tramped. Up hills and down hills, across streams and through woods. For Brooks, despite his continual assertions to the contrary, was *not* sure of the way.

After more than four hours, and when they were all worn out, Pierre thought the surroundings familiar. They were marching at the time on the outskirts of a long arm of the forest. Suddenly, rounding a corner, they found themselves in the open and near the very farmhouse that was the object of their quest.

Toward this they hastened—a party of weary men and women, willing, nay anxious, to give themselves up to an unknown and mysterious captivity for a "mess of pottage."

Hunger was forcing them to forego the liberty to gain which they had but lately fought so desperately. When near the house, but on the far side from the entrance, Pierre suggested that he be allowed to go first and reconnoiter.

"I speak the language, you know," he called back in explanation, as he disappeared in the darkness.

"It is because he prefers to be the only one hurt in case we are met with hostility," whispered Bob to Alice. "And," he added, with sincere enthusiasm, "he is the bravest, most splendid fellow I ever knew."

"Yes," Alice responded quickly, and her eyes were bright and her breast heaved with some sudden emotion, but the darkness protected her secret.

The house appeared dark and quiet, and down where the camp-fire had been there was no sign of life.

Pierre was moving cautiously but swiftly toward the doorway where hung a lantern.

This gave but a feeble light, which was sufficient, however, for Willwood to descry a man emerge from the darkness and make a rush toward the count.

Before Bob could give a cry of warning, the man was upon Pierre; about whose head he threw a heavy cloak and, securing his arms, dragged him quickly through the open doorway.

It was all over in a few seconds and absolutely without noise.

Bob reached the spot of the capture almost instantly, and fearfully entered the dark passageway. He saw a spot of light at the far side of the courtyard and made rapidly toward it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE KING.

WHEN the cloak enveloped the count, he had felt like one suddenly possessed by a bad dram. He dared make no resistance, but walked as he was guided.

After a few minutes he heard a door open and was shoved into a room. The door was closed, and the cloak taken from his head.

The light in the place blinded him for a moment. He put his hand instinctively to his eyes.

He heard his captor say in Portuguese: "I found this fellow prowling around outside, so I brought him before you."

"Well," said a man's voice that was full of charm and betokened culture and gentleness, "Go!"

"But I fear—" began the captor.

"Yes, *you* fear," said the gentleman. "But *I* do not. Go!"

The door opened and closed.

Pierre took his hand from his eyes. He saw that the room was lighted by many candles stuck along the shelves and table, and that the windows were closely shaded.

A fire burned in the chimney and beside it, leaning one arm on the mantel, stood a strikingly handsome young man. His attitude was that of bored interest, and he was indolently smoking a cigarette.

He looked at Pierre, and seemed about to speak, when an inner door opened slowly. Some one entered, uttered a cry. There was a clatter of breaking crockery as a dish dropped to the floor.

Pierre turned in the direction of the accident. There stood the singer peasant!

"Why, it is the other!" cried the boy, and he stood staring from the count to the man beside the fire.

"You see, it is as I said," he continued. "He is *you*."

Pierre looked inquiringly at the gentleman.

"What is all this?" he asked quietly.

"The boy thinks you resemble me to an extraordinary degree," answered the other. Taking his cigarette from his mouth and producing a silver case, he offered one to the count.

"I fail to see the likeness; perhaps you'll call that my vanity. I am the king!"

He said it quietly and naturally, but there was a ring of pride in his voice, and as he lifted his head he looked his royalty.

The count came forward a few steps and knelt.

"And I am Pierre, Count de Bele, de Traslis and Martye," he said.

The king advanced and laid his hand gently on the kneeling man's shoulder.

Pierre noticed that his majesty's hand was beautifully delicate and trembled slightly despite his apparent calmness.

"I think I have caused you much suffering," continued his majesty. "Do not kneel to me. I have no throne now. You are not a stranger, for I have heard of nothing but you and your adventures in this house—"

He broke off as the inner door opened and a tragically handsome woman stood on the threshold. She was simply dressed—but her bearing was regal.

"My son," she began, just as Bob, closely followed by the other fugitives, burst into the room.

The woman's hand went instinctively to her heart.

"My son," she cried in alarm. "What—"

"These are my friends," cried Pierre hastily.

The king turned to her majesty.

"Nothing is wrong, mother," he said tenderly. "These are the people who have suffered so much because of us."

Pierre went to the frightened group in the doorway, who were interested in noting the resemblance between him and this stranger.

"This is the king," the count explained, "and the queen-mother."

"Come in," said her majesty, graciously advancing toward the fugitives; "we have no ceremony here. They are your friends, my boy?"

She looked inquiringly at the king. Her tone was gentle and affectionate, but there was a note in it that seemed to betoken the fact that whereas his friends were always treated courteously yet they had often not been *her* friends.

"They are the touring-party that was mistaken for us," explained his majesty. "You look starved," he added, turning to the little group.

"We are," they answered in chorus.

"Quickly, mother, call some one."

In a few moments food was before them. They ate little, strange to say, for now that they had it, food seemed inadequate for their hunger—indeed, almost repulsive.

Pierre had been talking rapidly to the king. He turned now to his friends.

"His majesty has just told me," he began, "that a revolution has broken out. He and the queen-mother are fleeing the country. The secret of their proposed flight was betrayed. It became known that they were to attempt an escape in their automobile.

"And, owing to my resemblance to his majesty, I was mistaken for him—"

"You were mistaken for a king?" interrupted Turner. Oh, heavens! who would ever have thought of that? Mistaken for a king!"

And the others of the party began joking about it among themselves.

"Anyway, we were captured in place of them," continued the count shortly.

"Well, I'll declare!" burst from Brooks as he realized the situation.

"What is the king doing here, in our old prison?" Bob inquired.

Pierre repeated this question to his majesty, who replied in a torrent of Portuguese.

"They are stopping here for food before proceeding to the coast where a vessel awaits them," Count Pierre translated. "This house belongs to the singer-boy's father, who is a royalist. It is not occupied, the owner living nearer the highroad. His majesty stopped for refreshment. He received a hearty welcome, and was told all about us—our capture, imprisonment, and final escape.

"When did our captors leave this house?" broke in Willwood.

Again Pierre turned to the king, and again his majesty poured forth a stream of rapid, musical language.

"When we were escaping," the count explained for the others, "you remember the singer rushed up the steps to tell me that we must waste no time in getting away, because some one had arrived 'that they all obey'? Well, that 'some one' was the mayor of the neighboring village, whom they had managed to get to come to identify me. Learning that we were escaping, he led the search. He believed that he was pursuing the real king until he came upon me lying unconscious in the thicket.

"Instantly he realized that a blunder had been made, and frightened for its consequences, so he fled! But later gathering courage, he returned to make amends, only to find us gone.

"Convinced that the real king had slipped through his fingers while the soldiers and peasants were engaged with capturing and detaining us, he dispersed the men and took himself back to his village."

"It is not safe for you to stay in this unhappy country," said the queen, addressing the newcomers. "Danger lurks on every hand. The whole land is in arms. You must all come away with us."

"It is the one courtesy we can do to make amends for all the misery we have caused you," added his majesty. "Will you not accept it?"

A discussion at once began as to the advisability of the Turners' party joining his majesty.

"Yes," cried Turner; "let's get out of this—"

He was interrupted by the little peasant running in. He spoke rapidly.

Pierre translated: "He says his father sends word for us to fly immediately. The town officials have learned of the king's whereabouts, and a party is marching on us at this very minute!"

"Come, be quick," said the king. "Lead the way, boy!"

It was some distance to where his majesty's automobile awaited. But they hurried and were soon squeezed inside, piled all over each other, and were being whirled down the long, white road.

The speed at which they traveled was terrific. Disaster might lie in wait for them at any turn.

This feeling seemed to be present in every mind, certainly in the Americans'. It is a risky thing to be associated with a fleeing monarch, and yet they had hurriedly linked their fortunes with the king's. What would come of it?

The hour was wearing on toward daybreak. It was that time of night when the spirits of all things human are at their lowest ebb.

After all the harrowing experiences the Turners and their guests had gone through, this ride should have seemed an ordinary affair, yet in the memory of most of them it remains perhaps their most hazardous adventure.

Just at dawn they boarded the waiting vessel and were soon under sail, putting blue water between them and the land where they had been beset with such misfortunes.

In the freshening sea breeze the consciousness of their escape from danger was impressed upon them and the party seemed to take on new life.

They were gay and full of fun and laughter.

"I don't think you and the king are so much alike," Alice remarked to Pierre.

"Nor do I," added the countess.

"We are not, when seen together," the count replied. "If I had not shaved my mustache and then, changing my mind, started this little one, I never should have been mistaken for his majesty."

"You mean to say that all our trouble arose from the fact that you have a slight mustache?" laughed Willwood.

"It is the truth," replied the countess, "for when Pierre had his old mustache he looked years older than his majesty; indeed, I don't think there was then even a slight resemblance."

At this moment the king joined the group.

"How many of you are sailing straight for America the moment we land in England?" he asked. His majesty spoke simply, but he looked slyly at Count Pierre.

The count blushed and Miss Chase grew

so embarrassed that the king came gallantly to the rescue, by asking Turner what he was going to do about his lost automobile.

The American replied that he thought considering all the men he and his companions had shot, it was best to let sleeping dogs lie.

"From all you have told me," laughed the king, "the hounds being killed, must needs lie."

THE END.

Mr. Scales at the Fancy Dress Ball

By C. Langton Clarke

MR. SCALES, bending like Issachar between two burdens, deposited a couple of brown paper parcels on the floor of his hall. They emitted a faint clanking sound as of metal, and Mrs. Scales at once evinced a lively curiosity.

"What on earth have you got in there, George?" she asked. "I do hope to goodness you have not been spending your money in any more foolish things for the house. I'm sure we have got enough useless trash of your selection as it is."

"My dear Minnie," replied Mr. Scales, "I have told you on more than one occasion that you are a little too apt to jump at conclusions. Why not wait to find fault until you know whether there is anything to find fault about?"

"I have not found it necessary to wait very long, as a rule," responded Mrs. Scales scathingly. "Whenever you bring home something big and clumsy, and look as if you had done something very clever, I know that either you or I are going to get into trouble."

"Guess what it is," said Mr. Scales banteringly. "Something that you would never think of in your wildest dreams."

"There are lots of things you have brought home that would answer that description," replied Mrs. Scales. "I'm not going to bother my head guessing."

"Then wait until after dinner," and Mr. Scales slung the bundles one after the other under the hall-table.

During dinner Mrs. Scales studiously avoided any reference to the mysterious bundles, much to the disappointment of her husband, who was evidently eager to be questioned, and when he himself introduced the subject waved it aside with an air of indifference.

"I forgot to tell you, George," she remarked, "that Mrs. Butterworth and I have quite decided on our costumes for the Foresters' fancy ball next week."

"Oh, indeed!" replied Mr. Scales. "Something nice and expensive, I suppose."

"Not so very," was the careless reply. "We were at the costumer's this afternoon, and find that we can get them quite reasonable. Mine will only cost me thirty dollars, and it is practically new."

"Very cheap," commented Mr. Scales bitterly. "And what on earth good is it going to be when you have once worn it?"

"I suppose," replied Mrs. Scales coolly, "that the costumer can rent it to some one else later on, can't he?"

Mr. Scales gasped.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that you are going to pay thirty dollars for the use of a fancy dress for one night? I thought you meant you were going to buy it."

Mrs. Scales laughed with unaffected heartiness.

"My dear George," she said, "you may be very clever in your own line, and know a lot about real estate, but you are evidently ignorant as to the value of fancy-dress costumes. That one I am to wear cost at least three hundred dollars."

Mr. Scales looked slightly staggered, but returned again to the charge after a brief exercise in mental arithmetic.

"You are paying," he said, "thirty dollars for the use for one day of an article that cost three hundred dollars. That is ten per cent. In other words, you are being soaked three thousand—six hundred—and fifty per cent per annum."

"Stuff!" replied Mrs. Scales contemptuously. "You don't suppose the man can rent out that costume every night in the year, including Sundays, at that price. My dear George, you are a perfect slave to figures. At the end of a year it will probably rent for five dollars."

"It's a pity it isn't the end of the year now," observed Mr. Scales gloomily.

"In which case," replied his wife lightly, "I wouldn't have it at any price."

"And what particular character in history or fiction," inquired Mr. Scales with elaborate politeness, "may I ask, do you intend to represent?"

"I am going," responded Mrs. Scales placidly, "as Mary Queen of Scots."

After one astounded glance, Mr. Scales burst into a roar of laughter, which brought a wave of scarlet flaming into his wife's indignant countenance and a dangerous glitter into her eyes.

"And I suppose," continued the husband, densely blind to these danger signals, "that Mrs. Butterworth is going as Helen of Troy, or Fair Rosamond, or Guinevere, or some other famous beauty of history."

"Mrs. Butterworth," responded Mrs. Scales icily, "is going as a Dresden shepherdess, and Mr. Butterworth as a shepherd."

Mr. Scales nearly rolled off his chair in the excess of his mirth.

"Butterworth as a Dresden shepherd!" he gasped as soon as he could command his voice. "That's too rich. Is he going to carry a crook with pretty ribbons on it, and a nice woolly lamb under his arm?"

Mrs. Scales regarded her husband's facial and bodily contortions with a frosty glare.

"I had picked out your costume," she said. "That of a courtier of the time of Charles the Second. I thought that with your rather dumpy figure you would show to the least disadvantage in something which would conceal it, but now I think I will change it."

Mr. Scales, his hilarity suddenly evaporating, stared speechlessly at his wife.

"I think," continued Mrs. Scales, regarding her husband's form with the eye of one trying to make the best of rather hopeless material, "that I will order one of these motley suits, with the legs of different colors, a scepter with a ridiculous caricature at the end of it, and a cap with bells on it. I think that would suit you ever so much better."

She paused for a moment; but, no reply being forthcoming, continued with bitter emphasis:

"Those court fools were always making stupid jokes which nobody could see the point of, and nobody ever laughed at but the people who had to, or get into trouble. Y-e-e-s. I think I will go down to-morrow morning and change my order."

Mr. Scales, more resentful than he cared to admit at this slighting criticism of his personal appearance and capabilities as a humorist, emitted a disgusted grunt.

"You needn't bother about me," he said. "Run your own beauty competition. I've got my costume. I think it will hide my dumpy figure, as you are kind enough to call it, better than either of the two you have suggested."

Sudden and intense curiosity swept away all Mrs. Scales's indignation.

"Oh, George," she said eagerly, "what is it? Oh, I know— You are going as a sandwich-man. One of those unfortunates who parade up and down the street with bill-boards in front and behind. That would hide your figure better than anything."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Scales with bitterness. "I wasn't sure whether you meant that or a quick-lunch artist. No, I am not going as a sandwich-man."

"You are the most tiresome person I ever saw," declared Mrs. Scales petulantly. "Why can't you tell me what it is?"

"All in good time," replied Mr. Scales,

restored to good humor by the sight of his wife's annoyance. "I brought it home with me. Yes—you're quite correct—it's in those two bundles out in the hall. Butterworth is coming around this evening to help me put it on. It was partly through him that I got it, and I think it will create something of a sensation. You say yours cost three hundred dollars. Well, mine is worth about three times that, if not more."

"And how much are you paying for it?" demanded Mrs. Scales, her eyes distended with interest and expectancy.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Scales curtly.

Mrs. Scales stamped her foot with impatience.

"What an intolerable, tantalizing person you are, George!" she exclaimed. "Why can't you come out with it like a man, and say what it is?"

"Because," replied Mr. Scales, with an aggravating laugh, "I am dealing with a woman, and there is nothing better for curiosity than to keep it warmed up for a while. Wait and see.

"And," he continued, as his wife gave utterance to several mutinous remarks, "to insure the waiting until the prescribed time, I think I'll take a slight precaution."

And, going into the hall, he bore the two parcels up-stairs to his dressing-room, and deposited them in a cupboard to which he alone possessed a key.

II.

HALF an hour later Mr. Butterworth and his wife, the former plump, exquisitely groomed and immaculately attired—the latter willowy and cultivating an atmosphere of estheticism—were ushered into the study where Mr. and Mrs. Scales sat awaiting them.

"Well," began Mr. Butterworth as, having exchanged greetings and helped himself to a cigar, he settled himself comfortably in an easy chair, "has Scales divulged the secret of his wonderful costume?"

"No, he hasn't," replied Mrs. Scales tartly. "Mr. Scales always likes to make mysteries of trifles. And the worst of it is, he thinks I am eaten up with curiosity, whereas I really don't care a bit."

Mr. Butterworth's answering smile had a touch of incredulity, and Mr. Scales laughed disagreeably.

"By the way, Butterworth," said the latter, "I hear you are going as a Dresden china shepherd. A nice figure you'll cut with that shape of yours."

"I bet I'll cut as good a figure as you do," responded Mr. Butterworth testily. "At any rate, I won't look like a—"

He checked himself in time.

"Like a what, Mr. Butterworth?" demanded Mrs. Scales.

"I had forgotten it was a secret," was the reply. "Upon my word, Scales, it's a shame to keep your wife waiting any longer. Come along and we'll try it on now."

He fairly dragged the reluctant Mr. Scales out of his chair, silenced all remonstrances by the argument that he must try it on some time, and might as well begin to get accustomed to the thing right away, and finally hauled him out of the room, leaving Mrs. Scales and Mrs. Butterworth keyed up to a high pitch of curiosity.

Twice during the next half-hour did Mrs. Scales's nerves, already at high tension, receive shocks—once when a sound combined of screech and expletive rang down the hall from the chamber where Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth were busy, and the second when a noise like some one dropping a coal-scuttle down three flights of stairs reverberated through the house. The second time she dashed out on the landing and called excitedly to the servant to know which of the dishes had been broken and returned palpitating, after receiving distant assurances from her husband and his aide that nothing serious had happened.

"I do wish they would hurry up," she said peevishly. "I can't think what they can be doing. I never heard of any costume which took as long to try on as that."

Fully ten minutes more elapsed, however, before she received notification that the task had been completed, and this was conveyed by a piercing scream from the maid-servant, and the sound of her rapid descent of the stairs several steps at a time, followed by a jarring, clashing noise as though some one were hauling a barrow full of scrap-iron over a rough pavement.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Scales, with her hand on her heart as the sound drew nearer along the passage. "What on earth is that?"

Mrs. Butterworth, tense and tremulous, with one eye on the balcony outside the window, sat upright, her long, thin hands clutching the arms of her chair.

The study-door flew open, and Mr. Butterworth appeared on the threshold.

"Allow me," he said with much pomposity of manner, "to introduce the doughty champion, Sir George Scales, hero of a hundred battles, skirmishes, and outfalls, in the panoply of his noble profession. Enter, Sir George."

He opened the door a little wider, and a figure clothed from head to heel in full armor, which clanked at every movement, shuffled awkwardly into the room. On one arm he bore a shield with blazonry almost effaced, and in his gauntleted grasp was a double-headed ax, which he appeared to find a most inconvenient encumbrance.

The vizor was closed, but through the bars in the strong electric light could be seen a decidedly sheepish countenance, which conveyed rather the idea of a small boy detected in some delinquency than the hero of a hundred battles.

The appearance of the skeleton in armor himself could hardly have created a greater sensation. Mrs. Scales uttered a shriek, and Mrs. Butterworth sank back in her chair with a gasp.

"Don't be alarmed," said Mr. Butterworth reassuringly. "It's quite harmless in the presence of ladies. But in battle—" He threw his hands into the air to convey that words were inadequate.

"Show them how you cut down those three Saracens at the gate of Jerusalem, Sir George," he added.

"Don't be a blamed ass," retorted Mr. Scales crossly, his voice reverberating in the hollow of his helmet. "Well, Minnie, what do you think of it?"

Mrs. Scales, who had recovered from her momentary panic, regarded the steel-clad form of her husband with cynical amusement.

"Splendid, George," she said. "What are you supposed to be—a stove advertisement? You look like a walking self-feeder, and move with about as much grace."

"Ha—ha!" laughed Mr. Butterworth, "that's not a bad idea. Scales was always a good deal of a self-feeder, ain't you, old man?"

Mr. Scales, who found conversation through the bars of his helmet somewhat difficult, rested the handle of his ax against a chair, and, after a short struggle, succeeded in unclasping and raising his vizor.

"I don't see what there is to make fun of," he said with considerable resentment. "I'll bet there won't be another costume at the hall to compare with this one."

"For the sake of Forester's floors we'll hope not," rejoined Mr. Butterworth. "Two of you would be as bad as a traction engine."

"You don't mean to say," cried Mrs. Scales, "that you are going to the ball in a suit of tin armor?"

"Tin armor?" Mr. Scales's voice was positively shrill with indignation. "I wish you had to wear it. You would soon know whether it was tin or not. This is the real thing. It belongs to Armisted, the artist who got back from Europe a few weeks ago. He was good enough to lend it to me. He paid eight hundred dollars for it in Normandy, and swears he got it at a dead bargain. It is a sixteenth-century suit of tilting armor."

Mr. Scales, endeavoring to turn around so as to present a view of himself from a different angle, got his armored legs entangled in the haft of the battle-ax he had discarded, and, after a desperate struggle to retain his balance, measured his length on the floor with a crash like a trayful of saucepan-lids.

In his fall one of his steel-clad arms struck the arm of a Chippendale chair, a particular treasure of his wife's, and splintered it like a straw.

Mrs. Scales uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

"I can quite believe it is a suit of tilting armor," she said sharply. "I should think it would tilt anything but a telegraph-pole; but for goodness' sake, George, if you are going to do any tilting in it, do it where you can't smash the furniture."

Mr. Scales, after several sprawling efforts, managed to regain a perpendicular position, assisted by Mr. Butterworth, who at first could do little for laughing, and made his way with ponderous steps to a chair which fairly creaked under his weight.

"What a lovely time you will have at the ball dancing in that thing!" commented Mrs. Scales, as her husband, having with difficulty removed his helmet, wiped his perspiring brow. "And what a lovely time your partners will have! They say now that you tread on their toes, but in that get-up they will have all the excitement of dancing with a steam-roller."

"Go on," said Mr. Scales bitterly. "Get all the fun you can out of it. I'm going to wear it, anyway, and I bet I can carry it just as well as you can your Mary Queen of Scots outfit."

"By the way, Mr. Butterworth," observed Mrs. Scales, unwilling to subject her own selection of a costume to any caustic criticism, "what was that awful crash we heard? It nearly scared the life out of me."

"We let the casque fall," replied Mr. Butterworth.

"The cask?" queried Mrs. Scales. "It sounded to me like a whole brewery collapsing. What cask?"

Mr. Butterworth explained that "casque" was real sixteenth century for helmet, and, his cigar having gone out, struck a match on Mr. Scales's corselet and relit it. Then, with an envelope opener from the desk as wand, he delivered a brief and extremely inaccurate lecture on armor, tapping the various segments of Mr. Scales's shell as he named them, usually wrong, and more than once endangering that gentleman's eyesight.

"When you've got through with that highly interesting spiel," said Mr. Scales at last, "I'll get this thing off. It may be all right at a fancy ball, but it's not the most comfortable of lounging-suits."

"Well," remarked Mrs. Butterworth, who was of a romantic temperament, "I don't care what any one else says—I think you are just splendid, Mr. Scales. You carry that armor like a knight of old, and there won't be a costume at the ball to compare with it."

Mr. Scales, rising to his feet with some difficulty, acknowledged the compliment with a courtly bow, which almost overbalanced him, and, his self-esteem restored, retired with weighty and resonant strides to his dressing-room, where he resumed his own raiment, and, fortified by Mrs. Butterworth's approval, met the ill-timed jocularity of his wife and friend on his return with a superior and contemptuous air.

III.

On the night of the Foresters' ball Mr. and Mrs. Butterworth, habited as a shepherd and shepherdess, and looking like a couple of biscuit statuettes in a china shop, dined at the Scales home, in order that the former might assist Mr. Scales in incasing himself.

There was some discussion as to what he ought to wear underneath his harness, as the regulation garments of chamois leather were not to be obtained. It was finally carried by a majority vote that a suit of heavy union underwear would be most appropriate, and Mr. Scales's objections that he did not want to be cooked alive like a lobster were overruled.

There was a slight misadventure at the start. Mr. Scales was descending his front steps to enter the cab which had been specially chartered for his transportation, when his steel-shod feet slipped, and he traveled the rest of the way on his back with a clatter which startled the ancient cab-horse out of his accustomed apathy, and sent him up the street at a most unusual gait.

The cabman was deeply incensed, and on his return regarded with strong disfavor the cumbrous form of his prospective fare, who had been assisted to his feet by some highly interested lookers-on, and was being dusted off by zealous hands.

"Say," he said, "this ain't no stove foundry delivery dray. Where do my springs come in?"

It required at least five minutes' argument by the persuasive Mr. Butterworth, and the promise of ample compensation in case of any possible accident, before Mr. Scales was literally hoisted into the cab, and drove off amid the cheers of the small crowd which had quickly gathered.

The countenance of Mr. Forester, who, in a French hussar uniform, greeted his guests, was a study in emotions when Mr. Scales shuffled and clanged and clashed through the vestibule door.

"Good Lord, Scales!" he cried, as he peered into the hollows of the helmet. "You don't intend to dance in that outfit, do you? You'll bring down the roof."

Mr. Scales somewhat curtly disclaimed any such intention, and Mr. Forester, glancing from the steel-ribbed shoes to his own highly polished oak floors, ventured on a remonstrance.

"I don't want to seem inhospitable," he said, "but if you go strolling around much you'll make these floors look like a field after a steam-plow has been over it."

"I had better go home, then," replied Mr. Scales huffily, and turning about with as much difficulty as a Dreadnaught in a narrow channel.

"Don't be such a precipitate ass," said Mr. Forester, catching him by the elbow-joint of his armor, and eliciting a rattle as of castanets. "You look first rate, but oak floors cost money. I'll tell you what. There's a pair of overshoes in the hat-rack; put them on over these sardine-can

boots of yours, and you can't do any harm."

"You might lend me a plug hat to wear instead of this helmet," retorted Mr. Scales bitterly. "It would be about as much in keeping."

In spite of his annoyance, however, he was not insensible to the force of his host's objections, and after a slight demur, consented to swathe his feet in the cloth and rubber coverings provided.

His appearance in the ballroom created a genuine sensation, despite his foot handicaps, and the many compliments he received on the originality of his costume went far to restore his self-esteem.

"You are just my conception of *Richard Cœur de Lion* and *Ivanhoe,*" remarked one stout lady attired as *Semiramis,* and Mr. Scales fairly beamed under the compliment, although he refrained from bowing his acknowledgments, realizing from past experience that too much deviation from the perpendicular was apt to be attended with disaster.

He did not attempt to dance except in one case, when he essayed a quadrille, and disorganized the set by the slowness of his movements, but he sat out a good many dances, and enjoyed himself in spite of the extreme bodily heat engendered by his steel casings and the thick wrappings in which he was swathed. Half-way through the evening he dispensed with his helmet, and found considerable relief.

His double-bladed battle-ax he had bestowed in the hat-rack previously, several guests having narrowly escaped gashing their lower limbs, inciting his host to venture on another mild remonstrance.

"It's all very well for you, Scales," he said. "You can whack that thing up against your own shins without hurting yourself, but unless I get up some stovepipes from the cellar for the rest of the company, I'm afraid there's going to be an accident."

IV.

"WELL, Scales," said Mr. Butterworth, pausing in front of his friend, who was seated by the side of a very charming girl on an oaken bench which ran almost the entire length of the hall beneath the balustrade of the staircase, "you look like a battleship at anchor. What about a cigar in a little while, or a cigarette? Forester says we may smoke on the upper landing if we like. I'm going to have a whiff or two myself during the next dance."

"Surely, Mr. Butterworth," interrupted Mr. Scales's fair companion reproachfully, "surely *Ivanhoe* would look rather odd with a cigar in his mouth."

"*Ivanhoe?*" responded Mr. Butterworth with a laugh. "Is that what you have christened him? But so far as that goes, I never heard of *Ivanhoe* walking around in cloth overshoes. What do you say, Scales?"

Mr. Scales, flushing slightly at this allusion to his foot-coverings, and retiring his feet as much as possible from public view under the bench, shook his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid I can't," he said. "It would take me half an hour to get up the stairs, and another half-hour to get down again."

"Judging by your performance in front of your own house," replied Mr. Butterworth callously, "it wouldn't take you very long to get down. Get him to tell you about it, Miss Chisholm. Well, if you won't come, I think I'll go and have my smoke now."

And with a nod Mr. Butterworth turned away, and mounted the stairs, picking his way among the couples which dotted the broad steps.

"What was Mr. Butterworth talking about?" demanded Miss Chisholm, and Mr. Scales, who had no objection to a story at his own expense, provided he was allowed to tell it himself, launched forth on a lively account of his misadventure.

He was leaning forward, giving a vivid description of the alarm of the cab-horse and the indignation of the driver, when something occurred which cut the recital short.

In the upper hall Mr. Butterworth encountered two congenial spirits who had already availed themselves of Mr. Forester's permission to smoke, and hailed his advent with enthusiasm. One of them proffered his case, and Mr. Butterworth, selecting a cigarette, lit it and inhaled the fumes with every manifestation of enjoyment.

"By Jove," he said, as he settled himself comfortably against the balustrade, "a cigarette never goes so well as after a period of enforced abstinence. By the way, Crossethwaite, now that I've got a chance to talk to you, what about that Western

irrigation stock you were telling me about?"

Mr. Crossethwaite, who was deeply interested in disposing of some of the shares in question, launched at once into a panegyric, which would have been invaluable in a display advertisement, and Mr. Butterworth, forgetting his cigarette and with both hands on the railing on which he was half seated, listened appreciatively.

One of Mr. Forester's hobbies was to wax his floors to a polish resembling that of a skating rink, and as Mr. Butterworth slightly shifted his position, one of his satin-shod feet slipped. He recovered himself with a twist of the body, but the fingers of his right hand, which held the cigarette, relaxed in the effort, and the little roll of paper, with its glowing tip, escaped and fell into the hall below.

Immediately beneath sat Mr. Scales in the full tide of his graphic recital. He was leaning forward, and his posture left a considerable gap between his gorget and the back of his neck.

Into this gap, as neatly as if purposely aimed, dropped Mr. Butterworth's cigarette, and vanished in the recesses of the body armor.

A minute later, Mr. Forester, passing, rang a regular tocsin with the hilt of his sword on Mr. Scales's cuirass.

"Supper's on, Scales," he said. "My word, what a dinner-bell you would make. Better take Miss Chisholm in now."

Thus it happened that Mr. Butterworth, suddenly missing his cigarette and descending the stairs to look for it, made an unavailing search.

"What on earth has become of it?" he said to Crossethwaite, who had accompanied him, peering as he spoke under the bench on which Mr. Scales had been seated. "That's one of the most mysterious disappearances I ever heard of."

"Lost something, Butterworth?" queried Mr. Forester, as he passed by to herd some more of his guests into the supper-room.

"N-no," replied Mr. Butterworth, who did not wish his host to know of his carelessness. "I was just admiring this bench or settle or whatever you call it. A pretty substantial piece of furniture."

"It need be substantial," replied Mr. Forester, laughing. "Scales was sitting on it a minute ago. He has just gone into the supper-room with Miss Chisholm. Take my advice, and follow his example."

He passed on, and Mr. Butterworth turned to Crossethwaite with an air of relief.

"That settles it," he said. "Scales knew I had gone up-stairs for a smoke. He must have seen it fall and picked it up. I had forgotten he was sitting here. I would hate to have Forester know I had dropped a lighted cigarette among his guests. I'm going to take his advice and get some supper. Ah"—as Mrs. Scales emerged from a side room. "Mrs. Scales, your husband has stolen a march and slipped in to supper. Shall we try and find him?"

Mrs. Scales accepted Mr. Butterworth's proffered arm, and they repaired to the supper-room, where Mr. Scales was descried seated at a small table in a distant corner, and still entertaining Miss Chisholm with a recital of his adventures.

"Thanks, old man," said Mr. Butterworth, as he piloted Mrs. Scales to the table and took possession of the two remaining chairs. "I would have done the same for you."

Mr. Scales stared at him.

"Thanks for what?" he replied. "I don't know what you are talking about."

Mr. Butterworth went through the pantomime of drawing a cigarette from his lips, letting it fall, making a desperate effort to retrieve it, and then gazing downward with a horror-stricken countenance.

Mr. Scales regarded these maneuvers with a wondering eye.

"What's the matter with you?" he responded. "Have you been in here before? That champagne cup at the buffet isn't strong enough to produce this sort of effect."

"Do you mean to say," queried Mr. Butterworth, "that you didn't pick it up?"

"Pick what up?" demanded Mr. Scales crossly, who was not particularly well pleased at this irruption of his friend and wife on his *tête-à-tête*. "I wish you would talk plain English."

"In plain words, then," said Mr. Butterworth, "didn't you pick up a lighted cigarette I dropped from the upper hall?"

"No, I didn't," replied Mr. Scales curtly. "I don't know anything about your confounded cigarette. And you ought to be more careful. Suppose it had fallen on some woman's dress."

"Then," said Mr. Butterworth, "the mystery is as deep as ever."

It is no easy matter to shrug one's shoulders in a suit of armor, but Mr. Scales made a very passable attempt.

"I don't see that we need worry about it," he remarked. "What's the matter?" and his wife gave several audible sniffs.

"Something is burning," she replied, sniffing again. "It smells just like burning old rags in a stove."

"It must be Butterworth's precious cigarette," suggested Mr. Scales, with a harsh laugh. "Those are the kind he smokes."

"I can smell it distinctly," said Miss Chisholm. "It is getting stronger."

Mr. Butterworth, in some trepidation, arose hastily and made an examination of his own habiliments.

"I was afraid," he said as he resumed his seat, reassured, "that I might have set fire to myself. I've got some matches in one of my pockets. There's one advantage about that suit of yours, Scales. You couldn't very well set fire to yourself, unless you stepped into a Bessemer furnace."

Mr. Scales was about to reply, when he suddenly straightened up in his seat with protruding eyes and mouth agape. A spoonful of ice-cream which he was in the act of carrying to his lips fell clattering to the table.

"Good Heavens, George!" cried Mrs. Scales, aghast at these manifestations. "What is the matter? Are you ill?"

Mr. Scales's reply was a wild yell, as he clashed cumbrously to his feet. At the same time those at the table noticed a fine thread of smoke which arose from the back of his neck and curled about his head.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" he yelled, as he whirled around, striking his hands against his steel-clad back. "Help! Help! I'm on fire. Put it out. Help!"

Mr. Butterworth sprang up with consternation writ large on his countenance, while Mrs Scales and Miss Chisholm sank back almost fainting. The supper-room was nearly full, and there was a great scraping of feet and pushing back of chairs as Mr. Scales's piercing cries rang in the ears of the guests.

Surprise gave way to consternation, however, as his armored form came charging for the door like a runaway locomotive, overturning chairs and more than one table.

Women screamed, and one shrieked that Mr. Scales had gone mad and to run for the police.

"Stop him!" yelled Mr. Butterworth, who had been too paralyzed for a moment to take any action. "Stop him! Don't let him get away."

Whether any one but a champion football tackle could have succeeded in doing this is a question, but fortunately at this moment Mr. Scales tripped over the corner of a tablecloth, and crashed headlong to the floor. Mr. Butterworth, in hot pursuit, hurled himself on the prostrate figure, and several other gentlemen assisted in restraining the convulsed limbs.

"What's the matter with him?" gasped one, who was hanging on to one of Mr Scales's legs with both hands.

"He's on fire," shouted Mr. Butterworth. "Quick! Who's got a knife?"

A stalwart Highlander, with great presence of mind, snatched a *skean dhu* from his stocking, and handed it to the palpitating Mr. Butterworth.

Then followed a scene which, for realism would have done credit to any stage. It was as though a gallant knight had been borne to earth by a party of revelers and was being slowly done to death, the effect being greatly heightened by Mr. Scales's cries of pain.

Fortunately the leather straps which held back and breast plates together had become slightly rotted, and after several ineffectual attempts, and much flourishing of the knife, to the imminent hazard of the clothes and limbs of the others, Mr. Butterworth succeeded in severing them. He tore the two parts of the armor apart, thus revealing the upper portion of a somewhat gaudy suit of underclothes.

In the center of the back was an incinerated patch some four inches across, surrounded by a crawling ring of flame.

One of the guests, in his excitement, beat upon it heavily with his hand and elicited from Mr. Scales a yell compared with which his former cries were mere whispers. Another, with greater presence of mind, dashed to a side table, and seized a siphon, the contents of which he discharged over the sufferer's back.

The prostrate Mr. Scales, with his ministering attendants, was by this time the center of an excited and voluble throng, among them Mr. Forester, with a heavy frown on his brow, and Mrs. Scales, pale and terrified. A young doctor, in the garb of *Æsculapius,* stepped out, and, kneeling by the sufferer, whose moans were heart-rending, made a hasty examination.

"Give me that knife," he said sharply to Mr. Butterworth.

"What for?" asked the other, hesitating.

"To cut away this underwear," replied the doctor curtly. "You don't suppose I want to perform an operation, do you?"

Mr. Butterworth passed over the knife, and at the same moment the doctor's disengaged wrist was seized by Mr. Scales with a viselike grip.

"Don't touch it," he croaked in an audible whisper. "I—I've got nothing under it."

"Tut-tut," said the doctor, his professional instincts predominating. "I can't peek through the hole."

He poised the knife, and there was an instant stampede by the lady guests, Mrs. Scales alone remaining to minister to her husband.

"It's a pretty nasty burn," announced the doctor later in Mr. Forester's dressing-room, as having obtained a supply of oil and batting, he made a temporary dressing, "but it won't amount to much after a day or two. Fortunately the lack of oxygen under the tin dishpan prevented the flames from doing much more than smolder. What beats me is how it happened."

"That's what I should like to know," said Mr. Forester severely. "I don't want to seem unkind or inhospitable, particularly to a guest who is suffering, but"—as he recalled the ruin left by Mr. Scales's headlong charge—"I think a little explanation is in order. How did it happen, Scales?"

"How do I know?" retorted Mr. Scales hotly. "You don't suppose I set fire to myself as a joke, do you?"

"Perhaps," ventured a mild-eyed man garbed as a red Indian, who had volunteered his assistance—"perhaps it was caused by spontaneous combustion. I have heard of such things."

"Pooh! Pooh!" said Mr. Forester, contemptuously dismissing this solution. "Scales isn't a grain-elevator or a hay-barn. Butterworth, you were at Scales's table. This isn't one of your practical jokes, is it?"

"No-o," replied Mr. Butterworth, who had before this divined the cause of the mishap. "No-o."

"You don't seem very sure of it," said Mr. Forester, fixing a keen glance on the other's somewhat confused countenance.

"The fact is—" Mr. Butterworth was beginning, when Mr. Scales, raising himself painfully on one elbow, pointed an accusing finger at his friend, while his eyes positively glared with indignation.

"You did it!" he said. "You—"

"My dear George," remonstrated Mrs. Scales, laying a hand on her husband's shoulder, "Mr. Butterworth could not possibly have had anything to do with it. He was sitting at the opposite side of the table."

"He did it!" shouted Mr. Scales, shaking off the restraining grasp. "It was his confounded cigarette. Didn't he say at supper that he had dropped it over the balustrade and couldn't find it, and thank me for picking it up and carrying it away?"

"Well," replied Mr. Butterworth, with a feeble attempt at jocularity, "my thanks were deserved. You did carry it away."

Only the exhaustion consequent on pain and extreme physical effort prevented Mr. Scales from rising to his feet and committing an assault on his friend at this ill-timed levity. He gasped for breath, and was endeavoring to find words sufficiently scathing to express his feelings, when Mr. Forester interrupted.

"This is no joke, Butterworth," he said, "though you seem to regard it in that light. How did it happen?"

Mr. Butterworth, somewhat abashed, gave a brief recital of the events which led to the accident.

"I couldn't help it," he said in conclusion. "If you didn't keep your floors so confoundedly slippery, Forester, it would not have happened. You don't suppose I turned Scales into a walking ash-tray on purpose, do you?"

"I don't see," observed Mrs. Scales, who by this time was busy assisting the doctor to swathe Mr. Scales in an ulster, "I don't see that Mr. Butterworth is to blame."

"You don't, eh?" howled Mr. Scales. "Then who is to blame?"

"You are, George," replied the wife calmly. "In the first place, you should never have come in such a ridiculous dress, and in the second, when you caught fire, you ought to have sat quite still and let us put it out, instead of rushing away like a frightened child."

"There's a good deal in what your wife says," put in Mr. Forester. "I must say I am surprised at you."

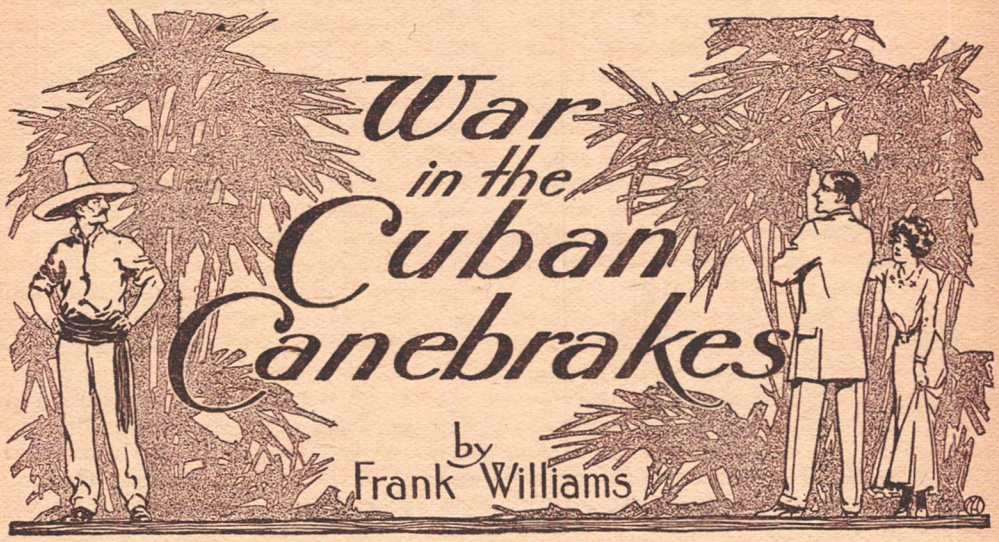
"So am I," added Mr. Butterworth hardily.

A tap came at the door, and a servant announced that Mr. Scales's cab was waiting.

Mr Scales rose heavily to his feet. His gaze, eloquent of reproach and resentment, rested first on his wife. Then it traveled to Mr. Forester, and lastly rested on his friend. The reproach had vanished, and there was nothing but resentment remaining.

"Some day," he said, "I will give you a surprise which will really surprise you."

And without another word he walked from the room.



CHAPTER I.

ADRIFT IN A STRANGE LAND.

THE big German steamer slowed down off Havana Harbor, and took aboard the pilot from his six-oared cutter. Then she poked her nose cautiously between O'Donnell's lighthouse and El Morro on the left, and the white orderliness of the Malecon on the right, thence proceeding through the channel to the bay.

On the promenade-deck of the Bremen, Ned Cummings and Nathalie, his runaway bride, were so engrossed in their conversation that they did not seem to be aware of the beauty and strangeness all about them.

"Four days, and not a word from a living soul by wireless!" cried Ned despondently. "Brother Bill knew where we were, and he might have wired."

"That isn't my worry, dear," returned Nathalie calmly. "I am only afraid of what we *will* hear eventually. Just at present there is nothing to spoil our happiness."

"Nothing except this," replied Ned grimly, drawing out a long, flat wallet. "When that caves in we won't be so happy."

"You have no reason to think there won't be money here. Of course, we ran away, and our fathers never have been on good terms, and we should have had a big society wedding in Grace Church, and I ought to have gone to Europe for a trousseau, and you should have—"

"That will do, darling," interrupted Ned, smiling; "every one on the ship doesn't need to know our troubles. But, to return to our chances—we shall be unable to plan anything until we reach the Inglaterra Hotel, so we may as well collect our hand-baggage and be ready to disembark."

Slowly the big ship passed through the narrow channel. On the left were the magnificent fortifications of the Cabana, crowning the heights opposite the city, and on the right La Punta fortress, the beginning of the magnificent Prado or boulevard, and the bright-yellow cárcel or jail.

At last the Bremen came to anchor, and the tender drew alongside.

Two hours later, after a cursory customs examination, Ned Cummings asked for his mail at the desk of the Inglaterra Hotel, and received one fat envelope. This he

discreetly pushed into his pocket as he returned up-stairs to Nathalie. It was addressed in his brother's handwriting.

Nathalie noticed his dejected air as he pulled the communication from his coat, and settled herself to listen.

Ned ripped the top of the envelope, drew out the letter, and read:

1219 Riverside Drive,
January 5, 1911.

DEAR NED:

I am sorry you entrusted me with your secret, for I have been in hot water steadily ever since. What a pair of fools you and Nathalie are! Why didn't you stay here and do the thing right? It would have taken longer, but it wouldn't have cost you as much; for I may as well tell you that father has cut your financial head off clean, and you may expect no more money from him. To think that any son of his married any daughter of old Eben Northrup has kept him in bed with diphtheretic pip ever since you left.

It also develops from the old man's ravings that he was going to send you down to Cuba for the winter on business for the house. So when I tactfully approached him on the subject of letting you round up there and take the job after your wedding trip (he doesn't know where you are), he nearly gave me a caning. It reminded me too much of the good old times, so I didn't wait to argue.

Father may be sore, but you ought to hear what old Northrup has to say! He has started annulment proceedings. He says you deceived his daughter into thinking you were a rich man, and he also says you are incapable of supporting her, now father has turned you off. Those are his grounds for annulment.

When father heard that, he got still madder and said you were as good as anybody else's son and a lot better than somebody else's daughter and you could earn a living against any situation. "But you'll help him, won't you, father?" I asked, and the way he said *No!* could be heard three blocks.

So there's the situation, old chap. I'm nearly broke myself though it is early in the month, but here's fifty dollars. It may pay for a day or two at one of those awful Havana hotels. Let me know what you are going to do. Of course, if you would care to separate and let Nathalie come home alone there might be—

"Curse his insolence!" cried Ned hotly, crumpling the letter in his hand and throwing it angrily on the floor. "If all he has to do is write and ask you to leave me, I wish he would keep out of correspondence altogether."

"Yes, but you forget, dear," said his wife, "that he has enclosed fifty dollars, and borne all the blame and trouble of our inconvenient manner of getting married."

"That's right," rejoined Ned contritely, picking up the letter again, and finishing its few remaining paragraphs aloud. When he had put the unhappy missive back into its envelope he walked thoughtfully up and down for a while.

"Why do all these unpleasantnesses have to come to us, Nathalie?" he cried petulantly. "It seems that we can never do as we wish without having some trouble. It makes me darn tired, I'll tell you that."

And for a matter of half an hour he gave expression to his childish anger, until his wife's sobbing brought him to his senses.

Ned Cummings was not a very appetizing character to those who appreciate the big in life. He had always had too much money in his pocket, and his boyhood and youth had been spent in gratifying every whim and desire to which cold, hard cash could minister.

He was typical of the present younger generation in being selfish, overbearing, uncontrolled, and egotistical. He belonged to several clubs, had been working comfortably in his father's firm, and was an expected figure at teas, receptions, and balls. He was not above the average in height, had light hair, pale-blue eyes, and a rather indulgent and sensual mouth.

Nathalie had always known the same sort of existence. She was typically a society girl, and her heart, fortified by many near-loves, had given way to the excited pleadings of Ned Cummings only after considerable calculation in many directions. She was a very beautiful girl, with wonderful golden hair, and a kind of pathetic oval face, in which the deep-blue eyes commanded attention. Intellectually she had not dented the armor of the world's thought.

They both felt they were vastly in love. They agreed in most things pertaining to a method and means of existence, found each other physically appealing, found other people a good deal of a bore, and decided to make a go of it together. Knowing the business enmities of their parents, and the social scandal the affair would make, they had simply been married in Jersey City, booked on the Bremen, and disappeared from their usual haunts, leaving William Cummings to explain.

When Ned had comforted Nathalie to the best of his no mean ability they faced for

the first time their new situation. He drew out his wallet instinctively, and ruefully counted the two hundred dollars that still remained in it aside from the fifty he had received in the letter.

"If I had only kept out of the smoking-room," he groaned, "we would have had twice as much."

For a time he was at a loss to proceed. He had never confronted enforced economy before. But now Nathalie came to his rescue.

"I guess we will have to find cheaper lodgings," she said. "We can't go on paying ten dollars a day for a room without meals."

"By George, that's an idea!" he exclaimed, and immediately set about putting it into execution.

Across the Parque Central, on which the Inglaterra faced, was an office operated by an American for the benefit of his countrymen whose ignorance left them at the mercy of the Spanish language and inhabitants. Thither Ned hurried, and asked for a list of boarding-houses, preferably English-speaking.

This was furnished him gladly, and he set out to locate them in one of the ridiculously cheap carriages which infest all Cuban cities. It was a long and arduous search, for the town was full of tourists, and accommodations were rare.

Finally the *coche* turned off the Prado, traveled south two or three blocks, and finally stopped before a tall, cream-colored building.

"*Virtudes, diez y ocho,*" said the driver, and Ned stepped out.

"Eighteen, Virtudes Street; this is my last chance," muttered the young man as he swung open the heavy door and entered the tile-floored hallway.

Here at length he was successful. The American lady who ran the house had one room left, and would be delighted to have Mr. Cummings and his wife for as long as they cared to stay.

Ned hurried back to the hotel, helped Nathalie pack their hand-bags, and walked with her to their new lodgings, which were only a few blocks away.

"Well, this is a good beginning," he remarked cheerfully.

"Yes, but it is only the beginning," was the reply, "and goodness knows where it will end."

Nathalie looked around the huge, bare room, with its plastered walls, tiled floor, and strange glass doors that opened on the interior garden or *patio* of the dwelling, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"Ned," she cried, "let's go home. I am so strange and lonely and helpless here, I am utterly miserable. We have absolutely nothing to look forward to except worry and unhappiness. Let's go home and talk to our fathers, and make them forgive us and take us back. Think of all we have given up! I am sick for New York and for faces I know and for the English language."

Somewhere down in the depths of a nature long submerged by superficiality Ned Cummings's real character stirred.

He frowned and bit his lip.

He, too, was sickened by the unfamiliarity of a new and strange city, and the prospect of a return to all that had been, if it could be secured, seemed the fairest thing in all the world. But this strange new combativeness within him triumphed for the moment.

"No, we won't go home, Nathalie," he said decisively. "We'll fight it out here if we have to starve doing so. After the way our loving parents have performed I refuse to go whining back in the rôle of the prodigal son. Since they have turned me loose, I shall turn them loose from this moment on. We may have thought we had troubles before, but those were only inconveniences. We're up against something real this time, and I sha'n't lie down and roll over, either. And if you are the kind of girl I take you to be, you'll stick along with me."

Nathalie looked at her husband in amazement.

"But what will you do?" she asked somewhat weakly.

"Get a job," he replied, unlocking the trunk.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE HEART OF CUBA.

It was not until the next morning that Ned Cummings put his resolution into practise. Various inquiries from fellow boarders at the American Inn showed him the magnitude of his undertaking.

No one got a job in Cuba, they told him, unless he had been sent down by a home company in the States, and it was almost hopeless to expect anything without a fluent knowledge of Spanish.

The first secretary of the American Legation, who sat next him at the table, held forth no hope, speaking unofficially.

"If you were a laborer, now," he said, "we might find you a job on the crew raising the Maine in the harbor; but I see you are not that class, and I cannot think of anything particularly fitted for you that is open just now. However, I will give you some cards to my friends, who may know of something."

Thus armed, Ned set off, after "coffee"—the combination of fruit, cold bread, and warm liquid that passed for breakfast.

Everywhere he found the same condition. Where he might have landed as a bookkeeper or secretary, his ignorance prevented him. His total inexperience and lack of ability stood continuously in his way. One souvenir-shop which wanted an American clerk to handle the tourist trade refused to accept him because he knew nothing of stocks and prices in Madeira linens or pineapple cloths.

Occasionally he found an opening which demanded a knowledge of Spanish, and one store which needed an expert in German. More and more as he tramped the hot streets did he realize how completely unfit he was to take any active part in the world where men were doing something, and he returned to lunch quite famished and discouraged.

Nathalie had accepted her husband's firm dictum in regard to remaining in Havana. There was a scene, of course, but finally she became imbued with some of Ned's newly acquired fighting spirit, and determined to make the best stand she was capable of against the circumstances that surrounded them.

So now, when he returned after his vain quest, she talked hope and courage into him as he devoured boiled guinea-hen and prepared for another attack upon the strongholds of employment in the afternoon.

When after lunch they wandered out to the big, cool hallway where every one gathered after meals, Ned's eyes lighted upon an English paper, the Havana *Post,* and he seized it with a cry of delight.

Eagerly he scanned the New York gossip, wondering if the secret of his hurried runaway marriage had got into print. Evidently it had not, for there was no mention of it or of any annulment proceedings. Evidently the Cummings and Northrup wealth had been used with some effect.

Finishing the comparatively scant news columns, he ran his eye over the advertisements, and finally encountered the "Want" section. Suddenly he leaped to his feet with an exclamation of surprise, and motioned Nathalie to come up-stairs. Gaining their room, he pointed to an ad near the bottom of the page. It read:

> WANTED—An English-speaking manager for the Santa Maria sugar plantation, Tunucu, Cuba. Must have had some qualifying experience. Spanish not absolutely necessary. Permanent work and to begin at once. Good salary to right man. Apply Room 214, Obrapia 33, Havana.

"There's my job," cried Ned exultantly, "and I'm going right out to cinch it now!"

He reached for his hat.

"But the experience, Ned," protested his wife. "You've never had anything to do with a sugar plantation in all your life."

"Never mind that, dear," he replied. "I was on a big wheat farm in the West all one summer, and if I can't make that answer I'll throw the biggest bluff you ever saw in your life."

Cutting out the advertisement, he placed the clipping in his pocket, kissed the doubting Nathalie, and hurried down-stairs.

He found Obrapia 33 to be a bank-building with offices on the second and third floors, and soon located his room. After giving his name and stating his business, he was shown into the private office of a fine-looking Spaniard, Señor Alonzo Alvarez.

"I have had several applicants for the position to-day," said the Spaniard, after listening to Ned's request, "but most of them have been men who I feared were untrustworthy—soldiers of fortune, stranded workmen, and the like. You appear to be a gentleman. What experience have you had?"

Ned told him.

Señor Alvarez looked doubtful. He scanned Cummings carefully.

"You are a man of nerve?" he asked suddenly.

"I certainly am; I just got married," replied Ned, and Señor Alvarez laughed.

"But this position calls for a different kind of nerve," he said slowly. "You may not find it an easy thing to handle a lot of Cuban tenants scattered over twenty-five thousand acres of sugar-cane. Those rascals," and his eyes glittered, "need a mas-

ter, a driver, a man of force and great will. Your past life has not led me to believe you have had to exercise such powers, but," and again he scrutinized Ned carefully, "I think it is in you."

"Why is the present manager leaving?" asked Cummings, in his turn.

Señor Alvarez looked out of the window for a moment before replying.

"He did not have the qualities I mention," he said finally. "In short, he lost his nerve. I do not need to say more than that, which fact you will realize when you have been at the Santa Maria for a little while."

"Then, will you take me on?" asked Ned happily.

"Yes, at a hundred dollars a month, which includes your own house and food. When can you start?"

Ned calculated quickly.

"To-morrow night," he replied.

"Very well then," said Señor Alvarez. "Come in to-morrow morning, and I will have the contract ready for your signature."

"By the way," inquired the American, "who are the real owners of the land?"

"A Philadelphia corporation under the name of the Santa Maria Plantation Company. They have owned it for a number of years, having acquired it in very bad condition after the Spanish-American war. Because of this fact it has been run pretty close to the wind in the matter of expenses, and has only begun to pay within the last year or two."

Ned Cummings walked out of the office jubilant, and to celebrate his success proceeded to buy Nathalie a beautiful pink coral cameo at a price twice as great as he would have had to give if it were not winter and the city flooded with tourists.

The next night found them at the Villanueva station, boarding the sleeping-car of the Santiago express, which was due to leave at eight o'clock. In his pocket Ned carried a signed and witnessed contract installing him as manager of the great Santa Maria plantation.

Nathalie was all excitement.

"Who would have thought of Ned Cummings, the popular young clubman, being buried in the heart of Cuba, the boss of thousands and thousands of acres?" she cried happily. "Isn't it great? You were a wonder to get that job, Ned, really you were."

"I may want to get out of it as quickly as I got in," said her husband quietly; and he told her of Señor Alvarez's veiled allusions to the true condition of affairs on the plantation.

"Somehow or other," he concluded, "I can't help thinking that the close handling of the expenses there and the discontent of the tenants are cause and effect. From what I have been told since yesterday, you and I are in for a rather interesting and strenuous time, to put it mildly. But I think we can carry anything through, sweetheart, if we stick together. We're done with the old life now, for good."

"Will it be horrid and rough and uncomfortable?" asked the girl, annoyed at such a prospect.

"Undoubtedly," he replied, and they dropped the subject.

A Cuban sleeping-car is an American-built contrivance of light weight and great elasticity, and, though the berths are wider than in the home-grown product, one needs the added space to bounce in. Ned had groaned before boarding the train because the schedule called for only slightly above twenty miles an hour, but with the approach of dawn he thanked Providence for the wisdom bestowed on the man who drew it up.

At Placetas, in Santa Clara province, neither of the Americans could endure the jouncing and plunging any longer in a reclining posture, so they dressed with difficulty and awaited painfully the end of their journey.

Zaza del Medio, their junction, brought pleasant relief, and they entered the station for coffee before taking the branch line a few miles to Tunucu. It was a glorious morning, with a bright sun, wonderfully clear air, and the freshness of the trade-winds that blew steadily across the island.

But Ned, looking at the apparent indifference of those who lived on the land, thought how the beauty of the country belied its actual conditions, and felt a subconscious foreboding.

When the jerky little branch line set them down at Tunucu only one vehicle stood at the station. Against a background of luxuriant green foliage the little, undergrown, flea-bitten ponies stood with their heads hanging. An old brown man approached Ned and Nathalie, removing his hat.

"Is this Señor Cummings?" he asked in slow but good English.

Ned admitted his identity and introduced his wife.

"I am Luiz Perez, the Cuban keeper, and I am indeed glad to see you, *señor*. You will put heart in us all who face life in this green wilderness."

He loaded the trunks into the wagon, threw the hand-bags after them, and stood back for Nathalie to take her place.

"Driscoll, our last manager, was a strange man," he explained. "He has not gone yet, and you will see him at the house, for he wants to take you around the place, show you the books, and make you familiar with your duties."

"What was the matter with him?" asked Ned sharply.

"Who can say, *señor?*" came the languid, almost indifferent, reply. "He said he saw and heard strange things all about him—in the edge of the forests, in the depths of the cane, on the bank of the deep river."

"Did he drink?" persisted Ned, feeling a sort of uncanny animal-like bristling along his spine at the mention of these inexplicable presences.

"No, Señor Cummings," replied Luiz, "not a drop. But there was a story that came from ten miles south about a beautiful Cuban girl whom Driscoll had loved, though she did not love him, and was already promised. Her betrothed husband died strangely, and Estrella wandered away broken-hearted and soon followed him. Since then there have been strange mutterings, for Señor Driscoll is suspected by the simple folk who live on the land."

"Is that the only reason he is leaving the plantation?" asked Ned as they drove slowly away over the primitive earth road to the south.

"As far as I know," replied the old man dreamily, and dropped into silence.

Ned wondered to himself what there could be in Luiz's story. It appeared to him like a pure fable of the people, one of those ultraromantic and dramatic tales that are life to the Spanish imagination.

What could be more suited to fanciful romance than having the white *Americano* desperate for the love of a lovely, dark Cuban, the daughter of his poorest tenant?

Yet Luiz had not told all. Of that Ned was certain. Romantic stories are all right as far as they go, but they do not explain away a feeling of mystery that extends from the plantation mill three hundred miles to the offices in Havana.

Señor Alvarez knew, but would not say; Luiz knew, but would not say; perhaps Driscoll, the departing manager, knew, and *would* say. Ned decided to wait and probe the matter for himself.

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT EPISODE.

It was not until late that afternoon that Henry Driscoll rode up to the big, rambling ranch-house, and in the intervening time Ned and Nathalie had settled themselves fairly comfortable in their new quarters.

The house was a rambling, two-story affair, with wide verandas and stone pillars. The lower half was constructed of stone, but above this was wood, the whole surmounted at one end with an open-air cupola. The roof was of rough clay tile.

Driscoll dismounted and walked dejectedly into the house. He was a dark man, of medium height, and his face wore an expression of desperate weariness. This, Ned noted, was accompanied by a furtive manner of action which was enough in itself to put a stranger on his guard.

When Driscoll had dressed for the evening Ned introduced Nathalie, and then the two men sat down on the piazza for a talk.

"Why are you leaving, Mr. Driscoll?" asked Cummings bluntly.

"I can't get the work out of the men," replied the former manager. "And you've got your hands full if you think you can," he added bruskly.

"What's the matter?"

"They say they are maddened at the way the place is run," replied Driscoll, "and I don't very much blame them. Here we only pay three dollars for a hundred *arrobas* of cane, while the Esperanza people to the west of us give half a dollar more, and the farther east you go the higher the rate becomes. But that is all we can afford to pay, however, as our investment and repairs were heavy. But it makes the tenants ugly."

"As I understand it," said Ned, trying to grasp the situation, "these tenants work about two hundred acres of land each that belongs to the company, and you pay them for the amount of cane they produce. Is that correct?"

"Yes, the lazy dogs," snarled Driscoll, "and they don't begin to get out of the land what it should produce. But I remedied that quick enough."

"How?"

"I fired them out, bag and baggage, and put others in their places. Most of the incompetents have gone over to the Banao hills that you see in the distance there, and are loafing on their companions."

"I see," said Ned slowly. "And how do those now occupying the land feel about matters?"

Driscoll hesitated a moment.

"They are all rather ugly," he replied. "It is all we can do with a corps of twenty men to keep marauders from setting fire to the cane. We had three fires last week."

"What is all this likely to lead to?" inquired the new *administrador* anxiously.

"That I cannot say," answered Driscoll, rising, "but I am glad I do not have to stay and see it through. Perhaps, though, they will like you better than they do me!" He glanced about him apprehensively in the growing darkness. "I seem to feel them looking at me everywhere."

"I have heard," said Ned cautiously, as he rose, "that there was something perhaps—er—indiscreet, or hasty about a —well, you know what I mean. That gossip concerning the south part of the plantation and yourself."

"Cummings," roared Driscoll, his eyes blazing and his face twisted with rage, "don't you ever mention that to me again. It's a lie, an outrageous lie from beginning to end, and—"

"Then why are you so angry about it?" queried Ned easily.

Driscoll's furious response was cut off as just then Nathalie appeared in the doorway announcing dinner. Silently the three entered the house.

At the table was some one neither Ned nor Nathalie had seen before. Old Luiz Perez brought her in, his old brown face alight with love and pride.

"My daughter Dolores," he said by way of explanation.

Ned gazed upon her with an involuntary thrill. Never had he seen such beauty. Her face was rather long, but finely molded, and with a clear olive skin, which threw into prominence her great passionate black eyes.

Over her profusion of rich, dusky hair was a creamy lace mantilla that dropped gracefully across her breast. Her lips were red, temptingly, alluringly red.

Cummings acknowledged the introduction with an involuntary bow. Her presence seemed to demand it. Something new and strange and subtle, like an oriental perfume, awoke in him its respondent thrill.

It all occurred in a moment, but the peculiar action of her husband was not lost on Nathalie. Conversation languished.

"Shouldn't wonder if Ramon Spinoza happened around to see you to-night," growled Driscoll, as the guava jelly and cheese were passed.

"Who is he? inquired Nathalie, seizing on the name gladly as a pretext for talk.

"He is the first trouble that a new *administrador* has to face," said Driscoll. "You will know him far too well for your own comfort before long, I imagine, but before he comes I might tell you a few facts as to the things that *have* happened in Cuba, and are likely to happen again."

"Go on, Mr. Killjoy," laughed Nathalie.

"The tenants and *juajeros,* or countrymen, are a discontented lot. They claim there is nothing in life for them, that they are downtrodden and oppressed. They say they are the body of the people out of which the officials suck the golden blood, and there's an awful lot of talk about not standing for it."

"Suppose they didn't stand for it?" asked Ned interestedly.

"Señor Cummings would be killed," interposed the soft voice of Dolores.

Ned looked at the girl, surprised. She was the last one from whom he would have expected such an answer. She smiled pleasantly across the table at him.

"Tell me," he asked, fascinated by her beauty, "did such an uprising ever occur?"

"Often," she replied in her broken English. "The *colonos,* or tenants, rebel against their masters, the hated landowners. They burn, they destroy, they kill everybody on one plantation. Then if the times are bad, others join them, particularly the lazy negroes, who are shiftless and looking for trouble. I have seen it done in Santiago province."

Very shortly the whole conversation was between Ned and Dolores, but the young man did not notice the frown that gathered and remained on Nathalie's brow when she observed his absorption in the beautiful girl.

At the end of the meal old Luiz Perez led Dolores outside to the veranda. Ned watched him curiously. His manner was

courtly, gentle, almost reverential; not that usual between a father and daughter.

Cummings thought the matter over. Was it possible that she was other than she had been represented? Certainly in the brown face and bent body of the old keeper there was nothing that hinted of the loveliness of feature and queenliness of form that so distinguished the girl.

She, for her part, did not act like a daughter to the old man. She accepted his attentions as a princess would receive those of a guardian.

Yet why should there be any deception practised? He sought counsel of Driscoll, but received no satisfaction.

"As far as I know, she's his daughter," he said indifferently. "I never thought much about it."

Ned also asked himself why he was concerned in any way with this Cuban nobody; what appeal she made to him; why he found himself so strongly impressed with her personality that his mind reverted to her in odd moments, even though he had only known her a couple of hours.

Never having been a student of the human passions, Ned's analysis did not lead him very far in answer to his own queries.

Driscoll spent the most of the early evening going over the papers with Ned. The two men, with Nathalie, who exhibited intense interest in all these new surroundings and experiences, stretched maps, diagrams, and tall rows of figures beneath the sitting-room lamp, and got down to the more monotonous routine of the gigantic business.

After a while Nathalie's eyes began to swim and her brain to reel with the immense detail into which Driscoll was going. Then, too, the room was full of the strong, sweet odor of Cuban cigarettes, and she wanted fresh air.

She stepped quietly out so as not to disturb the two men at their work, and, walking down the path to the road, passed slowly along. It was a beautiful night, with a half-moon of extreme clarity sailing in a cloudless sky.

The stirring palm-leaves seemed to be made of running quicksilver, and all about was a full stillness. It enchanted her, and she walked on, careless of anything but this new-found beauty.

A hundred yards from the house the road turned to the right, and she followed it mechanically, unaware that it led directly into the cane-fields to the north. For the first time she heard the silky rustle of the sugar-cane and smelled its green sweetness.

When she had gone what she considered to be only a little way she turned back, and as she did so she heard Ned's old familiar whistle pierce the stillness. Instinctively she answered it, and heard it again—this time nearer.

Suddenly around the bend in the road stepped the white figure of a man who she knew instinctively was not her husband. He gave the old familiar whistle, but this time she did not answer it, standing half paralyzed with fear and uncertainty directly in the moonlight.

He advanced rapidly, took off his hat, bowed low, and said:

"*Buenas noches, señora.*"

Nathalie stared at him insolently, undecided whether to run or scream, and regretting vastly her injudicious walk. She stood her ground, however, looking about for help. There was none.

The strange Cuban made other advances, purring forth liquid and musical Spanish in support of his suit. He was a little man, and Nathalie was tempted to laugh.

Suddenly she swung her empty right hand and caught the fellow such a clout on the ear that, being in the act of kneeling in the roadway, he tumbled. The girl sped by him.

"*Volgame Dios!*" cried the man, enraged, and leaped up in pursuit.

Just then there sounded the soft patter of hoofs far up the roadway leading into the cane-fields, but neither Nathalie nor her swearing cavalier heard them. Cubans are not runners, but this man was light and wiry-looking, and he gained on the young woman, who had not as yet reached the junction of the cane-field branch with the main road.

She felt him drawing nearer, and screamed with terror. Into the calm quiet of the night her cry cut like a knife, and instantly there was an answering stir everywhere. The pattering of the unshod hoofs on the earth road increased in rapidity. They were very near now, but the man did not hear them. Nor the girl.

Nathalie felt a rough hand grasp her shoulder, and, with the hope of despair, put her whole remaining strength into one cry. Then suddenly behind her there was

a Spanish oath, a sickening impact, a groan, and the hand relaxed its grip.

"Do not run, *señorita,*" said a rich, full voice that carried with it the assurance of protection. "There is nothing to fear; that dog will bother no one for a few hours."

Nathalie, panting and exhausted, dropped into a walk, reassured by the respect and evident command in the voice, but too breathless even to murmur her thanks.

"The *señorita* should never walk alone in the cane after dark," said the wonderful voice again. "One often meets brigands like that."

Nathalie, unstrung by her experience and the victim of its reaction, began to sob hysterically. Then shouts were heard a short distance away, and a moment later Ned, Driscoll, and old Luiz broke out from the main road, and, sighting the party, bore down upon them.

Nathalie finished her cry on Ned's new linen coat, and received a severe chiding without a word.

Turning back to the house, her rescuer was forgotten until they all stood in the light from the veranda. Then Nathalie looked about quickly, and saw him sitting his little horse motionless, his hat off and his handsome face white in the moonlight.

"Good evening," he said. "I am Ramon Spinoza, and I have come to see the new manager."

CHAPTER IV.

OPEN DEFIANCE.

"You couldn't have come at a more opportune time," said Ned gratefully, and thanked Spinoza for his intervention in Nathalie's behalf. "And by the way, who was that chap you stunned so neatly? I've had him taken to the jail."

"Jose Laborde, son of a neighboring planter, who came here for some unworthy purpose, I'll warrant. How did he happen to chase you, *señorita* of the gold hair?"

"Let me present you to my wife, Señor Spinoza," interrupted Ned hastily.

Spinoza, who had dismounted, bowed low over Nathalie's hand.

"I struck him," said Nathalie in answer to the Spaniard.

"That's bad, that's bad," replied he, shaking his head. "The rascal will never forget it. I know Jose Laborde for a surly and implacable man."

For a half hour or more the conversation revolved about the exciting events of the evening. It seemed to be the impression that Laborde would not forget the blow Nathalie had administered both to his pride and his face, and that the new manager and his wife might expect unpleasantness at some future time when they might be greatly in need of the opposite.

The wind freshened and became quite cool as the evening wore on, so that the party finally went inside to the parlor. Here they had a first good view of Ramon Spinoza.

He was tall for a Cuban, and had flashing, amorous black eyes set widely over a straight nose. He had a good, clean-cut chin, and affected a romantic Spanish mustache twirled at the ends.

His voice was deep and full, even when low. Outside of his personal appearance, Ramon was known as the most dashing rider, reckless fighter, and daring love-maker in the province. He was something of a Byron, in fact, and proved it by singing his own love-poems to music composed by himself.

When she had been able to see him clearly a few moments and to fall under the spell of his voice, Nathalie felt her face beginning to burn as she was stirred by the same exotic, tropical sensations as had set Ned wondering vaguely about Dolores. They were different from anything she had ever experienced, and she was as much disgusted as delighted to have to admit to herself the influence of this man, whom she scarcely knew.

Had Ned and Nathalie been children of experience, wisdom, or even a fair amount of reading, they would have recognized this alluring Spanish influence, this tempting physical languor, as something vastly dangerous to their own happiness and ideals. But, as we have said, they were not, and, ignorant of the vast pain it was to bring upon them, yielded to its delicious influence willingly.

"For what did you wish to see me, Señor Spinoza?" asked Ned, when he had passed the cigarettes.

Driscoll had gone out; Luiz and Dolores had retired; only the three were left.

"I am one," said Spinoza slowly, "who is a tenant of your plantation. With my four brothers I work two parcels of land over near the Alonzo Sanchez hills by Zaza del Medio, and we have not been able to

make more than a bare living. Being a workingman, I know the troubles of the *colonos,* and I make it my special point to see what the new manager will do for us."

"In what way?"

"Bettering our conditions. We want $4 per one hundred *arrobas* of cane—that is twenty-five hundred pounds. It may seem a large demand, but they are paying it at Matanzas, and we grow better cane here than they ever can in the 'black province.' Besides, we want some saints' days upon which to celebrate. Who is your patron saint?"

Having at one time been in the Presbyterian church, Ned had not the slightest idea, and said so. Spinoza looked horrifiedly disapproving.

"Anyway, we want that day for a celebration," he said.

"Is that all, *señor?* Wouldn't mine do?" asked Nathalie, smiling at the young Spaniard, and involuntarily approving the very dark curling hair that swept backward from his brow.

Ned glanced at his wife startled. What did she mean by such a sally?

"Ah, *señora,*" cried Spinoza, leaning forward, "that would be almost too great honor for us, the poor workers on your land. But we would love it and you, our patron, with all our souls."

His burning eyes searched hers and sent a thrill down into her heart.

"By the way, Señor Spinoza, was there anything else the matter?" inquired Ned, slightly bored and impatient at the ardent looks of his visitor.

"*Si, Señor Administrador,*" cried Ramon; "we want justice. If a man kill another man, let him go screaming to the garotte; if a man set fire to the cane, let him have his prison sentence; if a wife offend her husband, let him beat her without interference. All we ask is justice."

"Have you not had it?"

"No, we have never had it. What is there in life for us?" he demanded hotly. "That brigand on the *Presidente's* throne in Havana bleeds us for his own gain and admits it; his cabinet admires and imitates him; our landlord, some machine in Philadelphia called a corporation, follows their examples and grinds what is left of us into poverty and misery by giving low prices for cane and tobacco. They complete the work by asking us nearly twice the regular cost of food and clothes at the company's general store. And we have to buy at that store or get off the plantation. Don't you think we have cause for complaint?"

"Why, I think it is a perfect shame!" cried Nathalie sympathetically. "To think that the Cubans, after their wonderful fight to be free from the political slavery of Spain, should be the industrial slaves of the United States and the sugar trust. I certainly think something ought to be done immediately, and, Ned, I hope you will see to it."

She spoke in the tone of a school-teacher to a pupil, and Ned began to fume. With a qualm of shame he remembered his previous and present admiration for Dolores, but deluded himself by thinking it had not been open and flagrant like Nathalie's for Spinoza. At least he had restrained himself! While she! How relieved he was that no one else was in the room to see his disgrace!

So she was begging in behalf of this Cuban and his cane-slashers, eh?

"The plantation seems to have just begun to make money under the old methods," he returned, "and I for one do not see any particular reason for changing them. The thing to do is to get the percentage on the investment, and that's what I am here for. Furthermore, Señor Spinoza, you are not in any such miserable condition. You have good houses, good food, and ample protection. Being paid by the *arroba,* your income depends on your industry, and if you don't make a lot of money, it is your own fault.

"And if *you* don't make money, we can't," he went on. "So there we are around the circle with all the blame or all the credit resting upon you *colonos.* You know it, Señor Spinoza, and you came here only for the purpose of making trouble and nothing else."

"Why, Ned, how can you say such things?" demanded Nathalie hotly. "Hasn't Señor Spinoza just been telling us the true facts of the case?"

"Ah, *bella señora!*" came the soft whisper of the handsome Cuban into the silence that followed her remark.

Ned looked around, his face white with anger.

"What do you know about it, Nathalie?" he cried. "What do you mean by taking sides with this man against me? Have you fallen so much under the in-

fluence of these lazy brown devils that you can't stay in of an evening, and besides, must take the defense of their shiftlessness upon yourself, thus opposing your husband and his work?"

Nathalie seemed to shrivel up under the fire of his invective. Never in all their acquaintance had Ned spoken to her so. In the heat of his anger he had forgotten courtesy and respect.

"*Señor,* I pray you be gentle," came the honeyed words of Spinoza.

"And I pray you shut up!" was Ned's answer. "'If a wife offend her husband, let him beat her without interference,'" he quoted.

"Oh, Ned! Ned!" Nathalie cried, "you aren't going to beat me? You wouldn't do that, would you?"

She looked around her in an agony of shame as she spoke and rose to her feet. Her beautiful hair was disarranged, her eyes were filled with tears, her hands were at her cheeks in wonder. Suddenly she stepped toward Spinoza, and cried:

"Protect me, *señor.* I have no one else now. He has turned against me."

Ned's jaw dropped for a second. Then he realized her misunderstanding, and laughed in half amusement.

"You little fool," he said to his wife. Then he turned savagely on Spinoza.

"Darn you, get out of here. You've made enough trouble for one night in this vicinity. In fact, I don't care ever to see you again. You stick to your acres where you belong, and keep out of the *administrador's hacienda,* where you don't belong. That's your line of conduct from now on, and don't you forget it."

Ramon the dashing, Ramon the cavalier, had risen with just a little too much haste to be perfectly dignified.

"And what about the demands I have made in behalf of the poor tenants and laborers?" he asked tragically.

"You get none of them," snapped Ned. "No one ever got anything out of me by demanding it, and you're no exception. Now get out."

Spinoza opened the door. His face grew dark and lowering. He at last was losing his temper.

"So I am kicked in the road, like a dog, eh? This is too much. We had hoped the new *administrador* would be a man of reason and sense, if not manners. I find he has none of these qualities.

"We have borne enough already. We will stand no more. I represent nearly three thousand men, and I will give you until to-morrow at noon to reconsider."

"And if I do not?" sneered Ned.

"Refuse if you dare!" growled Spinoza, and left the house.

A moment later his horse's hoofs could be heard pattering down the front path to the road. Ned had just turned to Nathalie with a bitter remark on his lips, when the door from the hallway opened and Driscoll entered, glancing furtively around. He was dressed for travel, and had a bag in his hand.

"I heard what Spinoza said," he muttered absently, "and I'm going to move along. Don't like trouble around here—never did."

"Oh, I say, you're not going to leave me in the lurch like that, are you?" asked Ned anxiously. "I haven't been around the place at all, you know."

"Better not go, better not go," whispered Driscoll. "There's trouble ahead. Better take the first train out—I'm going to." He opened the door. "Good-by, Cummings," he said, "you're welcome to my job. Good-by."

Again Ned and Nathalie found themselves face to face alone; but this time without anger. The minds of both were too occupied with speculation as to their present situation and what the future would bring forth.

Certainly their first day and evening had been disastrous enough. Yet reviewing it hurriedly, Ned remained firm in adhering mentally to the course he had taken.

He was manager of the Santa Maria, and as such he would be supreme and be obeyed, by his wife as well as anybody else. He had turned to her to impart this piece of information when a shot rang out into the night.

It was followed by a human scream of terror, and then three more shots. After that silence.

The two scions of New York society looked at each other, mute.

CHAPTER V.

UNFORESEEN EVENTS.

SUDDENLY there was a scuffling sound outside, and Ned sprang up, his hand flying to his revolver-pocket. Opening the

front door, he peered into the silvery quiet of the night.

A short distance away a group of workingmen in white suits was bearing something toward the house.

Ned stepped out and waited, his heart beating uncertainly. He had never looked on tragedy before. In a moment Nathalie joined him fearfully, drawn by the fascination of the thing, and together they watched the approach of the group.

The men were about to bear their burden up the steps, when a voice cried: "Halt! Put me on the ground. I will go no farther."

It was Ramon Spinoza.

With a little cry Nathalie ran down to him, scarcely shrinking from the pool of blood in which he lay. His great, dark eyes, now savage with pain, looked up at her with a trace of the old fire.

"Dear lady of my dreams," he said boldly, "if I die I shall bear your image on my heart to purgatory."

"How badly are you wounded?" asked Ned bruskly, coming down the steps.

"Of all people, you certainly ought to know most," answered Spinoza meaningly, "but since you have forgotten, I will remind you. There is one bullet in my right thigh, another through my shoulder, and a third through my right hand. None of them are dangerous, as you know, but it wasn't that you didn't try."

"Look here, Spinoza, what do you mean?"

The wounded man, whose fever was mounting, beckoned those about him.

"Did you hear that? Did you hear him ask what I mean? We know, my good *juajeros,* we know. He shot your leader after throwing him out of the house."

Ned and Nathalie both staggered back as if they had been struck.

"Never mind him now," said Ned in a moment; "he is crazy. Just carry him into the house, and we will have the doctor immediately. He is not responsible for what he says."

The men closed about Spinoza again.

"Back," he cried feebly. "I will go in no house with the *Americano administrador.* He has shot me and he shall pay for it, but not now."

With a weak effort the wounded man raised a little silver whistle to his lips and sent its shrill tone piercing through the night.

Almost instantly there was a drumming of unshod hoofs, and a little band of horsemen on Cuban ponies swept up to the gate. Without a word they dismounted, hurried to the stricken man, and picked him up—before Ned could command his voice.

"Halt! Put that man down," he finally roared in a towering rage. "He shall stay here and be treated."

Spinoza spoke a few low words to the men, and they continued their operations, turning masked faces toward Ned. The latter in a moment bottled his wrath, for he felt infinite relief that the fellow was going to be taken off his hands. But he did not like his authority to be balked.

"I want to see you as soon as you are able to be around, Spinoza," he said finally when the leader had been helped on a low pony.

The Spaniard was babbling a little now, but was none the less vindictive. He turned in his saddle, and with shaking fist cursed Ned Cummings up one side of the saints' calendar and down the other. He accused him of murder, attempted assassination, and a number of other crimes, and finally ended with:

"You have begun well. Yes, perhaps too well. Maybe when I am done you will wish you had never begun at all, for I love the beautiful *señora* with the golden hair." Then they rode off.

After a little space Ned laughed harshly and turned away, Nathalie clinging to his arm.

"Do you like that creature?" he asked shortly, looking down on his bride.

"Yes, I like him," she answered seriously and slowly. "I like every one here, and I think it is our duty to do so, but that man frightens me."

And she did not dare admit to herself that the fright was a delicious one, born of the romance and mastery in the dark wooer.

"Well," suggested Ned unsympathetically, "if you ever see that dog around our back yard, you call me and I'll talk to him confidentially."

They did not discuss the shooting that night, and turned in as soon as quiet had come, for it was now long after midnight, and they were both exhausted.

Breakfast the next morning was an unhappy ceremony. The servants were content to serve fruit and bread and coffee, but when Ned saw the layout he balked,

perceiving sensibly that no busy man could do half a day's work on that.

It was a sleepy and worn-out collection that assembled around the board. Old Luiz Perez, after ceremoniously conducting Dolores to the table, lapsed into a stupid silence, only interrupted by attending to her wants. The girl herself was pale and wan. There were circles under her dark eyes, and her attitude was one more of mental stress than physical.

But with it all she was ravishingly beautiful. The gray dress, with touches of red at throat and cuffs and hem, blazoned forth her luxurious dark beauty.

"I expect trouble to-day, Luiz," said Cummings heavily. "I give my ultimatum at noon."

"I fear there will be trouble, and more than enough, before we have done," answered the old caretaker. "What will be your reply to the men?"

"Just what it was last night. I must have my position here clearly understood, and that position is this: that I am a new manager, and that I am going to manage to get the results. I have to. If I were a millionaire or a philanthropist, I might make a soft thing out of this job, and run it at a loss to satisfy a lot of lazy Cubans. But not being either wealthy or foolish, that isn't my plan."

"Those are hard and dangerous things to say to the tenants, *señor*," spoke the soft voice of Dolores, and she fixed him with her great eyes.

"Oh, when I say them," he laughed, "there will be a big, thick coat of sugar all over them, so it will take a long time to eat through. But, of course, when I talk to you here, as part of the official family, I can talk more plainly and with total secrecy. That is why I like you two to be here. You can give me all kinds of advice—"

"Which you will never follow," interrupted Dolores half seriously.

Ned's reply was interrupted by the sharp ringing of the telephone, and he rose from the table to answer it. The person at the other end was evidently excited.

"Is this the new manager?" he asked in excellent English.

"Yes."

"Well, I am Wilson, head of the fire fighting department, and I have serious news. There are four fires burning now, all of which look to be incendiary. Something pretty serious must have happened last night."

"Something did happen. Ramon Spinoza was shot three times not a hundred yards from this front door."

"Great cat! And by whom?" exclaimed the voice.

"Don't know. Unfortunately I had just had a fuss with Spinoza, so things point to me, but I can prove an alibi. We are on the trail of the assassin now, and hope to have him rounded up before long. By the way, how many men do you need?"

"Send out all you can except about ten. You might need them near the house. The men will find us near the northeast corner of the cane-fields. But, Mr. Cummings, you must hurry them. This must not get beyond our control."

"Luiz, give the necessary orders at once," said Ned, hanging up the receiver and explaining the situation to those at the table. "But be sure and keep some of the men here. I only wish I could go out to the firing-line myself. If it wasn't for that conference I have at noon to-day I could be where I belonged."

Speculations as to the person who had shot Ramon Spinoza were rife. Among the Cubans the popular belief, of course, was that the new manager had tried to kill their hero. News of such events seems to travel through the cane country with the speed of the telegraph, and it was scarcely dawn before the humblest Cuban in the most tumble-down shanty had heard the news and fastened the suspicion irrevocably upon Ned Cummings. Even the servants in the *hacienda* looked at him askance.

Ned knew this, and it was therefore with the idea of laying hold on the real culprit that he had the head of the *rurales* come into the dining-room as soon as he had returned from patroling the edge of the cane.

To him Ned told the events just as they had happened the night before, and then asked for his opinion.

"It looks to me very much as if Driscoll was the only person to suspect," said the chief finally. "Were there any clues to the assailant such as the weapon, a garment, or footprints?"

"There were no such clues," replied Ned, who had talked to all who appeared to have the slightest knowledge of the tragedy. "I have visited the scene of the shooting myself, and beyond blood-stained

grass and leaves, there is nothing. The peasants, when they rushed to his aid, obliterated any tracks there might have been. And so far there are none of the peasants who recall having heard as much as a rustle in the woods all night."

"I suppose you have searched the house thoroughly to throw suspicion away from any of the inmates?" asked the captain.

"Why, no, I have not," replied Ned, surprised. "Whom do you mean—the people living here? Shall I have everything searched? I do not like the idea."

"Why not?"

The captain looked at him narrowly. He, too, had heard reports.

"Well, I hate to be unchivalrous and discommode the—ladies," Ned replied, flushing, with a lame bow toward Dolores.

"I don't see what difference that makes," rejoined the officer.

"It doesn't make any; go ahead and search. I'd sooner you would."

"Now, Señor Cummings, you'll pardon me, but you spoke of an alibi. Would it be too much trouble for you to prove it to me satisfactorily?"

"Look here, captain," replied Ned testily, "I asked you here to help me find a criminal, not to waste valuable time puttering around the house among people who had not and never will have any idea of shooting a gun. What are you trying to do, fasten the suspicion on me?"

"I have to investigate everything I hear, *señor*," replied the other imperturbably.

"And you have no doubt heard all the details of how I went forth in the dark and shot the people's champion in the back," said Ned sarcastically.

"In the farther corners of the plantation reports have him flayed alive and his skin festooned gracefully between the trees. So you see you have a big reputation for villainy."

"Now let's cut out this extraneous matter and get after the real criminal."

"Ah, yes, but will you just tell me first how many people were with you last night after Driscoll had gone, telling you it was the safest policy to leave the plantation?"

"One," answered Ned steadily, "my wife."

"When did you next see some one?"

"When they carried Spinoza wounded and bleeding to the foot of the steps."

"Between those two times how many people did you see?"

"Only one — my wife." There was a dramatic pause as the captain made notes in his book.

"Señor Cummings," he said, "your alibi is worthless. With the connivance of your wife you might have shot a hundred men between the two times you mention. I am speaking now from the point of view of the law. Personally I have no idea you shot Spinoza any more than I did, but that doesn't let me out of the painful necessity of having you watched. Hereafter two *rurales*, night and day, will have you constantly in sight.

"Meanwhile a squad of men shall be sent after Driscoll, and I will send his description out by wire in case he took a train. As there are *rurales* on every car that moves in Cuba, he should be apprehended shortly. But in case he is not, and Spinoza wished to press the charges against you he can do so, and with every right."

Ned sat quietly back in his chair, too angry to speak, his face white and his hands twitching. Was this the end of his virtuous attempt to become somebody worth while? Was he to be hauled up eventually and made a scapegoat on circumstantial evidence for having shot a fellow of whom he would not think twice in a lifetime?

The young American's blood boiled at the thought. He looked about the table at the faces there.

Old Luiz was downcast, inscrutable, as dull as though he had said; "This is all very unfortunate, but I haven't any ideas on the subject."

Nathalie sat pale and silent, her fair white skin almost tinged with the blue of her eyes, it was so wan. She looked steadily and almost wildly at him from her great eyes.

Here was panic, indeed, and Ned Cummings felt a guilty thrust at having brought this fair flower into such a desperate soil for its growth.

Finally his glance turned to those eyes of Dolores; great, passionate, velvet eyes, like the dusk of a raven's wing, and here his gaze paused.

What did he see there, now that he was apprehended of the shooting of Spinoza? He had expected a warm, human glance of sympathy and trust, but the girl kept her eyes veiled with her long lashes so effectually that Ned was at his wits' end.

Like the sphinx she was alluring, quiet, deep, immovable, wise. Ned felt that be-

hind that calm and maidenly exterior lay more than had been in his philosophy for some time.

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING FIRE AND WORSE.

It was nearly noon when the telephone-bell again jangled. Before that time the attention of every one had been drawn to a dark mass gathering in the northeast like a great storm-cloud.

It was Wilson on the phone, greatly agitated.

"Mr. Cummings," he cried, "one fire is beyond our control. We have used all our extinguishers and are now powerless. The wind is blowing the flame directly toward the house and your only salvation is back-firing. Old Luiz Perez has fought fires all his life. I suggest you put him in charge."

"Did those men I sent out this morning reach you?" asked Ned.

"Only about half of them," answered Wilson. "The others told me that their comrades had decided not to continue when they had come part way. What does it all mean?"

A chill struck through Ned's heart. Were the men deserting him already?

"I don't know," he replied gravely, "unless they have begun to defy my authority. Hurry home with your men as fast as possible, Wilson; we will need you here."

"Yes, sir. And by the way, Mr. Cummings, this is the last you will hear from us until you see us. You know this telephone is a military instrument we carry. Once we start across country there is no finding us."

Quickly Ned found old Perez, who had been supervising and checking the cane at the mill. Grinding was stopped and the workmen poured from the great building like rats from a sinking ship.

As soon as possible they were provided with implements and set to work on the edge of the great sea of green that extended toward the northeast. Over on the horizon the dark blotch had become a mighty, smoking menace.

Having given his orders, Ned looked at his watch. It was nearly the time set for the conference. Who would come, he wondered, and would it be necessary to declare war?

Within a few minutes of noon a group of horsemen loped into sight along the road from the railway station. They were the conventional Cuban tenants, lazy, languid, and indifferent.

They wore dirty white cotton suits, big straw hats, and smoked constantly. The long legs of the tall ones almost touched the ground as they lounged on their little horses.

This unimpressive cavalcade finally drew up in front of the fence that surrounded the house, and the men dismounted. Ned sat on the porch. Much to his relief he did not discover Spinoza at the head of things, and had hopes of bringing these men to a more rational view of matters, now that their hot-headed leader was absent.

One of their number, whose looks were as evil as his English, acted as spokesman. These five men, he said, represented the *colonos* and *juajeros* of the Santa Maria plantation. He outlined the demands of the people much as Spinoza had done, and wound up by hoping that the new *Señor Administrador* would harken to their plea and take pity on their wretchedness.

Ned sat and smoked thoughtfully, almost indifferently, while the speech was going on. Glancing about, he noted the servants of the house looking from behind bushes and around corners.

Suddenly he felt a presence behind him and rising, saw Dolores quiet, dignified, and beautiful, standing in the doorway. Instantly all the *colonos* took off their hats and made sweeping bows. Ned looked his astonishment.

Her presence nettled the young man. He turned to address the representatives, but her calm voice broke in:

"The *señor* should think well before he speaks."

The lace mantilla had fallen from her head and showed the curve of her throat where her dress opened in front. Ned thrilled for the instant but pulled himself together sternly.

"I have thought," he said to her. Then he turned to the men again.

"I told Señor Spinoza last night," he began in a cold voice, "that I could grant none of the things you ask. I might have changed since then, for I am a reasonable man and come from a country where we love personal liberty perhaps too much. Most of the things you ask are not in my power to give, but such things as saints' days and occasions of special celebration, I shall be glad to grant as holidays.

"Even if I could accede to your other requests I am not sure that I would. Not only have I been threatened, but the pact with Señor Spinoza was broken by those you represent. I was to have until noon to-day to consider, but no sooner do I get up this morning than I find four fires—"

"Sparks from the railroad, *señor,*" volunteered one of the men lamely.

"Sparks from your hatred, rather," returned Cummings calmly. "More than that, since I spoke to Señor Spinoza there a crime has been committed. As you know, he was nearly killed. That also was during the time of the pact. How," and he fixed the delegation with a cold and pitiless eye, "how do you expect me to grant you anything when you have no respect for persons or property?"

The men before him, unused to cold, calm logic, shifted uneasily.

"We might be able to explain the fires, *señor,*" said one at last.

"How about the attack on Señor Spinoza?"

"We only know what rumor says, and that is, that the tenants had nothing to do with the shooting. Why should we kill our leader?"

"I don't know why you should do any of the things you do, but they are done."

"Perhaps if the *señor* should inquire nearer home he might find the assassin," suggested the spokesman with a scowl.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Ned, his temper rising.

"I mean nothing; I only know what rumor says, and that is not very complimentary to the *señor.*"

"Well, you tell Rumor next time you meet her," said Ned slowly, "that she lies like a horse-thief; and tell the same thing to anybody you see whose jaw is wagging about the *administrador.* Also send them to me and I will see to them personally."

"Did you put that in practise with Señor Spinoza?" leered the spokesman.

Ned leaped out of his chair so suddenly that the delegation fell over itself in astonishment and an endeavor to get beyond reach of personal violence. Cummings was furious.

"This thing has gone far enough," he snarled. "You have heard my answer; now get out. I have told you I cannot grant any of the main things you ask. If you want to write to the owners in Philadelphia, do so, but until I hear to the contrary, the Santa Maria will continue to run so as to show results, even if I have to *cut down* the price of cane."

"Brothers," cried the leader to his friends, "the man is mad. Let us go." Then turning to Ned.

"Is that your final answer?" he demanded.

"It is."

"Had you not better think?" interposed Dolores. "You have no idea of what may arise from this refusal."

"I have already thought beyond changing. When shall I hear your decision?" he asked of the men who were lazily mounting their horses.

"Shortly," answered the leader non-committally, and they turned and padded softly away.

A sob reached Ned's ear. Turning quickly, he saw Dolores seated in a chair, her face buried in her hands.

He was beside her in an instant, full of solicitous inquiry.

"Those men represent Cuba," she cried tragically. "Must she ever be turned away hopeless, empty-handed, and sick to death, as they have been to-day? God forbid! Rather let us die first."

A stumbling answer was on Ned's lips when a great shouting broke out. Then he remembered. The men were fighting the fire for their lives. Excusing himself, he hurried from the porch.

North of the main house was a row of neat frame structures in which the "chiefs" or heads of departments lived. To the east lay a small triangular patch of ground destined some time to be a park. Beyond that a broad road to the fields, and on the other side of the road the sweeping green sea of cane.

It was here the fifty men under Luiz Perez were laboring.

Ned reached the scene of operations quickly, but not before he had glimpsed the mighty terror that was rushing upon them out of the northeast. Reaching almost to the zenith of the heavens was a great pall of blackish-gray smoke that slanted somewhat as the upper currents of air drove it onward.

The sky looked as if preparing for a terrific cyclone, and everything on the earth was cast into a sickly greenish hue as the sun entered the edge of the smoke.

Along the horizon were flashes and tongues of flame that leaped into the murk

and illumined it momentarily, and across the mile of intervening space the deadly song of the fire began to be heard.

At the edge of the field preparations had been nearly completed. For a distance of twenty yards from the road the ground had been picked clean of anything inflammable, all of this material being piled up in a huge line nearly a quarter of a mile long at the edge of the cane.

Two hand fire-engines had been hauled from their sheds and set in place to wet down outhouses should the flames approach too close. Just as Ned drew near, men ran down the line of cane and touched flaming torches here and there.

The dry leaves caught quickly, and the thick underbrush burned like celluloid. Because of the cleared space back of the cane the fire could only burn in one direction — against the wind — and this it did with remarkable speed. The fierce crackling of the tinder-dry materials increased until it became a veritable roar, and the heat drove the workers from the line of fire.

Though not traveling as fast as the fearful blaze it was destined to meet, the back-fire leaped through the cane with remarkable velocity. Thousands of dollars' worth of sugar was eaten up in an instant, but the loss was trifling compared to what it might have been.

After the first anxious moments it was seen that the end had been achieved, for there could be no doubt now that the back-fire would stay the onset of the other. Many of the men had turned away and were trudging back toward the mill when a cry of horror broke from Perez, who had been watching the field intently.

"*Volgame Dios!*" he cried, wildly seizing Ned's arm and pointing past the nearest wall of flame. "Do you see them there, the men? They will perish."

Ned directed his eyes as the other indicated. Down the long roadway that divided the field in half he saw the blurred figures of several men running hither and thither madly. Behind them came the great wall of the original conflagration, and leaping toward them swiftly in front was the back fire now rivaling the former in size.

"Can nothing be done?" asked Ned frantically of old Luiz.

"No, *señor,* nothing. There is something odd about this. They should not be in the cane. We will see afterward."

Ned turned and walked away, sick at heart and helpless.

Amid the heart-rending cries of the women the two advancing waves of flame met, leaped in a tremendous billow to the skies, and in an hour were dead. Ned Cummings white, wet, and unnerved, waited tremulously for Luiz to report.

"There were not even bones left," he said, "but there were many bottles. Also a telephone outfit and fire extinguishers. Those men had evidently drunk themselves into a stupid sleep and did not wake until the fire was almost upon them and it was too late to escape."

"Those, Luiz," said Ned slowly, "were the remainder of the fire-fighting squad I sent out this morning. Those who did not report to Wilson. I am more sorry than I can say about this, but they brought it upon themselves."

Nor was the gloom in the big house lightened when that night Ned found this note on the floor:

> We have decided. Get out or die. Enough harm has already happened since you came. This afternoon's butchery settles it, and you had better move quick. Let one warning be sufficient.
>
> RAMON SPINOZA,
> Representing the tenants.

(To be continued.)

IN THE WOOD.

O TREE, perhaps alive as I—
One process lacking of my clay—
Give me your outlook to the sky,
The airy cheer that fills your day!

Your grace of perfect service teach;
Your splendid dare of things that are;
The noble patience that can reach
Across the years from sod to star.

Catherine Markham.

In Death Valley

By John Blunt

IN Death Valley two men were fighting for the right to live. Across the blistering sands they staggered on foot, a trail of discarded saddle-bags, cartridge-belts, food, and finally even coats and hats dotted the arid plain behind them to mark their mad desire to travel light, and so reach the mountains ahead. Unless those hills were gained before another two hours—

Faster now they stumbled forward. Heads rolling, glazed eyes fixed only on their goal, with black and swollen tongues protruding from their broken lips, they scuffled through the scorcing surface of the desert, whistling breath and muttered curses accompanying each painful step.

Suddenly the taller of the two stopped.

He unlimbered the canteen from his shoulders. Unscrewing the top, he tilted the tin to his caricature of a mouth and took two meager swallows. It was the third time in the last ten minutes he had helped himself from the water supply of both.

Standing behind him, the other stole his hand into his shirt, his fingers closing around the butt of the pistol hidden there. Why should he let his companion take from that canteen what would go twice as far with only one parched throat to moisten? He drew out the gun. Besides, the man would have to die anyway.

Swiftly he drew bead on him as he stood screwing back the top of the canteen. A bullet through the small of the back, he meditated, would do the trick with neatness and despatch.

And then—he lowered the weapon and thrust it back in its hiding-place. He couldn't do it. Not that he found it impossible to shoot down from behind a defenseless man who was his friend, his partner. That, in its proper time, he was bent on doing anyhow, wasn't he?

The thing was—the thing was, he was afraid. Afraid of what would come after he had done for his companion. Then he would be alone. Alone in the desert. They said that no one man could ever come through it; that a man by himself in that Hades would go mad, raving crazy in an hour. He—was afraid to be alone.

Without a glance behind him, the other had again started on. Into zigzag step at his heels, the man with the hidden pistol fell once more. Over the blazing sand they hastened; on toward the hills.

Six weeks before the man with the canteen had persuaded the other that gold for the seeking lay in the mountains to the west of Death Valley. Together they had started out. With two burros and a sizable camping outfit it had been easy to cross the desert the first time.

But, by the time they found what they had gone after, both animals had died, the camping outfit had to be left behind on their return trip over the plain, and—it had not been so easy on this second journey.

Indeed, not. Three days now, they had been tramping across the desert in what they thought was the general direction of the mountain chain in the east. Were they

any nearer to it? Would two hours more bring them to their haven, or—were they actually lost?

No! No! That could not be. Such a gibe of fate would be too cruel, too inhumanly malicious. They had found gold. They must get back to civilization in order to realize on their discovery, in order to make it of any more value than the finding of so much yellow putty.

They were rich men. Rich? They were billionaires! Among those mountains in the West they had uncovered a vein of pure metal that was beyond the dreams of avarice, surpassing an actual El Dorado, worth more than an emperor's ransom. They were kings of wealth, princes of fortune, such as even a Rockefeller would have to doff his hat to.

They *must* get back to the civilized world with all that it would mean to such Midases as they.

That is—one of them must get back. The man with the gun concealed from the other's view in his shirt knew who that one was going to be. He brought his hand to the weapon again. How simply it was all going to work out. Just one shot, the man in front would drop like a log, his claim on the Golconda in the Western hills cease to exist, and he—he alone—would own the whole, staggering thing!

Once more he had the gun out in his hand, its muzzle trained on the spine of his unsuspicious companion. And once more he stopped.

What of that fear?

The dread of being alone in Death Valley, that inferno where rumor had it hundreds of lone men had been driven stark crazy by the heat, the trackless solitude, and all, stayed him from the deed he contemplated—he couldn't lose his companion just yet. The time for his slaying was not ripe.

Putting the pistol back a second time, he told himself that when the desert was all but crossed, when the town nestling in the foothills in the east came in sight, then, and then only, would he do what he planned. Then, when there was no need for him to dread being left alone, he could dismiss the other by means of a bullet easily enough.

At that moment he looked up.

"Saved!" he screeched, bounding forward.

Straight before them a cleft in the hills toward which they had been moving appeared. In the distance they could see houses, stores, a street with men and horses moving in it. It was the town from which they had set out a month and a half previous—Too-Bad City.

"Halleluiah!" shouted the man with the canteen, staring at their goal with the tears running down his cheeks. "We're all right, Joe! We're all right! All right!"

He wheeled and darted down upon the other. Throwing his arms around his shoulders, he enveloped him in a frantic hug of joy. And then, above his exuberant laughing and crying, a shot spat upon the air. His arms relaxed. He slipped away from the man whose smoking pistol had torn a hole through the pit of his stomach.

Flat upon his back he lay, his split lips and blackened tongue upturned to the pitiless sun. The other contemplated him a moment to make sure that the bullet had done its work. Then, as he had no need of his companionship any longer, the fear of being alone on the desert at an end, he turned to look toward the town that was now so close at hand.

And—the mirage had vanished.

PAVEMENTS.

STERN and unyielding as some natures are—
  Perfect in polish and precise in poise—
They seem to glory in the clash and jar,
  In all the tense and immelodious noise.

What wonder, as I tread them day by day,
  Passing upon life's multivaried round,
My spirit yearns for quiet paths of clay,
  The springy feel of mossy woodland ground!

Clinton Scollard.

With His Back to the World

By Charles Carey

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

TO LIVE A MAN'S LIFE.

IT was a wild night in Red Butte.

A storm sweeping down from the mountains was deluging the camp with a mingled fusillade of rain and hail and snow.

The play of lightning was almost incessant, and the deafening crashes of thunder from time to time seemed about to split open the heavens.

In the barroom of the Mountain Hotel were gathered for shelter a number of the leading citizens of Red Butte.

One pictures, no doubt, a dingy, low-ceilinged place, lighted by one or two smoking kerosene lamps, with a rough board counter garnished by a few bottles and glasses, a faro layout in full blast at the back, and an assembled company of bearded, flannel-shirted miners.

Never was a greater mistake. The miners were there, some of them in flannel shirts, too; for Red Butte was in the heart of the Nevada gold-fields. But the barroom itself, with its tiled floor, and onyx wainscoting, shaded electric lights, and trim, white-jacketed servitor behind a bar of glistening marble and silver, might have been transported direct from Broadway.

Indeed, the Mountain Hotel—a solid structure of reenforced concrete, eight stories in height—was fitted throughout on the same scale of elaborate magnificence.

It had a pillared office supplied with leather-covered easy chairs and divans; a mezzanine floor all in scarlet and gold; faultless elevator service; and a Hungarian orchestra to play at meals.

The wild West doesn't stay wild very long nowadays; and Red Butte, although only three years out of the tent and canvas-covered shack stage, was already a thriving city with every up-to-date improvement.

Its rapid growth and development was, of course, a frequent subject of proud remark among its inhabitants; and the little company storm-bound in the barroom of the Mountain Hotel that night proved no exception to the general rule.

They had been boasting complacently of the recent extension to the trolley system, of the new streets being laid out, of the fact that Red Butte the previous month had shown larger bank deposits per capita than any town west of the Mississippi.

Then, "Tex" Barlow—now the millionaire president of "Red Butte Consolidated," but formerly a three-card-monte man—observed with a reminiscent shake of the head:

"And just to think that three years ago it was only sand and rock when Jack Griscom came along and made his lucky strike.

"By the way," he added thoughtfully, "I wonder how old Jack is making out in

New York these days. Anybody heard anything of him lately?"

"Not since the news came of his marrying that actress and buying a house for her on upper Fifth Avenue," rejoined Billy Barnes, editor of the Red Butte *Echo*. "Probably the next move will be a divorce suit, though. That seems to be the one best bet in that bunch of plutocrats Jack's training with on there."

"Don't you ever believe it," spoke up Barlow, with some vehemence. "Mind you, I'm not saying that maybe Jack hasn't made a mistake. I think he made a bum draw when he got the bug in his nut that Red Butte was too small for him, and the big metropolis was nearer his size. I'm laying two to one that he gets good and trimmed by those Wall Street coyotes before he's through with them.

"I'm offering the same odds, too," he went on, "against this marriage deal he's butted into; the stage is no great shakes as a training school for matrimony, that I ever heard of. But don't you boys dream that he'll welsh on any proposition he's ever put his fist to.

"I tell you, Jack Griscom is the gamest, squarest sport that—"

"Who's that taking my name in vain?" a deep voice broke in upon Tex's panegyric, and turning, they beheld at the screen doors of the barroom a tall, stalwart figure, buttoned up to the throat in a raincoat.

"Griscom!" they ejaculated as one man; then the group broke into noisy expressions of greeting, and made a rush toward him.

As he stepped forward into the light, however, with a sweep of his broad-brimmed hat which sent a spatter of raindrops to the tiled floor, they could not help but observe that he had aged fast in the eleven months he had been away from them.

The dark hair clustering at his temple and the close-cropped mustache showed unmistakable streaks of gray; his face was thinner and more Indian-like in profile; the glance of his black eyes was as straight and keen as ever, but there was a network of fine, little wrinkles at the corners; and his smile, although cordial, was a bit weary and disillusioned.

"Just got in on the limited," he explained in answer to their eager questions. "Came right through from New York without stop."

"Merely here on a flying trip, I suppose?" questioned Billy Barnes, alert for news. "Back again to the effete East before the end of the week, eh?"

"No," said Griscom dryly. "I have returned to Nevada for good."

There was that in his tone which did not invite further inquiries, and in the West they know how to respect a man's reserves. So, the subject was dropped there without further comment, and the group simply devoted themselves to making their old comrade feel he was at home.

Later, however, when Griscom was alone with Tex Barlow, the latter, relying upon their old intimacy, ventured to ask:

"What does it all mean, Jack?"

A rather bitter smile twisted the other's lips.

"Simply what I say. I have come back to Nevada for good."

"Did they 'get' you on East there, Jack?" demanded Barlow significantly.

"Why do you ask?" Then, his guarded tone relaxing: "Forgive me, old pal. It's only that I've got into the habit of being careful what I say. No, they didn't 'get' me, Tex—financially, at least—or rather they didn't get me hard enough to hurt. I could have stayed on and still sat in the game. I didn't come back because I had to."

"Well, Red Butte is glad enough to have you on any terms, Jack. Will you be wanting to take your old place back at the head of the Consolidated? You know, you have only to speak the word, and I'll resign in your favor quick as a wink."

But Griscom shook his head.

"No," he said. "I do not intend to stay in Red Butte. You have become too citified here for me, old man. You are simply New York on a smaller scale. I am going up into the mountains to try to make another lucky strike, and start the game all over again. That's the only field for a chap of my temperament."

"And your wife?" questioned Barlow diffidently. It was the first reference which had been made to Jack's marriage. "What'll she have to say to it?"

Griscom merely shrugged his shoulders, his face like a mask. Then a sudden impulse to confide in some one gripped him.

"Between ourselves, Tex," he said, "that is another game I've quit."

His friend started a little. "You don't mean—divorce?"

"Oh, no; nothing like that. We have

simply decided that she shall go her way and I will go mine. My wife is all right, you understand, Barlow; I haven't a thing against her. But we both have come to realize that our marriage was a grand mistake.

"She's New York to her finger-tips," he explained. "She likes the glitter, and the glamour, and the artificiality of it all, while, hard as I might try, I could never bring myself to care for that sort of thing. I belong to the mountains and the desert; and we didn't mix any better than oil and water.

"To make a long story short," he concluded, "I turned over to her everything I had in the world but $50,000, and have come out to make a fresh start."

His friend gave a quick frown.

"Fifty thousand ain't much, Jack," he observed ruminatively, "to a man who's been used to playing with millions."

"It's more than the grub-stake I had when I first hit Red Butte," laughed Griscom carelessly. "Don't worry about me, old man; I'll roll up another pile, all right. The chief thought in my mind just now is that I'm free from all the fol-de-rols, and can live a man's life again in a man's way. Tex, old boy, I've turned my back to the world."

But there was no especial enthusiasm in his voice as he spoke, only a sort of dogged determination.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED LEADING.

GRISCOM slept that night amid all the comforts and luxuries of the Mountain Hotel, and breakfasted royally the next morning on grape-fruit chilled in ice, broiled mountain trout, rolls, and coffee.

But when he had transacted some business at the bank, and visited one or two outfitting stores, he felt that he was through with Red Butte.

Returning to the hotel with his purchases, in a taxicab, he proceeded to his room, and emerged an hour later in typical prospector's garb.

He wore heavy boots, a rough canvas suit lined with sheepskin, and a round cap fitted with tabs to tie down over his ears. In the roll of blankets suspended over his shoulder were his supplies of beans, bacon, flour, sugar, and coffee.

Taken altogether, he presented quite a contrast to the trim, well-tailored figure which had descended from the limited the night before; yet in any guise Jack Griscom was a noticeable specimen. There was no mistaking that he was a man, every inch of him.

Such currency as he might require for immediate expenses he carried in a belt about his waist; the remainder of his $50,000, in the shape of five certificates of deposit, was sewed securely inside the lining of his coat. There would be no difficulty in getting these certificates cashed he knew; since there was not a bank in any town in all that region which needed any identification for Jack Griscom.

Thus prepared and accoutered, accordingly he paid his last toll to civilization by slipping a dollar-bill into the palm of the uniformed door-man of the hotel, gripped hands with the group of friends assembled to see him off, and clambered up to his seat atop the rickety, old stage-coach bound for the mountains.

The driver, an old-time Western jehu, who might have stepped bodily out of the pages of Bret Harte, unbent far enough to give his lone passenger a patronizing nod, as he climbed to his box.

Then, with a crack of the whip which sounded like a revolver-shot, and amid a volley of good-luck wishes from the crowd on the sidewalk, the lumbering old vehicle dashed away, and in a few minutes had left Red Butte behind.

The storm of the previous night had by this time fully abated, and the sun was shining clear from skies of brilliant blue; but it was bitterly cold, and a wind which searched to the very marrow of one's bones blew down from the white-capped peaks toward which they were heading.

These looked so near in that rarefied air that it seemed as though they would not be more than an hour in reaching them; but Griscom knew that they had an all-afternoon ride over the snow-covered desert and up and down perilous mountain roads before they would reach their destination.

"Ugh!" He shivered, turning up the collar of his coat. "I believe I have grown soft since I have been on East."

Ben Little, the old stage-driver, merely smiled incredulously. Griscom's name was pretty near a synonym for tireless endurance in that part of the world, and Little

wasn't taking much stock in any claims of softness his seat-mate might put forth.

"You'll be all right, I guess," he grunted, "as soon as you have a chanct to git out an' stretch yer legs a mite. Which way'll you be headin', anyhow, Jack? Off toward Jackrabbit Mountain, mebbe, eh?"

There was something in the old fellow's tone—a certain quality of suppressed eagerness—which did not escape Griscom's keen ear.

As a matter of fact, he had not yet settled in his own mind just which direction he was going to take. He was leaving that largely to the guidance of destiny.

At the old stage-driver's question, however, he scented a leading, and immediately began to angle for more information.

"Why do you pick Jackrabbit Mountain, Ben?" he asked with assumed carelessness.

"Waal"—Little's left eyelid drooped in a significant wink—"it don't stand jest to reason that a feller with all your money is pirootin' around on any kind of old chance, now does it, Jack? It looks a dern sight more to me like thar was a ace in the hole som'ers, an' that you was nosin' around after it."

The suspicion was a reasonable one, Jack had to admit. No one except Tex Barlow had any idea that he had practically stripped himself of his wealth; and such being the case, the natural inference would be that he was merely taking the rôle of prospector as a blind in order to investigate more freely some new property of which he had got wind.

And Jack saw no necessity to relieve this impression.

"Possibly. Possibly," he laughed in answer to the stage-driver. "But why Jackrabbit Mountain, Ben? You haven't told me yet what you mean."

Little gave him another sly glance out of the corner of his eye.

"Waal," he observed, expectorating a stream of tobacco-juice toward the front wheel, "thar was a stranger come through with me night afore last that was hittin' up his demijohn pretty free, an' had evidently been doin' the same fer some days back. So, bein' in the state where a feller naterally gits confidenshul with 'most anybody handy, he up an' tells me that his name's Copeland Minear, an' that— Eh? Did you speak?" he broke off at a slight, startled exclamation from his companion.

"No, no. Merely a little speck of mud which flew up from the wheel and struck me in the eye. Go on with your story."

"Oh," sniffed old Ben, only half convinced, "I thought mebbe you might 'a' reckernized that name. Waal, 's I was tellin' you, this Minear party hands me his callin' card, so to speak, an' states further that his business is to buy up promisin'-lookin' minin' properties. Has I ever heered of Jackrabbit Mountain? he axes me. I has, I rejoins, but never in the light that it was no especial bonanza. Well, thar was where I'd made the mistake of my life, he informs me, fer he was on his way right then to look at some claims held by a man named Dean which, accordin' to surface indications, had anything at Goldfield or Tonopah beat forty ways from the ace. Brighton was the name of the new camp, he says, and the reports and samples he'd had from it was sure phenomenal.

"I figgered," concluded the stage-driver, "that mebbe you'd heered some of the same kind of news, and was comin' up to look the place over?"

But the interest had died out of Griscom's face.

"Small good it would do me, Ben. This Copeland Minear, who I don't mind telling you is, for all his intemperate habits, a pretty shrewd article, and a plunger in addition, has two days' start of me. Everything worth while will have been gobbled up before I can get there."

"No, that's jest where you're wrong, Jack." The stage-driver laid an earnest hand on his arm. "Minear, thinkin' he's got all the time he wants, has laid off at Belknap's fer a spree. When I went through thar last night he was loaded to the guards, an' swearin' he wouldn't leave so long as thar was a drop of whisky in the dump. It's a cinch he won't be in no fit shape to travel fer three days yet."

"So?" Griscom glanced up with a quick flash of resolution in his eye. "I don't know of any obligation, legal or moral, to stand aside for a man who deliberately throws away his chance in order to get drunk," he muttered.

"Neither do I," asserted his companion. "Go to it, Jack; don't let any dern fool scruples stand in your way.

"But listen," he adjured; "if you fasten onto anything good up there, I want you to promise to let me in on it."

"You!" Griscom stared at him incredulously, for old Ben was probably the one man in that entire region who at some time or another had not dabbled in mining ventures. He was forever preaching on the folly of those who yielded to the allurement.

"You?" repeated Griscom.

"Waal," growled the old man defensively, "'tain't 'cause I didn't want to that I never tackled nothin' of the kind; but because to do it I'd 'a' had to string in with a lot of four-flushers or come-ons. This here's a different proposition, though; you're not only straight an' square, but you know the game from sody to hoc. So, if you promise to take me in on anything you find, I've got six thousand dollars saved up that's ready fer you whenever you want it."

"But I can't guarantee you results, Uncle Ben," protested Griscom. "The best experts in the country occasionally get fooled at this game, and I am as likely to call a wrong turn on it as the next one. Better keep your six thousand dollars in your pocket, and then you'll know it's safe."

"No," the old man insisted; "I'm game, I tell you, an' it's only fair that you should let me in, so long as I was the one to give you the tip. Come now, Jack; promise like a good feller."

Griscom laughed.

"All right, all right," he finally consented; "but don't go banking any hopes of riches on this deal. These things are a good deal like the Englishman's receipt for cooking hare—first to catch your hare. And from what I know of Jackrabbit Mountain, the chances are about a hundred to one against finding anything that'll assay higher than thirty cents to the ton.

"However," he added, "it will do no harm, I suppose, to take a look, as the boys say; so, as that's the trail to Jackrabbit just ahead, if I'm not mistaken, I guess we'll part here."

Yet, when he had swung himself and his traps down from the stage, and stood in the road listening to Ben's called-back adjurations not to "fergit that promise," his reflections were far from the pessimistic ones to which he had treated the old stage-driver.

"Copeland Minear," he muttered, "booze-fighter though he is, never came out here on a wild-goose chase in the dead of winter. He had to be 'shown,' and 'shown' good and strong before he ever stirred a foot. Consequently, this man Dean must have pretty near the real stuff, and I have simply butted blindly into another fortune.

"Well"—with a sudden frown—"I guess it only goes to prove the truth of the old saying: 'Unlucky at love, lucky at everything else.'"

CHAPTER III.

AT FORCED SALE.

GRISCOM had complained that he was "soft" as a result of his sojourn in the East; but he certainly showed no trace of it in the way he covered the rough thirty miles of trail leading to Jackrabbit Mountain.

Ahead of him loomed the long, rounded peak which had gained its name from the two little protuberances at one end like ears, and a certain resemblance it bore to a crouching animal; and as often as he raised his eyes to it Jack was impelled to greater speed.

Through drifts almost waist-high he plunged at times, and negotiated slippery paths along ravines and down into cañons, where the least false step would have sent him crashing down to certain death.

But ever the fear was in his heart that he might be forestalled in his purpose—if not by Copeland Minear, then perhaps by some other—and so he hurried on regardless of perils or fatigue.

As long as daylight lasted, and then by the light of the moon, he pushed ahead; but when at last about midnight the moon set, he was obliged perforce to give over the task for the time being, and, seeking a sheltered nook under a ledge of rock, roll himself up in his blankets.

If his wish was sincere to turn his back upon the world, he had certainly achieved it; for in less than twelve hours he had stepped from all the luxuries of modern civilization into a condition of primitive savagery.

Nor can it be denied that he slept far more soundly out there on the frozen ground and under the stars than he had the night before on his soft bed in the steam-warmed room at the Mountain Hotel. To be physically tired all the way through is the best thing in the world to banish haunting worries, and as a soporific beats anything which the doctors have yet been able to compound.

For six hours the slumber of absolute physical exhaustion claimed him; but with the first break of dawn he was up again and,

after a hasty breakfast, was once more on his way.

Mile after mile he trudged, until at last shortly after noon he came in sight of a camp which from the directions furnished him by old Ben he was sure could be none other than Brighton.

It consisted of but three rough cabins set up amid the snows in a cañon eight thousand feet above sea level; but the loneliness and dreariness of the place did not depress Griscom.

He had seen wilder and more inaccessible spots than this blossom into cities under the impetus of a rush of gold-seekers, and he knew that if his calculations proved correct he would see at Brighton inside of a week dance-halls, saloons, gambling-places, and a population of anywhere from five hundred to a thousand men.

Before going too far into such dreams, however, he decided that it might be wise to take a look around, and see for himself if there was anything in sight.

Therefore, he skirted the little clearing, and finding with small difficulty the staked-out claims of which Ben had spoken, proceeded to make a brief private investigation.

He discovered to his surprise that considerable excavation had already been done, a shaft having been sunk and a tunnel extended for quite a number of feet; and as he picked out random samples from the ore-heap at the mouth of the shaft his eyes opened wider and wider with wonder.

Truly, he had not been deceived by the reports of the old stage-driver. If these indications held out, he was standing in the presence of one of the great producing mines of the world. Beside it, his former strike at Red Butte paled into insignificance.

After satisfying himself as well as he could concerning conditions, Griscom carefully obliterated all traces of his visit, and then returned cautiously to the trail to approach the clearing.

He had as yet seen no sign of a human being around the camp, and this had rather surprised him, for there was no reason why the men should not be at work at this hour; but as he came within ear-shot of the first cabin the explanation broke upon him.

The entire population of Brighton was evidently engaged in a wrangling bee, for there floated out across the frosty air sounds of dissension and high-pitched, excited voices, mingled every now and then with the bark of a short, rasping cough.

Griscom stole closer and peered in through the one window of the shack. Over by the fireplace he could see a gaunt form huddled in blankets whose stooping shoulders and emaciated face labeled him as a "lunger," while across from him were two others who bore in features and manner just as plainly the hall-mark of the "crook."

One of these was tall and cadaverous, with a thin-lipped mouth and cold, merciless eyes; the other short and fat, but with no suggestion of kindliness or good humor in his evil, treacheous face.

They were in effect the tiger and the snake, the pair which by some strange rule of association may always be found together in the powers that prey.

And there could be no doubt that they were preparing now to devour the helpless, stricken creature before them.

The invalid, as Jack listened, recovered from a paroxysm of coughing, and lifted his voice in garrulous appeal.

"Do the fair thing by me, boys," he pleaded. "You both know as well as I do that the claim is probably worth millions; yet jest 'cause I got to git out of this cursed climate right away I'm willin' to let you have it for thirty thousand cash. Come, now; you'll make it a deal on them terms, won't you, Moffett?"

It was to the tall, lank crook—the snake of the pair—that he appealed; but the latter shook his head.

"No," he said coldly, "me an' Graham here," with a jerk of the elbow toward his stouter companion, "we've talked over this dicker, an' we allow that twenty thousand is as high as we can go."

"Twenty thousand!" The sick man raised his clenched fists above his head in a gesture of despair. "Why, after my debts is paid, that won't leave me enough to take keer of me till I die an' pervide me with a decent funeral, let alone puttin' by anything fer my family after I'm gone. If the property wasn't so good, I wouldn't say a word; but both of you know it's worth merely as a prospect double what I've asked. Be sports now fer once, boys, an'—"

"Listen, Jim Dean," the tall fellow broke in harshly; "when we all three come here to Jackrabbit Mountain we was on even terms, wasn't we? Then the claim that you staked out showed rich, an' the ones we took wasn't worth a dern. That was luck fer you.

"But now you're sick and got to light out,

an' the only chance you've got to sell is to us. An' that's luck fer Graham an' me.

"You can either take our twenty thousand," he concluded sternly, "or you can stay here an' cough yourself to death in two weeks."

"Yes," chimed in the shorter rascal with a villainous leer, "and call yourself good and lucky at that. There's them that wouldn't waste twenty thousand on a duck in your fix. They'd take a shorter way to close the deal"—tapping the revolver at his belt significantly—"and run a chance afterward on getting the papers and title-deeds and all that sort of thing into shape."

Dean paled before the unconcealed threat in the fellow's tone.

"Here, I'll sign all right," he assented hastily. "Give me the papers."

But at that moment Griscom stepped quietly in at the cabin door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WINNING HAND.

"MR. DEAN, I believe?"

Griscom bowed pleasantly to the startled invalid. He did not take the trouble to indicate to the other two that he was even so much as aware of their presence.

"I understand, Mr. Dean," he went on in brisk, businesslike tones, "that you have some claims here you are willing to dispose of, and, in order not to waste my time or yours, I would like to make you an offer."

"Well, I don't know." The sick man shuffled his feet and glanced uneasily at the pair on the other side of the fireplace. "I was jest about closing a sale with these two gentlemen here, an'—"

"Ah?" Griscom wheeled about to survey the two a moment; then shifted his gaze back to Dean.

"And what was the consideration they wanted?" he inquired.

Dean evaded a direct answer. "The price I made 'em," he said sullenly, "was thirty thousand dollars cash."

"All right," rejoined Griscom without a moment's hesitation, "I'll bid you forty thousand for the property, same terms, and take immediate possession."

Ordinarily he would never have dreamed of paying that amount of money for any prospect on a mere cursory examination such as he had been able to make; but as he had stood outside the window listening to the illuminating discussion within, the thought had come to him that if Moffett and Graham, who must be fully aware of the value of the claims, were willing to pay twenty thousand dollars for them, the claims should easily be worth double that amount.

Upon this assumption, together with the fact that Copeland Minear had found the proposition sufficiently attractive to drag him on a midwinter trip to the wilderness, Griscom justified himself in making his offer.

"Forty thousand dollars down and immediate possession, Mr. Dean," he repeated. "Is it a go?"

Hitherto the two crooks, taken aback as they were by his abrupt intrusion and the quick way he had taken command of the situation, had done nothing more than scowl over his presence.

But now, as they saw the prize for which they had schemed about to be snatched away, Graham, the shorter of the two, ground out a savage oath, and both of them as by a concerted movement reached for their guns.

Life in the East, however, had not by any means lessened Jack Griscom's old alertness of eye and hand, and ever since the start of the interview he had held himself prepared for exactly such a movement on their part.

Quick as they were, therefore, he was still quicker, and before either of them had time to draw, they found themselves gazing into the muzzles of a pair of ominous-looking .45s.

"My bid, as I have just said, is forty thousand dollars," observed Jack, holding them steadily covered. "Do I understand that either of you two wants to raise it."

The only answer he got was a flood of profanity and abuse.

"No?" said Griscom. "Well, then, the deal is closed. And since there is no further reason for you two to hang around here, I'd advise you to hike just about as fast as your feet will carry you."

"Wait jest a minute," interposed the sick man. "You may be all right, mister, but you've got to admit you're a stranger to me, an' I guess we won't call the deal exactly closed until I see the color of that forty thousand you're talkin' so free about."

Griscom shifted the gun in his left hand back to his belt; then, still holding his single weapon bent on the crooks, jerked loose the lining of his coat, and slammed down

on the table four of his certificates of deposit to the amount of $10,000 each.

"Say!" The invalid glanced up from an inspection of them. "I guess you're all right, mister. These is on the Red Butte County Bank, an' good as gold. All you got to do is indorse 'em over to me. Let's see; they're payable to John Griscom—" He halted suddenly, his eyes almost popping from his head. "Holy smoke!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean to tell me, you're Jack Griscom!"

That name, indeed, seemed to have a rather startling effect on the entire party; for Jack had no sooner acknowledged the corn than the two crooks made a dive for the door, and hastily gathering together their effects, lost no time in hitting the trail.

The invalid's departure, too, although less precipitate, was hardly much longer delayed. He was anxious, so he said, to get into some warm, dry climate as quickly as possible; and accordingly, with the first streaks of dawn the following morning, he had his pack on his shoulder and was off.

Griscom was monarch of all he surveyed.

A week later, Moffett and Graham, seated in the back room of a San Francisco saloon, were joined by Dean.

Without a word the latter drew a big roll of bills amounting to forty thousand dollars from his pocket, and, dividing it into three equal piles, pushed each man's share over to him.

"And jest to think," quoth the lank Moffett reflectively, "that we put one like that over on clever Jack Griscom. Now, if it had been Copeland Minear, and him drank as we planned for, it would have been different. But Jack Griscom! Heavens, when he let out that he was the boob we were trimmin', you could 'a' knocked me over with a feather."

"Well, it only goes to show," grinned Moffett, as he lovingly fingered his part of the booty, "that a smart one can be as big a come-on as anybody, if you only get him right."

"No," whined Dean, "it goes to show that I ought by rights to have a bigger cut at this stuff than you other two. It was that cough of mine that fetched him."

But the other two promptly negatived this proposal.

"Sho!" they exclaimed. "Did you bring Griscom up there so pat, or put the idea into his head to listen at the winder? No, he was ripe to be handed a lemon, and he got it. That's all there was to it."

In short, instead of circumventing two crooks, as he supposed, Jack Griscom had fallen a victim to three. The party had consisted not only of a snake and a tiger, but a tiger, a snake, and a jackal.

CHAPTER V.

"THE GRISCOM GONOZLE."

In happy ignorance of how neatly he had been swindled, Griscom in the meantime was working out plans for the development of the property which had so fortuitously fallen into his hands.

To properly work the mine, he would need machinery, and machinery costs money.

Moreover, Griscom, never a man of small ideas, has rather given his imagination free rein in regard to this new acquisition of his, and the machinery on which he was figuring included not only the latest appliances for getting out the ore, but also a big reduction plant.

That meant lots of money.

And where was he to get it?

He knew, of course, that friends like Tex Barlow, and others of his old cronies at Red Butte, would be only too willing to loan him any amount in their power; but he felt a certain delicacy in applying to them, and, besides, he doubted their ability to furnish funds to the extent required.

They were wealthy men, it is true; but that, as he knew from his own experience, did not necessarily imply that they were in a position to hand over ready cash approximating close to a million dollars.

Yet, the only other method he could think of by which to raise the wind was the old scheme of organizing a stock company and selling shares to the public through a brokerage house; and that meant that the brokers would get the lion's share of the proceeds. In fact, he questioned very strongly if enough would be left to come anywhere near accomplishing what he had in view.

He pondered the problem very seriously during the next two or three days, while he pottered about the camp, getting himself established in his cabin, and straightening out loose ends at the shaft; but revolve the

matter in his brain as he would, he could come to no satisfactory solution.

Then, toward the end of the week, while he was still involved in his quandary, he was surprised by the arrival of visitors.

Up the trail came old Ben Little, the stage-driver, closely followed by a young chap whose glances of open curiosity about the place plainly revealed that he was a tenderfoot.

"Sucker from the East," Ben explained, with a contemptuous wave of his hand toward his companion. "Went broke tryin' to play faro-bank down at Red Butte. Then, when he heard I was comin' up here to see you, he wouldn't give me no peace until I agreed to bring him along with me. He says as how he hopes to makes a dicker with you that'll be to mutual advantage; but, fur's I can make out, Jack, the critter is jest plain loco."

The stranger laughed lightly at this frankly unflattering description of himself.

"Ben's a little peeved, I guess, Mr. Griscom," he said, "over the way I badgered him into bringing me up here. But it was a ground-hog case with me. I was broke down there at Red Butte, as he tells you, and didn't know which way to turn. The news of your locating here, and the excitement it caused at Red Butte, however, very quickly decided me. It was like a ray of sunlight breaking through the clouds. 'Brooks, my boy,' I said to myself—my name is Chester Brooks, I forgot to tell you —'Brooks, my boy, you for Jackrabbit Mountain, if you have to crawl there on your hands and knees!'"

"The news of my locating here, and the excitement it caused?" broke in Griscom with a touch of surprise. "How in the world do they know anything about me down at Red Butte?"

"How?" The stranger eyed him quizzically. "You're too modest by far, Mr. Griscom. You don't realize, I guess, what an important personage you are. Why, it wasn't half an hour after Dean had cashed those certificates of deposit before the news of what you had done was all over Red Butte, and fully a fourth of the population was making arrangements to follow you up here. There'll be close to five hundred men in this cañon before the end of the week."

Old Ben nodded confirmation to the statement as Griscom turned to him in doubting amazement.

"But—but what's got into them?" stammered the mine-owner. "It's been known right along that Dean has been up here, hasn't it? Why should they suddenly take it into their heads to stampede the place now?"

"Ah, the magic of a name!" Brooks threw up his eyes. "Dean might have scratched away for a thousand years, and nobody would have thought anything of it. But the minute you took over his claims, the case was altered. It was like putting the government stamp on a piece of bank-note paper. Nobody could doubt, after that, that the proposition was A No. 1, and instantly there arose a furor to get in on it. 'This man Griscom,' said I to myself, 'is evidently a chap I want to hook up with.' So I am here."

Jack surveyed him a trifle critically. He was rather taken by the young fellow's free and easy manner of address; still, he had no possible use for a broke faro-bank player at this stage of the game.

"I'm sorry," he said; "but I'm afraid you've taken your trip for nothing. I'm not employing anybody just now, and probably won't for several months. Besides, you don't look to me exactly like a mining man."

"I'm not," admitted Brooks cheerfully. "I'm some thing you need a good deal more just at present—an advertisement-writer."

"An advertisement-writer!" Griscom's tone was distinctly disparaging. "Oh, I see you don't understand this line of business at all, Mr. Brooks. That end of it is always looked after by the brokers or financial agents who undertake to dispose of the stock. The mine-owner has nothing to do with it."

"Exactly," assented the other, not a whit cast down. "But because a thing always has been done in a certain way is no reason that the same plan should always be followed. Why not appeal to the public direct, Mr. Griscom? You would save all brokerage charges and commissions, and narrow your expenses down to the mere cost of advertising."

"Appeal to the public direct?" It was evidently an idea that had never suggested itself to Griscom. "But"—he shrugged his shoulders—"nobody could ever sell mining stock by advertising. Why, the brokers merely advertise to get names, and then follow the thing up by correspondence to secure results."

"That is because they don't do the right

kind of advertising," rejoined Brooks scornfully. "Perhaps you recall a case, some years ago, when a big government loan went begging, and none of the financiers would touch it except at a discount. Well, the idea struck a New York newspaper to appeal to the public, and in less than twenty-four hours after issue that loan was oversubscribed many times. Now, what reason is there that the stock of this mine of yours can't be handled the same way?

"I have prepared"—he drew some sheets of paper from his pocket—"a bunch of copy which I think will do the trick. Please look it over, and tell me if there are any corrections or alterations you would like to make in it."

Impressed in spite of himself, Griscom unfolded one of the pages and glanced at the heavily underscored head-line running across the top of it.

"'The Griscom Gonozle?'" he read. "What the deuce does that mean?"

"Merely a catchy title that I invented for the enterprise. Your name, you see, known as it is to everybody at all acquainted with mines or mining, is our chief asset. It gives solidity and standing to the proposition at once, and assures every investor that he will have an absolutely square deal."

"That's so," assented old Ben, nodding his head vigorously. "You told the truth there fer once, young feller, if you never did before in all your life."

The big mine-owner blushed as awkwardly as a sixteen-year-old girl receiving her first compliment.

"Well," he yielded hesitatingly, "after what you tell me of the way folks are acting down at Red Butte, maybe there is something to it. At any rate, I don't suppose sticking the 'Griscom' in there will do any harm.

"But this other word"—he looked at the paper again—"this 'Gonozle' business? What does that mean?"

"Search me," returned Brooks blithely. "I don't know."

"You don't know? Then who does?"

"Nobody; and that's just the point, don't you see? In short, I consider the invention of that name a pure stroke of genius; for it's bound to catch the eye, and every one will be asking his neighbor the same question you've just asked me. Mark my words, it will create inside of a week more comment and more excitement than a second 'pigs in clover' puzzle.

"'Gonozle' will fire the public's interest, and get them to talking. I tell you, and 'Griscom' will bring them into camp and shuck the dollars out of their pockets. It's a double action contrivance that they simply can't get away from."

"He, he, he!" snickered old Ben. "By George, Jack, I believe the critter's right. Leastwise, if I was you, I'd give him a chance on that scheme of his'n."

Griscom, however, frowned doubtfully.

"How much would this advertising you propose cost?" he questioned.

Brooks came back Yankee-fashion with a query in return.

"How much were you planning to put into the preliminary expenses of marketing your mine—expert's reports, surveys, the engraving and printing of stock-books, and all that kind of thing?"

"Well," said Jack reflectively, "I don't know as I'd care to go in deeper than ten thousand dollars just at present. More could be spent to advantage, of course, but that was about the figure I'd settled on."

He didn't think it necessary to explain that the ten thousand he mentioned was every penny he possessed in the world.

"Well, that'll do, I suppose." Brooks looked a little disappointed. "And, if you'll take my advice, you'll hold everything else off until later, and go into advertising with your whole bundle. You couldn't make the amount fifteen thousand dollars in any way, could you, Mr. Griscom?" he urged.

"No." Jack shook his head. "Ten thousand is the limit, and although I'm willing to risk that on your scheme, it's absolutely the best that I can do."

"Hold on thar!" interrupted the stage-driver. "Hold on thar, Jack! You're fergittin' about that six thousand of mine, an' your promise to let me in. This 'Griscom Gonozle' business looks good to me, an' I believe the young feller knows what he's talkin' about; so I want to subscribe for my stock right now, an' that'll put sixteen thousand dollars in the treasury. Is that a long enough pole fer you to knock your persimmons with?" he challenged Brooks.

"Long enough for the present, and hurrah for you as a game old sport, Uncle Ben!" The advertising man beamed. "We will use thousands more later on, of course, but we can wait for that until some returns come in. This will be ample for the opening gun of our campaign."

The main point being thus settled, the three sat down more quietly to a discussion of details; and, as a result, there appeared shortly after in a carefully selected list of leading magazines and newspapers a glowing full-page announcement, setting forth the merits of "Griscom Gonozle" as the star investment proposition in the field of mining stocks.

The response was almost magical. Even the optimistic Brooks was staggered by the way the public grabbed at the offering.

Checks, drafts, money-orders, and currency rained in on the bewildered promoters in a steady stream, while by both mail and telegraph there were constant inquiries and requests for reservation of stock.

The company was capitalized at three million dollars, in shares of one dollar each, and, contrary to the usual custom with mining stock, these sold at par.

Yet, so great was the potency of Griscom's name, and so alluring the character of Brooks's advertising, that in less than six weeks there were reservations on file to the amount of 3,362,125 shares, or an oversubscription of more than $350,000.

Almost, in fact, before the stock certificates could be issued from the printers, the entire issue was sold out and "Griscom Gonozle" planted on the firm foundation of solid cash.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOUD ON THE HORIZON.

It was three months later.

In that time the remote cañon up on Jackrabbit Mountain had become transformed.

Brighton, instead of being a mere clearing with three cabins, was now a full organized camp, with scores of shacks and tents dotting the mountainside, and even more substantial buildings along the line of the main street.

The machinery at the "Griscom Gonozle" was rapidly being installed, and the monster reduction plant was in course of construction. A regular daily stage line to the place had been established.

In short, Brighton had become about as busy and lively a town as could be found in the entire gold country, and Jack Griscom, who was naturally the "big noise" of the community, had a dozen questions a minute put up to him for adjudication.

In addition to the other activities in which he was interested, he had been compelled to establish a bank; for although not very much ore had been taken out of the ground as yet, prospects were being exploited in every direction, and the public, unable to get any more of the "Gonozle," were pouring in their money to buy what they considered the next best thing.

In many of these Griscom was interested, and, as a result, had already piled up more of a fortune than the one he had so chivalrously turned over to his wife. When the mine got to going and its output was added to his wealth, he saw himself very rapidly advancing to the Rockefeller and Morgan class.

Yet the ease and security of his present position did not lead him to abate in the slightest degree his tireless energy and industry. He was busy all the time—now out at the reduction plant, overseeing the work, and pushing it to more speedy completion; now hurrying off to pass his opinion on some new prospect just opened up; and again presiding at a directors' meeting, or discussing with a party of citizens some plan for the better policing or sanitation of the little settlement.

Perhaps he did it all so as to occupy his mind and keep from brooding over things it were wiser for him not to think about.

Certainly one object for his activity, however, was the desire that everybody who had put money into the development of Brighton should reap full benefit. He felt that the public had invested largely upon the guarantee of his good faith and honesty, and he took pride in making good. He was in reality working far more for his stockholders than for himself.

Nor in all this time did the slightest suspicion ever cross his mind that his tower of seeming prosperity was built upon other than the most solid foundation. He was still as blind as when, a self-deluded dupe, he had fallen for the clever frame-up at the consumptive's cabin.

Events, however, were ripening toward his enlightenment; for it happened, just about this time, that a tall, cadaverous individual with the cold, shallow eyes of a thorough-paced crook, chanced one afternoon, while lounging in the back room of a New York saloon, to pick up a paper and strike an item which bore for him a peculiar interest.

It was one of those pieces of informa-

tion which Brooks, in order to help out his campaign of advertising, was in the habit of feeding to the press of the country as news, and stated in this instance that the new mining-camp of Brighton had broken the record the previous month for sales of stock, more than seven million dollars having been received during that period for investment.

The saloon lounger read the article slowly through a second time; then laid the paper down, leaned back in his chair, and lapsed into meditation.

Gradually, it could be seen, a resolution formed in his mind, and a slow smile of sinister meaning broke across his thin lips.

Stepping to the telephone, he called up a number of resorts similar to the one he was in, and, succeeding thus in locating the two men he wanted, bade them come to him at once.

A little later a short, stout man, with the hungry lips, and evil, treacherous eyes of a tiger, entered the hang-out, to be followed closely by a coughing consumptive.

Tiger, snake, and jackal! The vicious trio of Jackrabbit Mountain was once more assembled.

It was Graham, the fat one, who, after the high-sign had been passed to indicate that there need be no fear of listeners, first broached the business in hand.

"Well, what's up, Moffett, with this hurry-call of yours?" he demanded impatiently. "You pulled me out of the middle of a stuss-game where I was just beginning to win, curse the luck."

Dean, the "lunger," said nothing, but it was plain from the eager way he leaned forward, and the slight hectic flush on his thin cheeks, that he, too, was anxious to learn the reason of the summons.

Moffett did not answer directly.

"How much have you two got left out of the forty thousand we took from Griscom?" he asked instead.

"Not a red," hurriedly announced Graham, scenting a touch; and Dean likewise shook his head.

"They got all mine away from me in the pool-rooms," he whined. "I've been broke since last Friday."

Moffett surveyed them with cold contempt.

"Well, I'll tell the truth," he said. "I've got about five hundred in the kick, but that's getting too close to the cushion for comfort. The reason I asked was because I wanted to know just about how ready you two were to make another pull."

"Another pull!" they ejaculated in unison. Graham's brightening eye, and the covetous twitching of Dean's thin fingers was a better answer than words. "Where?" they demanded.

"Same old place," Moffett grinned. "Right out of Jack Griscom's pocket."

"Jack Griscom!" Dean, the timorous, recoiled aghast at such a proposal. "Lord, I don't want ever to come within gunshot of that man, after what we did to him!"

Graham, too, failed to view the project with enthusiasm.

"What's the joke?" he growled. "You know as well as I do that you can't trim a guy like that more than once."

"Can't you?" returned Moffett evenly. "Just listen to this, then," picking up the paper and proceeding to read the instructive article. "Don't you see that this puts Griscom completely in our power?"

"You mean," snapped Graham excitedly, "that he's got to pay us to keep still?"

"Exactly," nodded Moffett. "Why, curse him, he's turned that lemon we handed him into a whole orange-grove, and trimmed the public for millions, where we only got a measly forty thousand out of it. Would he ever have done it if we hadn't showed him how? Certainly not. Then, ain't we entitled to a fair share of the boodle? Well, I guess, yes."

"That's right," assented Graham, with a fat chuckle. "He's flimflamming the public, and if he wants to keep on at it he's got to step up to the captain's desk and settle. Oh, I see where I am going to live in clover all the rest of my life."

Dean, however, shook his head discouragingly.

"I don't know," he muttered. "From all I've ever heard of Jack Griscom, this don't sound a bit like his style of play. Maybe," he suggested, "the mine wasn't such a lemon, after all, an' Griscom has found it out. I always told you fellers, remember, that I believed there was pay ore there, if you'd only tunnel a few feet farther."

"Shucks!" scoffed Graham. "It's a flimflam all right. There ain't any doubt in my mind on that score. But there is as to whether Griscom will fall for a shake-down or not. Suppose he stands pat and tells us to go ahead with our rat-killin', what are we goin' to do then, Moffett?

You know we ain't exactly in shape to court publicity, as the newspaper writers say."

Moffett nodded.

"I've thought of that, too," he said, "an' I've figured that it's jest about an even chance that Griscom'll call our bluff and turn us down. But, even at that, there ain't no especial cause to get cold feet. Did you notice what this article says about the loads of coin goin' to Brighton? Well, it oughtn't to be no very hard job for three old guns like us to get on the inside of their little old dog-house of a bank. I, for one," he announced, rising to his feet, "ain't overlooking no such easy bet, and I start to-morrow for Nevady."

The other two hesitated a moment; then they also signified assent. The next morning saw all three embarked on a train for the West.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LADY PASSENGER.

It seems to be an accepted theory that the morals of a mining camp shall be of a rather free and easy variety; and Brighton started out to be no exception to the rule, until Griscom put his foot down good and hard.

He was no Puritan, so to speak; but he was determined that the town which he had founded, and which was always connected with him in the public mind, should not be a refuge for all the off-scourings of humanity.

"It isn't fair to Anna," he would mutter to himself. "There she is in New York, going around and meeting all sorts of nice people, and when they hear her name is Mrs. Griscom they whisper to one another and say: 'The wife, you know, of the man who runs that awful cutthroat hole of a town out in Nevada.'"

As a matter of fact, New York people, if they connected her at all with the Western mine-owner, would only have regarded the lawlessness of his town as making her a more interesting acquaintance; but Jack was not sophisticated enough to understand this. He merely saw it as a bar to Anna's social advancement.

Accordingly, he determined to clean up the camp, and having organized a band of vigilantes from among the better men of the community, served stern notice on the rough element that they would better stay away from Brighton.

Brooks, through his news bureau, promptly disseminated the information far and wide, giving so vivid a picture of what would happen to any one disobeying the rule, that thenceforth crooks, both of the roughneck and lily-fingered species, gave Brighton a wide berth, and the vigilantes found themselves, like *Othello,* with occupation gone.

One morning, though, Griscom received a mysterious telegram from Chicago announcing that three bad men were on their way toward his bailiwick with the avowed purpose of levying tribute, and might be expected to arrive there the following Thursday.

No name being signed to the message other than "A Friend," Jack was at first inclined to regard the wire as the work of some kidding acquaintance, and drop it in the waste-basket.

Happening to recall, however, that a rather important consignment of currency for the bank was due to arrive on Thursday's stage, he decided to be on the safe side, and accordingly called out the vigilantes.

There was little opportunity for a hold-up or get-away afterward on the road out from Red Butte until the trail branched off for Jackrabbit Mountain; so Griscom led his party no farther than this point, and as the most careful search on the way down had failed to reveal the presence of any lurking outlaws, he began to feel like a fool.

They had almost reached the spot where one road forked off for Belknap's and the other to Brighton, when one of the vigilantes, peering through the trees, exclaimed:

"Here comes old Ben and his ice-wagon now. Guess that ends the chance for any excitement."

"Yes," assented Griscom, "it looks as if the drinks were on me, all right, for calling you out, boys.

"Still," he added, "as long as we have come this far, I suppose we may as well ride back with the stage, and make sure that it gets through all right. We'll wait here for it, and—

"Or hold on!" he interrupted himself sharply. "What the mischief is going on down there?"

For, as he spoke, the stage had sudden-

ly halted, and they saw old Ben, dropping the ribbons, elevate his arms above his head with the automatic action of a railroad semaphore.

From one door of the stage had leaped a man, to spring forward and hold the horses' heads, while out of the other door piled two more to cover the venerable driver with their guns.

So swift was the transformation from the placid scene of a moment before that the watchers were for an instant too taken by surprise to stir.

Then, recovering himself, Griscom clapped spurs to his horse, and with a cry to his followers to come on, dashed off down the trail.

The hold-up men, at the sound of the approaching hoofs, gave over their task, and fled into the underbrush, and although the rescue party opened fire at a glimpse of them as they went up over the rocky hillside, the shots rang wild, and they made good their escape.

Seeing that pursuit was for the moment futile, Griscom called his men back, and rode on to the stage to find out what damage, if any, had been sustained.

There appeared on investigation to be none; but old Ben was swearing as vengefully as though his horses had been shot and the money-chest taken from him.

"To think," he raged, "that them low-down, ornery varmints had to turn a trick like that when I had a lady passenger aboard!"

"A lady passenger?" ejaculated Jack. "I don't see anything of her. Where is she?"

"Inside thar, in a dead faint, I guess. Skeered to death, maybe, by them scalawags."

"Oh, no, I'm not," said a composed voice behind them, and, turning quickly around, Jack saw framed by the glass of the door a pretty, piquant face crowned by a mass of golden hair.

For a moment he stared, struck by a sense of vague familiarity both in voice and features; then the young woman began to fire questions at him so fast that he had all he could do to think up the appropriate answers.

"Is the shooting all over?" she demanded. "That was what made me keep so quiet, and hide back out of sight. I was afraid I might be hit by a stray bullet. I wasn't really scared by the hold-up, only interested. I had heard of such things many times, but never dreamed that I should have the good luck to be in one, or actually become the subject for a thrilling rescue."

Then she wanted to know if the outlaws had got away unharmed, and if there was any chance for them to be overtaken, and if there was any possibility of her encountering them again on the way up to Felkins's ranch, whither she was bound, and where she had engaged board for a month in the mountains.

Also, she desired to know how much farther on it was to Brighton, and what kind of a place that was, together with a quantity of other information in regard to the topography, history, and general characteristics of the country.

Griscom answered her inquiries as well as he was able; and then, observing that old Ben was beginning to show signs of impatience, suggested that she reenter the coach and proceed to where the road branched off for Felkins's ranch, promising her that he himself would act as her escort and see her safe to her destination.

In the meantime he despatched parties of the vigilantes to scour the mountains in every direction, and form a sort of drag-net, as it were, through which it would be almost impossible for the hold-up men to make an escape.

These preparations were just about completed, when old Ben, with a stentorian "Whoa!" drew up at the trail leading off to Felkins's.

The ranchman's little thirteen-year-old daughter was waiting there with a horse and mountain buckboard for the expected visitor; but as this child could hardly be considered an adequate protector, Griscom felt that it was up to him to redeem his promise and go along.

The young woman thanked him with a smile; and then as he moved off beside them, and the little girl addressed some remark to him, glanced up with a touch of lively interest.

"Mr. Griscom!" she repeated. "Surely, you are not *the* Mr. Griscom the whole country has been hearing so much about—the proprietor of the 'Griscom Gonozle'?"

Jack, with some embarrassment, admitted that he was; then, with a bit of playful audacity quite unusual with him where women were concerned, he intimated that she had better even up the score by telling him who she was.

"Oh, I am nobody," she laughed. "Merely an insignificant Chicago schoolteacher, out here to recuperate from nervous prostration. My name, if you care to know it, is Cora Rexall."

"Strange," commented Griscom musingly. "When I first heard your voice there at the door of the stage, I would have sworn that it was my wife speaking. There is a certain resemblance, too, between you, although you are so fair and she is very dark."

"Indeed?" said the Chicago schoolteacher. "That is very interesting, especially as I had never read in any of the accounts of your career that you were a married man."

"Oh, yes, I am a Benedict, all right," said Jack. "My wife was formerly Anna Shanley, the actress."

"Oh, that explains the resemblance you spoke of," cried the girl. "I have often been told that I resembled Anna Shanley very much.

"And does Mrs. Griscom live out here with you?" she asked. "It must be quite a change for her, after all the triumphs and applause to which she has been used."

"No," said Griscom, with just a hint of stiffness in his tone. "Mrs. Griscom resides in New York. I am obliged to be out here to look after my interests."

The girl evidently saw that she had unwittingly touched on a rather sore subject and did not press it further.

"Ah, that wonderful mine!" she cried, instead. "The 'Griscom Gonozle'! Tell me, Mr. Griscom, is it really such a tremendous bonanza as has been reported?"

"More so, I believe," he replied with placid confidence.

She eyed him searchingly.

"I have a little money saved up," she went on, "which I want to invest so as to bring me in an income, as my health requires me to give up teaching. I have the chance now to buy some 'Gonozle' shares; would you advise me to do it?"

"I could not counsel you to better advantage. Take my tip for it, and buy without delay."

They had no opportunity to talk further just then; for by this time the ranch-house was reached. But hospitable Mrs. Felkins insisted that Griscom should remain to supper; so afterward he and Miss Rexall resumed their chat, and kept it up until late, seated out on the veranda in the moonlight.

Despite the conditions, there was nothing sentimental or loverlike in his attitude and nothing flirtatious in hers. He simply found her a sensible, vivacious companion who, it struck him, would be a good pal, and she evidently took him on the same footing.

She made him rehearse for her the whole story of how he had come into possession of his mine; and then, when he had finished, she said:

"Now, I am going to tell you something, Mr. Griscom. I didn't speak of it before, because I didn't know just how much you were yourself deceived. But I am perfectly satisfied now that you are a square and sincere man, and I think it is only right that I should inform you what I have learned.

"That quarrel in the cabin which induced you to buy Dean's claims"—she spoke earnestly—"was a put-up job. All three men were in it, and the object was to unload a worthless property on your hands."

"Impossible!" He started up incredulously. "What makes you say such a thing?"

"Because I know it."

"You know it?"

"Yes; the men who held up the stage-coach to-day were the same band of crooks, and I heard them chuckling among themselves over the way they had fleeced you, and laying plans to blackmail you further on the strength of the knowledge they possess.

"I cannot be mistaken," she insisted; "for their appearance tallies exactly with the description you have given me."

"Yes," he assented; "with that of Moffatt and Graham, no doubt. It would not surprise me at all to learn that they were concerned in this hold-up."

"Yes," she asserted, "and so was Dean, the consumptive. I tell you all three of them were in this affair, and all three of them were in the swindle perpetrated on you."

Griscom rose and paced up and down in agitation, the big beads of sweat popping out on his brow as he realized how easily the story she had told him might be true.

What a fool! What an abject fool he had been not to have had an expert examination made of the mine.

"I must look into this matter without

delay," he muttered. "You will forgive me if I leave somewhat unceremoniously."

Then he mounted his horse and rode like mad back to Brighton.

Most of the searching parties of vigilantes had returned by the time he reached camp, and all of them had only bad luck to report; for no trace had been found of the outlaws.

The general verdict was that they must be persons well acquainted with the region; otherwise they would never have been able so successfully to elude pursuit.

Griscom could only nod assent to this conclusion. It added another proof to the accuracy of Miss Rexall's statement.

However, there was nothing more possible to be done that night; so, after exhorting his associates to be up bright and early the next morning to resume the chase, he announced his intention of turning in.

But first he stepped over to his office in the bank building to lock up and put some papers away, and there on his desk he found a folded missive which read:

> Jack Griscom, unless you deposit $50,000 under the big stone at the head of the cañon before six o'clock to-morrow night, we are going to blow your scheme to flinders and let the public know how you are trimming them with a worthless mine. We have the goods on you, and you know it; so you had better buy our silence while you have the chance.
>
> MOFFEIT.
> GRAHAM.
> DEAN.

CHAPTER VIII.

DIRE TIDINGS.

GRISCOM stood rooted to the spot gazing down at the impudent scrawl in his hand.

For a moment the temptation assailed him strongly to yield to the demand made on him, and thus purchase freedom from exposure and ruin for a time.

It was all very fine and noble to stand out against the threats of blackmailers, of course; but who would give him any credit for having done so?

Who would believe, if the story came out now, but that he had known the truth about the mine all the time, and had simply used his name and reputation to clean up a fortune at the expense of the public?

Why, the very name he had given to the enterprise would be regarded as proof of his villainy, a sort of grim jest that he had played on trusting investors. "Gonozle"! Shorn of the stability which rested in the "Griscom," it fairly shrieked of swindling. There would no longer be any question about the meaning of the word. In future lexicons it would stand forever connected with his name as a synonym for fraud and fake.

On the other hand, if he threw this sop to the blackmailers, he would have an opportunity to look around, and possibly escape the storm of obloquy.

He was not deceived in thinking that this would be the last demand upon him. Moffett, Graham, and Dean would be after him almost immediately again; but in the meantime he could use the machinery by which he had built up the "Gonozle" to exploit some other property of actual value, and so be in a position to pay back all the losses which his folly had brought about.

So Griscom wrestled there with his soul; and strangely enough it was the memory of the girl he had met only that afternoon which brought him the victory.

He was not in love with her, not a bit. But somehow he did care what she thought of him.

"You are square and sincere," she had said to him.

Well, then, by Jove, he was going to prove to her that she had not been mistaken. Let these filthy blackmailers do their worst. He would not put himself on a level with them by giving in so much as a single inch.

If the mine was no good, he would never rest until he had paid back every cent which had been put into it. In the meantime, people might say what they pleased of him; he would at least have his own self-respect.

Nevertheless, it is hardly to be supposed that Griscom slept to any great extent that night. When he arose in the morning, there were deep circles under his eyes, his face was haggard and drawn, he looked as though he had passed through a hard spell of illness.

But one hope remained to him, and that was the very faint one that the crooks might have been mistaken in their estimate after all, and the "Gonozle" really be the choice proposition he had represented to the public.

Accordingly, the first thing after breakfast, he sent over to Belknap's for Copeland Minear, whom he had learned a day or two before was still sojourning in the wilds, while recovering from a prolonged illness brought on by his winter debauch.

Minear, for a wonder, responded to the summons, and, for a still greater wonder, responded sober.

"Copeland," said Griscom, "you are the most reliable expert in the business. I want you to give me an absolutely truthful report on this mine I have."

"What? On the 'Gonozle!'" The other lifted his eyebrows. "Why, I supposed that was all settled long ago, and proven to be a second Comstock."

"Never mind what you supposed. I want you to go through, and view it as you would an utterly unheard-of property. Then tell me what you think about it."

Together they descended the shaft, and for an hour or more, Minear poked about, investigating, measuring, and testing. Then he returned to the office, and carefully scrutinized the assayer's reports upon various samples which had been submitted.

Finally, he glanced up at Griscom with a peculiar glint in his eye.

"Do you really want me to tell you the truth about this thing?" he asked.

"I really do. Go ahead with the verdict."

"Well, to give you the cold, brutal facts, it's the rawest fake I ever saw perpetrated in my life. That tunnel which is supposed to cut across the ore-body and show it as seventy feet wide, is really run along it, and not across at all. In reality, the ore-body isn't more than ten feet through at its widest point."

"There is absolutely no hope for the enterprise, then?" Griscom's voice sounded in his own ears as though it came from a long distance away.

Minear shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," he protested palliatingly. "There is good ore down there, some of it, as your assay reports show, running as high as $2,500 to the ton. But the trouble is that the vein is a mere outcropping. Now, if you could find the mother lode, that would be a different thing."

"Comforting, aren't you?" Griscom's lip curled scornfully. "You know as well as I do just what chance I have of finding the mother lode. It may be five miles away from this outcropping, or down a thousand feet in the earth."

"Yes," admitted the expert, "it is a little like hunting for a needle in a haystack.

"But what do you care?" He stroked his chin significantly. "You've got yours, haven't you?"

Griscom turned on him like a flash.

"Copeland, do you believe that?" he demanded.

"No, I don't, Jack." The other extended his hand. "I believe you are just as badly fooled as anybody else. But nobody else will believe it; and since you've got to have the name, take my advice and have the game, too. I can see in your eye that you are figuring on making restitution and all that sort of thing. Don't do it, my boy. They'll not call you any less a swindler. In fact, they'll respect you far more if you stick your ill-gotten gains down in your pocket, and politely tell them all to go to the dickens."

And with that piece of worldly wisdom, the expert went out, and left poor Griscom to the company of his own mournful thoughts.

There he sat with his head sunk into his hands, thinking, thinking, thinking.

Swindler! Yes, that's what they would call him. Not only people of the outside world, but those of his immediate circle—old Ben, the stage-driver, Tex Barlow, and many other friends at Red Butte, whom he had coaxed into this fiasco with the idea that he was about to help and benefit them.

How could he stay and face them all? Yet how could he go away to face the curious looks and sidewise glances of strangers; for he knew that anywhere he went, the stigma of what he had done would follow him. He would be pointed out as Griscom of the "Gonozle" for the rest of his days.

And Anna, too! A sharper pang than ever smote him as he thought of the shame he had brought her.

Oh, he could not stand it! There must be some way out of it all!

Yes, the thought came to him; there was one way out—one very sure way.

Half-involuntarily, his hand reached out, and drew open the drawer of his desk in which lay a loaded revolver.

And then, just as he was about to grasp the thing, he heard a quick, light step in the outer office, and without so much as

a by-your-leave, the Chicago "school-marm" pushed her way in to where he sat.

Hurredly he pushed the drawer shut. He hoped, although he could not be sure, that she had failed to see what the drawer contained.

At any rate, if she did see, she gave no hint of it in either her expression or manner.

"I had an intuition," she said breezily, "that you'd be sitting here moping; so as I felt sort of guilty, I came around to cheer you up. Besides," she confessed naively, "I had use for you."

"Use for me?" He endeavored to speak naturally.

"Yes. You see, Mrs. Felkins tells me there is to be a platform dance this afternoon over at the Ten Spot Ranch, the other side of Belknap's, and I want you to take me to it."

"Good Heavens, child!" exclaimed Griscom. "I haven't been to a dance in twenty years. Anyway, I am in anything but the humor for such frivolities to-day."

"But I'm in the humor," she pleaded, "and unless you go, I shall have to stay at home, for I don't know any one else that I can ask to take me. And I dearly love to dance," she added plaintively as a final argument.

Of course, she had her way. The threatening sign of tears on the part of a woman is enough to bring most men to her way of thinking—especially men of Jack Griscom's type.

He yielded, and got out his motor-car to drive her over, although he could not refrain from telling her morosely, over and over, that she had picked out deuced poor company, as he was in no mood for merriment.

He was, however, even if he didn't know it, in exactly the right mood; for as Cora Rexall told him afterward, the time when people most needed enjoyment is when they are blue and down-hearted.

And, strange as it may seem, Griscom did enjoy himself that afternoon. Under the influence of his vivacious companion, he fell to dancing, and frolicking around with the light-hearted country boys and girls, and first thing he knew his troubles had slipped from his shoulders.

He was quite a different man both in looks and feelings when he loaded the girl into his motor, and started with her on the return drive.

"By Jove, you are right!" he said glowingly. "A bit of recreation is the very thing for a man when he is down on his luck. It doesn't make his troubles any less, of course; but it gives him a chance to forget them for a season, and makes him better able to face the music again, when he has to."

She laughed.

"You speak as though that were a new discovery," she said; "but you must have found it out often before when you went out for a bit of pleasuring with your wife."

"My wife and I never did any pleasuring," he answered shortly.

"What?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me you two never went out together?"

"Oh, yes," he explained, "to high-toned receptions, and teas, and musicales, and often to the opera or theater, or with a party to some swell restaurant for dinner."

"But never off on a frolic like this, just by your two selves? Never off on a little impromptu excursion? Don't tell me that the pair of you never ran off like a pair of naughty children, and went to Coney Island?"

"No," said Griscom, with a shake of the head. "We never did."

"Then," observed Miss Rexall, with decision, "it's no wonder that you're living out here in Nevada, and she away off in New York. I don't call that being married at all; it's simply being hooked up. What you people need is some great big trouble that will bring you together."

"There isn't any need to go looking for that." He laughed grimly. "As you may, perhaps, guess, the trouble is here already."

"Well, then, don't stand up to it alone. Send for your wife, and let her share it with you."

"Oh, no," protested Griscom. "I couldn't do that."

"Why not? Do you think she'd be too selfish to come?"

But Griscom declined to accede to any sentiment so disloyal.

"Oh, no," he said weakly. "It's simply that I don't think it would be fair to bother her with my difficulties. She's not to blame for them."

"Bother her with your difficulties!" repeated Miss Rexall scornfully. "Bother her with your difficulties. Why, you poor,

dumb thing of a man, don't you know that if she is any sort of a true woman, you could extend to her no prouder privilege. A husband's confidence, and the right to be with him in weal or wo is something that a wife prizes higher than any amount of money he may lavish on her, or—"

But at that moment a horseman dashed furiously up to halt the automobile.

"Hey, Jack!" he panted. "You're needed over to camp! While all the boys was out chasin' them hold-ups this afternoon, the scoundrels sneaked around through the woods into town, raided the bank, an' killed Chester Brooks!"

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

GRISCOM'S hand shot forward to the clutch almost before the words were out of his informant's mouth, and thereupon ensued an exhibition of speed which would have smashed the record in any hill-climbing contest ever held if it had been made as an official test.

The horseman who stood open-mouthed gazing after that runaway flight described it graphically afterward as reminding him more of a cat scratching over a back fence with about a dozen dogs in pursuit, than of anything else he had ever seen in his life.

Straight up the sheer mountainsides went Griscom as hard as he could drive, and then over a summit and down into the valleys in long, breath-catching coasts without the slightest abatement in speed.

Recklessly he grazed the edges of precipices, shot around corners, and took perilous short-cuts.

Chester Brooks killed, the bank raided, and the miscreants who were responsible still at large! Surely, that was reason enough for haste.

Naturally, there was no conversation between him and his companion during that wild ride. She had all her energies engaged simply in holding on; but Griscom noted with quite a little satisfaction that she did not scream or clutch wildly at his arm when they hit the rough spots. There was some comfort, he told himself, in going about with a woman who had a nerve like that.

Little did he know how affrightedly her heart was thumping against her ribs, or how she was biting her lips almost until the blood came to restrain her feminine shrieks.

Fortunately, however, the ride could not last long at such speed. They were bound either to get to their destination or go smash, and in this case they accomplished the former.

On their arrival in the camp, moreover, they discovered that the report which had reached them was happily overstated. Chester Brooks was not killed, but only knocked out and unconscious as the result of a blow over the head sustained while attempting to guard the bank against the attack of the robbers.

There could be no doubt, however, that the bank had been looted, or that the thieves had managed to get safely away to the hills with their plunder.

Jack let Miss Rexall out at his house, and, bidding her make herself at home, busied himself at once in marshaling his forces and arranging for the pursuit.

Within fifteen minutes after his return to camp he had brought order out of the chaos existing there, and with a party of eager vigilantes at his heels, was hurrying along the trail left behind by the outlaws.

This was easy enough to follow for a time, but presently it struck into a patch of barren, stony ground just back of the shaft of the "Gonozle"; and the trailers, finding no more footprints or other indications to guide them, were at fault.

While they were vainly casting around, seeking to recover the lost scent, Griscom was startled by hearing a rasping cough, proceeding as if from the air above him.

With this clue, it did not take him long to reach a solution of the puzzle.

The robbers had evidently taken refuge in the cup-shaped depression on top of a mesa some five or six hundred yards back of the shelf, and so were hidden from view.

No one would ever have thought of looking for them there, because the mesa was practically unscalable from this side; but Griscom, with Dean's cough as a clue to guide him, quickly figured out that the trio must have sought out that retreat the night before, and then, when they set out this afternoon for their foray on the bank, have let down ropes which permitted them to descend, and afterward to ascend again with their booty.

At any rate, he felt with a thrill of excitement that they were safely cornered.

Accordingly, leaving a detachment of men in front to guard against escape on that side, Griscom led the bulk of his forces around to the rear and, having placed them in position, demanded the surrender of the fugitives.

But only a defiant silence came back to him in answer. The besieged were evidently determined to stick it out; and they had a certain amount of reason in so deciding.

There in the cup-shaped hollow they were protected from the fire of their enemies, and even on that side of the mesa they had a manifest advantage of position over any one trying to get up to them.

In short, the chances were that they would be able to hold out successfully for quite a length of time, and, of course, every additional hour they could withstand the opposition lengthened by so much the likelihood of something turning up which would help them to escape.

Griscom realized this as well as they did, and therefore at once led an assault upon the stronghold; but if the robbers had been silent before, they were certainly not so now, or, rather, their guns spoke for them.

Bang! Bang! Bang! A fusillade rang out from the top of the cliff, and, in spite of themselves, the attacking party had to give back. It would have been sheer suicide to press ahead in the face of such a murderous fire.

One of the vigilantes had already received a flesh wound in the arm, and Griscom himself had a neat round hole bored through the top of his hat.

For a season after this rebuff he was nonplused what move next to make; then a stratagem occurred to him which, although almost laughable in its character, he thought might possibly prove effective.

In their skylarking about the camp from time to time, he had often noticed some of the men stalking around on stilts, and there had seemed to be a certain rivalry among them as to which could manage the tallest pair.

Calling to him, therefore, three or four of those whom he recalled as champions in this regard, he bade them get out their stilts and take up a position on the other side of the mesa.

Elevated in this fashion, they could easily command the top of the mesa and the depression in which the outlaws were hiding; but, since they themselves would make such obvious targets, he instructed them not to approach within range of the others' guns.

Their rôle was simply to create a diversion and draw the attention of the besieged, while he and a scaling party stole up to take the fortress by surprise from the rear.

The scheme worked like a charm. The trio, rendered uncertain and nervous by the feint from the front, gave all their time to watching the movements of their elongated foes, quite forgetting the danger from behind; and, consequently, Griscom and a half-dozen or so of his followers mounted the mesa without interruption.

Just as Griscom reached the top of the steep incline, however, an unfortunate incident occurred. The man directly behind him stumbled, and in the effort to save himself dropped his revolver with a clatter on the rocks.

At the sound the three outlaws whirled like a flash and, seeing Jack's head and shoulders just rising above the edge, fired simultaneously.

In their excitement two of the shots went wild; but the third, that of Dean, the consumptive, struck Griscom full in the shoulder directly above the heart.

He staggered, went down to his knees, and clutched at an outcropping piece of quartz to save himself. But the rock broke off in his hands, and, still clutching it, he rolled backward, head over heels, to the ground.

The men behind him quickly sprang forward and overpowered the outlaws; but Griscom was unable to share in their victory.

Unconscious, seemingly dying, he lay at the foot of the incline with a ghastly, bleeding wound in his chest.

CHAPTER X.

DISREGARDING THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS.

TENDERLY the vigilantes lifted their fallen leader and bore him back to the camp.

The news had preceded them, however, and when they arrived at his house they found everything prepared for his reception, with Miss Rexall ready to assume the functions of nurse.

She was very pale, but she showed no nervousness or trembling as she swiftly set about the duties required of her.

Like every true woman, she arose to the emergency when it presented itself, and no graduate of a training school could have been more dexterous or quiet in getting her patient ministered to and made as comfortable as possible.

After they had got him into bed, Griscom rallied for a moment and, opening his eyes, recognized her as she leaned above him.

"I guess they've got me," he muttered faintly. Then, as though struck by a sudden thought, he plucked at her sleeve and drew her face down close to his own.

"Send for Anna," he whispered. "I guess I can hold out until she gets here."

Then, with some remark about "sharing troubles," his voice trailed off into indistinctness, and he lapsed once more into coma.

He did not arouse again until the doctor arrived and brought him back to consciousness.

"Am I going to die, doctor?" he asked indifferently.

"From that little puncture in your tire?" the medical man scoffed. "Not by a jugful. Why, except for a bit of soreness in your muscles, you won't know by the end of the week that anything has happened to you. That bullet most obligingly skipped around so as to avoid every spot where it could have caused the slightest danger.

"I'll tell you, though, Griscom," he added more soberly, "you might have croaked from loss of blood if you hadn't received such competent 'first aid' as was given you. That nurse was certainly a dandy, and no mistake."

"Miss Rexall?" said Griscom, glancing questioningly around. "Where is she?"

"Oh, I guess she'll be here in a minute," smiled the doctor. "Listen, there is somebody at the door now. Probably it is she."

But it wasn't. It was a woman of about her general appearance, but with hair dark as a raven's wing.

Griscom struggled up on one elbow at the sight of her.

"Anna!" he exclaimed incredulously. "How in the world did you ever get here so quick?"

"Oh, I have been here all the time," she answered as she laid her hand soothingly upon his brow.

"Then you were—"

"Miss Rexall? Yes, I took that disguise in order to find out whether you really wanted me to be with you or not, and I found out; so now I warn you that you'll never be able to shake me again."

"But I don't understand." Jack still shook his head in puzzled fashion.

"How you were so easily fooled, eh? Oh, that is simple enough. I am thinner than when you saw me last, dear, and a blond wig with a few of my old stage tricks of make-up accomplished the rest.

"It is a far more wonderful thing to me that I should have happened to take the same train as those rascals when they left New York, and to have overheard their plotting and planning, so that I was able to warn you in advance of what they were up to."

"Ah! So it was you who sent me that telegram from Chicago?"

"Yes, and it was overhearing that talk on the train that decided me to come myself. I had intended only to take a run out to Chicago, but when I learned that you were facing serious trouble I knew my place was by your side.

"And—oh, Jack!" Her voice thrilled. "I can't tell you how proud I was of you when I saw you tested by the fires of temptation, and knew that you came out pure gold.

"Don't you worry another second over that fiasco of the 'Griscom Gonozle,' dear heart. We will be able to square up every obligation with the money you settled on me, and, although we shall have to start in all over again, we will have the satisfaction of knowing that the name we bear is without smirch."

"Here, here!" The doctor interrupted authoritatively. "There is too much talking going on. You turn over and go to sleep, sir," addressing his patient with mock sternness, "and don't let me hear another peep out of you before ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

As he finished, he lifted Griscom's right arm to feel his pulse; but halted at the sight of what lay in Jack's hand.

"What is this?" he exclaimed in astonishment. "Are you keeping missiles around to throw at your physician?"

"Oh," Jack explained, "that is a corner of rock I grabbed at when I was shot, and which broke off under my weight. I must have continued to hold on to it unconsciously all this time.

"I guess we'll have to keep this as a souvenir, eh, Anna?" He held up the fragment to gaze at it curiously.

Then, as his keen, prospector's eye noted

a streak in the thing, a sudden, overpowering excitement flashed into his eye.

"Send for Copeland Minear!" he cried. "Send for him at once, and get him here without delay!"

Then, shooting a defiant glance at the doctor, he ordered him out of the room.

"I want a word in private with my wife," he announced masterfully; "and I am going to have it, whether you like it or not."

"It's the mother lode, dear heart," he whispered tremulously when only Anna was near. "The mother lode! Who would ever have dreamed of finding it sticking out of the top of the mesa? Yet that is where it is. I am certain of it myself, although I have sent for Minear to verify the truth.

"And when he does verify it, Anna! When he does verify it, then 'Griscom Gonozle' will be a gilt-edged bonanza in fact."

And as Minear did verify it, that is the way things turned out.

THE END.

A Gale Triumphant

by Milton Price Harley

CAPTAIN BILL TICE sat on the end of his little wharf and swung his boots over the tide. Far off toward Barnegattown a power-boat was dancing steadily across the bay, her high bows throwing the spray up in clouds as she met the seas in the ship-channel opposite the inlet.

Captain Bill watched her intently for some time. Finally he reached around to his pocket for his plug, bit off an ample supply, in the meanwhile ejaculating thoughtfully to himself:

"That son of a gun, Ed Tilton, goin' to Baltimore for a load of Chesapeake Bay oysters, I'll bet! If I don't get a barrel or two out of him I'll—well—I'll eat my shirt, that's all!"

He chewed and spat speculatively as the power-boat chugged nearer and nearer. In the stern big Ed Tilton swung an arm in greeting, and then to Captain Bill's ears came the hoarse bellow of a song driven in against the stiff easterly wind by giant lungs:

Sailin' down Barnegat,
We trimmed her down, we trimmed her flat;
Sailin' down Barnegat,
Before we come to Hawkin.

"Voice like a goose," muttered Captain Bill appreciatively.

Ed Tilton drove his craft full speed into the quiet water in the lee of the shore, swung in a wide circle, reversed his engine, and shot her cleverly alongside the dock in a tremendous churn and swirl.

"A right handy little tub, Bill."

He stood up and shook off the spray from oilskins and sou'wester, his strong, fierce face tanned and lined and weather-beaten—a fine-looking specimen of a man, with

his steel-gray eyes and large, humorous mouth.

The short, brawny captain of the life-saving station rolled his quid, and gazed at him admiringly. Ed Tilton, captain of an oysterman, was all the reckless daredevil he looked.

"Where you bound, Ed?"

"Seaside, to get the Baltimore train. Just got a wire from the boys—they've a fine lot of oysters aboard the Dart—hundred an' twenty-five barrels—and I want 'em in Fulton Market, New York, by next Friday morning. Expect to sail from Baltimore at sunrise to-morrow—that gives me three days to make it; and then I lay her up for the rest of the season at Leary's, over to Brooklyn. She certainly needs overhauling bad."

"You ain't countin' on this northeaster that's blowin' up, Ed." Captain Bill raised his hand; and they listened to the steady roar of the heavy surf over on the beach. "I cal'late you can't make it, not by Friday, Ed—"

Ed Tilton snorted.

"Listen here, Bill Tice; it's never blowed hard enough for me yet, and I've sailed some. The way I figure with the old Dart, the harder she blows the faster she goes. Put me once around Cape Charles, and I'll drive her up the coast hell-bent-for-election, no'theaster or not!"

"Well, Ed, you might ship me down a barrel of oysters—we could certainly appreciate them here."

"I guess, with Fulton Market gone clean crazy to get 'em, they're worth money these days, Bill."

Captain Bill Tice bit off a fresh chew, and hooked his boots into the bow of the power-boat.

"I tell you what I'll do, Ed." He paused, and spat deliberately, knowing his man. "I'll bet you twenty-five dollars to a barrel of nice, fat oysters you don't have your mess in Fulton Market by Friday noon."

"You're on, Bill, you old son of a gun, and now I'm away for Seaside, or I'll miss that blame train."

"Have a bite to eat first?" But the answer was lost in the roar of the engine, and the power-boat shot from the dock and swerved away on her course up the bay, her exhaust exploding like pistol-shots.

As Captain Bill sauntered up the plank walk to Station 14 a distant wind-blown voice reached his ears from far up the bay:

Sailin' down Barnegat,
We trimmed her down, we trimmed her flat.

"He's certainly got a voice like a goose," said Captain Bill.

II.

Down the broad Chesapeake from Baltimore the seventy-foot sloop-rigged Dart made splendid weather of it under full sail, with the stiff easterly gale steady over her port quarter. She was old and shabby, this oyster-sloop, with patched mainsail and scarred, dingy hull; but give her a good stiff breeze, and a long run before her, and big Ed Tilton to slap the canvas on and crowd her into it, and she certainly could go.

Down near Old Point she began to feel the great swells from the Atlantic, broad and irresistible, sweeping in through the mouth of the Chesapeake. Ed Tilton struggled into his oilers, his eye noting the gray desolation of the eastern horizon.

"Bill Tice was right about that no'theaster, and I just hope she'll blow like Sam Hill! Toss me up my boots, Jimmy—and get us a good bite to eat before we go about."

His crew of three followed his example into boots and oilers. They were good sailors, all of them, and worked well with big Ed Tilton.

"We'll stand well over to Norfolk, so we won't have to beat out, and then it'll be make everything fast and away we go for Sandy Hook. The captain stood, big and powerful, at the wheel, holding her straight through the rollers coming abeam. "And that fat Bill Tice said I couldn't make New York by Friday noon! I'll teach him a lesson in sailin'!" He waved an arm out to windward. "We'll just eat it up out there!"

"I'll bet we roll some, light as we are," ventured Jimmy, the cook, from the hatchway.

Ed Tilton gave him a fierce stare.

"What the deuce kind of sailin' do you want, you—"

He bit off his sentence, and his face lighted up pleasantly. Quick of temper was the captain of the Dart—quick, but nothing more.

Norfolk rose up out of the waters and grew steadily on their southern horizon as they munched their good bread and meat.

"Eat hearty, boys; it's breezin' up all the time, and we'll all be busy enough later on. Take the wheel, Tyler; hold her due sou'-east — and no easin' her off!" over his shoulder as he went below.

The little Dart held her course steadily till she was well to the northeast of Norfolk. It was blowing a hard easterly gale now, and quite a sea was kicking up.

"Put her about, boys!" He whirled the wheel over as they trimmed in the heavy mainsail and jib. Around she swept in a big circle, her sails booming and cracking in the wind. Ed Tilton smiled as she heeled far over and gathered way.

"No'theast by east, as long as the wind allows. I want to work her as far to wind-'ard as I can before it shifts to the north-'ard. Anybody wants to do any sleeping, get below and do it now. I'm thinkin' nobody will want to sleep to-night."

The early March evening closed in upon them fast, as the Dart leaped swiftly on her way. Far behind, Norfolk sank like a ghost into the gray waters. The easterly gale howled through the stays, the racing seas hit the starboard quarter crushing blows and melted into deluges of water that swirled across the decks and off to leeward.

Hour after hour she went roaring on her way, the captain lashed to the wheel. She pitched wildly over unseen seas in the night; the rising gale laid her flat to leeward, with her lee-rail awash; the stinging spray flew up in sheets and drenched her down fore and aft. It was faintest dawn in the leaden east before they shortened sail.

It certainly was blowing then, dead east, coming in terrific gusts that made her bury her bows to the mast. As far as they could see the raging seas went by in smothers of foam. The sailors moved carefully about the pitching decks, all hands with a rope to something secure. Hard work it was to reef her down, wallowing in the trough of the seas.

"Hustle it, boys—we've certainly boiled along so far, and a man couldn't hardly ask more favorable wind for a fine long run to New York."

Jimmy winked at the others. "I sure do like to see her roll," but Big Ed was preoccupied, scanning the storm-clouds to windward.

And soon they were off again, making better weather of it now, and fairly scooting along. As day advanced the wind increased in violence. Two men at a time now were lashed to the wheel, with the others below. The Dart was making the record passage of her whole career.

All day long they held the terrific pace —and a wild day it was, too! The seas grew to enormous size, and the little vessel literally stood end on end up and down them. And blow? It certainly did blow! Even big Ed Tilton never saw it blow harder. He hardly took time to snatch a bit of food, or stay below for a few minutes' rest. He was in his element, happy and high-spirited, shouting orders and comments, or bawling snatches of song into the teeth of the wind.

"By gum, boys, it's fine! An' my soul, don't it blow! Wow! If Bill Tice was here he'd jump overboard!"

And so he laughed at the great storm and the wild ocean, and drove his little Dart as few had ever done before. More than once great seas threatened to engulf her bodily; but the crew lashed the cover over the hatchway, and lashed each other to wheel and rail, and on and on she ripped and tore her way.

Somewhere off the Delaware Capes she blew out her jib. It went like a cannon-shot, and Ed himself risked his life before the mast to cut it loose.

That was a terrible night on board the Dart. The wind blew with hurricane violence. Not a man dared go below, or even raise the hatch, for the volume of water swinging across her decks. In utter darkness they drove her on, now shuddering her full length, now struggling up mountainous rollers, now racing on her side before the ever-bursting gusts of wind. Her decks were under water half the time; the men at the wheel struggled waist-deep when the surges swept into her. A long, terrible night, indeed, but many miles slid away under her stern.

Thursday dawned gray and forlorn over a waste of foam, and the tired sailors slunk below for a little rest. Only big Ed Tilton kept the wheel, tireless and strong as ever.

"My soul! what a passage!" And then, "Blow, you devils, tear loose; you can't hurt the Dart! This time to-morrow we'll be in the East River—the roughest passage ever run! And the last trip of the season, too!"

On and on fled the little Dart, while the great storm roared across her. All day long it kept up with undiminished violence, and all day long they held her on her course. In late afternoon Ed Tilton took his well-earned rest.

Long he slept in his leaping bunk, and his able crew sailed close to the wind as he had ordered them. Well off the Jersey coast they were now, heeled far over, awash from bow to stern, racing along the last stretch of their journey. Fearsome, indeed, was that night on the stormy ocean —black as ink, with the deafening roar of wind and seas in their ears.

The cook scrambled aft to his companions at the wheel for company. A terrific squall burst upon them, and laid the vessel flat, the relentless seas poured over her, and she hung trembling in the balance. Then the mast went by the board with a thunderous crash, snapped off clean at the deck.

Before the stunned men at the wheel could regain their feet big Ed Tilton was up the companionway and upon them.

"Cut that stuff loose!" he bawled. "Batten down that hatch!"

They worked desperately with their knives, and Ed swung an ax ferociously at the tangled mass of stays and ropes. How they kept their footing on that lurching, slippery deck they never knew. But presently they were clear, clinging desperately together, while the Dart rolled helplessly in the seas.

"Now, boys, I'll take you out of this," he shouted through his hands. "Keep your nerve! We aren't lost yet, by a darn sight!"

He took the wheel and put her about before the wind.

"We ain't many miles from shore, an' I'm going to take you there. We'll run before this wind like a duck, an' nothin' short of shoal-water's goin' to stop us! Anybody don't want to stay on deck an' see it, get below — and shut that hatch behind you!"

And run before the wind they did, hour upon hour, with the everlasting seas breaking on them astern, and sweeping off her plunging bows. Hard it blew that night, but Big Ed Tilton still held the upper hand, and ever the Dart staggered on into the gloom. Somewhere around midnight they saw Barnegat Light clear on their port quarter. Tilton guessed it was not two miles away when they first saw it through the rain. Then they heard the doleful reverberations of the bell-buoy somewhere to the south of them. They were running directly into Barnegat shoals.

Helpless they were, mere playthings of the deep, all but Big Ed, fighting it out at the wheel. Not a light aboard in this black night of tempest—not even a rocket to signal the life-saving service—but Big Ed was making the fight of his life, and a desperate fight it was! Once she struck with a sickening shock, but the great seas swept her on her way, and Ed Tilton held her swerving bows ahead of them.

And so the Dart finished her last passage, struggling on over miles of hummocks and shoal water, completely submerged, broken and battered, but ever pointing on ahead of wind and wave. Right up on to the beach she made her way; and even then the tremendous breakers pushed her up farther and farther, wrenching the bottom out from under her, breaking in her decks, mashing her bows, till her crew leaped down at last on to solid sand, and staggered weakly up beyond the tide.

And there the life-guard from Station 14 found them, stiff and cold, but supremely happy. Big Ed sent up a whoop that whirled away for miles on the wind. And Bill Tice himself and his men came running, with lanterns and blankets.

"Bill, you old fat son of a gun, I'm certainly glad to see you!" and Ed gave him a resounding thump on the back. But Bill Tice was sad and down-hearted.

"Ed, I'm sorry you done this. I didn't mind your losin' that little bet, but I sure am sorry you lost the Dart doin' it!"

Big Ed turned away toward the twinkling lights of Station 14, and started off, shouting back over his shoulder, through the storm:

"I lost the Dart, right enough, Bill Tice, but I got my eye on another that ain't so old; an' Bill, as far as that bet goes"—his voice floated back to them now from the blackness up the beach—"you lost that bet, not me—I was only making the run to lay her up for the season—them oysters was shipped by rail last Tuesday—market couldn't wait for the Dart—"

And Captain Bill Tice lifted his lantern up so the light shone on the wet faces about him.

"Ain't he got a voice like a goose?" was all he said.

Just Like Wyoming

by Edgar Franklin

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

In the effort to give an unusual entertainment, Mrs. Peter Scrimmins, of Blythemount, a select suburb, sends out invitations for a hobo party in a freight-car, her husband being high up in the railroad line. But through some miscalculation, when but eight of the guests have arrived, ahead of the host and hostess, the door is slammed shut, the car hitched to a train, and carted off into the unknown. The next morning the eight find themselves in their dress-clothes apparently thousands of miles away from home. Savage, the grumbler of the party, insists that they must be in Bloody Hollow, Wyoming. In any case, the locomotive has gone away and left them. High cliffs are on every hand and the rusty track leads off over a trestle above a turbulent river and then into a tunnel. The only sign of habitation is a ramshackle, deserted factory of some sort, provided with cots and a considerable quantity of canned goods. In order to cook some of these, Moore, who took an engineering course at college, starts to make a fire in a furnace, which acts queerly. The others withdraw, one by one, and finally Moore follows them outside, remarking that he has come out to wait till the fire burns up. His words turn into a yell, and he dives straight under the freight-car as the factory starts to rock, and from its depths come the detonations of a million thunders.

CHAPTER VI.

WAYS AND MEANS.

THERE was, Moore observed, when at last he opened his eyes, much dust, also, and this impressed him as distinctly odd, as he crawled from beneath the car, there was still some factory.

Logically, there should have been none at all. After a crash like that, nothing but a deep hole in the ground should have remained.

Yet, with dust-clouds floating through broken windows, there stood the deserted plant!

Moore rubbed his eyes and licked his lips and smiled faintly. In an uncertain way he knew that Miss Kinsley was leaning against the car and smiling dazedly; he knew that the bridal pair were embracing each other frantically and crying aloud in chorus; and he had a notion that Savage was on his hands and knees, growling and wild-eyed and for all the world like an ugly, frightened mastiff, while Pye hopped nimbly away from him — and he stared again at the remarkable factory.

The dust was settling now. The view through the open doorway, if not instantaneous, was distinct and complete once more. And the rough country on the far side was visible fast enough, for the back of the great building seemed to have been blown cleanly out of existence!

He walked to the door and stared in. And after a full minute's inspection Mr. Moore was himself again, for he turned to them with a bland:

"Well, the boiler blew up—that's all!"

"We—we don't really need a boiler this hot weather, anyway!" Pye contributed shakily.

"And now maybe you know what your funny little clock was, madam?" Savage snarled to the bride as he struggled to his feet.

"It was the steam-gage, of course," Moore actually laughed. "I—I couldn't think, for the life of me, why that thing was there, until just before it happened. I was just going to tell you, and—" He broke off. "Well, well!"

He stared at the platform for a second and shrugged his shoulders sadly.

"And I know what that 'fix s.v.' meant, too—there was something wrong with the safety-valve. I—I might have thought of that!"

"Now, my dear young man, do not blame yourself in the very smallest degree!" Savage protested hastily. "No individual capable of attending a hobo party is expected to own brains enough to—"

"Why, where's Mr. Brayton?" Miss Kinsley cried opportunely.

For an instant there was deep, astonished silence. The little explosion seemed to have blown the handsome gentleman from the landscape altogether. Mr. Moore sent a swift eye about the sky-line; and, oddly, there was no trail of dust.

Then, within the freight-car there came a rustling and a gentle scraping; a face of marble whiteness emerged slowly into view around the edge of the doorway and wide eyes peered cautiously about as Mr. Brayton said hoarsely:

"I have been senseless!"

"Since birth!" Savage agreed heartily. "How—"

Slowly Mr. Brayton's splendid person came wholly into view. He steadied himself against the side of the door and, having cleared his throat, broke in impressively:

"Just at the instant of that terrific concussion, I seemed to be lifted from my feet. For a moment I thought the car had toppled over; and I knew no more until—" and he glanced soulfully at Miss Kinsley, who blushed—"until I heard your voice speak my name!"

"Well, it's too bad you spoke just then, but it can't be helped now," Phelps contributed. And looking away from the girl he faced Moore with a blunt: "That blast didn't injure the food supply, did it?"

"If the food supply was done up in armor-plate, probably not," Moore said, with a startled smile. "I—we'll have to see about that."

He started for the open door; then paused as Miss Kinsley cried:

"Is it safe to go in there? Something might fall."

"Um." Moore squinted. "No, I think that about everything has fallen now except this front part of the roof, anyway."

He stepped in and looked about amazedly, and in a minute or so they trailed after him, speechless and almost breathless amid the wreck.

For it was in coldest truth a wreck! Had an oriental typhoon undertaken to greet a Kansas cyclone in the center of the abandoned plant, the orderly arrangement of things could hardly have been more thoroughly disturbed.

Boards, long and short, wide and narrow, broken and whole, were everywhere; strips of torn belting hung from bent shafts overhead; rusty, broken pipes were strewn about at curious angles; an enormous vat lay on its side, and a ragged tarpaulin hung rakishly over a rafter above. Whatever the normal horse-power of the rusty boiler, it seemed to have developed the force of a ton of dynamite under Moore's tender care.

Where the thing itself had been, there were solid foundations; where the rear wall of the factory had been, there was sunshine and fresh air; where the back part of the side walls had been, there was fresh air and sunshine. A trail of smoking, smoldering embers toward the northwest indicated the path by which the fire itself had effected to leave. And—

"Why, the loft is gone!" Mrs. Phelps cried, gazing up at the warm blue sky which seemed to have replaced it.

"I noticed that," Mr. Moore murmured. "I noticed that when we first came in."

"And all the food was up there!" the bridegroom added.

"Well, it's somewhere around here still," the cheerful member stated. "You can't blow a ham out of existence, or—"

"But you can make it look as if a steam-roller had gone over it!" Savage chuckled. "Look at that one!"

He pointed to one of the great, rough boulders on the rise behind the place. And a ham, indeed, was visible there. Seemingly, it had been in the direct line of fire; at all events it had collided with a rock and, being able to travel no further, had flattened out as a rather unappetizing disk something smaller than a cartwheel.

"Well, that—that saves slicing it!" Moore gasped.

"And that must be the barrel of flour!" Mrs. Byrd wailed, waving a plump hand at a great white blotch upon the foreground.

Mr. Moore stepped toward it hurriedly. He returned rather solemnly.

"That *is* the flour!" he said. "I'm afraid we can't use that flour."

He glanced aloft and his eyes remained there as he continued:

"I suppose I may as well tell you that nearly everything else is over there, too. There's a regular cascade of peach-juice down the rock beyond that one, and there's a puddle of succotash at the bottom—and I guess the reddish pond must be tomatoes!" He sighed. "There's a lot of shredded bacon floating around in it!"

"Is our food *gone?*" Brayton cried.

"Well, it isn't actually gone," Moore said dryly. "It's there if you want to eat it, society's strong man, but—"

He shrugged his shoulders rather gloomily. He scowled frankly when, with a simultaneous sniff of genuine grief, Edith and Mrs. Phelps leaned against each other and wiped their eyes. He scowled more heavily when his ear caught the really horrible remarks which Pye and Savage were interchanging in a gruff undertone.

And then he stopped scowling. The little group seemed to be losing much of its artificial refinement and affectation, and to be getting back to nature. Like himself, they had had a hard night, and they were very, very hungry; and Moore said blithely:

"There's no use getting mad about a little thing like this. We'll find a breakfast fast enough. Look here, Phelps! Suppose you and Pye and the ladies poke around here and see what can be picked up. The rest of us will—oh, sort of look about and see if we can't discover a sandwich-tree or a coffee brook or something! Come along!"

With no very definite purpose, he steered for the remaining half of the factory again. Out there beyond the car, there might be bushes and berries and—

"I say, Moore!" Brayton said sharply.

"Eh?"

"That ladder!"

"What about it?" Moore stared at the tall, slender pathway to the roof of the place.

"It must be all of fifty feet up there and there are windows at the top. Why not climb up and—why, see if we can't spy a village or a house or something? You're quite light."

"But not in the head," Moore smiled. "If there was a village anywhere in this county, the natives would be piling in here now to find out what caused that blast!" He tried the ladder. "What's more, that thing is too shaky."

"Nonsense!"

Savage smiled sourly.

"If I had a physique that had been photographed in a leopard skin and a pair of sandals for three magazines, Brayton, I'd glide up that ladder myself!"

Mr. Brayton glanced at him in rather startled fashion. Then, with an effort, Mr. Brayton shut his teeth hard. Possibly it seemed time for his magnificent proportions to redeem themselves; at all events, with a faint cough and no comments, Mr. Brayton put hand and foot to the ladder and took to climbing.

Savage merely glanced upward and walked quickly to a safe distance. Mr. Moore stood still and watched with expressionless eyes. It was not that he hated Brayton, for his nature was incapable of such a trick; it was not that he envied Brayton's magnificence, for he felt curiously capable of thrashing that paragon of strength upon any occasion; it was only that a strange, sweet wish surged through Moore, that a wildcat or something might jump out and scare the senses out of Brayton, so that Miss Kinsley could hear him howl for help. One has to have this sort of feeling to understand it fully.

But Brayton was going on and on serenely. He was almost at the top now. Now he was looking gracefully over the edge of the platformlike loft.

And now, with a scream not unlike that of a steam siren, he had clutched the ladder at either side and was sliding downward like a flash of light!

With a second unearthly yell, he landed on his feet. His hands went to his carefully tended hair — and shot away as quickly; and Moore found himself mouthing:

"The top of his head's loose! The top of his head's come off, and—"

"Bats! Bats! Bats!" Brayton shrieked, running about frantically.

"I see him! It's all right!" Savage called, racing toward him. "Stand still! I'll attend to it!"

"They're—they're—" Brayton roared.

"Well, stand where you are! I know what to do!" the sour man shouted at him as he brought out his knife and opened the little scissors.

He gripped Mr. Brayton firmly by the neck. For an instant, then he paused un-

certainly. He released the grip and snatched up a yard or so of small timber, a stick perhaps two inches square. And he brought it down resoundingly upon the top of Brayton's surging mass of hair.

Like a log Mr. Brayton dropped to the ground; and Moore could no more than clutch a dusty upright beam and watch, as Savage swiftly seated himself astride the prostrate form and said hurriedly:

"You needn't have lain down. I could have done it while you were standing up, Brayton! That's right. Be still. I'll just cut the hair all around him—this way!" Faintly, Moore caught the snipping of the scissors. "That little tap sent him into the next world, all right, Brayton. He—ah! There he is!"

Triumphantly Mr. Savage arose and, turned to Moore, extending the while a mass of yellow hair with a gray something in the center.

"That's all you can do with a bat when he gets into your wool!" he chuckled. "I've had 'em do that to me! If you can kill 'em first, it's just that much easier. Finished this little chap, didn't I?" He nodded, as he tossed the fragment of Brayton's beauty out of sight. "Well, get up!" he said rather contemptuously. "It's all over!"

"He—he can't get up!" Moore said hoarsely. "You—finished him, too!"

Second after second Mr. Savage stared in dumb amazement at the calm, still form on the floor; then he gasped:

"Well, I knew his confounded head was soft, but I never supposed a rap with a shingle—"

"A shingle!" Moore cried as he pointed to the club. "Do you call that thing a shingle?"

"Did I—did I hit him with that, Moore?" Savage choked.

"Yes, and—"

He stopped. Slowly Mr. Brayton was sitting up. Slowly he rose to his feet, and he looked at them with a vacant smile.

"I think the ladder broke," he explained. "There are—eagles or something—up there, and—"

His hand wandered to his head, and his white fingers encountered a large spot of very short hair. And in a twinkling Brayton was himself again.

"Who did that?" he demanded.

"Well, I did," Savage confessed mildly. "There was a bat in your hair, and—"

Brayton's breath came in a long wheeze.

"Moore, have you a mirror?" he cried brokenly.

"If I had I wouldn't lend it to you now," that person smiled pleasantly. "How's the head? Busted?"

"I have no pain to speak of, if that's what you mean. But—" He turned to Savage and he choked, as the hand went over and over the thin spot. "If—if you were a younger man—" He choked again.

Then he turned and strode toward the front of the factory, groaning.

"He isn't much hurt," Savage said in relief. "His darned vanity counteracts the pain."

"Well, any man that can survive your style of anesthetics wouldn't be much hurt, in the natural order of things, for—"

Moore stopped. The commotion had brought the ladies, it seemed, for they were about them now.

"It's all right," he added soothingly. "Mr. Savage stunned Mr. Brayton with a club, and then gave him a hair-cut. That's all. There's nothing the matter."

"Is he hurt?" Edith asked quickly. "Where is he?"

"He's right outside, growing some new curls, and he isn't hurt," Moore stated.

A quivering sigh escaped Mrs. Byrd.

"I—I do hope that nothing else is going to happen," she said rather tremulously.

"There isn't much of anything left to happen," Savage began. "I—"

And his voice stopped as suddenly as if he had taken his own treatment for bats.

One second—two seconds—three seconds, Savage stared at them, his eyes now wide, now contracting suddenly, his hands gripping in an utterly dumfounding fashion and his face turning to brilliant purple. Then:

"Oh!" cried Savage strongly.

"What is it?" Moore gasped.

"Oh! *Oh!*" roared the sour man as his muscles tightened. "Ow! Wow!"

"Good gracious, Bertie! Bertie, take me—" Mrs. Phelps began.

"Don't go near him," Mr. Pye put in hurriedly. "Just—just get out of the way, all of you. He's lost his reason. It—it happens that way frequently. It's the heat or the excitement or hunger or—"

"O-o-o-h! O-o-o-h!" vociferated Mr. Savage.

And the very rafters were ringing with the echo as Pye went on:

"Come! Please! All of you ladies get

outside as quickly as possible. The poor chap's gone crazy, and—"

"You're a liar!" Savage thundered at the top of his lungs. "It's my rheumatism. My rheumatism's come on!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE WAY OUT.

For a time, they all stared mutely at Mr. Savage.

That gentleman, having given vent to sounds highly suggestive of the lion cage at feeding-time, rolled his purpled countenance into a little wrinkled ball, with an excellent line of white teeth across the center, hissed between his teeth like a steam-engine and reached cautiously for his left knee.

Despite his apparent expectation, it did not dart away. It remained there, twitching, and Mr. Savage clasped it and said:

"Gawp, confound you all! Gawp!"

"Does it always—always take you like that?" Moore found himself asking in an awed whisper.

Savage's eyes opened far enough to favor him with an evil glare.

"No!" he snarled. "Usually I giggle and titter and snivel and—bah!"

Mr. Pye, having calmed somewhat, approached.

"If there is anything I can do—" he began.

"You bet there's something you can do," Mr. Savage shouted at him. "If there's life enough left in your old bones, get out of this and find a telephone and get Blythemount, if we're within telephoning distance, and have my man charter a special train and come on here with my medicines and my liniment and my masseur and my woolen bandages and my thermal bath and my electric machine and my—"

"Well, he'd need more than one special train to bring all that," Moore put in. "Why don't you go out in the sunshine?"

"What?"

"Certainly. The ladies don't like to see you suffer. Why not go out and tell Brayton about it? He's in a good mood to offer sympathy just about now."

Slowly and threateningly Savage's lips opened; there was an ominous rumble in his deep chest, and one could positively see the words that were coming.

"Well, by the holy—" he began.

Even as Phelps clasped his bride, to steady her against the coming shock, Mrs. Byrd clapped her hands to her ears and screamed:

"Oh, Mr. Savage! Mr. Savage! *Please* go outdoors before you say it."

The sour man's teeth shut with a click, and he turned away. Thoughtfully he reconsidered the distance to the door. He took a new grip upon his leg and essayed a hop. It carried him some two feet, and brought forth a grunt.

Also, it caused several members of the party to redden and bite their lips. Another hop and another grunt, and he clasped his hands beneath the offending limb and settled down to the pace with a vicious snarl, thumping along heavily and ferociously—until at last a rapid series of bumps carried him through the doorway and into the sunshine without.

"Well?" Mr. Moore smiled. "Breakfast ready?"

"The chops are not quite done," Phelps said sadly.

"Didn't you find anything at all?"

"Six cans of pears are out there, unsmashed. Then we gathered up about three dozen pilot biscuits, and we've managed to dust them off pretty well. That's all."

"Well, what more do we want?" the cheerful person asked. "Bring 'em along."

Mr. Phelps turned and trudged away silently.

"Are we going to eat those dreadful things in here?" Mrs. Byrd asked.

"Not at all. We'll go out in the sunshine and set the table," Moore laughed. "We'll let Mr. Savage talk, and then we'll forget how things taste."

They found that gentleman camped upon a tool-box at the distant end of the platform, speaking his mind to the open air. He kept right on speaking his mind, and they did not molest him for the time. Rather they scanned the landscape for signs of Mr. Brayton.

These were altogether lacking; the handsome man, his beauty marred, seemed to have shriveled up and blown away; and, after a considerable amount of walking up and down and peering around corners, Moore approached Savage with:

"Where's Brayton?"

"In the car."

"Sulking?"

"I don't know," the sour man bit off.

"Well, let him sulk and be hanged!" Moore muttered wearily, as Mr. Phelps ap-

peared with arms loaded. "Lend me that knife of yours, Savage."

In veriest truth, gnawing emptiness was having its own effect upon Moore's supply of good humor. There was something within him which demanded more than cold pears and pilot crackers; yet he managed a smile as Phelps set his burden down.

"Many a poor wretch would drop to his knees and give up thanks for a meal like this," he observed.

And, catching Phelps's eye, he ceased. Somehow, the pretty sentiment did not seem to chime with the occasion.

Silently they settled down in a circle upon the hard, hot boards, their evening clothes making a strange picture. Silently they took the large, round crackers, hard as the pyramids and not much younger. Silently Mr. Moore tried to bite into his.

And just there a shuffling came from the car. Mr. Brayton appeared and blinked in the sunshine, while his arms clutched a bundle of something white.

"You take these cold chickens, Moore, and Phelps can take the mineral water," he said placidly enough. "I'll carry the sandwiches."

"*Food?*" Moore gasped as he shot to his feet.

"Nobody thought to look in that sideboard. I just smashed it. This must be part of last night's meal," Brayton announced as he dropped to the platform and carefully adjusted his recovered Panama hat over his strange coiffure.

Down the platform came a steady, rapid *thump-thump-thump.* They did not turn to watch Mr. Savage's approach; they were rather busy assisting Mr. Brayton just then in arranging platterless roasted chicken and plateless sandwiches upon the cloth. They gave no attention to the grudging smile upon the rheumatic gentleman's countenance, nor did they hear his genial:

"If we didn't know it was blind luck, we might think you weren't the fool you look, Brayton."

A new, beautiful kind of silence fell upon the gathering — a silence far, far removed from the cold pear and pilot-biscuit variety. If the morning had been blistering and miserable a few minutes back, it was merely pleasantly sunny now.

They tore innocent fowl to pieces with their fingers, they watched Moore open rather warmish mineral water, and they drank it from the bottles—and they ate.

And after something like half an hour, contented little sighs became audible, and Phelps said almost reverently:

"Well, the hobo supper was a success, after all."

Moore nodded beaming assent as he crossed his legs and surveyed them. It chanced that Moore had been thinking as he ate, and now he spoke:

"Everybody more comfortable?"

"Even the little birds overhead," Mrs. Phelps said poetically. "See them. I wonder what they are?"

Mr. Savage squinted upward.

"Buzzards!" he stated.

"What should buzzards be doing here?" Pye gasped.

Mr. Savage laughed shortly and stared at the platform.

"Well, they happen to be hen-hawks," Moore pursued, "but they landed here too late. We've made a clean sweep of the chicken supply. Now, we'd better get down to business."

They looked at him, and he leaned forward earnestly.

"Now, all that has happened to us is just this: this car of ours was picked up by mistake, evidently in place of some car that was at Blythemount, and was going to be sent up here. That much is plain, isn't it?"

They nodded, all save Savage, who permitted a grim, mysterious smile to reach his lips.

"Hours and hours before this—within a few minutes after we left last night, in fact — Scrimmins and the rest of the people have discovered that we were carried off. Naturally, they'll start in to look for us."

"Did you ever try to trace a missing freight-car, young man?" Savage inquired.

"I was just coming to that. I—I don't quite know how anybody would go about just this kind of a job, but—why, it might take them days to find us, I fancy."

"Or weeks," said the rheumatic man.

"At any rate, now that we've had a good square meal, the next thing is to find out where we are and how to get away in the shortest possible order," Moore went on. "Meanwhile, supposing that we're to be here for the rest of the day, we'll try to make the ladies as comfortable as possible." He turned to Brayton. "How many more meals is that car good for?"

"What? Brayton stared. "You mean meals like this?"

"Certainly."

"Why, none at all."

"Do you mean to say that we've eaten *all there was?*" Moore cried.

"Of course. That must have been part of the supper they'd sent down ahead. I know that the servants were going to bring down the bulk of it and the wine, in some unique way, and—"

"And you let us eat it all up, and never said a word," Mr. Moore demanded. "Well, never mind. The chances are we won't need another meal here, anyway. *Now,* what's the nearest way out?"

"There's nothing but another hill beyond that ridge to the south," Brayton contributed. "I saw that much from the top of the ladder before—"

He broke off, and a hand went to his head; and Moore put in:

"One thing's certain—we're in the middle of a wilderness somewhere or other—"

"Wyoming — Bloody Hollow, Wyoming. The nearest town is Dead Bone, forty-three miles east," Savage murmured.

"Nonsense. But we're in a wilderness, because that explosion hasn't brought any one, and it must have been heard for miles." Moore took to studying the westward outlook. Further, with a little wince, he took to studying the paper-like soles of his dancing-pumps. "It's a long rough walk to the top of that rise."

"All of a half-mile," Brayton said positively.

"It may not be that, but it's too far to go in this kind of shoes," Phelps contributed. "I'm getting lame already, bumping around here."

"Well, you're not going to walk away over there, Bertie," his bride announced. "You've done your share gathering up all those crackers and cans and things."

"Well, I don't believe climbing that ridge would do any particular good, anyway," Moore assented, with a final and convincing wiggle of his left foot. "The thing to do is to walk the ties and get to the nearest telephone or telegraph."

"And that must be Dead Bone," Savage rasped. "This place has been built and these tracks laid since I was here—"

Mr. Brayton returned from a brief study of the ties.

"There are splinters there about one yard long, and they've got points like swords," he reported. "Anybody that tried to travel those ties with soles like these would be crippled before he'd gone a hundred feet."

Mr. Moore, too, stood up.

"There must be one normal, respectable pair of shoes among us," he muttered. "Yours, Mr. Pye? No, they're thinner than the rest of 'em, aren't they? And yours are about the same, Phelps, eh? Um-um!"

He glanced from one pair of shining feet to the other—and as he glanced at Savage's his countenance brightened suddenly.

For Mr. Savage, disdaining pumps upon any and all occasions, wore a most excellently soled pair of high-cut patent-leather shoes, well enough calculated to take their wearer a hundred miles or so without a break.

"I guess you're the candidate," the cheerful young person announced blandly.

"The candidate for what?"

"For the big walk down the track, to Dead Bone or Live Hand, or wherever it is this track leads to."

"And seeing me unable to stand on two feet, you have the cold assurance to—"

"It's for the good of the service," Mr. Moore smiled. "It's a noble undertaking for the rescue of beautiful ladies, and all that sort of thing. It's like something or other an old-fashioned knight would tackle, Savage, when—"

"Well, you can dig up an old-fashioned knight and set him doing it," Savage cried wrathfully. "You can't kick me into undertaking it." He hopped back some three or four paces and glared. "Why, if I tried that I'd be laid up for—"

His voice broke with emotion. For a little Mr. Moore said nothing at all. Instead, his clear and steady gaze remained upon Mr. Savage's feet, wandering only for an instant to the more lightly shod pairs about. Then he seemed to come to a decision, for he nodded to Brayton and Phelps, and they followed as he walked down upon Savage.

That gentleman backed away to the best of his ability, until, out of the ladies' hearing, Moore buttonholed him.

"Mr. Savage," he said with gentle gravity, "we are willing to make allowances for your physical disability, but—"

"I don't care a hang what you're willing to make," Savage rapped out. "I—"

"*But,*" Moore persisted, "your shoes are not disabled."

"Eh?"

"And I think that they'll fit either Brayton or Phelps or myself after a fashion. We need those shoes for our walk, Mr. Sav-

age. Will you be good enough to remove them?"

"I—I—I most certainly will not," the sour man gasped.

"Is that a flat refusal?" Moore asked calmly.

"You may bet your eternal existence it is."

"Then I fear that it is going to be our painful duty to remove them for you, sir. Eh, gentlemen?"

"That seems to be the only course," Brayton agreed.

"Do you realize that I'd be in bed for a month if I went around in a pair of those things of yours for one hour?" Savage very nearly screamed.

"That is one of the unpleasant features of such a situation as this," Moore said firmly. "Will you remove them or—"

He laid a hand upon Mr. Savage's shoulder, and Savage hopped nimbly away. Some five seconds he scanned Mr. Moore's countenance with a hard, sharp eye, and found determination there. Then he sighed.

"That's a definite determination, whether I suffer or not?" he asked.

"It has to be," Moore said grimly. "The ladies—"

"Very well, then. Rather than excite the ladies, I will remove them myself!" Mr. Savage interrupted. "I'll just step inside."

He turned and hopped into the factory with slow dignity. Inside, he looked about, and they waited for him to find a seat.

Instead, Mr. Savage seemed to find what he wanted, which happened to be the club that had so nearly sent Brayton's soul to keep company with that of the bat; and Mr. Savage snatched it up and whirled about.

"Dod blast one and all of you, come in and *take* my shoes!" he cried furiously.

"What—"

"You see that?" The sour gentleman brandished his weapon. "That's going to split the skull of the man that touches my shoes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO TUNNEL EPISODES.

THEY studied Mr. Savage for many seconds. Mr. Savage meant just what he said; there was no doubt at all on that point. One powerful hand resting upon a rusty iron drum, the other was wound lovingly about the big stick, and his eyes were hard as steel.

"We could rush him—" Phelps began softly.

"No! Let him have his beastly shoes!" Brayton said hastily.

"That's right!" Moore assented. "Keep your shoes, and—"

"I intend to keep my shoes!" came from the shadows of the factory. "And what's more, that little promise holds just as good two hours or two days from now as it does at this minute, if any one happens to catch up with me!"

"You're not going to mount your trusty steed and gallop away, are you?" Mr. Moore inquired.

Mr. Savage did not reply. Very gently and very cautiously, he lowered his ailing foot to the ground and tried it. It seemed capable of doing at last part of its share, and Savage backed away swiftly, his wary eye never leaving the trio in the sunshine, his strong fingers retaining their grip firmly upon the miniature telegraph-pole.

Now he had passed from the gloaming and into the brighter region lately occupied by the boiler and the departed balance of the plant; he threaded his way among piles of wreckage—and he passed altogether beyond the factory limits and started across country.

"He's actually going, somewhere or other," Phelps muttered.

"Yes, and the sun's sort of shinier here already!" Moore said tartly. "Well?"

Mr. Brayton was about to speak. He stopped. They turned and walked slowly toward the ladies once more—and here Mr. Brayton elected to relieve his mind with:

"Mr. Savage has taken himself and his shoes somewhere else! Ha, ha! However, since some one evidently must walk those ties, and nobody else seems anxious for the job, I'll go for help myself! That settles that matter!"

"Indeed it does, my dear boy!" Moore agreed heartily, gripping his hand. "When are you going to start?"

"Immediately!" Brayton announced quietly.

"That tunnel looks awful dark!" Miss Kinsley cried.

"Well, I'm not afraid of the dark, you know!" the strong man laughed with con-

scious superiority. "Evidently I'm the only one to go. Therefore, I'm going."

"If I only had your spunk, I'd go myself," Moore said, transferring his burning feet to a pleasantly shaded and cool spot on the boards, and yawning long and deliciously behind his hand. "I—I wish I had."

Mr. Brayton, having turned up his trousers, had shaken hands with Mrs. Byrd and Mrs. Phelps. Miss Kinsley's slim fingers he retained a little longer as he addressed them:

"It may be a good many hours before you hear from me again, but don't worry. Whether the next human habitation is one mile or one hundred miles distant, I shall simply keep on until I reach it!"

"Hear! Hear!" Moore said sleepily.

"This may be a deserted section of the country or merely an abandoned plant, but somewhere or other, within twenty miles or so, I'm bound to find some one, you know—and don't fear for a moment that I shall pause before I find him!"

"That's what I call *a man!*" observed Mr. Moore.

Mr. Brayton released the hand slowly and gazed soulfully into Miss Kinsley's eyes.

"And now I'm off, and when you see something roaring and rushing out of that tunnel, you'll know that help is at hand. It won't be long. Good-by!"

His Delsarte step wafted him gracefully to the track beyond the freight-car, and he paused for a last look.

"Aren't you going to take off your hat when you leave the ladies?" Moore asked.

Mr. Brayton clutched the Panama instinctively, and drew it down a little tighter as he delivered a last, full-chested "Good-by!"

And, squaring his shoulders and allowing his hands to swing correctly at his sides, he strode away down the hot track. And all things considered, perhaps he was quite an impressive figure, for Moore watching him sighed heavily:

"Oh, I wish I was big and strong!"

"You haven't failed much since your football days, Jimmy," Phelps suggested.

Miss Kinsley was looking at the sad one with a tiny, puzzled smile. Mr. Moore stared fixedly at the air just one inch above her head.

"It isn't that — it isn't mere brute strength and powerful brains that count, Herbert," he said gravely. "It's Grecian god beauty—it's muscles that you can make into magazine pictures—it's the low, well-modulated voice and the melting eye, both cultivated at tremendous expense. I see it more and more, every day of my miserable life!"

He allowed his eye to rest for an instant upon Edith's, and that young woman reddened—and Mrs. Phelps was crying:

"Oh, see! He's crossing the trestle now! He's going into the tunnel!"

"And he ought to have a balancing-pole to get across that trestle!" Moore remarked, with reviving interest as he noted the divers wild wavings of Mr. Brayton's arms. "He's going to fall, and—pshaw! No, he isn't either," he sighed.

The bridge had been passed safely. With the black circle for a rather effective background, Mr. Brayton had paused momentarily. Hands were waved at him; he waved back—and then vanished into the darkness.

"I suppose it'll be afternoon or evening before we see anything more of him," Pye observed thoughtfully.

"He will keep on until he's able to send us help and get us all out of here!" Miss Kinsley said, with a touch of defiance.

"Or until—" Moore began under his breath. And he stopped and pricked up his ears suddenly.

"Was that Brayton's voice yelling for help?" he cried amazedly.

"Help! Oh, my God! Help!" came frantically and distinctly.

"Oh, look! Look! Look! What is it?" Mrs. Byrd screamed.

Twelve eyes flashed toward the mouth of the tunnel.

For an instant, only the round black spot at the base of the hill was to be seen. Then, with a really odd effect, a little cloud of dust puffed out from the opening —and something like one one-hundredth of one second later Mr. Brayton appeared behind the cloud.

Also, he was traveling much as if he had encountered a stray ten-inch shell coming through the black tunnel in the opposite direction. He did not pause to consider the trestle and the distance between the ties and the rocky stream below; he merely hit the first tie and leaped to the fourth; for the tiniest fraction of time he paused there on his toes, and then he was shooting to the seventh tie.

Striking that, he bounded to the grass-grown track; and there he bent low, hat jammed down and elbows close to his sides, and tore on. The handsome man, apparently, had left something behind and was hurrying back for it, yelling wildly as he sped.

"Well, we see something rushing and roaring out of the tunnel, but I'm hanged if I believe he's found help in this short time!" Moore gasped.

"He's bringing news of some sort!" Miss Kinsley cried excitedly.

"I may seem too familiar with the symptoms, Edith," the cheerful member remarked dryly, "but I'll bet the whole vast fortune I never expect to earn, that that gentleman is in a condition inelegantly known as 'scared stiff!'"

"Can we—can we stop him as he goes by?" Pye asked breathlessly.

"That's all right. He's going to hit the freight-car — that'll stop him!" Moore said, with pleasant interest, as he watched Brayton's kangaroo bounds through the hot air. "It might be just as well for us to steady the car, but—ah!"

The impressive person had veered; he had leaped to the platform now. And whether he slipped or did it purposely, he lengthened suddenly and dived toward them. He landed heavily; he slid amazingly—and came to a full stop at Moore's feet as that gentleman gasped:

"Welcome home!"

Mr. Brayton did not reply. Possibly he was waiting for the ladies, who rushed to his side and crouched and cried:

"Oh, he's hurt!"

At all events, Mr. Brayton opened his eyes just then and favored them with a week, deprecating smile, and while murmuring breathlessly:

"I—I think not."

"Oh, yes, you are!" Moore protested, as he placed his hands under Mr. Brayton's armpits, and, with a curious lack of effort, reared the big bulk to a standing position. "You've had a terribly thrilling adventure, and you're going to give us a nice dramatic recital about it, while we sit around and gaze admiringly. Go on!"

Mr. Brayton's gently opening lips closed suddenly, and he turned a frank stare upon Moore that expressed something very like plain, old-fashioned rage.

"That tunnel is full of bears!" he announced laconically.

"Chock-a-block, so you can't push by?"

"There are at least half a dozen of them!"

"What — what sort of bears?" Pye asked.

"I think they're grizzlies!" said Brayton. "It's pretty dark in there; you can't see the light from this end, and I couldn't make them out very plainly; but they're grizzlies, fast enough."

"And they came right up and barked at you?" Moore smiled.

"They attacked me, if that's what you mean!" Brayton said shortly. "I fancied at first that there was only one and I killed him!"

"How?"

"By choking him! I had just thrown him away from me when the rest of them came swarming!"

"The other five?" Mr. Moore inquired blandly.

"An exact count was impossible!" Mr. Brayton's voice rose somewhat. "I didn't wait to feel their noses. I don't consider myself capable of wiping out the wild animal population of any given section, without weapons, you know."

"Why, most certainly not!" Mr. Moore agreed heartily, picking splinters from the other's rather weary-looking evening coat. "The last thing which one would expect or demand of you—"

"And let me say just one thing more!" Brayton interrupted, rather nastily. "If your limit of cheap sarcasm hasn't been reached now, or if you have any genuine doubts on the subject which you feel compelled to air, you might first step into that tunnel and investigate on your own account!" He stiffened. "I dislike extremely to address you in this vein with the ladies present."

"Oh, I—I guess the ladies will forgive you," the cheerful one said thoughtfully. "We're all sort of getting back to nature to-day. Here! Don't fold your arms and tap with one foot like that!" escaped Moore irritably.

Mr. Brayton turned away coldly. The ladies, as seemed to be the habit of ladies when Brayton was about, clustered around him sympathetically. Mr. Pye, hands behind his back, was studying Brayton pensively. Phelps, hands in his pockets, was doing likewise; and after half a minute's consideration he said:

"Brayton, since we're getting back to

nature, let's drop superfluous politeness, and so on, and—er—on the dead level, *did* you see a bear or did you kick something soft, or—what?"

"The tunnel's right there, Phelps!" Brayton retorted.

"Well, Bertie isn't going into the tunnel!" the bride cried swiftly. "He's done his share this morning, gathering all those—"

"It won't be necessary for Bertie to go in there!" Moore said suddenly. "I'm going!"

Mr. Brayton turned and favored him with a very curious smile, in which satisfaction seemed to have a considerable part.

"*Really!*"

"Yes, very much really!" Moore said tartly.

"Good-by, old man," Mr. Brayton murmured, and he held out his hand. "You—you'll feel differently about it all, a few minutes from now."

"Perhaps—and perhaps not!" Moore sent a last rueful, impatient glance toward his thin-shod feet, and bowed deeply to the gathering. "This is your last chance to order perfectly fresh, new stock in the way of bearskin rugs, caps, motor-coats, and so on! Does any one with a private menagerie wish to speak in advance for a cute little grizzly? No? All right! *I'll* be back when I've found civilization and arranged for a train! Good-by!"

He turned and stepped lightly to the track and walked quickly away; and Miss Kinsley murmured:

"Are there really — really bears in there?"

"Positively, I don't know whether I finished the last one or not!" Brayton confessed frankly. "I was rather excited, you know, and I suppose I thrashed around pretty violently, but—wait and see what happens!"

Mr. Moore was whistling. Furthermore, he was nearing the trestle.

"Is he in real danger?" Pye asked anxiously.

"Wait!" said the handsome man.

"But if a live bear—" Phelps began.

Mr. Brayton folded his arms and smiled darkly.

"Just wait! That's all!" he said quietly.

The latest adventurer was crossing the trestle now, light-footed and gay. He reached the other side as if the best part of his life had been spent crossing aerial stretches of railroad track. He paused and turned back, for a last profound bow; and then he, too, vanished in the blackness of the tunnel.

Ten seconds passed—thirty of them—a full minute was behind now, and no one had spoken.

A long, shaky breath went up, and Mr. Brayton's face clouded slightly; something in the bear combination seemed to have slipped a cog.

A minute and a half had gone, then, and no form had yet appeared nor had a sound issued from the tunnel. A slow, rather hoarse, slightly derisive laugh began to sound in Mr. Phelps's locality.

And Brayton said:

"Aha! Aha! Aha-ha-ha-ha!"

For, like a projectile, Mr. Moore had shot from the depths of the dark tube.

There was no scream, no dust-cloud this time. Mr. Moore merely touched the rusty steel rail and poised there, somewhat like a humming-bird. Then Mr. Moore's hands went above his head and he dived headlong into the foaming stream below.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLOCKED PATH.

With marked resemblance to the familiar stage effect, a thick cloud of spray swirled into the air below the trestle and dropped back into the stream.

From the freight-platform of the factory a great gasp arose from all save Mr. Brayton. That gentleman, arms still folded, merely smiled complacently as he remarked:

"He found his civilization rather quickly, did he not?"

"But he's drowning now!" Mrs. Byrd cried. "He—"

"He swims like a fish!" Miss Kinsley said, almost unconsciously.

"And there he comes!" added Pye.

He pointed to the steep bank of the stream, some two hundred feet below the trestle. There was a rocky slope just at that point, and over the edge of the rock Mr. Moore's head was rising, his drenched hair shining brightly in the sun.

His body followed hurriedly; and having seated himself on the top for a moment and pushed back his hair and shaken his head, Moore dropped down the near side

and set forth across the stony, clay-like stretch.

Wet or dry, it was by no means easy going; at every other step they saw him wince as the thin shoes struck a sharp stone; and then Moore had attained the comparative comfort of the railway ties and was advancing with a series of long, sucking sounds.

He grinned damply as he mounted the platform, and halted as they cried:

"Did you see them, too?"

"Not perfectly enough to make a full report," replied Mr. Moore. "That's why I came back for matches."

"And they even scared you into jumping into the river!" Brayton laughed loudly.

Mr. Moore stared at him with mild pity.

"Did you think I did that because I was excited?" he inquired.

"Certainly not! We—"

"Because that wasn't it at all, you know. I jumped in there to throw them off the scent."

He permitted a few ounces of water to flow from his left ear; then faced Brayton with a frank and manly air, and continued:

"Well, I'll have to apologize to you!"

Brayton inclined his head gracefully.

"And you underestimated them, too, Brayton—I suppose that's due to your confounded modesty. There aren't six of 'em in there—there are nearer fifty!"

"What!"

"I am almost positive of it! Of course, that's only a rough guess, made from feeling over the heads as they jumped at me; but it isn't far from the truth. They're mostly grizzlies and polar bears and cinnamon bears and sun bears and—"

But they wound you up and set you going pretty nicely," Brayton observed pointedly.

"They did that," Moore agreed. "Six or eight, or even a dozen, I wouldn't mind, but—"

"But, as a matter of fact," Pye put in impatiently, "is this some fool joke you two have devised to pass the time or—"

Moore had been staring back toward the tunnel very thoughtfully. Now he held up a hand for silence, and the forefinger of the hand pointed meaningly toward the dark opening.

Silently, they stared. And more than one breath was caught hurriedly, for from the tunnel a considerable ball of dark fur was emerging just then! Moreover, the ball owned a head that was unquestionably the property of a bear.

He seemed to have no concern whatever with the factory. He waddled to the edge of the trestle and, bending forward, looked attentively at the stream below. He put his head, indeed, almost between the ties as he stared; and having remained thus for half a minute, he raised it, shook it slowly, then backed into the darkness once more.

"See that!" Moore whispered. "I threw him off the scent, fast enough."

"And they're really in there!" Phelps said hoarsely.

"That was one of them. That was the smallest one, the littlest fellow of the whole flock."

"But that wasn't a grizzly, was it?" Edith asked.

"It was a—a sort of undersized one," Mr. Moore stated. "I believe they always hunch up like that when they're in railroad tunnels."

"And now he's gone back with the rest of them, and there's no way of getting out!" Mrs. Phelps cried.

For a short time Moore stared at the hot platform.

"Well—never mind. Things could be worse. Just think of all the horrors Savage could have thought up about that tunnel if he'd stayed around!"

"So the only thing to do now is to strike off across country," Pye said rather fearfully.

For once, at least, Moore became entirely serious.

"It can't be done," he said. "Not in such shoes as these, at any rate. I don't believe there's one of us capable of doing two miles over country like this on such a day, under the circumstances. And it's a whole lot more than two miles to the nearest house."

The cheerful member looked them over rather dubiously.

"If bears live even in railroad tunnels around here, the woods are probably alive with 'em, too," he continued; "and in addition to that, we're all tired out. Nothing can happen to us if we stay right where we are. Scrimmins may turn up with a relief expedition any minute—it's unlikely, but he might. And Savage may walk far enough to get help, if he's mad enough." He shook the little streams of water from his eyes. "Phelps, why don't you and Pye gather what blankets are to be found and

rig up some sort of couches for the ladies? There are plenty of cool nooks in there. As for me, I'm going out back and hang myself on the clothes-line."

He smiled rather wearily, and departed in search of a spot sufficiently hot and sufficiently remote to fit the task of wringing out soaking evening clothes and baking them dry in the summer sun. Phelps and Pye, silently adopting the suggestion, strolled away through the wreckage.

And the breathless August day set about the somnolent job of merely wearing on.

There were, as Moore had said, an abundance of cool corners in the half-demolished place; and, given a few blankets, the most fastidious bones needed only sufficient weariness to induce sweet slumber. In the course of an hour or so, deep stillness had settled upon the factory.

The ladies had become invisible. Mr. Pye, with a blanket spread over a pile of musty tarpaulins and a coil of dusty rope for a pillow, smiled toothfully, and emitted a convincing, whistling rasp at five-second intervals. Brayton, having started his slumbering tour with the graceful pose of a sleeping Cupid, collapsed gradually—until at last, his handsome countenance having drifted into a little pile of soft coal beside the long-deserted forge, he bore striking resemblance to the Horrid Example, fallen by the wayside.

Mr. Phelps, as self-appointed sentinel, had acquired a club rather larger than the recent Mr. Savage's shoe-preserver and stationed himself on a corner of the platform upon a rickety chair; now, head on his breast and arms limp at his sides, he looked like the victim of a foul murder, and two little chipmunks played tag up and down the club at his feet.

Mr. Moore awoke with a start and blinked inquiringly from his station behind the large, secluded rock.

As a matter of fact, he had not meant to sleep. He had intended merely to doze while his things were drying; but he appeared to have dropped off, and he now blinked sleepily at his garments. It was lucky he had picked up that coat before quitting the scene of his efforts at boiler-firing, for it seemed to have turned cooler now.

He reached forward and felt of the garments. Like those on the lower half of him, they were thoroughly, even painfully, dry now; taken together, they constituted about the most forlorn set of formal togs he had ever studied. But he poked himself into them and stretched enjoyably—and quite abruptly the difference in things in general defined itself.

Somebody had removed the billion-candle-power sunshine! Either that, or it was near evening. Moore stared about in some astonishment. Undoubtedly, if that westward ridge had not shifted position, it was late afternoon at least—and a thunderstorm was threatening, too!

And things were perfectly calm, which meant that nothing in the shape of rescue had arrived to rupture the sublime peace of the isolated hollow. Moore whistled softly as he started for the distant voices; it seemed not impossible that they might be in for another night without home comforts.

Save for Mr. Pye, he found the party distinctly refreshed and distinctly cleaner. Some one, apparently, had carried water up from the stream; for there was a pail or two about, and the stains of stress had been scrubbed even from Brayton, whose maltreated locks floated frankly to the breezes now.

"Pye dreaming still?" he queried.

"Mr. Pye wandered away a little while ago," Phelps replied. "Have you had a pleasant afternoon?"

"Lovely, thank you. Restfully little place, isn't it, to spend the rest of our lives in?"

"And for all you men seem to be doing in the way of getting us out—" Mrs. Byrd began rather energetically, then repented.

Moore regarded her solemnly.

"Madam," he said, "in such a time as this, the right man—the born leader—the fellow with the real big idea—always comes to the surface unexpectedly. Brayton thought he was the man; then I thought I was the man; now—"

He stopped and stared toward the end of the platform, down which, hailing apparently from nowhere in particular, Mr. Pye was loping swiftly, stiffly, and enthusiastically, with lips apart to call:

"I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!"

"What is it?" Moore queried.

"The way out of here! The way to civilization!"

"What?"

"Yes! I—" Mr. Pye stopped and smiled oddly. "Wait a minute!"

And, even more speedily than he had arrived, he darted into the factory.

Speechless, they stared after him. He flitted diagonally across the shadowy reaches. He vanished around the corner of a partition—and Mr. Moore tapped his forehead sadly.

"The heat," he said significantly.

"What on earth was he talking about?" Phelps cried.

"Nothing at all," Moore smiled compassionately. "He's just conjured up a notion of some sort. He'll come running down the platform again in a minute and say the same things over again."

"He's starting machinery somewhere! I heard something clanking!"

"He isn't starting any machinery without a boiler, and I don't think I left a square yard of that boiler, but—" Moore listened with wrinkling brows.

Because, boiler or not, Mr. Pye had set something into motion. There was a series of little clanks and rattles, and they seemed to be going away; then they grew markedly thinner, as if they had been taken into the open air — and some three hundred feet away, apparently traveling a spur of track buried in vegetation and running out of the end of the factory, Mr. Pye appeared. He was approaching the single line of rails that had landed them there, and he was pumping violently at a hand-car.

A final rattling jounce, and the immaculate bachelor had attained the track itself; and he leaped to the ground and approached them, mopping his brow.

"And that's the way out!" he announced triumphantly.

"But we can't all ride on that!" Miss Kinsley objected.

"Only one person can go on it—the handle's broken off on one side. I found it all covered up, on some rails that come through a door into the place." Mr. Pye mopped on and listened complacently to the rumble of thunder. "I'm—I'm not strong enough to undertake the job myself, but one of you younger fellows—" He puffed to a standstill.

"Yes, Brayton!" Moore cried enthusiastically. "He's awfully, awfully strong!"

That gentleman, having caught his breath, said nothing. Mr. Pye, his dripping handkerchief poised, beamed happily on them, and demanded:

"Which of you three is going?"

"Well, you see," Mr. Moore explained mildly, "any one of the three that goes will have to go through that tunnel, and—"

Phelps glanced at his wife thoughtfully; something seemed to satisfy him.

"*I'll* go!" he said.

Mr. Brayton seized him by one hand, Mr. Moore by the other. Mrs. Phelps was looking toward the tunnel; she had not heard — and the bridegroom's countenance grew rather startled as Moore cried:

"I knew there was one real man here!"

"Yes! I'll go, and take whatever risks there are," Phelps announced, quite loudly.

His wife was still absorbed in contemplation of the tunnel; and little beads of perspiration sprang out upon Mr. Phelps countenance, for Brayton was saying:

"Well, go, and Heaven bless you, old man! Keep a stiff upper lip, and get off before Mrs. Phelps has time to realize the danger. Hurry up!"

Mr. Phelps swallowed hard.

"I said I'd go through that tunnel, and I will go through it—even if I'm eaten alive!" he shouted.

And here the bride turned swiftly.

"You will do nothing of the sort!" she cried wildly. "Bertie, I won't let you! You mustn't! No, I won't—"

Quite unconsciously, Mr. Phelps sighed out his huge relief as he dashed the perspiration from his forehead.

"There, there, my dear," he said soothingly. "I—I will not go unless you wish it." He turned to the others with a weak smile. "You see how it is, gentlemen! My wife must not be excited; I can't allow that!"

"Well, if she waits for you to—" Moore began disgustedly.

"Why not draw lots to see who'll go?" Edith suggested.

"I am unalterably opposed to anything like gambling!" Mr. Moore cried hurriedly.

"Well, some one has to go, now that I've found the means of going, you know," Pye suggested. "If my muscles were better, I'd undertake the job cheerfully."

"And if you draw lots, that will be fair," Miss Kinsley added positively.

She was looking meaningly at Brayton. Brayton, as was not unusual, was looking at her. And it is just possible that he misunderstood the look altogether, for he said heartily:

"That's what we'll have to do, gentleman! There's no other way of settling the matter. You know, there isn't any real risk, anyway, or—"

"Then, why don't you start out without all the bother of drawing?" Phelps cut in.

"Because I feel that you two ought to have an equal chance at the glory," smiled Mr. Brayton, as he produced a card from his pocket.

He tore it into three strips, and one of the strips he tore in two, tossing away the other half. Smiling, he shook the pieces mysteriously in his closed hand; and having done so, he lifted Miss Kinsley's hand and pressed them into it.

"Now, Miss Kinsley will turn her back and arrange the pieces so that they appear of equal length," he said genially. "The fellow that draws the short piece works the hand-car to the nearest telegraph. Satisfactory?"

Mr. Moore nodded silently. Mr. Phelps looked hopefully at his wife. That pretty young woman, after a thoughtful glance at the young woman whose back was turned, nodded doubtful assent to the proposition, and Phelps's eyes widened suddenly.

And Miss Kinsley was facing them, smiling, and with three ends of white card sticking side by side from her slim fingers. She approached and held out the closed hand to Moore. That young man, swallowing, selected the middle piece—and an instant later shouted:

"Saved! Saved! It's a long one!" He grinned fiendishly at the remaining pair. "Even money between you two," he stated. "Go on; I can get some fun out of watching it now!"

With a stifled groan, Phelps stepped forward and picked a slip; and he, too, burst into a delighted:

"Hey! Mine's a long one, too!"

Miss Kinsley's hand opened. The short piece was in her pink palm, and she extended it to Brayton.

"I *knew* that you would be the one to go," she said softly and with a deep significance that suggested deliberate manipulation in the recent drawing.

Brayton had grown distinctly paler. His lips, too, seemed dry, for he had to lick them several times before he managed a dismally croaked:

"I—um—yes—thank you!"

Miss Kinsley turned away. Mr. Moore, finding that his smile threatened to involve his ears, turned away also—and startling quiet settled upon the scene.

It had endured a good two minutes when Pye said sharply:

"You're going to start *this afternoon*, aren't you, Brayton?"

"I—what? Yes! Of course!" The strong man shook himself together suddenly, and looked them over with a drawn, martyred smile. "I'm—going to start right away, you know!"

He stared at the hand-car and he stared at the mouth of the tunnel, and he shuddered visibly. And then Moore, his expression grave and concerned, was at his side, and had laid a kindly hand upon his arm.

"What is it, old chap?" he asked soberly. "Are you really so badly frightened? Because if you are, I'll go myself. It's not just sporting, you know, but I'd as soon as not if you feel—"

"You dry up! I'll attend to you later!" Mr. Brayton rasped into his face. And with a last smile he squared his shoulders.

"Well, good-by, all!" he cried with attempted good cheer. "I won't be long getting help on that thing, thanks to Pye."

He waved an airy hand, and stepped quickly to the track and along it. It seemed, after all, to be a small matter to Mr. Brayton; for a peculiar smile, and a smile that puzzled Moore considerably, came to his lips suddenly as he stood beside the little car.

Thunder rumbled again as he stepped to the little platform. Brayton heeded it not at all. He bent over the machine with a polite interest and examined it carefully. He tucked up his sleeves and flexed his biceps tentatively. He gripped the handle and bore down mightily—and the car went forward with a speed that almost sent him from his feet.

"Oh!" said Miss Kinsley.

"Wonderful development! Wonderful muscular development!" Mr. Moore commented in humble admiration.

"Why, the thing goes a hundred feet every time he pushes the handle!" Mr. Pye exclaimed. "He'll make thirty miles an hour on that!"

"Well, he won't, at that rate!" Moore murmured. "What's he trying to stop for?"

"He *is* trying to stop!" Phelps agreed.

And that, indeed, seemed to be Mr. Brayton's idea. There was a slight grade toward the tunnel, and the hand-car had gained considerable impetus. That, it might have seemed, was quite satisfactory

and to be desired; yet, just now, all Brayton's cultivated muscle was bent to the task of slowing down.

And just out upon the trestle, about twenty feet short of the black opening, the hand-car stopped short.

Its passenger did not look back. Instead, he bent low over the simple machinery, and stared at it and felt of it. He bent lower still. Something appeared to puzzle him, for he stepped off and, balancing upon a tie, looked beneath.

The trouble, evidently, was there. Mr. Brayton straightened up and scratched his head thoughtfully and slowly, indicating deep meditation. Finally he shook his head, as if he had come to a decision, and then laid hands upon the edge of the platform firmly.

Then he began to lift the hand-car bodily.

Legs spread apart and well braced, the effort was plainly taking all of his strength, but he tugged on. The car rose slowly, sideways. Mr. Brayton essayed to look beneath it again and, apparently, failed to see what he desired.

For he straightened up and lifted afresh —until, with a mighty tug, the hand-car turned squarely on its side and, with a crash, toppled over into the rushing torrent below!

(To be continued.)

TEN miles from Albuquerque the land rises up, as by acclamation. They call it now Mount Taylor. In those days they called it the Mount of the Swimming Plain. Around the base of it was ordinarily a good day's journey, from sunup to sunup.

For many generations the races of the Southwest were annually run around the base of Mount Taylor. These were determined twice a year; the horse-races in the fall, the foot-races in the spring.

A man runs better in the spring, for the sap then oints his muscles. As for a horse, he runs well at any time, unless fed too much. Naturally it was the spring that brought the greatest crowds to the base of the Mount of the Swimming Plain, alias Taylor. The Navajos, being nearest, usually arrived first on the ground; then came the Nez Percés, then the Piutes, then the Yaquis, and, finally, the Mokis.

On its own ground, each tribe ran off the elimination contests, so that at the mountain a champion stood forth for each, one man for a tribe. Thus tribes, not single

runners, contested in the finals. Tribe glory, not personal esteem, was at stake.

As generation succeeded generation, the glory passed from tribe to tribe, rather impartially. Perhaps the Mokis were, in strict analysis, better runners, as a whole, than any of the others, but they had to travel so far—up from what is now Mexico—that their champion did not win oftener than was good for tribal self-esteem.

Circumscribing Mount Taylor, as I said before, was ordinarily a sunup to sunup proposition. In the fall the horses did it usually while daylight lasted. They would start out before the disk of the world's benefactor appeared on the horizon and nearly always crossed the line before twilight had dwindled into dark.

In the spring it was usually midnight before the winner dashed into the presence of the assembled tribes, ragged and gaunt-visaged under torchlight.

There came a decade when the Mokis lost year after year, with depressing regularity. By turns the Navajos, the Nez Percés, and then the Piutes produced champions to distance the best from Mokiland, although Indian connoisseurs were free to admit that, under even conditions, the Mokis were perhaps the best runners in the Southwest.

At last, after the tenth successive defeat, the Moki chiefs assembled in solemn council. The situation was desperate. Tribal honor was at stake. Something must be done.

They determined not to migrate down into Mexico that year. They would stay right on the ground, acclimate themselves and produce a champion who would show his heels the following spring to all competitors. Legend has it that such is the original cause of the Mokis settling north of what is now the border of Mexico.

The next spring showed the wisdom of this modern method of training for the great event. The Moki champion came in five hours ahead of his nearest competitor, a panting Navajo. More than that—astounding! miraculous!—the last gray shadow of twilight was still on the ground as he hurled himself, sweaty and beady-eyed, across the line. *He had run as well as a horse!* Never before in the history of the Mount of the Swimming Plain had such a feat been accomplished.

The next year the Moki did the same thing, and a little better. There were lavender and lilac and mauve still in the sky as he came across, winner. The third year gold and crimson stretched the horizon as he captured the prize. The fourth year the disk of the great golden sun itself was still visible as he panted in, victorious.

No horse had ever done so well. The Moki was the acknowledged king of all runners, past and present. Legend presented no memory to vie with this glorious actuality. The god-man, the perfect athlete, a Moki predestined for the happy hunting grounds had arrived!

And year by year the prestige of the Navajos fell, for the Mokis had encamped on their territory. The Piutes and the Nez Percés could withdraw to their own countries and console themselves, from spring to spring, but not the Navajos. They were compelled to share their ancient lands with the victorious Mokis. They drifted from baffled rage to sullen despair, from despair to meditated revenge, from meditation to determination.

Now the Navajo chiefs assembled in solemn council. Long they sat, ten days and ten nights. The morning of the eleventh day a slim warrior broke into the council chamber, without ceremony. And what he had to say in hurried gutturals decided the council.

Immediately a Navajo messenger departed for the head village of the Mokis. He delivered a challenge, and it was this: the coming spring the Navajos would send forth a champion to race the Moki champion around the base of the mountain. And a single heat should decide the fate of both tribes. It was no longer possible for both tribes to share equally the same territory. However, both should remain. The tribe of the winner should be the masters, and forever after the tribe of the loser should be the slaves of the other tribe.

With crafty glee the Mokis accepted the challenge.

From then on, for weeks and months, the Moki champion was tended like a crown prince on the eve of the monarch's decease. Casabas of that primitive age were ripened for his special delectation; hot-housed, as it were, down there by the Rio Grande. His muscles were kneaded by the supplest grand-dams of the tribe; his limbs stretched in contest by the fleetest runners. And to the joy of every Moki it was found that he was running more easily and faster than ever before.

The great day at last arrived. The two tribes assembled, and at dawn the two champions stepped forth, even before the sun had thrown a first gray light on the summit of the mountain.

As the starting whip cracked the two sped forth, fleeter than arrows, swifter than tomahawks. More ominous than the silence of a war council lay the deadly expectancy on both tribes. That day one of them would pass into slavery.

As the sun climbed high into the heavens and the forenoon advanced, the slim warrior who had dashed into the Navajo council six months before was observed looking over the Mokis with the insolent glance of a master appraising his slaves.

"Who is he?" asked a Moki chief of a Navajo chief.

"The father of our runner," said the Navajo.

Then no longer could the Navajo wait. He told the Moki how his champion had been prepared. Years before a boy had wandered from the tribe and had been lost. Some braves, seeing a herd of antelope, had started forth to hunt, but had perceived a man among them and had refrained from loosing an arrow toward him. Instead, a number of them had surrounded the herd, and had succeeded in roping the man. They had brought him to the camp, a captive.

He could not speak. He looked at them with wild, dumb, yet human eyes. They were kind to him. They fed him. Bit by bit, as with the newest infant, they had taught him to talk.

At first the father recognized the long-lost son, and at length the son recognized the father.

He could use no bow and arrow. He would not sleep in blankets. He cared nothing for the mud houses of his forebears. Cooked food he would not touch. In no way was he useful as a member of the tribe, except in one—he could run as no man ever ran before. One of his strides was equal to two of any other man's.

This wild man, this cheated antelope, was the Navajo champion.

Even as the two chiefs talked a wild shout rent the spring air. They looked far down the line of the waiting members of the two tribes, and, in the dim distance, saw springing lightly over the new turf, a swift, slim figure.

And the sun was but midway in its passage across the sky. It was high noon.

As the new champion glided across the line, in half the time the best horse had previously made, the savage shouts of the exulting Navajos mingled with the shrieks of the beaten Mokis, who, forever afterward, were to be and have remained the slaves to the tribesmen of the antelope-man.

Three hours later the Moki champion crossed the line, having beaten his previous record by three hours, and dropped dead at the feet of his chief.

BEWITCHED.

ARE you sorceress or Circe,
Never warmed with thought of mercy,
  Calmly binding me within your cruel snare?
Have you charmed the tender skies
Till they linger in your eyes?
  Have you deftly wound the sunlight in your hair?

Deep enchantress, witch, or fairy,
Do you join with comrades airy,
  Swiftly flying on the racing clouds above?
Are you these, oh, nymph unruly?
Are you these, or are you truly
  A distracting mortal maiden, whom I love?

Doris Webb.

In the Name of the King

By
Albert Payson Terhune

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE story is told by Dirck Dewitt, born in New England, but sent to New Amsterdam as a spy by Charles II of England to ascertain the lay of the land with respect to the British attempting to wrest the New Netherlands from the Dutch. On board the ship Stadtholder, Dewitt loses his heart to Greta Van Hoeck, who seeks to make him reveal his purpose in sailing to the New World. He is about to comply when her brother Louis appears, between whom and Dirck there is no love lost. Later there is an explosion on board and Dirck is tossed into the sea, from which he is rescued in mysterious fashion while he is unconscious, to find a sprig of Mayflower in his hand and the memory of a sweet face bending over him. In New Amsterdam, he makes a favorable impression on Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who appoints him his secretary and later sends him on an errand among the Arareek Indians, where he falls in with William Goffe, the exiled English regicide, his daughter Blanche, and Macopin, an Indian chief. He makes confidants of these as to his real mission in New Amsterdam, and they return thither with him. There is a meeting at the Governor's levee between Greta and Blanche, wherein the former is worsted in a wordy battle, and Dirck finds that she no longer exercises her former fascination over him. At the council Van Hoeck denounces Dirck as a spy, and puts in the Governor's hands the report he is supposed to have sent to the King of England. But this turns out to be a denunciation of Stuyvesant by Van Hoeck to the States General in Holland. The substitution has been made by Macopin, but Van Hoeck persists in claiming a hearing, declaring that witchcraft has been used. On the Governor's demanding proof of Dirck's guilt, Van Hoeck asks that his sister be brought, and on her evidence Dirck is sentenced to be hanged next morning. But through the connivance of Macopin and Blanche he escapes, and with Blanche as guide, takes a canoe for the other side of the Hudson. They are riding two horses that have been awaiting them when something strikes Dirck sharply across his throat and he is hurled from his horse to the ground.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRAPPED!

WE had been cantering, at the time, through a bit of tree-lined level road at the top of a sloping hill. The rough road-bed had shone dimly, through patches of moon-shadow. I had caught up with Blanche, who rode ahead.

While I had been saying my final sulky words my horse had taken fright at something I could not see, and had sprung forward a yard or two in advance of Blanche's mount before I could check him.

It was then that I had felt the tug across the front of my throat, and—riding carelessly as I was—had been brushed from the saddle.

An exclamation of alarm from Blanche reached me as I fell. Even before I crashed to earth I knew full well what had befallen me; and I cursed my folly in traveling so heedlessly through a tract of a hostile country.

It was an old Indian trick to bring down a rider by stretching a green withe from tree to tree across a road. Some wandering war-party, I knew, had heard our horses' hoof-beats and the sound of our raised voices, and had halted us in this primitive fashion.

I was right.

Scarce had my falling body struck ground when a half-dozen silent forms had sprung from the shadows and thrown themselves upon me.

As I fought desperately I had a fleeting glimpse of two more savages at the head of Blanche's horse, and of a third who was lifting her from the saddle.

The sight filled me with a maniac strength. What man is there who will not fight tenfold more furiously in behalf of the woman he loves?

I tore away the writhing, half-naked bodies that swarmed over me; I beat them back and struggled to my feet.

It was a Hercules effort. But I did it. I, unarmed, against my forest foes—and it was the love of a woman that gave me the power.

A huge savage, hideous in the war-paint and insignia of a sub-chief, slashed at me with his hatchet as I struck him from me. I ducked, eluded the blow, and rushed in, gripping him about the body.

The stroke of his hatchet, deflected, grazed my shoulder. The pain of the graze completed my Berserk rage.

Digging my chin into the hollow between his shoulder and neck, I used my arm-hold about the body as a lever, clasping my hands behind the small of his back, and exerting all my mighty muscular power in the pressure.

He was a strong man—as tall as I and heavier—and he fought like a wildcat. He beat at my head and struck fiercely, if ineffectively, with his war-hatchet.

Pressing outward with my chin and drawing inward with my arms, I gave one final heave. No back-bone could stand that strain. Something snapped, and the giant lay limp and helpless across my clasped arms like a shot squirrel.

The rest raised a fearful cry as he tumbled heavily to the ground. A score of weapons flashed out. I wheeled, gloriously drunk with excitement, to face them all.

Oh, I was in fine mood to die—to die fighting, like a wounded wolf on whom the pack turns!

Blanche, as the braves gathered for their rush, cried out a swift sentence or two in the Lenape dialect. She spoke so rapidly that, in my wrought-up state and imperfect knowledge of the vernacular, I could not understand her.

But the others did. They halted a moment, irresolute. She hastened on in her rapid speech. Even at that crisis I envied her her splendid knowledge of the native tongue.

She ceased. Several of the leaders drew together about her for a muttered conference. The rest of the war-party—perhaps forty in all—stood glowering in silent wrath at me, their hands on their knives and tomahawks, awaiting only their chief's permission to fly to the slaughter.

And at my feet between us lay the huddled mass that had so lately been a giant Indian.

At length the powwow ended. Blanche came up to me.

"You understood?" she asked.

"No," I replied; "scarce a single word. I am to die, I suppose. It matters little, if only they will spare *you*. I wish I might have saved—"

"There is no question of death yet," said she. "You slew the son of their chief. They are of the Hak-en-Sak people, and foremost of the tribes to plan war against the Dutch. They were about to avenge their sub-chief's death when—"

"When you cried out something."

"When I told them I am an adopted daughter of the Arareeks, and that you are an honored guest of Macopin."

"That was why they paused?"

"Yes. The Arareeks are a powerful people. The Hak-en-Saks want to stir up no blood-feud with them. They fear, if they kill us, Macopin will find out and will carry vengeance through their country."

"It was wise of you. So they will set us free?"

"Not they. You have killed their sub-chief. They dare not—*yet*—put us to death or torture. But they will not free

us. Instead, we are to be taken somewhere —and held captive until—"

"Until the hunt subsides or Macopin is thrown off the track, and it will be safe to put us out of the way in their own pleasant fashion? I understand."

"Macopin will pass here to-morrow. He will strike this trail, and he will read from it all that has happened as you or I might read a printed page. Then he will assuredly give chase, and—"

"March!" ordered an Indian, stepping up to us.

The braves fell in on every side. For an unarmed man to break past that human wall would have been impossible. Moreover, I owed it to Blanche to take no futile risk, but to bide near her in the faint hope of being at last of some use in case of emergency.

Back we traveled over the lane by which we had come from the river. The moon was low, and the skies were paling before the dawn wind's breath as we once more reached the waterside.

A couple of scouts, sent on ahead, had stolen several small canoes from Pavonia village just below, and were awaiting us at the brink.

"I see the idea," said Blanche. "They know Macopin will follow. And they know that no man may read a water-trail. They are going to take us by boat to some far outlying native village—perhaps to a village of another tribe that is allied to them. I have heard of such cases."

Into separate canoes we were thrust. The little flotilla set forth from land and faced up-stream. Northward through the gray of earliest dawn we went, propelled swiftly, silently.

The bulk of the war-party did not accompany us, but remained on the bank. Our escort consisted of perhaps twelve picked braves.

But, before starting, they had tied us, wrist and ankle, with deerskin thongs; so we were quite helpless.

There is no sense in tugging and mouthing when repose will suit one's purpose quite as well. Were there to be any future hope of escape, that chance would not be strengthened by useless struggles at present. Therefore, in very unheroic, but also very Indian, style I settled back quietly to await events.

Hour after hour the paddles plashed rhythmically into the still water. Hour by hour we moved northward. Around the ever-recurrent headlands of the Hudson's western shore we swept, keeping close to the bank and under the high hills' lee.

A man must needs have been in sorrier plight or in more dire danger than I in order to see that wonder panorama stretch out before him and feel no thrill.

The tall cliffs, the mountains, the lovely green forests, crept past behind us. Above was the blue morning sky, below the sun-kissed waters of the noblest river in the whole wide world.

A hundred times have I traversed that stream, but never without that same feeling of awed delight.

Here and there, in the distance, we saw a Dutch fishing-smack or two. But they were far out of hail. And if they noticed us, they took us for an Indian trading-party bound up-stream from a fur trip to New Amsterdam or Pavonia.

Dawn deepened into morning, and morning into noon. And so sped on the hours.

Around still another jutting headland we swung, and out to where the river broadens into a monster sheet of glittering azure water, more like a great lake than a stream's widening.

I knew the place. It was called by Dutch fisher folk the "Tappan Zee," or Sea of Tappan, taking its name from the tiny fur-trade post on one of its green banks.

We were far above the Hak-en-Sak country by now. An oblique movement of the leading canoe—and we shot across the Zee, transversely, coming to a halt at last in a shallow cove, shut off from the main river by a tall boulder-covered hill.

Beneath this hill, like a wasp's nest hanging to a shed's eaves, huddled an Indian village. The inhabitants ran down to the water's edge to welcome us. Our leader was evidently well known to them, for they greeted him warmly.

He jumped ashore. Gathering the head men of the place about him, he made a brief harangue, pointing from time to time at us.

A few minutes later we were lifted out, unbound, and shoved toward a couple of huts.

"Here we are to stay," said Blanche, "until it is safe to end our lives. They do not bind us or set sentinel over us, because they know we cannot get away."

"Cannot?" I asked. "Why not?"

"They have made themselves accountable to the Hak-en-Saks for us," was her reply. "That means every man, woman, and child of the village is our sentinel."

"And it was through *me,*" I cried bitterly, "that you were captured!"

"Don't!" she said, a brave little smile twitching her lips. "We are good comrades, you and I. We *must* be, for each is the last white person the other will ever again see. And—it might be worse!"

"Yes," I answered under my breath. "I might be forced to live on without you!"

CHAPTER XX.

A DREAM OF FREEDOM.

MONTH after month—winter and summer again—and still Blanche Goffe and I were captives at the wretched Tappan Zee village.

For all practical purposes we might have been at the north pole. News of the outer world never reached us. Save for each other, we saw no white folk.

We had, at first, made one or two utterly futile efforts to escape. But of late months we had so realized the uselessness of such an attempt that we had ceased to struggle. And now even the sleepless vigilance of our guards had begun to relax.

It had been a strange and not wholly unhappy period. I had been with Blanche daily, and all day. And each hour had strengthened that suddenly acquired love of mine until it was now the only real thing in my whole existence.

Yet I had never spoken of it. Once or twice I had cautiously broached the theme. But each time that look of troubled fear in her big eyes had choked back my avowal. She did not believe I loved her. By my own forced denial that night in the canoe she must be certain I cared naught for her.

Nothing I could have had the wit to say would have changed that wretched impression.

And I had learned gradually, too, that what I had once foolishly deemed her fondness for me was but the honest, frank affection a girl might have for a brother. Otherwise there must surely have been some sign in all these months of a deeper feeling.

Yet I loved her so absolutely that I tried to make myself imagine I was well content just to be where she was, to see her, to hear her speak, to know she was near me, that she depended on me for companionship.

I *tried* to imagine it, I say. But 'twas a pitiful effort at best, I fear.

One afternoon I sat on the rocks jutting out into the water, idly casting and recasting an Indian bass-rod, in the vain hope of catching some fish big enough to give me a good fight before I should land him.

At anchor, a mile out, lay a Dutch fishing-smack, her sails furled. A man and a boy were moving about the deck, working over a net they were preparing to attach from the anchor-rope to a stake in the water, a hundred feet nearer us.

Dressed in native deerskins and bronzed by a year in the open air, I must have looked, to the boat's occupants, like a mere savage.

They were too far away for me to hail. And, had I done so, it would not only have been worse than useless, but would at once have sharpened my jailers' sleeping watchfulness.

As I sat there Blanche came to me. She carried a fishing-rod, and walked with lazy slowness. Scarce nodding in response to my salutation, she seated herself on the rock just below me and began with elaborate care to entangle a snarl in her line.

With moveless lips and bent head, she started to speak. I had to strain my ears to catch what she said.

"Don't look at me," she began. "Don't pay any attention to me. Some of them may be watching. Listen! I have great news. Can you hear me?"

"Yes," I muttered, leaning eagerly forward in another direction, as though to scan an imaginary "bite" from an equally supposititious bass.

"A messenger came half an hour ago," she went on. "I was with the squaws in one of the kitchen tents. And a girl who had been sent to carry food for the messenger told us the tidings he brought. He is from the Palisades tribes."

"Well?"

"The lower tribes have massed, and are in the forests behind Pavonia. They descend upon New Amsterdam to-morrow. It is the attack you foresaw last year."

"New Amsterdam?" I exclaimed. "Tell me, could you gather from the talk whether the Dutch still hold the New Netherlands? Has not Nicoll, with the English fleet, come yet?"

"I am sorry," she said softly, "but the Dutch still hold the city and the province."

I could have groaned aloud. For weary months I had been imagining the British fleet arriving off the Battery, the fall of the Dutch, the Anglicizing of the New Netherlands—the fulfilment of my life-dream. Long ago, according to my rough calculations, the fleet should have arrived. And now—

"I'm sorry," she breathed again compassionately, for she knew how dear this hope had been to me.

"It's all right," I answered. "I am a failure at all I ever attempted. This but crowns my life-task of incompetence. Tell me more, won't you?"

"Governor Stuyvesant has taken nearly every available fighting man," said she, "and has sailed, with seven ships, on an expedition against the Swede colonies on the Delaware. He was to have gone last year, but fear of an Indian attack made him keep his forces in the city. The Indians knew this, and for many months they have tried to prove themselves peaceful and harmless."

"And Stuyvesant was fooled by such a trick?"

"It seems so. He has gone at last to the Delaware. And the tribes mean to enter New Amsterdam to-morrow. They vow they will not leave one stone standing on another or one white man, woman, or child alive. Oh, Dirck, *don't* look so heart-broken over your beautiful plan's failure!" she broke off. "'Twas no fault of yours. You plotted it splendidly. If the English had not the wit to take advantage of—"

"I have ever failed," I said, after a short pause. "And now I am going to start on one final venture. This time, perhaps, I shall succeed. If not, I shall at least not be alive to reproach myself with my last failure."

"Dirck!" she exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

"The Dutch must be warned," I said briefly.

"But you can't—"

"At least I can try."

"But how? It is madness."

"I have been 'mad' before," I returned, "and my madness availed me little. Perhaps Dame Fortune may relent, now that I offer my own life in payment. As to the means for doing this thing, I must think them out. There are always means when the man himself is worthy."

"Dirck," she pleaded, "stop and consider. We are close-held prisoners here. You *could* not get away. Even if you could steal one of the guarded canoes, there would be pursuit. Before you reached the Palisade headlands—"

I had scarce heeded her. I was studying the clouds to the northward. Now I broke in on her entreaties with the seemingly irrelevant remark:

"There will be a stiff north wind by night. Almost a gale; unless those clouds tell lies."

"I don't understand what—"

"You speak of canoes pursuing me. And one of the long war-canoes with its twelve paddlers could easily overhaul a single man. But *sails*, before a north gale, can outstrip any canoe."

"Sails? There are no sail-craft here. You know that."

With an almost unnoticeable gesture I pointed to the Dutch fishing-smack at anchor a mile away.

"The fishermen?" she cried. "Is *that* your plan? But how can you get word to them? It is too far away for you to shout. And—"

"It is all a desperate venture at best," I agreed. "But if I could steal a canoe and get out to that fishing-smack, I could easily persuade them of the danger. Or, if not, I could force them to put on all sail and hurry to New Amsterdam."

"But, Dirck, you could not get a canoe a hundred yards from shore without being seen. A pursuing canoe or a flight of arrows would—"

"After nightfall, then."

"The canoes are always guarded at night. You know that. If white men were watching, you might hope, by forest lore, to outwit them. But no white man—be he ever so clever a forest runner—can catch two sentry Indians off guard. You might possibly overpower them with that great strength of yours. But at first sound of struggle every brave in the village would be upon you."

"You are right," I growled. "Disgustingly right! There is no possible chance to get a canoe."

"And you will be wise and give up this crazy plan?"

"Why, no," I answered, in surprise. "I don't give up plans when once I've made them."

"I know you don't," she sighed in

despair. "But I hoped—for *my* sake, perhaps—"

"I had forgotten," I broke in, all penitence. "Here I've been trying to think out a way of saving a parcel of wretched Dutch burghers—and forgetting all about *you*. I can't go and leave you here. Forgive me for not thinking sooner of it."

Her eyes flashed and she retorted in pretty vehemence:

"We are comrades, you and I, Dirck. And where you go, I shall go. Shame on you that ever you doubted it! I begged you to give up this useless attempt because it seems to me to spell suicide for you. But if you are so pig-headed as to go, you sha'n't go alone."

"Blanche!"

"Oh, there is no peril to *me!* If we are caught the tribesmen will only bring me back to captivity. But they will kill *you*. It will be the chance they have so long awaited. Now, tell me this wild plan of yours, if you still have one."

Instead, I looked at her, a forlorn hope battling for life in my heart.

"Blanche!" I whispered. "You say you will go where I go. Does that mean—"

"It means," she said coldly, "that if there is a chance of escape I do not wish to be left behind. It means that. No more. No less. Let us understand each other quite clearly"

"I understand," I said quietly. "Forgive me."

A dull silence fell between us. At length she asked, in a collected, businesslike tone:

"Have you thought out any plan?"

"How far can you swim?" I returned.

"I don't know. I swam the width of Pomp-i-ton Lake and back without once touching bottom."

"That is nearly two miles in all. Could you swim out to that fishing-smack? With a heavy north wind blowing?"

"I think so," she replied.

"If there is any doubt," I answered dryly, "it would perhaps be as well to reflect on that doubt now, on dry land, rather than to wait until we are a half-mile off shore."

"You mean to swim out to the smack?" she cried.

"Under cover of night," said I. "Their anchor is cast. They will probably fish until morning. If we can reach the boat and—"

"Will they take us aboard? Can you make them believe your story? Can we get clear of the shore without being seen?"

"Let us take up those questions when we get to them," I suggested.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRYING-PAN AND FIRE.

THE wind rose at sunset, as I had foreseen. The night was overcast save for a rift or two in the clouds where a faint star shone through.

These stars showed me that the hour was close on nine, when Blanche and I (who had returned to our fishing after supper as the result of a loudly reiterated and laughing wager as to which could make the heaviest "catch" before midnight) slipped noiselessly into the cool water.

The waves were running high. Their swish on the shingly beach quite drowned any slight sound we may have made.

It was a propitious time. The hunters had returned from a day in the forest, and were gathered about the roaring camp-fire, eagerly questioning the messenger and discussing the chances of their Palisade brethren's raid.

All the camp was astir with excitement. Vigilance was slack. Nor did any think we would try so foolhardy a feat as to swim out into that wind-tossed river.

Your Indian is a fairly good swimmer. But, as a rule, only in quiet waters. When the wind is up, he believes the storm-spirits are playing over the waves. And, even in a boat, he will seldom of his own accord venture forth among the billows.

Least of all will he dare the storm-spirits' ire by swimming where those sprites are at play. Nor can he imagine that any one else would do so. This fact helped us; as I had hoped it would. And I was grateful, even though it is no easy task to swim in the trough of the Tappan Zee's highest waves.

Out from the shore we glided, Blanche and I, shoulder to shoulder. With the long, easy overhand stroke we swam, making almost no effort, content to husband our strength and to achieve only fair progress.

Our faces turned from the waves that washed sideways across us, we kept on. Little by little we drew away from land, out into the black night.

The girl was a perfect swimmer, and

my doubts as to her skill and endurance were quickly set at rest. There was a stirring, glorious sensation in thus breasting the rough waters, side by side with her, facing together outward into the unknown.

The fishing-smack showed no lights. It was quite invisible from the shore. I had known it would be so. And my trained forest eye that afternoon had marked with the most careful precision the boat's location.

At dusk, too, I had glanced out toward the craft again, to make certain it had not shifted its anchorage. To swim through such a wind to the supposed spot and then find the boat gone was a possibility we could not afford to risk.

If you think it was easy to swim in fresh water, with your clothes on, with waves ever slapping the side of your head, and toward no visible goal, you are quite mistaken. Strong as I was, and carefully as I nursed my strength at each stroke, I soon began to feel the strain.

"How are you holding out?" I asked Blanche.

"It is all right," she answered gallantly.

Yet I could catch the fatigue in her voice. And I checked the stroke that had been keeping me beside her.

"Turn over and float," I ordered.

"In fresh water—in this wind?"

"Do as I say," I insisted.

She obeyed. With one hand under her shoulders, and "treading water," I buoyed her up. After a moment of relaxation she asked:

"Is it much farther, I wonder?"

"We must be more than half-way there," I replied. "Are you strong enough to start on again? At any moment they may miss us. Then, when they find no trail leading into the woods, they will take their chances with the storm-spirits and come looking for us in a war-canoe."

We struck out again, and for a time swam on, stroke for stroke, side by side; the waters buffeting us and filling our eyes and nostrils.

We swam thus for what seemed an eternity. Then, all at once, the rhythm of our movement was somehow broken. I turned my head to note the cause. And Blanche was no longer beside me.

Back, ten feet or more, she was lying, strangely huddled, her white, upturned face awash, scarcely visible above the surface in that ghostly light.

With a plunge I was back beside her.

"Blanche!" I cried, seizing her numb hands and drawing her toward me.

"I—I hoped you wouldn't miss me—till—till—it was too late!" she panted feebly. "I—I can't go on. It is a cramp. In both my arms. Oh, *go!*"

"Go!" I echoed "And leave you to drown, you hero-girl? What do you think I am made of?"

"You *must!*" she gasped. "It all depends on you. "If you stay here with me we shall both go under. The warning cannot be given. I—"

"Blanche!" I cried, a red anger heating my chilled blood. "If you want to practise the feminine vice of self-sacrifice, do so, I pray! But not one inch shall I stir without you. If you refuse to let me help you, you throw away both our lives. Now, choose! And choose quickly! For my own strength ebbs."

"As—as you wish," she murmured, like a worn-out child.

"So! Have your cramped hands power enough to hold tightly to my shoulders? Try it. *So!* Good. Now lie flat, rigid. Hold the fringe on my hunting shirt's shoulders as gently as you can. And breathe as deep and as seldom as possible."

Off I struck again. She obeyed my simple orders, and at first I scarce felt her weight, though it impeded my speed.

"Remember," I warned her, "if you loose your hold, *I* shall stop, too. And it will be the end of us both."

It was no time for pretty speeches. At certain rare crises man is the master. And the most self-willed woman knows it and instinctively obeys him. This, if ever, was such a crisis.

On we went. The light touch on my shoulder grew to a crushing weight. The girl's slender body that I was drawing after me through the water seemed to weigh a ton.

I struggled on, doggedly, fiercely. I was fighting. Fighting the storm-spirits as never had I fought mortal opponent.

Despite my best care, my lungs and throat burned with the water that found its way into them. My muscles stiffened, and every motion was anguish.

Then—my outthrown left arm struck sharply against something hard and rough. My hands both closed upon the obstruction.

It was the stake that bound one end of the fishing-net.

At the other end of the straining net I knew lay the smack.

"We are there!" I panted to Blanche, hanging to the stake and letting my racked muscles rest. "See, over to the right. A bare fifty feet away.

Through the gloom, the fishing-smack was visible, tugging at her anchor and tossing heavily in the waves. The net between us and it was drawn as taut as a bowstring by the force of the pushing water.

"Come!" I said. "One more effort and we will be safe."

"Listen!" she broke in.

My own dense, water-beaten ears had caught no sound but the swish of wind and waves. But, as I harkened at her bidding, I now heard the steady soft *plash-plash-plash* of paddles striking the water in perfect unison.

Glancing over my shoulder as I struck out for the smack, I could see, ever drawing closer, a low, pointed, black shape. It was a war-canoe manned by six braves.

I needed no second vision to tell what had happened. Missing us, and finding we had not taken to the forests, the Indians had jumped at once to the conclusion that we had swum out to the fishing-smack in an effort to escape. And—remembering the smack's location quite as well as did we—they had set out after us.

It was no time for thought, but for the swiftest of swift action. I reached the smack's side, threw one arm over the low gunwale; and with the other, lifted Blanche over the rail. It was a feat that required all my ebbing strength.

The man and boy lay asleep on the little dirty deck. The boy, at the shock caused by my heave, started up.

"Injuns!" he bawled at sight of Blanche.

The canoe was already past the stake. Another two strokes would bring it up to us. Then, instead of being slaughtered or seized in the water, we should meet the same fate on deck.

Blanche safe over the side, I reached down to my belt for the long curved knife I had stolen that night from a momentarily empty teepee. The net's straining rope was close beside me. I gave one mighty slash with the blade, at the same time hugging the gunwale close with my other arm.

Out of the water leaped a brown curving thing; long, swishing, hideous, against the upper sky. Through the air it hissed, its flying ends just missing me.

Up and out it flew, encircling the war-canoe in the grip of an octopus.

"What — what *is* it?" cried Blanche aghast.

"The net!" I gasped, scrambling aboard. "It was strained almost to breaking point, and I cut the rope at this end. Luckily it was not weighted."

I had wasted no time in talking. Barely two seconds after I severed the net-rope, I was aboard, in the prow of the smack, cutting away like mad at the stout, over-taut anchor hawser.

The rope parted with a crack like a pistol's. The boat lurched violently and went floundering, wild among the waves.

The man, aroused by his boy's shout, had jumped to his feet, mouth open, eyes dazed with sleep.

"Injuns!" squealed the boy again; and "Injuns!" roared the man in reply.

He snatched up a blunderbuss from under a bit of tarpaulin. But I was too quick for him. Darting in, I struck his shoulder a blow that sent the clumsy weapon clattering to the deck.

Then, snatching up the blunderbuss, I leveled it at his head.

"Up sail!" I shouted. "*Quick!*"

Scared, he lurched to the mast, followed by the whimpering boy.

Thrusting the gun into Blanche's hands and running to the tiller, I ordered:

"Faster! Up sail!"

Even in his dazed, cowed state, the fisherman was a sailor. And as the smack floundered wildly, the dirty gray canvas was slowly raised. Luckily, the two had been too lazy to clew the furled sail properly to its boom. And the raising was thus the easier.

My hand on the tiller held the smack steady.

In as little time as the telling takes, the wind had caught the half-raised canvas, the smack had careened dangerously and straightened, and we had gathered headway.

Then and then only did I have scope to look about me. Blanche, gripping the blunderbuss, was still leveling it at the trembling, chattering fisherman.

The canoe (its prow and paddles tangled in the meshes and loose ends of the flying net) had lost all power of motion. But the six Indians, working like mad, were fast

cutting away the maze of wet strands. In another moment they would be free.

"Take the tiller!" I called to Blanche. "Keep headed due south — straight before the wind. Look to it that she doesn't jibe. So! A point to starboard!"

I had taken the blunderbuss from her as she grasped the helm. Now, kneeling and resting the gun-barrel on the gunwale, I took careful aim and fired.

In the prow of the white birch-bark canoe a mighty hole was suddenly ripped.

I turned back and faced Blanche again.

"That will keep them too busy bailing to try to follow us," I said. "If there are any other canoes in pursuit, we'll probably have gathered speed enough before we reach them to show a fairly clean pair of heels."

The sail was up. I had seen to that before I fired. Now, as I was speaking, the fisherman strutted over to me, grasping a long boat-hook. The peril of the loaded blunderbuss being removed, he was brave enough for any ordinary emergency.

"What d'ye mean by this outrage?" he bawled.

"From your speech," I answered gently, "you are English, not Dutch. We two are English folk escaping from captivity among the Indians. We need your aid and we implore it. I had no time to request it beforehand. For which, pray accept my apologies."

"I don't understand no fine gentleman talk!" he interrupted. "Leastways not when it's spoke by a man in Injun clo'es. But I *do* know you've sp'ilt my net an' stole my fishing-smack. An' I'm goin' to take it out of yer hide. An' when we git to Tappan, I'll have ye clapped into jail."

"We are not going to Tappan, my friend," I returned, "but to New Amsterdam. We must reach there with all haste. Later, I will pay you for your lost net and for whatever fishing I have made you miss."

With a growl he sprang at me, boat-hook raised. I stepped lightly aside to avoid his rush. My foot slipped on a greasy bit of deck and down I crashed on one knee, the blunderbuss flying out of my hands.

Before I could recover my balance he was upon me. By a sudden twist of the body I avoided the boat-hook's blow and grappled with the man.

Over and over we rolled on the deck; smashing alternately against gunwale and mast; clawing, panting, heaving.

He was a strong man; but he was no match for me in my normal state. Now, however, spent with my long, terrible swim, I could scarce hold my own against him.

Once, in our tussle, my hand touched the knife-hilt at my belt. A single stroke of that razorlike curved blade would have ended the fight then and there.

But somehow the use of the knife in fair combat has always seemed to me unworthy of a white man. I could not bring myself to stab an unarmed enemy. And so we struggled on.

"Dirck!" cried Blanche. "Dirck Dewitt, I say! Master him quickly and come here! Just ahead there is—"

"Dirck *Dewitt?*" cried the fisherman, loosing his hold on me and staggering back. "*Dirck Dewitt,* did she say? You're—you're never Dirck Dewitt, are you?"

"Yes!" I panted, hoarse with exhaustion. "What of it?"

"If I'd killed or harmed you, man," he gasped, "I'd have wished my hands to wither at the wrist."

Suspecting a trick, yet wholly puzzled, I stared at him.

"My brother," he went on, "was the only Englishman in the Stadtholder's crew. You saved him an' the rest from bein' blowed to blazes in that fire-ship. I—"

"*Dirck!*" called Blanche again in wild excitement. "Look!"

Scarce thirty yards ahead of us, and almost in our track, swung a great canoe manned by twenty Indians.

Drawn by my shot, while searching downstream for us, the savages had evidently divined what had happened, and had awaited our coming.

Their canoe lay obliquely before us, held steady by a dozen paddles; while six or seven braves crouched ready to spring aboard as we should draw near enough.

With our headway and the canoe's power of swift evolution, it would be an easy matter to board us, even if in straightway speed the savages' craft were not the smack's equal.

I jumped to the helm.

"What are you going to do?" asked Blanche in dismay, as she released the tiller to me.

"Run them down," I answered. "It's the only chance."

"A fine *chance!*" scoffed the fisherman, close at my side. "Don't you know the second we get within reach they won't *wait* to be run down? Every mother's son of

'em will be aboard us, ready for the massacre. An' we'll stand as much chance against 'em as a witch in a Puritan meetin'-house."

CHAPTER XXII.

MY FRIEND THE ENEMY.

As he jerked out this highly pessimistic forecast, the fisherman caught the tiller away from me. I gladly released it. Picking up the empty blunderbuss and swinging it aloft, club fashion, I ran to the prow to repel the attack as best I might.

Hopeless as I knew it was to try to stave off the invasion of a dozen or more armed warriors, yet I was minded to sell my life as dear as might be.

Down upon the canoe we swooped. The braves crouched ready for the spring. I held my blunderbuss poised for the blow. I was almost near enough to strike. Then—

There was a wrench that sent me clean off my balance and almost overboard. A dismal creak of tackle and timbers, and—barely out of arm's length from the tensely waiting braves—the smack veered sharply to starboard.

Like a living creature — like a shying horse — the fishing-boat curved outward, swung, and wheeled back upon her former course. We had made a semicircle around the canoe, just too far away for the most daring athlete of its crew to make the intended leap.

As a bit of seamanship, the maneuver was well-nigh unparalleled in my own scant experience. So swift, so uncannily sudden had it been, that even the alert canoemen —braced for the shock of collision—were tricked by it.

"Lie down!" roared the fisherman the same instant. "Lie down, all!"

He crouched under the afterrail as he spoke. We obeyed him; and none too soon.

Over our heads, like a flock of angry hornets, whizzed an arrow-flight. One shaft stuck in the mast. A second grazed the top of my head.

"Are you safe?" I called to Blanche.

"Yes," she answered shakily, drawing out an arrow that had pinned the edge of her skirt to the deck.

"Keep down!" bawled the fisherman. "They're li'ble to fire again. We're all right. We'll get out of range of that birch-bark tub mighty quick now."

"Well, Master Dirck Dewitt," he went on presently, "what d'ye think of me as a steersman? You're a grand man at savin' a crew from panic aboard a burnin' ship. But when it comes to doin' a bit of jugglin' with a tiller, you're not my match."

"If you owed me anything for keeping your brother from drowning," I answered, "I think you have squared the account this night."

"I'm downright glad!" he made answer. "Often enough my brother's told me the tale. An' I've wished I could shake hands with you. Now, tell me what all this means. I don't yet grasp the right of it."

As briefly as possible I told him of our imprisonment and escape; of the news concerning the Indian attack planned on New Amsterdam, and our need for arriving there in time to give the warning.

At the end of my recital, he scratched his head and looked at me oddly.

"If your good lady," quoth he, "will step forward, out of earshot, there's a word I would speak to you in private, Master Dewitt."

Beckoning me beside him at the tiller, as Blanche laughingly went to the prow, he whispered:

"No need in scarin' the lady. But, d'ye know, there's a thousand guilder reward for you, alive or dead, posted on the signboard in front of the White Hall, in New Amsterdam?"

"What?"

"'Tis true. My brother told me of it, an' how he was minded to tear down the placard. '*One thousand guilders' reward,*' it reads, '*for the body of Dirck Dewitt, English spy. This sum will be paid to whomsoever shall bring him dead or alive to Petrus Stuyvesant, Gov'nor.*' That's the wordin'. My brother copied it out. An' they mean it. Trust old Petrus Silver Leg not to forgive nor forget an en'my."

"But surely—"

"Yes, Stuyvesant's away on a war-venture, I know. But there's plenty of Dutchmen left in New Amsterdam who would risk their souls for the joy of feelin' a thousand guilders clankin' in their pockets. An', in Stuyvesant's absence, who d'ye s'pose Silver Leg has left in charge at White Hall? Why, his sec't'ry, this same Master Van Hoeck you just said was your worst en'my of 'em all. He'll show you little enough mercy, I'm thinkin', if once he gets hands on you."

"I'm glad you didn't let Mistress Goffe hear," I muttered. Then—"

"There is but one safe course. *You* must carry the warning to them."

"Me!" he cried in alarm. "Not me, Master Dewitt. I've a fondness for my own thick neck. An' I'd hate to see it stretched."

"What do you mean?"

"Waal," he drawled confusedly, "you see, old Petrus made a law forbiddin' any one to sell liquor or guns to the Injuns. An' I just happened one day—by an off-chance, you know—to swap a couple of hogsheads of schnapps with a Hak-en-Sak chief for sixty beaver pelts. An' the schnapps, as it happened, turned out to be half water. An' the chief told Stuyvesant. An'—"

"Well?" I queried as he paused.

"Waal," he answered, "I'm no fancy thousand-guilder crim'nal. But Stuyvesant condemned me to hang. An' he's offered two hundred guilders to whoever'll bring me to New Amsterdam jail. So I—"

"So you refuse the risk?"

"I most sure do," he affirmed positively.

"I am doubly glad Mistress Goffe does not know," I said.

"Why? Has she took a fancy to *me?*"

"I mean," I explained, "that *I* will have to go to New Amsterdam and give the alarm. And I do not want her to be worried as to what may happen to me."

"You're—you're goin' into the city? Goin' to run your neck into the noose? Just to save a passel of fat burghers from the scalp knife?" he cried incredulously.

"The fat burghers," I answered, "have innocent wives and children."

"H-m!"

"I wish," I went on, "there were some place where I could leave Mistress Goffe in safety until—until it is all over."

"I can help ye there," he cried eagerly. "My brother lives in Haarlem, right on the edge of the Spuyten Duyvil. The lass can stay with my brother's wife. An' glad they'll be to help pay their debt to you by harborin' her. We'll stop there on the way down an' leave you to foot it the rest of the way to the city, if you're still set on sudden death."

And so it was agreed. I made excuse to Blanche that her presence in New Amsterdam, in case of Indian attack, would but embarrass me. And, unsuspecting, she agreed to my wishes.

Thus it came about that early in the morning I walked calmly through the newly opened gate of the city hall; and so—as my timorous friend the fisherman had so cheerily put it—prepared to "run my neck into the noose."

It was the only thing to do. Yet, when I thought of Louis Van Hoeck being in sole authority in New Amsterdam, I was coward enough to feel a qualm of real fear.

(To be continued.)

DISTANCE LENDS ENCHANTMENT.

THE sails we see on the ocean
  Are as white as white can be,
But never one in the harbor
  As white as the sails at sea.

And the clouds that crown the mountain
  With purple and gold delight,
Turn to cold, gray mist and vapor
  Before we can reach its height.

Stately and fair the vessel
  That comes not near our beach;
Stately and grand the mountain
  Whose height we may never reach.

Oh, Distance! thou dear enchantress,
  Still hold in thy magic veil
The glory of far-off mountains,
  The gleam of the far-off sail.

Bucking a Blizzard

By Garret Smith

DAN McCULLUM is the man from the West who broke all Eastern records as a snow-traveler and won the reputation of being a lunatic. Not till old Wansey died, down Horton way, did the full particulars become known.

It was during the blizzard of 1896. Bulkley's first glimpse of Dan was on the afternoon of the second day of the big blow.

The little station at the junction was almost snowed under. Half a dozen railroad men, holding jobs on the branch line and consequently having nothing to do, were hugging the red-hot stove in the waiting-room.

All of a sudden the door flew open and a section of blizzard entered, accompanied by a little man, mostly fur overcoat. He stumbled into the nearest seat and sank exhausted.

"Where in blazes d'you come from?" chanted the men in chorus, after a liberal dose of whisky had done its work of revival.

The stranger staggered to his feet.

"I've got to get out to Horton right away!" he wheezed, looking at his watch. "Ticket to Horton and return," he demanded, stepping up to the ticket-window. "How late is the next train on that line?"

"Two days, so far," replied the agent, "and likely to keep right on being later for a week."

The others laughed. Horton is on a little branch line out of Bulkley Junction. The single-track road winds up between the hills and the cuts were packed with snow. Horton is ten miles from Bulkley. There would be no attempt to reach it till the storm subsided.

"I've got to get there! I've got to get there!" the stranger kept muttering, pacing back and forth like a caged animal.

The group stopped laughing and looked serious. Certainly the man was not drunk. He must be mad. Perhaps exposure to the storm had affected his brain.

"Where'd you drop down from, anyhow?" demanded the agent, repeating the question the stranger had before ignored.

"I left the express from Mortontown up in the cut a mile away," he replied. "She had a rotary plow ahead of her, but looked like she was stuck fast, so I hoofed it on. Took me two hours to make it."

"Good Lord!" murmured the section boss. "Walked two hours in this storm! You must be a reg'lar snow-eater! I couldn't get's far as the tool-house here this mornin'."

"I'm from the West," said the stranger. "We grow real blizzards out there. Look here, you men! I've got to get out to Horton before midnight. My name's Daniel McCullum. I've got a gold-mine out West, and I'll give a good chunk of coin to anybody that'll land me in Horton on time."

"Some friend sick out there?" asked the agent sympathetically.

"No! No!" exclaimed McCullum, getting irritated. "I can't explain. Don't ask me. Only for Heaven's sake figure out some way to get me there."

"It can't be done," announced the agent finally.

McCullum looked at him from eyes that showed no hint of insanity. They were calm and clear as any in the room.

"I've got to get there by midnight or it will be too late," he announced in level tones. Then he added impressively:

"I've been twenty years on the way!"

The listeners gave a start of surprise. Curious glances went around the little circle. The agent was decidedly worried. Were the annoyances of a tie-up on the line to be complicated by the antics of a madman?

By common, silent agreement, the rest fell away and left the man from the West to his own devices. He continued to pace back and forth, muttering again and again: "I've got to get there! I've got to get there!"

A half-hour of this and a big rotary plow scoured its way out of the cut and crept up to the station platform with the Mortontown express behind it. McCullum might have saved his two-hour walk if he had waited aboard her.

The fuming little stranger was the first man to bounce out to meet the train. He waded down the platform and climbed into the engine-cab.

Ten minutes later he reappeared with the engineer, arguing warmly.

"Look here," called the latter to the agent. "This gent is offering us all kinds of coin if we'll abandon the main line for the present and dig through the branch to Horton and take him with us. We—"

"Listen to me!" interrupted McCullum. "Wire headquarters that Daniel McCullum of Chicago will pay twice the price of a special train if they'll authorize you to put him through to Horton on a snow-plow this afternoon. And I'll give a bonus of a hundred dollars apiece to every man concerned."

The agent shrugged his shoulders. Plainly he was unimpressed.

"Now do as I tell you," commanded McCullum. "I've plenty of letters with me to prove my identity, and they'll find my credit good for any amount at the Traders' Bank in Mortontown. And I'll pay for the attempt whether I get through or not. I'll leave a check with you now."

Well, the upshot of it was that McCullum had his way. An hour later the big rotary plow started for Horton with nothing behind it but a locomotive and tender, with Dan McCullum as the only passenger. The group at the station pitched in and helped clear the frozen switches. Then after the rotary had disappeared in the swirl of fine snow, they trudged back to the station, consumed with curiosity.

The rest of the story was wormed out of Dan McCullum himself when he returned years later to attend old Wansey's funeral.

Four times in the first half of the run to Horton the plow stuck fast. As many times the crew announced that it was impossible to go any farther, and as many times McCullum raised the ante and induced them to dig the rotary out with their shovels and try again.

Then they struck a level open stretch and spurted to within two miles of their destination. There they lodged finally. The storm was raging harder than ever. For half an hour they shoveled around the plow only to find that the snow had wedged her from the rails and nothing but a wrecking crew could budge her.

McCullum paid up the men from a big roll of bills in his belt, then called for volunteers to accompany him on a tramp the rest of the distance. Only one man wanted another hundred dollars badly enough to take him up.

So, leaving the rest of the crew to await

the subsidence of the storm in the caboose of the rotary, the two started. They climbed the bank out of the cut and managed to find a road near-by which followed the high ground and was consequently not so badly drifted. Telephone-poles acted as guides. A mile on they struck a farmhouse and stopped for a rest. There McCullum's companion wanted to give back his extra hundred dollars and abandon the trip. He declared he wouldn't go out into that storm again for a million.

McCullum released him from his agreement, but refused to take his money back. The farmer wouldn't let a horse out in such a storm and did his best to get the Westerner to stay till morning.

"I got to get there before midnight," reiterated McCullum, and struck out again into the swirling, stinging twilight.

At length, nearly ready to drop and give up the fight, he saw the lights in the outskirts of Horton. It's a little town of a few hundred inhabitants.

He rang at the first door he reached and fell on the hall floor when it was opened.

"Can you tell me where Isaac Wansey lives?" he asked of the householder, as soon as a blazing fire and some hot coffee had revived him a little.

"Never heard of him," declared his host. "Does he live right in town?"

"I supposed so," faltered McCullum, the terror of a new possibility appearing in his tired eyes. Had he not then reached his journey's end after all?

"I can call up the post-office," his host suggested. "They'd know if he lived near here."

In a moment the other returned from the telephone with a shrug of his shoulder.

"Your man lives six miles out in the country," he said.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated McCullum, "and I've got to be there by midnight. It's eight o'clock now."

Ten minutes later, despite the earnest protests of his new friends, the resolute Westerner was on his way to the local livery stable. The most the hospitable villagers had been able to do for him was to induce him to swallow a hasty supper.

"Let out a horse for a six-mile drive on a night like this!" roared the liveryman indignantly. "Not much. I wouldn't let a horse out of my barn for five minutes for as many hundred dollars to-night."

"I'll buy one from you then," offered the other.

"No, you won't. I ain't got a horse to sell."

McCullum walked along the line of stables, employing his eyes after the manner of one who knew horse-flesh. Beside a sturdy-looking gray he paused.

"I'll give you two hundred dollars for this mare," he said.

"I tell you I won't sell."

"I'll make it two hundred and fifty."

"No!"

"Three hundred."

"Look here, stranger," said the liveryman, "is this all talk? Let me see your money."

McCullum drew forth a roll of bills big enough to choke any animal in the stables.

"If I sell her to ye, ye goin' to drive her six miles to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then ye don't git her, not even fer three hundred."

McCullum peeled from his roll a crisp five-hundred-dollar bill and held it out.

"Here," he said. "Let's have no more talk about this. Take it and let me use the horse as I see fit or leave it."

That was too much for the animal-lover. He took the money. A brief dicker over cutter and equipment followed, and fifteen minutes later Dan McCullum was buried deep in robes and starting for the Wansey place with his own outfit.

The road lay for four miles along the old canal, then, at the big stone bridge he was to turn to the left two miles. In good weather such directions would have been obvious enough. Not till he was well out of the village and facing the cutting blast did he realize how hopeless it was to follow them in the black night and storm.

With his face muffled to his eyes, he tried to keep a lookout ahead. His feeble lantern shed light only as far as the shoulders of the horse. The fine flying snow stung his eyes like electric needles. Then a blast put out the lantern. He made no attempt to relight the useless glimmer.

Still the horse floundered and stumbled forward through the drifts. He knew the animal could keep the road better than he could and he let her have her way accordingly. But this could not lead anywhere. Suppose the brute followed the road all right till they reached the stone bridge. It was useless to try to see that landmark. He would simply drive by it into unknown regions beyond.

His experiences of the afternoon should have taught him the foolishness of attempting to fight that blizzard at night over an unknown road. But his familiarity with the storms of the West had filled him with undue contempt for anything the East could produce. Moreover, his all-consuming purpose had deadened his mind to peril.

But he had gone only a little way farther when his better judgment showed him how vain was his struggle. He would strike back to the village while he was yet able.

At this point the road seemed to be a level stretch with few drifts. He stopped and got out to learn what the chances were for turning in safety. There were none. On each side of the sleigh the road dropped into deep snow.

Then he remembered the liveryman had told him that most of the distance to the stone bridge the narrow highway was at the top of the old canal bank, the empty canal on one side and a deep ditch on the other. Only at occasional stretches was there a level place wide enough for two rigs to pass or for one to turn around. To find one of these turn-out spots under such circumstances as the present was practically impossible.

McCullum got out and walked beside his cutter for some distance, feeling with his feet beside the track for any sign of a widening out. It was in vain. Everywhere he sank into snow of indefinite depth.

Finally chill and exhaustion drove him back to the robes.

He tried to stop his horse long enough to think out some plan of action, but, stung by the blast, the animal refused to stand. She seemed capable of keeping up a jog-trot for hours.

Now she slowed down to flounder through drifts to her belly. Now, in a clear space, she would scud rapidly over the wind-swept road.

Her driver had long ago given up trying to see ahead. Huddled in the bottom of the sleigh, with the lines wound around his numb wrists and the robes over his head, he left everything to the old gray mare.

So she ambled on. It seemed like hours to McCullum. Probably he had passed the stone bridge where he must turn by this time. Where would it all end?

Would his steed plod mechanically forward till they reached another little town in safety? How far off such haven might be he had not the remotest idea. Probably he would be frozen to death long before they could reach it.

He thought of the possibility of striking a farmhouse on the road. But such places were few, and stood back from the highway so that, even had he been on the lookout, he could hardly have seen them through the blinding storm.

No shouts for help could possibly be heard above the gale.

Still, with the hope of seeing the light of a dwelling, he climbed back on the seat and, turning his face away from the blast, left a peep-hole in the robe at the rear of the sleigh.

But no beacon-light favored him. The inhabitants of that region retire early.

At length he realized that the wind no longer came from dead ahead. Acting on a sudden impulse, he stopped his horse and once more got out to explore.

They had left the high, wind-swept road. Deep drifts surrounded them. There was no canal-bank beside the path.

The old horse in whom he had put his sole dependence had failed him, and wandered off the road. They were hopelessly lost.

Numbly he climbed once more into the cutter and drew the robes around him. The mare started on of her own accord and wandered where she would, unguided.

Gradually he felt stealing over him the sense of drowsy comfort that precedes death by freezing. In vain he wriggled about in his limited quarters and chafed his stiffened limbs. Then the desire to move left him.

As in a vague dream, he realized at length that the motion of the sleigh had ceased. From a great distance there seemed to come to him a voice.

"I got to get there before midnight," responded McCullum in a whisper.

Then he fell asleep.

It might have been the next instant, or perhaps years later, for aught Dan McCullum could tell, when a realization of life once more stole over him.

It was life accompanied by a genial warmth and quickening pulse. Some one was rubbing his limbs. Now a hot fluid was being poured down his throat.

McCullum choked and opened his eyes.

The face of a haggard old man was just above him. A yard away was a red-hot stove. He lay on a rickety couch. About the room were a few pieces of worn, old-fashioned furniture.

McCullum tried to sit up. The old man gently restrained him.

"Don't git excited," said his nurse. "You lie right still. Jest answer me one question. Where'd ye git that old gray mare?"

"Down at the livery-stable in Horton," answered the patient weakly, wondering at an inquiry apparently so irrelevant. "I bought her."

"God bless her old hide!" exclaimed the other fervently. "I'd been wondering what had become of her. I sold her to a hoss-trader a year ago. She'd been with me so long you couldn't lose her anywhere in this country. Turn her loose day er night, and she'd come home. She saved yer life, son. I heard a whinny outside a spell ago, clear above the wind. I went out, and I found her pawin' at her old stable-door. Lucky I was up. I ain't often as late as this; ain't been up as late as this before in twenty years."

He glanced at an old clock on the mantelpiece, and McCullum followed his gaze. It was half past eleven.

"Gad!" the young man exclaimed, trying to rise. "I must be goin'. I'm all right now. Tell me where I am."

For the moment he had forgotten everything but the urgency of his errand.

"Now, son, keep quiet," ordered the old man. "You ain't all right by a long shot. That hot whisky I giv' ye makes ye feel mighty frisky, but ye ain't. You let me do the talkin' till ye get stronger."

"But where am I, and who are you?" persisted McCullum.

"Well, yer in a good, comfortable farm-house, and kin stay as long as ye wish. Guess yer a stranger about here. Can't see how ye kum to be out sich a night as this. But ye kin tell me that later. My name's Isaac Wansey."

The old man at that moment had turned to adjust a damper of the stove, and failed to see the violent start the patient gave at the mention of that name. By the time Wansey turned back to him, McCullum had controlled his emotions, but his face was once more snow-white.

The old man noticed that much, and gave him another drink of whisky.

"Now, don't try to talk fer a spell," he warned.

"Listen," he added, after a moment's hesitation. "My name ain't Wansey. I've been lyin' fer twenty years kum midnight, and I got to tell the truth now. Seems as though you had been sent by Providence to listen to my confession. In half an hour now I'll be a free man again, after bein' hunted fer twenty years. I was sittin' up to-night, celebratin', and you come along in time to give me a chance to talk fer the first time in all them years. And yer the first man I've done a good deed to in that time. It makes me feel like I was livin' again. Listen to an old man's story, and then keep it to yerself till after he's dead. That's all I ask of ye to pay fer savin' yer life."

Wansey paused a moment and took a drink himself.

"My real name," he said at length, "is Martin Voorhis. I went West twenty-five years ago and took up mining. I had a partner named Ed McCullum. We quarreled and separated. I had bad luck, but McCullum prospered.

"Then I brooded over my troubles till I got to blamin' McCullum fer everything. Finally I planned and carried out a plot to rob him of all the gold he had saved. I was so clever that I got away before any one suspected me. They got me indicted, but never caught me.

"That crippled McCullum. The claim he was workin' was cleaned out, anyhow. Instead of takin' up work on another, he spent his time tryin' to get the man who robbed him. I kept track of things through a pal. Finally he took sick with worry and died. I knew I had practically killed my old friend.

"At his funeral, Ed's little son, Dan, a boy only about fifteen years old then, got up as his father's body was lowered into the grave and called on all present to help find the man who ruined his father. The boy swore he would find him and have him punished if it took the rest of his life. Somehow, I felt sure he would succeed.

"That night I fled East, changed my name, and settled down here in the back woods, and have spent twenty years repentin'. I learned that little Dan McCullum prospered, but never forgot the search for the man who wronged his father. So I have lived here in fear and horror, a hundred times worse than the punishment the law could give.

"I would have made restitution of the money if I had it, but I had gambled it away soon after I got it. Had I been alone in the world I would have given myself up,

but I had a wife and child. Finally they died, and for several years now I have been alone on this old farm, and the habit of hiding has become fixed.

"To-night at midnight it will be twenty years since I robbed Ed McCullum. The statute of limitations comes in to save me from any punishment by the law. In my old State an indictment dies in twenty years without action. I can go forth and leave the name of Isaac Wansey forever, and there will never be a stain on the name my wife and child bore. It will be a relief to meet young Dan McCullum as man to man. If he should kill me I wouldn't blame him. But I would give all the rest of whatever life remains to me if I could make some restitution to that man now."

Old Wansey ceased speaking and looked into the face of his listener.

"Forgive me, son, fer ramblin' on like this!" he exclaimed, jumping up. "I forgot everything but myself. Why, yer still pale as a ghost. I'll go up and get a bed ready fer ye. Ye need a good sleep."

The moment the old man left the room Dan McCullum sprang to his feet with surprising energy. Had Wansey known all along who he was? He reached into his shirt-bosom and drew out a package of papers.

He examined them again to see if they were all right. They included the appointment of Dan McCullum as deputy sheriff, and a warrant for the arrest of Isaac Wansey, alias Martin Voorhis, on a charge of grand larceny, together with the necessary requisition papers.

Dan looked at the clock. It still lacked five minutes of twelve. Old Wansey was still in his power. He felt in his hip-pocket. Yes. His revolver was intact. The old man, in his eagerness to save Dan's life, had never thought of any possible peril to himself in taking a stranger into his home.

Dan sank on the couch and, with the papers on his kness, struggled with himself, while the old man tramped about arranging the room overhead.

There was a step on the stairs. Wansey was coming down. Dan McCullum rose. Only a moment more he hesitated. Then, with a swift movement, he threw open the stove door and thrust the papers on the hot coals.

A LATTER-DAY FORTUNATUS.

SINCE fortune, in a golden whim,
Of him her darling made,
Behold him, grown superior, swim
Above the walks of trade.
How soon he shook from off his feet
Our low plebeian dust,
To tread the highways, fabled sweet,
Of fashion's upper crust!

Not as before he parts his name,
Not as before his hair!
The cynosure of social fame,
He's taken on an air.
He ran, 'tis said, from war's alarms,
But now he runs a trust,
And boasts a crest and coat of arms
In fashion's upper crust.

A slim aristocratic hand
He'll one day win, we know;
But love—oh, well, you understand
That love to-day's *de trop*.
He's rather crusty when we bow,
But then—let us be just—
He cuts a famous figure now
In fashion's upper crust!

Sennett Stephens.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

FRANK STANLEY, formerly a sailor, is now employed as a steel-worker on the Monckton, a sky-scraper in process of construction under the direction of Zeb Grant, who has made a special enemy of Dave May, the engineer, by declaring that May must be drunk when it is well known that he is a temperance advocate. Stanley confides to Jack Price, his chum and roommate at Mrs. Louden's boarding-house, that he has no call to be friends with Grant, as he recognizes him for the man who threw his friend, Jim Millen (now a telegraph operator), down a ship's hatchway, and lamed him for life. May is getting up a conspiracy against Grant to delay the completion of the Monckton. Stanley and Price are invited to attend the meeting in May's room, but they decline to take the oath, and are groping about in the hall outside, when they brush against Millen (who has been calling on Stanley) and now exclaims: "I wish they would let me take that oath!" The next Sunday afternoon Millen goes to the Monckton Building, and while Dave May lures the watchman with him to the thirty-second story, Millen manages to get into Zeb Grant's office and so alter the figures on the plans that the building will be delayed beyond the contract time. Frank Stanley has seen him go in there, however, and the two have a spirited scene, in the midst of which Dave May appears. He wants to know to whom Millen had been talking, and then sees Stanley standing in the shadow.

Stanley tries to make him think that he (Stanley) has altered the plans, in order to shield Millen. Next day on an upper floor of the Monckton Building, a fellow named Crouch, accused of being a spy in the employ of Grant, is rough-handled by the men, and is on the verge of being scraped off the flooring into space by a set of chains Dave May works toward him from his engine. Stanley springs to his assistance, and the two swing out together from the derrick, with only a foot and hand hold, over the far-distant street.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND GUILTY.

NOTHING is more characteristic of rough men than their eagerness to help an enemy suddenly finding himself in deadly peril.

No sooner had Crouch and Stanley swung out on the hooks, than there was a general rush to save them. The fact that nearly everybody had just before been stampeding the spy to death was forgotten. He was seen to be in imminent danger now, and he must be rescued. That was all there was to it.

Of course, Frank Stanley must be helped, too. But somehow he did not seem to need it so much as the miserable creature who had but just now so narrowly escaped with his life.

Only Dave May seemed not to be affected by the awful situation of the two men. He made no move to turn the derrick inward.

With his hand on the lever, it was quite within his power.

An oath deep in his chest expressed his disgust with Stanley's interference.

"The cussed fool! It serves him right! If he wants to be smashed up with that spotter, let him go! It ain't my fault. He had no right on that hook in the first place."

"Bring the derrick in, Dave!" shouted Jack Price, as, perched on the very end of a projecting girder, with one arm around a steel pillar, he tried to reach Stanley's extended hand.

There was no reply. Dave May doggedly kept the arm of the derrick some ten feet out from the building.

"I guess I'll just keep them out there for about ten minutes," he muttered. "By that time they'll be good and tired. If Crouch drops off, all right. It will be an accident. This is Monday—the hoodoo day. That will explain it. Stanley won't let go. He's too good a rigger for that. But it will teach him a lesson not to butt in where he doesn't belong. That's what he needs."

There may be persons who will think it not very difficult to stand on a large steel hook with one foot, letting the other swing loose, the owner meanwhile holding tightly to a chain.

Well, for half a minute or so it might not be hard. After that, however, the foot in the hook begins to feel cramped, the other one, with no support, involuntarily gropes around for something to rest on. Just then, too, all kinds of queer pains shoot up and down the leg, pinch the waist, grip the spinal column and crick the neck.

This condition may continue for ten or fifteen minutes. By that time, unless one is exceptionally seasoned to it, the tendency is to let go. No, it is not so *very* easy!

The crowd of turbulent men who wanted Dave to swing in the derrick, knew all about what "letting go" would mean. There were few of them who had not, at some time or other, seen a body shooting downward from far aloft, and heard the smash into loose boards on the sidewalk before they could get to the edge to look over.

They could follow it all in imagination —the hubbub in the street; the clang of the ambulance gong; the perfunctory examination of the crushed heap that had lately been a living, breathing man; the covering of it with a blanket or sheet, and soon the coming of the police-wagon to bear it away to the morgue.

All this had been in the experience of these men. They appreciated the horror of it. Their rage against Crouch had cooled slightly, and they were determined it should not happen now. They made a peremptory demand on the engineer for the swinging in of the derrick-arm.

"Bring her in, Dave!" yelled several in unison.

"Who's doing this?" was the surly response.

But Dave May knew the temper of the men with whom he worked. He realized that if he didn't move the lever the right way at once, somebody else would do it for him. An engineer considers it sacrilege for a strange hand to touch his engine or any of the machinery in his charge. With a growl, Dave caused the derrick to swoop lazily toward the building.

Jack Price was the first to seize Stanley's hand, as the latter stepped from the hook to the solid floor. Half a dozen calloused fists grabbed the spy. Crouch was not out of trouble yet.

"Well, what are you going to do with that double-dealing whelp, now you've got him?" called out Dave May sneeringly. "Going to let him get away, so that he can tell the boss something more about us? Why didn't you let him stay where he was?"

"I'll tell you why, Dave," replied Frank Stanley, in a ringing voice. "These men are square. That's why they didn't do it. What has this man Crouch done, anyhow? I don't know, for one. I'd like to be told."

"He's been spying on us and telling old Zeb," volunteered one of the men. "Bill Higgins knows something about it."

"Has he? Well, what does he say for himself?"

"He ain't said much *yet*, so fur as *I've* heard," remarked the man with the red nose who had been rather prominent at the meeting of the "club" in Dave May's room, a few nights before, and who was the Bill Higgins referred to. "As soon as the word come that he was snoopin' about in the boss's office, we all went fer him."

"Yes, that's it," rejoined Frank Stanley, taking him up quickly. "The man has never had a chance to defend himself, has he?"

"He don't need to. You've done it for him," snarled Dave May. "Is he a friend of yours?"

Frank Stanley passed over this slur as not worthy of an answer. He said quietly:

"As one of the men working on this building who has fallen into the super's black books, I think I am entitled to hear why you call this man a spy."

This seemed to be taken somehow as a formal call for a meeting. They formed a ring around Crouch. He gazed at each man in turn from the one eye that had not been closed for him. It was evident that he did not regret anything he had done except in so far as it had got him into a dangerous dilemma. Hang-dog defiance was in his every move.

Dave May, engine and all, was in the circle. He took it on himself to conduct the proceedings.

"It's just here, boys," he said. "This Crouch has been talking to old Zeb, at his hotel, in the street, in odd corners of the building, and in his office on the main floor. What was he talking about? A man who isn't a foreman, has no right to be intimate with the boss. No real man *would* be."

"That's right," grunted several voices.

"This Crouch came here from Chicago. He knows a lot of men there who are good friends of mine, and he's a smooth talker himself."

Crouch grinned.

"When he came on the job he knew all about the way we felt to old Zeb. He had heard that we were not treated well, and that some of us were getting ready to kick. I think old Zeb told him he was expecting trouble of some kind."

"Of course he did. Zeb brought this man here on purpose. That's my opinion," declared the red-nosed one.

"He even worked himself into our club," continued Dave. "He did it just so that he could—"

Dave May stopped abruptly and looked around, as if to see who were about him.

"Go on, Dave! What are you stopping for?" one man asked.

"I guess I've said enough," was the engineer's reply. "Some things we meant to do—quite harmless they were—have been carried to Zebediah Grant."

"What things are they?" broke in Crouch, speaking for the first time.

"Never you mind," snapped Dave May. "And don't you speak till you're spoken to, either."

"Have you any proof of what you say, Dave?" asked Stanley.

"Yes. We've been trailing him since Thursday night. But it wasn't till this morning that we got anything definite on him."

"That's what. But we got him dead to rights now," put in the wheezy voice of the red-nosed Higgins. "I'm the fellow that's been watchin' him. I'm the—"

"That'll do, Hig?" warned Dave.

"Oh, go in and curl up, Dave May! My name is Bill Higgins, and this is a free country. As soon as I knowed this Crouch had given it away about the plans and Jim Millen—"

Dave sprang forward and caught the loquacious Bill Higgins by the throat.

"Keep your stupid tongue still, will you?" he hissed. "Don't you suppose there are other men around here who will report all this to old Zeb? Haven't you any sense?"

"That's all right, Dave," returned Higgins, in a quieter tone. "I move we adjourn."

Some of the men who had been on the outskirts of the crowd had drifted away. Repeated calls, more or less angry, from foreman and subforeman were responsible for these desertions. Another reason was that the first heat of indignation had evaporated. There was a growing feeling that apparently no harm had been done, and as the spotter had been caught, he would behave himself in future.

In a few minutes there were not more than a dozen men left on the thirty-second floor, and most of those were paying no attention to Crouch. They had gone back to their regular work. In fact, from all over the vast building arose again the din and clatter that always attends the rising of a steel sky-scraper.

It was remarkable that the noise had ceased for only so short a period. The spy had been mobbed, had a narrow escape from a frightful death, been saved, and then put on trial, and all within the time a lazy man would take to fill and light his pipe; in fact, not much more than five minutes.

Dave May, Bill Higgins, Jack Price, and Frank Stanley were among those who did not lose sight of Crouch. Stanley had fought vigorously against Crouch being

treated with anything but fair play. But only on general principles. He believed the fellow had betrayed Jim Millen to old Zeb, and he intended to have it out with him before permitting him to get away.

A violent shaking of the chains hanging from the derrick sent Dave swiftly to his engine. It was a signal that he must lower away his hooks, to bring up some steel-girders.

"Look after that fellow, Stanley!" he shouted, as he ran to handle his levers.

Frank Stanley took Crouch by the arm. He might as well put the spy through a little questioning on his own account now as at any time. He had just opened his mouth to speak when a yell of surprise from Jack Price made him shut it again.

"Look, Stan! At the ladder!"

There was a square hole in the flooring at one side. From it protruded the top of a ladder. The elevator stopped four floors below. Working himself awkwardly up the ladder was—Jim Millen!

Stanley dashed across the floor, and throwing his arms around his crippled chum, lifted him bodily from the ladder.

"Jim!" cried Stanley, in amazement. "*How did you do it?*"

"I don't know, Stan. I didn't—suppose—I could," panted Jim Millen. "But I—wanted—to see you. I had—to—get here. Somebody has been—telling—Zebediah Grant—that I—did something—to his—plans."

"Don't worry about that, old boy!" said Stanley, in soothing tones.

"Yes, I must. It's going to get—you—into trouble. He thinks—you—were in it."

"That's all right, Jim. Let him. He can't hurt me. But how did you get up here? You might have killed yourself on that ladder."

"No, Stan. I know how to—climb—a ladder. You've see me—do it—many a dark night. Harder ladders—than this. I haven't forgotten—the trick, even if my leg—isn't as—straight as it was. When I—want a thing—I generally get there. I—always did. You ought to—remember that."

"That's true, Jim. But I wish you hadn't come up here. It's no place for anybody who doesn't *have* to be here."

"Well, I have to be here, Stan. I had to come and tell you. Zebediah Grant has got at the chief in the telegraph office, and I am out of a job."

"What? You? A star man? And they so short of good operators? It can't be!" shouted Stanley.

"Yes, Stan, I'm fired. It was Zebediah Grant who did it. The chief admitted it."

"Zebediah Grant! The old brute!"

"And that isn't the worst of it. Grant has such influence that he can prevent my ever getting work with a telegraph company again. That means ruin to me."

"Oh, no, Jim. We'll get you a job in some private office or on a newspaper. Don't give up."

"No, they don't want a crippled-up thing like me anywhere. But I'll have it out with Grant, and very soon. What I want now is to find the man who told him I was in his office. He is up here somewhere. His name is Crouch."

"Crouch?" cried Jack Price, who had been listening to Jim Millen's story. "Why, here he is!"

But Jack Price was wrong. The spy had taken advantage of the coming of Jim Millen, and the consequent neglect of himself, to slip away. He was nowhere on the floor.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE THE SPY FAILED.

"DOWN the ladder, Jack!" shouted Stanley. "He can't be far."

Jack Price was already at the square opening, looking down. He shook his head.

"No, Stan! He didn't go this way."

"He must have!" insisted Stanley.

"He didn't, I tell you. Everything is open down to the twenty-eighth story. I could see him if he was anywhere about."

"Then where did he go?"

Dave May looked over from his engine platform. He had brought up his girders and had a few moments respite from duty.

"Who's gone?" he asked sharply.

"Crouch."

Dave came running over, mumbling all sorts of angry oaths.

"What?" he howled. "The spotter? Why the blazes didn't you hold on to him? Get after him, quick!"

"We don't know where he's gone," snapped Jack Price.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," remarked May, shrugging his shoulders ominously. "It's going to make trouble if Crouch gets

to old Zeb Grant while Millen is on this building."

Frank Stanley ran to one corner of the floor and looked over the edge. It would have made most men dizzy to look straight down like that from a height of more than four hundred feet, especially without holding to anything. But Stanley was used to it. Moreover, he was too much occupied in seeking something to worry himself about the danger.

In a moment his eye lighted on what he had expected. Crouch was shinning down a steel pillar five floors below. He hung right over the street as he did it, clinging with fingers and knees. It was the kind of thing that called for muscle, agility, and abundant nerve.

Crouch was a steel-rigger, and necessarily had his share of all three. He had been badly handled by the crowd, but they hadn't disabled him, by a long way.

Frank Stanley's first impulse was to follow the spy down the pillar. Then he saw that he would have little chance of catching him. It was evidently Crouch's intention to get into the building and lose himself before proceeding very far.

Even as Stanley looked, Crouch suddenly swung himself off the pillar inward and vanished.

"He's gone!" announced Stanley, as he rejoined the others.

"You'd better chase him," advised Dave. "He'll go and tell old Zeb, Millen is here."

"I wish he would," broke in Millen violently. "I want to see this Grant."

Dave May turned to him with a heavy frown, as he growled:

"Don't you be a fool, young fellow. Keep out of the game for a while, and let somebody else play your hand. Whatever you do, keep away from old Zeb. There's others'll attend to him—men he's insulted, and who have a better right than you to do it."

Shaking his big, shaggy head, as he thought of his ever-rankling grievance against the man who had dared to accuse him of drinking, Dave went back to his engine. A signal absorbed all his attention just then. He was too busy with his levers to notice anything else.

"Jim," whispered Stanley, "won't you go home and stay till I come this evening? Then we can hold a family council and decide what you're to do."

"That's all right, Stan. I appreciate your good intentions. But, first, I want to see this Crouch."

"And get into an argument with him? What good will that do?"

"No; I don't care to speak to him. All I want is to have one good look at him," replied Millen through his set teeth.

"But you saw him in Dave May's room Thursday night."

"Yes, and it seemed to me then as if I'd seen him before. I couldn't remember where and when. But this morning, after I'd been fired, I saw his back as he came into this building, and then, in a flash, I knew who he was."

"Who was he?"

"I'll tell you that when I tell *him*. What I want now is to find him."

"You shall soon do that. I'm going after him. Jack," to Price, "come down with Jim Millen, will you? Lend him a hand if he wants it."

"All right," responded Jack cheerfully.

Stanley and Price were members of a certain working gang, like all the men employed on the Monckton. But a heavy girder had been put in wrong at the other end of the floor, and their foreman was too busy with it to notice them.

So Stanley hustled down the ladder four floors, and waited for the elevator to come up.

"Did anybody go down on the last trip, Barney?" he asked of the man in charge.

"Not the last one. There was nothing on but wheelbarrows. But there was a man on the trip before with his face all bunged up. I didn't know him. He said he'd been in a fight, and was after quitting for the day. Is that the one you're looking for?"

"I guess he is," replied Stanley, as he stepped on the elevator platform, and went jolting and wheezing down to the main floor.

Stanley went to the front entrance of the building, where men were busy going in and out, carrying material and shoving wheelbarrows. Overlooking everything with a sharp, official eye, was Pat Cregan, the watchman.

"Pat, have you seen Crouch go out of here this morning?"

"I have not," replied Cregan shortly.

"You know him, don't you?"

"Aye, I know him all right. He come in more'n an hour ago, an' he's in yet. There's no one could get away without me knowin' it. The Broadway side of the buildin' is all closed up, d'ye mind?"

Stanley thanked the watchman, and had just stationed himself near the foot of the rude shaft, in which ran up and down the two elevators, to wait for Jim Millen, when a tap on the shoulder made him turn. It was Zebediah Grant.

"Why aren't you at work?" asked old Zeb, in a curiously mild tone. "You ought to be on one of those upper floors."

"I got off for five minutes. I had some personal business down here."

"To see me?"

"No, not exactly," replied Stanley, rather nonplused.

"Well, I want to see *you*. Come into the office."

Old Zeb's manner puzzled Stanley. While it was not exactly friendly, it did not express any particular resentment. He seemed to have forgotten the stormy interview of the afternoon before—or, at least, to have forgiven all that Stanley had said. And yet the young man had admitted that he had altered the plans, adding insult to injury by calling the other "an old scoundrel."

Stanley thought of all this, and did not move.

"I suppose you're going to fire me," he said. "Can't you do it out here?"

"Firing you isn't the only thing I could do," was the rejoinder. "Don't forget that you confessed to having tampered with my safe and certain property in it yesterday. I could have had you in jail before this if I'd chosen. You'd better come inside."

There was no mistaking the threat in these words. Stanley followed old Zeb into the office.

"Now," began Zeb, as he closed the door, "I dare say you wonder why I didn't have you arrested for trying to spoil these blue-prints?"

"Why didn't you?"

Zebediah seated himself comfortably in his office chair, tilted backward, and smiled with the air of a man who has the upper hand. Then he answered:

"For the same reason that I let you go to work to-day. Some men in my position would have discharged you for your insulting language, aside from everything else. But I am a man of business. This building has to be finished within sixty days, and I am keeping on all my workmen."

"You could have fired me if it suited you," observed Stanley.

"Of course I could," snapped Zeb. "But it *didn't* suit me, as I have just said. Then there is another reason why I didn't turn you over to the police, and that is that *I know you did not alter those plans.*"

"You *think* you know it," came from Frank Stanley's lips steadily. "But your *spy* has lied to you."

Zebediah Grant started out of his chair and leaned forward to glare into the young man's face.

"What do you mean by 'spy,' and how do you know I got my information from any source except my own observation?" he demanded.

"Well, it is the general supposition among the men that you have a spy working for you, and that he fakes up yarns so that you will think he earns his pay. Anyhow, I have confessed that I marked up those blue-prints. That ought to be enough for you."

Zebediah Grant was a shrewd man of the world, who had made the dissection of human motives a life study. He understood perfectly well that Stanley was trying to shield his friend, Jim Millen. It was not the sort of thing old Zeb would have done for anybody. But he knew there *were* such curiously generous persons in the world, and that Frank Stanley was one of them.

He dropped into his chair again and changed the subject by saying, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I've heard something more about the conspiracy since I saw you yesterday afternoon."

He stopped. Stanley sauntered over to one of the windows, which was open to ventilate the rather stuffy little office. He looked through, in the direction of the elevators. But a steel pillar ran up and down close against the window and hid them from his view.

"Well, I don't want to see the elevators," he thought. "Jim Millen must have come down long ago."

"I've heard," went on old Zeb, "that there's another scheme afoot to prevent the Monckton being completed on time."

Stanley raised his eyebrows, but made no comment. Zebediah continued:

"The information I have is that the conspirators realize the attempt to cause delay by muddling up the plans is a failure. The person who did that work wasted his time."

"You mean me."

"I mean the person who did it," snapped Zebediah. "Now, the men are going to try some dirty trick."

"What are they going to do?"

"That's what I haven't found out. I want you to tell me. If you do, and I find you are telling me the truth, I will—"

Old Zeb continued to talk, admitting in effect that his spy had failed him; but Frank Stanley did not hear what he said. His attention had been drawn away, suddenly and entirely, by a metallic tapping close to his ear as he stood at the open window.

The tapping seemed to be on the steel pillar just outside, which he had noticed because it shut off his view of the elevators. The intermittent sound came to him like a singularly clear voice.

Involuntarily he turned to look out of the window. There was no one there. But the tapping continued.

The pillar, he knew, was one of a series, all bolted together, and forming a continuous, unbroken line of steel from the depths of the solid rock, a hundred feet below where he stood, to the very top of the great building, more than four hundred feet above.

The person making the tapping noise might be down in the sub-cellar or on any of the floors above, for all Frank Stanley could tell. That it would be transmitted the whole length of the steel line formed by the joined pillars he knew, of course. It was a phenomenon in natural science familiar to everybody.

Where the tapping came from was not the only question that agitated Stanley, however. It was what it *said*. For though the taps sounded to old Zeb—if he heard them at all—like a mere jumble, to the younger man they were coherent speech.

Some of the taps were short and sharp, others lingered slightly, and the intervals between these short and longer sounds were not all of the same duration. All this conveyed a distinct meaning to Frank Stanley. He could not have mistaken it if he would.

The tappings were calling his name!

The sounds and intervals were like this, so far as they can be shown on paper:

.—. . .. .— —. —.— and ... — .— —.

They signified, in the Morse telegraphic code, "Frank" and "Stan."

Over and over came this combination of dots and dashes with nervous rapidity:

.—. (F) . .. (R) .— (A) —. (N) —.— (K). Then ... (S) — (T) .— (A) —. (N). Then "Frank" again, and so on without ceasing.

The person making the sounds, whoever he might be, was determined to reach Frank Stanley somehow. Evidently, also, he was confident his call would be answered at last by the person at whom it was aimed.

It was not long in getting there.

"By the Lord! It's Jim!" muttered Stanley as he listened more intently. "I know his voice."

Any telegrapher who might have heard Stanley use the word "voice" in referring to the dot-and-dash calls on the steel pipe would have taken it quite seriously. It is a fact, known to the experienced operator, that every man "sending" over the wire has a distinct accent of his own.

Each man's accent is unlike, in some subtle degree, that of anybody else. To the receiver it soon comes to be like the actual speaking voice of the man at the other end of the wire, perhaps a thousand miles away.

Frank Stanley, listening to the persistent calls of his old comrade, was brought back to the little office with a jerk by the harsh tones of old Zeb, full of impatience:

"What do you say to that proposition?"

"Won't you give me a little time?" asked Stanley at random.

"Very well. I don't object to that," replied Zeb. "I'm going up to the thirty-second to see what they're doing there. Be here in this office in half an hour. Come out now. I'm going to lock the door."

Stanley went out quickly and stood by the side of the pipe, where he could still hear the dots and dashes rapping out tirelessly:

"Frank! Stan! Frank! Stan! Frank!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOODOO OF MONDAY.

EVEN while old Zeb stood at his side, Stanley managed to send an answer to the persistent caller by a hasty tap on the pillar with a lead pencil.

It was a very short message—only two dots, thus: .. This is "i" in the code, and telegraphers use it to express "All right. I understand." It is an abbreviation of "Aye! Aye!" One of the first lessons of an operator is to economize time and electricity.

No sooner had Stanley lightly tapped the two dots than a rush of tappings began in response.

Zebediah looked toward the pillar in some curiosity, and Stanley, his hand behind him, rapidly tapped — — .. —. This spells

"min." It is half of the word "minute," meaning "Wait a minute." "Min" is the regular code word for "wait."

The tapping ceased. Jim Millen, wherever he was, knew that Frank Stanley would not tell him to wait without good reason.

"I wonder who that is wasting his time hammering on that iron?" grumbled old Zeb. "If I come across him, he'll hear from me, I bet."

Stanley did not answer, and Zebediah went growling over to the elevator.

"In half an hour, mind!" he called out, as he prepared to step on the platform.

"Will you square it for me with the foreman when you get up there?" asked Stanley.

"Yes, I'll speak to him."

The elevator rumbled upward, with old Zeb aboard. Stanley waited till it had passed out of sight. Then he telegraphed on the steel pillar:

"This is Stan. Who are you?"

"Millen," came the reply.

"Where are you, Jim?"

"In the subcellar."

"Whereabouts?"

"Don't know. Follow this iron upright. That will bring you to me."

"How did you get down there?"

"Crouch brought me."

"What for?"

"Till he gets the police, he said. I think it is a bluff."

"All right. I am coming to you," replied Stanley. "Keep quiet unless you hear from me. I will speak to you on the steel pillar now and then."

.. came the response from Jim Millen. Then he was silent.

Frank Stanley lost no time in going to the rescue of his chum. He understood why Crouch had made a prisoner of him. It had been done by old Zeb's orders, and the object was to squeeze out of him information about the new scheme to delay the completion of the Monckton, of which Zebediah had spoken to Stanley just before.

Even in these prosaic modern days, men often adopt medieval methods to make other men give up secrets.

It was the work of only a few moments for Frank Stanley to run down the stone steps, already in place, to the first cellar. He noted the position of the steel pillar. Then he went down another flight to the subcellar.

It was dark down here, and he lighted a match to look about him. No one was there. Obviously Jim Millen had not been detained in this place. He would have to go farther down. First of all, however, he would speak to his imprisoned friend. So he went to the steel upright and tapped with his pencil:

—.—. (J) .. (I) — — (M).

Instantly came the "i" in reply.

"I am in the subcellar. You must be below," tapped Stanley.

"I am. But the door is shut."

"All right. Keep quiet. I'll find it."

It was not easy for Frank Stanley to blunder about the subcellar, dodging the many powerful steel uprights that supported the towering structure above, with no light but matches held in his fingers.

Fortunately, Stanley was a smoker. So he had in his pocket a full packet of patent matches, with paraffined stems, such as are given away to purchasers of cigars and tobacco by a well-known corporation. He estimated that this package of matches would more than suffice to light him until he had found his way to Jim Millen.

There was considerable litter of stone and other building material in both of the cellars he had examined. This lower one was the untidier of the two. In sinking the foundations far down into bed-rock caissons had been employed, and odd parts of these contrivances lay about here and there, together with great fragments of rock, planks, and general rubbish.

"I don't see any open stairway, like those above," said Stanley to himself, as he wandered about, match in hand. "I suppose there must be a trap-door somewhere. Ah, there it is!"

He had observed several cumbersome planks piled up against a wall. His quick eye detected finger-marks in the gray dust with which all of them were covered. In a few moments he had moved them away, revealing a square opening in the cement floor. From below came a gush of air colder than that of the cellar in which he stood.

"Hallo, Jim!" he shouted.

"Frank!" responded the voice of Jim Millen from the blackness. And how joyful was the tone!

Stanley lighted another match, to take the place of one just expiring in his fingers, and held it down the hole. He saw there a flight of stone steps very much like those he had already come down.

"I'm coming, Jim," he called out as he began to descend.

The roof of this lowermost cellar was considerably loftier than either of the others. He went down at least twenty steps before he reached the bottom. Then, as he lighted another match, the reflection shone full upon the face of Jim Millen, only a few feet distant.

Stanley put out his hand. Jim Millen grasped it with the fervor that might be expected in the circumstances.

"I knew you'd get to me, Stan," were Millen's first words.

"Suppose I hadn't heard your message?" suggested Stanley.

"You were bound to hear it. I knew you were in the building. Every steel support *must* come right down through here to get to the foundations. I knew that, too."

"I see."

"Sure! I would have tapped at every one of them until I got you. I tried four or five of them, as it was. I used the end of my pen-knife for a telegraph-key."

"But how did Crouch get you down to this place? That's what I want to know."

"By a trick. The scalawag!" was the angry reply. "I'll tell you. Jack Price left me when I got on the elevator on the upper floor. He knew I could get down, all right. As I stepped off at the bottom this fellow Crouch stood there. I didn't want to speak to him. It wasn't necessary. I can fix him when the time comes without having any talk with him."

"Yes, I've heard you say that before," remarked Stanley.

"He came right up to me and said quickly, as if he was worried: 'You're a friend of Frank Stanley's, I know. Well, he's badly hurt in the subcellar. He fell down a hole from the cellar above.'"

"I'll lick Mr. Crouch for that," put in Stanley quietly.

"Of course, that got me excited," continued Millen. "But I asked him what you'd been doing in the cellar. He grinned and said: 'He was hunting for me, I guess. But I haven't anything against him.' That would have made me mad if I hadn't been so worried about you. Why should Crouch have anything against you?"

"He may have after a while," was Stanley's significant response. "But go on. I want to get you out of this."

"Well, I took his word for it, and followed him down from one cellar to another. He had a lantern. It was slow work for me to go down those stone steps—three flights of them. But I did it at last. No sooner had I got to this place than Crouch burst out laughing. Then I knew it was a trick. I aimed a stroke at him with my cane. But, of course, I fell down. I can't stand without the cane, you know."

"Poor old Jim!" murmured Stanley.

"He flashed the lantern in my face and kicked the cane out of my reach."

Frank Stanley's terrible left fist clenched, and he shook it in the air. But he said nothing, and Millen went on:

"Then he told me that Mr. Grant had found out that something was plotted by the men on this building to delay it, and that I knew all about it."

"But you don't, do you, Jim?" asked Stanley eagerly.

"Of course I don't. I told Crouch I didn't understand what he was driving at. He swore and said the old man—meaning Grant—knew better, and that I'd have to tell all I knew. I asked him what would happen if I didn't. Then he grinned again, and said I'd better remember that this was Monday, the hoodoo-day. What does that mean, Stan?"

"'Hoodoo' is a word steel-workers use in connection with Monday," replied Stanley with a grave shake of the head. "And it is deserved, too. We are always glad when Monday is over. Men who work on high buildings have noticed that there are more accidents then than on any other day in the week. The records certainly prove that it is so."

"What is the reason?" queried Millen.

"Most of us think it is on account of the men having been off a day. We blame Sunday for it. A man loses his grip to some extent by lying around all day Sunday. Then on Monday, when he comes to work, why, he misses his hold somewhere, or drops a heavy tool a few stories on some other man's head, or a scaffold fetches loose, or a derrick lets go, or something. Anyhow, Monday has earned its right to be called 'hoodoo-day,' worse luck. But hurry up and tell me what else Crouch did."

"Well, we argued for a few minutes. Then he said there was plenty of evidence that I had broken into the safe in Grant's office on Sunday afternoon, and the old man had been going to turn me over to the police, when he determined to give me one chance."

"The chance was to tell him what the supposed move of the men would be, eh?"

"Yes."

"But it's a pipe-dream, of course? He's been after me to tell him what I know about it. But I don't know anything except what he has told me."

"No more do I, Stan."

"*You're quite sure you don't, Jim?*"

Frank Stanley's voice had taken on a tone of deeper earnestness than had been in it heretofore. He remembered that Millen was in the "club." If anything really were contemplated by its members, he ought to know it.

"I give you my sacred word I don't," was Jim Millen's emphatic protest.

That was enough. Stanley knew Jim would never tell a deliberate falsehood, any more than he would break an oath.

"Is that all the story?" he asked.

"Yes, except that when Crouch found I would not tell him anything, he went up the steps in a hurry, as if he'd lost patience. He called down that I would have to stay down here for half an hour, until he could bring a couple of policemen to take me away to the station in a hurry-up wagon. Then he went through the hole up there and covered it in with something heavy—a lot of lumber, it sounded like. I was left alone in pitch darkness."

"Hadn't you any matches?"

"Yes, plenty. It was a good thing I had, or I might not have been able to find my way to the upright, to telegraph you."

"Well, we'll fool them this time," said Stanley, gritting his teeth. "For Crouch's sake, I hope I sha'n't meet him to-day. Come along, old man!"

He gave a hand to Jim Millen, to help him up the steps. They got to the cellar above—still two floors down from the street level—and made for the steps that would take them to the next, guided by the little reflected light that shone from above.

"I didn't know how deep I was till I began to come up," remarked Jim Millen. "How many more of these stairs?"

"One flight more. You won't mind that," answered Stanley encouragingly.

"All right."

Millen said this absently, and his chum knew he was thinking about old Zeb and Crouch in a way that would mean an outbreak whenever he met either of them.

"Here we are, Jim. Here's the steps."

Stanley and Millen had reached the flight which would take them up to the main floor. Jim sighed in relief. It had been hard work for him to come up from the lowermost cellar, even with his chum's assistance. He planted his cane on the cement floor smilingly.

Then—there was a crash far above, like the crackling of a singularly spiteful outburst of thunder at the beginning of a fierce tempest. This was followed instantly by bangs and crashes that seemed as if they must be tearing the whole immense building apart in a hundred places.

"Back! Back!" shouted Stanley through the awful din.

He already had Jim Millen by the arm, and it was well that he had. With all his strength he dragged the crippled man away from the foot of the steps, and hurled him, as well as himself, headlong to the floor, twenty feet away!

Only just in time!

In the midst of the thunderous clamor, the splintering, banging, and crashing of falling bodies, a great steel girder, sixteen feet long, and weighing several tons, plunged head-on down the steps, and, sliding swiftly along the floor, dropped finally, with a deafening clang, immediately by the side of the prostrate young men!

"Hoodoo Monday, sure enough!" exclaimed Stanley, when the noise had somewhat quieted down, and he was satisfied that he and his companion were both unhurt.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T GET AWAY.

It was some minutes before the noise ceased entirely.

Twice, when Frank Stanley believed the the last crash had come, and that it would be safe to go up and see what really had happened, there was another tremendous rattle and bang, that warned him to remain away from the stone steps.

He and Jim Millen were not lying on the floor by the side of the heavy girder, however.

The great length of steel had hardly settled itself, after its dive down the steps, when Stanley dragged his bewildered chum from the vicinity of the stairway. Obviously, there was more likelihood of safety in the back of the cellar than near the

opening by which the steel beam had entered so boisterously.

But even at the other end they could not escape the slamming and crashing. Stanley only hoped the steel-ribbed roof would not give way. If it should, there would be little chance for them to emerge alive.

Frank Stanley and Jim Millen had been in imminent danger too often in their sailor days—and nights—to lose their heads even under such terrifying conditions as the present. They were really more curious than apprehensive.

The philosophy they both accepted was that a man has always at least two chances to one to get through a deadly peril without injury. The odds that he will escape with his life they placed at about ten to one. This opinion is shared by the average worker on high buildings.

"What do you suppose it is, Stan?" asked Millen, when the intermittent uproar finally ceased.

"Something given way," was the sententious reply.

"Yes, that's a cinch. But it doesn't often happen on buildings of this kind, does it?"

"No. When it does, there are just two causes."

"What are they?"

"Carelessness of the worst kind, or—criminality."

"Criminality? That is, done on purpose?" queried Jim.

"Yes."

"Who would do it?"

Stanley did not answer at once. After a few moments of silence, he said impressively, as he tried to make out the expression on Millen's face in the semi-darkness:

"It would be quite possible for a gang of men setting the steel work of a building like this to make it defective. They could do it in various ways, and so smoothly that they would never be suspected. Even architects and engineers can be fooled, if they are not on the job every minute."

"But a steel-frame building like the Monckton is constructed to scale, and every piece must fit into some other piece, where it belongs, or the whole thing is wrong. I don't see how the men *could* spoil it. Certainly it would not be easy."

"Not easy, Jim. But it can be done. I'd bet anything it *has* been done here. But I guess nothing else is going to fall. Let's go up and look around."

As Stanley took his arm to help him up the steps, Jim Millen drew back for a moment. Then he said earnestly:

"Stan, you don't think I had anything to do with this, do you?"

"Of course I don't. Didn't you give me your word?"

The steps were so clogged with rubbish that ascending them was difficult. It was especially hard for Millen. His twisted leg had never been more awkward. But he and Stanley got to the top somehow.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Millen.

Stanley had been looking upward through such spaces as had been left in the flooring at the different stories. His experienced eye soon told him what had occurred.

"It isn't so bad as I feared, Jim," he answered. "It seems to be mostly in the elevator-shaft."

"I wonder whether anybody has been injured."

"That's what I want to find out," replied Frank gravely.

On the part of the main floor where they stood was an immense tangle of steel beams, splintered wood, and broken stone used for flooring. It had all come from above somewhere.

The elevator-shaft was completely wrecked. One of the wire-ropes had been broken like a stick of macaroni, and the two unwieldy wooden platforms, smashed to fragments, were scattered over the floor in all directions.

All this Stanley took in at a glance. Then he saw Pat Cregan waving his arms at the main entrance from the street. He was yelling at the people who were trying to force their way in.

"Kape out, ye *omadhauns!*" he shrieked. his brogue thickening in his excitement. "Do yez all want to be kilt? Be th' saints, yez won't have wan mouthful o' breath in th' whole av yez av ye ventoor in."

But this had no effect on the crowding mob without. Every one of them would rather risk his life than not satisfy his curiosity as to what had taken place in the great sky-scraper.

"Stan' back, there!" he went on, louder than ever. "There's more av it comin' down. Don't yez t'ink we hov hurted men enough, wit'out yez breakin' in t' give us

more? Git back, or I'll powther yez wid me shtick, so I will."

Swinging his "billy" over the heads of the pushing intruders, he managed to get the big doors closed. As he dropped the heavy wooden bar into its sockets, he growled:

"Bad cess to 'em! Whenever there's a trifle of iron an' some wood falls down, I always hov a foight on me hands."

"Is anybody hurt, Pat?" broke in Stanley.

Cregan turned to see who was speaking. Then he answered shortly:

"How do I know? Likely there is. When eight or ten stories of a buildin' tumbles into the cellar, ye can't expect not to hit somebody."

Cregan was noted for his tendency to exaggeration, as well as his irritability. His statement that eight or ten stories had fallen did not worry Stanley. It was not likely that anything worse had happened than the giving way of some of the structural steel work on one or two floors.

Still, that would be bad enough. It would weaken the stories above, and might necessitate the pulling down and rebuilding of a large portion of the edifice.

It looked to Stanley as if the whole trouble might be the work of the "club" of which Dave May was president. If that were the case, probably no one had been hurt. All the men would be warned to get to a place of safety before the expected collapse. No doubt it had been fairly accurately timed.

"Will you wait down here while I go up, Jim?" he asked.

"Very well. But that man Crouch said he was going to get the police to take me to the station. If they come into the building they are bound to see me here."

Even as he spoke there was an authoritative banging at one of the big doors. Pat Cregan opened it cautiously. Two policemen came in.

"By George! There they are!" muttered Stanley.

But these officers were not after Jim Millen. They had come only to see whether anybody had been injured in the smash. They took no notice of either Stanley or Millen, but asked a question of Pat Cregan. Then they went hurriedly up the stairs.

"That was only a bluff by Crouch. He hasn't gone near the police. I don't believe he ever meant to. Come up after me, Jim. But take your time. We'll attend to Crouch later."

"Is it Crouch ye're talkin' about?" interposed Cregan. "Well, he ain't in the buildin'. He went away ten minutes ago, before the house came down on our heads."

"Come on, then, Jim. You'll find me up there somewhere."

Without waiting for a reply, Stanley sprang up the steps, pushing his way among the heaped-up rubbish and stepping over gaps where the stairs had been broken away.

Three steel beams, including that which had plunged into the cellar, had shot down the elevator-shaft. One of these great beams lay across the stairs three floors above. It had been flung out of the shaft, and, after plowing through a dozen of the hard cement stairs, had stopped suddenly, right in the way of people passing up and down.

The beam was in a ticklish situation, held by only one corner of a step. A hard shove or a sudden jar might have hurled it to the main floor like an enormous battering-ram.

"I wish Jim wasn't below there," muttered Stanley. "That girder is liable to let go at any moment. But there's nothing I can do. It'll probably hold till he gets past. Poor old Jim will have to take a chance, just as I and the policemen did."

With a last look at the tottering beam and an unuttered prayer for his old chum, Stanley continued his journey upward. More and more evidences of fierce destruction met him the farther he went.

At the thirtieth story he had to stop. He was in the presence of the real havoc.

As he left the top stair and stood upon the floor he found himself in the midst of a confused mix-up of steel girders, great blocks of stone, heaps of flat tiling, and broken-up building material of all kinds.

"Good Lord! There's Dave May's engine!" he exclaimed. "Crashed right through from the thirty-second!"

He had just seen the engine, on its side, in the midst of the mountain of rubbish. Far above it sprawled the immense wooden arm of the derrick. The wire-ropes, tackle and chains belonging to it lay in a tangle near-by, with the two large hooks thrown on top. The derrick itself was still in place.

"This has been a smash-up, sure!" mut-

tered Stanley. "It wasn't any accident, either."

The steel skeleton of the outer walls towered above him for four stories or more. There were two floors overhead which had been intact the last time Stanley saw them. Now they showed two enormous jagged rents. When the steel beams fell from above, they had crashed through them as if they had been of cardboard.

The damage had all been at the front of the building, so that only half the floor on which Stanley stood was encumbered with the débris. At the rear were gathered about twenty men. They were the steel-workers who had been employed on the three uppermost stories. Were they all there? He could not tell just then.

The two policemen who had preceded him up the steps were in the crowd, talking to Zebediah Grant. All were bending over something on the floor. Instinctively Stanley knew what it was, although he could not see from where he stood. Men never looked in just that way, after an accident, except at one thing!

Horror, pity, anger, and a desire to help were in every face.

Even old Zeb Grant's hard features softened.

It was a man, grievously injured!

"It's hard on him that he was the only one who didn't get away," remarked one of the policemen, as he bent down to make the sufferer's head more comfortable on the rolled-up coat that served as a pillow.

"Who is it?" asked Frank Stanley, in a hushed but eager voice.

No one replied. Instead, they made way for him to get through. Ere the last man in his path had stepped aside, Stanley made out on the floor the figure of a well-built man, in rough laboring clothes. His warm coat, very desirable when one is working on the breezy upper stories of a sky-scraper, was thrown wide open. He could not get too much air now.

Before the face came into view, Stanley was thankful to see that the arms moved. At least, he was not dead.

Then the last man obstructing his view moved aside.

(To be continued.)

THE BATTLE OF LIFE.

I MUST be strong of soul and stanch of heart,
No matter what the odds;
The long day's sturdy struggle is my part—
The far result is God's.

Not mine to wet the page of yesterday
With unavailing tears,
Nor strive to clear the mystery of a way
Far-leading through the years.

Mine just to meet and conquer, hour by hour,
The thing that men call Fate,
Going from strength to strength, from power to power,
Rising from state to state;

Fighting, face star-ward, through the changing wars
With which a world is rife,
So that my soul may borrow from the stars
Courage and light and life;

Cleaving the shadows with unswerving faith,
So I may move aright;
Down to the valley of the shade of death
Walking a path of light;

Till at the last, weary, I touch the goal,
And know the journey blest,
Ready, though stanch of heart and strong of soul,
Aye, ready—for my rest!

Nancy Byrd Turner.

The Man on Third

by F.V. Greene Jr.

"IT looks like a late supper, Billy."

Watson glanced quickly toward Stemper, walking at his side.

"You mean—"

"I mean from the way the game is going, we may have a tie score up to dark. I certainly don't think it'll be decided by the end of the ninth inning."

"Perhaps not," Billy remarked slowly, and he took his place as third baseman for the Danbury team, with Stemper only a few feet away, covering short.

The day was a perfect one for baseball, and the game now playing was as perfect as the day. In the seven innings not an error had occurred to reflect discredit on any player, and the two runs each team had made were earned by good, clean batting.

There had always been a rivalry between South Norwalk and Danbury regarding the relative merits of their baseball teams, and to hear some of the older residents of each town telling of the games which had been won or lost, one might thing that the national game had existed there since the time when the Indians dived for oysters off Nauvoo Island.

This rivalry each year consisted of a series of three games, and the toss of a penny decided which town should have two of them. In this respect, Danbury had been fortunate enough to win this year, and fortune did not desert them—they won the first game, too.

The second had been played at South Norwalk, and the home team succeeded in making one run more than its opponents, thereby giving to each a game. This added far more interest to the final one, and when it started, the grounds were thronged with spectators and rooters.

The game had progressed rapidly. There was little hitting and what was done was fielded cleanly, so that the two runs which each team had made in the third inning were runs to which they were justly entitled.

Billy Watson's face was lined with grim determination, which was also reflected on the countenances of every other Danbury player as each took his position in the field, and the next to the last inning was begun.

The pitcher threw the ball and instantly every player was keenly alert. But there was no necessity for action — the umpire called it a "ball."

Again the sphere shot toward the batter and the crack as it met his bat caused the subdued excitement of the Norwalkers to

break out in a wild yell of glee as they saw the ball shooting toward a spot a few feet from where Stemper was standing. But their joy was brief as the short-stop sprang toward the ball, which found a safe resting-place in the center of his glove.

Every sound of gladness on the part of the visiting team's followers was instantly stilled, while the Danbury enthusiasts showed their appreciation of Stemper's skill in a way which threatened damage to the throats of some of them.

The next two batters failed to reach first base safely, and one-half of the inning was over. But Danbury was also unsuccessful in scoring in their half—a pop fly, a foul just outside of third base, and a strike-out put them in the field again, and started the ninth inning.

Hardly a sound came from the throats of the spectators, so intense was their suppressed excitement, and the players felt the same way as they walked silently to their positions.

But bedlam was instantly let loose when the first South Norwalk batsman dropped a short right-field fly into a spot which enabled him to reach first base safely. And this wild enthusiasm was tripled when, as the pitcher's arm came back to throw the next ball, the runner dashed toward second, to reach it safely by a long slide, although the Danbury catcher had made a beautiful throw in an effort to head him off.

With a man on second base and no one out, the followers of the Norwalk team were giving an excellent representation of a lunatic asylum out for an airing, while each Danburyite's face glowered black and gloomy, as each man leaned grimly forward.

The next batter placed a beautiful sacrifice hit a few feet from first base, and by the time the player who covered that position had rushed to the bag with it, the man on second had gone to third. At this—only one man out—it looked like sure victory for South Norwalk, and their yells and actions proved that they considered the game as good as won.

The next man to step to the plate made two desperate lunges at the ball, but failed to find it. Then, with a resounding whack that brought every one on the stand to his feet, the sphere shot up in the air, far outside the third-base foul-line.

Billy Watson was after it instantly, and with his face turned skyward, he raced on toward where the crowd was seated on the grass inside the imaginary line the police had drawn.

But Billy didn't see them, or even think of them. His mind was entirely centered on getting under that ball before it reached earth, and as he neared them, the crowd scattered, and those who moved slower than others scrambled to give him a free path. But they were not at all successful in doing this, and unmindful of the fact, Watson stumbled over them.

All eyes were centered on the third baseman, and the majority of those on the grounds held their breath, some to give vent to quick cries of anxiety, as they saw he was in danger of being tripped up.

But they alarmed themselves unnecessarily. Billy staggered beneath the ball—he had not yet quite regained his equilibrium—and caught it. Then, a wild cheer broke the stillness, but it was immediately hushed as the Norwalk man on third rushed toward the home-plate.

To the spectators it seemed as if he was taking a hopeless chance, and particularly so to Watson. He smiled grimly as he drew back his arm slowly—there was no necessity for a hasty throw—and it looked as if the beginning of the ninth inning was over.

Then, something unexpected happened.

Billy didn't throw the ball!

Instead, it fell unheeded from his hand as he dropped on the ground beside the child who lay there with eyes closed and face white as death.

As Watson explained it afterward, he could never understand what unseen power had turned his eyes from the home-plate to the unconscious boy. It might have been intuition or Providence, but as he saw his little brother lying there, and knew that he had kicked him into insensibility, all thought of the game fled as he knelt and took the boy in his arms.

As to the spectators, all the Norwalkers knew was the fact that their team had made a run, and the Danburyites bemoaned it loudly.

But Watson didn't hear the howls of success, or the jeers of derision, as he stared about helplessly in an effort to locate a doctor, his brother limp and unconscious in his arms. He glanced toward the crowd appealingly.

Then, he saw a man rushing toward him at the head of a rapidly gathering mob, and an instant later a physician was working over the child, with Billy standing by them

and delaying the game, a fact against which the crowd protested. But not until his brother a moment later yielded to the treatment and opened his eyes, did he appear to consider what his fraternal love had cost the team.

"Did you—catch it?" the child queried earnestly, totally unmindful of his injuries.

Watson nodded joyfully. Not because he had caught the ball, but because of the little one's restoration to consciousness.

"Then go ahead and beat them," the small person directed.

Billy glanced questioningly toward the doctor, giving no heed to the crowd which pressed about them.

"Only stunned," the physician assured him. "He's all right now. I'll take care of him till the end of the game." Then he added, as he nodded toward the little fellow:

"Go in now, and do as he says."

It's a peculiar thing the way baseball seems to affect most people. Sometimes it appears to border on a mild form of insanity, and as such robs one of every higher instinct. And this was the case now.

Although the majority of the spectators knew some one had been hurt, and that in his attempt to give the injured one the assistance he needed, Billy had permitted the other side to score another run the jeers and mocking cries of the Danbury followers could be heard above the joyful cries of the Norwalkers.

But he gave little heed of it, happy in the knowledge that he had not seriously hurt his brother, and now pushed his way through the crowd which had gathered about them, starting toward his position on third base.

As he neared it, Stemper stepped toward him.

"Gee, that's tough!" he said bitterly.

"It's all right now," Watson assured him, not considering that even his friend's interest in the game overshadowed everything else to the extent of robbing him of the feeling of humanity with which the average person is endowed.

Suddenly he seemed to recall the struggle in which he was taking part, and that the cries of the crowd proved he was anything but their idol. Then, his jaws squared themselves and he endeavored to stop his ears. But the bedlam seemed to gather volume with each second, so much so that in starting the game again the umpire had to signal it—his voice could not be heard.

With the first pitched ball the crowd calmed down somewhat. But, from the way the pitcher threw it, he proved he had lost his interest in the game. He didn't throw it with the same speed he had been using, and the opposing rooters went wild with delight as they saw the sphere sail toward center field.

The player covering that position ran to meet it, and as he caught it the inning was over, with South Norwalk one run in the lead.

Danbury's last chance had come, but every man on the team, as all gathered on their bench, considered it a chance which would yield them no results. They were grimly silent, with not a word of sympathy for Watson, who now felt keenly what the others considered the disgrace of defeat.

The first player to face the pitcher struck out, and the hopes of Danbury fell lower than ever. Their rooters seemed stricken dumb, while all their former efforts in this direction appeared to have been transferred to the Norwalkers, who yelled continuously and with such volume that more than one vocal cord was strained severely.

But again baseball insanity robbed them of any thought of this. Then a pitched ball struck the batter, and he started toward first base on a slow trot, rubbing the spot where he had been hit, but smiling at the thought of it getting him safely around one-quarter of the distance.

There was only one out, with a man on first, and the volume of enthusiasm of the South Norwalk followers had decreased materially, giving way to a consequent increase in hopes on the part of the adherents of Danbury, whose remarks were punctuated with various cutting sallies directed at Watson. But he sat there grim and silent, regretting the disgrace which he felt he had brought to his nine, as well as the fact that this wildly excited throng was apparently without the fundamentals of humanity.

With a recklessness which bordered on desperation, the man on first started for second as the pitcher drew back his arm, and he was half-way there when the man behind the bat threw the ball to the bag with all the force and accuracy at his command. But the runner beat it, and the Danbury enthusiasts rose, as they yelled their encouragement to the team, while the South Norwalkers yelled, too, but in derision.

The crowd was now excited to a fever pitch, and showed every indication of having turned maniacs, when the batter drove a safe liner between first and second, and landed the other runner on third.

The Danbury shouters yelled themselves hoarse, as events looked more hopeful. And the more they shouted their advice, the higher the opposing rooters raised their voices. Nearly every one on the grand stand was now standing up, too excited to keep seated, and even female voices could be heard above the din as the fever gripped the women, too.

"Only one out, and Bagley on first and Dickerman on third," Stemper muttered as he stepped to the plate.

"Soak it, George," Watson whispered as he passed him, but the short-stop said nothing, only squared his jaw a bit more. And as he stepped to the plate there was a determination in his looks and attitude which bespoke his intentions, even if they failed to materialize.

The first ball thrown failed to interest him in the least; he let it pass without attempting to strike at it, and the fact that the umpire called it a strike did not cause his countenance to change its expression. He wanted the man on first to get to second, and his wishes in this respect were fulfilled.

As the ball left the pitcher's hand, a sudden hush fell over the assemblage, but the two factions felt they had cause to yell again as soon as the catcher had caught it—the one because their man had made another base, and the other because a strike had been called on Stemper.

In the midst of the turmoil the pitcher again drove the ball over the plate in almost the exact spot of the preceding one. Stemper struck at it desperately. There was a crack, but the ball went in the wrong direction—it was a foul which fell far out of the catcher's reach, dropping behind the back-stop.

"Two strikes!" the umpire called, and Stemper ground his teeth in rage as he waited for the next one.

Again he lunged at it, and it shot from his bat in a straight line about four feet from the ground, and between short-stop and third.

A wild cry of delight rose from the Danbury enthusiasts, but stopped instantly as Norwalk's man who covered that spot grabbed the ball.

Instantly all of Danbury's hopes fled, and those of their opponents soared high. This made two outs, and Danbury's chances seemed too slim for consideration.

Then Watson walked toward the plate, and as he did so cries of scorn greeted him, not only from the visitors, but from the followers of his own team as well. He heard them clearly, and they cut him deeply, but he feared it was too late to redeem himself.

Suddenly a small boy of ten, with a huge lump on his forehead, darted out of the crowd, and before any one could intercept him, he rushed up to Watson as he took his place at the bat.

"Hit it out, Billy!" the little fellow cried, and as Watson recognized the voice and turned toward it, the pitcher drove a straight ball over the plate, catching the batter unawares.

"One strike!" the umpire called, and again the howls of derision broke forth with renewed strength, while a dozen hands pulled the little fellow away.

Watson faced the pitcher with a determination that gave him additional strength. Then, as the next swiftly thrown ball neared him, he struck at it with all the power at his command.

There was a resounding whack, but the sphere didn't go straight. Instead, it soared far off to the left, outside of the foul line, as well as the fielder's reach.

With this additional strike against Watson, all of Danbury's hopes faded away, while Billy ground his teeth in rage. But he was desperate now, realizing that should his team be defeated, the blame would fall on his shoulders.

The next ball started to curve out before it reached him, and he let it pass without any attempt to hit it. The umpire had to motion that it was a "ball"—he could not be heard above the din and confusion which now reigned—and again Watson faced the pitcher.

The man in the box coolly held the ball for some seconds, then, as the catcher signaled for a drop curve, he let it drive directly for the plate.

Billy's eyes were riveted on it, and he was ready. When it reached him it was only a foot from the ground, and he swung the bat low to meet it. There was a crack—bat and ball met, then the latter went sailing over the center fielder's head.

Pandemonium broke loose from the throats of Danbury's adherents, and, for-

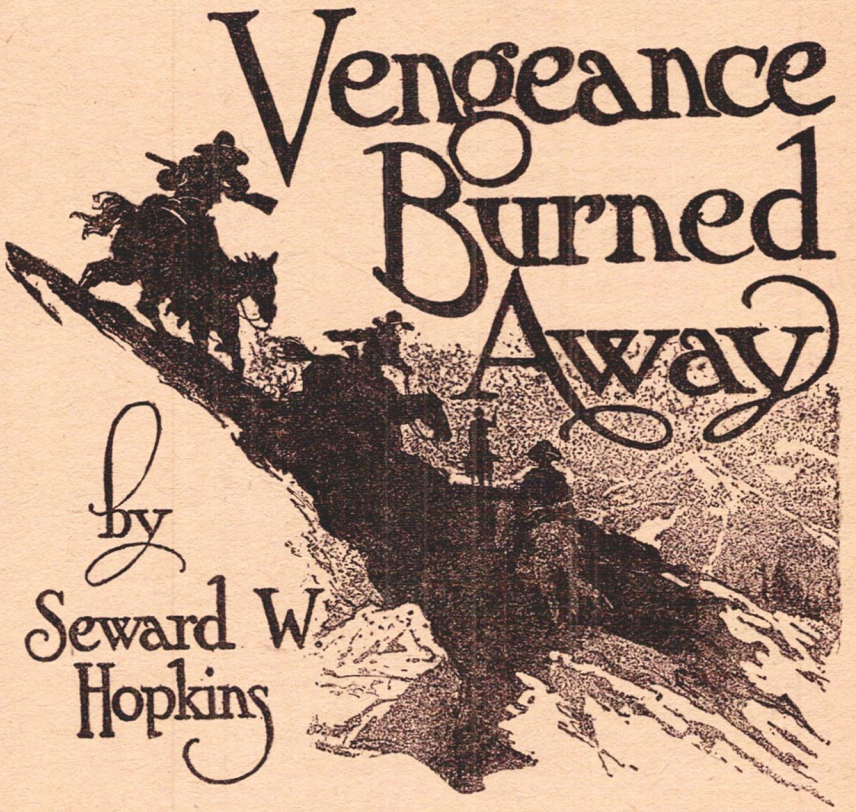
getting entirely that only a few seconds before they had been bitter in expressing their opinion of Watson, they now yelled their praise of him in words which were lost in the turmoil. The man on third raced in, as did the one who had been on second, and the game was won.

Watson kept on to second, and from there to third, but as he neared the bag he saw the man in front of him catch the ball as it was thrown to him, and an instant later he was out.

But before even this had happened the crowd flocked on to the field, and as Billy turned toward the stand he had hardly gone ten feet when a little hand was slipped in his.

"You did it, didn't you, Billy?" a voice piped, and he picked the little fellow up in his arms, to study for an instant the spot on his forehead where his shoe had struck.

"I'm awfully proud of you, Billy," the child added. "And I guess everybody else in Danbury is, too."



CHAPTER XIX.

THE ROBBER'S STORY.

I CERTAINLY had material enough for deep thought. Carboy had told me so many things that I was bewildered trying to marshal them in line so that I might digest them one by one as I lay there alone with the sunlight streaming through the little window.

All that concerning myself I dismissed. That is, with the exception of the bullet that struck me in the back. I wondered whether the sheriff had added me to Bill Boreel's squad of sharpshooters for the purpose of giving Bill a chance to pot me. It looked reasonable and yet very unreasonable at the same time.

I knew Bill Boreel was the kind of man to do it. But the bullet would show. There would be a way to learn whether Bill Boreel used a Kramer Jullet or not. So I dismissed that from my mind.

What seemed strange to me was that

Minnie Kedlar had cared. Perhaps what Carboy had said explained it all. A lonely girl in Arizona.

Certainly the life of the daughter of a poor farmer in Alvedo County could not be called lively nor inspiring. The narrowness of her circle, if, indeed, she was fortunate enough to have a circle at all, restricted her to the most meager forms of entertainment.

But my thoughts drifted away from the girl's surroundings to the girl herself.

It is astonishing how a man's mind, when it gets to dwelling on a girl, finds so many good things about her. Especially when he is wounded and flat on his back in a robber's stronghold, and wants the soft voice of a woman to cheer him up.

I recalled the fact that Minnie had a vast amount of hair of a dull golden brown, and wore it in a fashion all her own, which made it evident there were no rats or puffs needed to make enough for the style. I remember that—no, I didn't remember the color of her eyes.

I don't believe I had ever looked into a girl's face long enough to know the color of her eyes. But I remembered they were soft and expressive and kind. For when she had heard that the man in the bedroom was not her father, human sympathy flooded those eyes with a heavenly glow. And I wondered why I had waited till now to remember. Maybe it was what Dick Carboy had said.

I recalled her voice. There was a musical tone in it every time she spoke, and still I had paid it no attention.

What brought it to my mind now? Was it what Carboy had said?

And she had thought of me. And my letter to her mother had hurt her. I felt like kicking myself. I might at least have written a letter with a little more warmth of feeling in it. But—I had seen her that day and had spoken in a friendly way—yes, and that was just the trouble.

My letter spilled cold water over my words. Empty words. Another New York dude turned heart-breaker. The thought sickened me.

Then my mind jumped to Jim. Oh, how I felt like throwing my arms around his old sunburnt neck! Yet it was but like Jim. I knew how his mind had worked.

He had reasoned it out that I would have done that if I was there. So he did it for me. That was all. He had bought a poor farm and had perhaps saved a man and woman from death. But it was Jim.

I felt some pain during that morning, and grew restless. And was much surprised to see a withered old buck of some kind of tribe come in to take a look at me.

"How does the son of the early morning feel?" he asked.

"I'm not a rising sun yet, grandpa. If I could jump into a nice hot bath I'd feel better."

"So!"

"And why do you call me the son of the early morning?"

"Because you live where the morning comes from."

"Nix, grandpa. You've got to get farther away than I am. I can see it coming from where I live, the same as you can here. Grandpa, here is something I've never thought of before. The sight of the beautiful sunrise is God's gift to man all over the world."

He looked at me a minute with twinkling little eyes.

"The east man is much learned."

"Not much. I can count up to four. But that's a fine blanket, grandpa. If I had that up home, I'd carry it to the Turkish bath every time I took one."

"It is yours."

Without moving a muscle of his grave old face, he took the blanket from around his shoulders, and, after folding it, placed it on a chair. I gasped. It was a beautiful Navajo, and must have been much to him. I know it was to me.

"You speak of bath. I have come to see if you stand him good."

"Stand what? A bath?"

"Have not him, the captain, said?"

"Nix on the bath question. Any bad blood between you and him?"

"He, my good friend. Your back? Much stiff, yes?"

"Well, the feel of some hot water wouldn't go bad. I was just thinking of that."

He walked away as though he was disgusted with me. Then he stood somewhere outside and let out a ferocious yell. I trembled. I feared that one of Carboy's Indians had gone crazy, or that the stronghold had been attacked. Immediately the room was entered by four young Indians with a sort of litter.

"What's all this?" I heard Carboy ask, and I felt safe.

"Heap much want wash. Carry to hot spring. Wash good."

"Oh, the dickens, Buckskin! He can't go 'way to your village!"

"No? Why, no? When Indian get shot, walk in ten minutes or die."

"Yes, but this is different. This man has had a fever, and is very weak. He can't be carried three miles over a sun-baked mesa to a hot spring."

"Hot spring cure um."

"Well, I believe there is some virtue in your spring, but he can't go that far now. The sun would bring back his fever."

"When come again? Much make good medicine, that spring."

"I believe you. I've heard that it had great powers of relieving pain and healing wounds. Say, Buckskin, I'll tell you what to do. To-morrow have your young men bring a big lot of the water from the spring, and we'll drown the cuss in it."

"Heap good!"

The old Indian turned to go.

"Here is your blanket," said Carboy.

"No mine. His."

He stalked out, and Carboy laughed.

"He is the chief of a small band of peaceful Mokis who live on the mesa, about three miles away. There is a spring there, a hot spring, and I have heard that the water sold by these Indians really has great qualities. We'll try it."

"But isn't it a danger to you to have these Indians here with you?"

"On the contrary, they are my salvation. If a posse of deputies saw anybody come up the rocky pass to the table-land, they would simply think he was a member of Buckskin's band, or going up to see them. Now I'll tell you why I came back so soon. I remember what you said, or was going to say when I went out, and I believed that you had recovered from your excitement sufficiently to hear me. It is no more than right for you to know the truth in regard to the man who now holds your life in his hand."

"Yourself?" I said. "I am eager. Go on!"

He drew a chair near the bed and sat down.

"Carson," he began, "it is not a century ago, nor quarter of that, when this part of Arizona was absolutely unsettled by white men. Alvedo County had not been heard of. There were Indians and all that went to make up wild country.

"There were, in a little town of Illinois, five families, all united by bonds of a common purpose and interest. The names of these families were Horton, Boreel, Jarvis, Darkins, and Maduff. The names of four of these are now familiar to you.

"The Boreels are well known all through Arizona. Jack is sheriff. You know well enough what Bill is.

"Horton is one of the largest ranch owners in Alvedo County. Your cousin is the only one who has more land, I think. His family consists of himself, and two sons, as mean as himself.

"Jarvis has a ranch almost as large as Horton's, and so has Darkins. You have never heard the name Maduff in Alvedo County. You may hear it now. It is mine. My father was the Maduff who lived in Illinois, and was the friend of the other four.

"Now, in some way or other, these five men got it into their heads to come to Arizona and take up on a large scale the business of grazing. Their wives were willing to come along. At that time I was about five years old, and all I knew about the matter was that we had a terrifically long ride, and I, at the end of it, was to have a pony all my own.

"This little party, all married, and with children, reached their destination without any great amount of trouble, except now and then suffering thirst or hunger, or a scrap with the Apaches.

"But no lives were lost, and when the great four-horse wagons, carrying their household goods were halted about where Horton's ranch in the Green Valley is now, the women and some of the men, knelt in thankful prayer, as the Pilgrims did at Plymouth Rock.

"Land here in those days was public land. Grazing was cheap, and in a few years these men had erected houses, and were considered prosperous. A little school was built for the children, not only of these five families, but for children of other cattlemen at a distance. And so they prospered. There was not a word of discord, no dissension in the little community.

"Then one day an Indian cattle-thief potted my father, and he died. Naturally, my mother, being left alone with only a boy and girl, for I have a sister, was at a loss which way to turn in order to make both ends meet.

"The other four, Boreel, Horton, Jarvis, and Darkins, agreed to manage her cattle, and do the same with the profits as my father had been doing, investing in whatever was needed for ranching, or for the improvement of the stock. The Boreel in this philanthropic enterprise was your present friend Bill, for the original Boreel had died.

"They lied! They lied like devils! Instead of treating my mother with any kind of honesty in money matters, they didn't even treat her with respect.

"It was Bill Boreel again, the same Bill Boreel who wants to marry Minnie Kedlar. But he—never mind, he did not accomplish anything but the financial ruin of the widow of his old friend Maduff and his orphans.

"The cattle returns began to get smaller, and yet the number of cattle we had grew less. Mother was no manager. She should never have left her little home in Illinois. From the stealing of cattle they began to get, little by little, by one pretext or other, the savings my father had left.

"One time it would be a good investment in Eastern securities. A new railroad was going to be built. Some new mining stock was just put on the market. One investment followed another, and all proved worthless. At last my mother realized that these men were her worst enemies and the only thing she could do was to take what little she had left and get back to Illinois.

"Mind you, the herds of the other four were increasing all the time, and as at times the land was public, the four did their grazing together, and my mother supposed that one-fifth of the herds she saw were hers.

"When she had reached the last straw, she asked them what they would give for her share, and they laughed at her, and told her she had no share.

"Broken hearted, she, with two children, neither able to be of any assistance, but ready to eat all the time, hitched up the only horse she had left, and drove to Parsons, from which place a stage-line ran.

"How that little woman, none too robust ever, with two children, ever made her fight to her old home, is a mystery to me. But she finally reached there after much hardships.

"She had left a sister in passably good circumstances, and had relied to some extent on a little assistance from this sister until she could get on her feet.

"The sister was dead. Thrown again upon her own resources, the little woman went to work at whatever she could get to do, and plied the needle or scrubbed windows or floors. She got me a little job, and we kept body and soul together until at last she died, worn out with sorrow and hard work, and little food.

"I stood by her bedside the night she passed away. She was delirious, and would laugh and point with a swinging arm as if to embrace a great amount of vision, and say:

"'See, dear! See how good God has been to us. See the hundreds of cattle that will bring us money. We won't have to work so hard. We can send Dick and Susy away a while and let them have a good education.'

"Then she would laugh again, the laugh of a happy young woman.

"And I, then grown to an age of understanding, and knowing the devilish wrong that had been done her by those who ought to have been her best friends, registered a frightful, a terrible vow. I swore before the living God that I would never rest from my work until every man who had robbed my mother of her cattle should be robbed of his.

"I came here and took the name of Carboy. I made friends with the toughest men I could find. No man's record was too bad, if he only would obey me."

"I have in a measure succeeded. The reason Boreel is so red-hot to get me is because I got so many of their cattle they had to sell their ranch at a big loss. Horton is almost ruined, and Jarvis and Darkins are mortgaged up to the neck, and I hold the mortgages.

"Thousands and thousands of their cattle have I driven over the border, with my gang of cutthroats. They will do anything for me. Yet never have I permitted cold-blooded murder. I could have shot all these. It is not my wish to murder anybody. They did not murder my father. They drove my mother to poverty and distress, and I won't stop till I have them there themselves.

"I have never stolen a head from anybody else. Ask your cousin if he ever lost any cattle he thought I took. I have four ranches to lay waste, and then with my little bird I'm going back to Illinois."

"How did you meet her?" I asked.

"She and her father are from my town. Now what do you think? Place your mother in the position of mine when she died. Am I the devil incarnate they say?"

With one hand I covered my eyes. I held the other out to him. No word was spoken.

CHAPTER XX.

A SURPRISE AT NIGHT.

"WELL," said Carboy (I shall continue the use of this name to avoid confusion), one day when I had sufficiently recovered to get around on horseback, "it is time for us to part."

"Are you going away?" I asked.

"No, but you are."

"I scarcely think I can make it to Winston. I'm no giant yet."

"I know; but you will have to try. I'll send one of my men with you, and you will have a guide as well as help if you need it."

"But what's the hurry, if Jim and Julie and Minnie know I am all right?"

You will notice that, after much thinking of her, Miss Kedlar had become Minnie to me as I spoke of her.

"The hurry is this," he said, speaking soberly. "I have reason to believe that Boreel suspects I am here. I know the place is almost inaccessible to those who are not acquainted with the rocky paths, but Boreel will do anything to get me, and if he besieges the place we shall be compelled to surrender or starve. You couldn't shoot a rabbit up here. There was game at one time, but it's about gone. A hungry wolf isn't good eating. Now, I have planned that which makes it necessary for you, with regard for your own safety, to leave me and get to Winston at once."

"You anticipate a fight, then."

"There is no question about that. I have spent years enough in Alvedo County, and want to get back to Illinois. Moreover, a man in love doesn't want to lose decades of time or his life while he keeps his girl waiting. Now, I am going to make a grandstand play. I'm going to make a last raid. I have planned it all out. I have sent word for every man I can trust to be ready next Tuesday. We will ride about a hundred and twenty strong."

"Suppose I remain here till I get a little stronger myself?"

"I'm afraid. This will be the most desperate fight we've had. As soon as Boreel learns that I have such a force he will get all the men he possibly can, and there will be a battle beside which the one you saw would look like a love-feast. I much prefer to have you go, and relieve me of the responsibility I feel for your safety."

"Which way do you ride from here?" I asked.

"I go from here to the head of Gray Wolf Cañon, where I rendezvous."

"Well, why can't I ride that far with you? I know the way from the cañon, and that will save you one man."

"Very well. That suits me. I shall be sorry to lose your company, but our ways part at Gray Wolf Cañon. I go to Illinois, and you to New York when you are ready. You will never forget your acquaintance with a cattle-thief."

"I shall never remember you as that."

"Well, don't. I am not proud of the title, but—there's no use going all over that again. Can you stand it to start tomorrow?"

"I think I can."

"Then, I'll so arrange it."

I was not sorry of the opportunity to leave, yet after all there was a feeling of regret. It was a wild enough place. All there was to it was a broad table-land, like the sawed-off top of a mountain, and rocks were piled one on another in such a marvelous way that made it certain a great upheaval of nature had taken place there long in the ages past.

It certainly was a stronghold. On the level places houses or huts had been built, and the men lived in comparative comfort while they were there. At this time there were about twenty.

I spoke the truth when I said I believed I could ride to Winston the following day. I had been benefited by the baths in Buckskin's spring. Whether the water had any healing effect on the gunshot wounds themselves I don't know. I suppose not. But the bathing took away from me all the effects of the fall on the rock, and so built up my system that the wounds were healing quickly. All inflammation was gone, and this may have been due to the efficacy of the old Indian's hot spring.

I had enjoyed sound sleep night after night This, too, added to the recovery of my health and strength.

So, when the morning broke bright and

fine, I felt fit for a long ride. I had no fear of breaking down, because Gray Wolf Cañon was about half-way to Winston, and I would rest there a day or two.

The road that led from the rocks down to the plain was narrow, winding, and dangerous. In some places it might be, at the most, ten feet wide. In others it would narrow to about four.

In single file we went down. On one side the scarp of the wall rose sheer. On the other it had a straight drop. As we journeyed farther down, of course, the almost overtopping wall grew higher, and the wall below grew less. So confidence increased as we descended.

Nevertheless, when at last we rode out on the level plain I felt much better.

Riding by the side of Carboy, chatting about the things we saw or the things we expected to see, I forgot my slight anxiety concerning my strength, and when at noon we camped to eat I had an appetite for a whole prairie-hen that one of the men brought in. They made a raid on a pine woods, and brought out enough for dinner.

After a short rest and smoke, we rode on, and at dusk reached the camp on the Gray Wolf Creek, at the head of the cañon. Here there were already twenty men, which made our force forty.

A good supper was waiting, and we did full justice to it. But I confess toward the end of the ride I had begun to feel exhausted. I realized that a good sleep would do me more good than anything else.

"Carboy," I said, "I'm going to turn in. You've got work to do, and won't miss me."

"No. Get all the rest you can. You'll have hard riding alone to-morrow."

Alas! I was to have hard enough riding, but not alone.

I made a soft bed for myself, and was soon sound asleep.

It must have been about midnight when I was shocked out of my sleep by the report of a rifle and then the wild shouting of men. I leaped to my feet. I was almost alone, but all around me those who were there were getting their rifles ready for fighting.

The fusillading was terrific. I could hear the bull voice of Sheriff Boreel as he commanded his men, and could see, in the dim light, a great number of horsemen.

The camp was surrounded.

I had a pistol, but no rifle. I was in a quandary what to do. I certainly did not wish to turn outlaw.

Yet there was a feeling of loyalty to Carboy I could not overcome. And it was a question, anyway, how strong my plea that I was a noncombatant would go with Boreel.

It was settled for me. Out of the darkness struggled two men unequally. One was backing toward me, and I knew it was Carboy. The other was mounted, and I knew it was Bill Boreel.

"Now, you cattle-stealer and murderer," said Boreel, "I'll settle you!"

Carboy hit his heel against something, and went over backward. Boreel halted his horse, and leaned over to take good aim with a big revolver.

I knew that the next minute Dick Carboy would be in eternity unless I interfered.

Quick thoughts rushed through my brain. On the ground was the man who had saved my life. On horseback was the man who had tried to take it.

"Listen to me, Boreel," I said.

I fired, and Boreel fell, cursing, from his horse.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEFORE THE JUDGE.

THE fight was of short duration. Being deprived of their leader, Carboy's men scattered, and as many as could got away. Carboy himself had been rendered unconscious by his fall; and I, of course, submitted without any fighting to capture. I was immediately bound.

I lay with my wrists and my feet fastened, face upward, when I saw somebody looking down at me.

"Well," said a familiar voice, "you've made a nice fool of yourself. What the deuce possessed you to take part in this raid?"

"I didn't take part. I wasn't going to take part."

"But you are here!"

"I was on my way to your ranch, Jim. Honest, I was."

"Nonsense! You shot Boreel."

"Well, he was going to kill Carboy."

"That's what we came out for. We got information that he was planning a raid on Horton, Jarvis, and the Darkins place, and the sheriff got busy to head him off."

"Well, he didn't plan to raid your ranch, Jim."

"What's that to me? I might be next."

"No, you would never lose a steer by Carboy. I know his story, Jim."

"Devil take his story. I'd like one from you I can believe. *I'll* be *hanged* if I know how I can keep you from being hanged."

"But I tell you I was on my way home. Carboy said you knew where I was."

"I knew where you were, but I supposed you were flat on your back. Instead, I find you with this rabble. How the devil I am to help you I don't know."

"Well, leave me alone, and I'll try to help myself. I haven't done anything wrong."

"But you shot Bill Boreel."

"Oh, did I? Well, do you know whose bullet it was that kept me in bed? Do you know whose bullet sent me unconscious over the brink of Gray Wolf Cañon? Do you know whose bullet kept me two weeks in a delirious fever? Bill Boreel's. It was all fine talk, if you want to know my sentiments, that you got off your stomach about not getting in any row with Boreel. Well, I didn't get in any row. Like a darn fool I did the best I could for you and your cattle-owners, and rode so fast after some fleeing robbers that I exposed my back to Boreel, and he shot me."

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"I've got the bullet. Carboy dug it out of my back."

"How do you know Boreel fired it?"

"Doesn't Boreel use a Kramer Jullet rifle?"

"Yes. He and the sheriff have the only two in Winston."

"Well, the bullet that came out of my back was a Kramer Jullet. Got any more ladylike regrets or sanctimonious preaching? I'll join Carboy for good if you have."

"'M! This puts a new face on things. Are you sure it is a Kramer Jullet?"

"Do I know a Smith & Wesson? Do I know a Krag Jorgensen? Do I know anything about guns?"

"Well, I'll take back what I said, Walt. I was surprised to find you here. I'd shake hands with you, but you can't shake. I'll have a talk with the sheriff. He's in pretty bad humor over Bill being shot. It may have to come up before the judge, after all."

"Let it come. I am not afraid of Judge McKinnon."

He left me, and I tried to get more sleep. But I spent the night with my thoughts, and none of them were very pleasant.

We were up by daybreak. A breakfast was prepared for all, and the march back to Winston began.

There were few captives beside Carboy and me. We two were fastened to our horses, and rode side by side. But we were closed in by deputies, and conversation was practically impossible. Sometimes we would take the risk.

"I owe you another one, Carson," said Carboy. "That was a close shave for me."

"Don't talk about it here."

"Better not talk much, anyway."

So we rode mostly in silence. We camped in the same place we had on the way out, by the little stream in the valley, and then on the evening of the next day rode into Winston.

We were taken before Judge McKinnon, who opened court for the preliminary examination before committing for trial. He looked long and gravely at me.

"I am sorry that you are in bad company again," he said. "It seems strange that you are found with this thief and murderer so often."

"Well, your honor," I replied, "it was not my fault, and if it had not been for the thief and murderer I would have been a dead man. I lay unconscious and bleeding from two wounds in Gray Wolf Cañon when I was found by Carboy and taken to his hiding-place. He extracted two bullets, one of which will figure in your court.

"He and his men cared for me till after a siege of two weeks in a raging fever, through all of which I was delirious, I came out safe. I remained there to get well enough for the long ride home.

"When it was known that Carboy contemplated another raid he ordered me to come to Winston. He wished to be rid of all responsibility for my safety. I agreed.

"But I did not know the trail from his place to the Gray Wolf Cañon. Beyond that I was safe. I asked permission to ride with him that far, which permission he granted."

"But you shot Boreel."

"If your honor had lain two weeks, cared for by a man, saved by his tenderness and kindness, and another was trying to shoot him, would you stand by and see the man who saved your life shot down in cold blood?"

"But the man he was trying to shoot, according to the sheriff, was the cattle-thief."

"To me he was the man who saved my life. The man I shot was the man who tried to take it."

"That's a lie," broke out the sheriff.

"Your honor," I said, "I am not a citizen of Alvedo County, thank the Lord. I am a resident of New York, and am not to be treated as though I had neither friends nor resources in this world. I would like to ask the sheriff what make rifle he uses."

"Will you answer that, sheriff?"

"Certainly. The Kramer Jullet."

"And what make does Bill Boreel use?"

"The same."

"Is there another Kramer Jullet rifle in Winston?"

"I don't know of any."

"Then I would like to ask further, your honor, if the sheriff can afford to let you have a cartridge."

Everybody's face began to look toward the sheriff, and curious eyes were bent on him as he took a cartridge from his belt and handed it to the judge.

"Now, your honor, please compare this ball that was taken from my back with the ball in that cartridge."

"They are the same—certainly so," said the judge in surprise.

"Now, your honor, it is late, and we will all be committed for trial, I suppose. But I wish to make a charge of attempted murder against William Boreel."

There was a buzz.

"William Boreel is charged with attempted murder; plaintiff, Walter Carson, of New York. Investigation when Boreel is able to talk. You prisoners will be locked up for the night. We will dispose of your cases after a deep study and a fair trial. Adjourned."

CHAPTER XXII.

REAL DANGER.

THE court-house was separated from the jail by an unpaved space perhaps two hundred feet in extent. From a door on the side of the court-house a board walk led to a door on the side of the jail.

We were marched along this walk, followed by an immense crowd. Even though we were captives, in the hands of the law, and matters looked black for us, especially for Carboy, the crowd was not content.

Cattlemen had come to Winston to see speedy and summary punishment meted out, and did not wish to remain day after day while a trial dragged its way along. Trials for cattle-stealing usually take place at the spot where the thief is caught, and the man who catches him is the judge. But Boreel had thus far prevented any mob action, and though there were howls of triumph and jeers of derision, I did not feel any alarm.

The ceremony of being taken in and entered as prisoners was scant, and I was led away to my cell.

The jail building was not a poor sort, even though Winston was a comparatively new town. The cells were strong. Mine was on the first floor, and the window was heavily barred.

The construction was of wood. The form of the building was that of three bricks, one forming the front and the other two the sides, leaving a court in the center and open at the rear. To look at it from any point in front it seemed a perfect square. In other words, it had a wide front, with an L at each end reaching toward the rear.

My window looked across this court. I could see other windows, those on the first floor barred like mine, and those on the second not.

My feelings were peculiarly mixed when I was locked in the cell. I stood looking out of the barred window, musing.

Naturally I was humiliated at the position in which I found myself in. There was no shame for anything I had done. No crime had stained my hand since I had come to Alvedo County. But there was a feeling that somehow wrong had been done, and unjustly I was made to suffer.

I felt no fear of the results. I had confidence in Judge McKinnon, and I had confidence in Jim. His temporary anger at finding me with Carboy I did not count. It was natural enough.

While I stood there at the open window I heard a murmur. At first it was like the buzzing of a lot of bees far away. Then it seemed to grow nearer.

In a moment from one of the upper windows across the courtyard two heads were thrust out as though the owners of the heads had heard some sound and wished to investigate. It was dark in my cell, and that room was well lighted, so that I had a full view

The two persons who were looking from

the window were young women. Though their heads were so that I could not see their faces, I felt that one of them must be Minnie Kedlar.

But whatever had caused the noise could not be seen from a window overlooking the court. They withdrew their heads, and as the bright light fell on the faces of the two I saw that one was the girl of whom I had done so much thinking. They turned away from the window and went toward the front of the building, I supposed to get a view of the street.

Other heads came out of other windows, but as there was nothing to see in the yard they were quickly withdrawn.

I wondered myself what was happening. The noise grew louder.

From a building in the rear, facing another street, a boy came running through the courtyard. I hailed him. He swung toward me, still running.

"What is going on?" I asked. "What is the trouble?"

"I don't know. I'm going to see."

"Come back soon and let me know, will you?"

"Sure thing."

Off he went, and disappeared in the main hall that crossed the middle of the front square.

In a moment he came back, and I could tell from his breathing that he was very much excited.

"There's a mob," he said.

"A mob? What kind of a mob?"

"A big mob. Ye know they caught them cattle-stealers to-day, and they're in here."

"Yes?"

"Sure thing. My dad's a deputy. He was out. He says they're desprit fellows. Anyway, the mob says Judge McKinnon is too—too lean—what's that word I want?"

"Lean? He is quite lean. Do you mean lenient?"

"That's her. Leenient. They say he ain't no good for a case of this kind."

"Well, what do the people in the mob want? Do they want the judge to resign? And does he refuse?"

"Naw! The judge don't know nothin' about this. They want the cattle-thieves."

"The mob does?"

"Who else wants 'em? Yes. And the warden, that's Atlar, he says he won't give 'em up."

"Atlar's a good man, is he?"

"Oh, he's good enough. He says the cattle-stealers will hang accordin' to law, anyway, so what's the use takin' 'em out."

"Is that what the mob wants to do, hang them?"

"Sure thing. All cattle-stealers are hung."

"Get me some more news, will you? Let me know how things go."

"All right."

Here was something to fear. I began to try the bars. Real danger now confronted me.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRE.

In vain I attempted to move one of the bars. Struggle as I might, the only result was to get a warning pain in my back.

I tried the door, and that, too, was new and solid and well locked.

My young informant returned.

"Hey," he said, "the judge is here now making a speech. He tells all good men to go home and go to bed, and that he will see that the right thing is done to-morrow."

"Is there much of a mob?" I asked.

"Gee, all Winston and all the country round. Why, there's men here from Green Valley to see them thieves hung."

Green Valley, I remembered, was where the stealing was done from the ranches of Horton, Jarvis, and Darkins.

"What does the warden say now?" I inquired.

"He ain't sayin' nothin' now. He just stands there with a bunch of big iron keys in one hand and a revolver in the other."

"He will defend the jail, then?"

"Sure. He says he will, anyway."

"Is the sheriff there?"

"Yes, and he's standin' by the warden."

"That's good. The mob ought to obey him."

"Well, everybody is excited. Wait till I see again. I'll come back."

I felt a sense of security in the presence of Sheriff Boreel. Though I had no reason to like him, and Carboy's story had had its natural effect on my mind, still Carboy had not said anything direct against the sheriff. It was Bill Boreel he hated most.

It would be strange, I thought, if the sheriff, who had been so bloodhoundish after Carboy's life, should after all be the man who saved that life.

My veins tingled with excitement. There

was no fear, nothing but the whipping of my blood through my arteries as I strained to catch some of the words I knew were being spoken in front of the jail.

No words came, but at times a great volume of sound reached me, as though the mob was cheering or shouting.

The boy returned.

"The sheriff talked a little. He didn't say much. He said he'd shoot the first man who tried to get in the jail."

"I think he said a good deal," I answered.

"And then a man spoke. I know who he is. His name is Horton. He's from Green River Valley. He said half his herds was stolen. He demanded the life of the leader and the lives of all who followed him. He's a great speecher. He howls and waves his hands."

Just then a report could be heard, faintly, but unmistakably a shot.

"Gee!" cried the boy. "There's somethin' doin'."

He ran away again. There were, however, no more shots. But even through the walls there came a tremendous uproar. Angry shouts and cries rent the air. The boy came back.

"There's the devil to pay," he said breathlessly. "Somebody shot the sheriff."

"The sheriff! Is he dead?"

"Don't know if he's dead or not. Anyway he dropped and they carried him away."

"This looks bad."

"Betcher life it looks bad. Atlar can't hold out now."

"Isn't there a militia company or somebody he can call on?"

"I heard somebody say the hook and ladder company."

Again the terrible sound swelled upon the air. It grew louder than it had been at any time before. The boy scuttled to get more information.

It seemed to me that the smell of smoke or of burning wood came to me.

"Gee!" cried the boy as he came flying back. "I wish I could get you out. They've set fire to the jail."

My heart turned to ice within me. If the mob had fired the jail in front the only hope lay in the rear, and I could never break those bars.

"Get somebody," I said. "Isn't your father home?"

"No. He's in front."

"Get somebody with a crowbar to loosen these bars."

"Could you do it if you had a crowbar?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Wait."

It seemed an age, but it was but a few minutes, when he came panting back with an iron crowbar. He passed this through the window to me. I attacked the window-bars like a maniac.

I had been called an athlete. Nonsense! All the strength I had ever put forth in any contest I ever entered was play to what I threw into that bar.

"Atlar's wounded," said the boy, who had left and returned without my knowing it, so absorbed was I in my work on those bars.

At last I had one loose, and then another. I wrenched them from their places, and threw out the crowbar. Then I crawled through.

"Want to get through to Mary Street?" asked the boy.

"No, there's a friend in here."

I passed along the side of the wall calling: "Dick! Dick Carboy!"

"Here," I heard at last from a window three or four from mine. "Help me out of this. They've fired the jail."

"The warden is shot, so there is no hope inside. Here's a bar. Get yourself out. I'll find the girls. The fire is in front."

I called the boy.

"Where can I get a ladder?"

"Come with me."

We ran to his house and there, stretching along the side of the barn, was a long ladder. With his help I got it to the courtyard of the jail and up to the window where I had seen the girls. I ran up. Smoke filled the place.

"Here," I called. "Minnie! Nellie! This way. It is I, Walter Carson."

I heard a muffled sob, and through the smoke two almost unconscious girls groped their way to me.

It was Minnie who reached me first, and I wasted no time. I grabbed her round the waist and went down the ladder as I had never gone down a ladder before. By that time Carboy was running toward me.

I gave him Minnie, who had fainted, and raced up the ladder. The other girl was gone. I knew she would not run away from assistance, so crawled inside. Groping about, more than half stifled, I found her lying on the floor. I picked her up and carried her down to the ground.

"Take them to that house," I directed. "Can you walk, Minnie?"

"Yes."

"You take them, Carboy. Atlar is wounded and I'll—"

"Say, mister," broke in the boy. "You take the girl. I'll get the warden. My father knows him."

Times were strenuous. The warden was not seriously wounded, and Nellie did not remain in her swoon long.

The deputy in whose house we were came in with the wounded warden. He saw the situation.

"Is Carboy anything to you?" he asked the warden.

"He is to—ask my daughter."

"I—see! Here, there's no time to fiddle and dance. Here, Tom, hitch to the buckboard. Where do you go, Carson?"

"Minnie Kedlar and I will go to Jim's."

"Then Atlar, you get your crowd out of Arizona. The train goes in half an hour and you can kill time for that long making the station. Nobody will see you. Everybody is at the jail."

Carboy reached out his hand.

"Good-by, old man. Ever remember the best of me."

They were soon off.

"Come, Minnie," I said, and taking her by the hand I led her to the street.

"With you?"

"With me."

A subdued sob, probably caused by excitement and reaction broke from her, and she walked quietly by my side, her hand in mine.

"Are you afraid to remain here while I go find my cousin?" I asked her.

"No, nor afraid to go with you."

"Then come with me."

We threaded our way through the crowd, and found at the entrance to the building a wildly excited mob. Nobody noticed me, as I looked this way and that for Jim. He was inside calling my name as, with the warden's keys, they were releasing the prisoners.

"Jim!" I said.

"Thank God! Let's get out of this hell."

Outside I found Minnie where I had bade her stand, and with Jim we left while the building burned. Jim procured us a horse and buggy at a hotel, and while he rode, I drove Minnie to the ranch.

It was early morning when we arrived. Julie, grand, sweet-hearted Julie, took Minnie to her bosom as a mother welcomes a child returned from danger.

She remained at the ranch, pending some determination on the part of Kedlar of what he intended to do.

The fire made important changes in more ways than one. There was no more cattle-stealing in Alvedo County. There was no need.

While no communication had been received from Carboy, I knew from local happenings that his iron hand had not relinquished the mace. Horton failed and sold out. Jarvis and Darkins were sold up to satisfy a mortgage on each ranch. The holder of the mortgage was a banking company in Illinois.

Sheriff Boreel got well of the hurt he received at the jail, but he lost his place because the power that had been behind him, Bill Boreel, never recovered from the wound I gave him at Gray Wolf Cañon, but became a thin, worn man dependent on his friends. I never pressed the charge against him, as it would have brought Carboy back to Alvedo County as a witness.

This was the end of the four men who had ruined the widow and orphans of their friend and companion.

On the ranch, free from all worries and persecutions we rode, hunted, fished, and—had such singing and playing! Minnie proved the equal of Julie, having, like her, been educated at a girl's boarding-school.

One day, some weeks after all this happened, I received a letter from Illinois. As I read it, sitting on Jim's broad porch, Minnie leaned over my shoulder to read also, for she knew whence it came.

MY DEAR CARSON:

Back in Illinois, and old scores wiped out, I can try at least to feel like a Christian. If I fall short of that, at least a man—and a happy one.

Nellie and I were married the day we arrived, and are now in our own home. I am glad we got out of that fire. It was a close call. I don't know what I would have done had you not come along with that bar. I hope Miss Kedlar has not suffered any from the shock. Nellie says the fire welded us together, and that you and—

A gasp and "Oh!" from Minnie made me laugh. Her name was the next word in the letter.

"Well," I said, "how about it? How about us? Do we weld?"

"You answer."

"Then," I said, "if it is put up to me, I say yes. We'll weld with the L and wed without it. Come here."

But she had fled.

When I went back to New York and business I took Minnie Kedlar with me as my wife. Mr. and Mrs. Kedlar took up their lives again on their old farm, Jim turning it over to them at what he paid.

We spend our winters in Alvedo County.

THE END.

Dan Muir's Cattle Rustler

by George B. Walker

"IF I was sure of my men now I wouldn't stand it a minute longer, an' that's a fact."

For the previous three months, Bob Grenning, owner of one of the biggest ranches near the border line between this country and Mexico, had been missing cattle.

At first his suspicions had been directed toward some new men he had taken on for the coming spring round-up. Thorough investigation, however, had only served to show that they all had good records, and he was at his wits' end to accomplish anything in the way of apprehending the guilty parties.

He had put Danny Muir in full charge of the investigating, and it was the young fellow's return, empty-handed and without information from a self-imposed round of the entire ranch, that Big Bob had got hot about.

"Who missed the last bunch?" he asked sharply.

"Tom Hogan," Muir answered.

"Tom Hogan, eh," the other mused, and then aloud: "Did you monkey 'round for a while and see if he might have a hand in the game of runnin' off my stock?"

"No."

"What! Didn't you size things up at all?"

"Not in regard to Tom's honesty."

"Well, say, what do you think I sent you over there for? Did you figure it was a pleasure trip?"

"Why, Bob," the young fellow remonstrated, "I thought you told me that you'd trust old Tom with your life, and I just naturally supposed that—"

"Sure I would," the other broke in. "But trustin' these old-timers with your life an' trustin' them with your stock is two entirely different things. I thought I told you to investigate every man on this ranch. Did I?"

"You did."

"And you failed to look old Tom up?"

"Yep."

"Well, Dan," and Grenning let himself go, "here you've gone and passed up one

of my orders, and you know how I treat fellers that does that kind of thing around this shebang. You're fired, an' I don't want you runnin' to Daisy with any hard luck story, you savvy? Hit the grit an' get off the ranch as soon as you can make it."

With that the boss handed the boy a handful of bills and stamped into the house.

"You needn't fear any about my takin' my troubles to Miss Daisy, 'cause that ain't my style, an' in fact, I don't think I'll even look her up to say good-by," and the young fellow stepped down off the porch and shuffled across the yard to the corral.

Danny Muir was raised within thirty miles of the ranch he had been working on. Gradually he had risen from the post of general utility chore-boy to that of a kind of confidential man, and it was a complete surprise to him to be dismissed in that way.

Naturally he and Daisy, having been high-school chums, saw a great deal of each other, much to their own satisfaction, but against the wishes of Mrs. Grenning, who had much higher aspirations in regard to a son-in-law than just a plain, ordinary, every-day rancher.

To those privileged few who knew Bob Grenning well it seemed probable that she was indirectly the cause of Muir's dismissal. In fact, at the moment of their warm-worded conversation on the porch she stood behind the parlor curtains with a satisfied smile on her face.

Danny, in the throes of outraged dignity, roped his mount, threw on the saddle, and was busy tightening up the cinch when Daisy came in at the gate.

"Hallo, Dan," she called breezily. "Are you off again to catch the cattle-hustlers?"

"No," the boy answered gruffly.

"Why, what's the matter?" the girl asked, immediately scenting trouble and coming over to him.

"I'm fired," he answered gloomily.

"What for?"

"Because I disobeyed orders an' then was fresh, I guess."

He paused, and the girl looked up impatiently.

"Well, go on," she ordered.

"You see," Muir continued, "your dad sent me to find somethin' out, an' when I came back empty-handed he just naturally got hot an' let me go. I can't say I blame him a whole lot. I guess the job was too big for me, an' I'm glad it's over with."

There was a moment's pause, which the girl ended with:

"Well, Dan, I never thought you were a quitter, and I am surprised to hear you say anything like that. Brace up, and—"

"I'm no quitter, Miss Daisy," he cut in. "And what's more, I'll show you that I'm not. The next time I come into this ranch-yard it'll be with those cattle-thieves in tow, an' you can tell your dad what I say."

A look of anxiety rested on the girl's face.

"Dan, I know you're no quitter, and I shouldn't have spoken so," she said softly. "To tell the truth, I wish you would give up the idea, because you might get hurt badly by the men you would be going after."

But Danny shook his head.

"No," he rejoined. "I've made up my mind to see it through, and show you and your dad that there is something to me, after all."

He faltered for an instant before continuing:

"I guess I won't come in this way to see you again before I bring in my man, 'cause I imagine it'd be kind of against your dad's wishes, an' I want to show him I'm on the square an' worth better treatment than what I've got."

Swinging into the saddle, he faced about to the girl.

"Well, Daisy, good-by till I see you again." Reaching over his pony's neck, he held out his hand.

"No, no, Dan," she cried, clinging to it with a strong grip, but it was useless, for Muir, pulling away, set spurs to his mount and, with a wave of his hat, galloped out of the corral.

Daisy watched him till he disappeared around a corner of one of the big barns, then, nervously clasping her hands together, she stood wringing them and looking around helplessly.

"What shall I do! Oh! what *shall* I do?" she moaned to herself. "Now that he has taken that attitude, what in the world *can* I do?"

Quickly regaining control of herself, she marched out of the corral and into the house to her father's room, where she knocked on the door until he opened it.

"What did you fire Dan Muir for?" she demanded peremptorily.

"Why, Honey," he answered slowly, "I just naturally fired him because he didn't do what I told him to."

"What was it he didn't do?" his inquisitor threw back at him.

"Well, for one thing, I sent him out to get some news of them rustlers what have been gettin' away with the stock, an' after bein' gone for a week he comes back without anythin' to show for the time he put in. Also, he flatly disobeyed one of my orders."

"What was it?" she snapped him up militantly.

Big Bob paused for a moment before he answered, looking his daughter over coolly.

"Now look here, Honey," he admonished her softly, "ain't you gettin' kind of disrespectful?"

Immediately her attitude changed to one of pleading.

"Yes, daddy, and I'm sorry; but won't you please tell me?"

"Of course I will," Grenning replied, completely mollified. "You see, girlie, I gave him orders to look into every puncher's reputation on the ranch, an' he didn't do it."

"He didn't?" the girl asked, with wide eyes. "Why?"

"Wal, Daisy, some time ago I told the boy that I'd trust old Tom Hogan with my life, an' he took that for as much of an investigation as was needed in Tom's case. I'm kind of sorry, but you know how I've always stuck for absolute obedience from the men working for me. He disobeyed, an' I simply let him go."

Miss Daisy walked over and sat on the arm of her father's chair, at the same time rumpling up his hair.

"Daddy," she whispered, "will you do me a favor?"

"Sure I will, girlie," he answered.

"Well, please get Dan to come back to work for you."

"What!" he exclaimed.

"Remember your promise," the girl smiled sweetly at him.

Grenning got to his feet and paced up and down the room. He was placed in a position where he had to disappoint one of two people. It was a choice of satisfying either his wife or his daughter, and he didn't relish it.

Suddenly he stopped in his stride across the floor and faced the girl.

"Honey," he decided, "I'll break one of my strongest rules and hire him over again. Besides," he continued, as if in justification of his act, "I've come to the conclusion that I was too hard on the boy. I'll send Miguel out after him, and he'll be back here to-morrow morning on the job."

But Muir was not back on the job in the morning, and the men that Grenning sent out to look for him came in without finding any trace of him.

II.

DANNY galloped away with the firm intention of never returning without the rustlers.

Riding to an outlying homestead, he bought a light supply of grub, and continued on his way to the Mexican line, twenty miles from the Grenning ranch.

For two weeks he camped under the stars, keeping a sharp lookout for driven cattle going across to Mexico. Several times he had come upon fresh tracks where small bands had gone over, but as yet his luck in meeting up with any of them had been of the poorest.

Considering the fact that he was patrolling a stretch of land nearly forty miles in length, this was not at all extraordinary.

One evening he was sitting over his camp-fire just before turning in, when the familiar drumming sound caused by a band of quickly moving stock fell on his ears.

It was the work of a moment to throw dirt on the fire, bridle and saddle his horse, and set off in the direction of the sound. It came from the north, and Muir smiled grimly as he thought of what was due to develop in a short time.

Reaching a trail that he had come upon late that afternoon, he led his horse off to one side, compelled it to lie down, and himself crouched by the side of a large greasewood bush.

"I doped it out right," he told himself. "This is the trail over which all of Bob Grenning's stock has been disappearing."

"Lie quiet, Babe," as his horse tried to rise. "There's goin' to be plenty doin' here in a couple of minutes, if I ain't mistaken."

Suddenly an indistinct bunch of running stock took shape in the darkness. The rattle of horn on horn, and the sound of the gait peculiar to cattle decided Dan.

Jumping to his feet, he drew his guns

and bawled into the darkness: "Hands up," at the same time firing at haphazard toward the rear of the moving stock.

A sharp scream answered him, and a voice filled with terror called out:

"Don't shoot, oh, don't shoot again."

"Well, gosh," exploded Muir. "Doggoned if that didn't sound like a woman." And raising his voice, he continued: "Come on over here now, and throw your artillery on the ground."

A vague silhouette moved toward him.

"Ride right close up so I can see you throw them out," he ordered.

The rustler did as told, riding up to within ten feet of him.

"Well," Muir questioned, "why don't you do as I told—"

The sentence was not finished, for suddenly Dan saw the horse leap into the air toward him. He jumped to one side to escape being trampled on and fell over a large sage-brush.

Before he could regain his feet the mysterious rider had vanished into the darkness. Floundering around, he finally found his horse and leaped into the saddle to take up the pursuit. His pony took a couple of strides, tried laboriously to take another, and then faltered and came to a stop.

"Well, I'll be derned," Dan said to himself. "If I wasn't tricked by a woman or a boy an' then had my horse lamed up on me so that I can't follow. Gee, but that's tough luck, O. K."

Slowly he dismounted and ran over the horse's legs. A heavy swelling on the off fore leg decided him, and he spoke aloud:

"Well, Babe, I guess we'll camp right here for the night," and suiting the action to the word, he pulled off the bridle and saddle and rolled up in his blanket.

He was awakened to look into the barrel of a Colt's .44 held within a foot of his face by Grenning, who was sitting astride him.

"Come on, boys," the big man shouted, "I've got him dead to rights," and as they came riding up he took another look at his capture.

In an instant his eyes had penetrated the week's growth of beard, and he started violently.

"My God," he muttered, thunderstruck. "It's Danny Muir!"

"Stand up, you thankless dog," he commanded, keeping him covered, while he proceeded to heap some strong epithets on Dan's head.

The young fellow stood it for a moment without flinching, but suddenly throwing discretion to the winds, he leaped for the big man's throat.

Grenning pulled the trigger, and Muir sank to the ground in a heap, a nasty hole in his shoulder.

Bob then turned to the men.

"You're all witnesses that I fired in self-defense, aren't you?" he queried.

They nodded silently, even to old Fred Muir, who was Danny's uncle.

"Well, we'll have to get him into town and hold a trial," Grenning continued. "So come on, Fred, you take his feet and I'll help carry him over to the rig. Derned if I ever thought that little Danny would do anything like this," and the big fellow shook his head sadly.

Dan was unconscious when they reached the ranch, and Bob telephoned to the sheriff for the necessary authority to keep him there.

This was given, and the young fellow was put to bed in the big house.

Daisy was away when they brought him in, much to her father's satisfaction.

"Where's Daisy?" he asked his wife.

"Over to Della Macy's for the day," she answered him.

"Well, you send some one over and tell her to stay there for a couple of days, because I don't want her to know anything about this."

"All right, I will, Bob," she answered. "I'll send over right away."

Late that afternoon Grenning was astonished to see his daughter come into the sitting-room where he was reading.

"Honey," he said reproachfully, "I thought I sent to have you stay over to Della's this week."

"I know you did, dad," she answered, "but I met Tommy on the way over and it was too far to ride back again."

"Where's Tommy now?"

He looked at her sharply.

"Oh, I told him he could go into town if he wanted to, and I guess he did."

There was a short silence, and Grenning broke the news to her bluntly.

"We've got the rustler."

"You have?" she asked, starting.

"Yes, it's Dan Muir. We caught him just this side of the line asleep, and he's up-stairs now with a pretty sore shoulder."

"Danny?" the girl cried, starting forward. "Why, he's no rustler," and she ran

out of the room and up-stairs where the boy lay grinding his teeth in pain.

"It's all right, Dan," she whispered, bending over him. "Don't worry."

III.

It was nearly a month before Muir recovered sufficiently to stand the strain of a trial.

At the end of that time, however, the case was called, and all the people in the county were at hand to take it in.

The prosecuting attorney had spent about half a day in giving his evidence, and the judge was about to charge the jury when Miss Daisy came in through the front door and walked directly up to the bench.

"Judge Noble," she said, in a clear voice, "may I speak to you privately for a moment?"

"Is it relevant to this case?" the court asked her.

"Yes, sir," she answered.

"Well, you'd better give it right out here in the court-room."

"Certainly, Daisy," her father interposed. "Tell whatever it is right out here in court."

At this interruption which promised new developments, there was a shuffling in the room and then complete silence as the girl looked appealingly at her father.

"All right, Daisy," he nodded encouragingly to her. "Go ahead."

She straightened up and eyed the assemblage coolly.

"I'm the cattle rustler," she announced quietly.

Big Bob jumped to his feet.

"The girl's sick," he yelled. "She doesn't know what she is saying."

"Sit down," roared the judge, smashing his gavel on the desk. "Officer, if any person interrupts again throw him out. Now, Miss Daisy, go ahead. Begin at the beginning and tell the whole story."

The room was absolutely quiet. Grenning sat hunched down in his chair, and the young woman threw an appealing arm out toward him. If he saw it he paid no heed, and she turned again to the faces in front of her.

"A few weeks ago my mother received a letter from my brother, who is in San Francisco, saying that he was in a scrape and needed a certain amount of money. Mother came to me at her wits' end as to how to get it without letting my father know, as he has always been extremely severe with Dick, and we were fearful of the consequences. We talked the thing over together and I hit upon the plan of running off across the line with some of dad's cattle and there selling them. This is what I have been doing for the last six weeks and getting away with," and she looked scornfully at the men from the ranch. "Why, I have taken as many as twenty head of steers from right underneath your noses. Goodness knows what would become of my father's stock if there were any real cattle thieves in the country."

"Miss Grenning," the court interrupted her, "do you realize what a serious charge you are bringing against yourself?"

"Yes, your honor, I do," she replied. "But now that I come to think of it I am not going to accept that charge."

She paused for a moment to lend weight to her words.

"Is it a theft, when one takes one's own property?"

"No."

"Well, I have ten thousand head of cattle in my own name. Haven't I, daddy?" she asked, turning to her father.

He nodded.

"So you see, I can't be charged with anything at all."

"But what was Muir doing down so near to the line?" the prosecuting attorney asked, bound on having some kind of a conviction.

"Why, he was out looking for the supposed rustlers."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he stopped me on the last trip I made with a bunch, and very nearly got me."

"Kindly give a detailed account of that incident?"

Miss Daisy did so, and it agreed so perfectly with Muir's version of the affair that everything favored his release.

The necessary lines of the law were followed and Dan was at liberty.

He accepted Grenning's offer of a fine position on the ranch and drove home with them.

That evening Dan and the girl went for a drive.

"You didn't get your cow thief after all, did you?" she chided him.

"No," he admitted. "But I think I have got the cattle rustler now," taking her into his arms.

The Amateur Rounder

By William H. Greene

MARK WILSON was the only person in Maple Center who was not pleased when the Mattingly Stock Company came to the opera-house for the week. What did it matter to him that they were to play "Uncle Tom's Cabin," with a pack of real Siberian bloodhounds; "The Belle of Chinatown," with highbinders and white-slaves, and several other thrilling dramas of intense heart interest? Mamie Brennan, the cashier in Goodwin's restaurant, and the prettiest girl in town, had gone to the Monday night performance with Jim Barton, his bitterest enemy and rival.

This was Tuesday, and as Mark walked up North Street, he felt that life was a hollow mockery, or worse. Passers-by heard him muttering gloomily: "Gee whiz!" "What do you think of that?" "Ain't that the limit?" and other phrases to the same effect. Several of his friends paused to ask what was the matter, but their attempts to cheer him up were ignored, until he met Sydney Brett, who was never ignored.

Brett was a freshman at Kingston College, back home on a visit. Little more need be said. His clothes, his walk, his talk, and his nerve were the admiration of the girls and the envy of the other young men of Maple Center.

"Hallo!" he said, noting Mark Wilson's wo-begone appearance and drooping shoulders. "Worrying about your bank-account? Money piling up on you? No? Then what's the trouble, my son? Confide. Confide in me, true friend of my childhood."

Wilson confided, hoping that Brett might be able to think of some plan to help him out. Surely this was just where a college education ought to be of great assistance. Brett listened patiently.

"So Jim Barton took her to the show last night," he said.

"Yes," dismally.

"Then take her yourself to-night, and look into her eyes and tell her—"

"She's working to-night," interposed Wilson.

"Well, then, take her to-morrow night."

"Barton's taking her again to-morrow. I've got to think of some way to get ahead of that fellow. Last night he held her hand all through the show. I saw them."

The memory appeared to throw him into still deeper gloom. Brett thought a while, and a smile appeared on his bright young face.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed, slapping Wilson on the shoulder violently.

"Yes?"

"Yes. What you want to do is to make her jealous. Then she'll be crazy about you."

This idea was so original that Wilson gasped with astonishment.

"That's it," continued Brett. "That's the way to get them. Make her jealous. Make her think you've got plenty of other girls. Give her the impression that you're a man-about-town. A sort of roué. Do you get me?"

"How am I going to do that?" asked Wilson dubiously.

"Well, let me see," reflected his adviser. "I'll tell you. You say she'll be working in the restaurant to-night?"

"Yes."

"Then you take Miss Daisy Starland, the leading lady of the show, in there for supper after the performance. That'll open Mame's eyes, I guess. A blonde, too. She'll think you're a regular rounder."

"But I don't know Daisy Starland," objected Wilson. "She won't go with me."

"You leave that part of it to me, my boy," said Brett confidently. "I'll fix things for you. Blondes are my specialty."

"You can fix it so she'll go out with me?" Wilson asked.

"I'll fix it for both of us. That's the easiest thing I do," said Brett. "Meet me at the theater at eight o'clock."

At five o'clock that evening Mark Wilson began work on an elaborate toilet, and when he met his friend at the opera-house three hours later he was a work of art. His suit had come all the way from the Universal Tailoring Company, of Chicago. His hair, face, high collar, and patent-leather shoes shone with equal brilliance. In his buttonhole he wore a large chrysanthemum.

"You'll do," said Brett, looking him over and suppressing a grin.

The performance that night was "The Belle of Chinatown," Miss Starland playing the title rôle. Wilson and Brett sat in the front row and applauded everything she did. When Mr. Mattingly, the villain, hissed that she was in his power and should not escape him, Wilson also hissed, while Brett, the *blasé* smiled indulgently.

It was between the first and second acts that a young lady, Miss Violet Vale, according to the program, came out in front of the curtain to do a "specialty."

"Won't You Be My Honey Boy," she sang, straight at Wilson, who squirmed uneasily in his seat, while the whole house laughed, and the electrician turned the spot-light on him.

Brett shared none of his friend's confusion. Reaching over, he removed the chrysanthemum from Wilson's coat and threw it to the girl, who looked pleased, and sang the rest of the song to him.

When she came out again, between the second and third acts, she nodded to Brett in a friendly way. Wilson was almost overcome with admiration of his friend's cleverness.

"I wish I knew how you do it," he said.

"Modesty forbids me to tell you," said Brett.

When the last act was over, the villain properly foiled, and everybody else happy, Wilson and Brett hastened around to the stage entrance. The manager of the theater was there, talking to Mr. Mattingly. The boys were introduced to the entire company. Miss Violet Vale was a surprise, for they would never have known her with her make-up off. But she recognized Brett, and was extremely cordial to him.

"We must treat her kindly," Brett whispered to Wilson. "She may be somebody's grandmother."

Miss Starland was not such a disappointment, being almost as nice-looking off the stage as on. Brett explained that he and his friend would like to make up a little supper party. Would Miss Vale and Miss Starland care to go? Miss Vale was more than willing. Miss Starland did not appear quite so eager, and Mr. Mattingly looked the boys over with an amused expression, but at last the party was arranged, and the four started out.

Brett glanced from Miss Starland's trim figure and yellow curls to the less attractive Miss Vale.

"I'm doing this for you, Wilson," he said, in a confidential aside, "and for to-night only. After this, it will be me for Miss Starland."

"All right," said Wilson nervously. "You can have her. You know I only want to make Mame jealous. Gee, I hope it works!"

"Certainly it will work," declared Brett. "Keep your nerve, that's all."

But Wilson's nerve was gone long ago. He grasped Brett by the shoulder, as the latter was about to join Miss Vale.

"Look here, Brett," he faltered, "what'll I say to her?"

His friend regarded him scornfully.

"Make love to her, of course, you mutt," he said, and turned away.

As they walked down the street Brett and Miss Vale forged rapidly ahead, as he was in no mood to linger with so unattractive a companion. Wilson followed more slowly with Miss Starland. Something had evidently gone wrong with his conversational abilities. Several times he

opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came forth. The silence became painful. At last Miss Starland was forced to talk "shop."

"Did you like our performance to-night, Mr. Wilson?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Wilson.

Another silence. Then she tried again.

"You are a native of Maple Center, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I think it is a delightful little place," she went on.

"Yes, ma'am."

"So peaceful and quiet."

"Yes, ma'am."

She wondered if he could say nothing else, and decided to try a question that could not be answered with "yes" or "no."

"What is your favorite play?" she asked.

"Yes— I mean—er—'The Belle of Chinatown,'" he managed to stammer.

"Really? I'm sure you're just saying that because I played in it."

"Yes, ma'am."

The remainder of the distance to Goodwin's restaurant was covered in silence. When they arrived there, Brett and Miss Vale were already seated at a table near the cashier's desk, where Miss Mamie Brennan sat enthroned, dressed in immaculate white shirt-waist and skirt, her hair most wonderfully arranged—the queen of the *table d'hôte*—smiling impartially on all her faithful subjects.

Wilson was much disappointed because she pretended not to see him when he entered. He had counted on this entrance making a big impression on her. Nearly every one else in the place stared hard at Miss Starland, but Mamie's thoughts were apparently miles away. Wilson knew, however, that she must be aware of his presence, and as he and Miss Starland joined their friends, he did his best to imitate Brett's careless, easy manner, with the result that he nearly knocked the small table over as he sat down.

His seat faced the front of the restaurant, and though Mamie's classic profile, and sometimes the back of her head, were all he could see of her, he felt reasonably certain that she would miss nothing that took place at their table.

Wilson had been especially warned against one thing.

"It's better to use the wrong forks than to eat with your knife," Brett had told him. "So remember, no sword-swallowing!"

As he always reserved his "company manners" for his best clothes, Wilson got along fairly well, but his conversational powers did not improve. He ate in silence, and his appetite seemed good, but it was in vain that his companions tried to draw from him either wit, wisdom, or even the most commonplace observation. And when his glance left his plate it always wandered in the direction of the cash-register and Miss Brennan, who, seemingly unconscious of his very existence, was exchanging the most up-to-date repartee with the customers who lingered about her desk.

Brett was nobly doing the work of two, but Miss Starland insisted on teasing her bashful escort.

"Did you ever think of going on the stage, Mr. Wilson?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am—I mean, no, ma'am," he answered.

"Would you like a job in our company?"

"No, ma'am."

Miss Starland laughed good-naturedly, and Brett proceeded to take advantage of this excellent opportunity.

"If you would only make *me* that offer," he said. "I would do anything to be in your company." Which shows what a college education will do for a young man.

Wilson continuing mute, Brett came to the rescue.

"Pardon me, ladies," he said at last, and, leaning over, he whispered in his friend's ear: "You'll never make Mame jealous this way. She can see you're only staring at her all the time. Pay more attention to Miss Starland." But this warning was also without effect.

Still the little supper might have gone on pleasantly enough but for an unexpected turn of events.

Mr. Mattingly, thinking he would like a little lunch, strolled into the restaurant, entirely innocent of any idea of meeting Miss Starland, whom he evidently did not see. As there were no vacant tables just at that moment, he followed what appeared to be a custom of the village, and stood by the cash-desk, talking to Miss Brennan. He enjoyed her company undisturbed for about ten minutes, during which time Wilson grew more and more uneasy. Then, as Mattingly was about to leave the

desk, he leaned over familiarly and pinched Mamie's cheek.

Now, as a rule, Miss Brennan was quick enough to resent any such liberties, but, knowing that poor Wilson was watching her, she smiled and pretended to like it. The patient Wilson could stand a lot, but this was too much. At last he had something to say.

Jumping to his feet, he rushed over and grabbed Mattingly roughly by the arm.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "don't you get fresh with this lady. She's—she's a friend of mine."

"Oh, indeed," said the actor coolly. "Well, when you're out with my wife, you stay with her and be a gentleman. Don't leave her at the table like that, and don't get 'fresh' with me."

"Your wife?" said Wilson, surprised.

"Yes, my wife—Miss Starland."

"Then you can have her," burst out Wilson bluntly. "But you leave my friend alone."

"You are insulting both my wife and me," said Mattingly. "Just come outside, young man."

It was all over in a moment. Brett and several other men followed the pair out, and came back almost immediately, carrying poor Wilson. He had been struck neatly on the point of the chin, and was quite unconscious. They put him in a chair and hovered about him.

Miss Brennan was the only one who did not appear excited. She calmly took a bottle of water from the nearest table and dashed the contents in Wilson's face. Partially revived, he straightened up and stammered:

"Hallo. What's the matter? Oh, yes, I remember. Gee! He—he must have knocked me clean out."

"I should say he did," observed Brett.

"Well," said Wilson sheepishly, "I guess I queered myself with Mame. She'll never have any use for me now."

But Mamie was looking at him with a new expression on her pretty face.

"You poor boy," she said. And then, severely, "You certainly do need some one to look after you, Mr. Wilson—so I suppose I'll have to take the job."

"Don't call me Mr. Wilson, Mamie," he said, his mind still a bit hazy. "Call me—"

"Mark," she laughed. "I will. It's a good name for you."

LOVE'S RELENTING.

"Love," I asked—we met at dawn,
And he gamboled like a fawn,
Singing light and airily—
"Where the way to Arcady?"

Gaily shook his merry head.
"Find the way yourself!" he said.

"Love," I urged—high noon was near;
Shone the sunlight, fervid, clear,
And the day seemed long to me—
"Where the way to Arcady?"

Still a smile was in his eyes;
"Search," he said; "'twill make you wise!"

"Love," I cried—the dusk drew nigh,
Birds of night were flitting by;
In the shadows long walked we—
"Where the way to Arcady?"

"Any path"—his clasp was true—
"That's just wide enough for two!"

Ethel M. Colson.

THE SHOOTING AT BIG D

By FRED V. GREENE Jr.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FINAL ARRANGEMENTS.

THE faces of both Crawford and Lockwood turned an ashen gray as the visitor's words sank deeper into their brains, and they realized that matters had reached a crisis.

"Yes, we'll shoot at each other," Sandy repeated coolly. "Make it one of them duels we reads about thet used to happen years ago."

"Duel!" Crawford shouted. "Why, what do you think I am?"

"A durned bluffer an' a coward, if ye tries to crawl out of my challenge," Sandy retorted, and proceeded to roll a cigarette with the same equanimity that he would have employed were he about to shoot a dog that had become a nuisance.

Crawford caught the glance of dumb appeal which Lockwood shot at him, and he instantly recovered his presence of mind, as well as his nerve.

"Wal, what do ye say to it?" Sandy queried. "Are ye game, or ain't ye?"

"Game?" Crawford sneered. "I should say I am."

The look of amazement on Lockwood's face proved that he was resigned to what he evidently considered a hopeless future.

"Wal, it took ye a durned long while to say so."

"Did it? Well, let me tell you one thing, Sandy. Your bluff doesn't scare me for an instant. I—"

"It seemed to," the visiting cowboy put in calmly.

"It certainly did not," Monroe corrected emphatically. "The reason I did not take you up immediately was because I have some scruples against killing a man in such cold-blooded fashion. But now that you're so persistent in wanting some one to remove you from this country, I'll take on the job."

In those who were gathered about them, eagerly drinking in every word, this acceptance of the challenge inspired increased admiration for their comrade. At least, such was the case with but two exceptions. Decker did not show any enthusiasm, but seemed content to eye his cowboy as if secretly wondering what would be the outcome of the affair.

But Lockwood, the other exception, proved by his expression and action that if events came off as planned, he would be anything but pleased. He was shifting nervously from one foot to the other, and constantly cast glances of mute appeal at his friend—glances which the other carefully avoided.

As to Crawford, he was inwardly marveling at his own coolness.

Yet this was not the first predicament into which his bluff on the night of his arrival had thrown him, and the ease with which he had come out of the others had given him a self-confidence that now stood him in

good stead. And it was this assumed self-confidence which cloaked the fear and nervousness raging within him, his brain in a chaotic state from the endeavor to find some way out of the present difficulty.

"Wal, it's up to you to set the date of the shootin'," Sandy remarked after a brief pause. "It's up to you to name thet, as well as the place of the meetin', considerin' thet I'm the one what done the challengin'."

"I'll do that all right, and then it'll be up to *you* to name the place of your burial if I decide to shoot as I can. But I'll only wing you, Sandy—I couldn't kill you outright, although I feel that I should, considering that you've brought this whole thing upon yourself."

Crawford really marveled at his own audacity. But he had been so successful with his bluffing in the past that it had given him a confidence which was dangerous, in that it carried with it the conviction that he could follow along this line indefinitely.

"Wal, it's all in the game," Sandy remarked. "If I'm to shuffle off in this here thing, then thet's the way it'll be."

"You've brought it on yourself," Monroe declared, and he thought he detected some evidence of Sandy's weakening—his manner did not appear as nonchalant as it had a moment before.

"Wal, I don't see as all this fancy talk is settin' the date fer this here match," Lawson broke in impatiently. "Monny, why don't ye decide when it's to be?"

Crawford glanced slowly from one to the other, and his face reflected just the opposite of the fears that consumed him—he appeared as calm and collected as if he were arranging a ride in the park.

"As far as I am concerned," he remarked, "to-morrow will suit me as well as any other time."

"To-morrow!" Decker exclaimed, and he cast a look of amazement on the Easterner.

Even Sandy was somewhat taken aback, and the men, with the exception of Lockwood, bestowed smiles of admiration on Crawford. But Tom Lockwood stared at him as if he feared that he had gone completely out of his mind. But fortunately the strange look on his face was not noticed by the others, their whole attention being riveted upon his friend.

"Yes, to-morrow suits me," Monroe repeated. "I can see no reason for delaying the affair. My hands are just itching to get the purse in them."

"Then it'll be to-morrow," Sandy agreed, but his voice had lost a good part of the confidence it had heretofore contained.

Crawford had mapped out a plan of action, but he hoped he would not be forced to use it. As he had at first reasoned, he might be able to scare Sandy out of the duel; but when he saw that he had failed in this, he realized the necessity of some good excuse for changing the date.

"Then it's to-morrow, and—"

He stopped abruptly, and a cloud spread over his face.

"What's the matter?" Decker, who had been studying Crawford keenly, demanded.

"Have I got any cartridges?" he asked aloud, as if thinking to himself.

"Cartridges!" Bud exclaimed.

Crawford was playing his part like a seasoned actor, and, knowing that the slightest false step would disclose everything, he threw himself into it with all his might, while Lockwood looked on in speechless amazement.

"Yes, cartridges," he repeated, and, going to the satchel which he had pushed under his bunk, he drew it out.

"What do ye want cartridges for?" Sandy demanded.

"They are occasionally used in connection with revolvers," Crawford replied in his most sarcastic tone.

"I knows thet," the other retorted. "But they's plenty of them about. I'll *give* ye all ye wants."

"My gun shoots a peculiar kind," Crawford told him without raising his head—he was busily searching the interior of his bag.

"It what?" Sandy queried.

"I say that my gun shoots a peculiar kind of cartridge. I thought I had some left in that bag, but they're all gone. Has anybody taken them?"

No one replied as they each glanced from one to the other. Then Crawford turned to Lockwood.

"Did you, Tom?" he queried.

"Why — why, no — I didn't," was the stammered response.

"I certainly thought I put some in there," Crawford continued. "But they're not there now."

"What are ye drivin' at?" Sandy demanded impatiently.

"Just this," and Crawford faced him coolly. "My gun shoots a peculiar style of cartridge, and I'm completely out of them.

I thought I had a supply here, but it seems—"

"Can't ye git none in town?" Lawson interrupted.

"No, because I bought all they had when I was there the other day."

"An' ye can't use no other gun?" Bump queried. "Ye kin hev mine, an'—"

"Or mine," Reckless added.

"Thanks just the same, boys; but I'm used to this one, and I wouldn't risk my reputation by using any other. I suppose I'll have to send to Cheyenne for them, and that will take three or four days." Then he added impatiently:

"That's just my luck, confound it!"

"Let's see thet gun of your'n," Sandy directed.

Crawford drew it out without hesitancy, and handed it to him. Sandy glanced at the weapon, then chuckled:

"Wal, I dunno as ye'll hev to send to Cheyenne."

"Why not?" the Easterner asked breathlessly.

"'Cause we got a supply of them cartridges over at the ranch. Ye can hev all ye wants."

"To fit that gun?" Crawford persisted. "Are you sure they're the same?"

"Sartin!" And there was no lack of confidence in the cowboy's voice.

"Ye see," he added before Crawford could speak, "big Bill Walcott brought one of them there guns with him when he came to the ranch a few months ago; said he'd bought it at Buck Twining's, over at town, an' he had quite a supply of the cartridges what fits it. But since Bill got chucked off his pony by the fool steppin' in a hole, an' got rolled on, breakin' his hip, he ain't been able to ride nor shoot, so he's got all them cartridges yet. He'll give ye all ye wants."

Crawford could hardly believe his ears, and it required all his self-restraint to keep from confessing to the bluff he had tried so hard to carry through. It was certainly disconcerting to think that the only other revolver of this make in the surrounding country should have been bought at the same store from which he had purchased his. He recalled the storekeeper's information regarding it—that he had sold it to a cowboy who was going to the South.

"Yes — yes, of course," the Easterner stammered. "If he'll lend me some—that is—you see, I'll send for some right away, and then I'll give them back to him when I receive them. So, you see, if you want to have the match pulled off right away, I'll have to become a borrower."

"They ain't no hurt in thet, that I can see," Bump put in. "An' I don't see no sense of waitin', long as Big Bill has cartridges thet'll—"

At that instant Crawford unthinkingly put his hand in his pocket; and as his fingers rattled something there he interrupted quickly, fearing the sound might have been heard by those who surrounded him:

"Yes—if he will."

As he spoke he held up his forefinger, so that the big blister which had been raised by the constant pressure on the trigger that day, and which had broken, could be plainly seen by those surrounding him.

"I don't think that'll affect my shooting," he said, and then queried as he held it before Decker:

"Do you, Jim?"

The old rancher bestowed a peculiar look on him before he replied.

"Wal, I dunno," he said slowly; "it might, an' as them durned things heals up in a day or two, an'—wal, now, come to think of it, I b'lieve we'd better put it off fer a couple of days, 'cause I was sorter plannin' to go to town either to-morrer or next day, an' I can't very well put it off, 'cause I'm expectin' a very important letter. So if I goes to-morrer, s'pose we makes the shootin' day after—thet'll be Saturday. How does thet hit you, Sandy?"

"Whatever you says."

"All right, then—it's Saturday, at three o'clock, over here on the Big D. Does thet suit everybody?"

A chorus of "Sure does!" followed the old man's question, and both Crawford and Lockwood showed only a part of their relief at the postponement in their faces — the greater portion they managed to contain within them.

CHAPTER XVII.

KITTIE TO THE RESCUE.

"Won't stay over for a little grub?" Decker queried of Sandy, as the cowboy announced his intention of returning immediately to his own ranch.

"No, guess I won't. Ye see, I wants to git back an' tell the boys of the arrangements. I tell ye, Jim, they's a heap of interest over at the Diamond Star 'bout this

match. An' then, ag'in, I wants to make sure thet Big Bill has them cartridges. If he ain't—"

He ended with a laugh, and the men watched him as he galloped off to the south. Then the ranch-owner turned and stared thoughtfully from one to the other until his eyes rested on Lawson.

"Bud," he said, "I'm expectin' a letter from New York—a *very important* one."

He paused an instant to glance toward Crawford and Lockwood, and each thought they detected a peculiar expression in his eyes.

"I guess it'll reach town to-day sure," Decker continued, "but I ain't got time to go after it. How'd ye like to ride over to town fer me to-night, an' bring it back in the mornin'? I got to have it."

"Sure, Jim," Bud agreed. "I'll do thet."

"All right. Grub'll soon be ready, an' you git started as soon as ye feed. But git back as early in the mornin' as ye can, 'cause I wants to see what it says."

"I'll do thet," Lawson assured him; then the supper-call sounded, and they all hurried toward the mess-house.

During the meal the talk revolved around the match which was to take place on Saturday. But neither of the Easterners expressed any great enthusiasm over it. Lockwood was particularly reticent, and Crawford passed the matter off by simply stating that he was certain of winning, but that he hardly felt he should brag about what he would do to Sandy.

"To tell the truth," he added, "I'm sorry he made the arrangement he did, but he'll be a great deal more sorry than I am, after it is over. I don't want to hurt him, and I wish we were going to shoot at targets, instead of each other, but—"

"Ye didn't seem to feel thet way 'bout me thet night," Bud put in sourly.

"The cases are anything but parallel," Crawford rejoined. "I felt I was only giving you what you deserved, but with Sandy—well, for two men to stand up and shoot at each *other*—it seems almost like going back to the days of barbarism."

He shrugged his shoulders as he added carelessly:

"But it's his own fault. He suggested it, and he'll have to take the consequences. But I shall not shoot to kill. I'll only maim him, but even that is repulsive to me. But I'll show him, and you boys, too. That's all there is to it."

From then on to the conclusion of the meal the conversation dragged, Crawford showing plainly that he did not care to enter into it. Presently he and Lockwood left the building together and walked toward the corral.

As soon as they were out of hearing distance Tom turned to Crawford.

"Mon, in the name of all that's good and holy, *what* are you going to do about this?" he demanded excitedly.

"Hanged if I know," and the other's tone was totally devoid of the hope with which heretofore he had seemed so plentifully supplied.

"Then we'd better skip out to-night. If we stay here—"

"Skip out to-night!" Crawford sneered. "Will you tell me how we can do that?"

"Take a couple of horses and ride for all we're worth! We'll—"

"Horse-stealing is the same as murder—even worse—here in Wyoming."

"But we won't be doing that. Decker'll understand—"

"Then *you* tell him—I won't. And besides, we'll run into Lawson in town, and just as a slight way of relieving the monotony of the ride, we'll have the fun of fighting off coyotes all the way. And with neither of us able to hit one of them if he stood still and begged for the bullet—oh, talk sense, Tom."

Just then Bud came toward them, and after a word, started to saddle his pony.

"You ain't afraid of the coyotes, are you?" Lockwood queried.

"What—them things!" Lawson chuckled. "Oh, they'll foller me, I s'pose, same as they allus does, but when they gits a little too close, all I does is to shoot a few of them. That scares the rest off."

Without another word he sprang on his horse, and started off to the north, leaving the two Easterners staring wistfully after him.

Neither of them had any great desire for conversation, and they slowly retraced their steps to the bunk-house. As they neared it, a voice broke in upon their thoughts.

"Not comin' in to-night?" Kittie asked from the doorway of the shack.

"Oh—certainly," Lockwood replied in a tone he endeavored to make as natural as he possibly could.

"So it's all decided, Monny?" she began when they were seated. "Father told

me, and I can hardly wait for Saturday. But I don't like the idea of your shooting at each other. It seems almost barbaric to me."

Crawford looked up quickly into her face, and a gleam of hope was reflected in his own.

"So it does to me," he admitted quickly, "and I tell you, Kittie, it's got me going. I don't like to maim any one, and really, the thing has completely upset me."

"Of course, Sandy has brought it on himself," she reminded him.

"That's very true," Lockwood agreed. "But it isn't right. We're Easterners, and we haven't imbibed the same sentiments these cowboys have. I really feel that your father should say or do something to prevent the thing taking place as now planned. The two can prove their ability as marksmen just as easily by shooting at targets."

A new hope rose in Crawford's breast.

"I have half a mind to put the matter up to him," he said. "Why, honestly, Kittie, I couldn't sleep if I really hurt Sandy, and that's what I've got to do. It's either he or I."

"No, don't *you* speak of it," the girl advised thoughtfully. "He wouldn't understand your feelings as I do, and would think you're afraid. I'll put it to him myself."

"Will you?" Crawford asked eagerly, while Lockwood's intense relief showed in his features.

"I certainly will," she assured them, but before they could continue upon the subject, Decker entered the room.

The old Westerner glanced from one to the other, and there was on his face an expression which Crawford thought resembled a combination of curiosity and disgust.

"Wal, what ye doin'?" the ranchman asked gruffly. "Decidin' 'bout where ye'd like to be planted after Saturday?"

"Planted!" Crawford exclaimed.

"Thet's what I said," Decker rejoined. "I got a idea thet one or the other of ye is goin' to git pretty badly hurted, an' fer some very strong reason, Monny, I hopes it won't be you."

"Why—I—I don't understand you," Crawford stammered. But the smile he tried to force to his lips refused to come.

"Wal, I got a feelin' thet this here thing is goin' to result very serious fer either you or Sandy."

"Father, we were just speaking of that very thing," Kittie broke in. "Really, I don't think you ought to let the affair go on."

"Why not?" he demanded warmly.

"Because it isn't right to let two men stand up and shoot at each other," she contended. "It's against the laws of the country and—"

"We has our own laws out here," Decker replied, and studied Crawford's face closely as he said it.

"Yes, and more's the pity," Kittie commented. "If—"

"What are *you* worryin' 'bout? Are ye 'fraid Monny's goin' to git hurt?"

"Yes, just as much as I am that Sandy will," and her voice was even and determined. "Do you think I could stand there and see those two awaiting the signal that might turn out to be a death warrant for one or both of them? I *couldn't* do it, and if you could, father, I feel sorry for your lack of the better instincts."

"Ye do, eh?" Then Decker's tone and looks suddenly changed as he added:

"Wal, we'll see. I won't tell ye what's goin' to happen till to-morrer mornin'."

"And why wait till then?" Crawford asked eagerly. "What will take place to-morrow morning to cause you to decide the question?"

"I ain't in a persition to say just now," the ranchman replied evasively. "Ye know, a lot can happen over night. But look here, Monny, s'pose I stepped in an' said you two was to shoot only at targets. What would you say to thet?"

"I'd be delighted with the idea."

There was no mistaking Crawford's feelings with regard to the proposed change—the enthusiasm with which he greeted it was more than sufficient to convince any one—and he leaned forward almost joyously as he added:

"Will you do so?"

"I dunno yet, but I got a idea thet I may do somethin' or other regardin' it. I'll know fer sure to-morrer." Then he stared fixedly at Crawford. "Say, boy, but you got lots of nerve, ain't ye?"

"Courage is a thing that is necessary in all walks of life," the Easterner remarked. "I hope I have my share."

"Wal, I didn't say 'courage'—I said *nerve*—but I s'pose, as a rule, they means the same thing. Still, they's exceptions."

He rose with these words, and Lockwood asked:

"Why, in what way do you mean?"

"Oh, I dunno," Decker replied. "But I s'pose they is, thet's all. But I'm goin' to turn in. Good night."

The others told him good night, and the old man left them to themselves.

"I think father will interfere," Kittie said. "I'll tackle him again to-morrow, and you know I can generally get what I want from him."

"I hope you can in this case," Crawford remarked fervently.

"And so do I," Lockwood sighed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DECKER TAKES A HAND.

CRAWFORD slept better that night than he had on the previous one—Kittie's assurance of her power over her father proved comforting to his troubled mind, and he awoke the next morning feeling much refreshed.

While awaiting the breakfast-call, he formed a little plan.

When he had returned from their day's practise, he had many rounds of cartridges in the pockets of the heavy coat he wore while riding. This he had changed for a lighter one when he made the call on Kittie.

He decided that he would put that one on again, and immediately after breakfast would go down behind the corral and throw the ammunition away, scattering it as much as possible, so that by no chance could any one discover he had prevaricated when he had said he was all out of the cartridge that fitted his revolver.

So he went over to the peg upon which he had hung his coat. As he lifted it an expression of fear flitted across his countenance.

The coat seemed particularly light!

Crawford hurriedly got into it, then thrust his hands into the pockets.

The cartridges were gone!

Slowly he turned from one to the other of the cowboys, who were sitting around awaiting the call for breakfast, and endeavored to read in their countenances some expression that would show they were aware of his loss. But their faces betrayed nothing.

Just then Bud entered the room.

"Hed a great time las' night," the cowboy told them. "Got in town in time fer the dance they was havin' at the hotel, an' I tell ye, I was wishin' you fellers was there." Then he turned to Crawford. "Monny, ye'd have hed the time of yer young life."

"Is that so?" the Easterner observed, but there was no enthusiasm in his tone.

"They was a couple of fellers there from the Diamond Star ranch, an' they's all crazy fer this here match with you an' Sandy. They seems to think Sandy's goin' to win."

"Do they?" Crawford remarked in a most disinterested way.

"Yes, an' they's awful anxious to see ye. I told 'em a hull lot 'bout ye, an' 'fore I got through I guess they wasn't so sure 'bout Sandy."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the ranch-owner.

"Wal, Bud, s'pose ye fergot what ye went fer," he remarked.

"Nope!" Lawson returned, and he reached in his pocket and drew out a letter. "I went to the post-office the fust thing, 'cause I wanted to git some tobacco."

Decker took the envelope and immediately left the room. Then, before any further conversation could be started, the breakfast call came, and the men hurried to the mess-house.

At least, all did except Crawford and Lockwood. The latter had been late in rising, and was not yet fully dressed. So Monroe gave this as an excuse to wait for him. But in reality he had a far more important reason.

"Tom," he began, when the door had closed after the last cowboy, "did you take any cartridges out of the pockets of my heavy coat?"

"What's that?" Lockwood asked, without looking up from the pulling on of his boots.

"You heard me," the other declared impatiently. "Did you, or didn't you?"

"Why, no, of course I didn't," Tom retorted. "But what's up?"

"The whole thing, I guess," Crawford groaned. "Look here, Tom, when we came yesterday afternoon, I had both my pockets filled with cartridges. Now if you recall, I tried to get out of the match by lying—I said I had no more. Well, I haven't now—some one has taken them all out during the night, and that some one will know that I'm anxious to get out of the match. He'll tell the others, and—"

"Now look here, Mon," broke in Lockwood, "there's only one thing for us to do, and that is to light out. Take the first train East. This place has no charms for me, and I guess you feel quite the same about it. It's just been one nerve-racking experience after another since I landed here, and I'm absolutely disgusted with it all. I want to go back."

"Hanged if I'm not getting to feel the same way about it," Crawford admitted. "But, don't you see, we can't very well leave now. If we suggested such a thing, it would precipitate a riot, and then—"

"Don't say anything about it," Lockwood interrupted. "Just sneak off in the night."

"Yes, and have all the coyotes in Wyoming snapping at our legs!" Crawford gave a very perceptible shudder. "Not that for me! If we go at all, it's in the daytime."

"Then let's do go. Really, it's the only way you'll get out of the State with a whole skin. If these fellows learned that they've been bluffed as they have—well, I'll be glad it's you, and not me."

"Oh, dry up," Crawford growled. "Come on to breakfast."

Lockwood was dressed by this time, and they hurried over to the mess-house.

"Wal, seems to me it's 'bout time to decide which one of you fellers is the best shot," Lawson remarked as they took their seats.

"Sandy hasn't challenged me," Lockwood hastened to interpose.

"Wal, we ought to hev thet learnin' Monny was to give us," Bump asserted.

"My finger's too sore for that to-day," Crawford remarked as he held up the index one on his right hand. "But in a day or two it'll be all right. Then I'll give you all a few lessons."

This closed the matter, and as the others left the room—they were half-finished with the meal when Crawford and Lockwood had entered—the two continued to eat in silence.

Suddenly Decker strode in, and there was a grim determination about his mouth that both men noted at once.

"I wants you fellers to come with me this mornin'," he said gruffly. "Hurry up an' git through, an' then git on yer ponies."

"Anything particular on?" Crawford queried, as carelessly as he could.

"I wants to show ye a few things 'bout ridin'," the rancher replied. "So git a move on yer—I'll be waitin'."

As he closed the door after him the two faced each other.

"What do you suppose Jim's got on his mind?" Lockwood began.

"Hanged if I know," the other replied. "But whatever it is, it seems to make him act darned funny—just as if he was sore at us for something."

"Darned cranky acting, I should say. But come on—let's see what it is. We've got to do as he orders."

The two Easterners went directly to the corral, and saddling and bridling their ponies, rode up to Decker's shack, where he was already awaiting them.

"What are we going to do?" Lockwood asked.

"Ride to the north, fer one thing. They's a spot up there a little ways where I wants to show ye a few things. Come on."

The two stared from him to each other, but they could not fathom the meaning of his words or actions, and silently obeyed.

Once or twice Crawford endeavored to draw the old man into conversation, but he quickly realized that it was impossible and desisted from further attempts. As a matter of fact, he was not in a mood for talk himself—he was certain something was about to happen.

At length, after riding about three miles, the ranch owner drew up his horse, and the others did the same.

"Monny," Decker began in a sneering, hard tone which alarmed Crawford, "some miles to the north of here they's a town, a railroad station, an' a train thet stops there 'bout noon, to take people to the East. Now you an' this here friend of yours race them ponies as hard as ye can, an' git thet there train. Do ye understand?"

Crawford and Lockwood only stared blankly at him, too astonished to speak.

"An' let me tell ye," the old man added warningly, "thet if either of you fellers places any value on yer good health, ye'll never bother to come 'round this here part of Wyoming ag'in. 'Cause if ye did, an' certain fellers should lay eyes on ye, ye'd probably git shipped to Noo York in a baggage-car."

"But Jim — I — I don't understand," Crawford managed to falter. "What does this mean?"

"It means thet if I didn't know yer father, an' felt a sorter responsibility fer ye while you're out here, I'd hev let the boys know what I do, an' then give them a chance

to do with ye what they wanted. An' I tell ye, ye'd deserve all they'd give ye."

"You — you'll have to explain," Crawford persisted, and he put forth a supreme effort to keep out of his voice the fear that gripped him.

"I'm wastin' time doin' it, but I will," the old man replied ungraciously. "In the fust place, ye ain't as much of a shot as Kittie is. It was a accident when ye caught Bud thet night, wasn't it?"

"Why, I — I wouldn't call it exactly that," Monroe protested.

"Then ye ain't willin' to own up, even when yer caught. But perhaps ye'll tell me what ye lied fer when ye said ye didn't hev no more of them cartridges."

"Why, I haven't!" Crawford burst out.

"No, ye haven't now, 'cause while you two was courtin' Kittie last night, I went through yer coat an' found enough to kill a hundred Sandys."

"But—"

"Wait till I'm through!" Decker stormed. "A few days ago, when I began to git suspicions 'bout you an' yer shootin', I wrote yer father to find out if ye really was a shot there in Noo York, as ye claimed. It was his answer thet Bud brought me this very mornin'."

"And he said that I'm not?"

"You know, 'thout my wastin' time tellin' ye. An' ye also knows thet ye've lied all the time ye been here. I tells ye, boys, lyin' is one thing that don't go in Wyoming. The feller thet does it is the only thing what goes, an' thet's jest exactly what you fellers is goin' to do."

"All right," Crawford agreed with assumed bravado. "If you feel that way about it, we'll not stay. But what about our clothes?"

"They's there in the bunk-house, an' they's yer property. But bein' thet I knows yer father so well, fer his sake I wouldn't hev nothin' happen to ye here. But I'm ag'in' you goin' back fer 'em. Them there what ye got on'll cover yer nakedness, an' thet's all the law demands. Then the next time I'm goin' to town, I'll take 'em over an' ship 'em to ye, though ye don't deserve havin' thet much trouble spent on ye."

For a moment no one spoke, and Crawford's countenance reflected his regret at leaving the old man this way.

"Jim, I'm sorry—"

"No, ye ain't, an' don't say ye are!" the ranch owner interrupted warmly. "It's only addin' lies to them ye've already told. So now you ride like the devil himself was after ye, an' when ye gits in town, leave the ponies at the hotel. They'll take care of 'em fer me till I sends after 'em. Now git, or ye'll miss thet train."

"But won't you shake hands, Jim?"

"No, sir!"

The reply was so emphatic that it left no question of a doubt as to Decker's feelings, and as the old man pointed his finger toward the north, the two Easterners wheeled their horses and galloped away.

For some distance neither spoke. Then Crawford turned in his saddle, to see the old man still watching them, his horse and himself clearly silhouetted against the cloudless sky.

"He's a decent chap, isn't he?" Monroe asked, and his voice shook just a trifle.

"Yes, as far as things go in this half-civilized country," Lockwood called back. "Gee, but I'll be glad to get back to New York!"

"I think I will be, too," Crawford said thoughtfully. "I guess I'll go back to banking. After all, it isn't so bad. I'll wire father from Chicago for some money, and then we'll get some clothes."

They urged their horses to their utmost, in the fear of missing the train, and when Crawford turned around later, the old ranch owner was not to be seen.

He had started back to the Big D, and arriving there, and finding the boys all out at the corral, he carefully gathered together the effects of the departed Easterners, and took them to his shack, knowing that if he told the cowboys about them, they would destroy the clothes in spite.

In a few words he apprised Kittie of what had taken place. At first she appeared a trifle upset over it, but she quickly recovered herself.

"They *were* worthless fellows, after all," she said pensively. "I would never have thought it of them."

Later in the day she remarked to her father:

"Well, if that train's on time, they're on their way East."

Just then she caught sight of Lawson as he walked toward the bunk-house, and she hurried to the door of the shack.

"Say, Bud," she called, "will you stop in a little while after supper?"

THE END.

Plucking Out the Mystery

By Joseph Ivers Lawrence

(A NOVELETTE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER.

"HIRAM H. RUNYON—Herbert Blymton Cate-Bourke," drawled Wyncott Wyme, the world-famous amateur detective—world-famous through the medium of Wyme's "Philosophy of Deduction," Wyme's "Fallacies of the Obvious," and Wyme's "Handbook of Criminology," three text-books for sleuths and near-sleuths, privately printed by the author for gratuitous distribution.

He read the two names from cards tendered him by Binks, the butler.

"The gentlemen are below, Binks?" queried the great detective.

"Yes, Mr. Wyme."

"Withdraw for a moment, Binks," said the detective.

"Yes, Mr. Wyme."

Wyncott Wyme very slowly took a large pipe of curiously carved wood from a tray on the wide, flat-topped desk, and filled it carefully with some saffron-yellow, finely-shredded tobacco, which he drew from a richly enameled, barbaric sort of urn. He lighted the pipe at the tiny flame of a little Arabian grave-lamp, and then settled back in his easy chair and regarded Mr. Wroxeter, his admiring satellite and boon-companion, with eloquent intentness.

Anticipating, as usual, the question of his friend, Wroxeter said earnestly:

"Hiram H. Runyon is the man whose elderly sister died last night under mysterious circumstances."

"And—" prompted the detective impatiently, although the other man had not had time to hesitate.

"Why, yes, and this Mr. Cate-Bourke was mentioned incidentally, I believe, in the newspaper report—an interested friend of the family, it seems."

"Very good," murmured the detective. "I think we'll have them in now, Wroxeter. Observe them carefully as I talk with them—or rather, as I allow them to talk to me. And you—yes, you may take notes, Wroxeter; it will save me the trouble of remembering the small details.

"Binks!"

"Yes, Mr. Wyme," responded the butler, appearing with suspicious alacrity from behind the arras.

"The gentlemen may come up," said the master. "And, Binks, you will note their manner of coming up. Let me know later which one precedes the other, and if either shows hesitancy, eagerness, nervousness, or anything else. Also advise me, Binks, as to their hats, coats, sticks, or other accessories."

"Yes, Mr. Wyme."

"But, my dear Wyme, I can't see your reason for all that," protested Wroxeter, almost vexed.

Wyme smiled dryly and waved a thin white hand, one finger of which was encumbered with a ponderous piece of jade, set in dull red gold.

"Wroxeter! Wroxeter!" he sighed wearily. "Why try, dear fellow? If I explained it all to you, with diagrams, you would not understand. It took me years thoroughly to comprehend my own system. Pray, why should you expect to grasp it in a fortnight?"

"Why, I've been with you two years," expostulated Wroxeter.

"Dear fellow, two years are but a fortnight to the serious mind," laughed Wyme, and continued to chuckle with amused satisfaction.

"Mr. 'Iram H. Runyon and Mr. 'Erbert Blymton Cate-Bourke!" announced Binks, holding aside the arras.

Wyme had wrapped his rich burnt-orange and black, arabesqued dressing-gown more closely about his spare frame, and now sat low in the great chair, his head wreathed with blue smoke of an odor more of incense than tobacco.

"Mr. Wyme, I thank you for receiving us!" cried the elder of the two visitors, stepping forward with extended hand.

Six impressive feet of Wyncott Wyme unfolded from the chair and stood erect in majesty. The great detective clasped the offered hand with his long, cold fingers, and transfixed the visitor with a prolonged and steely look.

"Mr. Runyon," he murmured.

Then he went through a like ceremony with Cate-Bourke, coldly greeting him with a dry "Mr. Bourke," ignoring the hyphen and the anterior part of the tandem.

"Be seated please, gentlemen," he said at last. "No, no, not those chairs! Pray take those seats there—by the wall."

"We have called upon you, Mr. Wyme," said Runyon agitatedly, "to ask you—"

"A thousand pardons, sir," interrupted the detective. "Sometimes at a sacrifice of tact and courtesy, gentlemen, I am compelled to provide protection for my mind and nerves. All superfluities are barred here. Facts, gentlemen, facts! In as few words as possible. I know why you are here. I know what you wish me to do. I even know the sum of money which you intend to offer me as a present in return for the assistance I may give you."

"Incredible!" cried the elderly millionaire. "How could you know that, my dear sir?"

"Psychology, sir!" explained the detective. "You are rated as about two million, Mr. Runyon. My system of deduction tells me that a man of your temperament and nature, with two million dollars, would instinctively offer a sum not far from five thousand for such services as you are about to solicit."

The millionaire's jaw dropped. "Why, really—" he began.

"Ah, ha!" said Wyme, with a dry smile. "I knew I was right, my dear sir; mistakes are the exception here. I will not go further with the explanation of my deductions. It is enough for you that I was really able to tell you what you had in mind."

"But, Mr. Wyme—" persisted Runyon, growing a bit flushed.

"And now, gentlemen," continued the detective, ignoring his client's efforts to speak, "I must tell you that you are sitting upon very peculiar chairs. They are connected with powerful batteries in my cellar, and by touching a button on this switchboard in my desk, I could send you both instantly to—"

But Mr. Cate-Bourke had sprung wildly from his seat, his face ashen. Mr. Runyon continued to sit on his chair, but he bent forward and looked curiously at the partially concealed mechanism beneath it.

"I apologize, gentlemen," went on the detective. "A little trick—that is all. A mere test. Please mention in your notes, Wroxeter, that Mr. Runyon is a man of phlegmatic mentality, not easily moved, while Mr. Bourke's nerves yield instantly to shock. You may sit down again, Mr. Bourke. The experiment is over. The mechanism is a mere sham."

"But I can't see the reason for all this," said Runyon, a bit testily. "We didn't come here to be examined for nervousness, Mr. Wyme."

"There, there; calm yourself, sir!" said Wyme. "No offense is intended, I assure you. My reasons? Well, I never give them. I may say that without needless parley I have accepted your offer, and taken under observation the strange case of your sister's death. Therefore, I shall pursue my usual course.

"I spare no one connected in the smallest way with any case, gentlemen. If there is a pet dog in your family, sir, I shall examine it objectively, and, I might almost say, subjectively."

As he uttered the last words his hand fluttered idly over a series of electric buttons on the desk, and with a sudden crash a large ten-pin ball fell from a shelf near the two visitors.

Both men shot out of their chairs with cries of alarm, and looked wildly around for the cause of the startling noise.

Another low laugh escaped the thoughtful detective.

"Pardon again, gentlemen," he said cheerily. "That is the last test. Please note, Wroxeter, that while Mr. Runyon is unmoved by casual mental shocks, his sensory centers are highly susceptible to sudden noises."

"By Jove, this is a farce!" exclaimed Cate-Bourke disgustedly.

The detective smiled without resentment.

"Greater men than you, Mr. Bourke, have said as much," he observed; "but they invariably apologized, sir, after the further developments of my system. Reasons, sir? No, I say again, I do not give my reasons for anything. If I were to explain all the ramifications of the system, all the men in the world clever enough to grasp it, would have it to abuse and pervert in a hundred ways. Take my services or leave them, gentlemen; but give me free rein."

CHAPTER II.

THE CASE.

"DETECTIVE HEALY, of the Central Office, to see Mr. Runyon, sir," announced Binks at this point.

"Show him up, Binks," said the great detective.

"No, perhaps I'd better go down and see him at the door," interposed the millionaire nervously.

"Not at all! Show him in here, Binks!" ordered Wyme dictatorially.

"Mr. Healy," announced Binks, and a strapping, curly-haired, blue-eyed, and red-cheeked young Irishman strode into the room without hesitation or diffidence.

He nodded pleasantly to the men generally, and said jocularly to the connoisseur of crime:

"Hallo, Mr. Wyme! Taking a flier in this case?"

The great detective might have flushed indignantly, but great detectives do not flush.

"Healy — Healy!" he murmured absently. "Ah, I believe I remember you. You're the young man — ah, yes — you're the young newspaperman that Inspector James got into the Central Office."

"Yes," replied the young detective without resentment. "I met you on the Oliver case, and the time we got Tim Donovan."

"Yes, yes; the time *we* got Tim Donovan, to be sure," said Wyme, with a sly glance at Wroxeter, who smiled with dry appreciation.

"You wish to see Mr. Runyon—to tell him something?" inquired Wyme.

"Why, I've got a few questions to fire at him," answered Healy.

"Oh, well, you won't mind waiting, then," said Wyme. "Your questions will keep, I'm sure, until I'm through with Mr. Runyon. You can walk home with him, Healy."

"Perhaps you'd like me to wait outside," suggested the young man good humoredly.

"Well—" hesitated the detective. And then: "Oh, no; wait here, if you like. If you can learn anything from my methods, you're quite welcome to it, Healy. I like to think of the police as my friends. Bless their hearts — they mean well. They're good fellows, as they run."

Time was passing, and the two visitors were becoming ill at ease.

The younger man, Cate-Bourke, took a brier pipe from his pocket and moved toward the desk.

"Do you mind if I have a bit of your tobacco, Mr. Wyme?" he asked.

With as nervous a start as he ever permitted himself, the great man clapped a hand over the cover of the urn.

"My dear Mr. Bourke," he said apologetically, "you may think me very rude, but that tobacco was given me — a large quantity of it — by my dear friend, the Khedive of Egypt. It is the product of a single plantation, cured for the sole use of the Khedive, and the dear fellow gave it to me with the sentimental proviso that I should permit no one but myself to touch it. My word was passed, you know. It's not selfishness, but my word to a friend, you see."

Healy took a leather pouch from his

pocket. "Have some of my old 'Sailors' Joy,' if you can stand it," he laughed.

"Thanks, that will do nicely," said Cate-Bourke, and filled his pipe.

"And now, Mr. Runyon, come to the point. My time, I need hardly tell you, is precious," pursued Wyme. "Whom, sir, do you suspect?"

"Suspect? Suspect?" cried the elderly man. "Why, great Heavens, man, I haven't an idea in the case. My poor sister had not an enemy in the world, to my knowledge. If the doctor had said she died of heart-failure, I should have accepted his word; but he says there are signs of poison, and I suppose the autopsy will prove that. I only came to you to-day because the police are taking the matter up, and if there is foul play, I want it run to earth as thoroughly and quickly as I can have it done."

"You did well to lose no time," said the great specialist. "Now, I must learn some things for myself.

"This Mr. Bourke—"

"Mr. Cate-Bourke," suggested Runyon.

"Very well, if you prefer the whole formula," said the detective, with a touch of impatience. "This Mr. Cate-Bourke is quite unknown to me, but I see that he is on terms of considerable intimacy with you—more than ordinary friendship, I should say."

The hitherto silent Wroxeter here broke in. "My dear Wyme, I don't want to interrupt, but I am interested to know how you deduced that fact."

Wyme sighed resignedly.

"Oh, your irrepressible professional interest, Wroxeter!" he said. "The deduction is *too* simple. Mr. Cate-Bourke has a pipe with Mr. Runyon's monogram on it, indicating an intimate familiarity between them."

"And then the young man came along here with Mr. Runyon," remarked Healy. "Nobody but an intimate friend would do that."

Wyme smiled indulgently.

"That is too obvious, my dear Healy," he said. "I should not mention it. And now, Mr. Runyon, I do not even know that you have a daughter, but I would wager that you have, and that Mr. Bourke—ah, Mr. Cate-Bourke—is betrothed to her, or is about to be. Is that not so?"

Mr. Cate-Bourke frowned with some annoyance. "You could easily learn all that from the society columns," he remarked.

"I never read them," said Wyme. "It seems, then, that I am right. Let us not quibble about sources of information. I dare say, Mr. Runyon, that the young lady, your daughter, will inherit something substantial from the deceased?"

"Why, I believe my sister intended that my daughter should receive something," admitted Runyon. "My daughter was her favorite niece."

"Pardon me," said the detective deprecatingly; "no offense intended, I assure you; but I dare say Mr. Bourke knew this before the death of the lady."

"What do you mean to insinuate, sir?" demanded Cate-Bourke angrily, getting on his feet again. "You'll be saying presently that I had something to do with the death of poor Mrs. Redding!"

"Take care that you do not say so yourself, Mr. Bourke!" said Wyme pointedly, getting up and pacing the hearth-rug.

"By Jove, you go too far!" cried Cate-Bourke, advancing toward the detective with clenched fists.

The faithful Wroxeter placed himself quickly between the master and the irate guest.

"Calm yourself, my dear sir," he pleaded. "You must see that this is no time for narrow sensitiveness to assert itself. We must assume that every one connected with a case in any way is guilty until he is proven innocent. Mr. Wyme has no more personal interest in you than he has in the furniture of your house. It is part of his great system to go into a thing radically from the very start."

"This is all very unpleasant," said Runyon. "Mr. Cate-Bourke is my highly respected prospective son-in-law, and he was held in very high esteem by my poor sister."

"Perhaps he was very devoted to the old lady?" suggested Wyme.

"Why, yes, confound you! I was," replied Cate-Bourke. "Was there anything wrong about that?"

"Nothing at all, I hope," observed Wyme pleasantly. "The paper said in its report this morning that the deceased partook of some bonbons sent her from Le Maitre's a few hours previous to her demise. Has any one learned who sent the lady the bonbons?"

Cate-Bourke paled perceptibly. "I sent them to her!" he cried defiantly.

"There—there," said the detective soothingly; "don't feel sensitive about it, Mr. Cate-Bourke. It is nothing uncommon for a man to send bonbons to an old lady. You must bear in mind that it is my duty to learn everything—however trivial it may seem—that has occurred in Mr. Runyon's house recently.

"I think there is little more to be said just now. I will not attempt to gather any more details until I call at the house and look over the field for myself. I will call, gentlemen, in the course of a few hours. I wish you all good day!"

Binks appeared automatically to usher out the callers.

"But I would like to say, Mr. Wyme, that I—" began the somewhat flustered Runyon.

"Sh!" cautioned Wroxeter, rising, and gently pushing the visitors toward the door. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but Mr. Wyme never speaks, after once terminating an interview."

"Oh, no!" cried Cate-Bourke disgustedly, and strode out of the room.

But Wyncott Wyme smoked his pipe of khedival tobacco in silence, and ignored the disgust of the departing visitors.

Runyon and Cate-Bourke were hustled down the stairs by the ever-efficient Binks, but Tom Healy, the central office man, still remained, sitting comfortably in a chair on the opposite side of the table from Wyncott Wyme.

Wyme blew a prodigious cloud of smoke, enshrouding the burnt-orange and black robe as with an opalescent veil.

"And are we now alone, my dear Wroxeter?" he asked.

"*We* are now alone," responded Tom Healy, before Wroxeter had a chance to speak.

"Dear me, I had quite forgotten you, officer!" said Wyme. "I didn't know that I was to be honored with your presence after the other party left."

"H-m! The honor's all mine," rejoined Healy. "I just stuck here a spell, Mr. Wyme, to tell you that this case o' Runyon's is a pipe. Or, rather, there's nothing to it. It's all a big noise from the family, and it's a good bet that the medical examiner will find that the old lady died o' natural causes. She croaked rather sudden, and then the family let out a howl o' foul play. I guess it's up to the daughter and another young woman who was a sort of companion to the old lady. They thought she died kind o' queerly, so they got hysterical right away. Old Hiram Runyon wasn't fussed a bit at first, but when they started the big noise he called in the police."

"Ah—ahem!" murmured Wyme quietly. "I may be glad to talk of some of these things with you later, Mr.—er—Healy. I shall look over the case presently—and, well, I may give you my views on it later. You know I like to be fair with the police. They are—"

"Oh, nix on that!" broke in Healy impatiently. "The stage business may get the easy ones, Mr. Wyme, but don't forget that I'm in the business meself. We needn't argue the matter, but you know—and Mr. Wroxeter knows—whether you or the police —meanin' *me*—copped Tim Donovan."

"Binks," called Wyme to the butler, "get Mr. Healy's hat and coat for him."

Binks appeared, and held aside the portières for the departing caller.

"Oh, fade!" said Tom Healy, giving the horrified butler a slight dig with his elbow. "I can get out o' the joint without a nurse."

Wroxeter lighted a cigarette, possibly—if the truth were known—to combat the pungent aroma of the khedival weed. My dear chap, I don't know how you manage to stand the impertinence of such fellows," he said agitatedly when they were alone.

The great detective smiled with godlike patience.

"Some time, Wroxeter, crime will be handled and controlled by specialists—by savants—and the police of the present dark era will be but a sort of soldiery," he said, peering beatifically through the smoke-wreaths into the perfect future. "Just now I find it expedient to indulge these clumsy fellows in their fallacies, and keep up a semblance of friendliness with them. 'Better the good-will of a dog—' you know, my dear fellow."

"May I ask if you have any idea of this case as yet?" said Wroxeter somewhat timorously.

Wyme smiled patiently.

"You're such an eager chap," he said. "Really, you know, I've scarcely put my mind on it. We have several items of evidence at present. There is an ambitious young man—that Bourke fellow with the hyphen; there is a box of bonbons; and there is a niece of the deceased, of whom we

have as yet no knowledge. Also, according to this fellow Healy, there is a young woman, a companion. We shall now proceed to the house, and make ourselves acquainted with all these matters. It is safe to say, Wroxeter, that if there was a murder, the young man, the two young women, and the box of bonbons are all as far removed from complicity in it as you and I ourselves."

"You astonish me!" cried Wroxeter.

"See my 'Fallacies of the Obvious,' dear fellow," said Wyme. "In time, Wroxeter, you will come to learn that the things which seem most closely associated with a case are the very things that you will presently discover to have no bearing upon it. Get all the clues you can, and then disregard them entirely. People have yet to learn that the unexpected happens, Wroxeter. I am the only living exponent of the science of the unexpected."

CHAPTER III.

THE MASTER MIND AT WORK.

"Was Mrs. Redding, the deceased, inclined to be greedy in the fondness for candy which you say she had?" inquired Wyncott Wyme of the pretty young companion, Miss Drake. "That is, would she be likely to eat an entire box of candy herself, without offering it to any one else?"

"Mrs. Redding could hardly be called greedy, sir," repied the girl. "But I usually declined candy when she passed it to me, so she rarely offered it to me; and, as she had few callers in her apartments, she usually ate all the candy herself."

"Then, I should infer," said the great detective, "that any one familiar with her habits would feel that he could send her poisoned candy without endangering the lives of others, except in a general way."

"Oh, I can't think that poor Mrs. Redding ever knew any one that could do such an inhuman thing!" exclaimed the girl.

"You observe, Wroxeter," said the detective in an aside to his friend, "that I do not neglect even the little matters which I consider irrelevant. All rules have their exceptions, and I never permit such things as 'little foxes' to catch me napping.

"Now," said Wyme, again addressing the companion, "we will rejoin the family down-stairs. I have looked over the apartments of the deceased pretty thoroughly. I will take this box, with the candy which remains in it, to my laboratory at home, and make a careful examination of it."

The two men and the girl went down to the lower floor, where Hiram Runyon, his daughter, and Mr. Cate-Bourke were waiting, and there they found Mr. Tom Healy, of the central office, who had just arrived.

Wyme and Wroxeter recognized his presence with rather chilly nods, and began conversing generally with the others without including him.

"I don't want to disturb you by dwelling upon this matter of the bonbons," said Wyme apologetically, "but I should like to ask Miss Runyon if she is not fond of Le Maitre's candy."

"Oh, very!" answered the girl, with a wan smile. "But I really can't see, Mr. Wyme, why you should pay any attention to the matter of the candy, when it was sent in the most regular way to my aunt by our friend, Mr. Cate-Bourke."

"I have tried to make you understand, Miss Runyon," answered Wyme, "that in these cases I never ignore any matter, however trivial. And I really must inquire why Mr. Cate-Bourke sent candy to your aunt without including you in the courtesy."

"He did include me," said the girl, pouting slightly. "He sent me a two-pound box the same day."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wyncott Wyme, with a glance full of meaning at Wroxeter. "Then, you would have been less likely to eat of your aunt's candies, Miss Runyon!"

"By Jove, sir," cried Cate-Bourke indignantly, "you may be a famous detective and a privileged person, but you can't go ahead heaping gross insults upon innocent persons like this! One would think you had me on the witness-stand as an indicted murderer."

"Let it pass," said Wyme easily. "I shall take no action, Mr. Cate-Bourke, until I have heard the report of the medical examiner. The coroner's inquest occurs, I believe, to-morrow. Meanwhile, as no one else has taken the trouble to attach any importance to the candies, I shall examine them in my laboratory for my own satisfaction."

"Excuse me for butting in," interposed Tom Healy, "but I'm here under orders from the detective bureau, you know, and as I'm not specially interested in this candy business I'd like to have some one show

me the rooms Mrs. Redding occupied. I've got my own work to do, you see."

"Miss Drake will show you the rooms," said Runyon. "Miss Drake, this is Mr. Healy, of the central office. Miss Drake was my poor sister's companion, Mr. Healy."

The young woman immediately conducted the detective up-stairs and showed him the rooms, the closets, and everything connected with the apartment.

Healy went over everything in a business-like way, without the air of mystery which Wyncott Wyme seemed to affect. He took scrupulous note of every detail, and jotted down what he regarded as important data in a small book.

"There seems to have been nothing done here in the way of house-cleaning since the old lady's death, Miss Drake," he said casually.

"No, sir; the coroner gave orders that nothing was to be disturbed until after the inquest," she answered.

"Perhaps the coroner won't be quite pleased when he hears that Mr. Wyme took the candy away with him," laughed the detective. "But that's no affair of mine. Mr. Wyme seems to stand in well enough with headquarters. What was that tumbler used for, there on the dressing-table, Miss Drake?"

"Just water, sir," replied the girl. "I remember Mrs. Redding asked for a glass of water just before she went to bed, the night she died. She wanted to take some medicine with it, I believe."

"Medicine!" cried the detective earnestly. "I haven't heard anything about any medicine before."

"It's the first time I have thought to mention it to any one," said the girl, with a note of anxiety in her voice. "I didn't think of it as anything important, anyway, for Mrs. Redding was always taking medicine. She got it from a doctor somewhere out of town. You know she was at a sanitarium for about three months last year. The sanitarium closed up, and she had to come home, but I believe she had great confidence in the doctor that kept it, and she used to send to him for medicine every little while."

"Do you remember the name of the doctor or the place?" asked Healy.

"Why, yes, it was the Hapsburg Sanitarium, and the doctor's name was Adams, I believe."

"Great Scott!" cried Healy, with unprofessional excitement. "Sam Adams ran the Hapsburg Sanitarium, and he was closed up and given the kibosh for some kind of crooked business."

"I never heard of that," said the girl, with surprise. "Mrs. Redding thought he was a very skilful doctor."

"Well, never mind saying anything about it," Healy hastened to caution her. "It may not have anything to do with the case, and there's enough for people to talk about as it is. I'd like you to keep this conversation under your hat, Miss Drake, as a favor to me. Will you?"

"Why, of course I won't say anything about it, Mr. Healy," said the girl, looking honestly into the good blue eyes of the detective. "I've done very little talking, anyway; besides, Mr. Wyme seemed to want to do all the talking himself."

"That's his specialty," laughed Healy. "And now, Miss Drake, I don't want to butt into the coroner's business, but if you could find a bottle or anything that had that medicine in it, I'd like to have a peek at it."

The girl looked doubtful. Mrs. Redding had kept the medicine with her toilet articles, and taken it without assistance, and her companion remembered only a casual sight of a small pill-box.

She looked hurriedly through the drawers of the dressing-table, and on the shelves of the closets, but found no trace of the medicine.

Meanwhile, Healy made a search on his own account, and he suddenly arose from a kneeling position by the waste-paper basket with a small object in his hand.

"Does that look anything like it?" he asked eagerly.

"That's it, I think," replied the girl.

"All right, and thank you for your help," he said. And he stowed the small pill-box carefully away in an inside pocket.

CHAPTER IV.

METHODS.

WYNCOTT WYME and his friend Wroxeter strolled into the fashionable candy-shop of the great Le Maitre on the following day, clad as usual in the modish garments of men about town.

"A pound of your assorted bonbons, please," said Wyme to the salesgirl.

"You didn't tell me you were coming here," said Wroxeter. "I didn't know you ever bought candy, Wyme."

Wyme tipped his inquisitive friend a portentous wink, and stepped close to the salesgirl as she began to select sweet dainties from the various trays and place them in the box.

"Those violet ones look very delicious," suggested Wyme, pointing to one of the trays on the counter. And he picked up one of the bonbons and turned and showed it to Wroxeter, holding it in his hand, with his back turned to the salesgirl.

"Won't you try one of them, sir?" asked the girl.

"No, thank you," answered Wyme. "I'll just place this one in the box for you. I'm sure it's very good, but I rarely eat such things myself." And he tucked the small bonbon in among the others in the box which the girl held out to him.

Presently they were again in the street.

"Now, tell me, old chap, what it was all about," urged Wroxeter.

"Be patient, my dear Wroxeter," said Wyme. "I can't expound my theories here on the avenue with practical demonstrations. When we get back to the house I will make it all clear to you."

They went to the study on arriving at the detective's residence, where Wyme quickly broke the tinsel seal of the dainty package of bonbons and removed the elaborate wrappings.

"You doubtless remember this violet confection?" he said, as he picked up one of the bonbons and tendered it to Wroxeter. "Pray eat it, if you don't mind. I assure you it is quite harmless, though you may not find it altogether pleasant."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Wroxeter. "I thought all of Le Maitre's candies were delicious."

He munched the bonbon critically, and immediately made a very wry face. "By Jove, it's bitter as gall!" he cried.

Wyme permitted himself a dry chuckle and held up to the gaze of his pupil a tiny steel syringe, resembling a hypodermic.

"I will explain to you," he said, "that I had this little instrument palmed in my glove as we stood at the counter of the candy shop. Under pretense of admiring this pretty candy you have just tasted, I held it in my hand with the syringe long enough to enable me to inject into it a drop of harmless solution of *nux vomica*."

"Ah, ha! I begin to see—" murmured Wroxeter enthusiastically.

Wyme looked disappointed. "I will make it yet clearer," he said. "By this little incident I have shown myself and you that a person disposed to foul play would have little difficulty in introducing poison into a package of Le Maitre's celebrated candy.

"Were I to introduce the evidence of the candy in the case in hand, the lawyers would say that a properly wrapped and sealed packet of the goods could not have been tampered with, as it is so carefully handled and prepared by the attentive saleswomen. I should then demonstrate in this manner that the thing is merely a matter of ordinary ingenuity. You see the saleswoman was in no wise disturbed by my action in handling the piece of candy, and made no objection to my placing it in the box.

"It is absurd to think that one must introduce poison into all the candies in a package, in order to accomplish the death of the recipient. Being fairly certain that the person will eat the candy without offering it to any one else, it only remains to place the lethal dose in one or two pieces, and the deed is done."

"What a horrible crime!" exclaimed Wroxeter. "You make it seem very simple, but, nevertheless, it is a matter of fiendish cleverness. I must say I should hardly take that chap, Cate-Bourke, for so clever and consummate a devil. Casually, he would appeal to you as a fairly decent sort."

"You are a guileless soul, Wroxeter," observed Wyncott Wyme. "You will ultimately learn that clever villains, who make an art of crime, almost invariably appear as very 'decent sorts.' It's part of the art, you know."

"This, then, is your solution of the mystery?" said Wroxeter. "You remember, you mentioned this candy matter as one of the obvious clues in the case, and therefore of secondary importance. You have changed your mind, it seems."

"Not at all!" said Wyme, with a shade of impatience. "I have explained to you before, Wroxeter, that I give the same thorough attention to the small details of a case that I do to the more profound manifestations. I am looking for other developments, but meanwhile we may find that we have the mystery already in hand, and

can put our finger on the criminal and the explanation of the crime at the mere turn of a card, as it were."

"This policeman chap: I fancy he would hardly think of anything as subtle as this," suggested Wroxeter.

Wyme smiled commiseratingly.

"He certainly might think of it, but he would scarcely know how to work it out. However, Wroxeter, you should bear this in mind: that the police, dense as they may be, do their work assiduously, albeit with the methods of blacksmiths and butchers. It is nevertheless inevitable that they should sometimes run down clues of importance by mere brute force. For that reason I always keep an eye open in their direction. It's one of my tricks of the trade, Wroxeter, and not to be passed over lightly.

"This Healy fellow, now, is young, alert, and ambitious. He has little cleverness of the finer sort, but he has his career to make, and his work will not fail for lack of enthusiasm and energy. I wish you would now enter the case, in your customary manner, as my assistant. I will assign you to keep a sort of espionage over Detective Healy. It will not be difficult. Keep in touch with him. You need not dog his footsteps, but you can keep tabs on his line of operations, and let me know instantly of anything he does that has the air of importance."

Wroxeter showed little enthusiasm over the prospects of his work as laid out for him, but he accepted the assignment.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROFESSIONAL ON THE TRAIL.

Tom Healy did not retire to a sumptuously furnished apartment to muse on the mysterious case of the old lady's murder. He took the shortest route to headquarters, and frankly consulted some of the old stagers at the game.

He found that his surmise in regard to the evil reputation of Dr. Sam Adams was quite correct, and a search of the rogue's gallery brought to light a picture of the man.

It appeared from his record that he had been known to the police rather vividly in the past. He had actually been graduated in medicine and had practised in a general way for a time, but he came into the public eye early in his career, and served a term in the penitentiary on a conviction of malpractise.

At the expiration of his term he enjoyed a season of liberty, but, after the restless manner of his kind, terminated it abruptly by allowing the powers of law and order to send him back to durance vile on a charge of forgery. Since that he had shown a lively versatility in crime, and a happy faculty for winning the renewed confidence of the public time after time, despite his free and easy way of handling the said confidence.

The Hapsburg Sanitarium had netted him handsome profits for a time, but it was presently discovered that his treatment covered a variety of maladies far in excess of those generally recognized by the medical profession, and, taking his cue in the nick of time, he closed the institution and made a discreet disappearance.

Tom Healy spent a day or two in patiently getting on the trail of the accomplished doctor.

One morning he crossed the ferry to Long Island, and took a train for a remote and quiet suburban settlement.

In making a turn of the ferry-boat deck he almost collided with the elegant Mr. Wroxeter.

"Hallo! Out for a bit of golf, Mr. Wroxeter?" he asked cheerily.

"Er—well, hardly," said the assistant of the great specialist in crime. "I suppose you are on business bent, as usual, Mr. Healy?"

"Oh, I have a little job to look up," answered the young detective easily.

"Going far?" inquired Wroxeter shrewdly.

"Not very," replied Healy, and smiled quietly at the other man's obvious disappointment. "Where are you bound? Perhaps we're headed the same way. Got your ticket?"

Wroxeter flushed and seemed much at a loss for a reply.

"I—I have a mileage book," he finally admitted. "It will take me anywhere, you know—over any branch of the road."

Healy did not attempt to hide his smile.

"That's very handy," he said pleasantly. "If you see anything interesting in any old direction at all, you have only to hop aboard the train. I suppose that's one of the little developments of Wyme's big system?"

Wroxeter was visibly nettled, and he suddenly saw something in the crowd that fixed his attention. "Pardon me," he said lamely. "I think I had a glimpse of some one I know—I may see you later."

"That's more than likely," laughed Healy, and continued to smile as he watched the other plunge through the crowd on the forward deck and make strenuous efforts to obliterate himself.

On arriving at his railway destination, Healy hired a stable rig and drove into the country. He had little difficulty in finding the "old Bennet farm," and he stopped at the little old white cottage in the woods, and informed the old woman who answered his knock that he was an agent for farming implements, and wished to see "Mr. Stokes"—that being the name under which he had learned the elusive Dr. Adams was then going.

The woman was gruff and discourteous, and only vouchsafed the information that Mr. Stokes was almost never in in the daytime. She certainly didn't know when he might be found at home.

Healy strolled away, making a few hasty mental notes of the nature of the premises, and started back toward the village.

A short distance from the house he and the stableman met a rapidly driven motor-car, and a man in the rear seat caught the ever wary eye of the detective. The car was well past before he had time for a second look, but something about the figure struck him as familiar. The costume he had no recollection of—and the man was certainly not Wroxeter—but he knew he had seen him before, and he stopped the horse and looked back, and saw the machine turn in at the Bennet place.

Without explanation, he paid the stableman for his rig and jumped out, merely saying that he would walk a bit and get back to the village on his own resources.

He left the road and made a détour through the fields and woods until he approached the old farmhouse from the rear. For an hour or more he waited patiently, and then received his reward in seeing the man who had sat in the rear of the automobile come out of the house and reenter the car.

"Ah!" murmured the detective to himself, and that was all, but his face was a study in astonishment and bewilderment.

He moved stealthily away from the vicinity of the farm, and turned his steps toward the village.

Suddenly, at a bend of a lane, he came face to face with Wroxeter.

Wroxeter turned very red and tried vainly for words which would not come.

"I might have saved you a whole lot of trouble if I'd known you wanted to come with me," said Healy. "You must have had a weary time of it."

"Oh, I say, what's the use of all this evasion?" protested Wroxeter testily. "You work under a cloak all the time, Mr. Healy. We're all in the same game, you know, and I can't see why you can't be open and aboveboard about it."

The detective laughed heartily.

"The evasion is all yours, Mr. Wroxeter," he said. "I don't mind telling you all about it. But you should ask me, you know, if you want to know anything. It's as simple as the nose on your face. I'm out here to get a line on a Mr. Stokes. Know 'im? Well, I'll tell you something more that you can report to the specialist in criminology: I'm here on the Redding murder case, just as you surmised, and this Mr. Stokes may have had something to do with it. You're welcome to all that information, and a lot of good it will do you. I wouldn't publish it to the newspapers, but you see I trust to the natural and elaborate secrecy of you and the eminent Mr. Wyme."

"Instead of working with us for the general cause, you pit yourself against us," whined Wroxeter. "You, an officer of the law, are actually delaying and circumventing the ends of justice."

"Oh, forget it!" cried Healy. "You'd better get back to the palatial Wyme residence in time for a good dinner. You'll feel better."

Before Wroxeter could catch his breath, the detective strode away at a rapid pace, and the assistant of Wyncott Wyme did not attempt to follow. He had gathered all the intelligence he could handle for one day.

Healy reentered the village and went directly to the only pharmacy.

"Mr. Stokes trade here?" he asked the druggist.

The man acknowledged that he did, and Healy produced from a pocket the pill-box he had obtained from the waste-paper basket in the Runyon house.

"Mr. Stokes is away from home to-day,"

he went on in an easy tone, "and I want to get some of the medicine he sent me the other day. If this is one of your pill-boxes, you may remember what you put up for him. I want to get it filled again if I can, and it'll be all right with Mr. Stokes—he's a friend of mine."

The pharmacist scrutinized the box carefully, and finally nodded his head.

"I remember what it was," he said; "I guess I can fix it up for you all right."

He retired to the rear of the store, and occupied himself for some ten minutes in a mysterious clinking of bottles and stoppers.

At last the detective got the box, with the assurance of the man that the pills were identical with those he had recently put up for Mr. Stokes, and hurried away just in time to catch an early evening train for the city.

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING A SPLURGE.

Wyncott Wyme sat with Wroxeter in the study of his house, wrapped in his gaudy robe, and smoking the khedival tobacco industriously.

He listened to the report of his henchman, and then took up the matter in hand in his usual nonchalant manner.

"Wroxeter, this blue-eyed Irish cop is stealing a march on us," he said pointedly.

"He really never was a patrolman; he was a reporter before they took him on at the central office," Wroxeter explained for the sake of accuracy.

"That's beside the mark, but it accounts for some of the fellow's impertinence," said Wyme. "I don't know what he's got up his sleeve, but we must find out by hook or crook. Meanwhile we must do something on our own account. The public knows now that I am on the case, and it will expect results. The name of Wyncott Wyme, my dear Wroxeter, has become synonymous with results.

"The coroner's inquest has proved that the deceased came by her death through some peculiar poison. The matter of the candy is disagreeably circumstantial, but it is at present the only tangible clue we have. Therefore, we must feed it into the greedy maw of the public. I have decided! I shall lay my evidence before the district attorney at once, and give him some of my theories on the case. We will arrest this Cate-Bourke chap, to be on the safe side, and then we will find out what Healy is trying to pull off."

The two men left the house and called at once upon the district attorney. The latter was vastly interested in the exhibit of the box of bonbons, and rose to the bait when Wyme demonstrated with much dramatic effect the probable method of the murderer. A warrant was promptly obtained, and Wyme and his "shadow" accompanied a headquarters man to the Runyon house to make the arrest.

Cate-Bourke was found there. He had been devoting his entire attention to the hysterical Miss Runyon since the tragedy. When placed under arrest he struggled and stormed in a manner that was in itself incriminating, and Miss Runyon added to the disturbance with spectacular displays of hysteria.

"Why don't you arrest me, you cowards?" she cried. "The police are so inefficient! Their efforts are so futile! And they listen to the absurd, specious arguments of that idiotic wretch there!"

The last remark was directed at Wyme, and he flushed vividly, but restrained himself and smiled patiently with his habitual superiority.

"The evidence is purely manufactured," asserted Cate-Bourke, when he had recovered a modicum of poise. "It is but a figment of this chap's overwrought imagination. But take me along if you want me. Perhaps you'll even have the satisfaction of nailing the crime to me."

"The young man has already done most of the nailing himself," remarked Wyme with a smirk of satisfaction.

Wroxeter nodded enthusiastically.

Tom Healy arrived in the midst of the excitement. He was palpably astonished at the developments, but held his peace according to the proprieties of the profession.

"Where is Mr. Runyon?" he inquired.

"He's been away almost all day," said the daughter. "When he learns of this outrage, he will be prostrated. He knows, as we all know, who have any intelligence, how innocent poor Herbert is. Herbert was as devoted as a son to my dear aunt, and these fools call him a murderer just to have some one for a scapegoat."

Healy approached Wyme and drew him aside. "You're barking up the wrong tree,

professor," he said in a whisper. "That chap's as innocent as I am! I know it!"

Wyme could not control his color, and he flushed painfully. "Perhaps you have solved the mystery?" he said.

"Well, I won't say that exactly," replied Healy, "but it might be, you know."

"H-m! This is no place to discuss it," murmured Wyme. "Come over to my house and we will go over the matter. I may be able to elucidate some things for you, my friend."

Healy laughed, causing the great detective to wince again, but he went with the two amateur sleuths, after saying a few reassuring things to the distracted girl, and giving the wretched young prisoner a friendly wink which seemed to comfort him vastly.

Seated presently before the roaring fire in the famous study, the three men bandied very doubtful compliments and eyed each other with something more than professional interest.

"I admit that my solution of the case is quite circumstantial, but it works out without a hitch as far as it goes," said Wyme. "Now, what right have you to ridicule it?"

"Perhaps because I can see the answer," replied Healy dryly.

"You have learned something which you are keeping to yourself," declared Wyme, with a hurt expression.

"It would do a lot of good if I ran to the newspapers with every clue I got hold of, wouldn't it?" said Healy. "But I'm not afraid to show my hand. It's my case. You're an outsider anyway, but I'll tell you something about it at that."

Wyme's small, steely eyes glittered with excitement. But he arose from his great chair, stretched, yawned, and went over to stir up the fire.

"Now we'll sit down and hear your tale," he said patronizingly. "I'll even show you a mark of very especial favor, Healy; I'll allow you a pipe of my marvelous tobacco—the Khedive gave it to me, you know—I never let even poor Wroxeter have any, you know."

"Poor Wroxeter!" murmured Healy. "But if it's all the same to you, professor, I'll let poor Wroxeter have my share of his nibs, the Khedive's dope, and I'll just light up some of my old 'Sailor's Joy,' specially imported from Ole Virginny."

Wyme switched off the electrolier and left the room half-lighted by the mellow glow from the fire. He wrapped his burnt-orange and black gown about his spare frame and sat back in his chair, leaning his sharp chin upon a bony hand, and peering at the young detective from under his heavy brows.

"Now let's get into the matter," he said sententiously.

"All right. But just stow the dramatics, professor. Nix on them. They don't go at headquarters or in a newspaper office, you know."

"Thank Heaven this is neither," murmured the faithful Wroxeter.

"Better keep Willie quiet, professor," suggested Healy. "He pretty near got in wrong with me out in the country with his phony, story-book stunts."

Wroxeter rose to expostulate, but the great specialist restrained him with a wave of the hand.

"Let us not quarrel," he said patiently. "We are facing a grave situation, and the most trivial incidents must be regarded with due attention. Won't you please proceed, Mr. Healy."

"All ready?" asked Healy. "Very well, then; here goes for some of the trivial stuff. I'll just let you in, professor, on what I'm working at. I've got good old Doc Adams with the goods."

"Sam Adams, the forger, the kidnaper, et cetera?" gasped Wyme in something like astonishment.

"The same," said Healy. "He's stopping in a little farmhouse out on Long Island. Never mind how I nailed this thing on him. But I've got a straight line on the dope he's been sending old Mrs. Redding, and I've got some of the dope itself from the country druggist that put it up."

The glowing pipe of the great man went out, and the khedival tobacco grew cold, all unnoticed.

"But how is the man connected with the case?" demanded Wyme. "What was his object?"

"That will all come out later," said Healy. "He had a sanitarium up at Hapsburg. The old lady went there for treatment and stayed until the place was closed up on him. Then he had the wool pulled over her eyes so nice that she went on taking his dope and believing everything he told her."

"Why haven't you arrested him, if you're so sure?" asked Wyme eagerly.

"That's coming in good time," said the detective. "I'm not neglecting my bird, professor. I've got a good man or two on

the job, and it's just a little matter of nabbing him in his soft, warm cot when I get good and ready. I always like to give the other fellows in the game—if there are any—some show of coming in and showing their hands. Doc Adams didn't do the job all on his own account. The old lady didn't will him any coin. There's a 'man higher up' and I'm giving him a chance to walk in. They always do, you know, if you give them half a chance."

"I'm glad you told me all this, Healy," said Wyme, recovering his cool, phlegmatic poise. "It's quite interesting. I can't say I see it very clearly as a positive solution. It's somewhat circumstantial as it stands, from the evidence you have given me. But I'll watch the developments with interest.

"Meanwhile I shall go on with my case against this chap, Cate-Bourke. I am satisfied that he is at least involved in the crime."

"Well, this has been a very pleasant party," said Healy, rising from his chair. "And now, as my evening's work is not half done, I'll be off."

He made his adieus with elaborate politeness and was shown out by the butler.

Wyme stood by the door until he heard the outside door close upon the young detective, and then he fairly leaped out of his gown and began rushing about the room.

"Binks!" he shouted; and as the butler appeared: "Get my ulster and slouch-hat. A couple of revolvers for each of us. And have the motor-car brought around immediately, Binks!"

Wroxeter stood gasping for breath.

"My dear fellow!" he cried, "what in the world are you going to do?"

"We are going to that farmhouse at once, Wroxeter!" said Wyme; "to arrest this Doc Adams. It may seem to savor of trickery—breach of confidence—and all that, but my reputation is at stake, Wroxeter.

"I have Cate-Bourke locked up for murder. If that Irishman lays the real murderer by the heels and delivers the goods, as he would say, I'll be laughed at all over the country.

"Never mind the 'man higher up'! My keen scent for such game tells me that this Healy has blundered on to the right thing. Now it's for us to save our skins, you see. The chap will make an awful howl when he finds we've taken his game away from him, but it will be all right. Healy is not over-popular in some circles around headquarters, and I know one or two men that will thank me for — for, well, stealing his thunder, as it were."

"The motor-car is 'ere, Mr. Wyme," said Binks from the doorway.

"Good! We're off!" cried Wyme, scrambling into his ulster.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DRAMA AT THE FARMHOUSE.

It was near midnight, and Dr. Sam Adams sat in the Long Island cottage with two evil-looking companions.

"I'm going up to bed, Sam," said one of the men.

"Go along—both of you," said the doctor. "I'll stay up a while yet. There may be some kind of news from the front. The police are too busy to have nothing doing at all, and I want to hear about it."

The two men—old pals of the doctor—stretched themselves and wearily climbed the stairs.

A half-hour later there was the sound of a motor-car on the road, and it slowed up and chugged into the farmyard.

Adams went into the dark kitchen and peered out into the black night, noting the familiar lines of the car with satisfaction.

Presently there was a double knock at the door, and Adams opened it and admitted an elderly man.

"I don't think it's altogether a wise move to use the car so much," said Adams.

"It's safer than walking about where people can see me and recognize me," said the visitor. "I wouldn't dare use it if you hadn't given me Dick for a chauffeur.

"I had to come out myself to tell you the news."

"What is it?" cried Adams anxiously.

"Cate-Bourke's arrested for the murder!" said the elderly man with some emotion.

"Well, I sort o' expected it," rejoined Adams. "He's the most likely one to nail it to. And I'm satisfied, at that. He's been a good deal of a butter-in all along. Always trying to set the old girl against me and all that. What does the girl think about it?"

"The poor girl is prostrated. It almost killed her," said the other regretfully.

"Oh, well, that can't be helped," said Adams. "She'll get over it soon enough. If little Herbert hadn't been so fresh, he wouldn't have landed in so much trouble. That's all."

"What are we to do now?" asked the older man somewhat helplessly.

"Nothing," said Adams. "We haven't anything to do. For myself, I think I may fade away for a while. When the whole show is settled up I'll drop around for what's coming to me. It don't do any good to settle up the business end of these things too soon. Take it easy."

"*What's that!*" almost screamed the elderly man suddenly, as a strange noise came to their ears.

Both men sprang to their feet — their faces white as chalk—and with a crash the kitchen door was burst inward, the bolt being torn from its socket by the force of the assault from outside.

Adams leaped for the mantel-shelf where there was a revolver, but a stern command came from the two men who rushed in over the fallen door.

"Hands up, Adams!" cried Wyncott Wyme, the great criminologist, "you're under arrest for the murder of Mrs. Redding."

Adams made no attempt to reach the revolver on the shelf, but raised his hands obediently. He was hardly unaccustomed to such scenes, and something like a bitter smile played around the corners of his mouth.

The gray-haired, elderly man sank into a chair, breathing heavily, his face a ghastly purple.

"And I arrest you, too, sir, on the charge of being accessory before the fact!" said Wyme, astonished at finding the old man in such a plight, but making a shrewd guess at his complicity in the crime. "I may say, Mr. Runyon, that this is one of the most shocking experiences of my whole career as a detective."

The elderly man, erstwhile a person of smug respectability, never raised his eyes, but continued the labored breathing and seemed on the verge of apoplexy.

Doc Adams seemed amused at the consternation of the detective.

"Don't blame poor Runyon," he said lightly. "The old girl got what she deserved. She was an old tight-wad. She squeezed him until he hadn't a drop of blood left. His bank was going to smash and she wouldn't help him to a cent. What was the old chap to do? She had the dough he needed, and he had to get it away from her somehow. He couldn't do it while she was alive, and she had him down for most of the property."

"For an experienced man, you talk a good deal, Adams," remarked Wyme. "You'd better save some of your information for the trial."

"Are the police wise to this?" asked Adams suddenly.

Wyme smiled. "Hardly," he said with grim satisfaction. "I have a little way of keeping these matters to myself until I have them consummated.

"Give me the handcuffs, Wroxeter."

Wroxeter lowered the two revolvers he held and put one hand in his pocket.

At that moment the two detectives were seized roughly from behind by two brawny fellows who had crept down the stairs barefooted.

There were wild cries and imprecations, and a fierce struggle ensued. But the two detectives were no match for the two thugs, and Adams took a very active part in the mêlée.

Presently the victims were overpowered and disarmed, and they stood there helpless, looking as miserable as mortals can look.

"The eagle-eye sometimes overlooks a trick, eh?" said Adams maddeningly.

Hiram Runyon sat up suddenly and seemed to take a new lease of life.

"Cheer up, Runyon, we've got 'em," laughed Adams happily. "The clever detective, Mr. Wyncott Wyme, just admitted to me that he had kept this little matter a secret from the police. So by fixing him and his little friend here properly, we shall have no further trouble, I dare say."

"You're not going to kill these men, Adams?" demanded Runyon thickly. "Surely we've got enough blood on our hands now."

"Don't be squeamish!" said Adams. "Never send a boy to mill. Blood has to be covered up with blood sometimes. And I fancy there are a few people that will never miss Wyncott Wyme."

"The sooner we make a clean job of it, the better, says I!" growled one of the thugs. "Don't forget, Sam, that *we're* in on this little deal, too."

"We'll talk it over a bit," observed Adams easily. "You, Tim, go out to the barn and get Dick—he's with the automobile—and bring in the rope that's out there. We'll just tie up our guests while we talk it over."

Poor Wroxeter was in a state of collapse. An ignominious death stared him in the face.

Wyncott Wyme was magnificent even in extremity. He was very pale, but he retained an admirable degree of poise.

"This will be a dear job for you and your friends, Adams," he said. "I will tell you now, that this matter *is* known to another party. Do what you will with us—you will all be laid by the heels before another night."

Adams laughed.

"That's too thin, Wyme," he said. "It isn't like you to share your little tea-parties with others. I'll take your word for what you said first, and rest easy on it."

The kitchen door opened.

"Did you find Dick?" inquired Adams.

"Uh-huh!" muttered a voice.

And then, out of the dark kitchen, into the lamplight of the sitting-room stepped a stranger with two revolvers covering the men in the room.

"Don't move! Any of you!" commanded Tom Healy. "A couple of cops have got your men in the barn, and I guess I've got you."

"Well, if the police are in on it, too," said Adams coolly, "I give up."

Wroxeter fell in a limp heap on the floor and sobbed convulsively.

Wyncott Wyme had tears of emotions in his eyes. "Thank God, and you, Healy!" he said hoarsely.

"What's the matter with Runyon over there?" asked Healy suddenly; but he did not lower his weapons, nor take his eyes from the prisoners.

Wyncott Wyme stepped over to the old man in the chair, and raised one of his wrists to feel his pulse. Then he put his head down on the old man's breast and listened.

"Fortunately, he's dead!" he said calmly.

THE END.

The Lid of the Rain Jar

By Frank Sullivan

THE bright Cuban sun shone hotly into the tiled *patio,* as I could see through the narrow passage that led from the street. In its white light the Cuban gentleman continued to beat his wife, his hand rising and falling with the regularity of a clock pendulum.

The policeman in blue linen leaned against the door-jamb, puffing his inevitable *cigarro,* and smiled approvingly.

I walked through the passage and out upon the scene of battle, which had now moved from the grilled doorway to the edge of the marble fountain. The mantilla had fallen from the wretched woman's head in her frantic struggles, and her shrieks broke the otherwise religious stillness of the town of Camagüey.

With a jolt to the stomach I brought Mr. Wife-beater's head down and met it at the lower extremity with an uppercut that turned him half over in the shallow foun-

tain, and left him gasping and bleeding. The woman, surprised at the intervention, turned her puffed and tear-stained face upon me in gratitude.

I looked at her, and my jaw fell.

I looked again, and staggered back a step in amazement.

"Maude Eastman Gonzales!" I cried wildly, and then something pulled down the curtains over the sun, and I knew no more.

When I came to, the policeman had me by the collar and was throwing water in my face. His club had done the trick. Out of the torrent of Spanish with which he was flooding me I gathered that I was to go to the station-house at once and answer for this heinous crime.

"Suppose you bring him along, too," I cried, pointing to the prostrate wife-beater. "I may get ten days, but he'll get ten years, or I'm a Hindu."

"A man can beat his wife till she dies," volunteered my captor, "but to strike another man—that is crime!"

"You bloodthirsty savage!" I burst out. "You tell that to the judge, if you dare. I just want to hear you."

Then we started.

This was an auspicious beginning for me, Sydney Lemar, detailed to Cuba on duty by the highest authority in the United States secret-service department. I had been in Camagüey just three days, and had found a good scent, when this unfortunate incident occurred.

And my mission was serious enough, too. Two years before, when our Executive had mixed in with Cuban affairs, a reactionary party had been founded whose success in forthcoming events would be spectacular, to say the least. It was the idea of this faction to overthrow the existing administration, of course; but that was only a part of the plan.

The second, and by far the most serious, half was the expulsion by legislation of all Americans from the island republic. It was a serious problem to deal with, and demanded secret work of the closest order.

Camagüey had been indicated to me as the very hotbed of the faction, and, after cautiously sounding the sentiment westward from Santiago, I had arrived in the very old city where I now was.

Knowing Spanish well, after several years' mining experience in Mexico, I had been able to ascertain that my tip on Camagüey had not been far wrong.

But I was now in a bad situation, for which my American chivalry was responsible, and I was not very cheerful or confident as I followed my friend in blue linen through the streets, a crowd in attendance.

It being eleven o'clock, the judge was at breakfast, so we waited until he had finished the last three courses. Meanwhile, my former opponent had driven up in a coach, and was to appear against me. I scarcely recognized him. Could it be possible that this was the José Miguel Gonzales who had gone through Columbia with me, graduated with high honors, and been the social star of the whole class? It did not seem possible, and yet careful study of the fat and degenerate-looking face convinced me.

But how he had changed! This was not the slender, dark, handsome young fellow who had married Maude Eastman from under the noses of New York's favorite sons, and borne her, a happy and lovely bride, to the beautiful home he talked of so passionately.

There were many who had mourned her going, but none as I had. Because of it into my life had come Mexico, the mines, and—

"Will the plaintiff state his case?" broke in the gruff voice of the judge.

II.

I CAME out of that court-room one hundred dollars poorer than I went into it, but I had learned my first lesson in Cuban law. A man *can* beat his wife all he wants to, and get away with it; but to touch a fellow man! It may give great satisfaction, but it's expensive.

I went back to the hotel in despair, and talked to the clerk. I was almost broke—some fifty dollars on hand, and a four-dollar-a-day hotel-bill to face—and I didn't know what to do. Of course, I could have flashed my credentials and got anything I wanted, but that would have ended my service and usefulness to the United States government right there.

"Guess I'll hunt up the consul here," I finally said.

"He's out of town," replied the clerk, "selling mules in Santa Clara province. Anyway, he wouldn't give you any money. There is no fund for the poor and indigent. There's an American Methodist Church here, but I haven't seen any one connected with it bustin' with cash."

"Well, what'll I do?" I inquired unhappily.

"Better get a job till your remittance comes from Havana," he suggested. "My friend Paulo Juarez, who owns the dry-goods store on Calle Mateo, near the Parque Agramonte, told me yesterday that he wanted an English-speaking clerk to take care of the American tourists who are beginning to flood the island. Wait a minute and I'll give you a note to him."

Here was an idea. I could live right among the people. I would change my quarters, and eat and sleep with a Cuban family, if I could find one still grateful enough for the United States intervention to take in an *Americano*. I could conduct my investigations with more expediency. It was the solution of my problem.

"*Viveres y Ropa*" read the sign over the store, as I entered it in search of Señor Juarez, and half an hour later I was hired as chief clerk at fifteen dollars a week, Spanish, to superintend the disposal of groceries and dry-goods.

That night I wandered out toward the Plaza Caridad, near which I had had my encounter of the morning, in the hope that I might see Maude again. Her house, one of the finest on the street, jutted out on the sidewalk like all the others. The mattings had been rolled up, giving the breeze free access through the heavily barred windows, and I could see by the light of the electroliers the rich mahogany furniture disposed about the uncovered marble floors. But in the enormously high, wide rooms not a human being was visible.

However, as I passed the second time a noise smote my ears. I listened intently. It was the sound of a woman sobbing, and I thought I recognized the voice.

Then rage welled up again in my heart, and I wished for another chance at José Miguel Gonzales. I hated him before for a handsome, insinuating lover who had stolen my sweetheart despite my greatest efforts—who had come into our lives when our engagement was about to be announced. Now I hated him for a greasy devil of a Cuban wife-beater, and when I thought of him as having lifted as much as a little finger against the frail flower I had loved, I could have killed him where I stood.

Again the sobbing came to my ears. Probably after his victory in the court he had returned and finished the interrupted job of the morning, with trimmings thrown in.

My blood boiled, and my hands clenched. José Gonzales and I had never been quits for his first dastardly trick. But we should be now!

During the following week I pursued faithfully the duties involved in a profitable disposition of dry-goods and groceries, but in all that time I never saw Maude Gonzales or her husband.

However, I had made it plain to old Juarez that I thought the United States a bad country to live in, and Americans the worst breed of sons of conceited peacocks that had ever graced the earth.

The first time I voiced this sentiment the old man had looked at me curiously out of his heavy, black-rimmed spectacles.

"Why do you lie?" he asked bluntly, and it took half an hour of hurt feelings and voluble forensics to convince him of my sincerity.

Even then I was not satisfied, and thought I detected lurking behind his eyes a gleam of suspicion.

By gradual degrees I began to assimilate the information I wanted. Juarez at last believed me, I thought, for he let slip discreet hints concerning *La Alianza contra las Estados Unidos,* and admitted that a number of his friends were interested. But he would give no names, and only smiled when the enthusiasm of my hate for my native land ran away with me.

One morning I had just put into a basket for a puffing negro servant, three onions, a bottle of *agua coco,* a pair of stockings, and a night-shirt, when I was aware of some strong attraction in front of me.

It was not the onions. I looked across the store, and recognized a tall, slim figure, although the back was turned and the face was shrouded by a black lace mantilla. It was Maude Gonzales.

Instantly I felt that she had something to communicate, and this intuition was borne out by the aimless manner in which she handled the various materials before her. Juarez was out at the market buying, and I was in charge.

Finally there came a lull; the last customer departed, and I sent the clerks out on various errands in the rear of the store. Maude and I were alone.

She glanced quickly about and then rushed over to me, stretching out her hands, while tears streamed down her face.

"Oh, Sydney, I have tried so hard to get to you, but he watched me always, night

and day, and if I as much as looked out of the window he—he—"

"Did that dirty dog touch you again?" I snarled, my head whirling with the fury of anger.

"See here." She rolled her sleeve quickly to the shoulder, and I saw her arm, black and discolored with great bruises. "He holds me by that arm," she said quietly.

"Maude," I cried, "if you want me to commit murder within an hour show me something more like that."

The tone of my voice arrested her, and she shrank back before the blazing fury of my face. Then the memories of the tragedy of our two lives returned to me.

"Oh, why did you do it back there?" I cried, miserably indicating the States with my arm. "Didn't you know what might happen after the first ardor of his passion wore off?"

"No, I didn't," she said faintly; "but he is different from most."

"How?"

"He is a reversion to type. With him education was like so much water thrown into the ocean. He was like a college-bred Indian who goes back to the reservation and sinks into apathy beside his native teepee, content to hoe his patch of corn and idle the years away in aboriginal indulgence. He who started to lead his nation up sinks to its lowest level. That is what happened to José when he returned here. The cafés were open, he had an income, he did not have to work.

"Gradually he sank until the poorest *boyero* that goaded his oxen into town in the dawn was a creature more to be respected. In the matter of vicious indulgence there was nothing he did not practise, either at home or away from it, and then, when I would not follow him into the pit he offered, he became insanely jealous. But I do not need to tell you more. I did not come here for that. It can but make you unhappy."

"Unhappy!" I groaned. "I would sooner be dead than see you in this position."

"Sydney," she said softly, "I wish I had it to do over again."

One of the clerks entered just then, but I sent him out to sort onions as a punishment for his intrusion.

"José suspects you," went on Maude breathlessly, when she saw my love in my eyes. "No, you mustn't even touch my hand, and that's what I came here to tell you. His jealousy took the form of a violent hatred of all Americans, because I was American, and now he is one of the leading spirits in this terrible plot. He suspects you, Sydney, and I want you to go away before any harm comes to you."

I looked at the still girlish woman in front of me, and I realized what she had done. In order to tell me this she had taken her life in her hands, for Heaven only knows what his vengeance would be did he see her with me.

"I leave town?" I said slowly, in reply to her plea. "Dear girl, I wouldn't leave Camagüey now without you, if I had to be buried here all my life. Nobody knows *why* I am here, but—"

"I do," she faltered. "You are here for the United States government, to spy on the movements of the *Alianza*."

"How do you know that?" I asked, in amazement.

"He told me." I stared at her speechless. "But, listen," she hurried on, "I came here to help you, since you will not go away. There is to be a secret meeting of all the leaders of the movement in Cuba to-night in our *patio*. You must come; you will overhear them all; your work will be finished."

"Not until I have taken you away from this terrible life," I said firmly. "My work here is one thing, but you are another, and you are the first. You have always been the first thing in my life, and you are still."

"But you will come to-night?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes," I said. "When?"

"Midnight at the rear wall of the garden. Oh, Sydney, look, we are watched!"

Glancing outside, I saw the evil face of the policeman who had arrested me the day before peering around the edge of the doorway. Instinctively I reached for a tin of beef, but a little cry from Maude arrested the action of throwing.

"He does not understand us; we spoke in English," she told me. "Don't be foolish, and get yourself in jail. If you do, what good will you be for your work?"

My hand fell, and I felt the blood come to my face with shame. So quickly had I disregarded the hot vows of allegiance to her and our cause. And all because of this damnable quick temper of mine.

Maude moved toward the door.

"To-night at twelve, at the rear garden wall," she whispered, and smiled.

Despite her years of suffering, and the unhappy bitterness of her heart, it was the same old smile that I had loved.

"Yes, to-night at twelve," I repeated, and could trust myself no further.

When she had gone with a bundle of small purchases, I stood for a long while in thought. And suddenly there came over me a sense of the hideous unreality of the whole situation.

Here in the heart of Cuba, the threads of two, yes, three, lives were being woven again into the same skein after many years of separation. Centered in this one far-away spot was all in life I loved and all I hated, and two irrevocably bound together by the ties of church and state. And the result was three tragedies.

For the first time I loathed my duty, this duty that had helped to deaden the past pain, with its constant excitement and hazard. I wished my credentials were at the bottom of the sea, and that I was at liberty to settle matters after my own inclination.

I realized that in my present excited condition I was in no fit shape to meet the emergencies of the case for the government. My nerves were at the breaking point, my hands trembled, and underneath my seemingly calm exterior I was seething with a mental turmoil that unfitted me for anything.

Suddenly I roused myself and looked to the rear of the store. There, standing in the doorway, was old Paulo Juarez, his cigarette drooping between his lips, and a queer look on his face.

I gulped. How long had the old rascal been there? Had he overheard? If so, how much did his limited English permit him to understand?

"Not very busy just now," I volunteered conversationally.

"Beware of that woman; she is a devil," he said, disregarding my remark.

"What woman? What do you mean?"

"Señora Gonzales. Many Americans have wished they had never met her. Very few have started to meddle in her affairs who have not in the end regretted it."

"In what way?"

"The pocketbook. José makes a good income from those who interest themselves too closely in his wife's unhappy lot, and his wife seems to profit by it also, judging from her clothes, and the way they live."

"Look here, you old gossip," I said, walking over to him, "suppose you let that subject drop. I don't need any advice from you or any one else as to what I am to do, or who I am to become friends with. What I do is my own business."

"Perhaps, *señor,*" replied Juarez, his dark face coming down into a scowl, "you would be happier if the reason for your presence here were only your own property."

"Perhaps it is yours?"

"No, it is not. But others have whispered about, seemingly with some certainty."

"Well, *señor,*" I replied, out of patience, "to any who ask, you will do me a favor if you say my presence here is to act as *ropero primo* in the good store of Paulo Juarez."

At that the old man smiled.

I had much to think of that day as I scooped dried peas and measured cloth for the chattering women of Camagüey.

The meeting of the night to come interested me. Was this all a gigantic hoax? Was I to be made the dupe in a game played by a crafty Cuban? Had he forced his wife to come to me and lure me into the trap he had laid?

I considered it possible, but not probable. Maude had not acted that way, and yet there had been moments in our talk that, seeing things as I did now, gave me reason for deliberation.

One man in Camagüey knew my full mission. To the ordinary citizen he was a humble little shoemaker, who sat in an open doorway and pounded leather. To me and to those in authority in Havana he was the chief of the local secret police.

To him I had gone the first night of my arrival. And after much thought, it was to him I went now, when we had closed the store.

Our conversation was brief, and carried on over an old pair of shoes that I had brought with me. But it was to the point, and I went away reassured.

III.

AFTER deserting the rather expensive hotel under the press of financial necessity, I had gone into the family of old Juarez, my employer, and it was there during the evening meal that I fenced with him over the hard Cuban bread, *frijoles,* eggs, and coffee. I must make my absence that night logical.

"The ghosts dance at night in the cemetery here, do they not?" I inquired.

"Only those whose relatives rented a coffin for the burial," he replied, crossing himself vigorously. "The bodies thrown into the common trench cannot rest. Therefore the spirits haunt the graves of those who have been properly buried, for they are jealous."

"I watch them to-night," I said firmly.

"*Dios Vd. defende!*" he replied piously.

It was a moonless night, with a great brilliancy of stars, when, at half past eleven I crept stealthily forth and turned south in the Calle Mateo in the direction of the Plaza Caridad. It was a long walk, but I did not take the car for fear of being recognized. The cemetery lay in quite another direction.

The streets were just beginning to quiet down, and pedestrians were few. The only sounds were the clanging of the *cochero's* bells as they neared the corners, and now and then voices from within a few houses where the inmates were entertaining.

In the corner cafés the Cubans sat about the white marble-topped tables with their *piña fria,* or coffee, smoking and laughing noisily, but none of them noticed my passing.

At the Parque Agramonte the theater had long since poured forth its audience, and, as I skirted the little square, the hands in the tower of the San Francisco church pointed to a quarter to twelve.

I must hurry. I quickened my pace, following the line of the car-track and came to the Santa Cruz bridge over the crawling Jatibonico. Crossing this, I had nearly reached my destination.

I left the main road and took a dark side street that would lead near the rear wall of the Gonzales mansion. It was quiet out here, and as I listened near the garden, I heard only the crow of an ambitious cock, the bark of a dog, and the rustle of the soft wind through the royal palms.

Groping along the masonry I presently came to a small wooden door set deep in an embrasure. I pressed it gently and it yielded without a sound. The breath of tropical flowers smote me in that remote corner of the garden, and I thought what a beautiful setting it was for such unpleasant business.

"Sydney," came a soft voice almost beside me, so that I leaped within myself, though I did not move from my place.

"Maude," I whispered back, and a moment later I felt a hand laid upon my arm.

I took it and raised it to my lips.

"No, you must not!" she whispered quickly. "It is not yours to kiss."

"Are they here?"

"Yes, but in the front of the house drinking. They are almost in the bestial state, when they do the most daring business."

"But you!" I cried. "Where are you supposed to be?"

"Up-stairs locked in my room. That is my usual portion on the nights when the *Alianza* meets. But I have outwitted him before, and I did so again to-night."

"When before?" I asked, all the suspicion that Paulo Juarez had planted in me rising. "On what occasion?"

I could feel her look at me in the darkness.

"That I cannot tell you," she said.

I hesitated a moment without replying or moving. Should I trust her? Should I take my life in my hands and let her lead me helpless into the trap her wily master had prepared?

Things looked suspicious, but I still had a lover's faith in the girl.

"Lead on," I said. "Where are you going to hide me?"

"In the *tinajón.*"

A *tinajón* among Spaniards is a stout person with a large capacity for liquid refreshments. The title, however, in Camagüey has ceased to be applied to human beings, and belongs rather to great earthenware jars in which rain-water is stored. Despite the modern cistern, your Camagüeyan who is going to build a house selects his jar, sets it in place, and erects the building around it, so to speak.

I wondered if she was going to put me underground in the water, but my fears were soon set at rest. We crossed the grass of the garden without a sound, and I noticed the white marble fountain gleam dully in the starlight as we passed it to our left. We drew near the house, where the gloom of the gallery roof cut off the stars.

"Here," Maude whispered, and placed my hand on something rough and hard.

It was a huge *tinajón* placed under the eaves to catch the rain-water that roared down the spout during the swift tropical storms. I remembered seeing several around the yard on my first visit to the *patio.*

"Quick! They are coming!" said the breathless voice of my guide, and I heard the loud and uncontrolled voices of men who had been long at their cups.

I scrambled up on the huge jar that stood at least six feet high.

"Look out for the cover," she cautioned me. "It is hung over your head and is very heavy."

"'Heavy, heavy hangs over my head,'" said I, quoting the childish phrase with a catch at my heart.

Many a time we had said that when we had wanted to give one another something.

"Oh, Sydney!" breathed a heart-broken voice in the darkness, and I silently cursed myself for uttering that reminder of happier days.

"I'm sorry," I said contritely, as I slid down into the great jar.

But there was no reply. She was gone.

The sounds of those approaching increased. There were great bayings of laughter, the quick staccato of Spanish, and the noise of shuffling feet. As they were about to enter the garden, a long drawn "Ps-s-sst!" from the leader compelled silence.

Standing as I was I could see nothing. The jar just topped my head.

I swung my foot about and encountered some hard object. It was a folding stool about two feet high, with three steps. Maude had anticipated everything.

I mounted the first step cautiously and peered out.

From the inside of the house a flood of light poured into the *patio*, and in it I saw perhaps thirty men walking stealthily out of the doorway. In the corner as I was, and overhung by a great cascade of *bougainvilla* flower, my position was ideal for observation and concealment.

When the main body of conspirators had passed out, the flood of light was extinguished, and by the one lamp remaining I saw the ugly face and close-cropped head of José Miguel Gonzales as he followed his guests.

For some moments there was a confused murmur of conversation, which I was unable to catch. Then a strangely familiar voice exclaimed:

"There is a spy in town. I did not know it until to-night, when I found his papers."

It was old Paulo Juarez who spoke. With a muttered curse I clutched at my breast-pocket. My wallet with my credentials was gone.

In the pretense of going to the cemetery, I had changed into old clothes, and had transferred my belongings carefully. I felt deep into the pocket. The bottom was out of it, and the wallet had dropped through.

"Where is the spy?" asked a score of voices. "Where is the spy?"

"That I do not know," replied Juarez, in a tone of fear. "He left my house to visit the cemetery, saying he wanted to see the spirits dance."

"A repetition of this blundering carelessness," said the low, ugly voice of Gonzales, "and he will see your's dancing among them, old fool!"

"Brava! Brava!" cried the babbling voices of those most inflamed with drink, and Juarez pleaded his cause with these villains long and earnestly before they finally decided to keep their hands off him. I was sorry for the old fellow, in a way.

"To business," said Gonzales sharply at last.

Standing on my stool and well out of the *tinajón* I rested my elbows on its edge and took in the strange scene. Near the fountain the conspirators were gathered in a semicircle about one whom I later knew to be Gonzales. Occasionally one or another tipped back his head with a flask to his lips, and then threw himself into the discussion with more fire than before.

"Are we ready, then, brothers?" I heard José ask.

"*Abajo con la Administracion Publica!*" cried many voices.

"*Abajo con las Americanos,*" cried others in a half-frenzy, rising in their places.

Others quickly pulled them back and silenced them.

"The provinces are well canvassed," continued Gonzales, "and we can count on fully half the *rurales* as well as a larger proportion of the population, particularly those who are tenants on the big plantations. Nearly all of Mantanzas, the 'black province,' is pledged to us. Everything is propitious, and I think there is nothing more to be done except to give the signal. When shall it be?"

Again his voice was drowned out in the incoherent suggestions of his followers. With uplifted hand he commanded silence.

It was then that my stool, made unsteady by my excited and strained listening,

tipped over beneath my feet and precipitated me into the bottom of the *tinajón* with a rattle and clatter.

For a moment there was absolute silence, a silence alive with running thoughts and leaping hearts, and then followed action.

Stools shrieked on the polished marble floor, feet clattered amid a steamlike escape of blasphemy, and then came a cautious advance in my direction, and the command in Spanish to yield myself or die.

Like a rat in a trap I could do nothing. Matters were beyond that. My life, my success, *her* life depended upon others.

Had Mederos, the little shoemaker, been successful? Had Maude Gonzales herself been treacherous? I was completely at her mercy now. If she was playing with me, and I was merely her dupe, I should die in this *patio,* dragged from the jar like a squirrel from a tree-trunk. I had been in tight places before, but never one like this.

I raised my whistle to my lips and blew three quick blasts.

For as many deathly seconds I waited, and received no response. Then, with a kind of desperate fury, I kicked the stool into place, drew my revolver, and started to mount. If I had been betrayed, at least there should be no tame butchery.

Suddenly there was a flood of light, and my heart beat again.

"Stand where you are—you are taken!" cried a great voice, and the conspirators gibbered in terror, as from every door, window, and *tinajón* swarmed the blue-coated police.

A shot or two was fired, but no more. Those who once where so brave, sought only to escape, and some of them were barely able to walk. I swung myself out of my damp prison and landed on the ground, just as a woman rushed past me.

"Maude," I cried, "you have done it all; you are wonderful!"

But she did not hear me. She hurried on, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"José, my husband," I heard burst from her lips, as she hurried about the *patio* searching for him.

I was searching for him, too, but I had difficulty in keeping track of her.

Half-way down the garden I became embroiled in a very satisfactory argument with several of the hunted, and this delayed me. When I had broken loose I followed in the direction Maude had taken.

Near the end of the *patio* I came upon her. There was a man at her side. My heart leaped. At last Gonzales and I would have a strict account, I thought, and I advanced upon them.

Maude turned and saw me. Then she shrieked in Spanish to José, who climbed like a monkey to the top of the *tinajón,* alongside which he had been standing.

With a snarl of rage I sprang forward just as Maude drew from her bosom a dagger and laid its sharp edge against the rope which held the *tinajón* cover above its opening. Suddenly José Gonzales disappeared from view, a great splash of water rose into the air, and the mighty cover clanked down into its place.

"Great Heavens, Sydney!" cried Maude, half distracted, "I'm drowning him! Take off that cover for the love of God!"

All animosity forgotten, I leaped upon a stone beside the great jar and struggled frantically with the heavy earthenware top. I could not as much as move it.

Soon others arrived, and we pulled out the limp figure of José Gonzales and laid it on the grass under a light. He was dead, but not from drowning.

The shock to his worn-out nervous system when he saw his doom sealed by the fall of the cover proved too much for him, and he died of fright and heart failure.

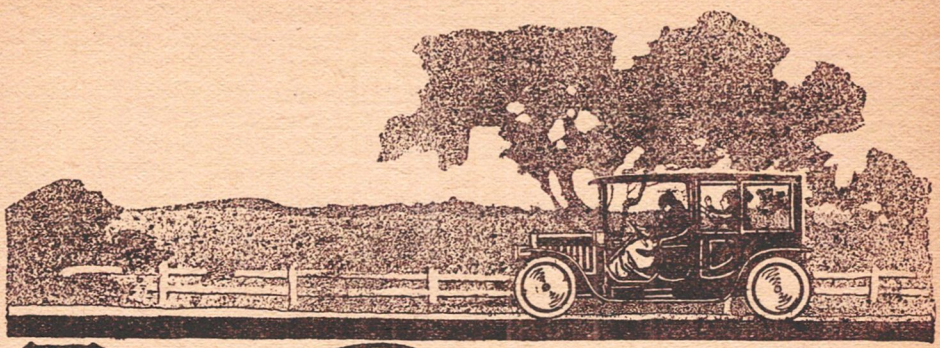
"But why did you do it?" I asked, when Maude was at last able to speak.

"Oh, I can't explain," she answered, sobbing. "You won't understand. I knew José would receive a life sentence, and at the thought that I was responsible for it, that I had deceived this man who loved me once, all the old affection came back to me. I just couldn't see him caught without interfering. It's a woman's unreasoning way. I felt I must attempt to save him, and I found him cowering behind a bush.

"Then came the terrible part, and as I cut the cord above the jar, I remembered. Into that *tinajón* had been poured the water from all the others, so that you, Sydney, and the police might hide in them, and it was full almost to the top. It was too late to stay my hand then."

She paused for a while, and then turned in my arms so that she could see my face. She was calm, and smiled as she looked up.

"But, Sydney," she added wearily, "I am glad, after all. We will now begin to put the clock back."



THE DRAWING CARD

By Helen A. Holden

THE big audience waited. At first with good-natured patience, then with growing irritation.

There was to be a joint debate, the suffragettes against the anti-suffragettes. The women of the city thrilled with the enormity of the affair.

The suffragettes had to represent their side a woman from Colorado. She had been invited East for the occasion, was advertised as the drawing card, and was considered invincible.

The antis had asked to speak for them a woman from Philadelphia. She belonged to an old and aristocratic family, but was not well known to the general public.

At last, when the patience of the audience was almost exhausted, a number of women trooped in and took their places in the row of chairs on either side of the stage.

But there was a vacant place in the ranks of the suffragettes. The place of honor, the chair reserved for the lady from Colorado was empty.

What could it mean?

The chairman's gavel fell several times before she finally succeeded in making herself heard. A loud murmur buzzed from every corner of the theater.

As soon as quiet was established, the chairman explained that she, as well as the audience, was surprised at the absence of Mrs. Ludlum, their speaker from Colorado. But she begged the ladies to have patience a little longer, when Mrs. Ludlum would undoubtedly be with them.

The minutes passed. Then more minutes, but still no Mrs. Ludlum.

The situation began to grow embarrassing for the suffragettes. They apologized at intervals to the anti-suffragettes. Still no Mrs. Ludlum.

They telephoned frantically to Mrs. Ludlum's hotel. Word came back that she had left early that morning, and had not returned.

Wherever she was, why didn't she send word? It seemed as if the only excuse for not doing so was that she had met with some fatal accident.

The chairman filled in the time of waiting as well as she could. A number of women were called upon for speeches.

At last word went around that something had happened. The audience thrilled with anticipation and suspense.

The chairman's gavel fell. Immediately there was silence.

"A telegram has just come from Mrs. Ludlum"—she glanced at the yellow paper Instead of being here as she expected, she in her hand—"and she regrets her absence. sends the telegram from somewhere out on Long Island, where she finds herself through foul play from the other side!"

There was the first hush of paralyzed astonishment, followed by a babel of excitement.

II.

MRS. LUDLUM'S time since her arrival in the city had been completely filled. She

had lived in one mad whirl, having been fêted and entertained from early till late.

It was not until the last day—the day of the all-important debate — that she found herself with an unengaged morning on her hands. She expected to leave for the West again that evening.

She was glad for this time to herself, as she had some friends upon whom she was very anxious to call. They lived in Brooklyn, on the same street, not far apart.

One was a former college-mate, a Mrs. Stevens. The others, Mrs. Chance, was a Colorado woman who had moved to Brooklyn the year before.

Mrs. Ludlum hastened to telephone to Mrs. Stevens. She was at home, and insisted on Mrs. Ludlum's coming to luncheon.

Mrs. Ludlum replied that she would not be able to stay to luncheon on account of the suffragette meeting at three that afternoon. As she was the chief speaker, of course she could not run any risk of being late.

After many protests and much argument, the matter was finally arranged. Luncheon would be at an early hour, and Mrs. Stevens promised to return Mrs. Ludlum to New York in her automobile in plenty of time for the all-important meeting.

So Mrs. Ludlum had spent a morning with her friend in Brooklyn. But it had not been an entirely satisfactory one.

After discussing old times and friends, they drifted to the all-absorbing subject that had brought Mrs. Ludlum East. She was surprised and grieved to find her friend stanchly enrolled under the banner of the opposition.

Here was her chance to make her first convert in the East—to try some of the arguments she meant to use in her speech that afternoon. So she talked long and persuasively, ending with:

"Even if you cannot entirely readjust your ideas on the instant, you must agree in a measure with my point of view."

"All points of view are somewhat obscured just now by that big hole in Junior's knee," replied Mrs. Stevens. "Perfectly good, whole socks not two hours ago."

Mrs. Ludlum got up with a sigh. Her friend was hopeless. It was useless to waste more words.

"It isn't time for you to leave yet," protested Mrs. Stevens.

"I want to call for a few minutes on a former Colorado neighbor," replied Mrs. Ludlum. "A Mrs. Chance, who is living at 321 Parkway Avenue. It must be very near here."

"That's the Belleview, an apartment house half-way up the block on the other side of the street," replied Mrs. Stevens.

"You're sure I'll reach the theater in time if I leave there at two o'clock?" asked Mrs. Ludlum anxiously.

"It is now half past one," replied Mrs. Stevens. "I will phone Edward to have the car at the Belleview for you at ten minutes of two. That will allow for all possible delays and get you at the theater in plenty of time to begin operations at three."

So Mrs. Ludlum bade her friend good-by and hurried across the street. Mrs. Chance was at home and delighted to see her friend.

While they talked, Mrs. Ludlum's attention was divided. She listened to her friend with one ear, while with the other she was striving to catch the *chug-chug* of an automobile.

At last her ears caught the sound of an approaching motor. She hurried to the window and looked out.

A comfortable looking limousine was just drawing up to the curb.

"Here he is with even five minutes to spare," she exclaimed thankfully.

With a hasty good-by she hurried out.

The chauffeur seemed to understand the importance of the occasion. He was standing with the door already open as Mrs. Ludlum appeared on the steps.

"This is Edward?" she asked, as she bustled past him into the car.

The man nodded.

While he tucked her comfortably in, she explained that although she was averse to having him break any of the speed laws, she would be glad to have him travel as fast as he otherwise could.

As they hurried down one street after another and around corners, Mrs. Ludlum began to lose her feeling of strained anxiety, and settled herself in her corner.

She looked forward with keen anticipation to the coming struggle. She felt deeply the honor of having been asked to represent the cause.

At last the wide, attractive up-town avenues were left behind. They were forced to go much more slowly through the narrow congested streets.

Mrs. Ludlum turned from the uninteresting scenes among which they were passing. She shut her eyes and settled back luxuri-

ously in the comfortable corner of the limousine.

And in the cozy corner of the limousine, Mrs. Ludlum soon did more than rest.

She slept, a sleep of utter exhaustion.

If the car had continued to experience the ordinary interruptions of the busy city streets, Mrs. Ludlum would soon have been roused to consciousness.

But instead, in front of the unconscious woman stretched an even country road.

On and on the automobile sped. Lower and lower settled the unconscious form of the sleeping woman.

At last they came to a bad stretch of road. The sun had melted the frost in the ground and it had frozen again in deep ruts. The car swayed from side to side.

Mrs. Ludlum slowly opened her eyes.

Where was she? She looked about in drowsy bewilderment. Then, in a flash it all came to her. She was on her way to the theater in Manhattan.

But where were the houses? Where was the city.

She looked out and saw open country, fields, and woods.

Was she still dreaming? She rubbed her eyes and looked again.

Then in a frenzy of excitement she struck sharply on the window between herself and the chauffeur. He was busy guiding the car over the almost impassable road, and was unconscious of the extra rattle on the pane.

Mrs. Ludlum was beside herself. She beat frantically on the glass and shouted at the top of her voice.

At last the screams penetrated the frosty stillness of the outside air. The chauffeur brought the car to a sudden stop, and turned to learn the cause of the commotion.

The white face with the wild eyes peering out at him made him shudder.

"Why did you bring me here," demanded Mrs. Ludlum. "How did you dare?"

"Where did you think you were going?" asked the chauffeur soothingly.

"You know very well," replied Mrs. Ludlum, "I have an engagement at the Lyceum Theater this afternoon, and that's where you were to take me."

The chauffeur turned away, slowly shaking his head. He thought they ought to have told him that it was a poor crazy woman he had to deal with. Instead, he had simply received orders to take a lady from 321 Park Avenue to "The Rest Haven" at Forestdale.

"I was to be there at three, and it's that now," Mrs. Ludlum went on almost hysterically. "Don't sit there like an idiot. Get me back, get me back, just as fast as you can. I don't care what you break to do it!"

The chauffeur started the engine. The car continued to crawl along the road. Thereupon came more wild and insistent cries from the inside.

"I told you to take me back," screamed Mrs. Ludlum.

"Impossible to turn on this narrow road," replied the chauffeur.

Poor Mrs. Ludlum felt herself to be in sorry plight indeed.

She must do something or she would go crazy. Yet what was there to do? She could not run the car herself.

It was already three o'clock.

Mrs. Ludlum groaned aloud, and wrung her hands in an agony of despair.

How had that thing happened? Instead of finding herself in New York, here she was out on a deserted country road.

She glanced at the chauffeur again with sudden suspicion. It was perhaps a scheme, a plan to get her out of the way.

Her friend, Mrs. Stevens, was a stanch anti-suffragette. Could she have been guilty of such treason?

Party feeling had run high. But that the anti-suffragettes had deliberately planned to kidnap her in broad daylight seemed unthinkable.

She had stepped into Mrs. Stevens's automobile in good faith, to be taken across the bridge to Manhattan. Instead, she found herself mysteriously and unaccountably miles away from the desired goal.

Once more the chauffeur was conscious of the tattoo on the window.

"Are we headed for Brooklyn?" screamed Mrs. Ludlum. "I haven't noticed that we've turned yet."

The chauffeur increased the speed as he muttered something unintelligible.

They were now entering Forestdale. No long ride back to the city alone with the crazy woman for him. He meant to get her to the Rest Haven as quickly as possible.

He wanted to make an end of it. This dealing with a madwoman was not to be prolonged.

All the way up the wide avenue to the Rest Haven he could hear vigorous protests from inside the limousine. Paying no attention to these, the chauffeur speeded the car madly along.

He remembered having often seen the place. It was easy to find. Over the gate hung a large sign:

REST HAVEN
SANATORIUM.

The car swung around the curve and up through the grounds. It stopped with a quick jerk in front of a large building.

The chauffeur got down from his seat. He opened the door for Mrs. Ludlum to alight at the same time the door of the house opened. A doctor hurried down the steps and approached the car with hand outstretched to welcome the new guest.

With fire flashing from her eyes and rage almost choking her, Mrs. Ludlum talked. She told, first, the chauffeur, then the doctor, what she thought of them, individually, and of every one else in general.

She railed against the anti-suffragettes. She explained that at last she recognized the whole thing as a miserable plot planned to keep her away from the meeting.

The doctor soothed and threatened and coaxed. But Mrs. Ludlum remained firm.

She would go back to the city in the automobile. The sooner they took her the better it would be for every one concerned.

The doctor, Mrs. Ludlum, and the chauffeur each argued in turn. Then they all talked at once.

But it was useless. As the doctor reluctantly shut the door on the angry woman, he spoke in an undertone to the chauffeur:

"I had no idea it was so bad a case. I can't force her to remain. Her family ought to have sent some one with her."

"She's as mad as a March hare," replied the chauffeur gloomily. The prospect of the long ride back with such a passenger made him irritable.

They had no sooner started than the familiar tattoo on the window caused cold shivers to run up and down his spine. Paying no heed, he kept steadily on. At last the fact that his passenger wanted a telegraph office penetrated to his understanding.

Here was his chance. He drove the machine rapidly along the main street of the little town to the station.

Mrs. Ludlum could hardly wait for the motor to come to a stop before she had the door open. In a couple of bounds she was out, across the platform, and had entered the station.

Here she sent a telegram. It was the one that had put the audience at the Lyceum in such a flutter of excitement.

Having justified herself with her friends at the theater, she hurried out again to the automobile.

It was gone! Not a sign of it in either direction.

III.

It was after six o'clock when a woman, breathless, dragged herself up the steps of the Stevens' residence on Parkway Avenue.

Mrs. Stevens hurried down to greet her.

"How, when, where?" she began.

"Don't question me!" cried Mrs. Ludlum. "Just wait while I ask you a few. Perhaps you thought it was clever to play a trick like that on me. But I tell you it was one of the most contemptible—"

"There has been some mistake," broke in Mrs. Stevens. "If you will just be calm, we can get to the bottom of the matter."

"What motive could your chauffeur have had in taking me out on Long Island, instead of to New York, unless he'd been bribed?" stormed Mrs. Ludlum.

"My chauffeur didn't take you anywhere," replied Mrs. Stevens quickly.

"What do you mean?" gasped Mrs. Ludlum.

"He went to the Belleview at exactly ten minutes to two," continued Mrs. Stevens. "He waited and waited for at least three-quarters of an hour. Then he came back here to ask me what to do.

"I phoned over to Mrs. Chance. She replied that you had left at about fifteen minutes to two. I suppose you were afraid to wait and had taken the Subway."

"I can't understand." Mrs. Ludlum's tired brain refused to work out the puzzle. "A chauffeur named Edward took me out to Forestdale, and left me there."

"Edward said that while he was waiting at the Belleview," said Mrs. Stevens, "some one came out of the house to ask if he was from Edwards, a garage just around the corner. They had been waiting for half an hour for an automobile to take one of their family out to a sanatorium at Forestdale."

"Please order him around again to take me back there," groaned Mrs. Ludlum. "It's where I belong, and where I'd like to hide while you explain whatever you can to the suffragettes and the antis."

The Argosy's Log-Book

By the Editor

IN speaking of the great popularity the Log-Book has achieved, a friend remarked to me the other day: "But aren't you surprised to get so many letters from the West and South?"

"Not in the least," I replied. "I am surprised when they come from New York."

Which reminds me that a correspondent writing from Far Rockaway, Long Island, under date of May 21, asks me to answer his questions in the July Log-Book. This would be out of the question, as the magazine must necessarily be made up far ahead of date in order to allow time for the printing of its enormous edition, even on fast presses. So when you write, say, in answer to any question one month, it is only by a lucky chance that you will be able to see your letter in the next.

You know by this time the nature of the surprise of which I spoke in June. This series of city stories to be inaugurated next month with "Why Williamsport?" will serve to make our readers realize what a tremendous country this United States of ours really is, just as, in another way, the Log-Book impresses the fact on them. But these stories as stories are just as interesting to those who live elsewhere as to those who reside in the towns where their scenes are laid, and besides they may always live in expectation that their city may be the next one chosen. The "daring" element in the scheme lies in the fact that great pains must be taken to have the local color accurate, as there will be so many keen critics ready to pounce on the first slip. But "to err is human, and to forgive divine," as somebody says, and if the name of a street has been changed, or a bridge removed since our story was written, don't be too hard on the poor author. Meantime, let me know what you think of the idea.

And now I must hasten to open for you the enormous batch of mail. I will start with two readers who seem to want just the opposite kind of stories. H. E. V., of Medford, Oregon, says:

> I like the serials best, and always read them first. The complete novels can't be beat. I do not care so much for the short stories, although they are all good, especially the *Hawkins* stories. Of the serials now running, "In Quest of the Pink Elephant" and "The Shooting at Big D" are both A No. 1. Why don't you publish some stories dealing with China? I don't believe I have read any of that sort.

I may refer our friend to "A Chinese Conspiracy" which ran just after the Boxer uprising. But here comes M. R. B., a Brooklyn reader, who wouldn't care for Chinese stories at all, for she says:

> I like everything laid in New York, Brooklyn, or Long Island, and I cannot understand why people want stories with the plot laid in Africa, or some foreign country that they know nothing about. For me a story holds more interest when the heroine is to meet the hero in a spot that I am entirely familiar with. I feel as though I myself were in her place, and I would feel decidedly out of place in Africa. I know something of Savannah, and therefore found "Her Hero from Savannah" very attractive. I like short stories equally as well as the serials, provided there are plenty of nice young ladies therein, lots of action, some consistency, and a pleasant ending. You ask your readers' opinion on "Midnight Between Towns." Personally I like it beyond cavil. There is plenty of action, a few pleasant descriptions, and lots of love. I wonder if it is what so many of your correspondents term "mushy"?

I imagine most of my readers, as I do myself, will disagree with M. R. B. in thinking that there was lots of love in "Midnight Between Towns." However, it's all in the point of view. As to *The Munsey Amateur* she suggests we start, I fear that the only persons who would want to read it would be those embryo authors whose contributions were printed, and they would care to read nothing but their own productions.

How many of our ARGOSY constituency, I wonder, go as far as does Paul R. J. to get his magazine each month. He writes from Mosca, Colorado, as follows:

> Over a year ago a friend loaned me a copy of THE ARGOSY. I started to read it, and read until nearly midnight. I liked it because it was different from most magazines, as I enjoyed *all* the stories, and in other magazines I never liked more than half at most. I have to go twenty-eight miles to get it each month, and I would be willing to go twice as far. I think it is the best magazine going, and, although the serials are good, I like the complete novels and short stories best.

Here is Harry E. S., of New Haven, Connecticut, who has been reading THE ARGOSY since he was eight years old, which is a fine record, as he has now just attained his majority, even if it does foot up thirteen. Of "Midnight Between Towns" he says:

> It is a very good story, but Mr. Krog writes very good stories at the worst. The stories in the June ARGOSY are all exceptionally good, and "The Fighting Streak" is a crackerjack, as I always like to read any kind of war stories. Why don't some one write of 1812? Let us have some more like "The Man Who Leased Air" and "The Wire That Wasn't Cut." The *Castleton* series I like to read, for *Tommy* is always doing something or something is doing something to him.

In reply to one of your questions, Harry S., I have just bought another Utica story from Seward Hopkins, and the next time I telephone Mr. Terhune, will tell him of your suggestion in regard to making his heroes remain bachelors for a change.

Arthur M. F., of Covington, Virginia, thinks the June number the best he has ever read, an opinion particularly gratifying to the editor, as I was myself especially proud of it. But he begins:

> I am a constant reader of several of your publications, and would like to say a word in praise of THE ARGOSY. I think it the best magazine I have ever read, and I read a great many. Like some of the other writers in the Log-Book, I like some of the scenes laid in other places besides the parks and buildings of New York, but the last numbers leave nothing to be desired in this

respect. Both the June complete novels were fine. "Midnight Between Towns" was a good story by a good author, and one of the kind that every one likes to read. I completely lost myself while reading it—but that was the case with everything in the magazine. I think it is divided up just right. Any effort to change it would only result in dragging it back from the position it has already attained. You have excited my curiosity by your mention of that story now being written for THE ARGOSY on a new and daring plan. I am, along, I fancy, with the other readers of THE ARGOSY, impatient for the time of its appearance. I know it will be a good story, though the fact that it is to appear in THE ARGOSY insures that. I think the Log-Book is one of the best features of the magazine. It brings the readers into closer relations with the editor.

My request for opinions on "Midnight Between Towns" has set some of my readers to splitting straws, as it were. Here is Clara B. W., of Bellingham, Washington, asking what kind of trolley-cars they use in Missouri "that leave cinders on the road-bed which cut Elmer's feet. If he had been in Washington he would have had less trouble, as the Washington trolley-cars don't drop cinders on the track."

Doubtless in the State of Washington they don't construct road-beds of cinders as they do at times in the Middle West and elsewhere to ballast the track. Our readers have sharp eyes and no point escapes them, even if they do sometimes overleap themselves as in this instance.

Here is another Western reader of the fair sex, Mrs. A. D. B., of Denver, Colorado, with a suggestion that fiction writers refrain, for a change, from killing off the heroine's mother in the first chapter. She goes on to say:

Whether she lives on a ranch, or in a mining-camp, or a Fifth Avenue mansion, why can we never escape the statement that she is her father's housekeeper and only companion, her mother having died in her infancy? Of course, it never occurs to the author that the average father would marry again. I wish THE ARGOSY writers would inaugurate a reform in this instance. Give the poor girl a mother and half a dozen brothers and sisters. I believe she will enjoy the change. On my twelfth birthday one of my presents was a year's subscription to the then *Golden Argosy*. I well remember the delight I experienced in reading Alger's stories and Mr. Munsey's "Afloat in a Great City." I have not missed very many numbers since then, and for the past ten years do not think I have missed a single one. As a native Missourian I enjoyed "Midnight Between Towns," and all of Fritz Krog's stories, although some of his characters are just a shade overdrawn.

Mrs. B. then takes Mr. Terhune to task for speaking of mesmerism in "In the Name of the King," although "Mesmerism was unheard of for a century or more after the Revolution." In reply I think the term was merely used in the sense of fascination, and as to an Indian speaking English and Dutch so well in the early days of the Colonies, I see nothing impossible about that. It all depended on the Indian. As to that reform in motherless heroines, it may be THE ARGOSY can do something in that line. We have already blazed several new trails in fiction. For example, in "His Automobile or Theirs" we printed the first motor-car novelette in which not a single machine breaks down, and in "The Fighting Streak," a Southern soldier falls in love with a Northern girl.

Still they come, charming letters from women readers. Thank you very much, Mrs. F. G. K., of Westport, Missouri. Here is what she says:

The sociability of your Log-Book is like a round-robin letter that I look forward to as regularly. THE ARGOSY does so much to break up the seclusion and loneliness of farm life that I feel I must tell you the place it fills. We read it aloud in the family, and it presents such a variety of new thoughts and things to talk about that we feel more than repaid. We like best stories of the city, and agree with G. G. G. that "Four Magic Words" was super-excellent. It furnished reading for two nights and thoughts for two weeks. We like the *Hawkins* stories, too, and my son likes clever schemes like "Groceries, Diamonds, and a Fraud," in this June number.

This Ohio reader, O. G. S., of Lima, has a record which no one else can possibly beat, for he says:

I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY from Vol. I, No. 1, to date, and have felt many times as though I would like to criticize some of the stories, but I suppose some one would not care for the ones I do. Give me stories of real life, preferably complete in one number. I don't know anything that will stop me getting THE ARGOSY on the 15th of the month, unless you quit publishing it or I go broke. Then I would borrow one. P. S.—I have practically all the books.

F. A. M., of Vancouver, British Columbia, comes forward with a strong plea in favor of a sane view of the West by the Easterner:

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for some time, and vote it the best story-telling magazine issued to-day. I like stories of adventure and romance. That is, if they aren't too hot. Western stories are fine when they haven't too much gun-play in them. I regard that as foolish. I often wonder if the average Eastern man thinks that a Westerner is a man wearing a young cannon on his hip and shoots at anybody that calls him a liar. Probably it will be a surprise for some of them to hear that a great many Indian towns up in the Northwest elect their mayor and councilmen instead of having a chief. But THE ARGOSY is an excellent magazine, and could not very well be improved upon. P. S.—The two long, complete stories in this (June) issue are simply great.

E. H. H., of Pittsburgh, mentions a technical error in a wireless story printed several months since. The author went around the world on a battle-ship and assured me that all these details were correct. But I will quote further from our friend's letter:

I have been reading THE ARGOSY ever since I was fourteen; am thirty-two now. In the June Log-Book I saw L. S.'s plea for a story about the traveling photographer. I second the motion; and, as he says, there are enough of us; there is—too darned many of us in this section. I think that the least you can do for us is to have *Hawkins* invent us a new flash-lamp. There would be possibilities in the flash-lamp and *Hawkins*. My favorite authors are Albert Payson Terhune and Edgar Franklin. I have never read a story by either that was not good. "In Quest of the Pink Elephant" is a dandy.

Here comes a strange request from a young lady, Miss Freda M., of Milwaukee. She wants us to print a story "dealing with politics and have a nice Socialist as a hero." I think she will be pleased with our Russian serial, "The Black Paw," to begin in a month or two. Of THE ARGOSY she writes:

I like it so much that I read most of the stories twice, especially stories like "A Cold Deal," "Her Hero from Savannah," and "In Quest of the Pink Elephant."

Mr. and Mrs. J. W. B. offers a suggestion from Stanfordville, New York. I think they will enjoy "The Savage Strain," a fantastic yarn I have just bought:

Just a few words in appreciation of all your publications (and THE ARGOSY in particular). They are the only magazines we buy. "Midnight Between Towns" is a well-written story, as are all of those by Fritz Krog. Why not give us some stories dealing with science? Am quite sure they would be gladly received.

A clear-cut, frank expression of opinion is this from Guy H., of Wichita, Kansas:

I read ten to twelve magazines a month, most of them higher-priced than THE ARGOSY (and some a great deal higher), but for actual enjoyment I would rather read THE ARGOSY than any of them. Some of the stories are rather improbable, but they have "snap" to them. They are not stories written for a purpose, or character studies, or studies in morals, but just good, wholesome, interesting *stories*, and nothing else. I never read the serials, but just the complete stories in each issue. Accept my congratulations on getting out so good a magazine.

For the benefit of W. B. B., from Winterport, Maine, Louis N. B., Ann Arbor, Michigan, and

others, I will say that a new serial by William Wallace Cook is booked to start in the October ARGOSY, and that a novelette, in addition to the two complete novels, will hereafter be a feature of the magazine.

Here is an echo of the "Putting It Through" discussion, regarding that story in the May issue. S. A. G., of Reston, Oregon, is the writer, and I suppose by "another position" he means that of wife:

As *Miss Brown* knew her namesake was about to accept another position, I think she was excusable for her action. I differ with R. S. I consider "Roy Burns's Handicap" one of the poorest stories you have published. In regard to "The Clown's Mate," I call it a pretty good story. I take all six of the Munsey publications, and read all of the stories.

F. A. L., writing clear from the Philippines to renew his subscription, adds with emphatic frankness: "I like all your stories as a general thing, except those old war stories. They are no good."

In answer to George B.'s inquiry about the artist who used to live in his native town of Napa, California, the last I heard of him he was residing in Holland. The prices for stories and pictures vary. He will note that his final question was answered in the July number, when we introduced illustrated headings to the stories. His letter begins:

I have been taking THE ARGOSY for about four years, also the *Railroad Man's Magazine*. THE ARGOSY beats them all. I never yet saw in THE ARGOSY a story that I didn't like. Can't say that about any other story-magazine. Give us some more tales like "Her Hero from Savannah" and "The Shooting at Big D."

Miss Bessie L. C., of Portland, Oregon, is a philosopher, it would seem. In reply to her question, I have some excellent stories by Mr. Cain in the safe. She says:

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for years, and there is no magazine I like as well. I liked "The Fighting Streak" very much, although it really ended differently than I thought it would. By that I mean he married the wrong girl, to my idea. But that is the way in real life, so that is why I liked it so much. Does George M. A. Cain write stories for THE ARGOSY now? I like his stories very much.

This from a new reader. When I saw the dateline on his letter, I felt pretty certain he was going to express his pleasure over "The Fighting Streak," and that my expectations were realized is a happy augury for the success of the new style city stories to be inaugurated next month. But this is what H. E. B., of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, writes:

I have been a reader of your magazine but a short while, but in that time I really think that THE ARGOSY is the best all-story magazine published. I have just finished reading "The Fighting Streak," and think that it is simply great. It deals with Gettysburg, too, and that makes it more interesting. I am a great reader of books, and your stories always come first in every particular.

Here is another new reader (from Vancouver, British Columbia) who likes us. He was approached by a sign company who offered to give him a magazine in exchange for being allowed to use the wall of his store for advertising purposes. He says:

I of course named THE ARGOSY, and I find the stories in it very interesting. Those I liked best were "The Exhibit That Walked Away," "The Woman He Feared," and "The Big Obstacle." I also like the *Hawkins* stories, and hope to see more of them.

J. F. B., of Salinas, California, comes forward with a suggestion for *Hawkins*, the second one that has been offered him in this month's batch:

Have read THE ARGOSY since 1895. I notice that many and various are the criticisms you are called on to hear, so I take the liberty to add mine to the general supply. Take poor old *Hawkins*, for instance. Every invention a failure, every resulting calamity his, barring *Griggs*. Why not have *Hawkins* invent something which would cause a tremendous furor and excitement in his neighborhood, sinking the inventor in dire distress and sorrow because it was a failure, then raise him to the highest pinnacle of happiness by its turning out to be very useful and valuable for an entirely different purpose than that for which it was first intended, and for once shutting *Griggs's* sarcastic mouth and causing him humbly to apologize? While some of the Western stories seem far-drawn, in some ventures I have personally had, as a surveyor on the deserts and in the Sierra and Cascade mountains in the extreme West, they are tame by comparison. I read all the stories, and in the main consider them good, and well arranged. I consider that the advertisements contain a wealth of information and educational knowledge which I have found most beneficial financially.

W. W. G., of Bellefontaine, Ohio, thinks he used to know L. S., a traveling photographer, writing from Oklahoma, about the time he started reading THE ARGOSY, seven years ago, and hasn't seen him since. W. W. G. continues:

Personally I like Mr. Terhune's stories about the best, though I remember especially "Four Magic Words," and one published some time ago, "Finis." I have been studying literature in Boston for the past school year, and THE ARGOSY was often a relief from the classics. I believe it is as evenly balanced to suit *everybody* as possible. The stories I care for least are those of Western life, but I realize the fact that a great many *other* people like them the best. It is also easy for me to understand how trifling mistakes may get through, as I have made many of them in the few years I have lived in this large world.

He mentions a trifling oversight, having nothing to do with the plot, which went through in "A Tenderfoot's Stand" in the June issue. The author noticed it too late for correction, and it slipped by us all here. I wonder how many other readers caught the thing.

Here is an enthusiastic correspondent from Canada (Fred D., of Guelph) rallying to the defense of *Roy Burns*, who seems to have had the faculty of setting our clientage at loggerheads:

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for over eight years, and in all that time I have never come across a story I liked better than "Roy Burns's Handicap." "His Brother's Eclipse" is also splendid. But what's the use of saying more? They are all head and shoulders over any magazine that I've read.

J. H. H., of Germantown, Pennsylvania, who says he is the son of a Civil War veteran, wrote before we published "The Fighting Streak." I would be glad to have him tell me how he liked that story. An Oregon Reader, who neglected to sign his name and give the place from which he wrote, declares himself in favor of hard-luck stories, and mentions among recent ARGOSY favorites, "The Big Obstacle," "His Brother's Eclipse," and "Fencing With Villainy."

Mrs. L. T., of Selkirk, Kansas, is another fair-minded reader who realizes that tastes differ. She begins:

Have just finished reading the last ARGOSY Log-Book, and want to tell you how well we like THE ARGOSY away out here on the plains of western Kansas. It's *just splendid*. I well remember the first story I ever read in THE ARGOSY. It was over ten years ago. I chanced to pick up a number at a neighbor's, and read the complete story called "The Serpent Stone." Have forgotten the author, but I thought then and still think it one of the best stories I have ever read. Have been a constant reader ever since of the good old ARGOSY. Am rather partial to the serials and complete novels, like stories with just a dash of love as seasoning, but can't say that I like the *Hawkins* stories or such as "Insane Island." But, then, that is the charm of THE ARGOSY. It has stories to suit and please everybody.

Here is F. C. N., of Akron, Ohio, saying some very nice things of THE ARGOSY, but kicking about a recent improvement in its appearance, which adds considerably to the cost of getting out the magazine. I may say to him that several people in the past have objected to the couple of lines he pleads for, as being likely sometimes to give away the plot of the story.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for several years, and I thought maybe you would give me a little space in the Log-Book for my first letter. I get *The All-Story* and *The Cavalier* also, but I always read THE ARGOSY'S Log-Book first, then the short stories, and last, but not least by any means, the complete novels. The serials I do not read. Now, in reading THE ARGOSY, I always look for *Hawkins* first (after the Log-Book, of course), and next for *Mr. Scales*, and then just as the titles strike me. Now, I say do not change THE ARGOSY in any way, as it is as near perfection now as it is possible to make it. I prefer your old style of heading your stories with a couple of lines dealing with the subject to the new way. I would like to know what your other readers think of this through the Log-Book.

From among the Thousand Islands, Alexandria Bay, New York, C. H. B. writes enthusiastically with respect to all our authors save one. I wonder if he won't reverse his opinion of Mr. Twinells when he reads "On the Cannibals' Reserve List" in this issue.

I have never before read such entertaining and amusing stories as I have read in THE ARGOSY of the past year. "Midnight Between Towns," by Fritz Krog; "Four Magic Words," "His Brother's Eclipse," "Roy Burns's Handicap," "The Big Obstacle," "The Tail of the Oregonian Limited," etc., were just to my liking. The writers certainly know about that of which they write, and I hope THE ARGOSY will always bear in mind that the stories that pay are the big, clean, and instructive as well as amusing ones. I do not care for H. E. Twinells, but he is the only author on THE ARGOSY staff whose stories I do not read. Elbert Wiggins's "In Quest of the Pink Elephant" is a dandy. He must be quite a writer to turn out such a tensely dramatic story with the scene in Africa.

It is possibly a brother or sister to the foregoing, with almost the same initials (C. L. B.) and writing from the same place, who prefers tales of mystery and adventure, and adds to the foregoing list of favorites "In the Name of the King" and "T. Z. B."

Fernand D., under date of May 19, sends a very interesting and well expressed letter from Trinité, in far-off Martinique, where the terrible earthquake took place some years since.

I have just finished reading THE ARGOSY'S Log-Book in the April issue, and enjoyed the kicking of G. A. P. about deer tracks being found in blizzard's snow. I do not know anything about blizzards and deer tracks, but I know something about turtle eggs, as I am very fond of them, and they are often a part of my *menu;* and I remember having had good fun out of one of the complete stories in the March issue ("Spar-Mates"). There is a man (page 584) who *breaks* the shell of a turtle egg on the toe of his shoe. The point of it is, the shell of a turtle egg is not *hard*, and cannot be *broken*. Instead of being made of any calcerous material, that sort of shell is made of a soft substance very like parchment, and can be easily mistaken for a ping-pong ball out of shape. Turtle eggs cannot be hardened in boiling water, neither can their shells. When ready to gulp an egg of turtle (either raw or boiled) you must tear open the parchmentlike shell, and boot-heels would be of little use. A nice bite of your white teeth will do. I have been for several years a reader of THE ARGOSY, and find it very satisfactory. I am not overfond of hard-luck stories, being too tender-hearted to go through them without weeping my soul away. What I enjoy delightfully are adventure stories, detective work, out-of-door adventures, historical novels, and, above all, stories about boys having brains and using them to nerve their way to success. THE ARGOSY gives me all I want in that line, and I beg to remain its and yours. P. S.—Please excuse my mistakes in English grammar and spelling. I just learned some English by reading over and over the stories of THE ARGOSY, and am not familiar with your language.

From that Mecca of American sight-seers—Niagara Falls—C. A. B. suggests a story of Tibet, "that little known country where many travelers have entered and few have returned." We printed such a story several years ago. After also eulogizing as subjects stories about the river Amazon and the Spanish Main, C. A. B. heaps praise on a tale of altogether different character, as follows:

The short story, "A Shot in the Dark," in the April ARGOSY, was certainly the best short story I have read in a great many years. Everything in it was so natural and could easily have happened to any one who wandered about a dark house in the night. I would keep that writer in sight for something else. Thanking you for making so good a magazine as THE ARGOSY possible.

A correspondent, who claims as his motto "Long live THE ARGOSY," dates his letter Maple Falls, Washington, and says:

As you will see, I'm away up between the mountains, but like to read THE ARGOSY. Here in the wild and woolly we like stories of nerve and daring, as "Midnight Between Towns," "The Fighting Streak," etc. It also makes me feel young again to get at some of the old-time love-affairs. They're all good.

Here is a reader who has found an excellent way to bridge the gap between ARGOSIES. He is H. L. G., and writes from Sandwich, Illinois:

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY since January, 1898. I think it is the best magazine to be had, regardless of price. I think "Putting It Through" is a good story. *Miss Brown* made her own opportunity, and she made good. Between THE ARGOSY and the *Railroad Man's Magazine* I do not have to wait long.

By the way, I will suggest as H. L. G. complains that he cannot buy his magazines in the mountains while he is away in the summer, he send the money for those months direct to this office and have them forwarded to him from here during that period.

In reply to another Illinois reader, E. W., of Symerton, whose letter follows, I will say that he will find a corking detective story in "The Frame-Up," which begins next month.

Since the starting of the Log-Book section in THE ARGOSY I have been very interested in the different opinions of the readers, and therefore I feel like putting in my two cents. Well, to begin with, I want to congratulate you upon your good taste in supplying us with such good stories. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for over twelve years, and I must say that the last copy has been as interesting as the first. Mr. Terhune has been my favorite writer, because his stories have a certain vim and go, with just enough love to give a good flavor; not too much of it. I hate those sentimental love-stories where the hero seems to have no use for the practical side of life and is always gushing about his lady-love. "An Up-to-Date Shipwreck" was fine, and *Hawkins* can't be beat; but how about a few good detective stories? We haven't had any of them for some time.

M. G., of San Francisco, notes in the July Log-Book the several outbursts of protest over his dislike of "The Clown's Mate," and writes again to explain that his principal charge against it was the silliest dialogue he had ever read in THE ARGOSY. He is of the opinion that the story was written by a young boy whose literary experience was very limited. I may tell him that he is altogether mistaken in this, as the novelette was the work of a man who has written many tales for THE ARGOSY and other magazines, and whose other work M. G. must have admired, as he says in closing: "'The Clown's Mate' was published a long time ago, and the reason I remembered it so well is because it is the only one of the many hundreds of stories I have read in THE ARGOSY that ever gave me a pain."

From J. H. K., in Philadelphia, comes an admonition to pay heed to our critics only under pain of direful possibilities. In reply to his final suggestion, I have a dandy railroad story in reserve by the author of "The Tail of the Oregonian Limited," and Mr. Fuller will soon be represented by another in the *Railroad Man's Magazine*. Here is J. H. K.'s letter:

DEAR LOG-BOOK: Don't listen to the old fogies who kick on *Hawkins*. His is the best dope ever doped out. THE ARGOSY is all right as it is, and if you follow the instructions of your would-be critics the sheriff's sign will adorn your door. Would like to see in THE ARGOSY a good railroad story by Jared L. Fuller.

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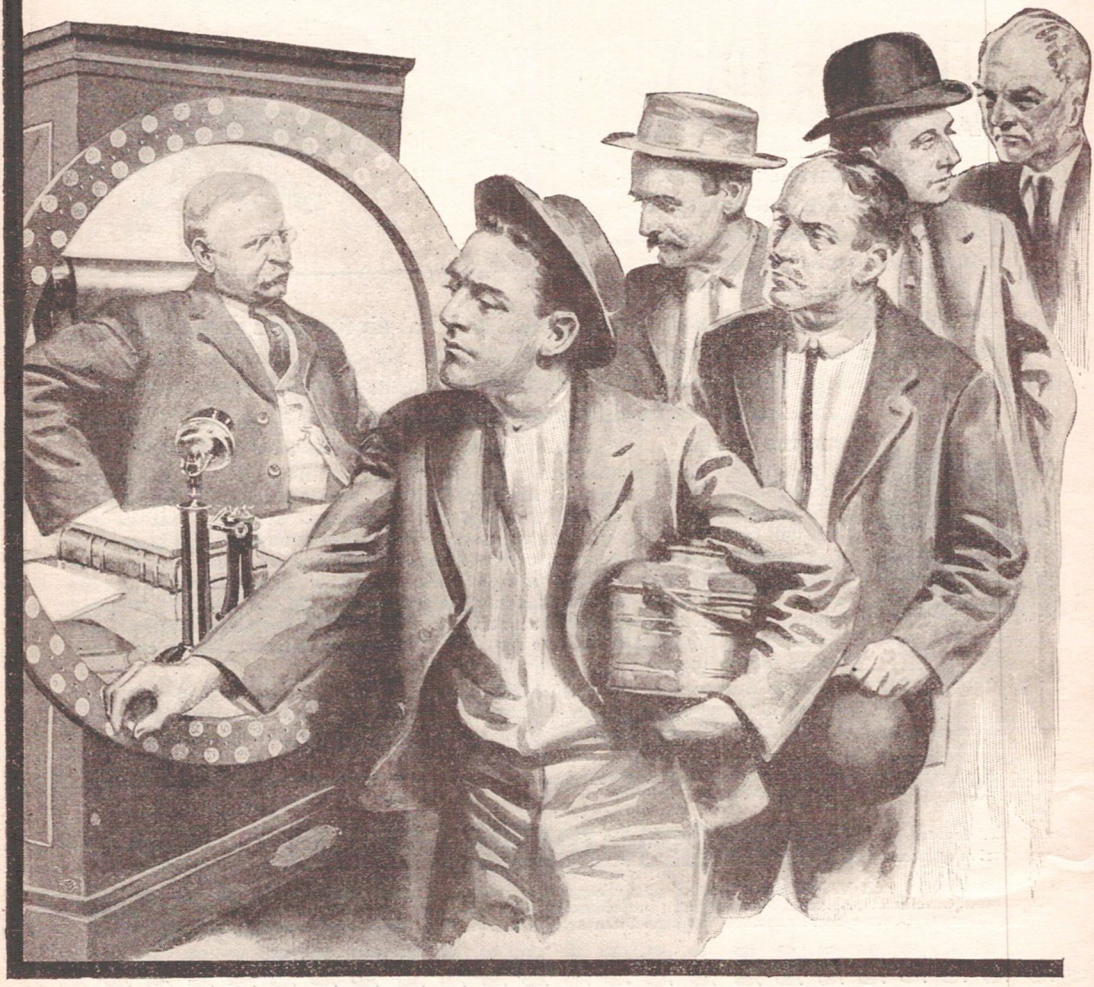
The first step is training—that leads to promotion and more and more money. Once a man acquires training and begins to go up, there is no such thing as calculating where he will stop. There are many students of the International Correspondence Schools who are now owners and directors of great enterprises, who were merely laborers before they received the help of the I. C. S.

How is it done? Read the next page!



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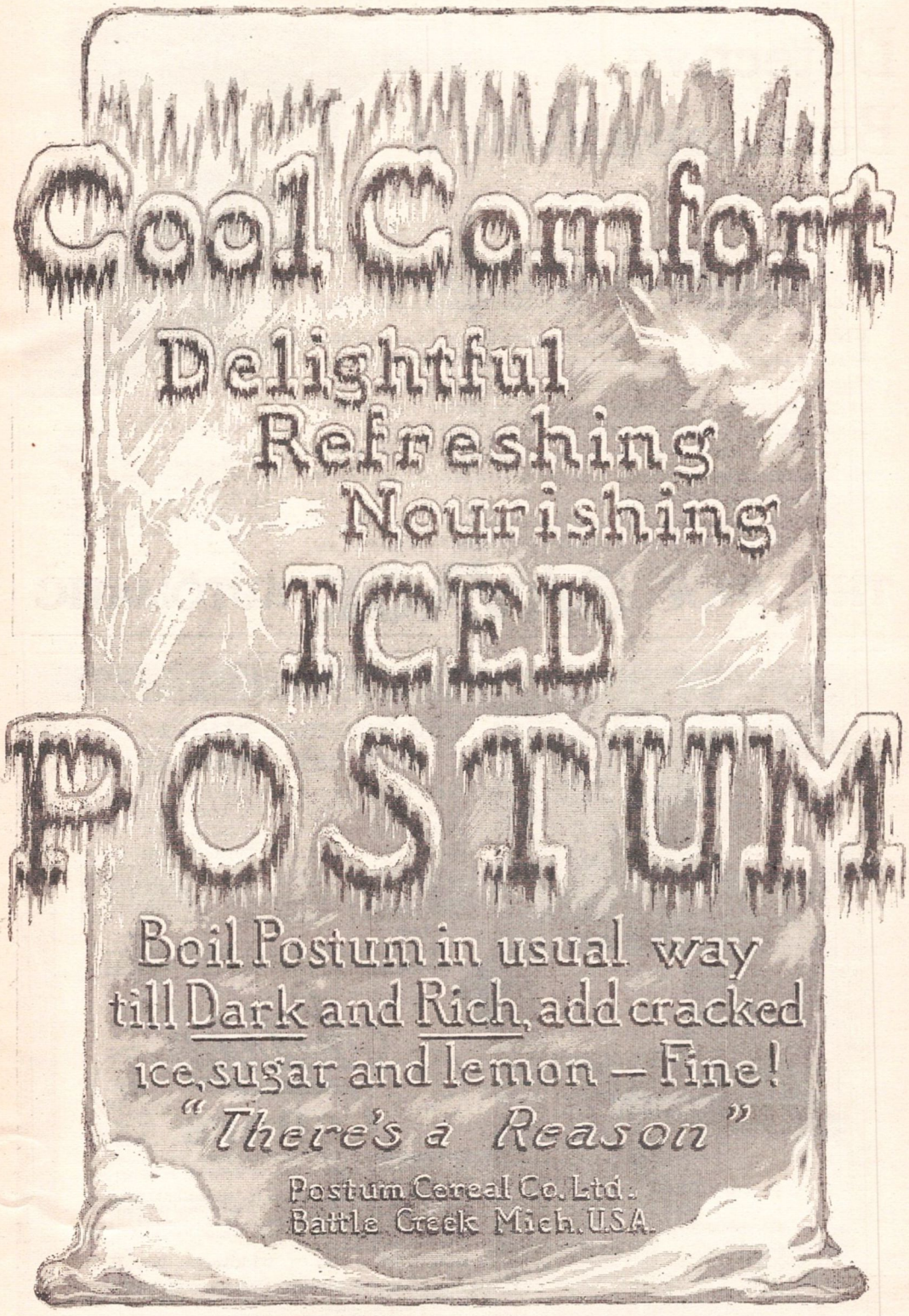
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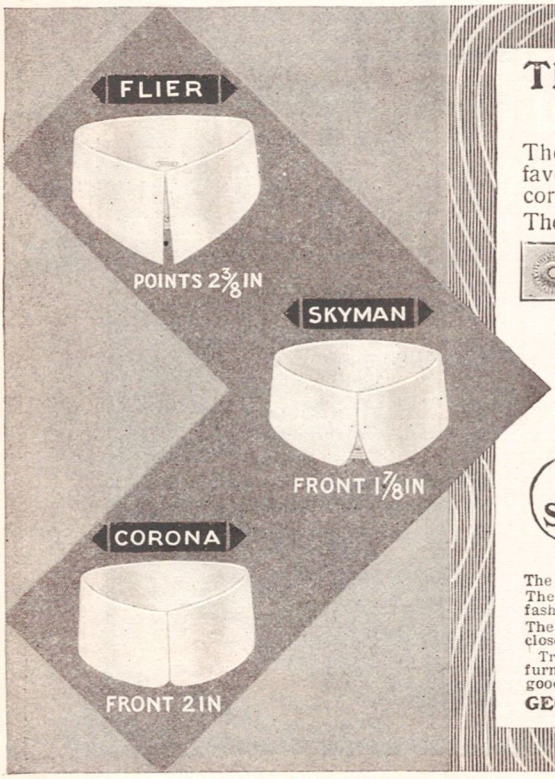

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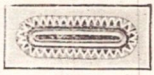

Front Back

the collars stay set and they're easier-to-button and *don't tear out.* Only in

1/4 Sizes — *Silver* BRAND Collars — 2 for 25¢

In Canada, 3 for 50c.

The FLIER appears high, but is cut low for real comfort.
The SKY-MAN really a low-cut BIPLANE in shape, but fashioned for Summer ease.
The CORONA fashioned from the famous HALLEY meets close in front and won't spread. It is the correct close-meeter.

Try the one that suits you best. Look them over at your furnisher's. Send in for "What's What," our guide for the good dresser, Summer or Winter.

GEO. P. IDE & CO., 505 River St., Troy, N. Y.

Hot Summer Days

Bring enough necessary housework without the fuss and heat of cooking.

One can avoid some hot work and come to table "fresh as a daisy" by serving

Post Toasties

with cream

for breakfast, lunch or supper.

The appetizing flavor and wholesome nourishment found in this ready-to-serve food makes hot days more comfortable for the whole family.

"The Memory Lingers"

Sold by grocers.

Postum Cereal Company, Limited,
Battle Creek, Mich., U. S. A.

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Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

Cox's
INSTANT POWDERED Gelatine

Dissolves Instantly

IN a fine restaurant you have often wondered how the chef makes such remarkable soups, sauces and gravies. Here is the secret—he knows how to use Cox's Gelatine. You or your maid can do as well in your own kitchen. Cox's Manual of Gelatine Cookery will tell you more of the chef's art than ten chefs could tell you.

This is not a book of fussy desserts. It shows 205 good practical things to do with Cox's Instant Powdered Gelatine. Sauces, savories, salads and other nourishing dishes as well as desserts.

Here is a seasonable suggestion—a new dessert not in the Manual:

RASPBERRY SPONGE

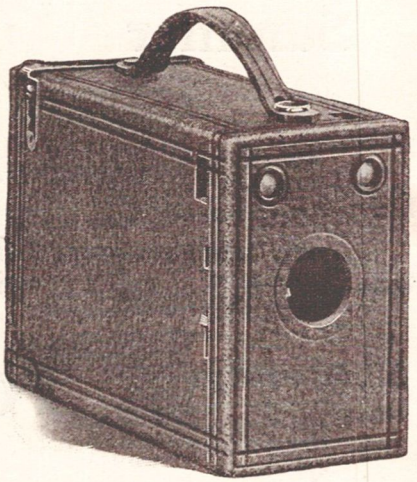
(5 to 6 persons) 1 oz. (2 heaping tablespoonfuls) Cox's Instant Powdered Gelatine. 6 tablespoonfuls of raspberry puree. Rind and juice 1 lemon. 3 ozs. (3 tablespoonfuls) sugar. Whites of 4 eggs. 1 pint (2 cups) water. Few drops of red coloring. A little chopped cocoanut. Rub enough raspberries through a sieve to make 6 tablespoonfuls of puree. Put Gelatine into a saucepan, add the grated lemon rind, sugar, and water, and dissolve over fire. Then strain into a basin and cool slightly. Add the lemon juice, red coloring, raspberry puree and whites of eggs beaten up, and beat all together until thick and frothy. Pour into a wet mold. Turn out when set and decorate with chopped cocoanut.

Write to-day for Free Copy of Cox's Manual.

COX GELATINE CO., Dept. K **100 Hudson Street, New York.**

U. S. Distributors for J. & G. Cox, Ltd., Edinburgh, Scotland

Price $1.50



The New No. O
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A substantial, reliable camera in every respect, making 1¾ x 2⅜ pictures.

It can be loaded in daylight easily and quickly with a Premo Film Pack.

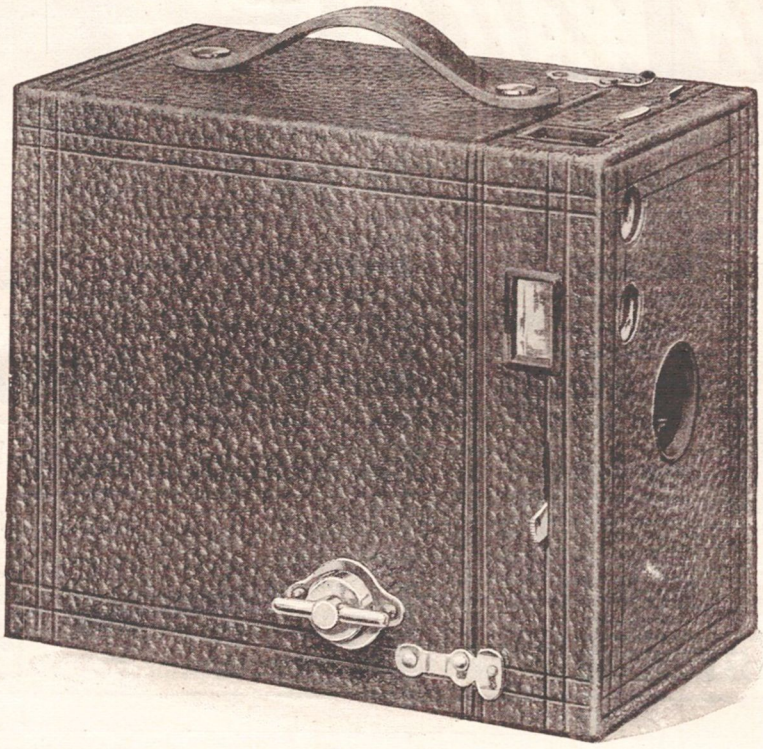
It has automatic shutter for time or snap shot exposures, meniscus lens and two finders—a practical, inexpensive, simple camera for making good pictures.

Same camera for 2¼ x 3¼ pictures, $2.00; 2½ x 4¼, $3.00; 3¼ x 4¼, $4.00; 4 x 5, $5.00.

The Premo catalogue describes fifty different styles and sizes of film and plate cameras, from $1.50 to $150, and the simple Premo Pack System. Free at the dealer's or mailed on request.

IMPORTANT—In writing, be sure to specify Premo Catalogue.

Rochester Optical Division
Eastman Kodak Co. Rochester, N. Y.



Take along a Brownie.

Make the happiness of to-day a pleasure for many to-morrows with a picture record of your summer outing.

The Brownie Cameras (they work like Kodaks) make such good pictures, are so convenient, so simple to operate and so inexpensive, that they put picture making within reach of everyone. They use daylight loading Kodak film cartridges and no dark-room is necessary for any part of the work. *You can make good pictures with a Brownie.*

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Catalogue of Kodaks and Brownies free at the dealers or by mail.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., *The Kodak City.*

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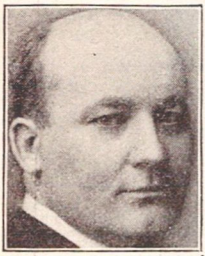

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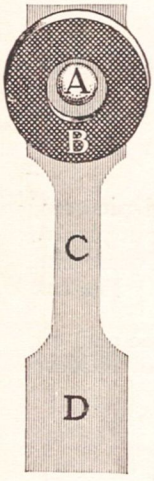
How to Forget a Corn



A Blue-jay plaster is applied in a moment. Then the pain of the corn stops instantly. Then the bit of red B & B wax gently loosens the corn, and in two days it comes out.

The plaster is snug and comfortable, and one simply forgets the corn. In 48 hours one is rid of it. No soreness, no pain, no inconvenience. Do you wonder that most people now use Blue-jay? Five million corns are removed by them every year. Please try them on yours.

See the Picture

A is the harmless red B & B wax which loosens the corn.
B is soft felt to protect the corn and keep the wax from spreading.
C is the comfortable narrow band which goes around the toe.
D is rubber adhesive. It fastens the plaster on.

Blue=jay Corn Plasters

At All Druggists 15c and 25c per Package

Sample Mailed Free. Also Blue-jay Bunion Plasters.

Bauer & Black, Chicago and New York, Makers of Surgical Dressings, etc.

(105)

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OLD and NEW

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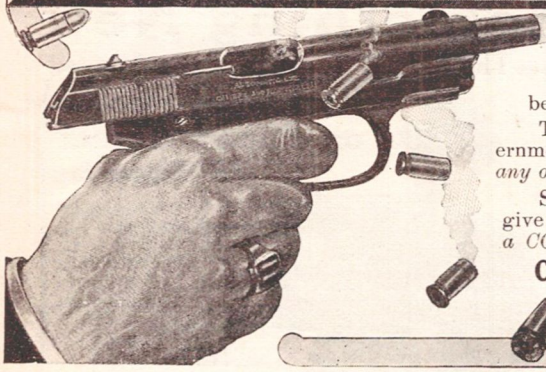
Safe, Sure and Always Ready

COLT AUTOMATIC PISTOL



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because rigid, official tests have proved it the best.

The COLT has been adopted by the U. S. Government "*in consequence of its marked superiority to any other known pistol.*"

Send for Catalog and Folder No. 15 which will give you positive evidence that *your choice should be a COLT.*

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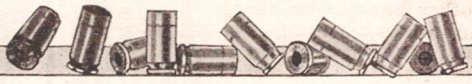

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$150 Per Month and Expenses are made by active men selling our popular line of clothing. No experience necessary. We are **America's Pioneer Tailors.** We operate the largest mills in United States and sell goods cheaper than any other house. Finest tailored suits, $7.50 up. At these prices you have no trouble in getting orders. **OUR PLAN**—We furnish you large, handsome sample outfit, cloth samples, lithograph fashion plates, tape measure, order blanks, advertising matter, all sent express prepaid. Don't buy a suit or overcoat anywhere, at any price until you see our liberal offer and the biggest and lowest priced tailoring line in the United States.

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Take it along with you or purchase it from any of our Sales Agents

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Use MENNEN'S BORATED TALCUM Toilet Powder

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and insist upon your barber using it also. It is antiseptic and will assist in preventing many of the *skin diseases* often contracted. Sold everywhere or mailed for 25c. Sample box for 4c. stamp.

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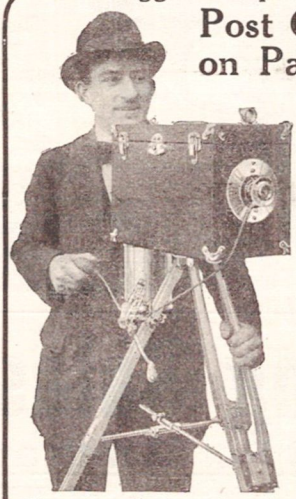
No Negatives



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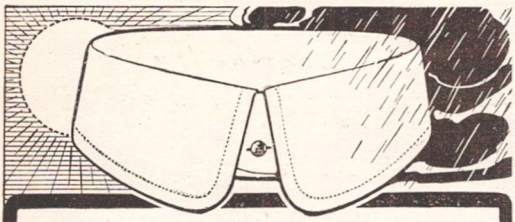

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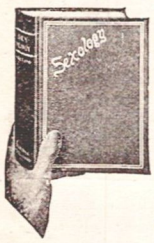

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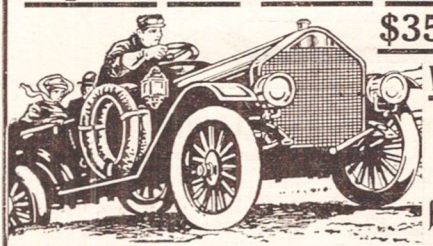

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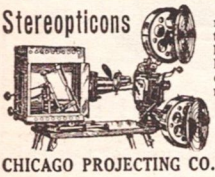

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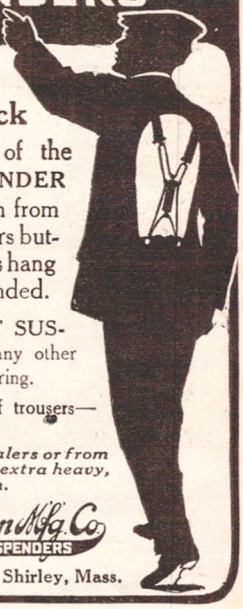

Note the Sliding Cord Back

It is the construction of the PRESIDENT SUSPENDER which removes all strain from the shoulders and trousers buttons, making the trousers hang exactly as the tailor intended.

SHIRLEY PRESIDENT SUSPENDERS will outwear any other make—that's worth considering.

Have a pair for each pair of trousers—it's a time and temper saver.

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IMPORTED from FRANCE

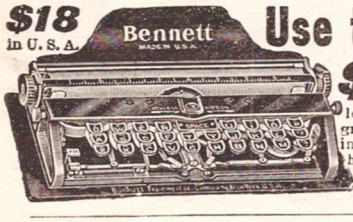
SEE THEM BEFORE PAYING!

These gems are chemical white sapphires—LOOK like **Diamonds.** Stand acid and fire diamond tests. So hard they easily scratch a file and **will cut glass.** Brilliancy guaranteed 25 years. All mounted in 14K **solid gold diamond mountings.** Will send you any style ring, pin or stud for examination—all charges prepaid—**no money in advance.**

Write today for Free illustrated booklet, special prices and ring measure.

WHITE VALLEY GEM CO., H 702 Saks Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

$18 in U. S. A.



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No need to stop the motor, even though you do stop the machine. The Thor Free Engine Multiple Disc Clutch running in oil is now equipped on all Thor Chain Drive models at no extra charge. It is perfect in action and principle of construction. It enables you to bring your machine to a standstill while the motor runs smoothly and silently on.

Thor Motorcycles — Champions of all Endurance Contests

Won every important endurance contest last season as well as this season. Endurance is the real test of a motorcycle—because you do want absolute dependability. For 1911 we submit five very handsome models—Four (4) horse power single cylinder and one (1) seven horse power double cylinder, all described in our big booklet sent anywhere on request. "A Guide to Motorcycles."

Agents—there are a few more openings in good territory; this is a big business opportunity. Act quickly if you want to get in on the ground floor.

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Free Engine Motocycle

gives you abundant speed and power on all kinds of roads and hills. Has the exclusive INDIAN Clutch—simple, efficient, starts anywhere, will not burn out. A twist of the wrist and a touch of the clutch gives any speed, with absolute control.

Send for our new 1911 Illustrated Catalog containing complete descriptions of all models, chain and belt drive.

THE HENDEE MANUFACTURING CO.
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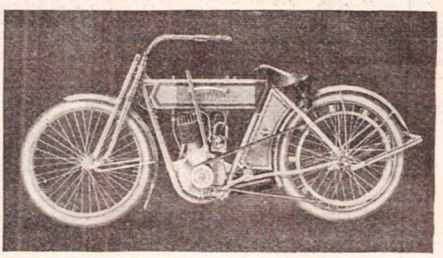


TEN MILES FOR A CENT

THE owner of a Harley-Davidson motorcycle is independent of street car, or train service. He can go when and where he wishes and at any speed he desires.

The HARLEY-DAVIDSON

is the logical means of travel for the business man, the tourist, the sportsman and men in every walk of life, because:

FIRST—IT IS ECONOMICAL
The Harley-Davidson holds the world's record for economy.

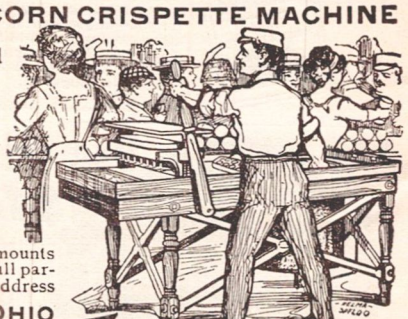
SECOND—IT IS RELIABLE
The Harley-Davidson won the only Diamond medal and 1000+5 score for superexcellent performance ever awarded in an endurance contest in motorcycle history.

THIRD—IT IS DURABLE
The first machines we made nine YEARS AGO ARE STILL RUNNING AND GIVING PERFECT SATISFACTION, although they have run thousands and thousands of miles. Nearly one-third of all the motorcycles sold in America are Harley-Davidsons. Send for descriptive booklets.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
787 L Street - - - - Milwaukee, Wis.

$1500.00 MADE IN ONE MONTH WITH A 'LONG' POPCORN CRISPETTE MACHINE

You might just as well make as much



J. A. M., Maryland, **took in $250.00 in one day.** Every nickel brought almost 4 cents profit. Best season just at hand. You can make lots of money this Summer and Fall at Fairs, Parks, Summer Resorts, Amusement Halls, Circuses, etc. Or, stay in your own town—rent a small store—a window—where the people will pass—set up your machine—sell Crispettes—make big money. **Crispettes are fine**—different in shape, taste and quality. Everybody—young and old—craves them. Sell for 5c a package—popular price—easy to get money. Think of fortunes made in 5c propositions—5c and 10c stores—moving pictures—street cars—Easy money to spend—mounts into the dollars—then figure what you can do. **Write me today.** Get full particulars—reports from others. Act upon the prompting you have—**now**—address

W. Z. LONG, 346 HIGH ST., SPRINGFIELD, OHIO

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THE BLACK SHELLS

Say that to your dealer, and you will be started on the way to better shooting than you have ever had. There are several important reasons why the new BLACK SHELLS are better.

Our NON-MERCURIC PRIMER is unvarying, sure, and quick. The FLASH PASSAGE (the hole in base of shell through which the fire from primer passes into the charge) is 100% larger than ordinary. That means there's not a chance of a fraction of a second's delay. Every shooter will appreciate the value of a shell that *never* hangs fire for even a tenth part of a second.

THE BLACK SHELLS are absolutely waterproof. No swelling and sticking in the chamber because of fog, rain, or even a ducking.

There are *three* classes of BLACK SHELLS, all with the standard loads:

ROMAX, a black powder shell with 5/16 inch base.

Send for book about shells. If you enclose 10c we will send a beautiful, colored poster, 20 x 30 inches, called "October Days." Sure to please every shooter.

CLIMAX, the most popular smokeless (both dense and bulk) shell made. Has one-half inch base.

AJAX is the highest grade smokeless powder (both dense and bulk) shell made. It has a long one inch brass base.

U.S. CARTRIDGE CO

Dept. A **LOWELL, MASS., U. S. A.**

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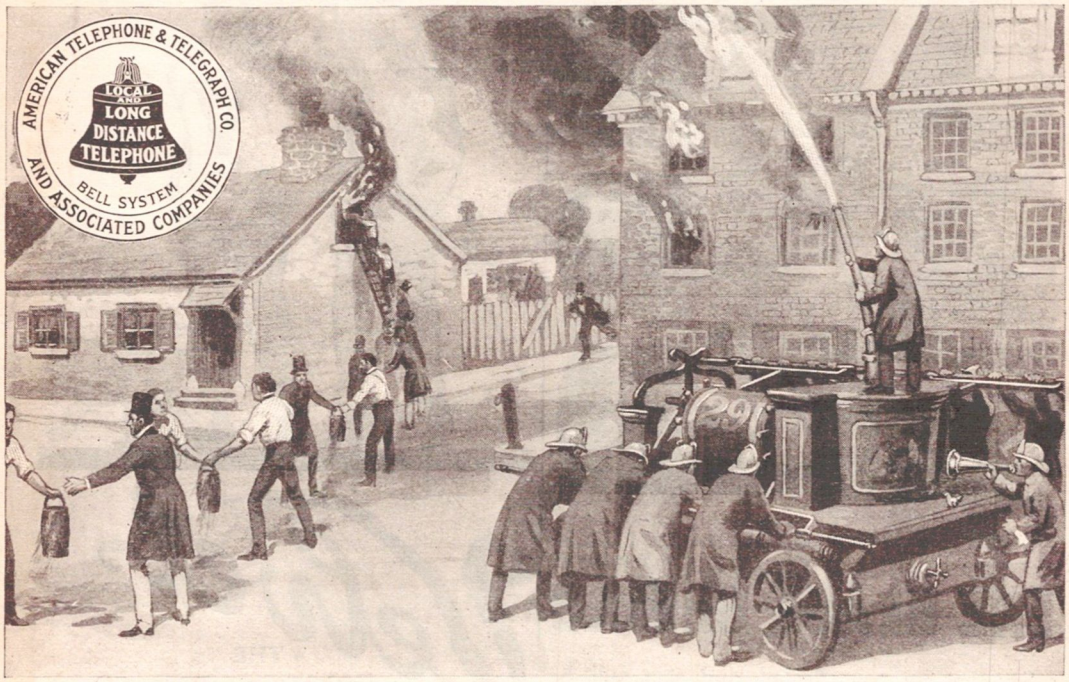
THE SMOOTHEST TOBACCO

College men—men everywhere smoke Velvet. It has a flavor that is irresistible. That's why it's popular. Velvet is just the choicest leaves of Burley tobacco — cured right — mellowed right and made right. It smokes cool and pleasant and it never burns the tongue. Good? Why mere words can't describe its taste—you've simply *got* to try it. You'll say you never smoked a tobacco as good. One trial will more than prove a treat. Just get a can to-day—ask your dealer for Velvet. Don't take a substitute. Insist on the real thing.

Spaulding & Merrick
Chicago, Ill.

In a neat metal case
10 cents
At your dealer's, or if he is sold out send us the 10 cents. We'll send you a can to any address in the U.S.A.



Fire Fighting and Telephoning

Both Need Team Work, Modern Tools and an Ever Ready Plant, Everywhere

Twenty men with twenty buckets can put out a small fire if each man works by himself.

If twenty men form a line and pass the buckets from hand to hand, they can put out a larger fire. But the same twenty men on the brakes of a "hand tub" can force a continuous stream of water through a pipe so fast that the bucket brigade seems futile by comparison.

The modern firefighter has gone away beyond the "hand tub." Mechanics build a steam fire engine, miners dig coal to feed it, workmen build reservoirs and lay pipes so that each nozzleman and engineer is worth a score of the old-fashioned firefighters.

The big tasks of today require not only team work but also modern tools and a vast system of supply and distribution.

The Bell telephone system is an example of co-operation between 75,000 stockholders, 120,000 employees and six million subscribers.

But to team work is added an up-to-date plant. Years of time and hundreds of millions of money have been put into the tools of the trade; into the building of a nation-wide network of lines; into the training of men and the working out of methods. The result is the Bell system of today—a union of men, money and machinery, to provide universal telephone service for ninety million people.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY
AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy ***One System*** ***Universal Service***

DURING 1910, 2,623,412 CHICLETS WERE SOLD EACH DAY

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REALLY DELIGHTFUL

The Dainty Mint Covered Candy Coated Chewing Gum

Strong in flavor, but not offensive.
A delicate morsel, refreshing the mouth and throat and allaying after-dinner or after-smoking distress. The refinement of chewing gum for people of refinement.
It's the peppermint—the *true* mint.

For Sale at all the Better Sort of Stores
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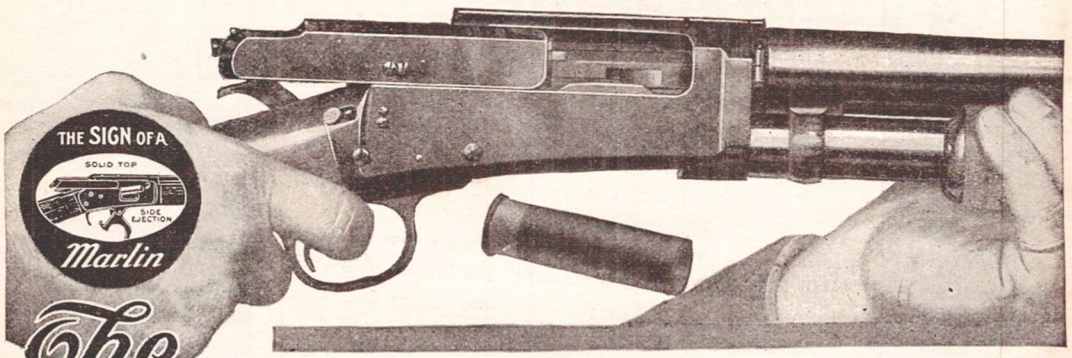

The Marlin 12 or 16 GAUGE Repeating Shotgun

Made famous by its dependability. The solid top and side ejection keep gases and powder away from your eyes; help quick, effective repeat shots. Rain, sleet, snow and foreign matter can't get into the action.

The mechanism is strong, simple, wear-resisting. The double extractors pull any shell instantly; two special safety devices prevent accidental discharge while action is unlocked, and an automatic recoil block makes hangfires harmless.

All Marlins are strongly made, finely balanced, accurate, hard hitting guns, and are the quickest and easiest to take down and clean. Illustration shows Model 24 grade "A" 12 gauge; it has all the features that make for a perfect gun

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In Every Jar

Improves Bad Complexions
Preserves Good Complexions

The daily use of Milkweed Cream will keep freckles away, relieve the smart and sting of sunburn and give additional attractiveness to a healthy summer tan. The first requisite of beauty is a healthy skin. Then all the more need to give your complexion the attention it deserves. For a decade

MILKWEED CREAM

has been recognized as the best face cream and skin tonic that skill and science can produce.

Milkweed Cream is a smooth emollient, possessing decided and distinct therapeutic properties. Therefore, excessive rubbing and kneading are unnecessary. Just apply a little, night and morning, with the finger tips, rubbing it gently until it is absorbed by the skin. In a short time blemishes yield to such treatment and the skin becomes clear and healthy, the result—a fresh and brilliant complexion.

To prove to you the advisability of always having Milkweed Cream on your dressing-table, we shall be glad to send a sample free, if you write us.

Price, 50c. Large Size, $1.00.

F. F. INGRAM CO., 44 Tenth St., Detroit, Mich.

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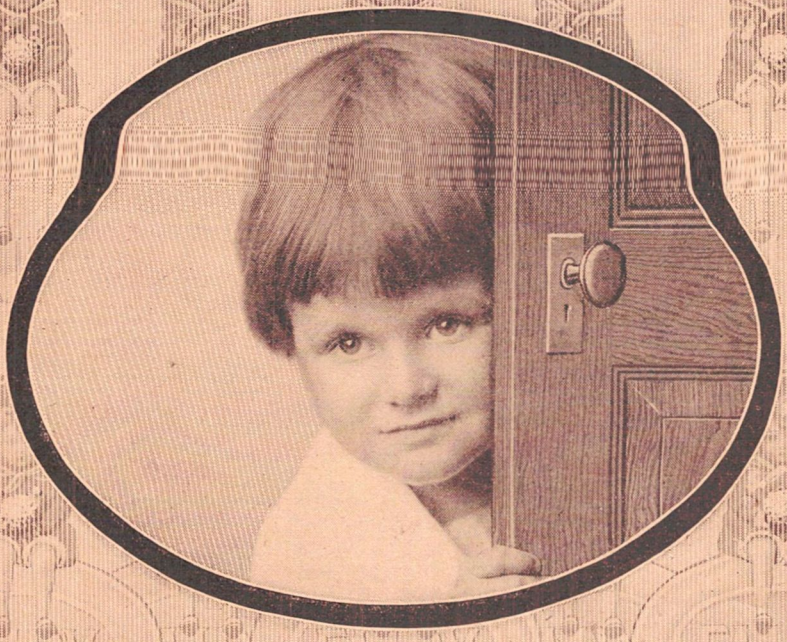

Get Acquainted with Fairy Soap

If you are not using Fairy Soap today it is only because you have never tried it. To try Fairy Soap is to like it, for there is no other soap so pure, so white, so handy in shape, so satisfactory in every way for the toilet and bath. You'll favor yourself as well as us by giving Fairy the fairness of a trial.

Price but 5c for this handy, floating, oval cake of saponified purity.

THE N. K. FAIRBANK COMPANY
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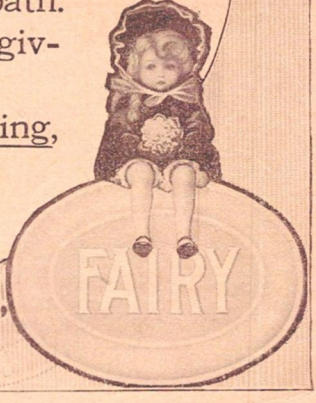
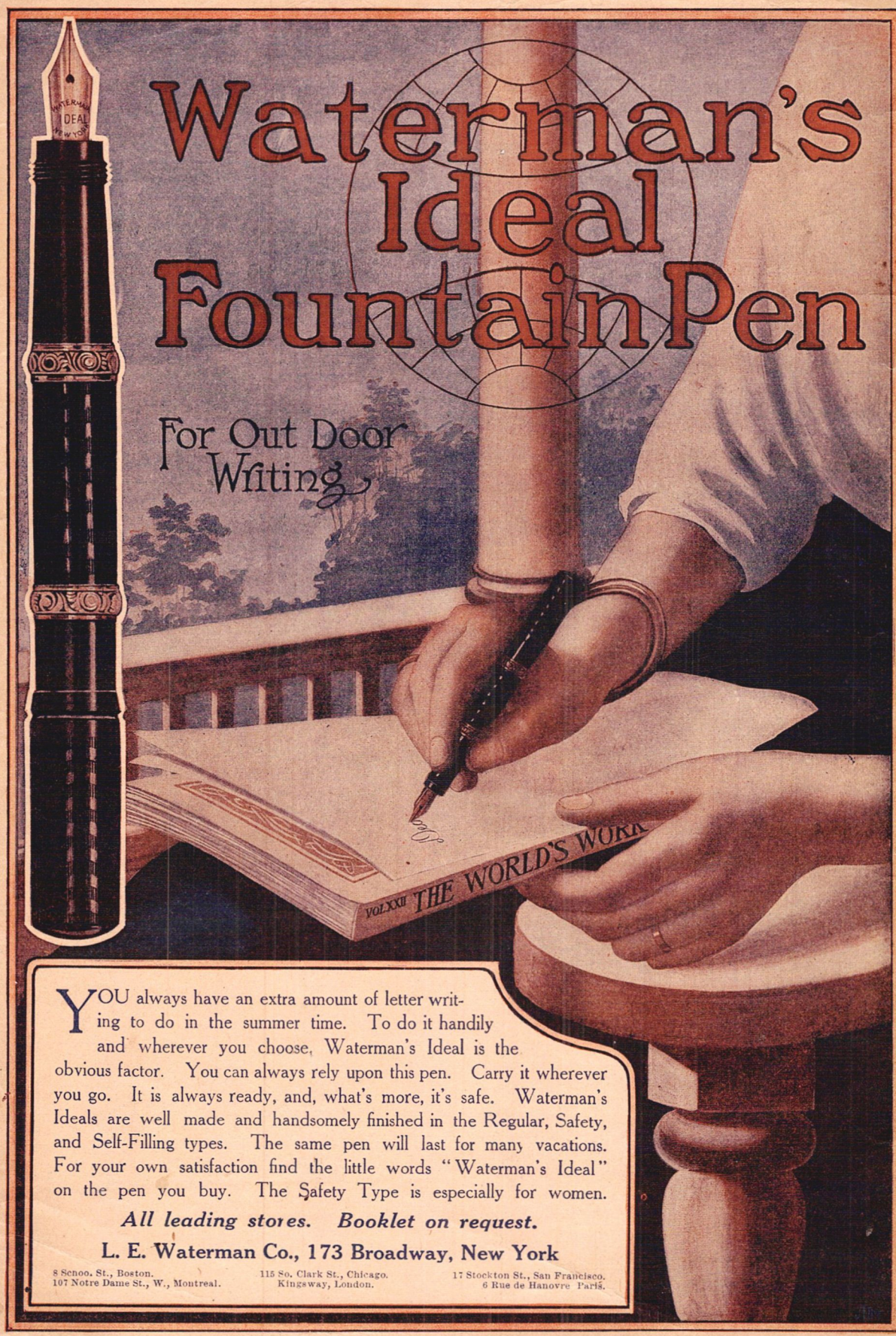


"Have You a little 'Fairy' in Your Home?"



YOU always have an extra amount of letter writing to do in the summer time. To do it handily and wherever you choose, Waterman's Ideal is the obvious factor. You can always rely upon this pen. Carry it wherever you go. It is always ready, and, what's more, it's safe. Waterman's Ideals are well made and handsomely finished in the Regular, Safety, and Self-Filling types. The same pen will last for many vacations. For your own satisfaction find the little words "Waterman's Ideal" on the pen you buy. The Safety Type is especially for women.

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