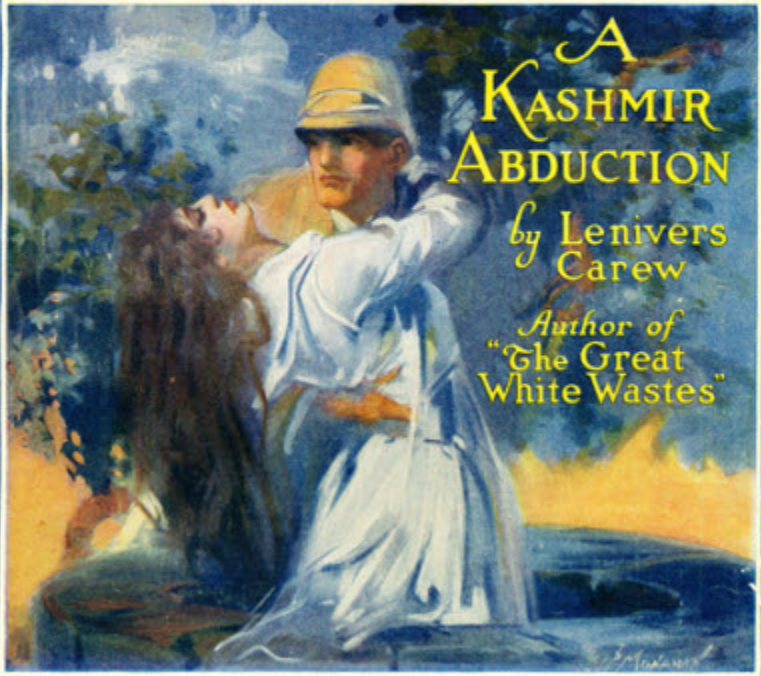
THE ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



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THE ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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The Ninety-Second Volume of The Argosy

begins with next week's number, a rattling good number with no signs of venerable age about it except the Roman numerals indicating the piling up of the bound books made from the separate issues of the magazine from its start in 1882. The dash, sprightliness, and vigor exemplified in THE ARGOSY fiction reflect the spirit of youth. *Read about some of the attractions for February 23 in the Log-Book on page 765.*

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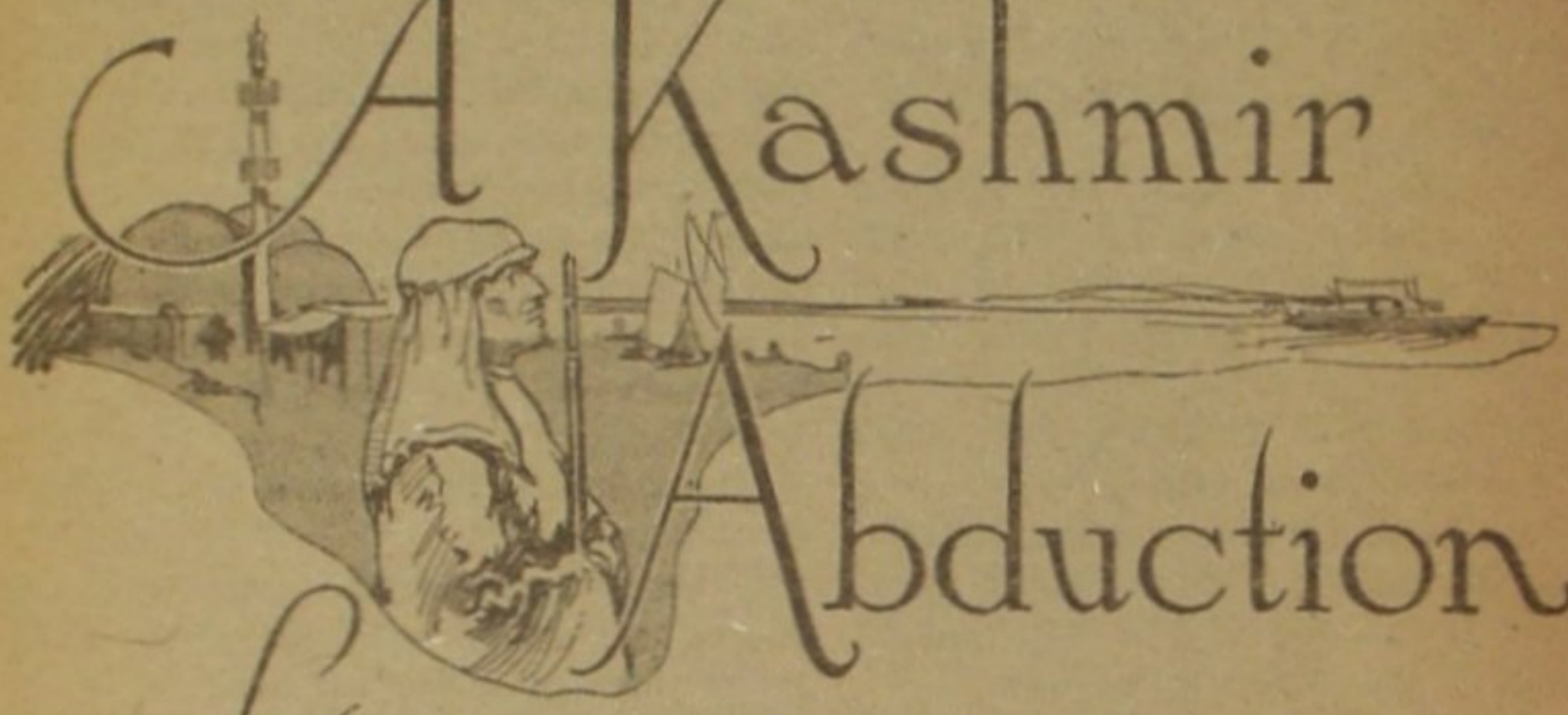
THE ARGOSY

Vol. XCI SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1918 No. 4

A Kashmir Abduction



by Lenivers Carew

Author of "The Great White Wastes," "The Keys to Freedom," etc.

CHAPTER I.

Who has not heard of the Vale of Kashmir,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave?
—Tom Moore's "Lalla Rookh."

"THERE, the seasons succeed one another, not with violent changes of wind and weather, but with endless successions of the most enchanting phases of beauty," breathed Rupert Atherall, his eyes dreamily penetrating the ceiling of the Vidals' drawing-room to some cloudland beyond the ken of his hearers. "The earth is forever spread with an Oriental carpet of the flowers of paradise, the air — soft with cool and fragrant zephyrs—is made melodious by birds and murmuring waters; the smiling skies, modestly veiled with mists of amethyst and opal, are kissed by the titan mountains until they blush perpetually. It is the sublimation of earth's loveliness, without—"

"How is the social life?" inquired Mrs. Vidal, who had begun to fidget about in her chair.

Rupert Atherall winced perceptibly, and his eyes came down abruptly from the aperture which they had drilled through the ceiling.

"Social life!" he exclaimed painfully. "Ah!—well—I met some highly intellectual persons in Kashmir; persons of distinctly esthetic perceptions; artists and literary folk—"

"Usually rather impossible socially, aren't they?" queried Mrs. Vidal.

"I—I beg your pardon!" gasped Rupert.

"Mother—Oh! really now, isn't that rather rude to Cousin Rupert?" protested Althea Vidal.

"I guess Rupert knows by this time that we're plain American people and we talk plain United States," said James H. Vidal, Althea's millionaire father. "Your talk is

good enough for a book, Rupert, but if you're boosting this Kashmir place as a pleasure resort, you've got to show *me* that it can beat Palm Beach and Hot Springs. I like flowers and sunsets, an' all that, in the proper place, but I've got to know something about hotel accommodations and food and recreations. How's the bathing?"

"Have they got any American bars there? Can they make cocktails and gin rickeys?" broke in Stuart Vidal, the twenty-four-year-old heir-apparent of the house of Vidal.

Rupert Atherall darted furtive glances from one inquisitor to another, plainly suffering from shock.

"It's really too bad!" sympathized Althea. "Cousin Rupert will think us all hopelessly *matériel!*"

"I suppose that's French for material, ain't it?" blustered her father. "Well then, why not speak United States? Then there'd be a chance of getting understood."

"Don't be coarse and common, James!" warned his wife. "Althea should know how to speak, having been to Bryn Mawr."

"Is this just a family squabble?" demanded young Stuart. "I thought Rupert was going to tell us about that place, so we could see if we wanted to go there. Ain't I right? Shoot us some more dope, Rupert, and I'll keep the crowd quiet. We've got the scenery and weather stuff all fixed, so let us in on the important details. How's motoring down there?"

Rupert was still trying to control his delicate nerves, but he brightened a little at the last question.

"H-m—motoring—Ah! Yes!" he said slowly. "The British residents, you know, have introduced motoring to quite an extent. It's rather popular, I believe—which is a bit odd, when you reflect that bullock-carts and litters were the chief means of transportation a short time ago. Yes, yes; you can travel now from the railroad at Rawal Pindi all the way to Srinagar by motor."

"Why, Rupert, it sounds as though the place were frightfully remote!" cried Mrs. Vidal; "like Siberia or Patagonia, or something like that."

"That wouldn't bother me, so long as the hotels and the amusement places were all O. K. when I got there," said Mr. Vidal. "Rupert says that Kashmir is too far off to pull the regular tourist crowd, and it's too expensive to get there for most people. Well, that's all right, ain't it? The expense don't bother me, and I don't mind traveling if the accommodations are first-class. I'd be mighty glad to get away from the regular track of all those opera-glass tourists that travel second-class and eat basket lunches all over the place."

"Rupert is so poetic, so temperamental," Mrs. Vidal said gravely, "that I almost fear he magnifies the importance of the natural beauties at the expense of practical considerations. I adore scenery—as you know, Rupert—but I should hardly be contented without a really good hotel—with a French *cuisine*, and with hair-dressers and manicures—all that sort of thing, you know."

Rupert looked a little more ill and a little more hopeless.

"How about the girls?" demanded young Stuart. "Do they match the scenery? All perfect little queens, I suppose."

"The native idea of beauty scarcely conforms to Occidental standards," Rupert answered stiffly, "but there is a considerable European population, you know, and I may say that I have seen some very prepossessing young women at the garden-parties and among the house-boat colonies of the lakes and rivers."

"Then they have garden-parties—and house-boats!" Mrs. Vidal exclaimed, suddenly alert. "Do they—that is, does one meet the right sort of people at such functions? Or is the society—well, ah, rather mixed?"

"It is a society that the average person would find it rather difficult to get into," said Rupert; then added, with a certain hauteur: "I was entertained at all the best houses, you know, and I met some exceptionally charming people. The Earl and the Countess of Cromack were forever entertaining me on their house-boat—they quite spoiled me! Then, I had many an agreeable morning on the golf links with Sir Douglas Holmwood. We had the jolliest little parties, going out to see the polo

matches, and the spectators furnished quite a display of beauty and distinction."

Mrs. Vidal was closely attentive, and a little excited.

"How fortunate that you had the entrée to the best circles!" she said gravely. "Of course, we live rather simply, Rupert; our tastes are quiet and modest; but I *should* adore the natural beauties of the place. I fairly see those mountains and valleys now, after listening to your inspired descriptions. Althea and Stuart would enjoy the experience, too. I fear that we should rather shrink from the pretentious social life, however. Do you know if the Earl and Countess of Cromack are still staying there?"

"I dare say they are," drawled Rupert. "In fact, it wasn't so long ago that I had a letter from the dear countess, urging me to come back and visit them again."

"And that Sir Douglas—the man who played golf," Mrs. Vidal went on casually. "I suppose there was a Lady Douglas—whatever the name was?"

"Sir Douglas Holmwood," answered Rupert. "No, there was no Lady Holmwood; the dear chap—Oh! a very good fellow!—was a dashing bachelor; a splendid sportsman, too, in every way."

"We should be wary of dashing, titled bachelors," Mrs. Vidal said archly; "our Althea is at such an impressionable age, you know. But then, there's little to worry about on that score; as mere American tourists we should hardly come in contact with the society people."

"Especially if you were making merely a short visit," Rupert agreed discouragingly. "Naturally I should give you letters to my friends there, but society people, you know, are inclined to treat such long-range introductions rather perfunctorily."

Mrs. Vidal nodded, and sighed gently.

"You adore the place so ardently, Rupert," she said presently, "that I suppose you'll be going back there before very long. How delightful it would be if we could all travel together!"

Rupert Atherall allowed his shoulders to droop dejectedly.

"My journey to India was an uncommon luxury for me," he said. "We poor beggars without incomes do such things about once in a lifetime, you know. It makes me absolutely wretched when I think I may never go to Kashmir again."

"Wouldn't it be splendid if Rupert could go along with us, James?" Mrs. Vidal said suggestively to her husband.

Mr. Vidal did not jump at the bait.

"Oh! it is all settled that we're to go?" he asked dryly.

"I was merely considering such a possibility," his wife explained diplomatically. "Most of our travel, lately, has been so disappointing, and so commonplace. It would be a wonderful experience to go to India, and to stop for a while at this enchanted Vale of Kashmir. Splendid for the children, too; extensive travel is so broadening."

"But it has its dangers, too," observed Rupert, with a smile. "You might lose Cousin Althea, in spite of all your motherly care. You may remember, the Crittendens—of Philadelphia, you know—they took in Kashmir during their world tour, and it was there that the lovely Miss Crittenden met Viscount Ferndell. So they lost their daughter, and she's in the British peerage now."

"As a rule, I'm opposed to these international marriages," Mrs. Vidal said gravely, "but I'm quite capable of looking out for Althea. I tell you, Rupert, your account of the attractions of that wonderful place has set me on fire to see it. I wish you were going there again, you would be such a capital guide for us."

"It's rather out of the question for me, I fear," replied Rupert. "My trip there was an extravagance; another one would be literally a financial impossibility. I haven't sold a picture since I returned, and I have written almost nothing for the magazines. That's the way with us poor wretches who live the vagabond artistic life; affluence and extravagance one day, and the next day—nothing!"

Mrs. Vidal gave her husband a significant look, but if he got it he failed to acknowledge it by word or sign. The lady, however, was not so easily thwarted.

"If we were traveling in such a strange land, we should certainly require the services of a professional courier," she said.

"Now, how infinitely better and pleasanter it would be to have Rupert pilot our little expedition—and, quite fairly, at our expense."

Rupert smiled, but deprecated the idea of such generosity with a shake of the head.

"Why, you're almost rude to Rupert, Hattie!" Mr. Vidal protested, with the suspicion of a gleam in his eye. "You forget that Rupert's pride and dignity have to be considered. No! we couldn't insult him by offering him pay, like that, for serving us as sort of a 'man from Cook's,' now, could we?"

"Oh! I assure you I understand Cousin Harriet's idea perfectly," he said. "I'm sure I know this family too well, to take offense at a proposal made with the most kindly intent."

"What I want to know," broke in Stuart Vidal, "is whether mother has settled on this trip in earnest, without consulting the rest of the family. If I have to go along with the crowd, I'd jolly well like to know if there's anything in this Kashmir dump except sunsets and wildflowers and garden-parties."

"It is a paradise for sportsmen," Rupert said rather coldly. "Some of the Englishmen have corking good stables of polo ponies, and you can see some very snappy polo played there."

"I've no doubt you would learn the game directly, Stuart," Mrs. Vidal assured her son.

"No, thanks!" the young man responded with a wry face. "I've seen men get some nasty tumbles in that game. I guess motoring is about as dangerous a sport as I care to go in for."

His sister glared at him contemptuously.

"Always take good care of yourself, Stuart dear," she sneered. "Perhaps you can play golf in Kashmir; that's quite safe, so long as you mind when any one shouts 'Fore.'"

"Rupert has practically admitted that he would not be offended if we offered to take him as our guest," persisted Mrs. Vidal, looking at her husband with a defiant and challenging air.

"Oh! has he?" was the somewhat daring response.

"My feeling is, that it would be too generous an arrangement," Rupert said hastily. "I—I should certainly hesitate to accept it. I fear that the benefit would be too heavily in my favor, you know."

"Your guidance would be invaluable to us!" declared Mrs. Vidal.

"Well, what's the use of arguing about it?" demanded her husband. "It seems that Hattie has decided that we're going, so that's settled, ain't it?"

"You'll never regret it, I'm sure," said Rupert. "Really, I quite envy you the delights of the trip."

"Oh! you're coming along too!" Mr. Vidal declared bluntly. "Hattie has hired you, hasn't she?"

CHAPTER II.

But there was one, among the chosen maids,
Who blush'd behind the gallery's silken shades.
—"Lalla Rookh."

THE voyage from New York to Queenstown was uneventful and rather irksome. Cousin Rupert was distressingly seasick, and the immediate members of the Vidal family were only slightly less so; therefore it took even more than the German submarine menace to stir anything like interest among the party.

On the P. and O. steamer to Bombay, however, it was different; there was a larger passenger list, and a mild sort of gaiety prevailed on board, in defiance of the German and Austrian submarines that infested the Mediterranean.

"A peach! A regular little queen!" exclaimed Stuart Vidal gleefully, as he met Rupert Atherall on deck, the first day out. "Have you seen her?"

Rupert was still pale and hollow-eyed, and he shook his head, making no attempt to conceal his indifference.

"A peach!" reiterated Stuart, forcing the other to listen. "She's a bit shy; she plays the ingénue business up pretty strong; but—oh, boy! I got to talking to her old man this morning. He's a missionary, or some kind of a devil chaser. Wears a black frock coat, y' know, with a shiny white shirt and a stringy little black tie. I suppose he'll wear the same costume

when he gets right into the tropics. Good deal of a bore—but he introduced me to his daughter, so it's all right."

"English or American?" Rupert inquired idly.

"Straight United States!" Stuart announced proudly. "They came from somewhere in Pennsylvania. The old boy asked me first off if I was a Christian and I asked him if he thought I looked like a Jew. He said he didn't mean it that way, but he wanted to know if I'd ever been saved. I told him that I got beyond my depth at Long Beach one time, and that a life-guard saved me. He looked kind o' hurt at that, but he said he was a life-guard, saving men from the waters of oblivion—or something like that, y' know.

"I was trying to shake the old bore about that time, but along comes the peaches-and-cream daughter, so I slipped the old boy a twenty-dollar-note for the foreign missions and told him I was crazy about such things. That warmed him up a bit, and I got the glad hand and an introduction to the little queen. She didn't have much to say, but—she's the easiest thing to look at you ever saw. I'm going to be making a hobby of foreign missions and all that sort of thing, especially on moonlight nights."

Rupert, the temperamental idler, took little pains to conceal his contempt for young Vidal's taste in all things, and the impassioned description of the missionary's daughter moved him to nothing more than a hearty yawn. His interest was awakened, however, when the young girl was presented to the entire Vidal party a little later in the day.

A majority of the ship's passengers were on deck, absorbed in the pastime of watching for submarines, but with the comfortable reassurance afforded by a French patrol boat about two miles astern.

Stuart Vidal, glowing with enthusiasm, conducted the young woman to his mother's steamer-chair; he had made a discovery and he was eager to display her, with a certain feeling of triumphant possession.

"Here's my mother," he announced to the rather diffident girl, and then, turning to the imperious Mrs. Vidal: "Mother, shake hands with Miss Druce—Miss Hope Druce. Her father is the Rev. Mr. Druce, and they're going to this Kashmir place, where we're going—to convert the heathen."

Mrs. Vidal graciously extended her hand to the girl, but scowled her shocked disapproval at her son.

"I beg you to overlook my son's boorish manners, Miss Druce," she said. "I can't imagine where he picked up such forms of speech, unless he has associated too much with our chauffeur or the coachman."

The senior Vidal was regarding the young girl with evident approval, and he did not wait for further formalities.

"My wife keeps up the social standard of our family, Miss Druce," he said jovially, "but we men—Stuart and me—we're what they call 'rough diamonds,' y' know; we speak right out what we feel and manage to make folks understand us. I guess our taste is all right, though—especially in good-looking young ladies."

Althea Vidal pressed forward sympathetically and took the hand of the blushing girl.

"I am Miss Vidal," she said softly, "and I'll try to keep these awful men from shocking you any more. My father and my brother are the best men in the world, of course, but—well, mother spoke of the chauffeur and the coachman, and if Stuart has associated with them, I almost fear that they have been the victims."

"My daughter," said Mrs. Vidal, "was graduated from Bryn Mawr, so she is even more critical than I am myself."

"Bryn Mawr!" exclaimed Hope Druce. "Wasn't that splendid! I always wanted to go there, but—"

"You're still very young, my dear," said Mrs. Vidal, who was in particularly good humor.

"I'm seventeen," said Miss Druce simply.

"You're not 'out,' then, are you?" said Mrs. Vidal sympathetically. "But this foreign travel is an excellent thing for you, is it not? I suppose you are traveling with your father and mother."

"Father and I are alone," the girl answered soberly. "My mother died when I

was eight years old. We've always lived in Pennsylvania—nowhere else—but father has just decided to take up the work in the missionary field, and we are going to Kashmir."

Mrs. Vidal stiffened a little, the obviously poor clergyman and missionary being outside the sphere of her comprehension; but she remained at least sympathetic.

"Poor child!" she exclaimed. "What a frightful thing! To go into a strange land, an uncivilized country, with practically no social connections at all. I hope I shall meet your father; I dare say he is a very worthy man. I should like to talk with him about your future."

Miss Druce stiffened in turn.

"My father and I have always been very close together," she said, with mild defiance. "I believe he has very definite ideas about my future. I have already taught school in a Pennsylvania mining town, and he wants me to study nursing, to prepare for active work in the missionary field."

"Horrors!" cried Mrs. Vidal. "Pardon me, my dear, but you are altogether too—too attractive a young woman to be turned into a professional spinster! I positively must see your father. He should be thinking of preparing you for a suitable marriage—"

"Yes, indeed!" seconded Stuart Vidal; "that's my idea exactly. Guess I'll have to tell him about that myself."

"Stuart!" snapped Mrs. Vidal sharply, "don't be ridiculous!"

"I have my own ideas about work," Miss Druce said coldly, "and I don't think that a girl should regard marriage as her chief object in life."

"Quite right!" remarked Rupert Atherall, who stood behind Althea's chair, regarding the scene with philosophical composure. "Girls are thinking for themselves nowadays, and they're finding out that there's something in the world besides bridge, whist, and afternoon teas."

"Oh, you here, Rupert?" exclaimed Stuart. "I'll see if I can work the introduction trick right this time. Miss Druce, allow me to present my cousin, Mr. Atherall. He paints pictures and writes things for magazines, and he's the only male highbrow in the family."

Rupert detached himself from the back of the steamer-chair and bowed from the waist with graceful ease.

"I must take the opportunity, Miss Druce," he said, "to congratulate you upon going to Kashmir. It is a land of surpassing beauty, and—if I may be so frank—an appropriate setting for so fair a lady."

The girl's confusion was complete, and a dark blush suffused the clear, transparent skin from her sensitive chin to the severe line of her brushed-back soft brown hair.

"Gee! I wish I could hand out the poetic stuff like that!" exclaimed Stuart. "I've got it all in here"—tapping his breast—"but I'm blamed if I can put it across."

"You are so coarse, Stuart!" wailed the mother.

Althea Vidal got up and took Miss Druce by the hand.

"You poor dear," she said kindly, "these awful people will upset your nerves completely if we don't stop them. Come with me to my stateroom and we'll have a nice little chat all by ourselves."

Miss Druce was perceptibly relieved. She smiled timidly and bowed herself away from the group.

"Come on, and I'll fix you all up comfy," prattled Althea, as she led her along the deck. "We'll have a cigarette or two; I guess my nerves are almost as jarred as yours."

"A cigarette!" cried Hope Druce, unable to conceal her consternation. "Oh, you don't really mean that, do you?"

Althea laughed heartily, a little contemptuously, but with the patience of conscious superiority.

"Oh, you mustn't be shocked at that," she said. "You will have to get over the little provincialisms of Pennsylvania small-town life. It's really quite proper—quite the correct thing. You would find Philadelphia ladies of the choicest old Quaker stock enjoying their after-dinner cigarette. The Englishwomen smoke nowadays as naturally as they take tea. It is a matter of choice, of course, but you

mustn't be shocked about it, my dear. That would give you away as hopelessly provincial."

Hope Druce stopped and looked at her companion rather miserably.

"And you are such a nice girl—such a pretty girl!" she exclaimed rather abstractedly. "Do—do the girls at Bryn Mawr smoke cigarettes?"

"Awfully sweet of you to say that I am pretty," laughed Althea. "I wish I could get all the men to say that. Why—no, I wouldn't say that all the Bryn Mawr girls smoke. Of course it's not permitted; but that makes it all the more alluring. But I'm no longer in Bryn Mawr, you know; I 'came out' last year, and that makes it quite a different matter. When you are 'out,' you know, you learn not to blush except when it is desirable, and not to be shocked at *anything*."

"Father has said so much about the depravity of society," murmured Hope, half to herself, "and I have thought that he exaggerated it, but—oh, I don't like to think that women are so—changed, nowadays!"

"You're a droll little thing!" cried Althea, vastly amused. "Oh, well, you'll get over your qualms of conscience all too soon. I won't urge you to smoke, but you may come and watch bold, bad me. We'll go to the stateroom because I don't really care to smoke on deck. Come on! You'll see what a simple and harmless little recreation it is."

Hope remained motionless.

"Isn't it—don't you hate to do anything that you are ashamed to do in public?" she demanded.

"Dear me, how merciless you are!" Althea exclaimed. "Why, no; I don't feel that way about it. There are many perfectly innocent little things that one doesn't do in public. I might smoke here on deck without being really improper, but it would make me more or less conspicuous, don't you see? You wouldn't do your hair or manicure your nails in a public place, would you? I'm sure you wouldn't let a man kiss you while you were walking on the avenue with him."

"I wouldn't let a man kiss me anyway, unless he were my husband, or we were betrothed," Hope Druce tried to say coldly, while the blushes rushed back to her pale cheeks.

Althea uttered a ringing laugh and patted Hope playfully on the cheek.

"You dear, virtuous little angel!" she giggled. "Really, you'd better run along to your daddy. I fear that you shouldn't play with the naughty Vidal girl, after all. But be careful of yourself, pet! By the time you're thirty you'll be a nun or a perfectly bad, bold, disillusioned woman. That's the ghastly psychology of cases like yours."

She turned away from Hope and ran lightly to the door of her stateroom. The other girl stared after her for a moment, then walked slowly in the other direction.

Althea had her smoke, and presently returned to her party on deck.

"Well, I scared your little pink-and-white pigeon away with a cigarette, Stuart," she chuckled, as she reclined in her chair.

"Leave it to you to mess things all up!" cried her brother. "I might have known better!"

"The girl is impossible," declared Althea simply.

"I wonder at you, Althea," Mrs. Vidal said reprovingly. "Did you expect to find a sophisticated gentlewoman in a little Pennsylvania village belle? A country minister's daughter, at that! Of course, Stuart is responsible for bringing her here and presenting her to us, but you ought to know Stuart by this time. Would he be likely to devote himself to any one that was a social possibility? Hardly!"

Stuart got up heavily and slapped his white flannel cap upon his head with the violence of anger.

"This whole bunch makes me good and sick!" he thundered, and he strode away, followed by the rippling laughter of his sister.

On the other side of the steamer he found Hope Druce wandering about in quest of her father. She regarded him rather coldly as he stopped and doffed his cap.

"*Some* family!" he muttered darkly.

"I beg your pardon!" she exclaimed with a challenging air.

"That bunch that I belong to," he growled. "They make me as sore as a pup! Say, Miss Druce, you mustn't mind the way they talk and act. They don't know—"

"I don't care to discuss your family with you, Mr. Vidal," Hope replied sharply.

She turned away, but Stuart placed himself beside her and kept pace with her.

"Now, don't go and throw me down on account of the rough stuff my family handed out to you, Miss Druce!" he pleaded earnestly.

She stopped and tried to evade him by turning back, but he blocked the way.

"Say, Miss Druce," he persisted, "you're only a kid, but you got me! Believe *me*, little lady, I never fell for any girl quite so hard! I'm all through with that bunch of snobs and four-flushers. I've got money of my own—I pulled a wad from my grandmother's estate—so I don't have to take any hot air from the family if I don't want to. See? You be a good little friend to me an' you'll never be sorry! I haven't known you very long, but I'm wild about you, kid. I've made up my mind I'm going to marry you, and I'll tell your old man so if you'll just lead me to 'im."

Stuart paused for breath and looked eagerly at the girl to note the emotions stirred by his impulsive and passionate declaration. Such hearty frankness, he felt, should impress any reasonable female with his manly straightforwardness and virility.

He stared for a moment, then gaped wonderingly and shrank a little from the gaze that was returned. The lady seemed incomprehensibly filled with horror and indignation.

"I am sorry that my father chose to take passage in the first-class cabin," she said in a hard, inflexible tone. "I am sorry that I shall be forced to see you on deck and around the steamer until we reach Bombay. But please don't force me to ask the ship's officers for protection. My father is an old man, and I wouldn't shock him by telling him of this insult. Please don't speak to me or look at me again."

Some five minutes later one of the men passengers came upon Stuart Vidal standing just as the girl had left him.

"You look as though you saw a submarine!" exclaimed the passenger, pausing in his walk. "I guess we're going to have a fine night."

"Er—oh, is that so?" returned Stuart. "Say! don't women beat the devil?'

CHAPTER III.

A strange emotion stirs within him—more
Than mere compassion ever waked before.
—"Lalla Rookh."

THE ship was in the Mediterranean, and the passengers—with the exception of Stuart Vidal—were more than ever alert for the dreaded appearance of a hostile submarine. Stuart dreaded the grim menace no less than his companions, but his mind was distracted with another matter. His feelings had suffered a wound that was slow to heal, and the incidental pain was without cessation.

When he saw Hope Druce, and hastily turned aside to avoid a meeting, he mentally railed at her for her utter madness, at the same time pitying her for her blindness. She had been offered a path to affluence and happiness, and she had wildly rejected the boon, with no regard to the high-strung sensibilities of the would-be benefactor.

He watched her standing afar off—almost the length of the deck—and when his pain grew too acute he turned abruptly away.

"Poor little boob!" he muttered, and felt genuinely sorry for the girl.

With his family he was on terms of armed neutrality. He had offended his sister by dubbing her a meddling old maid. She was too young to be sensitive on the score of age, but she had been the loser in a certain affair of sentiment at home, and was quick to take offense. With his father and his mother he maintained an attitude of cold formality. Rupert Atherall had attempted some light banter upon the subject of the minister's daughter, and vigorously resented Stuart's inflammatory reply. So Stuart walked largely alone and herded by himself.

Late one afternoon, just as appetites

were growing keen for the evening meal, a cry rang out from the bridge, and in an instant it seemed that everybody was shouting and running.

A gun barked somewhere out on the water, and a shot splashed just in front of the steamer's bows.

The ship hove to, and the panic-stricken passengers on the starboard side saw an Austrian submarine rolling on the gentle swell and signaling to the officers.

In another minute the seamen were casting loose the boats, and the trembling passengers were scattering over the ship like frightened ants, some of them scrambling for their valuables, others madly trying to don more than single life-belts.

Stuart met his father in a gangway, and the elder man was carrying his half-swooning wife in his arms.

"My son!" shrieked Mrs. Vidal.

"Where's your life-belts?" yelled the young man.

"Got 'em on!" responded Mr. Vidal, with the addition of an oath.

"So you have," admitted Stuart. "Go put mother in a boat, an' get in yourself. I'll get my belt and come right away."

"Cap'n says the ship'll be sunk in ten minutes!" roared Mr. Vidal.

"Don't I know it?" snapped his son. "Quit talkin' an' get out o' here!"

Stuart shoved his parents through a door onto the deck, then raced for his stateroom. In a narrow passage he encountered a struggling mob of steerage-pasengers who fought one another like wild things, and, though he was not skilled in self-defense, he used feet and hands like a savage to extricate himself from the tangle.

When he got free he was scratched and bleeding, and his clothes were in rags and tatters, but he thought only of the patent unsinkable harness which he had purchased in New York the day before sailing, each member of the party having acquired a similar one.

Dodging the mad rushes of his fellow victims, striking out with clenched fists whenever he was opposed, he gained his room. A man stood there, frantically buckling himself into Stuart's harness.

Stuart gasped and uttered an angry roar. Then he saw that the intruder was Rupert Atherall.

"Somebody took mine from my cabin," Rupert explained with grave simplicity.

"Take it off! I want it myself!" Stuart yelled.

"No time to change! Go find another one!" was the terse reply.

Rupert buckled the last strap in place and made a dash for the gangway. Stuart cursed him, tackled him around the waist, and hurled him back against the wall.

"You crazy fool! Do you want to have us both drowned here?" gasped Rupert. "There are life-belts outside. There's no time to change."

"I may not find one outside," Stuart panted. "I want that one anyway. I don't care what happens to you. I ain't going to drown for your sake, you poor four-flusher! You trail along at my father's expense an' expect me to die for you! Not much! Take it off! Take it off!"

Rupert caught up one of Stuart's walking-sticks from the corner of the room and aimed a blow at its owner.

The stick was caught in mid air and the two men rolled on the floor, struggling and cursing. Rupert drove a heavily shod foot into his opponent's stomach and silenced him for a breathing-space, but as he tried to make use of the opportunity to get away, Stuart recovered sufficiently to trip him and throw him headlong across the threshold.

The next instant Stuart had him by the throat, choking him into helplessness.

Rupert struggled a moment, then slowly relaxed. Stuart let go his throat and struck him viciously in the face, bringing the blood. The strangulation and the blow took all the fight out of Rupert, and he sank back weakly as Stuart ripped open the buckles, tore the harness from him, and blundered wildly out of the room.

"It's every man for 'imself in a case like this!" muttered Stuart, and began to adjust the straps to himself as he floundered through the cluttered gangways.

An officer shouted somewhere that the time was nearly up, that the boats must be lowered away.

Stuart dashed out on deck and glared

crazily at the crowded boats swinging from the davits. His father, mother, and sister shrieked at him from one of the boats, but when he ran toward it an officer waved him back. The boat was already overcrowded.

Rupert Atherall staggered out to the deck, beltless, and ghastly from the lately inflicted wounds. He ran to a crowded boat, and when an officer ordered him back he flung the officer aside and hurled himself over the side of the boat.

Stuart laughed harshly at the spectacle, but began to fling himself about in a frantic search for a boat that would receive him.

"Other side of the ship, you fool!" cried an officer, and Stuart ran obediently around the deck-house.

All the boats on that side were lowering away, save one, and the occupants of that one were screaming at Hope Druce and her father, bidding them hurry to get in.

Stuart stopped and stared at the man and the girl on the deck. Hope Druce was sobbing in terror, but she was buckling a life-belt around her father's body, while she had none for herself. The Rev. Mr. Druce, white-faced and trembling, was praying in broken sentences, but seemed hardly conscious of the real state of events.

Hope completed her task and began to drag her father toward the boat. The old man protested vaguely and hung back, utterly bewildered.

"Say! you better quit praying and get in!" yelled Stuart, and he took the missionary from his daughter's embrace, lifted him, and tossed him into the boat.

"Where's your belt?" Stuart demanded of the girl.

"I c-couldn't find one!" she faltered.

With lightning motions the young man tore his patent harness off and flung it upon the shoulders of the girl.

"No! no!—I can't—I won't take it!" she cried stoutly, and tried to shake it off.

She broke away from him and started for the boat, but he caught her arm and flung her about so roughly that she cried out in pain.

"You'll do as I say!" he roared, and in a moment he had the harness securely buckled in place.

"Only one more in this boat!" called out a seaman who held an oar.

"All right; I'll go back to the other side," said Stuart, and picked up the girl and swung her into the arms of one of the seamen.

"Lower away!" some one cried out, and the davits creaked as the ropes slipped through the tackle-blocks.

Stuart, a little dazed from the rapidity of passing events, trotted around the deck-house, stopped, and saw that things were exactly as he feared: the last boat was away, and he was left alone.

The panic and growing horror that had been with him almost since the first warning of the hostile submarine were now strangely dispelled. He stared for a moment at the deserted deck, then passed a tremulous hand over his damp forehead.

"Well, I *am* a damn fool!" he mumbled softly.

CHAPTER IV.

When Hope's expiring throb is o'er,
And ev'n Despair can prompt no more—
—"Lalla Rookh."

THE boats were pulled swiftly away from the condemned ship, and Stuart Vidal, dumbly watching and waiting, saw the submarine maneuver into a position from which the gun just forward of her conning-tower commanded a full sweep of the steamer's starboard side.

He saw three men at the gun, and he remembered vaguely that, according to a newspaper article, a submarine commander would use guns for the destruction of ships whenever it was possible, thereby saving the costly torpedoes for another day. He wondered if the first shot would smash the hull, or go higher and include him in its murderous sweep, and out of his unnatural calm came fresh panic, and he cried out and ran to hide himself behind the deck-house.

He heard a sharp report, and as he winced and shrank from the mere noise, the steamer vibrated from a sudden shock and the sound of crashing steel and wood came from below.

Stuart groaned and ran around to the starboard side again. He waved his arms at the men on the submarine and shouted incoherently. It seemed to him, as he viewed the distant figures, that they mocked him; but in the next instant he noted signs of unusual excitement on their part. The gunners left the gun and ran aft, and as all the figures disappeared below, the strange craft began slowly to submerge.

Stuart gazed dully over the waters to the horizon, and he saw the funnels of a destroyer. It was still far away, but it came on so swiftly that the submarine commander had evidently not dared to chance another shot.

This heartening discovery was followed by others. Already the ship's boats were returning, and the joyous passengers were frantically cheering the rescuing patrol-boat.

Stuart jumped up and down, laughing and shouting hysterically. Like a madman he welcomed the refugees home.

The boats flocked in like chickens around a mother hen, and the destroyer stood by reassuringly. The steamer's officers viewed the hole torn in the side by the first and only shell from the enemy, and then they scrambled aboard to fight the fire in the hold which the shell had started.

Still the rescued passengers laughed and cheered, and some of them tore off their life-belts and waved them aloft triumphantly.

In the midst of the rejoicing one of the boats fouled another. There were shrieks of terror, sounds of bumping, splintering wood, and one boat swamped and left its passengers floundering in the water.

Small boats flew from the destroyer to save the drowning ones, and the steamer's crew labored valiantly to overcome the tragic turn of events. For a feverish quarter-hour the confusion and desperate work continued, then the rescued ones were all gathered on the deck, to be taken one by one to the staterooms and revived.

A hurried roll-call showed four of the steerage passengers missing, and one man from the first-cabin list; and the latter was the Rev. Mr. Druce. Another man from the swamped boat recalled that the missionary had removed his belt, while offering a prayer of thanksgiving, just a moment before the crash.

Hope Druce, wet and chilled, was searching the deck for her father when she heard the announcement of his fate, and she collapsed.

"Poor, poor little thing!" cried Althea Vidal in sobbing sympathy. "Take her to my stateroom; it's larger and more comfortable than hers."

"That's tough!" exclaimed Stuart Vidal heavily. "That's what it is—tough!"

Two hours later Hope recovered sufficiently to ask for confirmation of the horror, and when it was given her she swooned again.

It was morning of the next day before she could think and talk coherently, and then the grim awfulness of her position was made known to the people around her. She was literally alone in the world; her father had been her only known relative, and she could think of no friends to whom she might turn for the very substantial aid which she would need.

With the impractical blindness of the unworldly man, Mr. Druce had carried his small wealth about with him in currency, planning to deposit it with a British bank in Bombay on arrival, and now it was still with him, beyond the reach of friend or foe.

Hope gave no thought to that part of her plight, however. She had been passionately devoted to her father, and the loss was a crushing blow.

Mrs. Vidal, with the kindliest intentions, sat by her bedside and promised her the protection of the Vidal family. They would make Hope their guest, she said, while in India, and after the return to America they would safeguard her comfort so long as it might be necessary.

Hope sobbed and moaned continually, and the only answer she could make to the gracious offer was a vaguely protesting shake of the head.

"Don't you worry about anything, little girl," said Mr. Vidal, from the doorway c the stateroom. "My wife will fix you u and we'll do all we can to show you a go

time in India. You're mighty hard hit—I know that well enough—but it 'll wear off after a while; trouble always works like that. You just buck up, my dear, and remember that you're among friends."

Hope sobbed more violently, and Mrs. Vidal turned and glared fiercely at her husband.

"If you have no sense of tact or decency," she said, "you might at least go away and stay away!"

Mr. Vidal was humiliated and hurt.

"To please you," he said bitterly, "I suppose I should have taken off my life-belt and jumped out o' the boat."

"Get out!" Mrs. Vidal whispered furiously, and he retreated in confusion.

The ship was out of the dangerous waters of the Mediterranean and in the Red Sea when Hope was able to leave the state-room and lie in a steamer-chair on deck. She was over the hysterical stage of her grief and shock, but nothing could lift her from the dull, apathetic melancholy into which she had settled. Mrs. Vidal and Althea attended her with admirable devotion, but she persisted in sweeping refusals of their offers to safeguard her future. She was unable to make plans for herself, but the idea of accepting what seemed to her the charity of the Vidals was steadily rejected.

Rupert Atherall came to her on deck and paid his respects for the first time since the disaster. Mrs. Vidal and her daughter were absent at the moment, and Rupert pulled up a chair and sat down to talk to the girl in his quiet, rather soothing way, and in a mood of unusual tact and consideration.

"My cousins are genuinely grieved over your reluctance to accept their hospitality, Miss Druce," he said gravely. "I think I understand your feelings in the matter, but you really should consider every serious aspect of your present position."

"I have considered everything," Hope replied bitterly, "for so many days and nights, it seems, that I wonder how I have lived through it. I can't see any future, and I can't make any plans, but I can't imagine myself as an object of charity. I do appreciate Mrs. Vidal's kindness, but I have already accepted too many favors from her."

"Very young people are prone to be obstinate in matters where compliance would be the simplest and wisest course," Rupert remarked in a quietly patronizing tone. "Between you and me, Miss Druce, my cousins are not always the most tactful of people. With all the best intentions in the world, they sometimes choose their words and actions rather unhappily. But I would try to overlook that, if I were you. They are earnestly desirous of helping you, and you will hurt them, in a way, as much as you will hurt yourself, if you continue to hold out against them."

"There's young Mr. Vidal," Hope murmured abstractedly: "I suppose I owe my life to him—though my life doesn't seem a very precious thing now."

"Indeed, I haven't heard of anything like that!" Rupert exclaimed, with a start of surprise. "But Stuart is not on sociable terms with any of us just now, and he refused to 'make up' even after the—"

"He took off his life-belt and made me put it on," she explained simply, "and then he was left on board alone."

"I heard he was left behind," said Rupert; "but I put it down to his usual pig-headed stupidity."

"I should have drowned when the boat capsized, of course, if it hadn't been for that," Hope went on wearily. "I think it would have been better for me if I had drowned; but I am grateful to him. I ought to thank him for it, but—"

"I understand," said Rupert, nodding his head. "I must beg you not to mind young Stuart, Miss Druce. I dare say that he has made himself obnoxious to you; but we are all fellow-sufferers in that respect. Really, he is just a clumsy, lumbering bad boy. He has no tact, and he makes a sad mess of everything that he tries to do. Please pay no attention to him; he is quite harmless, and it's not hard to put him in his place."

Hope sighed wearily and seemed to find little interest in the conversation.

"If I were to accept Mrs. Vidal's hospitality," she said presently, "it would be with the understanding that I should find

some occupation and work to repay her for all the comforts I received."

"That would be unnecessary," said Rupert; "but if it would satisfy your pride, some arrangement of that sort might be made. I'll see Mrs. Vidal directly and try to explain your feelings to her. We must try to fix things so that everybody will be satisfied."

"You're very kind," Hope said with a heavy sigh, and she closed her eyes and sighed again for relief as he bowed himself away.

Rupert encountered Stuart Vidal halfway down the deck.

"How are you, Stuart?" he said with a certain reserve.

Stuart started slightly, as though discovering the other man suddenly.

"Oh, you!" he exclaimed, and then shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and passed on.

A moment later Stuart came unexpectedly upon the chair of Miss Druce. He stopped abruptly and awkwardly backed away, but Hope saw him and bowed slightly.

"Mr. Vidal," she said gravely, "I want to thank you for—what you did for me that day. It was very generous of you, and brave."

"That—oh! that wasn't anything!" he muttered, twirling his cap in his hands. "That—wasn't anything at all!"

"I want you to know that I am very grateful," she continued, ignoring his protestations. "I can't feel that life is very valuable to me now; but you saved my life, and you almost sacrificed your own in doing it."

Stuart was very red in the face, and had he been ten years younger the tears would have gushed from his blinking eyes.

"Say! Miss Druce, I want to tell you that—that my life isn't worth that!"—he snapped his fingers—"to me, when I can chuck it up for your sake. I don't believe for a bloomin' minute that I'm really brave, or anything like that; but I know now that I'd walk right into fire if you wanted me to."

"Please—please don't talk like that!" she protested.

"I have to talk like that!" he declared. "You threw me down good and hard the other day; I never got such a wallop before, and I thought it would sure hold me for a while; but I found out that I had to go on thinking just as much of you, after all. I'm crazy about you, and if I ever get married—any time in my life—it 'll have to be to you!"

Hope pressed her handkerchief to her burning face.

"Please don't talk to me any more, Mr. Vidal!" she begged.

Rupert Atherall came striding swiftly along the promenade and stopped to glare at Stuart with disfavor.

"Look here, Stuart!" he said sharply, "you must knew that Miss Druce is ill. We are all taking care to guard her from annoyance and worry. Now, get out, and don't come around here again."

"*You!*" Stuart blurted out hoarsely. "Huh! you're taking care of her, are you? Well, I guess—"

Speech left him at that moment, and he seemed on the point of choking, but he chanced to perceive a mocking smile flickering over Rupert's face, and he struck out mightily in his rage and stretched Rupert flat on the deck.

CHAPTER V.

Impatient of a scene, whose lux'ries stole,
Spite of himself, too deep into his soul—
—"Lalla Rookh."

AT Bombay the Vidals spent four days in sightseeing, but Hope Druce scarcely left her room in the hotel. Virtually against her will, and after repeated objections and protests, she was adopted as the guest of the Vidals for an indefinite period. This arrangement was, in fact, almost the only one possible for her: war and its alarms had made consular officials rather too busy to give more than perfunctory attention to penniless young castaways, however prepossessing, and Hope's little Pennsylvania home town was a long way from Bombay.

She was stirred neither in one way nor another when her hosts announced

that they would postpone further rambling in India and start at once for Kashmir, the goal of their journey.

"I can see that you're bored to death here, Miss Druce," said the solicitous Mr. Vidal. "Bombay is all right, I suppose, for them that don't mind hot weather and dirt; but as for the special attractions—believe me, you can see most everything they've got right down to Coney Island at home. Remember the Midway at the Chicago World's Fair? Oh! no, I guess you weren't born then. Well, that was some show!—and they had more Bombay stuff than you can find right here in Bombay."

Miss Druce listened politely, but a subdued sigh escaped her.

"We're going right on, now, to this Kashmir place," Mr. Vidal continued, "and I hope it's all that it's cracked up to be. We thought, first off, that we might knock around here in India for a couple of weeks, but we can do that on the way back. I guess you'll feel better when you get to the place your poor father was so keen about going to."

Mrs. Vidal had been listening from the adjoining room of the hotel suite, and at this juncture she called her husband to her peremptorily.

"James Henry Vidal!" she exclaimed in husky exasperation, "if you can't speak to that poor girl without making a donkey of yourself, keep away from her."

Mr. Vidal chuckled rather sheepishly.

"H-m! Any one would think you were getting jealous," he remarked.

His wife gave him a glance from which he quailed.

"I *am* jealous, you booby!" she cried; "but it is for the family's reputation for plain common sense. Have you no tact at all? Or do you find pleasure in wringing the girl's heart? Althea and I, fortunately, have the—the *savoir faire*—the instincts of high breeding—but it seems that you and Stuart are always ready to mortify us with your—your gaucheries! I wonder what Rupert really thinks of you; he is a man of such delicate perceptions and exquisite tastes."

The opening was not neglected by Mr. Vidal.

"I'm glad you mentioned Rupert," he said happily, "because I can assure you that you don't need to worry about him at all. Rupert's delicate perceptions get along fine so long as somebody pays the bills. Only last night he tactfully mentioned a little cash advance, and I came across in a way that seemed to suit his exquisite tastes to a T. Oh! you can't queer me with Rupert, Hattie: I'm the little old cashier of this outfit, and Rupert and me—we're regular pals, we are!"

Young Stuart came in quietly, casting a furtive, timid glance at the door of Hope Druce's apartment. He carried a rather bulky bundle of papers and magazines under his arm.

"I won't bother Miss Druce," he said awkwardly, "but you can give these things to her, ma. I found a place where they have American magazines and things, and I got this bunch of funny papers for her. They're all back numbers—'way back!—but she'll enjoy the cartoons and the jokes, I guess. I thought it might cheer her up a bit."

Mrs. Vidal gasped and fanned herself weakly.

"Mercy! Mercy on us!" she moaned. "Stuart—Stuart Vidal!—when you were a little boy you seemed really intelligent."

Mr. Vidal gained a position from which he could make gestures and grimaces of a sympathetic nature to his son.

"You and me, we're in wrong, Stuart," he said plaintively. "We haven't got the—the *savoir faire*, or the *pâté de foie gras*, or any of those things like Rupert has got. Rupert, he wouldn't 'a' brought that poor girl any funny papers: he'd 'a' brought her something appropriate—a copy of 'East Lynn,' or 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'—weeps for the weepy, you know. But never you mind, Stuart; you and me will read those funny papers. Don't try to understand women, my boy; I'm an old man, an' I gave it up long ago."

"Don't try to understand anything!" snapped Mrs. Vidal, "for you'll fail miserably if you do."

The railway journey to Rawal Pindi was begun that evening, and the Vidals—fastidious in their several American ways—

were surprised and gratified to find the train made up of rather luxurious cars, fitted with European conveniences, and even lighted by electricity. Meals were to be had in a well-appointed dining-car, and several of the train and station officials spoke intelligible English.

The historic and picturesque city of Delhi was passed about twenty-four hours after leaving Bombay, and another station bore the vaguely familiar name of Lahore. At the end of the second day the party left the train at Rawal Pindi, and found themselves indeed in a strange land, with their actual journey still before them. Kashmir is blissfully free from many of the nuisances of worldly progress, and the railroad is left behind at the frontier.

Rupert had informed the travelers that motor-cars could be obtained for the trip of a hundred and ninety-six miles to the Kashmir city of Srinagar, and the guide-books confirmed his statement; but not a motor-car was available when the party was ready to leave Rawal Pindi next morning. The maharaja and his considerable retinue, it was reported, had passed that way, and the maharaja was partial to motor-cars as a means of conveyance.

"You see!" exclaimed Mr. Vidal to Rupert: "you ought to have wired ahead for the automobiles."

"But—the maharaja!" Rupert breathed with reverence.

"Maharaja fiddlesticks!" fumed Mr. Vidal. "I guess my money will buy as many automobiles as his, won't it? Now, it seems, we've got to wait in this lonesome burg for the cars to come back, or else ride in some of those push-cart affairs over there. Do you mean to say that those poor little half-starved ponies can pull a cart with a man in it?"

"The tonga is the vehicle most generally in use here," said Rupert patiently. "One of them will seat three passengers, and two ponies will draw it very handily. We shall need two tongas, you see. The drivers change horses every little while."

"Change horses!" gasped Mr. Vidal. "Good Heavens! how long do we have to ride in those go-carts?"

"About six days," answered Rupert quietly. "Not continuously, of course, you know. There are delightful rest-houses—like inns, you know—all along the route."

"If your friend, the maharaja, has hogged all the hotels," said Mr. Vidal disgustedly, "I suppose we'll camp out beside the road."

After a family conference the tongas were inspected and pronounced primitive, uncomfortable, inelegant, and generally unsuitable; but, in view of the conditions, regrettably necessary. Two of the conveyances were engaged, with another sort of native cart for the luggage, and presently the cavalcade was in motion.

Mrs. Vidal, with Hope Druce and Rupert Atherall, occupied one tonga, while her husband rode in the other with his son and his daughter. Stuart was partially responsible for the arrangement, being unwilling to ride with Rupert. Since the unpleasant episode on the deck of the steamer there had naturally been a coldness between the two young men, and though Rupert had been the sufferer, physically, it was Stuart who was the more reluctant to consider the incident closed.

In the lumbering, two-wheeled, two-horsed vehicles—distant relatives of the Irish jaunting car—the party bumped over the ancient cart road that wound through the mountains and across the frontiers of the land of *Lalla Rookh* and her descendants. The highway was in fair condition, and with frequent changes of horses it was possible to make the trip to Srinagar in two days; but the luxurious and care-free Rupert, disdaining expense, chose to patronize the best of the rest-houses along the route and take the usual six days of the extravagant tourist.

The first halt was at the hill station of Murree, some thirty-five miles from the starting point, and comfortable rooms were found in the little hotel which nestled among the mountains at an altitude of six thousand feet.

"I am glad to be out of that ridiculous perambulator at any rate!" Mrs. Vidal declared, after making certain invidious comparisons of the hotel to those of the American standard.

"Seems to me that we came an awful distance from home to get this kind of experience," Mr. Vidal mused dubiously. "If my liver needed shaking up, I might 'a' jounced up and down Third Avenue in a taxi every day, or used some of those devilish contraptions they have at Coney Island. Here, I can't even cuss out the driver; he doesn't understand English, or pretends he doesn't. I took him aside when we changed ponies just after he hung us over that five-hundred-foot drop on the way up, and I told him plainly just what kind of a woolly haired, bandy-legged, lopsided son-of-a-she-goat I thought he was. What did 'e say? He grinned like a Cheshire cat and gibbered like a hand-organ monkey, an' I made out he was thanking me for the compliments. I might better have saved my breath."

"I have rarely heard a tourist complain of conditions or accommodations," Rupert said gravely; "they are usually too absorbed in the grandeur of the scenic features around them to give any thought to minor matters."

Mr. Vidal sniffed.

"My personal safety and comfort have never been minor matters to me," he said gruffly. "Nature and scenery are all right, far as they go, but I never exactly specialized in such things."

It was near dusk, and after the evening meal the members of the party walked on the terraces near the hotel and viewed the lesser peaks of the Outer Himalayan Range and the Black Mountains to the north.

Hope Druce, quietly courteous to all, but still sunk in melancholy, drew apart from the group and sadly contemplated the scenes that her father had talked of enjoying.

Stuart Vidal, by elaborate maneuvering, contrived to cross her path while affecting utter innocence of such intention.

"Rather breezy up here toward night," he observed abstractedly. "Could I go and get you a scarf or something, Miss Druce?"

"Oh! no, thank you!" the girl answered hurriedly; "I'm quite comfortable, and won't need it, I'm sure."

"I—I suppose you wouldn't care to take a—a little stroll—up the road, or somewhere—before it gets real dark?" Stuart ventured uncomfortably.

"Thank you very much," said Hope; "but I am rather tired with the journey to-day. I think I shall go to my room in a few minutes."

Stuart nodded silently, and poked some soft earth into a little pile with the toe of his boot. He found the situation perplexing. There seemed to be nothing more to say, yet he did not know how to get away gracefully.

The girl glanced at him furtively, realizing his awkward boyishness more than ever before, and something like compassion touched her slightly.

"It's—wonderful, isn't it?" she said quietly. "These mountains! The marvelous coloring of everything!"

Stuart started and colored vividly with pleasure at such a concession on her part. He even glanced about in a sweeping survey of the panorama, as though not having observed it before. But in an instant he realized that the girl was merely "letting him down easy."

"I suppose it's all right," he said dismally, knocking down the pile of earth with his toe. "Yes, I suppose this is a fine place to come to. You have to be in a—in the right kind of a mood, though, to enjoy such things. You need the right kind of a person to talk it over with, too. I don't get along very well with that family of mine; they're blamed peculiar. But I guess that if I could — oh, well, I don't know!"

CHAPTER VI.

Here, maiden, look—weep—blush to see
All that thy sire abhors in me!

—"Lalla Rookh."

ALTHEA VIDAL and Hope Druce were drawn together in a measure by the bereavement of the latter. Althea, the older of the two by three years, was sensibly touched by the helplessness of the young girl, and had shown her, since the disaster at sea, a really tender and gracious kindness.

The serious-minded Hope, however, con-

tinued secretly to deplore the light cynicism of the society girl, and between them there was an invisible barrier not easily to be broken down.

"Poor dear!" Althea exclaimed sympathetically, as they jolted along in their tonga on the second day of the journey. "I shall be so glad, for your sake, when we get to a comfortable place where you can rest and be quiet. I understand that Srinagar is quite highly civilized, and we can live more in our own fashion."

"I'm afraid that I seem ungrateful for all your kindnesses," Hope replied. "You have done so much to make me comfortable, and I am really quite comfortable; but wherever we are I can't get over this most awful depression. I can't see any light ahead. I'm so utterly alone and helpless."

"It's entirely natural for you to feel like that, dear child," Mrs. Vidal assured her. "Time, however, heals all wounds. You have youth and — rather unusual attractions, and you may be sure of making friends. I am told that we shall meet charming people among the European residents of Kashmir—charming people! You mustn't hold yourself too much aloof, my dear. Remember that you have life before you, and don't be entirely deaf and blind to your opportunities."

Althea laughed softly and glanced back at the other tonga, a hundred yards in the rear, in which the three men were riding—Mrs. Vidal having changed the seating arrangements for that day, over the protest of Stuart.

"You may observe, mother," she said dryly, "how enthusiastic Hope gets over the social opportunity afforded by the company of our two young men. No, I fear that Hope will not get wildly excited over the society life in Srinagar or any other place. She's a dear, shy little pigeon, and she'll hide herself away in the first snug corner she can find."

Hope smiled wanly.

"Please don't think that I shall make no effort to help myself," she said. "I must begin making my plans very soon. I'm sure that father would have wished me to become active in the missionary field, and I shall try to prepare for some sort of work like that."

"I dare say," Althea ventured cautiously, "that you might be slightly impressed by the attractions of some likely young missionary or clergyman. A man of that sort wouldn't scare you as these naughty, frivolous-minded young society blades do."

"The poor clergymen have such a wretchedly hard time getting on in the world!" Mrs. Vidal observed practically. "Excellent men, most of them, but so meagerly rewarded for their labor, you know. A girl should think of all those things. With some of the Church of England clergy, however, I believe it is different, as it is with our Episcopalians at home. Social advantages, you know! Some of them are paid quite handsomely. Hope, dear, we must find you an amiable young curate with desirable connections — one who is quite certain to become a bishop in the course of time."

Hope's manner became more constrained, but she strove against showing resentment.

"Really—I can't think of such things!" she said plaintively. "I know that marriage is a very happy state, or it should be; but my own plans are just for myself."

"It's a shame for us to tease you so!" exclaimed Althea. "We'll have no more of it."

The party halted that evening at the rest-house at Domel, and after they had refreshed themselves, Althea persuaded Hope to walk with her along the road as the twilight gathered. Presently Rupert Atherall joined the girls and discoursed sententiously on light and color, on the poetry of Tom Moore, and on the estheticism of the Oriental races.

"Delightful pagans, all of these Orientals!" he exclaimed. "Beauty is familiar to them, yet the humblest of them never grow contemptuous of it. Beauty is their standard of life, and they are joyously unhampered by the smug asceticism of our northern Puritans — for whom beauty is dead."

Hope Druce opened her eyes wide in sudden horror.

"But—surely—you are a Christian, are you not?" she demanded.

Rupert smiled blandly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Pray don't be shocked by my generalities, Miss Druce," he said. "And don't be horrified if I fail to answer your question. Let us say that I am—that I am an artist, a poet—and perhaps a little bit of a pagan in my own way; but quite harmless—oh! quite harmless!"

"Rupert's bark is much worse than his bite," said Althea. "He delights in shocking people, but he is generally well behaved.

"As for your comparisons of the northern and eastern peoples, Rupert," she added severely, "I think you're quite a bit off. Your New England Puritan can learn a lot about asceticism from the Mohammedans and the Buddhists, and these Orientals have moral principles that would make Connecticut blue-laws turn green."

"Ah! our young Bryn Mawr graduate speaks!" Rupert exclaimed lightly, but flushed a little. "You are quite right, Althea, in what you say, but I was dealing in abstractions, you know; I was not discussing moral philosophy in a concrete way. You may get my meaning if you will contemplate the differences between Oriental and Occidental art and literature."

"You're hedging!" accused Althea blithely. "I don't know very much about anything Oriental, but I know that Oriental philosophy hits the carnal pleasures just about as hard as John Knox ever hit them."

"Still it is a matter of racial viewpoint," Rupert insisted. "Our Puritans are always on the lookout for wickedness, while the Oriental is more innocent: what is carnal to one is beautiful to the other."

Hope's face became very grave. She could not tell if her companions were as serious as they seemed, or merely making conversation. And Rupert's distinctions between the abstract and the concrete were not very clear to her. At any rate, she thought they offered a rather slim excuse for his dangerous breadth of mind.

"It is beautiful out here," she said soberly, "but I think I must go in. I'm very tired, and—I'll leave you to settle your argument. Myself, I think quite a lot of Puritans know a good deal about beauty and nice things."

Rupert laughed heartily as the young girl almost ran away.

"Quaint little thing!" he observed.

"Rather too pretty to be called quaint, isn't she?" Althea asked pointedly. "Doesn't your Oriental taste respond to so much beauty?"

Rupert looked at her sharply, and became cautious.

"Really, Miss Druce's type of beauty is not one that I could become rapturous about," he said coolly.

"You are discreet, if not always tactful, Rupert," said Althea. "But don't feel that you have to be gallant with me. Don't try to think up some original way of telling me that I am ravishingly beautiful."

"You are *not* ravishingly beautiful!" Rupert replied, with that brutal bluntness which is said to captivate some women. "But—neither was Cleopatra, according to the recent discoveries of historians. Catherine of Russia was ugly, Mme. de Staël was coarse; some women ravish the senses with sheer personality!"

"You have about as much tact as one of our tonga ponies!" Althea declared indignantly. "You are positively implying that I am ugly—and I am not. No one ever called me ravishingly beautiful, but my enemies admit that I am not at all bad-looking."

"You never let me finish talking!" Rupert protested. "You misunderstand me, my dear Althea. There is no chance of argument about your beauty; you are undeniably beautiful; but I was about to say that your vivid personality positively renders your beauty a negligible factor."

"Careful!" warned Althea. "You'll be losing your head in a moment and telling me that you are in love with me."

Rupert turned slowly and looked over the tops of the trees at the mountain tops which were now dark purple in the dusk, and he sighed softly.

"The head is not so easily lost, after the heart is gone, Althea," he whispered.

The girl sighed in turn, but mockingly.

"Does the Himalayan mountain air affect many persons like that?" she inquired.

"Have you no feeling—no heart?" he demanded sharply.

"I'm sure I haven't lost my heart," she answered.

"Althea," he said huskily, "I am an unhappy man. I have one priceless possession—my art—but I have nothing else, except my honor and my humble spirit. I have accepted favors and bounty from your family; you have been my benefactors; but you have stripped me of my independence. Art smiles upon her children, but—she doesn't feed them! The artist has always taken crumbs scattered from the rich man's table."

"Why don't you write that out and sell it to a magazine?" asked the girl.

"Listen to me, and do not mock me!" he ordered sharply. "Believe me, there are limits to my patience. I tell you, Althea, that if I were not a protégé of your family—if I were not a mere beggar, buffeted about by fortune, I would tell you—that I adore you, that you are my divinity, my inspiration, my hope in life and in the life beyond!"

"How fortunate that you haven't told me that!" she remarked.

"*La belle dame sans merci!*" he exclaimed bitterly.

"It would frighten me terribly to have you tell me all that," she said. "I have had—proposals; quite a respectable number of them, in fact; but I never had a really romantic, impassioned one, such as you suggest. On the whole, I guess it's just as well that you are prevented, as you say, from making such a declaration."

"You have no pity, then?" he gasped.

"Loads of it," she answered. "I would pity you particularly if you should make that declaration, and father should happen to hear of it."

"You mean—"

"Oh! you know what I mean! I'm afraid he doesn't take you seriously, Rupert, but he might do so, on sudden impulse. Then—well, I'm afraid it would all be like one of those scenes in the funny supplements of the Sunday newspapers. There would be a lot of slap-stick humor, or tragedy, with crashing glass and that sort of thing."

Rupert groaned and hung his head despondently.

"I have had cups of bitterness pressed to my lips all through my life," he said dramatically, "but now, indeed, I am tasting wormwood!"

"One of those dark-brown tastes that I've heard about," said Althea. "Try eating cloves; I think they're recommended for the trouble."

Rupert uttered a cry of outraged pride, flung his hands above his head in a gesture of agony, and dashed away to the rest-house where it nestled among the trees below the level of the road.

As for the facetious Althea, she did not laugh after he disappeared. She stood alone in the road, gazing into the shadows of the balmy Indian night, and after a time she sighed rather forlornly.

"Poor old Rupert!" she exclaimed softly. "I wonder what he would do if he had his chance in the world. I wonder—if he knew what he was saying—to me!"

She started walking slowly toward the path that led down to the inn.

"I wonder!" she said heavily.

CHAPTER VII.

But other tasks now wait him—tasks that need
All the deep daringness of thought and deed.
—"Lalla Rookh."

IN the rest-house at Chakoti, on the third night of the tonga trip, Mr. Vidal met a "white man," as he described him. There were few tourists in the region, on account of the war in Europe, and Mr. Vidal was tired of the turbaned heads and dark faces that were all about him. When he saw a white face with a brown beard and gray eyes, surmounted by a white sun-helmet, Mr. Vidal uttered a sigh of vast relief.

"How are you?" Vidal said with hearty directness. "My name's James H. Vidal—from New York, U. S. A. Where are you from?"

The man bowed formally, but did not respond to the overtures with equal heartiness.

"I am an American, sir," he answered. "My name is Hargrove. I take it that you

are traveling for recreation. I happened to see you arrive here with a party."

"You got it right!" Vidal said jovially; "all except the recreation business: I'm not so sure this is recreation as I was when I started out. My wife is still willing to go on, though, so I suppose it's all right. Yes, I'm with a party, as you say. *Some* party, too!

"There's my wife," he went on chattily, "and my son and daughter, and a cousin of mine. He's an artist, a poet—a regular highbrow. Then we've got a young lady with us that's no relation: a nice, pretty little girl that played into awful tough luck on the way here. One of those infernal submarines came along and sunk the poor girl's father—that is, our ship was attacked by the blamed thing, and the Rev. Mr. Druce couldn't swim."

The man in the white helmet started back with a gasp, showing every sign of deep consternation.

"Druce!" he cried excitedly. "You mean to tell me that the Rev. Mr. Druce lost his life at sea? Why, my dear Mr.—"

"Vidal—James H. Vidal," said the other quickly, with the heartiness of one who has been the bearer of startling tidings.

"I am overwhelmed with horror and regret," said the bearded man. "Mr. Druce was well known in the missionary field, and we were looking forward eagerly to his arrival at Srinagar. It will doubtless surprise you to hear that I was even now on my way to meet him at Rawal Pindi."

"I'm sorry to be the bearer of such bad news," said Vidal heavily, "but since you're interested, I'll tell you the whole story. Say! perhaps we can dig up a little drink somewhere round this place, though I haven't seen a regular bar since I left Bombay, and the one I found there was no great shakes."

"You may find some fair Scotch whisky here," the man said doubtfully, "but I must ask to be excused."

"Oh! I see! You're some sort of a sky-pilot, too!" Vidal exclaimed. "I beg pardon, Mr. Hargrove; no offense intended, I assure you."

"It's quite all right," said the other. "I am attached to the mission at Srinagar, but you need not feel embarrassed on that score, sir. Well, well, you have certainly taken me off my feet with the news you bring, Mr. Vidal. And pray tell me of the poor young daughter of our unfortunate friend."

"A right nice little girl!" Vidal assured him. "She's none of your high-rollers in society, like my wife and daughter, but we all took to her right away. Pretty as a picture, and mighty sweet-tempered. She's hard hit, though. She thought the world of her father, and no one can say a word now to comfort her."

"Poor child!" exclaimed the missionary, with a little catch in his voice. "I must ask you if she is provided for in any way—beyond the liberal hospitality of your family?"

"The reverend took everything he had with him," Vidal explained with characteristic directness. "The poor little girl is flat broke."

"It's odd that the mission at Srinagar received no word of this," remarked Mr. Hargrove, frowning slightly.

"My mistake, I suppose; all my fault!" Vidal declared honestly. "Truth is, I never thought of it. My wife usually gives the orders about such things, and I guess she didn't think of it either. If Miss Druce had asked us to, we certainly would have sent a wire from Bombay when we got there. I guess she was too busted up to think of anything like that."

"I must pay my respects to the young lady at once," said Hargrove, "and offer her whatever assistance the mission can render."

"Say! she'll be tickled to death to see you, I'm sure!" Vidal cried enthusiastically. "Right this way, Mr. Hargrove. My womenfolks are having tea and cakes in the next room."

A moment later he presented his find to the women of the party.

Mrs. Vidal bowed austerely and looked the stranger over critically, admitting to herself that, for a missionary, he was of rather prepossessing appearance.

"And you are from the mission, Mr. Hargrove!" cried Hope Druce, with more

animation than she had shown since the catastrophe at sea.

"I am from the mission, Miss Druce," said the man. "I have heard your pitiful story, my dear young lady, and—believe me, my heart goes out to you."

Hope pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and began to sob quietly. Though the man was a stranger to her, he was from the mission, and one of her own kind.

"It is hard to assuage the grief of a devoted child over the loss of a kind parent," observed Mr. Hargrove. "You must look continually to the one high source of comfort and mercy. The ways of the Master are indeed inscrutable, but His will, not ours, must prevail."

Althea Vidal yawned quietly behind her hand.

"It is indeed fortunate for Miss Druce," Mr. Hargrove continued, "that she won the friendship of such a family of Samaritans. She was a stranger and you took her in, she was hungered and you fed her, she was thirsty and you gave her drink. 'Verily I say unto thee,' says the Master, 'inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me.'"

Mrs. Vidal produced a dainty bit of lace and linen and formally brushed away a few tears of well-bred emotion.

"It was a privilege granted us," she said hoarsely. "What a blessing it is, Mr. Hargrove, that even the humblest of us sinners are permitted to serve."

"You are a Christian woman, Mrs. Vidal," Mr. Hargrove said with firm conviction.

"I am an Episcopalian," said the lady, with a touch of pride.

"It amounts to the same thing!" declared James H. Vidal, by way of helping out the conversation. "I'm an Episcopalian, too. I don't work at it very much, but my credit is as good as any man's, and I always come across with my check when anything good needs pushing along."

"James!" cried Mrs. Vidal in horror. "Mr. Hargrove is not accustomed to your —your vernacular, I fear!"

"On the contrary, I understand Mr. Vidal perfectly," said the man from the mission, with great good humor. "It is the spirit which counts, madam; not the language!

"I have been thinking," he added, "that our mission at Srinagar would feel it an honor to offer Miss Druce the hospitality of its roof. If she feels a desire to take up some work for the mission, every opportunity and aid will be given her. I was on my way to Rawal Pindi to meet our lamented brother; we were evidently misinformed of the date of his expected arrival. Now, I must turn about and return to Srinagar with the sorrowful tidings. I have no doubt, Miss Druce, that you would be loathe to leave your kind friends, but I have a private tonga at my disposal, and it is at your service. By leaving here early in the morning and changing horses frequently, we should reach the mission before sunset."

Hope brightened perceptibly at the suggestion and there was no mistaking a certain eagerness in her face.

"Oh! I should so dislike to seem ungrateful to my friends," she said, "but I am very anxious to reach the mission. It was to have been—my father's new home, and mine. It would seem—in this foreign land—almost like going home, you know."

"Don't hesitate, dear child!" Mrs. Vidal exclaimed graciously. "Be assured that we shall understand."

"Sure!" Mr. Vidal seconded with friendly emphasis. "It'll be our loss, but your gain. We'd be mighty glad to do everything to make you happy, but our happy little family isn't—as the saying goes—just the place for a minister's son, or for a minister's daughter, either. I'm afraid we're a little bit on the rough-neck order, when it comes down to cases."

"James Vidal!" cried his wife rather awfully. "Have the goodness to speak for yourself! You lay us open to misconceptions. Mr. Hargrove does not know that our daughter was graduated from Bryn Mawr, and that I myself came from the Van Pelts."

"You've told him, so it's all right," said Mr. Vidal, quite unruffled.

"My husband affects the manner of the popular conception of the modern, rough-

and-ready American businessman," Mrs. Vidal explained to the stranger. "I really believe that the dramatists and magazine writers have established the type, but the idea prevails, it seems, that a successful businessman should be rough, uncouth, and utterly lacking in tact and consideration."

"Thanks for the bouquets, my dear," Mr. Vidal said, grinning happily. "Same to you, and many of 'em."

Althea yawned again, this time with a little less concealment.

"I must be going to my room, I fear," said Mr. Hargrove. "I wish to make an early start in the morning and be sure of getting to Srinagar before night. I wonder if Miss Druce—"

"I should really like to go with you, Mr. Hargrove," Hope said eagerly.

"Then, if Mrs. Vidal doesn't object, I shall have the tonga waiting for you at about seven o'clock in the morning," Mr. Hargrove informed her.

"We shall miss you sorely, my dear," said Mrs. Vidal, "but I dare say that it is really the best arrangement. You will precede us, it seems, but you may be sure that we shall look you up at the mission as soon as we arrive."

None of the Vidal party was up or awake when Hope Druce left the rest-house with Mr. Hargrove in the morning, and Stuart Vidal knew nothing of the new arrangement until the two tongas drew up in the road and the tourists went out to begin the day's journey.

"I think I'll have you and Althea ride with me to-day, Stuart," said Mrs. Vidal. "Rupert and your father may have a cart all to themselves."

"Where's Ho—where's Miss Druce?" demanded the young man, looking about anxiously for the missing one.

"Indeed, I thought you had heard," said his mother. "We met a charming clergyman from the mission at Srinagar last night, and he insisted on taking Hope with him to the mission."

Stuart was disappointed and disturbed at the news.

"Say! was it that long, lean guy with the brown whiskers and the bath-tub hat? The one I saw loafing around here last night?"

"It was Mr. Hargrove, of the mission," reproved his mother, "and he seemed a distinguished and most agreeable gentleman."

"So much so, that your mother almost got religion," said Mr. Vidal.

"And your father, for some reason, behaved with even more than his habitual coarseness," Mrs. Vidal fired back spiritedly.

"The tonga ponies are quite impatient to start," Althea announced wearily. "Please decide where you want to sit, Stuart, and let us go on."

"It makes no difference to me where I sit, or where we go to!" Stuart grumbled, and flung himself heavily into the leading cart.

Rupert Atherall worked himself into an ecstasy over the scenery and the roadside flowers, and delivered little orations on art and nature whenever the two vehicles were sufficiently close together, but his audience was not responsive. Mrs. Vidal was irritated by her son's sulkiness. Althea was painfully bored, and Mr. Vidal's humor was, as usual, out of tune with the scene.

"That mountain!" exclaimed Rupert, as they rounded a turn, "is it not a miniature Parnassus in *lapis lazuli*, set in Arcadian meadows of asphodel?"

"I don't get all your language stuff," replied Mr. Vidal, "but I reckon the mountain's all right, at that. I have an idea, though, that we could beat it at Delaware Water Gap, and find a first-class hotel stuck right on the side of the mountain. This place is all right so far as it goes, Rupert, but it needs some enterprising Yankee to come along and boom it."

"Heaven forfend!" cried Rupert, with a gesture of horror.

"Well, heaven and the distance from Broadway probably will," allowed the elder man, "but it's tough luck for the place. I must say that after I put in a day on this scenery and nature stuff, I do like to know that I can stroll into the grill-room and order a porterhouse steak with French-fried potatoes, and a little of Milwaukee's best on the side."

"For me," mused Rupert defiantly, "a

Grecian göblet of old Falernian wine, and a morsel of bread and honey."

"Try Grape-Nuts—there's a reason!" snorted Mr. Vidal.

Thus the day passed, and the night was spent in the rest-house at Baramula, from which point it was but a little over thirty miles to their destination.

They made an unusually early start next morning, and with several changes of ponies they managed to reach Srinagar before nightfall.

Mr. Vidal loudly expressed a desire to have the party driven at once to Nedou's Hotel, so Mrs. Vidal countermanded the order, on principle, and directed the drivers to proceed first to the mission, that compliments might be exchanged with Miss Druce and Mr. Hargrove.

At the mission a courteous young Englishman—a doctor in the hospital—greeted the visitors, and when they mentioned Miss Druce he expressed horror and regret over the tragic death of the Rev. Mr. Druce.

"It was odd that you, here at the mission, did not hear of the tragedy for so long a time," Mrs. Vidal remarked conversationally.

"So long a time?" queried the young man. "Why, I believe that we heard of it almost at once. It was reported to Bombay by wireless, and we had the news here a day later. We were profoundly shocked, you may be sure."

"But Mr. Hargrove said that you had heard nothing of it," protested the lady. "In fact, he was hastening back here to tell you, after he had the news from us."

"Mr. Hargrove?" murmured the young man casually. "I don't think I know such a person."

"Try again!" encouraged Mr. Vidal sociably. "Hargrove, he's one of the top guys here at the mission—let him tell it!"

"Top guys?" questioned the Englishman, vastly puzzled. "The term is not familiar to me."

"It's evident that you have been here but a short time, sir," said Mrs. Vidal, seeking to assume charge of the conversation. "You will understand, I'm sure when I tell you that Mr. Hargrove is the reverend gentleman who escorted Miss Druce here to the mission yesterday. We met him at Chakoti, and he—"

"I must tell you, madam," said the Englishman, "that I have been here quite some time, really; and I know every person connected with the mission and the hospital. I can assure you that there is no one here by the name of Hargrove. As for the young woman you speak of, she has not been here."

"The devil you say!" cried Stuart Vidal, fairly leaping forward.

"Stuart! consider where you are!" gasped his mother.

"I say! would you mind telling me?" exclaimed the Englishman, in a sort of well-bred excitement. "This Hargrove person—what sort of a looking chap would you call him?"

"My wife called him a charming, distinguished kind of a feller," broke in Mr. Vidal.

"Hold your tongue, James!" ordered his wife, forgetting herself in growing fear and anxiety.

"He was a scrawny, tall sort of a guy, with brown whiskers, and dressed something like one o' those wild-animal hunters," Stuart said helpfully. "I only had one chance to give him the north-and-south, but he didn't begin to make a hit with me. These women would fall for a Coney Island ballyhoo artist with rhinestones in his shirt-front. Say! do you know 'im from my description? Speak up, old top, for I've no time to waste!"

The Englishman stared at Stuart in some bewilderment.

"I—I was—I recall a chap," he said nervously, "who worked here quite some time as a clerk, you know. Really, now that I think of it, he only left here some few days since. I wasn't interested at the time, of course, but I fancy that he was bounced—for intemperance, or for falsifying accounts, or something of that sort. Yes, by Jove! I'm jolly well certain that he wore a beard. It may have been a brown one, too; I dare say it was."

"I like to talk," said Stuart crossly, "but I've got something else to do now. From what you *happen* to remember, I'm

just about dead sure that you've hit the nail on the head. That guy looked to me like just the feller that would get fired from *anything!* He's a crook and a thug, and he's run off with Hope Druce! Where's the police station?"

"The thing to do," began Mrs. Vidal, "is to—"

"The thing for you women to do is to shut up, when something has really happened!" roared Mr. Vidal, with the courage of a lion who has found himself. "This is all your work, anyhow! Ain't it? You palavered with that crook and made a regular pet of 'im. He could 'a' taken away your own daughter if he'd wanted to!"

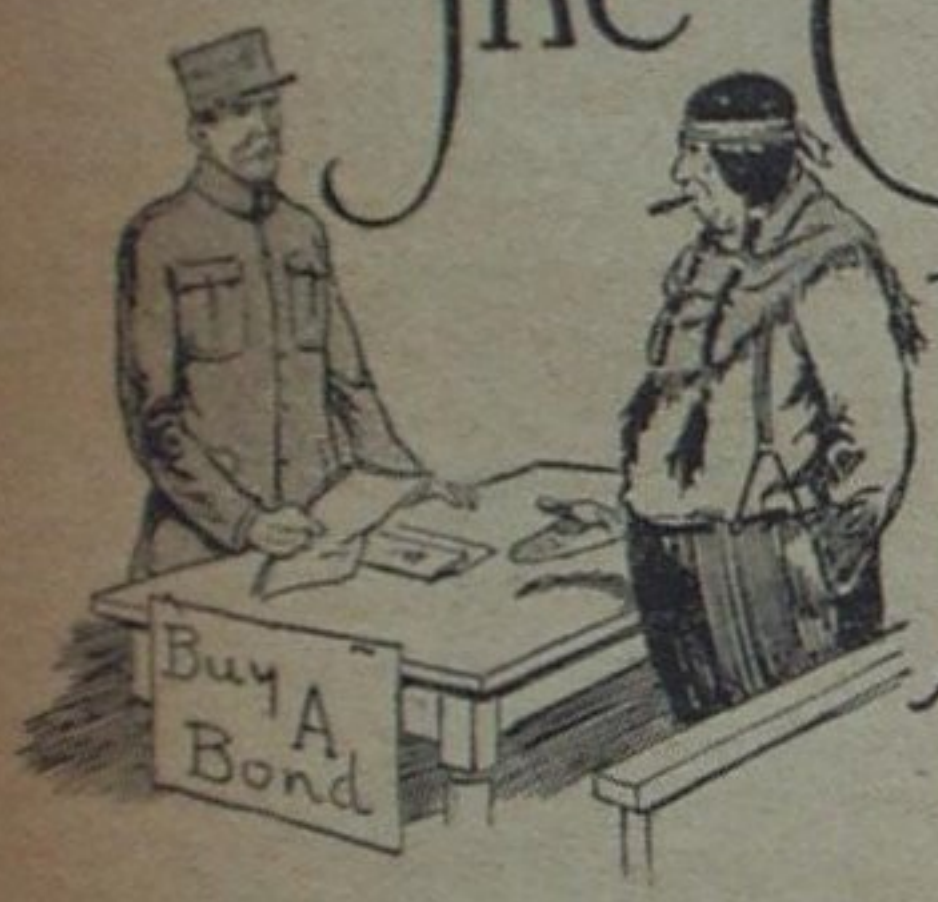
"*You* discovered him, and introduced him to us!" shrilled the lady. "You are an imbecile, James!"

"The thing to do," said Rupert Atherall, "is to consult with the mission officials, and then to report this outrage to the British resident at once."

"The thing to do!" sneered Stuart, "is for all you people to go somewhere where you can talk yourselves to death. Leave me alone, that's all! I'm going to start now, and I'm going to find Hope Druce."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Captain and the Miracle



by Edna Wahlert McCourt

THE captain had been in and about the trenches three years before he crossed the Atlantic.

And yet, although there were apparently hordes of us Americans who were eager and able to talk French with him, he could not be persuaded to speak of himself personally, or of his intimate experiences. There was rumor of much that he might have told — months in the thick of the fight; shrapnel wounds; and, during convalescence, heroic defense of a church, hallowed by the Red Cross and bombarded by the enemy.

There was a report of promotion and transfer to the Engineering Corps; of consultations and conferences with the highest authorities of France; of his mission to the United States to purchase gasoline. Yes, there was gossip of much that he might have told; but I was given to understand that before he came to Oklahoma he had been strangely silent on the subject of his own history.

Of course, I had my doubts about his irrevocable reticence. As a plain, cool-headed prospector who has been up and down and around and across the continent for half a century, I had yet to meet the man whose tongue would not wag briskly and with even astonishing eloquence when given as a theme the history of its possessor. Even a dumb man, I believed, would manage to convey to any willing listener a chronicle of his own little story.

But our Senator assured me this was not the case with the captain.

"I've been with him in New York and

in Washington, and we were on the same train coming down here," he said. "It's a fact, true as the seasons, that the captain doesn't mix himself up in his talk of The Cause. I've seen him under a good many different circumstances, too, and I've heard all sorts and sexes cross-question him in all grades of French. But I assure you he clung to the big issues like a cactus to the sand. When they got him in an exceptionally tight place he would actually say, *'Qu' importe moi-même? Je ne signifie rien. Il n'y a que la cause.'*"

"Which means in American English?"

"That he himself doesn't matter; that nothing matters but the cause of France."

My skepticism clung, however.

"Give him the time and the place and he'll loosen up," I insisted.

"Perhaps." But the Senator smiled a slightly superior smile. It was plain he didn't agree with me.

Now I was particularly anxious just then to obtain information about certain activities of the extra Congressional session, just adjourned, so the Senator and I changed the subject, and I rather forgot about the captain until the following night.

The Senator was home, campaigning for the Liberty Loan.

In the hills and the inhabited districts of our State he had been more than successful in securing subscriptions, but he was a man who knew his people and was, therefore, not sanguine of happy results in my county, which is the county of Flathead and one of the richest and youngest oil centers in the world.

Incidentally the captain—who was with us to investigate our gasoline prospects—was as fascinated as a boy or a poet with the history of Oklahoma, and he urged the Senator for all manner of details. He wanted to hear all about the portioning of the territory by the United States government to the various Indian tribes; all about the miraculous mint of oil treasure which suddenly gushed from the barrenness, making millionaires of the outcast red men.

"*C"est une fable—une légende de fée,*" the captain vowed. "*Le bon Dieu a eu affaire de celui-là.*"

When the Senator translated that the captain felt our oil-fields were God-given, so to speak, to the Indians in compensation for the white man's usurpation of his bigger dominion, I said:

"Seems like the captain is a pious chap."

And the Senator smiled again, a slightly superior smile. He didn't agree with me.

"There never was a less orthodox man," he replied.

As I said, the Senator was campaigning for the Liberty Loan.

A mass meeting had been called at the county seat of Flathead that Saturday night, and he was to be the principal speaker. He confided to me that he considered his task a pretty onerous and difficult one, and I confess I felt no desire to stand in his stockings.

It was for the most part a hard crowd which assembled, hard-headed, hard-lipped. True, it was composed of men who made and held money lightly, but at this particular moment every John Smith wanted to sink what lucre he possessed into new oil holes.

The men had come in for forty miles around, willing to flock to the county's center at the slightest excuse for gathering, the slightest pretense of carouse. True, we were bone dry—but who would drink, could. The roads, dusty as though strewn foot-deep with tawny flour, began early to line up automobiles, and our so-called "Square" began to blacken with people. A sort of speakers' stand had been knocked together to accommodate the band the Senator had imported and the "leading citizens," and there was a chair for the captain.

I said to him (he seemed to understand pretty nearly everything spoken in English):

"Any one who says the Wild West days are over doesn't know. This is as typical a "boom" town as ever sprung up overnight, and as typical a crowd as ever created and lost millions. Except for the fact that the boys tear around on Fords instead of broncos and in goggles instead of chaps, you might be watching a William S. Hart film to-night."

And the captain did watch. He watched the men who had assembled; watched their hard faces and the softness veiled by their eyes; watched the grim, cynical curve of their lips and the gentle something that lurked in the corners! watched the bold poise of their shoulders, and the gnarled fingers he seemed to sense could twitch and tighten with emotion.

And, somehow, the eyes of that crowd began to pivot about him. I confess he was unusual to look upon—solemn and boyish and uplifted. And bits of his mission and his story had filtered through the masses, naturally haloing him to our elemental and therefore hero-worshiping crew.

The Senator spoke splendidly.

The effort he made to arouse that crude crowd to patriotic response was magnificent. He played to their emotion and their intelligence. He appealed to their sympathy and their loyalty. He frankly avowed the nation's need for money. He let his voice range from fortissimo through tremulo and back again. He put himself through all the conventional gestures; his vocabulary through every pace, from flowery oratory to good U. S. A. slang. He both begged and bullied the boys to come up to the Liberty Loan booth which he had had built on the platform and subscribe!—*subscribe!*

But though the audience did clap and cheer him, the Senator knew, as he resumed his seat, that he had failed. Exuberant spirits, not conviction of the men themselves, created the shouting. He knew they would hold on to their money.

The band crashed into "The Star-Spangled Banner."

But he murmured as he wiped the evidence of effort from his face:

"They aren't going to pony up. Those boys are neither fools nor leaves of an aspen, to bend to my will. Only a few months ago I was haranguing them to vote for Wilson because he was going to keep us *out* of war—and now I'm trying to get them to fork over their good money in order to *make* war. They see the illogicalness of my position. I haven't been able to put over the deep necessity. I guess," he muttered, "I've lost my hold on this bunch. It will take a bigger man than me to move them now."

His eyes, genuinely troubled, scanned the strange crowd; and then unconsciously veered to the captain.

Swift as thought an inspiration came to the Senator. As I said, he knew his people. Psychologist, politician, bulldog—he suddenly gripped the captain's knee. And all pretense was gone, and any barrier of tongue. There was no French for the Senator.

"Captain!" His eyes had become incandescent. "Captain, you've got to make a speech! You're going to make a speech! You're going to win that granitic bunch for me! You're going to make them buy the bonds! You're going to talk to them!"

The captain looked mildly astonished for a moment, but then he smiled, amused. He thought, of course, the Senator was joking.

But the Senator was deadly serious. His knuckles whitened as he gripped the Frenchman's knees harder, and the muscles under the skin of his jaws moved determinedly, like little waves of light.

"You're going to talk to them, man!" he repeated between his teeth. "You're going to get them. They've got to come across! You've got to bring 'em!"

The captain understood then, but he was completely taken aback, even pathetically frightened.

"*Moi?*" he exclaimed. "*Mais non! Mais—je ne peux pas le faire! Je n'ai pas le vocabulaire! Je n'ai pas des—*"

But the Senator interrupted with what were rudeness had it not been earnestness.

"Talk American! And don't say you can't! Don't think you can't! You've got to make a speech to these fellows. That's all there is to it. You've caught their eye. They'll be putty in your hands. I know. Haven't I been studying crowds for thirty years?"

The captain had turned white as his teeth.

"*Mais. Je ne peux pas—*" he stammered. "I cannot. I do not speak ze English. "*Je ne peux pas—*"

But the Senator's square jaws only clicked impatiently.

"You're got to," he repeated. And then, "You've got to make a speech!" he repeated again.

Beseechingly the captain looked at me, but I shook my head, declining to interfere.

"The Senator always has his way, captain," was all I could say.

The troubled foreigner turned to Drumlong, the man whom he had really come to Oklahoma to see (the old fellow was setting up a five-million-dollar refinery), but Drumlong offered even less encouragement.

"Oh, just say anything," he suggested. "You don't have to make much of a speech. You really do know a little English."

"*Je n'en sais rien!*" cried the captain pathetically. "*Je ne peux parler Anglais! Je ne sais que des mots techniques*—gasoline, pressure, benzine, temperature, oil—*Je ne sais que des simples phrases ordinaires. Je peux comprendre, mais*—"

"Better make a stab at it anyway," old Drumlong volunteered again. "I'll help you out *sotto voce* if you get stuck."

The band stopped screaming with a blast.

From a dance-hall somewhere up the street floated insidious rag-time. Almost imperceptibly, but certainly, the crowd swayed toward it.

And the Senator leaped to the speakers' stand.

"Men!" he cried loudly, yet solemnly. "There is with us to-night one who can urge you far better than myself to loyalty and cooperation; one who can better make you understand why your country asks you to subscribe to the Liberty Loan! This man has been in the thick of the European fight for three years. He has seen. He knows why you must win this war! And he is going to tell you. You understand to whom I refer. Your eyes are upon him. True, his speaking knowledge of our language is limited; but a real man can speak to real men with something besides words! In spite of the obstacle of being obliged to use a strange tongue, he is going to address you. He is not going to make a set speech. He is not prepared to make a set speech. As you know, his talk has not even been scheduled. But I feel he has a message for you! And so it is my great honor and my great privilege to introduce to you, and it will be your great honor and your great privilege to hear—the captain!"

The instantaneous answering murmur, swelled gradually to thunderous applause, might have come from one mighty throat.

And the volume of the cheer lifted the captain to his feet.

Now I give you my word that he was white and shaken and dumb, for all his fine, proud soldier bearing. He did sway toward the crowd hungrily, with something like eagerness and sadness in his eyes. "If only I could talk to you! If only I could make you understand!" they seemed to say. But I assure you he was utterly at a loss for speech. So he wheeled to the Senator, flinging out one hand in a gesture which was pleading for release.

But by a queer trick of fate his action was metamorphosed. To all intents and purposes, his flung fingers only indicated majestically, almost touched, the two flags—American and French—which floated behind him at the back of the erected stand.

And as the soldier's eyes followed his fingers, his feet took him backward a little—until his hand clutched the two flags. Simply, and not unafraid, he united them—lifted them forward—high—and together. Unconsciously he had symbolized whatever speech he could make, whatever speech he could wish to make.

How the crowd yelled then! Leave it to a crowd to catch the real dramatics of a gesture! Those men understood.

Picture the scene, if you can. The black-brown prairie stretching farther than any eye could, treed like a forest with oil derricks, each burning its pipe of waste gas like a torch and lighting the night wide with mystery and shadows and moon-colored smoke; the startling Southern stars only arm-high overhead; the crude, less-than-two-year-old town, its houses just boxes except for a sky-scraper that lifted its skeleton to the sky; the granitic black crowd with white faces rainbowed by splashes of red and bright blue where Indians slouched; and up on the platform

that beautiful big blond Frenchman touching two flags as a priest holds a cross.

Even I leaped to my feet.

As the shouting died, words were born to the captain.

I cannot say that he spoke like a man in a trance or under hypnotic control, although his voice, in the feather-still silence the crowd made, was indeed very low-pitched and perhaps a trifle monotonous, as blows of a hammer are. I cannot say his English was wholly correct, or his accent, or his grammar. But I am telling the truth that this man who could not speak English *did* speak it—with earnest, uplifted simplicity, and without any halting.

"My friends and allies," he said. "Men, I will speak to you. You are ze fighters, I am ze fighter: I speak to you man to ze man. I tell you how it is zat I am here. It is ze very simple story. It is ze very unimportant story—ze part zat is mine—but I tell it.

"Four year ago I was ze artist. I paint ze pictures. My fazer was ze rich man. I have everysing. I travel. All over ze continent I travel—but Greece I love ze best, and ze Black Forest of Germany. I have ze friend in ze Black Forest. I laugh wiz him, I paint ze pictures for him, I tell him of ze affairs of my government—I have been ze *officier* two year. He write me much. He ask me bring my friends who were zen ze *officier* to his lodge. We have ze good time togezer.

"Zen come ze war.

"I go to ze fight.

"My home it is in ze norzern part of France. My fazer have ze gasoline business—ze big gasoline business. Ze enemy come straight to his plant. You know who lead zem? My friend of ze Black Forest! I have told him my fazer have ze important papers. He get zem all. He tear our pictures; he take my sister to keep his house, to cook for his men. My sister work still for ze Germans like ze servant, and se have one baby.

"My brozer have ze wife and six children. He is killed at ze first battle. Ze Germans take his land, his family. I hear zat one of his little boys—five year old he was—do not salute ze German *officier*. He forget. So every time, five zousand francs zey fine ze mozer! All ze money se have goes so to ze Germans. Se is ze beggar now. Se work for ze Germans.

"Ze first time I see ze enemy come, I notice what is like ze cloud before ze regiment. It is ze women and ze little children zat zey put before ze guns. So we French cannot fight. We cannot kill ze women and ze little children who scream before ze big guns. We retreat. And zen I say, 'Ze enemy is bad. Ze enemy is not good. We must beat zis enemy.'

"When I have ze wounds, I see how ze Germans hurt ze hospital, ze nurse, ze church. I see zey have no soul, ze German army. And so I say anozer time, 'Ze enemy is not good.'

"When zey retreat zey kill ze trees. Ze trees! If zey blow up ze railroad, ze bridge—to zat I say, 'Yes, zat is war.' But when zey blow up everysing in ze little small houses everywhere and kill all ze trees, zen I say, 'Ze enemy is bad.'

"I tell you from ze heart zat every Frenchman have ze same or ze worse reason to say, 'Ze enemy is bad.' If I talk all ze night to you I cannot tell one little part of how well I know ze enemy is bad.

"I do not say we are ze good people. No. We were ze decadent people, we French. Ze war is a fine sing to wake us up. We need ze war. But we are not ze bad people. We do not kill to kill. We do not destroy to destroy. No ozer big people do, no ozer big army do—but ze German army do.

"Why do zey fight, ze Germans? I cannot know. Zey have ze big, beautiful, rich country. All ze world honored and loved zem for what zey achieve. Zey do not fight for some big sing like ze religion. Zey fight to kill.

"And so I say to you, 'Ze enemy must be whipped. We must whip ze enemy.' And do you notice—I say *we!*

"For no man lives in ze small town any more. Each man lives in ze world. Ze world is like ze barrel of apples—not any apple is safe if zer is one rotten apple in ze barrel.

"I say to you from ze heart—win ze

war. I say from ze heart—give ze men. I say from ze heart—give ze money. It is ze Liberty Loan you must subscribe to zis night—ze Liberty Loan! Can you not understand? I know you-all make ze big money. Ze men who dig ze wells, ze carpenter who build ze derrick—all make ze eight, ten, ze fifteen dollar ze day. You 'blow in,' as you say, hundred, thousand dollar in ze one night sometimes. I know. And if you have ze cash in ze hand—ze ten, ze twenty zousand dollar—you razer use it to dig anozer oil-well zan to buy ze Liberty Loan. Is it not so?

"But I tell you from ze heart—put ze money in ze Liberty Loan. Ze Senator, he tell you why. I try to tell you why. I cannot speak, but you will understand.

"And you will do zis."

For a moment the captain and the crowd gazed into each other.

And then old Kiowa-Chief shuffled up to the booth. He was a big, fat, sloppy Indian, dressed in slouching moccasins and gray trousers. A purple-blue shawl snuggled over his shoulders and a flame-colored rag circled his brow. He laid one great, red, pudgy paw on the table-top, and with the other removed the rich Havana on which he had been sucking.

"I buy," he said loudly, "one-half of one million dollars of Liberty Bonds!"

And that burst the silence into a yell. How that crowd yelled! The men fought to the booth. They emptied their pockets. They promised—how they promised! The bonds sold to a figure that staggered us.

When the excitement had lulled I remarked to the Frenchman:

"That was a pretty good speech for a fellow who never before uttered a real paragraph of English."

Old Drumlong said, aside to me:

"Now, really, it wasn't bad. He probably knows our lingo better than he realizes. And besides, I prompted him rather a bit. Couldn't you hear me?"

The young lawyer who was handling the bonds for the county—a suave little runt—began to orate on the psychology of the mob—his notion being that the crowd had not only "inspired" the captain to supreme effort, but had actually supplied him with the words of his talk, telepathically, so to speak.

However, I caught the captain and the Senator whispering under their flags, and I heard them laugh softly, a little like two wondering boys.

"Come. What does the captain think about his suddenly loosened tongue?" I begged the Senator to tell me.

"He doesn't know! he can't explain it. He says it was a miracle, his talk. He says he knows he couldn't do it again even if he tried."

"Why were you laughing so queerly—"

"Oh"—the Senator tried to be offhand—"we were just recollecting how speech in strange tongues came to men in the Bible days. Remember? Of course"—lightly—"we don't believe there's anything supernatural in this sort of thing—"

But I noticed his eyes and the captain's met with a dazzling, queer spark.

A THEFT

AS Lydia trips along the lane
A sunbeam flashes through the rain

And, with the clouds in half eclipse
Snatches a kiss from her sweet lips,

Like some impetuous cavalier,
Who sees a maiden unaware

Walking in April's sun and shower—
Her hair soft gold, her lips a flower—

And, with an impulse fugitive,
Pilfers a kiss she did not give!

William H. Hayne.

The Sixth Domino



by Reese James

Coauthor of "In Fear of Scandal," "In the Blue Limousine," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSING OF HARRISON STRONG.

ONE bright May morning New York was stunned by the news of Harrison Strong's death.

Small wonder! The sudden death of a banker well known on both sides of the Atlantic is bound to make a stir, even when it is from a perfectly natural cause. But when, as in Harrison Strong's case, it is from an unnatural cause, it is bound to make a tremendous stir, indeed.

Now it happens that the power to peer into the future, even into the *immediate* future, is given to no man—not even to a superman whose financial transactions with the Allied governments have won for him a coveted place among bankers.

Otherwise it goes without saying that New York, on the morning in question, would not have been stunned by the news of his death, which, according to the papers, was from a knife-thrust administered by some one intimate with the banker, and which, according to rumor, was the result of a German plot.

It goes without saying because Harrison Strong, yet in life's prime, would not have put himself so directly in the way of receiving the thrust. In other words, in spite of a promise made to his foster-daughter, Alma, and Mrs. Dayton Veers, one of his close friends, he would not have undertaken to play the leading rôle, that of an assassinated potentate, in an amateur photo-drama, two scenes of which were taken on the night of the tragedy in the gardens of his city home.

And, for all that, Harrison Strong might have saved himself from an untimely death if he had been obdurate with his foster-daughter. If, after a hard day at the office and a late dinner, he had refused to keep the promise hastily made and as soon forgotten when, cigar in hand, he met her on the terrace in front of the Strong mansion and she reminded him of it.

If he had been obdurate with the girl!

Instead, he temporized! And, in answer to her reminder, he gave an embarrassed laugh.

"No, I'm afraid I'll have to back out," he said, tossing away the cigar. "After all, I'm not an actor. And I—"

Alma, dressed in the mode of medieval Italy, bit her lower lip in vexation.

"But, father," she interrupted, "I didn't think you'd break your word. I'd hate to have you disappoint me now." She held out a velvet costume and cap. "Go ahead! Please do!"

"Yes—do!" spoke up a third person who approached.

It was a woman of about Harrison Strong's own age—to all appearances, between forty-five and fifty. And she was still a handsome woman, in spite of her gray hairs, in spite of the lines on her face which, even in the soft light shed by the Japanese lanterns strung on wires overhead, were distinctly visible.

To her the man turned protestingly.

"But, Mrs. Veers," he half-laughed, "I repeat—I'm not an actor."

She tapped him lightly with her fan.

"Come—come!" she said, stamping her foot in mock anger. "I won't accept that as a valid excuse. For my part, I'm positive you can play the rôle as well as most of the motion-picture actors I've seen. Upon my word, I'm positive of it!"

"And so am I."

None of the three had noticed the approach of the young man who spoke.

"Oh, good evening, Dr. Jackson!" greeted Mrs. Veers effusively. "Have you just come?"

The physician nodded.

"Yes. And I'm delighted to see the panchroma lamps and the scenery all in place. I'm delighted—delighted! But, just as I came up, I happened to overhear what you were saying to Mr. Strong. Certainly I hope he isn't going to renege."

The girl, offering him her hand cordially, made a charming moue.

"I'm afraid father is, unless—"

"Unless?" hazarded the doctor.

"Well, I was going to say, unless Mrs. Veers can dissuade him."

The lady herself poked Harrison Strong with her fan.

"Please—for my sake—" she began.

"Remember!" cautioned the doctor. "I need you, Mr. Strong, to make the film a success!"

"What! Is *Caesar* afraid?" added Mrs. Veers in a bantering tone.

"What do you mean?" grumbled Strong.

She smiled.

"Oh, I was only referring to a passage from the play, 'Julius Cæsar.' Don't you recall it, Harrison? I mean the one in which *Caesar*, who's afraid of assassination, declares he won't go to the capitol. Don't you recall it?"

"No," Strong growled with the air of a man more interested—as he was—in stock quotations.

But, in the manner in which he said it, he gave evidence that he was yielding.

"Well, it really isn't a matter of life or death, as in *Caesar's* case!" asserted Mrs. Veers.

But she did not know that, only an hour later, she would remember the remark as having been almost prophetic.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE PANCHROMAS.

ONCE more Miss Strong thrust out the costume and cap.

"Please!" she urged.

"Very well, Alma!" grumbled her father, taking them. "I'll show you *Caesar* isn't afraid! Guess it won't *kill* me to turn actor! Eh, Jackson?"

The latter shook his blond head, his blue eyes dancing.

"I guess not—especially for such a worthy cause."

A quizzical, almost a cynical smile on his handsome features, the young physician followed Strong as the two women, hooking their arms through the banker's, led him away.

Though one of the cleverest diagnosticians in the city, Hunter Jackson was a thinker who delved into subjects far beyond the scope of the merely medical.

For one thing, he made a study of the diseases of the human mind as well as those of the human body. He dipped into criminology in all its phases. He read the works of Lombroso, of Havelock Ellis, of Prichard.

A close friend of Rutherford Jones, admitted by many to be one of the foremost private detectives in the city, he discussed many of his cases with him.

In addition, he always took an interest in a number of charities.

There were scores who wondered how Hunter Jackson found time to do all these things. Sometimes he wondered himself.

For the past few months he had been

devoting a great many of his spare moments to raising money for the Allied Red Cross.

And at last he began to see the fruition of weeks of patient effort. At last he had managed to persuade society to lend a hand in raising money for that cause.

And now, as he strolled across the spacious gardens of Harrison Strong, the banker, he fell to thinking cynically of the frivolities of the society folk, whose idol he was for the moment—and of those frivolities as contrasted with the gallant deeds of the soldiers whose sufferings he had, for two short years, tried to lessen.

Taking a cigarette-case from his pocket, Hunter Jackson smiled grimly to himself as he selected and lighted a cigarette. In mind he went rapidly back over the strenuous campaign he had just closed for Red Cross funds.

In a dozen addresses to as many small circles of society women he had pressed them to give freely of their money to the noblest cause on earth. But all he had succeeded in getting out of them was a few paltry thousands.

Thoroughly disheartened, he had appealed to Alma Strong, because he knew from experience that she made it her business to help any worthy charity whenever she could. And he had not gone to her in vain.

With the girl's assistance he had interested Mrs. Dayton Veers, who owned a large block of stock in the Cosmos Film Company, in the project of screening a photo-play in which well known society people should take all the parts.

Through both women, also, he had obtained the hasty promise of Harrison Strong to play the title rôle.

And Dr. Jackson had left it to Alma Strong and the older woman to get some one to write the scenario. Then, a week after he had broached the plan to them, he had been gratified to hear that they had secured "Giovanni, a Medieval Romance," from Charles Cassel, one of the members of the younger set and an aspiring photo-playwright.

Concerning "Giovanni," the doctor cared little whether it would be good or bad. Knowing Cassel fairly well, he judged it would hardly be a world-beater.

He did not expect, in any case, to make a great deal of money for the Red Cross out of the smart entertainments where the film would be shown.

What he *did* expect was a lot of valuable publicity—which ought to act as an opening wedge. For, getting a lot of valuable publicity, he argued, would be taking the first step toward getting generous contributions from certain rich people who, having made millions out of the war, seemed strangely unwilling to "do their bit" to ameliorate its sufferings.

Again Hunter Jackson indulged in that quizzical smile so characteristic of him.

As he sauntered after Harrison Strong he reflected how definitely the banker chanced to fall into the latter class of crass money-grubbers.

He knew no one had made more—or as much money out of the war. And no one had given less, in proportion, to its charities than he.

At the last minute Harrison Strong would have declined to do even what little he had been asked to do, except for the intervention of Mrs. Veers.

Hunter Jackson imagined he understood why the banker was so ready to give in to almost every whim expressed by the woman. He had heard things — unpleasant things—whispered about Mrs. Veers. Society, he knew, expected her to marry Strong in the near future, although neither Dayton Veers, Sr., nor Mrs. Strong had been dead a year.

But he did not give the tinker's proverbial cuss about the character of the banker or the woman who seemed about to become the second Mrs. Strong.

Only sometimes he pitied the chestnut-haired beauty who was swinging along on the banker's arm—pitied her because she had to live among such people.

Somehow he believed Alma different from them. And then again he wondered if she really pitied herself—was cognizant of what he chose to call "her plight."

For he knew she had engaged herself to Thompson Lambert who, a typical product of the moneyed East Side, was a good deal

less remarkable for his brains than for the reputed size of his fortune.

At length, with a grimace of distaste for scandal-mongers and all their works, Hunter Jackson tossed away the stub of his cigarette and followed the banker and the two women around a vine-clad pergola adjacent to the spot where "Giovanni" was about to be filmed.

For a moment he paused to look at the scene.

He had viewed it hastily when he came by in search of Alma Strong and her father. Now, however, he studied it minutely.

In the center of the wide lawn before the Strong mansion and well hidden by trees and bushes from the curious gaze of passers-by, he saw a dais on which stood a throne—and behind it a back-drop bearing a coat-of-arms evidently meant for the coat-of-arms of the noble house of *Giovanni*.

Above and around the dais were the panchroma lamps to be used for illuminating the picture.

At the moment only one of the panchromas was lighted, because the lamps, being excessively brilliant, were correspondingly irritating to the eyes.

The rays from that lone panchroma fell slantingly on the costumed group of men and women gathered about the camera, where the director and the camera-man, with many gesticulations, and assisted by the author, Charles Cassel, were evidently explaining the action of the drama.

As Hunter Jackson watched he became aware that two figures detached themselves from the group and approached Harrison Strong and his escort.

He stepped forward also to join the trio.

"I believe they're about ready," he heard Mrs. Veers saying as he came within ear-shot. "Hadn't you better get your costume on right away?"

"Where'll I go to make the change?" Strong wanted to know. "Back to the house?"

His daughter pushed him toward the pergola.

"No—in there," she instructed. "I've had the pergola on the other side of the lawn reserved for the women. I don't think you'll have to do more than take off your coat and vest. I'm sure you can button the costume up around the collar—so that it won't show."

Mrs. Veers brought the efficacious fan into play again.

"Hurry up, Harrison!" she begged, prodding him with it.

At that moment the two people Hunter Jackson had seen leave the group about the camera came up, and he perceived that they were Charles Cassel and Dayton Veers, Jr.—Mrs. Veers's only son.

"Oh, Mr. Strong," began Cassel excitedly, "I've been told you won't play *Giovanni!* Please don't disappoint us at the last minute!"

Young Veers hurried to his support.

"Don't, by any means, Mr. Strong! Why, I should say you're just cut out for the part."

Hunter Jackson gasped.

Taking into consideration Strong's reputation as a heartless martinet, the doctor believed he had never heard a more tactless remark. But was it only tactless?

Was young Veers the consummate ass he often seemed? Or did he, in this instance, realize what innuendo he had conveyed by the words?

He did not believe young Veers utterly devoid of intellect.

More than once he had heard that the latter was writing for *Freedom*, a radical weekly. As Jackson was aware—it took brains to land articles in *Freedom*.

Then had Veers intended to slur Strong? And, if so, had he been detected in the attempt by his mother?

Hunter Jackson glanced askance at Mrs. Veers and, from the look of annoyance that flitted across her face, gathered that she, at least, deprecated the remark passed by her son.

"Cut out for the part; eh?" laughed the banker, not catching young Veers's probable meaning—as Jackson could see, much to his mother's relief. "Cut out for the part? Then I'll have to play it, won't I?"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Cassel.

Mrs. Veers turned to him laughingly.

"Oh, I claim the credit's all mine for persuading him to do as he's promised," she said with a proprietary air. "I made Mr.

Strong say he'd take the part, after all, fully five minutes ago."

With a nod of relief Cassel threw his arm about Veers's shoulders and started back with him to where the director was holding forth.

"Now, hurry up!" urged Mrs. Veers again, pushing Strong toward the pergola. "I'll wait here for you with Alma."

"Oh, I do so hope this film 'll be a success!" Miss Strong remarked, *sotto voce*, to Hunter Jackson when the banker had disappeared.

"Don't worry!" advised the doctor. "I'm sure it will."

Her arm about the girl's waist, Mrs. Veers stood beside Jackson, watching the preparations for the scenes of "Giovanni" to be taken that evening.

Soon they heard a short laugh, and Harrison Strong, clad in the velvet costume and with the cap on his head, came out of the pergola.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mrs. Veers, looking him over. "I'm beginning to see just where my son was right. I'd almost say, too, you're just cut out for the part!"

Alma Strong gave a silvery laugh.

"So should I, father! What do you think, Dr. Jackson?"

"The same — assuredly!" nodded the young physician, eying appraisingly the well set-up figure and hawklike countenance of the would-be *Giovanni*, and inwardly amused at Mrs. Veers's efforts to put the best construction on her son's unhappy remark.

"Come along now!" begged the woman of Strong. "I'll have the director make you up."

The banker gave way a pace.

"Must I be made up, too?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Well, since I've begun—"

He shrugged and led the way to the director, who was still explaining what he wanted the performers to do.

At a single glance the physician could see that the director, having partly lost his temper, had been addressing the people about him more sharply than he should have. Jackson glanced apprehensively from face to face.

Finally, afraid that Grimm would endanger the success of the whole plan unless warned "to temper the wind to the shorn lamb," he whispered to Mrs. Veers that she ought to speak a word of warning to the director who, having cut short his harrangue, started to meet and make up Harrison Strong.

To what Hunter Jackson had to say Mrs. Veers lent an attentive ear.

"Won't you speak to him yourself, doctor?" she urged. "I think you're quite right. But I imagine he'll take what you say more graciously."

"All right," agreed Jackson.

He walked over to Ben Grimm, who was touching up Strong's eyebrows, and asked if he could talk to him privately for a moment.

"Certainly," said the director, and bent toward him.

"Having trouble with them?" asked Jackson, giving a slight nod in the direction of the amateur thespians.

"Uhuh!" Grimm grunted.

"Would you mind if I made a suggestion?"

"Why—" Then, seeing a grin on the doctor's face, "No!"

"Go easy with them. Remember who they are. Don't mind so much about the picture. It'll succeed, no matter how rotten it is."

"But my rep!" sputtered Grimm.

"Oh, I guess people 'll make allowances! Don't you worry about that."

"But I don't seem to be able to make 'em pay attention to me."

"Listen to me," advised Hunter Jackson.

"Well?"

"Tell 'em they *have* to pay attention. Pass the buck to Mr. Strong. Say he had a limited amount of time to give to this thing. That's why I've had the scenes in which he is to appear taken first. Pass *him* the buck! Tell 'em they must not waste time. Then run 'em through the scenes quickly and trust to luck."

"That's what I'll have to do," ruefully responded Grimm.

And, after finishing Harrison Strong's make-up, he followed the physician's suggestion. He made a neat little speech in-

corporating the points Jackson had advised that he make. At its finish he said:

"And now we'll run through the first scene I'm going to take. Mr. Strong, you're *Giovanni*. You ascend the throne thoughtfully. You are worried. You sit down to think. You nod your head once or twice. Suddenly you strike a listening attitude. You hear some one coming. At that moment the half-dozen of you gentlemen who are to take the parts of revelers in dominoes and masks rush in. *Giovanni*, the tyrant, rises and greets you. Then you press on him as though in carnival spirit. Suddenly you draw daggers and stab him to death! For the rehearsal, which I'm going to hold now, you won't need your costumes. You can get them and put them on in that pergola."

He pointed to the one in which Harrison Strong had dressed.

"After slaying *Giovanni* you rush out. Then the courtiers, who are secretly in cahoots with you, enter and bear the tyrant off. I guess I'd better run over the names of the courtiers." Ben Grimm consulted a typewritten list. "Mr. Wellington Terle, Mr. Crawley Drew, Mr. Clinton Edgington, Miss Strong, Mrs. Forrest, Miss Brennan and Mrs. Brennan. That includes everybody, I believe. Are you all in costume and made up?" Receiving a unanimous affirmative he added: "Very well, let's begin! Mr. Strong, you ascend the throne."

They went through the scene without a hitch. At least so Hunter Jackson thought.

And to make the acting more realistic they even shouted things which Ben Grimm, the director, had evidently told them to shout.

It was obvious that they pleased the latter.

Only once were they interrupted by Grimm, who advised Harrison Strong to groan when he was struck down.

After the brief rehearsal Hunter Jackson followed the men who were to play the parts of assassins to the pergola. He wished to caution them not to lose their tempers at Grimm. He found them donning the dominoes and masks, which were lying on a bench in the improvised greenroom, beside Harrison Strong's coat and vest.

"Humph!" young Veers was commenting as he regarded his property-dagger in the semigloom of the pergola. "I must say this looks businesslike. I wonder if one of us could slip it to Strong and get away with it?"

The others laughed.

"Suppose you try it?" suggested Cassel ironically.

"Not on your life!" returned Veers. "Why don't you?"

"No, thanks."

"Hello, doc!" said another of the young men to Hunter Jackson, whom he had not seen until that moment.

"Hello, yourself," the physician replied. "I hope you chaps have got over being angry with Grimm."

"Oh, sure!" agreed several.

"Well," explained Jackson, "I came here to find out how you felt. All got your dominoes?"

"Yes," they said in turn.

"I've found one here on the end of the bench."

The doctor held it up for them to see and claim it.

"It's an extra one, I guess," put in Cassel. "Why don't you drape yourself in it and get into the picture?"

"No, thanks," replied Jackson, retreating. "I'm not an actor; besides, I've got other things to do."

He returned to where the director was waiting, and before long caught sight of *Giovanni's* slayers, dominoed and masked, coming out of the shadows toward him. He called the attention of the director to them.

"Lights!" bawled Grimm to Strong's valet, who had charge of the panchromas and who, at his command, turned them all on. "Ready, camera!" This to Ned Alt, the camera-man, who had his hand on the crank of the cinema machine. "Now, Mr. Strong!"

Hunter Jackson was tremendously pleased by the lifelikeness of the scene that ensued. At the particularly realistic groan to which Harrison Strong gave vent as he fell at the hands of the maskers, he stole a glance at Grimm. He saw that the director was pleased, too.

After watching the courtiers bear off the "murdered" *Giovanni*, he turned to Mrs. Veers:

"What do you think of that?" he smiled.

"Splendid!" was her comment. "Wasn't Mr. Strong capital?"

To that question the doctor never made reply—for he was accosted, at that instant, by Alma Strong who, with staring eyes, rushed up to him and cried:

"Oh, doctor! Father! Go to him—at once! Fa—"

Then the girl collapsed into Mrs. Veers's arms.

CHAPTER III.

STRANGER THAN FICTION.

"WHAT on earth's the matter?" breathed Mrs. Veers in panic.

Hunter Jackson shook his blond head.

"I haven't the faintest idea; I'll see!"

He hurried behind the back-drop, where he knew he would find Harrison Strong.

There indeed he came upon a strange spectacle. Surrounded by an hysterical group of men and women he caught sight of the supine figure of the banker.

"What's happened?" he demanded of the valet, who was standing near, wringing his hands in abject helplessness.

"It's—it's Mr. Strong, sir!" the man gulped.

Without awaiting a more definite reply the physician bent over the recumbent form.

Had Strong suffered a sudden heart attack?

This was the first question he put to himself—chiefly because, only a short time before, he had pronounced the banker in tiptop physical condition.

Then, as he examined the stricken man, Hunter Jackson choked back an involuntary gasp.

On the velvet costume in the region of Harrison Strong's heart he felt something warm and viscous. Blood! Terror gripping him, he applied his ear to the banker's left side.

"Good God!" was the comment that burst from his lips.

"Is—is he dead?"

It was Wellington Terle, Strong's attorney, who rapped out the question.

Hunter Jackson looked up.

"Stabbed through the heart!" he whispered.

"My God!" replied Terle in a queer voice. "In the assassination scene?"

"I guess so!"

"What'll we do?"

The physician took out his watch.

"Do?" he said. "Why, call up the police! What time have *you?*"

Terle unbuttoned his costume and fumbled a while for his watch before finding it.

"Nine o'clock!" he said, finally consulting the timepiece.

The physician straightened up.

"Bear that in mind!" he cautioned the lawyer in a low voice. "I must act quickly. I'll have to ask you to see that Mr. Strong's body is not touched and to break the news to the people here. Also, to request them not to leave the grounds till the investigation of the police. I needn't point out how unpleasant the authorities might make it for them if they did." He pitched his voice still lower. "Besides, I don't really know who's responsible for this—this killing. I'm simply flabbergasted! It must have been one of the men who acted with Strong in the last scene. And yet—Well, I'm going to break the news to the rest of the folks and phone for the police."

He beckoned to the valet who came over to him.

"Go tell the butlers to stand guard at the front gates," was his command. "Tell them not to let any one in or out—except officers of the law. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

But the man hesitated.

"Hurry up!" snapped the doctor.

"But what, sir, if they insist?"

"Refer them to me."

"Very good, sir."

The doctor expressed his satisfaction. He had taken at least one step in the right direction. He knew that the valet, having been given precedence over the butlers in the Strong household, would execute with despatch his order to bottle up the place.

Most of all, he did not want any of the five men he suspected to get away. That is,

if they had not already gone. He had no right to interrogate them himself; he would have to leave that to the police.

Jackson hurried back to Mrs. Veers, whom he found trying to console Alma Strong and, at the same time, to get out of her what had just happened to the banker—as much for her own enlightenment as for the enlightenment of a circle of bewildered people about them.

One glance at the girl was sufficient to assure him that she was in a state closely bordering on hysteria. So he drew Mrs. Veers to one side and whispered to her:

"Get Miss Strong into bed if you possibly can. I'll prescribe for her in a few moments."

Mrs. Veers was excited.

"But what—what has happened?" she demanded, clutching the doctor's arm and turning him around so that the light fell on his face.

Jackson pondered. Should he tell her? If he did, would he have another patient on his hands?

At length, looking at the woman searchingly, he decided that she was strong enough to hear the truth.

"Mr. Strong," he said *sotto voce*. "Mr. Strong is dead."

"Dead!" The woman took a step backward and stood glaring at him like a person in a trance. "Of what did he die?"

Jackson saw that her gameness was enabling her to overcome her emotion.

"Of a dagger-thrust through the heart," he stated slowly.

"But—but who thrust a dagger in his heart?" Her hand was upon his arm again and her wild eyes were searching his.

Jackson shrugged.

"I know no more about the affair than you do. Even yet I can hardly believe it—but it must have been in the scene that both of us just witnessed.

"How horrible!" she breathed, her fingers tightening on his arm.

"Now please have Miss Strong put to bed."

"All right, doctor," Mrs. Veers acquiesced, and, releasing his arm, she turned away.

After the departure of Mrs. Veers, Hunter Jackson turned to the persons who were standing near. Not willing to mince matters, he told them of the sudden death of Harrison Strong.

And, as he was talking, he saw the young men who had acted the rôles of assassins approach from the direction of the pergola where they had evidently doffed their dominoes and masks.

He was incapable of analyzing his own emotions at the moment when he caught sight of them. What, indeed, could be the answer to Mrs. Veers's question? In what manner had Harrison Strong come by the wound that had caused his death? Was it not a certainty that one of the men in the dominoes must have done it! In that case, was the murderer still among the group of seemingly innocent young men?

"Of course I'm inexpressibly shocked," Hunter Jackson wound up, making as he did so a determined but unsuccessful effort to count the young men as they moved around. "And I can imagine how the rest of you feel about the matter. In conclusion, however, I am compelled to make one request of you. Don't any of you leave before the police come!"

Then Hunter Jackson made his way quickly into the library and called up Chief Inspector of Police Thomas Murphy. He was aware that, sooner or later, the latter would take charge of a case so important. So he decided not to bother with Murphy's subordinates, but to take up the matter with the chief himself.

It was necessary for him to call up the home of the chief inspector before he managed to reach him.

The chief's tone indicated that he did not relish a call at such a late hour, but nevertheless his answer was courteous enough.

"I'll be on the spot as soon as possible," Jackson drew from Murphy, after he had told him in a few words of the tragedy and outlined the steps he had already taken to clear up the mystery.

Then he proceeded to Miss Strong's room, told her maid to go out for some medicine, gave Mrs. Veers precise instructions as to how she should administer it, and in a few moments returned to the gar-

dens to take precautions against any of the evidence being disturbed.

As he expected, he found the actors in the drama that had just terminated so tragically standing around in awestruck groups conversing in low tones among themselves. He went from one group to another, doing his best to quiet them; and he paid particular attention to assuaging the nervous excitement of the women.

And then, in what appeared to be an incredibly short time, he heard the reverberation of a motor-car and saw its gleaming headlight swing round the drive toward the doorway of the Strong mansion.

Knowing that he would be asked for, Hunter Jackson left a group of women and hastened to the spot where the car stopped.

"I am Dr. Jackson," he announced to a burly man with a mustache, whom he correctly guessed to be Chief Inspector of Police Thomas Murphy.

"Glad to meet you, doctor," greeted the official perfunctorily as he stepped out of the machine and reached into his pocket for a note-book. "Can you give me the lay of the land?"

"What do you mean?" asked Jackson, slightly puzzled.

Murphy pressed a pencil and a stiff-backed note-book on the physician.

"Sketch a diagram of the Strong property," he requested. "Mark the position of all the exits. Also of the house and the spot where the body lies."

Hunter Jackson did as he was asked, adding, on his own hook, the positions of the two pergolas, which he thought, having been dressing-rooms, might figure in the solution of the mystery. When he had concluded, he handed the note-book back to the chief inspector. In it he had drawn a diagram.

"Fine! Are there any more exits?"

"No," replied Jackson. "And I suppose you know a high, wrought-iron fence, practically unscalable, surrounds the place. Also that I put the only two entrances under guard about twenty minutes after the stabbing."

Murphy gave a quick nod.

Then, wheeling on the motor-car, which contained five men in uniform, he called out:

"Gallagher!"

"Yes, sir!" responded the latter, getting out of the automobile and saluting.

"Take Ellis and order the servants to assemble in the kitchen. I want all of them there in fifteen minutes. Then search the house for prowlers."

Murphy explained why such an order had been given.

"I want to round up not only the murderer, if he is still here, but any accomplice or accomplices he might have. Not long ago I let what later proved to be a much-wanted man slip through my fingers by not taking every precaution."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

He thought it well within the range of probability that the chief inspector might, in that way, pick up an accomplice or accomplices of the guilty man. As for the murderer, however, he told himself that Thomas Murphy ought to have him in the toils in a short time, unless one of the five men in dominoes had already got away.

CHAPTER IV.

SCRAPS OF EVIDENCE.

FOR, as unreasonable as it seemed in consideration of the characters of the five suspects, Hunter Jackson reflected for the dozenth time—that it must have been one of them who did the stabbing.

Of a more daring murder he had never heard or read.

He did not doubt for a single instant that it was a murder. The accurate, deadly thrust necessary to drive the dagger—or knife—through Harrison Strong's costume could only have been premeditated.

He was astounded at the consummate daring of the act, which had been committed right under the dazzling panchromas—committed right under the eyes of a score of spectators.

The chief inspector, following a moment's cogitation, pocketed the note-book and addressed the men remaining in the car.

"Maloney!"

"Yes, sir."

"Goughan! French!"

"Yes, sir."

The three men got out and saluted.

"Run down to the gates, Maloney and Goughan, and relieve the butlers on guard. Tell 'em to join the rest of the servants in the kitchen. French, I expect the coroner and two of the squad from headquarters any minute. Send 'em to me as soon as they come."

"And where'll you be, sir?" asked French.

"Somewhere in the gardens. After seeing the coroner, look about the gardens to pick up whatever information you can."

"All right, sir," sang out French.

And the trio loped off down the drive.

"Now doctor," began Murphy, "I want you to tell me once more how you think the killing was pulled off."

"Do you recall what I said over the phone?"

"Yes and no—I couldn't get the drift of all of it."

"Well—"

And the doctor plunged into a minute description of the scene in which the pseudo *Giovanni* met death and the one which followed it, in which the courtiers carried him off. In concluding, he suddenly became aware that Thomas Murphy was listening open-mouthed.

"Am I—am I really to understand the stabbing was done right in the open, so to speak?"

Hunter Jackson gave a solemn nod.

"It looks so."

"But—but when Mr. Strong gave that groan of which you speak, didn't you wonder—"

"I thought he was acting exceptionally well—that's all."

"And the rest of the onlookers?"

"They did, too." After a moment. "I'm sure of it."

"Well, I'll see! After hearing your story I'm positive the murderer is one of the five assassins. Yet, by—" He broke off. "I imagine the man must be crazy—or pretty desperate. Well, I'm going to put the screws on every one about the place, before coming to any definite conclusion. It's far better, in a case like this, to work from the outside in, rather than from the inside out, so to speak. Get me?"

"Not exactly," confessed Hunter Jackson.

"By that I mean to get the story of every one who knows anything about this affair before making any arrests. Heaven only knows I'm afraid I'll be able to dig up little enough. Got a list of all the actors?"

Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"No—but the director has."

"Take me to him at once."

They came upon the director near the camera, conversing in low tones with the camera-man. To reach him, they had to thread their way through still excited groups, who almost stared Murphy out of countenance.

"Here's the list!" replied Ben Grimm to the chief inspector's question.

Feverishly eager to please, he thrust out the typewritten sheet, which Murphy accepted and scanned hurriedly.

"Does this include everybody except you and your camera-man?"

Grimm shook his head.

"No," he said. "There were a few spectators whose names I haven't got, and some chauffeurs. I imagine Dr. Jackson can tell you who they are."

"Can you, doctor?" the chief inspector wished to know.

Jackson nodded.

"Very well. Then get these people together for me."

"Right away!" acceded the physician.

He was delighted that the chief inspector showed a disposition to let him handle the people who had witnessed Strong's demise.

Indirectly, he had been responsible for their presence.

So he wanted to spare them the humiliation he was certain they would feel at being ordered about by the police.

He went behind the backdrop to see if any one besides Wellington Terle chanced to be near Strong's body. With the lawyer he found only the dead man's valet, who, hurrying to meet him, said:

"Sir, I've carried out your instructions to the letter."

The doctor nodded approval.

"Good! By the way, I'm glad I've run into you. I want you to come along with

me to meet Chief Inspector Murphy, who's just arrived."

"Very well, sir."

Hunter Jackson turned to the lawyer.

"And Mr. Terle."

"Yes, doctor."

In the emergency, Wellington Terle, like all the others who had witnessed the tragedy, seemed to look to Hunter Jackson for guidance.

"Will you stay with the body until the arrival of the coroner?"

"When's he coming?"

Terle spoke in a tremulous tone which indicated that he did not relish the task.

"Any minute now," replied the physician.

"All right, Jackson."

With the valet, who, he believed, would be of great assistance to Murphy, Hunter Jackson rejoined the chief inspector. It was his intention to present Strong's servant to the latter before he asked the men and women chatting in lowered voices under the panchroma lamps to step forward and hear what Murphy had to say to them.

After greeting the valet curtly, the chief inspector held out the typewritten list furnished by Ben Grimm and drew a pencil from his pocket.

"Just a moment, doctor," he said bruskly. "I want the names of those spectators. Were there many of them?"

"No."

"Recall who they were?"

Jackson pondered a moment.

"Yes. Mrs. Dayton Veers, Lester Forrest—"

"'S that all?"

"Y-e-s. But I haven't mentioned the chauffeurs."

"Do you know their names?"

"No—and I don't even know how many of them there were inside the gates. But I'm sure those who employ them can tell you."

"All right. Now go ahead! Ask these people to come forward and listen to me."

Hunter Jackson did as requested. In a few words he introduced Chief Inspector Murphy.

The police official lost no time in getting down to brass tacks. But, for all that, he was deferential in his manner toward the persons before him. Neither directly nor by inference did he once give them cause for complaint. He seemed to realize that, being for the most part people of refinement, they shrank instinctively from the ordeal through which they were forced by circumstances to pass.

He explained that he was going to read aloud the list he held and asked them to answer as he read their names.

"But first," he interpolated, "I want to know how many of you came in your cars and have them in waiting. Will you be good enough to put up your hands?"

Hunter Jackson counted three who responded.

"And where is your car now?" asked the chief inspector of each in turn.

"In the Strong garage," was the reply of all.

"And your chauffeur—where is he?"

"There, too."

Murphy wheeled on the valet.

"Go to the garage," he said, pressing him into service. "Tell the chauffeurs—yes, I mean the Strong chauffeurs, too—tell the chauffeurs to join the servants in the kitchen. Then come back immediately."

"And now I'll read the names," the chief inspector announced. "After responding, I wish all those who acted in the first scene to remain here."

Murphy paused as he scanned the list again. To Hunter Jackson it appeared that he was going to limit the investigation wisely to the men who had worn dominoes and masks.

Would Murphy find them all still on the spot?

The chief inspector went on.

"Those in the second scene I want to assemble in the library. I'll see them soon. Is Thompson Lambert here?"

"Present!" the doctor heard Alma Strong's fiancé respond.

Mr. Nevin?"

"Here."

"Mr. Orville?"

"Here."

"Mr. Cassel?"

"Here."

"And Mr. Veers?"

"Here."

"I believe that includes every one who took part in scene one. Now for scene two."

"Wellington Terle."

To Murphy the doctor whispered the whereabouts of Terle. So the chief inspector, nodding, continued:

"Miss Strong."

Again Hunter Jackson bent forward.

"She's in a state of collapse. I've had Mrs. Veers take her to bed."

"Then I'll check off the two of them," muttered the chief inspector, suiting the action to the word. Aloud he continued:

"Mrs. Forrest!"

"Present," the woman answered faintly.

One by one he called off the names: Miss Brennan, Mrs. Brennan, Crawley Drew, Clinton Edgington, Mr. Lester Forrest. And, one by one, he checked them off the list as he heard them reply to their names.

Then he excused those who had played in the second scene, returning the typewritten sheet to his pocket.

As he did so, Murphy was approached by three men who hurried up to him from the direction of the house.

"Good evening, Mr. Washburn!" he said to one of them. "I want you to meet Dr. Jackson." Turning to the latter, he explained: "This is the coroner."

Jackson shook hands perfunctorily with Washburn.

He had never heard of Washburn particularly—and he took no interest in coroners. So he was not overanxious to meet him. But he glanced curiously at the other two. Of the headquarter's sleuths, he had heard occasionally from his friend, Rutherford Jones.

Of one of the squad in particular, he had heard a great deal—of Dave Condon, whose ratiocinative powers, claimed Rutherford Jones, were equal to those of any living sleuth.

As an amateur student of criminals, therefore, Hunter Jackson was on the *qui vive* to meet such a man and have a talk with him.

He surmised that one of the newcomers was Condon.

Nor was the doctor mistaken.

The next instant he was presented by the chief inspector to "Mr. Condon" and "Mr. Day." Murmuring a polite acknowledgment, he shot a cautious glance of inquiry at the former of the two headquarter's men.

And, as is frequently the case, he was disappointed in the personal appearance of the man so highly recommended.

Dave Condon he found short of stature and thin—altogether a rather puny and insignificant-looking individual.

But when Hunter Jackson gazed into the detective's eyes, which were dark and restless, he understood how Condon had come to forge ahead in his chosen field.

But Murphy began to speak and, as briefly as possible, he apprized the newcomers of all Jackson had told him about the crime.

"Coroner," he concluded, pointing to the backdrop, "I want you to let Day help you examine Mr. Strong's body, which is behind there. Relieve Mr. Terle, who's guarding the spot—and remain with the body until I come to you. I'm about to conduct a little investigation of my own. And as for you, Condon!"

"Yes, chief," spoke up the alert little man.

"I want you to—" He broke off, turning to Jackson. "By the way, where are the dressing-rooms, doctor?"

"In the pergolas I drew in the sketch," replied Jackson hastily.

Murphy gave an understanding nod.

"Oh, I see! Are they lighted?"

"Faintly, by a pair of Japanese lanterns."

The chief inspector humphed.

"Well, I'm sorry. But, Condon—"

"Yes—"

"Do your level best to give them a thorough examination, just the same. Particularly the pergola used by the men. To-morrow I'll probably have you go through them again. Get those property daggers—you know what to do with them. Also, give all the dominoes the once, twice and three times over."

"Very good, chief."

"And return to me right after you're finished."

The three men left together.

Following their departure, Murphy eyed Jackson narrowly. Then, after a moment, he jerked his head in the direction of the five performers who, at his request, were lingering on the scene.

"Before putting the screws on 'em," he said, "I want to make a request of you, doctor."

"Go ahead," invited Jackson.

Murphy opened his mouth to speak, then checked himself, glancing expectantly over Jackson's shoulder. The next moment, greeting the returning valet, he asked:

"Did you find the chauffeurs?"

"Yes, sir," returned the valet, bowing.

"How many of 'em?"

"Three—and, of course, the Strong chauffeurs—two of them."

Murphy nodded approvingly.

"Good! And now I want you to stay by me. I'm about to start an investigation in which I may find you useful. Just as I saw you, I was telling the doctor that I wished to make a request of him—well, as it happens, I wish to make one of you as well."

"Yes, sir?" half interrogated the man.

"I believe you knew Mr. Strong very intimately."

"Of course, sir."

"Well, I want you to tell me if you have any reason to think Mr. Strong was afraid of an attack of this kind. Have you?"

The valet slowly shook his head.

"No, sir."

"You were present during the scene in which Mr. Strong probably met his death, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see or hear anything suspicious before or afterward?"

Another shake of the head.

"How about you, doctor?" asked Murphy.

"I don't seem to recall anything."

"Are you quite sure?" the chief inspector urged, palpably disappointed.

"Let me think a minute."

"Certainly. Only remember—anything suspicious, no matter how seemingly unimportant it was."

Of a sudden, Hunter Jackson snapped his fingers.

For he recalled in a flash the remark dropped by young Veers in the pergola:

"I wonder if one of us could slip it to Strong and get away with it?"

CHAPTER V.

THE KNIFE.

THOMAS MURPHY was quick to notice the physician's preoccupation.

"Well?" he prompted.

But Hunter Jackson shook his head quizzically and, in a doubtful tone, declared:

"I don't want to implicate an innocent party."

"*Innocent?*" The chief inspector snatched at the word. "Are you sure the person of whom you speak is innocent?"

"Well, to be quite frank, I'm not."

"Then speak right out—what was it you were going to say?"

"I—oh, hang it all, I recall that one of the men in the first scene made an odd remark in the pergola. It was while they were dressing."

"What was it?"

Hunter Jackson told him.

"Understand," he added cautiously, "I'm not intimating that young Veers had a hand in this crime."

"I know—I know," said Murphy somewhat testily. "Do you remember anything else?"

"No."

"Did any one seem particularly anxious to have Harrison Strong play the chief rôle in this play?".

The doctor threw Murphy a penetrating glance.

"Why, yes!" he responded in a surprised tone.

"Who?" exploded Murphy.

"Veers."

"Eh?" significantly. "Veers again?"

"And Charles Cassel, who wrote the photo-play."

"Ah!" sighed the chief dryly. "Anybody else?"

"No."

"Sure?"

Hunter Jackson, of course, remembered that Alma Strong and Mrs. Veers had brought

considerable pressure to bear on the banker. But, without hesitation, he eliminated them from the list of suspects and so shielded them.

Suddenly turning around the chief inspector beckoned to Ben Grimm, the director, who left the small circle of men under a temporary cloud, and came over to see what was wanted.

"Mr. Grimm," began Murphy, "I have a few questions I want to ask you."

"Fire away, chief," invited Grimm soberly.

"Did you notice anything peculiar while the picture was being taken?"

Grimm shook his head positively.

"No, I did not."

Murphy tried a new tack.

"Now I've heard that Mr. Strong gave a particularly realistic groan when he was struck down in the play."

"Yes—he did."

It was in a tone of sudden amazement that he uttered the words.

Murphy bent forward eagerly.

"The next question I'm going to put to you I must caution you to treat as confidential. Was it then—was it then, do you suppose, that Mr. Strong was stabbed? Of course I'm only asking for an opinion."

Ben Grimm met the other's gaze frankly.

"I do not know," he asserted. "But, in the light of later developments, I imagine he must have."

"Good! And now about the scenes that have been filmed—what's the earliest possible moment I can see them?"

"To-morrow noon."

"I want you to take particular care of that film."

"I understand, Mr. Murphy."

"Very well, I'll be at the studio at one o'clock to see it. Now go back and send the camera-man to me."

Ben Grimm returned to the group malingering in the middle distance.

"What's your name?" asked Murphy of the camera-man as soon as the latter, a thick-set, light-haired young fellow, presented himself.

"Ned Alt," came the prompt reply.

Then in substantially the same way he answered the same queries put to Ben Grimm. Only he was even less certain than the director on one point. Having been altogether engrossed in taking the picture, he had no opinion whatever to vouchsafe with respect to whether Harrison Strong had or had not met his death while he was busily engaged in turning the crank of the camera.

In a few moments Murphy requested him to return to the others.

Then he called for Thompson Lambert, Alma Strong's fiancé, but waved him back upon the sudden arrival of Dave Condon, who hurried up breathlessly.

"You're through in a jiffy," the chief inspector commented to him in surprise.

The little man started to speak, but hesitated, eying Hunter Jackson and the valet askance.

"Is it all right to talk freely before these gentlemen?" he queried in an instant.

"Certainly—go ahead!" said the chief inspector.

At that Condon, his hands behind his back, bent closer.

"I've made an important discovery," he announced.

"Good! What is it?"

"In searching the pergola where the men dressed I found the property daggers all right, but that they couldn't possibly have done the job. But I also found a knife—the one, I think, that did!"

"Eh? Any finger-marks on it?"

Dave Condon inclined his head.

"I've doused the handle with gray powder and brought them out clearly. I'm holding the knife in my right hand behind my back. I don't want those men over there to catch sight of it. You can use it to advantage, I imagine, in cross-examining them."

Murphy pursed his lips in a long whistle.

"Where'd you find this knife?"

"Sticking into the under side of a bench-seat."

The chief inspector grunted.

"Funny it was left where it could be found so easily."

"But it wasn't!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just this," elucidated Condon. "I might have overlooked it in a cursory obser-

vation—or destroyed the finger-marks in drawing it out."

"I see. Well, I'm everlastingly obliged to you for rustling it up so soon and coming to me with it. Now I'm going to take the finger-prints of that bunch. So I'd like you to chase up to the house and get me a bottle of India ink, a half-dozen pieces of heavy paper and a tray."

Condon grinned.

"I've already done it; I have everything you need in my pockets at the present moment."

"Excellent! Have you made any other discovery?"

The little man made a grimace.

"I should say so!"

"What was it?" asked Murphy tensely.

"I've found blood on one of the dominoes worn to-night."

"Ah!"

"And chief!"

"Well?"

"I've a suggestion to make."

"Go ahead."

"I think if you'd put the screws to that crowd singly and out of sight of one another, you'd get much more out of them. And—"

"That's just what I intend to do now I have the knife," broke in Murphy. "But go ahead."

"And—and then throw in a little third-degree stuff, I was going to say, with the knife and domino. See? I've got all the dominoes behind that tree back there." He jerked his head in the direction of a tree a few steps in the rear. "Also, the daggers with their hafts powdered, sticking in the grass. I'm afraid they won't be much good as evidence, though. But I've brought out all the finger-marks on them, too. Say, chief, wouldn't it be a ten-strike if you could trip the man who wore the blood-stained domino into admitting that he wore it?"

"It would," assented Murphy. "But I doubt if I could."

"Why not try?"

"Rest assured, I'm going to," grimly. "And Condon—"

"Yes, chief."

"I want you to slip me the knife *sub rosa*—" Pausing, Murphy turned to the valet. "Bring me that table over there," he requested, pointing to a light one near the camera, one which had been used by the director.

Then, after instructing the valet where to place the table, once it had been brought, he continued briskly:

"Next, Condon, I want you to put on this table the ink, paper, and tray. I won't trouble you to get the dominoes—I'll ask Mr. Strong's man to carry them to me—that is, after you take those fellows out of sight."

"Anything else, chief?" Condon lingered.

"No—except that I'm going to send them back to you as soon as I get through with them. And I must caution you not to let them talk to one another under any circumstances."

"I get you. But what do I do after—"

"Bring them to me again," Murphy cut him short, anticipating the question on Condon's lips. "Bring them to me again after I've interrogated the last man. Then I'll put you to comparing the finger-prints with those on the handle of the knife. By the way, I've already cross-examined the director and the camera-man."

Condon nodded, removing a diminutive tray, a bottle of black ink, and some paper from his pockets and placing them on the table, using his left hand awkwardly for the purpose. And then with his right, which he had held behind his back until that moment, he gingerly and surreptitiously—so only Hunter Jackson and the valet could catch a glimpse of it—passed a knife to Chief Inspector Murphy, who grasped it by the blade under its powdered haft and put it behind his back so it could not be seen.

Fascinated, Hunter Jackson had stared at it.

And the moment he had done so he had taken note of the fact that it could of a certainty have been employed to deliver the *coup de grace* that ended Harrison Strong's life. A hunting-knife it was, but sharpened to an almost needle-like point. Also, it had a hilt.

Raising his eyes from a study of the knife, Hunter Jackson chanced to gaze into

the beady black eyes of the valet. And to his amazement he perceived that they were distended with— Was it dismay?

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROVERBIAL NEEDLE.

WHETHER it was dismay, Hunter could not decide.

In making the positive assertion that Harrison Strong had not been afraid of an attack on his life, had the valet lied to protect some one to whom the knife belonged; some one, perhaps, whose accomplice he was? And now that the knife had been found, did he fear that the man would be caught?

Or, maybe, being innocent of complicity in his employer's murder, he still recognized the knife—knew to whom it belonged?

Maybe, however, he was merely overcome with horror at sight of the instrument of the crime, being fond of Harrison Strong?

Some time later Hunter Jackson wondered why he had not guessed at the true explanation.

At that moment he resolved surreptitiously to watch the valet, who quickly regained command of himself when Thomas Murphy, having watched Dave Condon lead the suspects into a little grove of trees that bordered the brilliantly lighted lawn, wheeled on him and in a brusk voice said:

"Get me the dominoes—but don't touch the daggers."

"Yes, sir."

The valet bowed and left. He came back with the dominoes presently and just as Thompson Lambert, evidently at Dave Condon's behest, approached from the direction of the trees.

"I want you to name them as they arrive," said the chief inspector to Jackson, motioning to the valet to lay the dominoes on the grass nearby. "Who's this man?"

Hunter Jackson told him.

"He's engaged to marry Miss Strong," he added.

"Is, eh?" was Murphy's laconic comment.

Eying Lambert as he came up with a swinging, almost insolent gait characteristic of him, the physician could not help wondering what would be Murphy's method of attack in cross-examining him and the men who were to follow.

Personally, he still could not bring himself to believe any of them guilty of the crime. But he knew from his wide reading and his countless confabs with Rutherford Jones that he must not draw too hasty a conclusion in such a matter.

"Mr. Lambert," began Murphy as soon as he had Alma Strong's fiancé standing before him, "I want you to tell me—to the best of your knowledge—just what occurred during the domino scene. I suppose you know it was then, we believe, that Mr. Strong was stabbed to death?"

The chief inspector's manner was bland and confiding. (Later, Hunter Jackson was to find out just how much of a pose it was.)

With a shade of petulance, Lambert tweaked the ends of his blond, waxed mustache.

"I know," he rasped, "but I'm blamed if I know how it happened."

Murphy shook his head.

"I didn't ask you that," he went on ingratiatingly. "In fact, I was sure you didn't. What I do want to know is: did anything occur while the scene was being filmed—did anything occur that aroused your suspicion?"

"No," responded Lambert shortly.

"Or before?"

"No."

"What about the remark uttered by young Veers in the pergola?"

For an instant Thompson Lambert eyed the physician askance. He might just as well have said to him, "What in the devil have you been telling this fellow?" Never a particularly companionable person to Hunter Jackson, now he brought a slight flush of anger to the doctor's face.

"The remark young Veers uttered in the pergola?" Lambert repeated.

The chief inspector now bent forward eagerly.

"Yes — about wondering whether it wouldn't be easy for one of you to slip it to Strong."

"Oh!" Thompson Lambert tossed back

his head reminiscently. "But I'm certain he made that remark only in fun."

He treated Hunter Jackson to an insolent glare.

"Perhaps," nodded Murphy, turning to the doctor. "Will you kindly pour some of that India ink into the tray?" he begged. At Jackson's compliance with the request, he went on: "Now, Mr. Lambert, I want you to dip the tips of your fingers in the ink, wipe the ink off, and press them on a piece of the paper on the table."

Lambert started back.

"What's the idea? Surely, I'm not sus—"

But Murphy interrupted in a more incisive tone.

"I'm not making any accusations, Mr. Lambert," he snapped. "Kindly do as I tell you."

The man submitted with bad grace.

Then Murphy took a pencil out of his pocket and passed it to him.

"Sign your name below the finger-prints," he added.

"Anything more?" was Lambert's sullen reply as he did as commanded.

"Yes; permit Mr. Strong's valet to go through your pockets."

Hunter Jackson gave an involuntary start.

Should he allow Murphy to press the valet into such service? Such was the question he asked himself in quick alarm.

Surely, if the valet were in cahoots with the murderer, he might readily give the pockets of the latter only a perfunctory examination; merely a pretense at searching them.

But Hunter Jackson had no opportunity, such as he wanted, of warning Thomas Murphy. Perhaps, he told himself, it was just as well he had not. He could better keep an eye on the valet who, if guilty and believing himself unsuspected, would be more apt to make a misstep.

But as he observed him in the act of rifling Lambert's pockets, he took careful note that the valet was extremely thorough. None of the articles he brought to light, however—a watch and a wallet, a bunch of keys, etc.—were of any interest to the chief inspector, who signed to the servant to put them back.

"Am I to be made to suffer any more indignities?" flared out Lambert when the search had been concluded without bringing any result.

The chief inspector disregarded the snarling question. Pointing to the dominoes, he queried:

"Can you pick out the costume you wore?"

Lambert shook his head emphatically.

"No," he snapped; "I happen to know they were all alike, and of the same size. So it 'd be impossible." Then, more vehemently again: "What's the use of trying to bulldoze me, anyway?"

"It might be to your interest to pick it out, if you can."

"Well," with finality, "I can't. I say, what's the use of bulldozing me? I haven't the ghost of an idea how Mr. Strong got stabbed. I hadn't any weapon to do it with—only a blunt property-dagger. Neither did any of us have, so far as I know."

Weapon!

Mentally, Hunter Jackson clutched at the word. Weapon! When he asked himself, would the chief inspector flash the knife he was holding behind his back on Thompson Lambert?

And with what result?

He need not have asked himself the question. For that instant he was aware that Thomas Murphy was of the opinion that he should confront Thompson Lambert with it at once. And confront him with it he did!

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARREST.

WHIPPING the knife from behind his back, the chief inspector held it, powdered haft upward, right before Lambert's eyes.

"Have you ever seen this knife before?" he rapped out.

To the physician Lambert seemed greatly taken aback, but not exactly terrified. He licked his lips.

"I have not!" he croaked.

"Sure—dead sure?"

"Absolutely."

He had lost all of his thinly veiled insolence.

"Listen to me, then! You refuse even to try to identify your domino?"

"I do; I know I couldn't."

"Very well; report back to Mr. Condon."

He half-turned.

"Am I to regard myself—er—a prisoner?"

"For a while at least," the chief inspector told him grimly.

The cross-examination of Charles Cassel was no whit more satisfactory. In answer to the charge that he had vehemently urged Harrison Strong to play the rôle of *Giovanni*, he shrugged.

"And why shouldn't I?" he returned. "I'd written the photo-play; naturally I wanted to see it succeed. With Mr. Strong in the title part I knew it would."

Without a murmur he did all that he was asked by Murphy to do.

He pressed his inked finger-tips on a piece of paper, afterward affixing his signature to it. He even attempted to single out the domino he had worn. But in that effort he was unsuccessful.

At sight of the knife he winced slightly. However, he denied having seen it before, and it looked as though he was telling the truth.

But the next suspect to be questioned, young Veers, exhibited marked nervousness, which only increased as Murphy's relentless inquisition went on.

Particularly when asked why he had let fall such a queer remark in the pergola was he palpably ill at ease. All he could say was that he had uttered it in fun. He refused point-blank to pick out, or to try to pick out his domino. And he almost collapsed at the first glimpse he caught of the knife.

"Have you ever seen this knife before?" thundered the chief inspector.

"N-o!" he stammered.

"Look at it!" wheedled Murphy. "It's a good sharp knife; not like the daggers in the play."

Young Veers was fighting hard for self-control.

"I've never seen it before," he reiterated stubbornly.

"Sure? I must say you seem to recognize it."

"Well, I don't!" This, covering his eyes.

Of a sudden Murphy shifted his attack.

"Then why so nervous?" he challenged, thrusting the knife closer to young Veers's eyes.

The latter made a valiant effort to pull himself together.

"Take that beastly knife away!" he burst out. "I can't stand the sight of it!"

"Can't, eh?" Murphy taunted him. "And why?" Then at Veers's refusal to reply: "Answer me! Eh? You didn't expect the knife to be found, did you?"

Dayton Veers gave a quick start.

"Just what are you driving at?" he gasped.

"I've made myself tolerably clear, haven't I? Expect you to be repeating in a moment that you've never seen this knife before!"

Young Veers eyed his accuser grimly.

"I haven't!" he replied in a firm tone.

"Then why'd you almost go into hysterics when I showed it to you?"

"I've told you once. It was because I couldn't stand the sight of the beastly thing! And—and—"

"Go on, I'm not stopping you."

"Because I recalled having made that unfortunate remark in the pergola. In the light of what's happened I was a little anxious how it would be interpreted."

There was an ill-disguised speciousness in the way young Veers spoke. It was as though he was attempting, at any cost, to square himself.

Murphy must have noticed it, for he grunted:

"Return to Mr. Condon."

Aside from being unusually pale, the chief inspector found Richard Orville, the next suspect to be cross-examined, at least outwardly calm. Nor could he get any piece of information out of him that shed any ray of light on the mysterious stabbing.

At length Murphy asked him if he could identify his domino.

"No," replied Orville with a shake of his head. "I happen to know the dominoes are all of the same size. And—"

"Very well," broke in Murphy, "I'll

excuse you for the present. Go back to Mr. Condon."

A quizzical frown on his face, the chief inspector watched Orville walk stiffly off.

"I've my doubts," he confided to Hunter Jackson, "about being able to carry out Condon's suggestion with respect to the dominoes. Unless I can get one of them to identify his domino beyond the shadow of a doubt, and it turns out to be the blood-stained one—"

He broke off dejectedly.

And so it was to the chief inspector's profound amazement, that in quizzing the last of the suspects—Archibald Nevin—that he got him to admit he could easily single out the domino he had worn from the rest. There was, of course, exactly one chance in six that he would identify the blood-stained one.

To Hunter Jackson, Nevin appeared more than eager to help the chief inspector. Was it not a proof, the physician thought to himself, that he was innocent? Would he be so anxious to pick out the domino if he had done the stabbing?

Yet, why should he not be, since he was probably ignorant of the blood-stain being on one of the dominoes? And how could he better establish his seeming innocence than, with Strong's blood figuratively if not actually on his hands, he showed himself eager to be of assistance to the authorities?

"Are you sure you can choose your domino?" Murphy was asking quickly.

Nevin nodded.

"But I understand they're all alike. How—"

"I remember mine had a tear in the right sleeve."

Murphy waved him to the spot where the dominoes were lying.

"Pick it out!"

Without much difficulty Nevin did so, handing the domino to the chief inspector, who took and tossed it over his left arm. Then he held up the knife in his right hand.

"Ever seen this weapon?" he asked Archibald Nevin casually.

From his manner it was palpable to Hunter Jackson that he did not expect the sight of the knife to have much or any effect on the man before him. Small wonder, too! He had put Nevin over a pretty rocky road of cross-questioning without once shaking his self-possession.

More than that, he had already used the knife with good effect on one man—young Dayton Veers.

But, to the amazement of both the chief inspector and Hunter Jackson, the sight of the knife did have an effect, and a tremendous one, too, on the suspect!

The blood ebbing from his face, Archibald started back involuntarily.

"Ever seen this knife, I say?" the chief inspector was quick to urge him again.

"N-o."

Hunter Jackson recovered from his surprise almost as rapidly as the chief inspector. Three men, he reflected, had been deeply moved on catching a glimpse of the knife—the valet, first; Dayton Veers, next; and finally, Archibald Nevin. Could they somehow have been in cahoots?

The doctor stole a glance at the valet to see how he had chanced to take Nevin's sudden perturbation.

If an accomplice of the latter the valet would probably be somewhat upset by it.

But Hunter Jackson observed that the man, as he scrutinized Archibald Nevin, expressed on his alert, little face only the liveliest curiosity.

To all appearances he was eager to know why Nevin was so unnerved; to all appearances was as much at sea as to the why and wherefore of it as the chief inspector was.

To all appearances!

But was the valet acting?

Hunter Jackson looked at the chief inspector once more. Murphy, he observed, was determined to press to the full the advantage gained by having shattered Nevin's self-control.

"No," he snarled, "I'm afraid, my friend, that you're playing with the truth. Once more: have you ever seen this knife?"

But the chief inspector could get nothing further out of Archibald Nevin, who had evidently made up his mind to shut up tighter than a clam. The police official stormed. But to no end. Finally, in despair, Murphy had to dismiss him.

After Nevin's departure he stuck the

knife in the table before him and fell to examining the domino on his arm. For a few minutes he was grimly silent as he bent to his task. Then with an ejaculation—half of amazement, half of satisfaction—he held it up for Hunter Jackson to see.

On the back of the domino just below the waist-line, the latter spied a small, dark stain.

"It's the mark!" exclaimed the doctor.

And the valet, peering over Jackson's shoulder, cried:

"Mr. Nevin picked out the domino with the blood-stain on it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

COINCIDENCE OR GUILT?

AT that moment Hunter Jackson thought that if the valet had uttered the words merely for their effect he was one of the most finished actors in the world.

Still, for some inexplicable reason, he could not help viewing the man with suspicion.

Just then, however, he had another matter over which to ponder.

From the very outset he had been unable to force himself to regard any of the dominoed men as the murderer. And next to Richard Orville he had fixed upon Archibald Nevin as the least likely suspect of the five.

Like Orville, the man who had just left was anything but the type of person to commit an act of violence and daring such as the stabbing of Harrison Strong.

But there was the incontestible evidence of the blood-stained domino. Granting that Archibald had made a mistake after all in picking it out, one still had to admit that he had acted strangely at sight of the knife.

"Why?" Hunter Jackson had got to the point of asking himself when he was addressed by the chief inspector.

"Tell me all you know about this fellow Nevin," requested Thomas Murphy slowly.

Hunter Jackson turned to him.

"I'm afraid I know very little."

"Well, tell me what you do know! Are his parents living?

"Yes."

"Father's rich, I suppose?"

There was an unmistakable sneer in the chief inspector's tones.

"Rich as Crœsus," nodded the doctor. "Made it in oil."

"And the son—he does nothing for a living?"

"No."

"I thought as much."

Hunter Jackson shook his head dubiously.

"But he's as harmless as most of his kind."

"His kind!" grunted Murphy. "Remember young Devereaux? And Raleigh? And others?"

"Yes, of course," acknowledged Hunter Jackson. "They were a fine pair of rich young scalawags."

"And a proof of the old adage about the devil and idle hands."

"But I can't imagine what motive Nevin would have had."

The chief inspector began to arrange the pieces of paper bearing the finger-prints of the five men as he answered:

"Motive! Well, I'll have to look for that. I haven't had a chance to give it a thought, of course, as yet. I've been too busy examining these men. And the next step I've got to take is to get Dave Condon to determine, if possible, just whose finger-prints adorn the handle of this knife. By the way, here comes Condon now."

Hunter Jackson, glancing in the direction of the knot of trees whither the headquarters man had taken the erstwhile performers, the director, and the camera-man, caught sight of them on the point of emerging from the shadows into the blinding glare of the panchroma lamps.

It was the work of a few moments, while Hunter Jackson looked on, for Dave Condon, after having requested the seven men who came up with him to remain standing a few paces away, to study the finger-prints on the pieces of paper, with the aid of a powerful magnifying glass which he took out of his pocket, and to compare them with the marks on the handle of the knife.

It required only a few minutes more for the detective to conclude an animated conversation with Chief Inspector Murphy,

who seemed vastly elated by what Dave Condon confided to him about the finger-prints on the knife.

Whose had they proved to be?

Archibald Nevin's?

That bit of information the chief inspector, for a reason best known to himself, did not disclose to Hunter Jackson, who noticed, however, that he rushed through the subsequent examinations in a perfunctory manner; in other words, he acted as if he was already satisfied in his own mind as to whom he should arrest.

In that event, the doctor thought to himself, Thomas Murphy must have learned from his subordinate that Archibald Nevin's finger-prints were identical with those on the haft of the knife.

Peremptorily ordering Dave Condon to take the seven men to the library, the chief inspector next asked Hunter Jackson and the valet to accompany him. Then he examined the dais and throne where Harrison Strong had been stabbed to death; but, evidently finding nothing that would serve as a clue, led the way behind the backdrop where the coroner and Detective Day were waiting.

"Dig up anything new?" he snapped at the latter.

"Nary a thing, chief."

"And you?" to the coroner.

"No, Mr. Murphy," was Washburn's reply. "It's just as the doctor says. A knife thrust in the heart did the job. By the way, Dr. Jackson, I'll call on you for a report. I want you at the inquest, too."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

"Now what's to be done with the body?" asked the chief inspector.

The valet spoke up.

"Miss Strong—" he began, looking at the physician.

"Yes," agreed Hunter Jackson, reading the man's mind. "I'll have to speak to Miss Strong about what undertaker she wishes to take charge."

"So much for that." Murphy turned back to the coroner. "I don't need you any longer, Mr. Washburn. I'll leave Day with the body until the undertaker arrives." Again to Hunter Jackson: "Will you kindly see Miss Strong about this matter as soon as possible? Remain with her and Mrs. Veers until I send up Condon to interrogate the woman. Miss Strong I won't trouble for the present. Then be good enough to come down-stairs with Condon. I'll need you at my elbow. Outside of Miss Strong and the servants, there's no one who knows more about the Strong household, is there, than you?"

Jackson shook his head.

"No. I probably needn't tell you that besides Miss Strong there's only Don, an infant son, left."

As the doctor hurried off to execute the chief inspector's command, he heard him say to the valet:

"Now put out all the electric lights and come with me."

Alma Strong the doctor found in no condition to talk to any one and Mrs. Veers, who, having sent the girl's maid to the kitchen, was nursing her in a highly nervous condition.

"They haven't—arrested my son?" was the very first question that fell from Mrs. Veers's lips.

"No," the physician assured her.

He noticed that she seemed almost beside herself with anxiety.

"How's Miss Strong?" he queried, glancing in the direction of the bed on which the girl was lying.

"Better! At first she seemed to go from one fainting spell into another. But after taking your medicine she dropped off to sleep."

"Then I won't disturb her. I've come about the undertaker."

"Can't I attend to that?" volunteered Mrs. Veers. "I know she'd want the one who had charge of Mrs. Strong's funeral."

A knock sounded on the door.

"Very well. I'll leave it to you to get in touch with him. There's a phone in the hallway." At a second knock: "But step to the door with me right away. I dare say that's Detective Condon, who wants to ask you a few questions."

And Dave Condon it proved to be.

But he could get no new testimony out of Mrs. Veers. In a moment or two he signified to Hunter Jackson his intention of returning to the library.

There they came upon the chief inspector interrogating Wellington Terle, the attorney, whom he had in a corner out of earshot of the rest of the people in the room. Gallagher, one of the policemen Murphy had sent scurrying through the house, was there, too, standing guard over the five suspects, who occupied another corner of the room apart from the others present.

"And you saw no one make a suspicious-looking pass at Mr. Strong?" Murphy was asking tensely.

"No," the attorney replied in a positive manner.

The chief inspector knitted his brows.

"As Mr. Strong's lawyer, you ought to know more than any one else about his business affairs."

"Except Mr. Robert Yeager, his private secretary," amended Terle.

"Of course. Now what I'm trying to get at is a motive for this crime. Had Mr. Strong a violent enemy—in a business sense?"

Wellington Terle shook his gray head gravely.

"None that I know of. But in that connection there's a matter to which I want to call your attention."

"Go ahead."

"I take it you know of Mr. Strong's financial transactions with the Allied governments?"

The chief inspector nodded.

"It hardly seems possible," went on Terle, darting a quick look at the five young men under suspicion. "It hardly seems possible. Yet—"

He paused speculatively.

"What hardly seems possible?"

"That the fellow who did this was acting for the German government."

"I've been thinking of that possibility, too. These days I hardly know what to expect."

"Listen to me," continued Terle more animatedly. "Mr. Strong, I know, has left all of his money to Miss Alma, who is not yet of age. In consequence, it will be tied up and can't be used to harm the German cause, as it undoubtedly would have been in Harrison Strong's hands. That, in addition to the fact that he was himself a large factor in 'the financial war' on Germany, has set me to thinking."

"Is there any one among the five you suspect more than any other?"

"Indeed no!"

Murphy shrugged.

The following instant, accompanied by Jackson, the valet, and Condon, he passed to the kitchen, where he ascertained from Officer Ellis—the other bluecoat he had ordered to search the Strong mansion, and who now stood guard in the kitchen—that of all the servants only three had witnessed the tragedy; the first and second butlers and the house-man, who had been present to attend to the wants of the guests, but who, it developed, had neither seen nor heard anything that could be looked upon as evidence.

There was a momentary flurry when Thomas Murphy learned from the chef that the latter suspected a German plot—mainly on account of what Wellington Terle had just said. But it subsided as soon as it came out that the chef, whose name was Henri Rochelle, believed in his Gallic way that there was a German plot behind almost every untoward event which was happening.

The chief inspector listened impatiently to a yarn spun by Sara Kane, the Strong baby's nurse, about a man who that morning "had kept his eye on the child in Central Park," and who, to her mind, was somehow vaguely connected with the crime.

Also, to a story told by the first chauffeur to the effect that he had driven an unknown man out of the grounds some time before the tragedy.

Murphy seemed all on edge to get back to the library.

It did not take him long to account for all the servants except the gardener, his wife, and son, who were reported as visiting friends. In fact, the second chauffeur asserted positively that just after nine o'clock he had passed the gardener near one of the gates as the latter was on his way out to join the rest of the family and had spoken to him.

Then Murphy dismissed the servants and returned to the library with his two men, the doctor, and the valet.

There, without further ado, he stepped up to Archibald Nevin.

"Consider yourself under arrest!" he said coolly.

Nevin recoiled under the hand which Murphy placed on his shoulder.

"On what evidence?" he demanded, white-lipped.

Murphy nodded grimly.

"I guess you're entitled to know. I found a blood stain on your domino, for one thing. For another, I found your finger-prints on the knife that killed Harrison Strong!"

CHAPTER IX.

AMAZING NEWS.

THE telephone bell jangled insistently.

Slowly Hunter Jackson emerged from the mists of sleep.

After the excitement of the previous evening, he would naturally have been drowsy. But the fact that, even subsequent to his return home from the Strong mansion, he had been called out to attend a woman with a weak heart, by whose bedside he had been compelled to remain several hours, accounted for the extreme lethargy to which he felt so like succumbing.

Glancing at a little ormulu clock on his chiffonier, he learned that the hour was ten, an unwontedly late hour for him to rise. So, with an ejaculation of surprise, he sprang out of bed and removed the receiver from the hook of the bracket telephone near the head of his bed.

"Who's speaking?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Dayton Veers," he heard that woman respond in her well-modulated voice. "Is that you, Dr. Jackson?"

"Yes." He wondered what she could want.

"Have you seen the newspapers this morning?"

Hunter Jackson confessed that he had not.

"Well, they're horrid!" Mrs. Veers informed him. "They do say the most awful things about Mr. Nevin. Doctor!"

"Well?" wonderingly.

"Can you come to me right away? It's about Mr. Nevin I want to see you. I—Alma—Miss Strong and I—and several others are convinced of his innocence—and we think you can help us. Will you—will you come?"

"Where shall I find you?"

"Still at the Strong mansion," she said. "I stayed with Alma, poor girl, all night."

"And how is she now?" inquired Hunter Jackson quickly.

Immediately he lapsed professional.

"Much better! Only—will you come right away? The place has been overrun with detectives since daybreak. You're the only man I can appeal to in the emergency, doctor; and the only one who won't be subjected to all manner of questions should you come here. Will you?"

"All right," promised Hunter Jackson, "I was planning to look in on Miss Strong this morning anyway. Expect me within the next hour."

"Oh, thank you, doctor!"

And, with a sigh of relief, Mrs. Veers hung up.

As he drove his runabout to the home of his patient of the previous night, whom he wished to see prior to going to the Strong mansion, Hunter Jackson wondered to what "emergency" she could refer. Also, he asked himself of what possible assistance he could be to her.

And it was a matter of not a little conjecture to him as to why Mrs. Veers had become so positive of Archibald Nevin's innocence. Had she got hold of some new evidence? Why, too, was she so anxious to have Nevin cleared when it might possibly mean that her own son would be arrested for the stabbing?

As the coroner's physician, Hunter Jackson knew that he would keep more or less in touch with the case, in which he was already deeply interested. Now, in Mrs. Veers's summons, he saw a chance to follow it more closely than he had at first imagined he could.

He longed for an opportunity to talk it over with Rutherford Jones.

For, in spite of the testimony of domino and finger-prints, he did not believe Archibald Nevin guilty of the killing. For one thing, he still could not bring himself to

think of the man as capable of such an act. It is odd how often that subtle something called "personality" will discredit any evidence, no matter how sinister, that is unearthed to prove a man a felon.

It was so in Archibald Nevin's case.

All in due time, Hunter Jackson was of the belief, Nevin would explain everything—everything! To begin with, he had been docile enough subsequent to his arrest. With the calm assertion that he must see an attorney before issuing any statement whatsoever, he had faced his friends in the crowded library on the previous night and then passed out quietly with the chief inspector, who, to Hunter Jackson's surprise, allowed the other four suspects to go on their way unmolested.

Altogether, Archibald Nevin had not carried himself like a man condemned in his own mind.

And, after all, mused the physician, he had not been the only one to recoil at sight of the knife. There was the valet, who the chief inspector did not even suspect. And Dayton Veers, Jr.! Hunter Jackson started. Was Mrs. Veers going to appeal to him, in addition to extricating Archibald Nevin from the toils of the police, to extricate her own son likewise, who had been or was about to be taken into custody?

Of one thing the doctor was positive. In the event of Nevin's guilt, he was positive of the almost equal guilt—in the eyes of the law—of the valet and young Veers. He had, he thought, seen them all show an incriminating fright.

And so, at the stabbing of Harrison Strong, Hunter Jackson began to feel a dawning certainty.

How many of the five had been in the plot?

What had been their motive?

Finding his heart-patient resting well, Hunter Jackson drove his car hastily to the Strong mansion, where he was directed by a butler to a sitting-room up-stairs. In it he found Alma Strong, Mrs. Dayton Veers, and Wellington Terle, the attorney, seated in a circle; while, standing by an open fireplace near by, were the valet and a young man with whom he was unacquainted, but to whom he was at once presented by Miss Strong.

"This is Mr. Robert Yeager, Mr. Strong's private secretary," explained the girl.

"Pleased to meet you," murmured the doctor politely, shaking hands with him. Then, turning back to Miss Strong: "I'm glad to see you're looking better."

She contrived a brave smile.

"How can I help it, doctor, with you to watch over me? Do sit down."

She motioned him to a chair and glanced significantly toward Mrs. Veers, who sat opposite her.

Mrs. Veers, her lips trembling slightly from some inward excitement, took up the thread of the colloquy.

"I see it's up to me to explain why I send for you, doctor," she began. "I did it primarily because you were of such tremendous help last night. And I—we all—need you now."

"In what way?" begged Hunter Jackson.

"In—in bringing about the arrest of the man who was responsible for this awful affair."

The doctor raised his brows.

"Then you know Mr. Nevin is innocent?"

Mrs. Veers nodded.

"Earlier this morning," she explained, "Miss Strong and I had a talk with Mr. Lambert, who came to see Alma. He's a close friend, you know, of Mr. Nevin's—and, in spite of appearances, was convinced of his innocence from the very start. Mr. Lambert brought news of the utmost importance."

"Yes?" urged Hunter Jackson.

"The news he brought had to do with Mr. Orville."

"Mr. Orville!" echoed the doctor uncomprehendingly. How dared Thompson Lambert, himself a suspect, cast further suspicion on another?

"Yes. It seems only a short time ago he had engaged in a violent quarrel with Mr. Strong over money matters. But I think Mr. Yeager had better tell the story from this point."

She motioned to the private secretary,

who left the fireplace and came over quickly.

"It's a fact," he nodded soberly. "I knew all about it. But I didn't know until lately that Mr. Lambert did. The quarrel was about a note which Mr. Strong was pressing against Orville's father. If Mr. Strong hadn't been killed and had continued pressing it, I've no doubt whatever he would have ruined the latter financially. I think Mr. Terle was aware of the fact, too—but not of the quarrel."

Hunter Jackson glanced at Attorney Terle, who inclined his head.

The physician gave a low whistle.

"Go on!" he begged interestedly.

"Hadn't Mrs. Veers better take up the story once more?" He appealed to her with a deferential bow.

"Where was I?" the latter asked. "Oh, yes! I was saying Mr. Lambert knew of the quarrel. And, believing Mr. Nevin innocent, he wanted to see him in jail, talk to him, and try to decide on some way of getting him free. But, on stepping out of his house this morning, he became aware of a detective at his heels. I guess all four of the young men discharged, for that matter, are being watched. At any rate, I received word from my son over the phone, just an hour ago, that he is. How terrible! Poor Dayton!" she rambled off. "To think of any one suspecting him!

"Mr. Lambert at once decided he'd better not go to see Mr. Nevin himself," she continued after a moment. "So he sent a mutual friend, who reported that Mr. Nevin told him in confidence that he could prove his innocence. It was all the assurance Mr. Lambert needed—if he needed any. He came to Alma at once with the story about Mr. Orville, which he felt the police ought to have immediately.

"He was for telling them without delay. So was I. For you know, doctor, what the police 'll do as soon as Mr. Nevin's released."

"Arrest one of the remaining four," put in Hunter Jackson.

"Mr. Lambert was quite excited over the prospect," nodded Mrs. Veers. "And I can't blame him. I was too; for Dayton's sake. But I'm glad now Miss Strong did not fall in with our suggestion. She advised us to get you to go to your friend, Mr. Rutherford Jones—is it? The private detective, I mean."

"Yes?" encouraged Hunter Jackson, with a glance at the girl.

"Miss Strong was opposed to causing Mr. Orville's arrest and his mother a lot of unpleasant notoriety until it was certain he may have done this horrible thing. She appealed to Mr. Terle, who arrived at that moment, and he backed her up. So I sent for you, doctor."

"But just what do you wish me to do, Mrs. Veers?" asked the puzzled physician. "I can't ask Mr. Jones to waste his time over so slender a clue as the quarrel of which you speak! Especially in the face of such damaging evidence as confronts Mr. Nevin."

Mrs. Veers spread her hands with a helpless gesture.

"But you don't really think Mr. Nevin guilty? Mr. Nevin, of all men?"

"No," he had to admit. "But—"

The doctor's shrug spoke volumes.

"But he told his friend positively that he can prove his innocence. In fact, he told him confidentially how his fingermarks happened to get on the knife."

"He did!"

"And I haven't told you once, doctor, that the quarrel Mr. Orville had with Mr. Strong was the only clue."

"There are others?"

"André!"

At Mrs. Veers's summons the valet came forward.

"Tell Dr. Jackson," the woman went on, "of the threatening note."

The valet bowed.

"It came about a year ago," André replied. "Just after little Don Strong was born. It came from the city. Last night, sir, you saw me start back when I caught a glimpse of the knife."

The valet's tone was half-interrogatory.

The doctor nodded.

"Well, I just remembered the note at that moment, sir."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Strong, he showed it to me before tearing it up. The note, sir,

went something like this: 'You took my treasure from me. Beware! I will take yours from you!'"

"Can you imagine what was meant by Mr. Strong's 'treasure'? Not money, surely."

"No, sir. I think not, sir. I imagine little Don, who had just been born."

"Oh, so the note threatened kidnaping! Was Mr. Strong worried?"

"Not overmuch, sir."

"That will do, André," spoke up Mrs. Veers. "Now—Mr. Yeager."

Taking a rumpled envelope from his pocket, the private secretary handed it to the physician.

"Mr. Strong received that letter late yesterday afternoon. Had he not been killed," Yeager explained, "he would have handed it over to the police. I hope I've done the wisest thing not to give it to them when I was being quizzed here after my arrival this morning."

Hunter Jackson glanced curiously at the letter. It was postmarked New York. That much he saw before he drew out the sheet of paper in the envelope and read what was typewritten on it:

> In the midst of life: Beware! Who robs another of his treasure may himself be robbed of the greatest of treasures—life itself!

CHAPTER X.

RUTHERFORD JONES TAKES A HAND.

HIS brows contracted, Hunter Jackson looked up from the letter.

"So you think Mr. Orville's responsible for this threat?" he demanded, somewhat incredulously. "Well, I don't; I can't believe it."

The private secretary gave an eloquent shrug.

"*Quien sabe?*" he asked. "For myself, I scarcely know what to think. But, with a knowledge of the quarrel, I shouldn't be surprised if he were."

Hunter Jackson got up and fell to pacing the floor.

"But Orville isn't the kind of man who is likely to write anonymous threats to others."

Yeager shook his head.

"Beg pardon, but I've every reason to suspect Mr. Orville was desperate, both for his own and his father's sake. Their joint business—a real-estate business, I suppose you know—was threatened with ruin. Just one year ago he had managed to save it from an identical fate."

"On account of the same note?".

"Yes."

"Then am I to understand that Mr. Orville wrote the other threatening letter, too?"

"Remember the repetition of the word 'treasure' in the two notes. And if Orville didn't, his father might have. Anyway, it's an open secret that the latter's mind is impaired and has been for the last year and a half—chiefly on account of his business worries."

"Is that so?"

"Fact!" boomed Attorney Terle.

"So I needn't point out," continued Yeager, "what a valuable clue this letter may prove to be. Certainly, I'm sure it's a clue the chief inspector wouldn't sniff at. But, like Miss Strong, I'm not altogether certain whether it 'll lead to Mr. Orville's door. So I agree with her that you should go to Mr. Jones with it and let him run the clue down instead of going straight to the police with it."

"Won't you, doctor?" pleaded Miss Strong tremulously.

Hunter Jackson regarded her sympathetically.

He knew that the death of Harrison Strong had been a frightful shock to the girl. Though not her real father, the banker had been like one to her ever since, at her father's death, he had taken her, a girl of ten, into what was then his bachelor home.

"Yes, I will," he promised her.

And not an hour later, having once more prescribed for the girl and bidden adieu to the rest in the room, he was ensconced in the private office of Rutherford Jones. As briefly as he could, he explained why he had come.

The detective smiled enigmatically and offered him a cigar which Hunter Jackson

declined on the ground of having missed too much sleep lately.

"I know lots more about this case than you imagine," said Rutherford Jones, in an attempt to explain his smile. Lighting the cigar, he hitched his swivel chair closer to the straight-backed one on which Hunter Jackson was seated. "Listen to me! I've got a pretty tale to tell. Know Condon?"

"I've heard you mention him frequently."

"Well, early this morning he put me hep to all the headquarters' dope."

"What! Are you going to be hired by headquarters to make a separate investigation of the case?"

"No—but thereby hangs the tale. Lately, at Police Commissioner Porter's request, I've been keeping an eye on all the important cases handled by Chief Inspector Murphy. I don't mind telling you confidentially, doc, that the chief inspector's under fire politically, and, for services rendered in the past, the big boss wants to save him. To prevent Tom Murphy's political enemies—among whom is that fellow Day—from telling a pack of lies about him, I've been informed by Condon of all the developments in Murphy's big cases during the past year."

"Then it's a good job I came to you. What did Condon say this morning about the Strong case? You know my reason for asking—"

Rutherford Jones examined the end of his cigar critically before he answered:

"Say? He didn't say a great deal. But he told me enough to make me believe Murphy's mishandling it somewhere."

"How so?"

"Well, to begin with, he pursued the only course, possibly; conducted a general investigation. But, afterward, I should have arrested all five of the suspects and put them over the jumps. What you've said of young Orville partly convinces me I'm right. But what I heard from Condon of Nevin's cross-examination at the station-house makes me sure of it."

"What was that?"

"Nevin's calmness during its progress quite took Murphy aback. The chief inspector became almost convinced against reason that he had arrested an innocent man. On top of that, he found out that Nevin's identification of the blood-stained domino as the one he had worn — might have been a mistake!"

"A mistake!"

"Yes—Murphy discovered that it was not the only one in the bunch with a torn sleeve. He also found out by means of finger-prints that Nevin had used one of the property daggers—probably in the murder scene. Of course, he still has to ascertain how and when Nevin's finger-prints chanced to get on the knife-haft. Again and again he begged him, if innocent of the stabbing, to tell. But, before seeing an attorney he named, Archibald Nevin refused."

"I don't wish, you understand, to cast reflections on Murphy's ability, which is great. But this time I'm of the opinion he's made a rather serious mistake. It 'll be harder to wring a confession out of the guilty party if he puts the screws on the other four suspects now. He's keeping them under surveillance, though, while combing the Strong mansion and its environs for clues and waiting for Nevin's attorney and the first showing of the film.

"Do you think he'll get any fresh evidence from the film?"

Rutherford Jones shook his head emphatically.

"He's not likely to. I understand those five fellows rushed on Harrison Strong in a mass and with their backs to the camera. Then how could Murphy identify them—and in their dominoes, too? Besides, he won't see more than the spectators did."

Hunter Jackson took the anonymous letter from his pocket and, handing it to the detective:

"But what's to be done about the Orville clue?" he demanded. "Shall it be passed over to the chief inspector?" And, by the way, what do you think of Lambert's part in calling it to Miss Strong's attention? Doesn't it rather cast more suspicion on Lambert?"

"One question at a time, please," responded the detective, taking the communication out of its envelope and spreading it

out on his desk. "All things considered, I think I'd better first investigate this Orville clue."

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT HUNTER JACKSON DISCOVERED.

"I'M afraid to let Tom Murphy have this letter in his present mood," Rutherford Jones went on to explain. "It'd be too bad if he'd make another mistake. The least I can do after my promise to Commissioner Porter is to prevent it by taking care of the clue myself. Hello!"

He bent over the envelope in his hand, sniffing it.

"Look!" he importuned Hunter Jackson, pointing to where a piece had been torn out under the flap. "Do you know what that means?"

"No," confessed the doctor, who had noticed especially the mutilation of the envelope.

"It means," exulted Rutherford Jones, "that I may have an easy time finding our anonymous correspondent."

"Why so?"

"Isn't it as plain as a Newport bud?"

"I get the reference—but I'm a bad guesser."

"Now why do you think he tore that piece out?"

"Give it up."

"Evidently to destroy some key as to where the envelope came from. Department-stores, pharmacies, and stationery stores often stamp their firm name under the flap of the envelopes they sell. I know of no department-stores in the district from which this letter is postmarked. But I do know of a number of pharmacies. I'll lose no time visiting them. It 'll be one step in the right direction if I can get a clerk at one of them to identify the envelope as one he's sold."

But Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"Still I don't see how that'll help you lay the blame for having written the anonymous letter at the Orvilles's door."

"Have a little patience, my boy," entreated Rutherford Jones, returning the letter to the envelope and taking out of a drawer of his desk a pair of handcuffs and an automatic pistol. "I have a good hunch! I'm going to make a round of those drug-stores. Can you come along?"

"How long 'll it take?"

"Oh, not more than a couple of hours—that is, to find out if the hunch is worth anything."

"It's a temptation," confessed Hunter Jackson.

"Then come on, doc. We'll drop around at the Cosmos Studio to look at that 'Giovanni' film." He reached for the desk-phone. "Say the word—I'll order a taxi to pick us up at once."

"All right, I'll go," consented the other. "But don't bother about the taxi. I have my runabout outside."

And so, within the next five minutes, they were speeding toward the Madison Square section of Manhattan, where the letter had been mailed.

Rutherford Jones told the doctor how to get to the pharmacy he wanted to visit first. Arriving there, he engaged in a brief colloquy, in the rear of the store, with the clerk in charge, reappearing in a few minutes very obviously disappointed.

"Don't ask any questions," he begged of Hunter Jackson, after telling him where next to drive. "I'll explain everything shortly."

The doctor was literally amazed at the detailed knowledge of New York possessed by the detective, who seemed to know the location of every drug-store in the postal district. Four, five, six pharmacies he took him to before the information which Rutherford Jones sought appeared to be forthcoming.

In the last place the detective stayed an unusually long time in conference with the pharmacist; and when he emerged from the back of the store, he was radiant. Hurrying out of the place with Hunter Jackson, he said enigmatically:

"We'll leave your car here. Come along!"

At a brisk pace he set off up the street, Hunter Jackson keeping abreast of him wonderingly. Before a brownstone apartment-house half-way up the block, he paused; then led the way into the building

and to the second floor, where he rang the bell of an apartment marked 2-A.

Of a frowsy housewife who answered, he inquired:

"Is Mr. Krick in?"

She shook her head.

"He ain't been in since yesterday noon."

Rutherford Jones smiled ingratiatingly. "We're friends of Mr. Krick's, madam. Can't we wait in his room until he comes back?"

"I can't say when it 'll be, sir."

She eyed the detective and Hunter Jackson with patent suspicion and began to close the door.

But the sleuth was too quick for her.

"Madam," he said sternly, "I'm a detective. Let me in—or I'll bring some bluecoats here and get in by force."

She gave way on the instant.

"Please, sir—" She fairly stammered with fright.

"That's all right," growled Rutherford Jones, brushing past her. "But don't you dare warn Krick if he comes. Let him walk in on me, understand!"

Once within the room, a small one at the end of the apartment, the detective faced Hunter Jackson.

"Guessing, doc?" he smiled.

"I certainly am!"

"Well, I've simply been following the *scent* of that anonymous letter. It smelled of drugs! So I concluded the envelope at least must have been bought at a pharmacy."

"But what about Krick—and—"

"Just a moment! I didn't believe the Orvilles had written the letter—they're not the sort to write such letters or to get others to write them. Still I didn't know and don't yet. But, granting for the sake of the argument that they didn't, I asked myself who did. A nut? Perhaps! A nut in the pay of the Kaiser! More than likely—Harrison Strong was a thorn in the side of Germany—nuts are just the kind to do Willy's bidding without question. I went out looking for a nut who had bought envelopes at some pharmacy in this district, where the letter was mailed, I took a long chance, of course. Thanks to the bright young fellow at the corner pharmacy, I dug up this fellow Krick. I'm going to take the liberty of combing his diggings. First, I want to find out if Krick wrote that letter. Then, whether he wrote it for the Orvilles. If Krick did, it'll begin to look bad for our friend Richard. But even if he didn't write it, it won't clear him by any means."

Rutherford Jones opened an unlocked secretary in the corner and began to ransack its pigeonholes.

Agog with excitement, Hunter Jackson turned to a small center-table and subconsciously picked up a book it held. Then he uttered an ejaculation of amazement. For he caught a glimpse of a startling familiar passage to which the book fell open:

> In the midst of life: Beware! Who robs another of his treasure, may himself be robbed of the greatest of treasures—life itself!

CHAPTER XII.

ANGEL FACE.

HUNTER JACKSON pursed his lips in a low whistle.

"What's the matter, doc?" queried Rutherford Jones, turning around quickly.

But the physician did not at once reply. For he heard heavy footsteps in the hall. He pointed to the door.

"Some one's coming, eh?" snapped the detective, misinterpreting the whistle.

"Krick, probably!" nodded Hunter Jackson.

He was between the horns of a dilemma.

In another instant, he had every reason to believe that Krick would enter the room. And yet he did not have time to warn Rutherford Jones against the man who, if the anonymous correspondent, was likely to be a dangerous character.

He was totally unarmed. Would Rutherford Jones, he asked himself in quick alarm, manage to protect both of them?

With a feeling of intense relief, he observed that the detective, his right hand gripping the automatic in his pocket, stood ready for an emergency. And then he heard the door-knob turn.

In the person of the newcomer, he saw a tall, thin man, blond and with that particularly cherubic countenance that belongs only to a certain type of light-haired males. He was as palpably nonplused at sight of them as they were at sight of him.

"Mr. Krick?" he inquired, with a lift of the brows. "Is he about?"

It was Rutherford Jones whom he addressed in a decidedly foreign accent.

"Not at present," the detective answered suavely enough. "I expect him any minute, though. Are you a friend of his, too?"

In manner Rutherford Jones was as disarming as he knew how to be. But he did not succeed in making the blond man "warm up."

On the other hand, the newcomer backed toward the door.

"Thank you," he mumbled, as he passed out. "I'll drop in later."

And, the next instant, he banged the front door of the apartment.

"By George!" Rutherford Jones exclaimed. "If I'd only had the authority to hold him! I've seen Angel Face before, if I'm not mistaken. I'll lay a handsome bet he was a particular friend of Krick's, too. He wouldn't have had a pass-key to the apartment, if he wasn't. Humph. He'll probably warn Krick now."

Hunter Jackson shook his head dubiously.

"I'm afraid he will," the doctor opined. "But just cast your eagle eye over what I've found."

He held out, open at the page on which was the telltale paragraph, the book he had picked off the center-table.

"Well, I'll be damned!" burst out Rutherford Jones excitedly. "Stay here, doc, until I get back. I'm going after our friend, Angel Face."

In most undignified haste for one so portly, he dashed from the room, down the hall and out of the apartment. But, before long, he came back puffing and blowing at a great rate.

"I've lost him!" he snapped. "I guess he must have got out some way other than through the lobby."

"But what would you have done if you *hadn't* lost him?" inquired Hunter Jackson, somewhat mystified. "I understood you to say you couldn't have arrested him."

Rutherford Jones sank into a chair to get his breath.

"Of course, I couldn't. I merely wanted to trail him into some building and then get a plain-clothes man to keep an eye peeled for him. Sorry, doc, but I may have kept you waiting for hours. I've seen that cherubic countenance before, I tell you. And now that I know Krick wrote that threatening letter, I'd be willing to go on oath that our blond friend had a hand in the plot against Harrison Strong, whatever it was, too."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

"So should I," he agreed. "But I see no evidence to the effect that the plot of which you speak is in any way connected with the stabbing of Harrison Strong—any evidence, in other words, that implicates Richard Orville or his father, or both."

Rutherford Jones scratched his head.

"To be quite candid, neither do I. But I must continue the search I've begun, in any case."

He rose and returned to the secretary.

But he found nothing of interest in its pigeonholes or in the drawers of a chiffonier standing in the room or in the single closet the room contained. He turned to Hunter Jackson with a grunt of disappointment.

Then, at that instant, he caught sight of a hot-air register beside the chiffonier and, somewhat to the doctor's mystification, bent over and glanced into it. And then, taking hold of it and finding it loose, he surprised Hunter Jackson still more by lifting it out of the wall, setting it on the floor and peering into the flue.

A moment later, he gave a gasp of surprise and took a small note-book with a loop on it from the black hole in the wall.

"What the deuce!" exclaimed Hunter Jackson.

"Funny place for a note-book, isn't it?" was Rutherford Jones's muttered comment, as he opened it. "Well, for the love of—"

The detective was staring open-mouthed at what he caught a glimpse of on the first page of the note-book.

"What's up?" queried Hunter Jackson.

"What's up!" repeated the detective exuberantly. "Why, I've just had a great stroke of luck, that's all. Ten to one, I wouldn't have tried to get that register out of the wall. Any way, who would have expected to find a note-book hanging by a loop on a nail in a hot-air shaft?"

"But what's in the note-book?" Hunter Jackson urged.

For answer the detective, having put the register back in place, held up the note-book to enable the doctor to see the page which had evoked his exclamation of surprise.

To Hunter Jackson it seemed to contain merely a meaningless jumble of penciled numbers. He shook his head.

"It's Greek to me!" he confessed.

Rutherford Jones closed the note-book, patted it and put it into his coat-pocket.

"Doc," he said, "I happen to know that each of these figures means something—and especially with respect to their position on the page—to each and every one of the German secret agents in this country."

"Oh, so they're a code!"

Of a sudden he divined the real reason for Rutherford Jones's growing excitement.

"Don't ask me how I got that information," the other plunged on. "I daren't tell you. This much, however, I *will* say—the same man from whom I got it showed me a photograph of our friend, Angel Face."

"A photograph of Angel Face!"

Rutherford Jones gave a quick nod.

"I must tip off that man through Commissioner Porter without delay. But first I want to talk with the woman who rents this apartment. I'm going to find out, if possible, if she knows who Angel Face really is. Then I'll ask the commissioner to put a plain-clothes man on guard here to arrest Krick when he returns—if he ever does. I want Krick now, not only for writing that threatening letter—which may, of course, implicate Richard Orville—but for a very serious charge in connection with certain pro-German activities of which I've just got wind. I'm genuinely sorry, doc, but I'll have to ask you to do guard duty in this room until I question Krick's landlady and get in touch with Porter."

Hunter Jackson smiled good-naturedly.

"I'll be only too happy to do anything you ask."

But what about your patients?"

"For once they can wait. As long as I can drop in on Miss Strong before the end of the afternoon, I sha'n't care a great deal how long I'm detained."

Rutherford Jones poked him in the ribs.

"So that's the way the wind blows?"

Catching the other's meaning, the doctor flushed.

"Oh, no, indeed!" he protested laughingly. "I suppose you don't know Alma Strong's engaged."

"Engaged? To some hairless heir?"

Hunter Jackson grinned.

"Not exactly. Her fiancé has a good shock of blond hair. But he's an heir, all right."

"Who is he?"

"Thompson Lambert."

Rutherford Jones scowled.

"You don't say!"

"You know him?"

"Rather well, I fawncy!" After a moment: "Well, maybe I won't have to keep you in this room all afternoon. I'll come back to you as soon as possible. Remember, by the way, I'm counting on you to take me to the Cosmos Studio."

"Yes; I shouldn't like to miss that 'Giovanni' film for the world now," confessed Hunter Jackson.

The detective drew the automatic from his pocket and handed it to the physician.

"In case Krick arrives in my absence," he explained significantly.

Hunter Jackson smiled as he took it.

"Depend on me—I'll hold him!"

But Krick did not come while Rutherford Jones was away. And yet it was fully an hour before the detective returned.

"So our 'compleat' letter-writer didn't turn up," was the way he greeted the physician.

Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"Did you get anything out of the landlady?"

"No," grumbled the other. "And I scared the wits out of her, too. I imagine she knows Angel Face only as a friend of Krick's."

"Did you ask her why he had a pass-key to the apartment?"

"Yes," said Rutherford Jones, taking the automatic which the physician extended to him. "It seems he paid her for the privilege of sleeping here occasionally. I've tipped off Commissioner Porter, who's sending Browning, one of his best plain-clothes men, to sit tight on this nest of pro-German conspirators. Guess I'd better give it another search before his arrival. Then I'll ask you to drive me over to the Cosmos."

During the thirty minutes that passed before the advent of Browning, the plain-clothes man, Rutherford Jones ransacked the room again. But he found nothing else that threw light on Krick's connection with the German propagandists.

"Let me know as soon as you lay your hands on Krick," he begged of Browning as he handed the headquarters' sleuth the incriminating note-book and left him in charge.

"Sure!" promised the man, a thick-set, dark-haired fellow, settling himself in the only easy-chair in the room.

At the Cosmos Building, Rutherford Jones soon induced Ben Grimm, whom he knew, to exhibit the film. Accompanied by Hunter Jackson, he was conducted by the director to a little projection room off the studio.

"Has Murphy seen the film yet?" the detective inquired.

"Yes. He came to the studio early this afternoon with Mr. Washburn and Mr. Day."

"What 'd he say?"

"Little or nothing," responded Grimm.

"And the coroner?"

"Nothing. Before leaving, the chief inspector warned me not to show the film to any one else." He hesitated, then added: "Of course, Murphy wouldn't forbid you and the doctor seeing it."

"But, just the same, don't tell him that we have," cautioned Rutherford Jones. "I don't want Murphy to know I'm interested in the case."

"I won't," promised the director and switched off the lights in the room, a moment later, switching on those in the projection machine.

Eagerly, Hunter Jackson watched the moving-picture of the grim tragedy enacted on the previous night. But, from the first appearance of the men in dominoes to the conclusion of the scene in which the courtiers bore off triumphantly the murdered *Giovanni*, he saw nothing which, to his mind, would serve as evidence tending to convict one of the five men under suspicion.

In the first place he could not recognize them in their dominoes and with their backs toward the camera. He wondered once why Ben Grimm had instructed them to wear masks, inasmuch as they did not turn around at all. He was on the point of asking the director for the reason when he paused to reflect that Ben Grimm had, in making them wear masks, taken precautions against that very thing.

He could not follow their movements, in the second place, as they rushed on Harrison Strong pretending to stab him. Or, what was more to the point, actually doing it, for all he could determine.

Outside the Cosmos Building he turned to Rutherford Jones.

"You were right," he conceded. "I didn't see anything in the picture that will help us to get the right man."

Rutherford Jones shook his head as he climbed into the runabout.

"Neither did I. But I guess Murphy and the coroner didn't either. It's odd that they should be working hand in glove. I could have sworn Washburn was out with the rest to get the chief inspector."

"Now that you mention it," commented the doctor relevantly, "I don't believe Murphy intended from the first to work hand in glove with the coroner—or Day. I don't imagine he intended taking Washburn to the studio this afternoon. Last night, I recall, he dismissed the coroner without saying anything at all about it."

"But, as the coroner in the case, Washburn would have to see the film anyway."

"I know," said Hunter Jackson. "But I mean the chief inspector didn't intend taking the coroner to the studio with him! I distinctly remember that his manner last night was cold to Washburn."

"Oh!"

As Hunter Jackson slid under the steer-

ing-wheel of his car he thought regretfully of the afternoon as wasted. To be sure, he had helped to find the ostensible author of the anonymous letter.

But he was no nearer than ever to a solution of the mystery. That is to say unless he could prove that one or both of the Orvilles had inspired the writing of the epistle—or that some connection, however vague, existed between it and the murder.

"Well," he commented casually, "I must say that Harrison Strong's assailant must have learned the trick of stabbing."

To his surprise, the detective turned to him with renewed animation.

"Damn it all, doc!" he cried. "I never thought of that—it may prove a valuable clue."

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER CLUE.

HUNTER JACKSON paused in the act of releasing the brake.

"How do you mean?" he demanded.

"In this way," explained the detective. "I'll make an effort as soon as I can to find out which one of the five suspects could have stabbed Strong in that way and got away with it. Suppose then I discover that Richard Orville could have done it, then lay my hands on Krick, who'll turn out to have been in connivance with him? Don't you see—"

"I do!" Hunter Jackson cut him short enthusiastically. "Well, I'm off for the Strong mansion. Shall I drive you around to the office?"

"If you please," nodded Rutherford Jones. "I'm due there, anyway, inside of an hour. I've an appointment with a man from the West who's lost track of his daughter. Pitiful case! While talking to him I'm hoping against hope that I'll get word that Krick's been placed under arrest."

"Will you tell me if he has, should I call you up?"

"Yes. But call me up at my home, not at the office. And not before to-night."

"All right."

Hunter Jackson drove the detective to his office and, less than an hour later, circled the drive and stopped before the Strong mansion, where he was greeted by the first butler with a good deal more warmth of feeling than the man usually allowed himself to show.

"Miss Strong is very anxious to see you, sir," the butler vouchsafed. "She's been telephoning for you all afternoon."

"Is she feeling worse?" the doctor asked.

"Oh—no, sir. But perhaps I shouldn't have said anything, sir."

Deprecatingly he conducted Hunter Jackson to the sitting-room up-stairs, the scene of the morning conference. There the physician found Alma Strong, who looked pale and distraught as she rose from the chair in which she was sitting and came forward to offer her hand.

"I suppose you want to hear how I made out with Rutherford Jones?" he asked her.

"No—not exactly," she replied. "But how *did* you?"

"He will investigate the clue."

"How splendid!"

"Tell Mrs. Veers and Mr. Terle."

"I shall."

"But caution them against saying anything to any one about it."

"All right, doctor."

She raised her hand to her chin in a gesture of acute nervousness.

"Why, what on earth's the matter, Miss Strong?" he asked.

"I'm worried," she said. "I—"

"Yes?" sympathetically.

"It's over Thompson—Mr. Lambert."

Hunter Jackson led her to a divan, on which she sat down wearily.

"What's happened to Mr. Lambert?" he wanted to know.

"He's—he's been arrested."

"Arrested!"

The physician was frankly astonished.

"This afternoon," the girl proceeded brokenly. "And, oh, doctor, I know in my heart he's innocent."

"On what evidence has your fiancé been arrested?"

She choked and looked away.

"Mr. Lambert—and I—are no longer engaged," she announced, ignoring the question. "I gave him back his ring this morning."

"Before I arrived?"

"Yes," in a low voice.

Hunter Jackson felt his heart give a great bound, although, at the moment, he could not have told the reason for it.

"There—there!" He tried to calm the girl, who began to sob convulsively. "I'll do all I can for you. Just tell me, please, what I can do."

Dabbing at her eyes with a dainty handkerchief, she looked up at him.

"Go to Thompson—Mr. Lambert! But, doctor, why should I ask you?" Then, as if in explanation: "I have no one else to whom I can appeal. I can't even appeal to Mr. Terle, on account of something I've heard he's done."

"What was that?" A moment later, seeing a reluctance on the girl's part to tell him, he added: "But never mind. I'll be only too glad to be of service to you, Miss Strong."

"Then go to Thompson—Mr. Lambert! I daren't! I didn't have the courage to ask you this morning. Tell him I'll forgive him everything."

She pressed a shapely hand to her forehead, as though suffering from a headache.

"Is that all?"

"Yes," faintly.

"Very well, I will."

"Soon, doctor?"

"Right after leaving you. Then I'll phone you as soon as I return to my office."

But he was aware that his enthusiasm was all on the surface.

"Oh, thank you!" the girl said.

"Where shall I find Mr. Lambert?"

"At the precinct station-house, where Mr. Nevin is lodged. At least, I've been told so by André, who says they're both to be kept there until after the inquest."

"When is the inquest to be held?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. But I do so hope it 'll be before the funeral, the day after to-morrow. I couldn't ask Mrs. Veers to carry this message for me, because I was once engaged to Dayton—and I know she still wishes me to marry him." Though somewhat astonished at the news, the doctor waited for her to go on: "It was two years ago I broke it off, on father's account."

"Mr. Strong objected?"

The girl nodded.

"I was very young then. But neither Dayton nor his mother took it very gracefully. And Dayton's been quite horrible about father marrying his mother. You knew they were to be married, didn't you?"

The doctor said that he had.

"After the marriage," the girl continued volubly, "I imagine Mrs. Veers hoped she could talk father over. I am quite fond of her in a way. I certainly appreciate, doctor, the way she took hold last night. But I know in my heart she's tried to poison father's mind against Thompson. So, you see, I can't ask her to go to him now."

"Of course not. But," he urged her once more, "on what evidence was Mr. Lambert arrested?"

The girl wept softly again.

"It's—it's horrible. He was arrested because, as my fiancé, it was thought he would have got control of the entire Strong fortune in the event of father's death. It—it was widely known he wanted to be a power in 'the street.'"

Hunter Jackson gave a nod of understanding.

"I see! It was by that motive Mr. Lambert was supposed to have been actuated."

Alma Strong grew calmer.

"So I believe from the questions Mr. Murphy put to me."

"Then the chief inspector questioned you?"

"Yes—right after your departure this morning."

"In substance, what did he say?"

"That he understood from Mr. Terle that I'd inherited all of the Strong fortune."

"From Terle?"

"Yes. Now don't you see why I couldn't appeal to him?"

"From your own point of view, I do. And then?"

"Mr. Murphy went on to say that he was under the impression my fiancé knew I was going to inherit all of the Strong millions in case of father's death."

"Murphy did!" exclaimed Hunter Jackson, a shade angrily.

The girl looked up quickly.

"Oh, he was a perfect gentleman about it," she hastened to add.

"What did you answer?"

"I—I tried to give him the impression that Thompson knew I was going to hand over the entire Strong fortune to Don when the boy comes of age."

"Humph! Then what did he say?

"Asked me how long Mr. Lambert had known it."

"Well?"

"I had to confess that Thompson—Mr. Lambert had known it only since this morning—when I told him."

Hunter Jackson had a flash of intuition.

So Thompson Lambert had known it only since that morning? What had Alma Strong's statement to do with their quarrel?

Had Thompson Lambert, though wealthy, coveted more wealth and the power that went with it, tried in vain to persuade her to hold on to the money? Then had she, not believing it hers by right, but merely bequeathed to her in trust, broken with him at once over the question?

On the surface, he decided, it looked that way.

There had been something that morning in the girl's manner, which could not be altogether explained even by the ordeal through which she had passed on the previous night. But whatever had been the reason for her quarrel with Thompson Lambert, the fact remained that Alma Strong had quarreled with him; and now she was unable, on account of his arrest, to see him and patch up their difference.

How he would be received by Thompson Lambert, the physician did not know. But he did not care. No matter how he was going to be treated, he made up his mind to keep his promise to the girl.

He could not get over feeling surprised at Thompson Lambert's arrest. At the arrest of Dayton Veers, Jr., he would have been much less surprised.

Small wonder, too!

Impulsively he bent over Alma Strong.

"Does Murphy know of your previous engagement to Mr. Veers?" he asked her.

"No—I'm sure he doesn't."

"And the way he acted about his mother's?"

"No—why?"

"Can't you see for yourself?"

"Do you think he would arrest Mr. Veers?"

"More than likely."

The doctor was firmly convinced that Thomas Murphy would think he had a good case against young Veers, if the chief inspector got wind of the story. From the very outset, he had been openly suspicious of Dayton Veers, Jr.—mainly, on account of the latter's ill-timed remark in the pergola.

"I shouldn't be surprised," Alma Strong commented, "if Mrs. Veers were expecting Dayton to be arrested any minute. You remember how she acted this morning?"

"Indeed, I do! And I remember she was mighty nervous about it even last night."

The girl caught up a wisp of hair that had fallen over her forehead and smoothed it back into place.

"As I said before, I am fond of her. But I found it frightfully hard to talk to her about father's death on that account—and because I imagine she has grown to love him dearly."

"And where is Mrs. Veers now?"

"At home with Dayton."

"Well, to change the subject for a better, how are you feeling now, aside from your nervousness?"

The girl colored a little under his solicitous gaze.

"Stronger than this morning, doctor."

"Good! Keep right on taking the medicine I've prescribed."

Then, taking his departure, he went to see Thompson Lambert at the station-house, where he was informed by Coroner Washburn that the inquest would take place the next morning at ten o'clock.

"Here?" inquired the doctor.

"Yep!" answered Washburn.

During a semiprivate talk with Thompson Lambert in the station-house office he delivered Alma Strong's message as diplomatically as he could. For a wonder he found the prisoner inclined to be affable.

"Please tell Miss Strong not to take any steps until I've seen her," Thompson Lambert importuned. "She will understand what I mean."

Arriving at his office, the doctor called up Alma Strong and told her.

"Oh, thank you so much, doctor!" she said. There was a positive lilt in the girl's voice.

With an almost unconscious sigh he hung up the receiver.

Snatching a bite to eat, he went into the waiting-room, where, his housekeeper reported, he would find a number of patients anxious to see him. He was extremely busy for the next hour or so and had a little time to speculate on the outcome of the inquest.

Would Archibald Nevin clear himself?

Would Thompson Lambert, too? Or would he only become more deeply involved in the mystery?

And what of Dayton Veers, Jr.? Would he let slip on the witness-stand a piece of evidence that would prove his undoing?

And, lastly, would Richard Orville turn out to be the man who had inspired the anonymous letter? Or his father, which would in the end amount to the same thing?

Hunter Jackson started.

Since returning to the office he had forgotten all about telephoning Rutherford Jones to find out if Krick had been apprehended as yet. He called up the detective, after dismissing the last patient waiting to see him, but could not get him on the wire.

He resolved to call him up again in the morning. Until that time he would have to rest content with what he already knew.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHO WAS THAT MAN?"

BUT the next morning Hunter Jackson failed again to get the detective on the wire. He wondered if Rutherford Jones had been unable to lay his hands on Krick; if he had as yet done nothing with the clue about the knife-thrust so unwittingly furnished him.

When he arrived at the station-house for the inquest, a few minutes before ten, he found the court-room crowded to capacity.

Among the witnesses he caught sight of the five suspects and, apparently, every one who had been present at the death of Harrison Strong. Also the Strong servants. Alma Strong and Mrs. Veers he saw sitting together, both rather pale and drawn-looking. He wanted to speak a few words to them, but knew he would not have time. Standing by Coroner Washburn he recognized Detectives Condon and Day and the chief inspector, whom he greeted with a wave of the hand.

He was the first to be called to the stand where, at the coroner's request, he described the wound that had resulted in Harrison Strong's instantaneous death.

"And now," said Washburn, "I want you to tell me, doctor, if you think it could have been inflicted by a man who had—ah—never— No, let me put that question in another way. Didn't you think it strange that a man who had always been quiet and law-abiding—as the five suspects in this case seem to be—could have stabbed another to death before a score of witnesses —*and not been detected?*"

While pausing to think how he should reply, Hunter Jackson took note of a meaning look that flashed from the coroner to Thomas Murphy. So the question, he reflected, had really been inspired by the chief inspector. For a moment he wondered if Thomas Murphy could have engaged in a conference with Rutherford Jones or been tipped off to pursue that line of investigation by Dave Condon at the private sleuth's behest. Then, for obvious reasons, he decided in the negative. In consequence he felt more respect for the chief inspector's ability.

"In other words," he said to the coroner at length, "do I think a man who didn't know how to handle a knife could have done it?"

Washburn nodded.

"Sure! It's rather an important question. Do you?"

"No. As a doctor, I know it isn't easy to kill a man in the way Harrison Strong was killed—without being detected at once."

"Thank you! That will do," affirmed the coroner. "Archibald Nevin!"

The doctor scrutinized the new witness narrowly as he resumed his seat. Archibald Nevins was pale, he perceived; but entirely calm. On the stand he even smiled grimly at an elderly gentleman seated in front of

him, whom Hunter Jackson recognized as a great criminal lawyer in the city.

"Mr. Nevin," began the coroner in a not unkindly tone, "I want you to tell me what, in your opinion, took place at the time Harrison Strong was stabbed to death. Understand, however, I don't expect you to answer any question you do not wish to answer."

Almost without variation the man on the stand related the story up to the banker's collapse on the dais just as he had related it on the night it occurred.

"And afterward?" urged Washburn.

Archibald Nevin moistened his lips and looked down at his attorney.

The coroner went on persuasively.

"I understand it is possible for you to explain, to my satisfaction, certain pieces of evidence which it is to your decided advantage to explain. At least, so I've been told by your counsel. Is that true?"

"Yes," responded the man in a low voice.

Hunter Jackson observed that the admission made the sensation he had expected it would in the crowded court-room.

"Then, Mr. Nevin," the coroner pursued, "I should like you to tell me how your finger-prints got on the knife-haft." Again Washburn cast a significant look at the chief inspector, who returned it. "I'll even grant, for the sake of the argument, that you may have made a mistake in picking out the blood-stained domino for your own. So I can't emphasize too much the importance I attach to the evidence I want you to give. *Well?*"

With a final glance at his attorney, Archibald Nevins replied calmly.

"I will tell you," he promised. "After the stabbing I stepped to one side with the rest who had worn dominoes. I wanted to watch the scene that followed. As I did so I was accosted by one of them who said, 'Hold this for me a second!' and held out the knife which you say killed Harrison Strong. I imagined he wanted to light a cigarette. But no sooner did I catch hold of it than I heard him whisper, 'Never mind!' I gave no more thought to the incident until I was asked by the chief inspector if I had ever seen the knife before."

The coroner scowled.

"Why did you deny having seen it?"

"I was panic-stricken."

Washburn bent forward earnestly.

"Didn't you recognize it the first time you saw it as being different from the dagger used by you in the play?"

"Yes."

"Well—didn't that fact strike you as strange?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I didn't know whether the daggers were all alike or whether they were different."

"But the knife had a sharp blade!" burst out the coroner.

"When I first saw it I didn't see the blade. It was the hilt I saw."

"Oh—so the man of whom you speak grasped the knife by the blade and held it toward you hilt first? This way?"

Seizing the knife in question from a near-by table, Washburn demonstrated what he meant.

"Yes," nodded Archibald Nevin.

"Do you think he had a purpose in so doing?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"That he wanted to conceal from you the fact that he was holding a knife and, at the same time, to get your finger-prints on the handle?"

Archibald Nevin hesitated a space before replying. He looked at his lawyer, who smiled encouragingly, then at the chief inspector and the two sleuths who, Hunter Jackson observed, were following the cross-examination as tensely as any one in the room, including the jurymen.

Finally the man on the stand spoke.

"Of course I do!" he replied. "I was expecting that question. But not in the way you put it to me at first."

"*Who was that man?*" demanded the coroner.

CHAPTER XV.

A WHEEL WITHIN A WHEEL.

HUNTER JACKSON had anticipated what the coroner's next question was going to be. He listened tensely. For he was aware that, should Archibald Nevin

give a definite answer to that question, he would, in all probability, solve the problem as to who had killed Harrison Strong—that is, if he were telling the truth.

He saw that the man on the stand was reluctant to reply.

At that moment he wondered how some of the others in the court-room were taking his testimony. Stealing a glance at the other four suspects, he observed that they were openly amazed; none of them, he decided, appeared especially frightened.

As for Alma Strong, however, she seemed to hang on every word that issued from Archibald Nevin's lips. Was she afraid after all, he asked himself, that the man on the stand would name Thompson Lambert?

And Mrs. Dayton Veers, he perceived, looked as though she was about to collapse.

But he glanced quickly back to Archibald Nevin when he heard the coroner start to speak again.

"Who was that man?" Washburn urged a second time.

"I do not know!" asserted Archibald Nevin.

"Don't know!" blazed Washburn.

"No—I couldn't recognize his voice."

"Why not?"

"The man whispered."

"Oh!"

Palpably disappointed, Washburn glanced, almost subconsciously, at the other four suspects. Then of a sudden he turned to the man on the stand again.

"One thing more—was he light or dark?"

At once Hunter Jackson divined the obvious reason for the question. Of the four suspects he took note at that instant that Lambert and Veers were light; Cassel and Orville dark. But he was disappointed once more in Archibald Nevin's reply.

"I do not know," the man protested. "Coroner, let me remind you of the fact that he was masked."

"Ah, so he was! But perhaps you can tell me if he was smooth-shaven or wore a mustache?"

Washburn's tones were ironical now.

"I can!"

"Eh?" ejaculated the coroner, taken aback.

Hunter Jackson looked covertly at Alma Strong. He knew how vitally interested she would be in the answer to a question that would either condemn or set free Thompson Lambert—a question that, on the surface, seemed devised to corner Archibald Nevin.

For, of all the suspects, Alma Strong's financé was the only one who was not smooth-shaven.

The doctor saw the girl start and grow pale.

"Well?" urged the coroner.

"He was smooth-shaven."

"Ah!" Washburn breathed. "At last I'm getting somewhere."

"Yes—he was smooth-shaven," repeated Archibald Nevin positively.

"Do you recall anything else about his appearance?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Do you remember what he did after extending the knife to you?"

"No—watching the scene, I forgot about him utterly."

"Is there—er—any other testimony you'd like to give?"

"No."

"That will do, Mr. Nevin. Mr. Lambert!"

In cross-examining the next suspect, the coroner, somewhat to Hunter Jackson's surprise, made no allusion to his arrest. At first he confined himself to getting Thompson Lambert's version of the banker's death. Then, finding it coincided with Archibald Nevin's, he held up the knife.

"Are you sure you never saw this weapon before the stabbing?" he demanded.

Thompson Lambert nodded.

"Absolutely sure, coroner."

"That will do, then. Mr. Dayton Veers, Jr.!"

Hunter Jackson leaned forward interestedly. An important discovery or two, he told himself, ought to be made during the cross-examination of young Veers. Judging from the coroner's manner, too, he decided that Washburn was of like opinion.

The coroner eyed the suspect a space before he spoke.

"Mr. Veers," he began at length, "you

are reported to have passed a very suspicious remark prior to the stabbing."

"Am I never to hear the last of that remark?" protested the man on the stand petulantly. "I passed it only in jest."

"Perhaps! But you must yourself confess that it *sounded* suspicious."

"Well," uneasily, "maybe it did. That is, in the light of what's happened."

The coroner pointed an accusatory finger at him.

"Nor is that the only pertinent question I have to put to you, Mr. Veers! Why, on the night of the murder, were you so disturbed at sight of the knife?"

"Must I repeat that, too? I've said once—and I say it again—I felt a positive nausea when I looked at the knife."

"But *why?*"

"Because I couldn't bear looking at the weapon which had killed Harrison Strong—that's all! Ugh! And, besides, having made the remark to which you allude, I was worried about how it would be construed."

"Humph!" The coroner scrutinized young Veers a moment. "I believe you were once engaged to Miss Strong, weren't you?"

The question made the sensation it was designed to.

And no one who heard it could have been more surprised than Hunter Jackson, although he already knew the engagement to be a matter of fact. For he recalled what Alma Strong had said about the chief inspector being in ignorance of her first engagement. He glanced quickly at Thomas Murphy. Then he realized, at once, that the chief inspector was as surprised as any at the coroner's query.

Hunter Jackson could not help wondering if Coroner Washburn, really inimical to the chief inspector, had conducted an investigation of his own—*sub rosa*.

He looked back at Dayton Veers, Jr., who, he saw, was flushing.

"I can't imagine"—young Veers was speaking almost in an angry treble—"what that has to do with the case!"

"Well, you were!" the coroner insisted. "I don't care whether you answer that question or not. It's a matter of common knowledge that you were. Also—that you objected strenuously to your mother's engagement."

Young Veers's eyes flashed.

"Kindly leave my mother out of this cross-examination," he snapped. "I imagine you've been listening to a lot of servants' tales. Now what on earth have they to do with the case, anyway?"

Washburn eyed him coldly.

"Maybe a good bit! I'm trying to get at the motive, you see, of the man who stabbed Harrison Strong, tried to put the blame for the deed on a friend, then left the knife with which he did it under a bench in the pergola used by the men as a dressing-room."

At the innuendo conveyed by the coroner's words, Dayton Veers, Jr., flushed again.

"Well," he replied, "if you're hinting that I did it, I take this occasion to deny the accusation hotly."

But the coroner suddenly dropped his bullying manner.

"Thank you, Mr. Veers," he said in excusing him.

Washburn next called Charles Cassel to the stand. After asking him to describe the assassination scene in the photo-play—as Charles Cassel remembered it—the coroner picked up the knife once more.

"Mr. Cassel," he said, with seeming irrelevance, "I understand you've always been more or less a globe-trotter."

The man on the stand gave a mystified nod.

"Why—ah—yes."

"Ever been to the Philippines?"

"Y-e-s."

"Ever hear of *duc-duc?*"

Charles Cassel gulped.

"Why, of course!"

"Will you describe it?"

The witness glanced uncertainly at the coroner and then about the room.

"It's—it's a way the Filipinos have of stabbing. They're very expert at it. For instance, they can knife a man in his sleep so neatly that he dies without a groan."

The coroner grunted.

"Much as Harrison Strong died, eh?"

But, as in the case of Dayton Veers, Jr., he did not press the innuendo any further.

He allowed Charles Cassel to leave the stand without even intimating that the latter had used the Filipino method of stabbing Harrison Strong.

Richard Orville, the next suspect he called, the coroner questioned in a perfunctory manner about the stabbing scene and the knife. Then he asked for Harrison Strong's attorney.

"Mr. Terle," he began, "I've been given to understand you told the chief inspector that Harrison Strong had no enemies made in business. Is that so?"

"Yes—why, yes!" assented Wellington Terle.

"You were conversant with Harrison Strong's affairs, weren't you?"

"Yes—though not so conversant with them as his private secretary, Mr. Robert Yeager."

"Of course; I understand. But what I'm trying to get at is whether you're quite sure you answered correctly at the moment. I can readily make allowances for the question being put to you too suddenly. I can't understand how a powerful man like Harrison Strong could have failed to make any personal enemies in business. You're sure there wasn't any one Harrison Strong was pressing for money?"

It was apparent that Wellington Terle was embarrassed; he reddened.

"Well yes," he confessed, "there was."

"Who?"

"William Orville—the real-estate man."

"Father of Richard Orville?"

"Yes," reluctantly. "For the moment I'd quite forgotten about it."

"Did Harrison Strong, to your knowledge, ever have a personal quarrel with the Orvilles?"

"Why, yes," more reluctantly. "After talking with the chief inspector, I heard that he'd had—with Mr. Richard."

"Who informed you?"

"Must I tell?"

"It might be advisable. Who told you?"

"Mr. Strong's private secretary."

"Ah—that will do." The coroner paused, then: "Mr. Yeager!"

It was the first intimation Hunter Jackson received that the secretary was present. As Yeager took the stand, the doctor could see by the expression on his face that he had been chagrined at Wellington Terle's unwilling testimony.

"What do you know about this quarrel?" he was asked by the coroner.

"Oh," answered Robert Yeager, "I just know it took place, that's all."

"Had Harrison Strong any more business-made enemies?" Washburn queried. "Do you know?"

The private secretary shook his head.

"I think not."

"Very well, Mr. Yeager. Mr. Orville!"

The real-estate man was pale as he mounted the stand again. In reply to a point-blank question as to whether he had quarreled with Harrison Strong, he replied simply:

"Yes."

"Over a matter of business?"

"Yes. But afterward I made peace with Harrison Strong." He paused, then burst out: "Look here, coroner, why would I have gone to the Strong mansion on the night of the stabbing, if I had still been on the outs with him? I'd an appointment, that very night, to talk over the matter that had been the cause of our quarrel."

"But you don't deny having the quarrel?"

"No—but, as I said before, I'd made peace with him."

Washburn excused Richard Orville.

Immediately afterward, he called the Strong servants, one by one, to the stand and asked them whether they had ever seen the knife before. Having obtained from each an oath to the contrary, he launched a cross-examination that, to Hunter Jackson, was totally incomprehensible and—the doctor believed, from appearances at least—to the chief inspector as well.

"Sara Kane!" called Washburn.

The nurse of little Don Strong, a buxom Irishwoman of over thirty, again took the stand.

"Tell me," he requested, "about the man who annoyed you in the park, Miss Kane, on the morning of the day Harrison Strong met death."

"Sure, sir," she said. "I haven't much to tell. I noticed the gentleman watching me and, sir—"

"What did he look like?" broke in Washburn.

"The gentleman, sir, had black hair and eyes. He was a little bald—"

"How do you know that?"

"The gentleman, sir, took off his hat when he came up to me—"

"Go on!"

"And he had a mustache curled up at the ends. He came up to the bench on which I was sitting, sir, and he said: 'And so this is little Don Strong!' 'And what if it is?' said I. 'I guess it's none of your business,' said I. 'Run along with you now or I'll be 'a' calling a cop.' I was that afraid of kidnapers, sir."

"And then?"

"The gentleman, sir, went off on the double quick."

"Thank you, Miss Kane. Mr. Urban!"

It was Harrison, Strong's second chauffeur, who answered to the name.

"You chased a man out of the Strong grounds on the night of the stabbing, didn't you?" Washburn inquired of him.

"Yes, sir," answered Urban. "I was working in the garage at the time. As soon as I saw him snooping around the building, I told him to beat it."

"And he did?"

Urban nodded.

"He went toward one of the gates, sir."

"But you are sure he cleared out?"

"And why wouldn't he?" belligerently.

"Why *would* he?" The coroner shrugged. "But I don't wish to argue that question now. He answered pretty well the description of the man in the park, didn't he?"

"I never thought—why, yes, he did, sir."

"Thank you. Mr. House!"

The assistant chauffeur took the stand a second time.

"On the night of the murder," Washburn addressed him, "you came into the Strong grounds a little after nine."

"Yes, sir."

"As you came in, you saw Mr. McCall, the gardener, pass out."

"Yes, sir."

"You spoke to him?"

"Yes, sir."

"He answered?"

"Well—no, sir. I guess he didn't hear me."

"Thank you, Mr. House. Mr. McCall!" To the gardener, who took the stand immediately, Washburn rapped out: "Did you pass out of the Strong grounds at the time Mr. House says he saw you?"

"No—it must have been some one else."

"You can prove what you say?"

"Of course. At the time, I was with friends."

"Thank you, Mr. McCall."

Coroner Washburn turned to the jury.

"Now gentlemen," he went on, "I want to sum up. In so doing, may I call your attention to a few—a very few facts in the case? Prior to the inquest, two men, as you are aware, were placed under arrest. As a result of the cross-examinations I've just concluded, I think that three more may at least be said to be under suspicion. I've shown also that it is impossible to prove that the knife with which I believe this deed was committed was ever in the possession of any of these men. And I've about established the fact that none of the Strong servants ever saw it."

He paused dramatically.

"Then where did the knife come from? At least one of the men under suspicion must know. That is, unless I'm to believe in spirits. Where, I repeat, did it come from? From the hand of an accomplice?

"Why not?"

Washburn shrugged and went on:

"But who was that accomplice? Gentlemen, I'm inclined to believe it was the man who spoke to Miss Kane in the park. Several people, it appears, bore a grudge against Harrison Strong—wanted to injure him. Evidently they thought at first of kidnaping the Strong child. Then, the last moment, they evidently decided to kill him. They used the photo-play as a cloak. One of them, who was to take part in it, was picked to do the job.

"Another was to bring this man the knife and, possibly, to take it away again. But he didn't do the latter. The reason is quite obvious. No doubt the murderer preferred to divert suspicion from himself by hiding the knife, with the incriminating finger-marks on it, under the bench where

he knew it would be found. Doesn't that explanation sound plausible, gentlemen?"

The coroner swept the jury with his eyes.

"And so, in conclusion, gentlemen, let me say again I believe that the accomplice was the same man who talked to Sara Kane in the park—who had an encounter with Mr. Urban—and who was taken for Mr. McCall. Of course, I needn't point out to you that this man, who resembles Mr. McCall, and who, for some reason, has slipped through the hands of the police, must be apprehended without delay!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CUMULATIVE EVIDENCE.

DIRECTLY after the inquest, Hunter Jackson hurried out of the court-room. Although anxious to speak a few words of encouragement to Alma Strong, he decided that he had better leave at once. He would pay her a semiprofessional visit late that afternoon. At present he was in no mood, anyway, to talk to any one.

He was angry. For, in the coroner's later cross-examinations and concluding speech, he had detected a palpable effort on Washburn's part to "show up" Thomas Murphy.

Eager to talk about it to Rutherford Jones, he called up the detective's home and asked for him. As he had been unable on the previous night, and that morning, too, to get in touch with his friend, he had leaped to the conclusion that the detective had been out on a case all night and so would be home, resting up.

"Is this Dr. Jackson?"

It was the voice of Mrs. Rutherford Jones which he heard over the wire.

"Yes," he replied. "Is your husband at home?"

"No. He's just left for the office. But he told me to tell you, if you called up again, that he wants to see you at six o'clock."

"Where, Mrs. Jones?"

"At his office."

"Thank you. I'll be there."

During his call on Alma Strong he learned from her that, as a result of the inquest, Charles Cassel, Richard Orville, and Dayton Veers, Jr., had all been arrested by Chief Inspector Murphy, who was beginning to be hammered unmercifully by the newspapers.

"Don't you think he'll let Lambert out soon?" she begged. "Now that he's practically been cleared by Mr. Nevin?"

Hunter Jackson shook his head quizzically.

"I really can't say, Miss Strong. I'm afraid a whole lot depends on whether the chief inspector takes any stock in Mr. Nevin's story."

"Oh, he *must* believe Mr. Nevin, mustn't he?" She bit her lower lip in sudden chagrin. "Poor Mrs. Veers is prostrated over Dayton's arrest. I loved father so—and I wish the man who killed him were—oh, I wish he'd have some awful punishment meted out to him. But I just *can't* believe Dayton is guilty. Can you, doctor?"

Hunter Jackson shrugged.

"I really don't know, Miss Strong," he replied truthfully. "Have you—er—been taking your medicine regularly?"

The girl nodded.

"And I feel ever so much better now, doctor."

"Very well, then I—I needn't come here again."

She flushed and looked quickly up at him.

"Oh," she said, "but you'll let me know everything Mr. Jones discovers?"

"If I'm free to do so, certainly," he hastened to say. "I really meant—I needn't come here again in a strictly professional capacity. I'm coming to the funeral to-morrow, of course, but I guess I won't see you. Send for me any time, though, you feel you need me professionally — or otherwise. For the present, then" — he smiled at her—"chuck out your medicine, Miss Strong, and chirk up."

And reluctantly Hunter Jackson took his leave.

At six o'clock sharp, after visiting several patients, he brought his runabout to a stop before a building in which Rutherford

Jones had his office. The detective he found most eager to talk to him.

"Have you got hold of Krick yet?" was the first question Hunter Jackson asked.

Rutherford Jones leaned back in his swivel-chair and sighed.

"No, he confessed, "I haven't."

"What—not yet?"

"Not yet! Ever since leaving you I've been busy on that case of the girl from the West. Found her, too!"

"Congratulations!"

"I haven't had a chance even to think of the Strong case. But I've just got word from the plain-clothes man who's relieving Browning that Krick hasn't turned up yet."

"Do you think Angel Face could have warned him?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"Certainly does. Did you hear about the inquest?"

Rutherford Jones nodded.

"Yes—this afternoon."

"Who told you?"

"Condon — I'd quite a talk with him here in this office."

"Here! Weren't you afraid he'd be seen coming in?"

"Oh, no; he came in the back way."

"Did he tell you about what Washburn did?"

The detective scowled.

"Yes. And I've been at boiling-point ever since. It was all a dirty trick to embarrass the chief inspector."

"That's what I thought."

"And I'm afraid it's succeeded to some extent."

"But where did Washburn get all his information?"

"From Day."

"Day!"

"*Day!*"

Seeming to forget that he was in the privacy of his own office, Rutherford Jones dropped his voice to a confidential pitch.

"To that effect I've been informed by Dave Condon, who claims that Day investigated at Murphy's command and then double-crossed his superior. Did it in this way. Day reported to Tom Murphy that he had learned nothing of value; then handed all he had dug up to Washburn, who made good use of it."

"The rat!"

"That's what I call him. I guess Day's after the chief inspectorship. As I said, ever since talking to Condon, I've been angry. Now I'm particularly glad you're here. But do you really know why I asked you to come?"

"To hear that Krick hadn't been caught?"

Rutherford Jones made a wry face.

"Not exactly; to meet Commissioner Porter."

"He's coming here?"

"At six-thirty. He wants to ask you about the anonymous letter."

"Oh!"

"Of course, the commissioner's interested in landing the Krick crowd," went on Rutherford Jones. "Equally, of course, the murderer of Harrison Strong. He'll want the guilty party landed without delay to protect Tom Murphy. But, say," wound up the detective, "Day did dig up some interesting facts — bad cess to him, anyway. Don't you think so?"

"I think both. What do you think of Washburn's theory of an accomplice?"

"Sounds reasonable. Where did the blooming knife come from, anyway? It's very much up to the chief inspector, I should say, to find that man." The detective chuckled. "I'll be able to help him accomplish that end, if I'm not very much mistaken."

"You will?" Hunter looked at the other in surprise.

"Certainly! I've almost got my fingers on the man now!"

"What's that you say?"

"Yessiree! Do you know whose description he tallies with?"

"Not Krick's!"

"That's the ticket."

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Yes," nodded Rutherford Jones, "Day, I should say, did dig up some interesting facts. Before Washburn was finished, thanks to Day, he was able to implicate the rest of the five suspects. By the way, let me tell you the latest."

"What's that?"

"I'm telling you in strict confidence, you know. Why, according to Condon, Archibald Nevin admitted, under pressure, that he thought it was Charles Cassel who started to pass him the knife."

"Well, well! It certainly makes things look black for Charles Cassel, in that event. I suppose Dave Condon told you all about his testimony relating to *duc-duc?*"

"He did."

Hunter Jackson was on the point of commenting that, in the light of later developments, the Orville clue looked as though it were going to peter out, when he heard a knock on the door.

"It's Commissioner Porter, isn't it?" he exclaimed.

"It must be." Rutherford Jones got up and opened the door.

The commissioner it proved to be; a tall, broad-shouldered, baldheaded man of about fifty. He was at once presented to Hunter Jackson by the detective.

"Ah—so this is the doctor, is it?" he said in a vibrant bass voice.

Smiling affably, he accepted a chair which Rutherford Jones offered.

"Yes—and a discreeter man never breathed, commissioner!" added the detective. "I can recommend the doctor heartily, in that respect. So, I assure you, that whatever you say, commissioner, will be kept within the four walls of this office—as far as he is concerned."

Rutherford Jones and the doctor seated themselves.

"I inferred as much from our previous conversation," said the commissioner, smiling again. "Well, doctor"—turning to Hunter Jackson—"I'm going to confide in you to considerable extent. But, first, tell me how that anonymous letter came into your possession."

Hunter Jackson acquiesced.

"I see; I see!" nodded Commissioner Porter, at the conclusion of the doctor's recital. "I'd rather not let it be known just how anxious I am to have the Strong mystery solved without delay. Of course, as the commissioner of police, I want to see the rascal who committed the murder brought to justice. But I've an ulterior motive in wishing it done speedily—I'm interested in the chief inspector. I don't want to see him broken. Has Mr. Jones told you?"

Hunter Jackson inclined his head.

"And obviously," the commissioner went on, "I don't want Mr. Murphy to find out that I am not placing absolute confidence in him. It so happens that, on account of the disloyalty of some of his subordinates, I can't. Understand! I don't want to warn him against them yet—I want to lay some sort of trap for them and 'get' them. But, in any event, I don't want Mr. Murphy to find out to what extent I'm taking an interest in the Strong case. That's the reason, of course, I sent for you secretly—assured, as I was, that you know more than any of the other witnesses about this strange stabbing."

The commissioner, declining a cigar which Rutherford Jones offered him, pursued:

"Then, too, I liked the way you disposed of the Orville clue very much. I was ever so glad you didn't make it public by handing the anonymous letter right over to the police."

But Hunter Jackson shook his head modestly.

"I was," he said, "merely following Miss Strong's suggestion."

"There's a girl I admire!" commented the commissioner. "I must say she's kept her head from the start. Well, at all events, thanks to your good sense in following her advice, I was able to spot a gang of German conspirators I've been itching to lay my hands on—this Krick gang."

"By the bye," interrupted Rutherford Jones, "I don't believe you are in touch with just all the latest developments, commissioner. The last of them, I think, has a distinct bearing on what you're saying."

"Please tell me what they are," urged Porter.

"First and foremost, I heard from Condon that Archibald Nevin has named Charles Cassel—"

"I know," broke in the commissioner. "I attach very little importance to that testimony, though. I've a firm conviction that Nevin was only guessing."

"So've I, to tell the truth. But, in the

second place, I rather think that I know who the murderer's accomplice was, if he had any."

"Eh? Who?"

"Krick."

"Krick—of all people!"

"Yep! And now if I could only find proof that Krick and Angel Face and one or more of the five men under suspicion were associated in some way prior to the stabbing!"

The commissioner brought his fist down on Rutherford Jones's desk.

"Perhaps I'll be able to help you to do that. Just recently I've unearthed what seems ample proof that Angel Face—as you call him—Krick, and Vance Workman were working hand in glove with some swells."

"Vance Workman?" half queried Rutherford Jones.

"The editor of *Freedom*."

"Oh!" with an understanding nod.

Hunter Jackson snapped his fingers reminiscently.

"Do you know," he said to the commissioner," that young Veers has written a good deal for *Freedom* and knows Workman quite well? I've heard that they were the closest of friends."

CHAPTER XVII.

A STAGGERING DISCOVERY.

"WHAT'S that, doctor?" exclaimed the commissioner. "They were!"

Rutherford Jones nodded.

"And I suppose you know, commissioner," he said, "how suspicious young Veers's conduct has been from the first?"

"Yes, I do. I know, too, that his father was a full-blooded German who changed his name. Also, that young Veers has been identified with the pacifists of the city for some time. I wasn't aware, however, that he was writing for *Freedom* or acquainted with Vance Workman. I'm mighty glad to be apprized of that last fact. But, in that connection, I've got another fact to consider. Since the stabbing, young Veers has tried in no way to communicate with Vance Workman, Krick, or the latter's blond friend. Nor have they with him."

"You're quite sure, commissioner?"

It was Rutherford Jones who put the question.

"Quite sure. At least, so I've had it from the plain-clothes men sent by Tom Murphy to watch him."

At that juncture, the doctor interrupted.

"After all," he said, "isn't it natural, commissioner?"

But Porter shook his head emphatically.

"No. I'd surprise you if I enumerated the number of cases in which, to my certain knowledge, a murderer tried, right after the crime, to communicate with an accomplice—only to give himself and his accomplice away, in that manner, to the police. Besides, I've no reason to suppose that young Veers suspected at all that he was being shadowed."

Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"I have, commissioner."

"Eh?"

"So I was told yesterday by his mother, who got it from young Veers himself."

"Is that so? Humph! I guess he's a good bit slicker than I at first imagined. It isn't often a man who's being shadowed can fool the best plain-clothes men I have."

"How do you mean?" asked Rutherford Jones.

Porter turned to the detective.

"I was informed by Cassidy and Masters, of the squad—you know them—that young Veers never once got hep to them. Now I see that he must have and never let 'em get wise."

"Rather slick, eh?"

"Rather."

Rutherford Jones fell to pacing the floor.

"I've got a bright idea, commissioner," he said, banging one fist into the palm of the other hand.

"Then spring it."

"Why not have Tom Murphy let young Veers out—and then have him cautiously watched?"

"I rather like that idea. But I'll have to think up some sop to throw the chief inspector."

"Oh, suppose that you tell him that, of

all the five in custody, you suspect young Veers the most; that if Tom Murphy lets him out, he may be able to catch him trying to get in touch with the accomplice of whom Washburn has spoken—and so catch the latter, too."

"All right, I'm going to act on the idea. As for Tom Murphy, I can handle him. Poor fellow, I want to get him out of the clutches of his enemies, if I can." The commissioner got up and placed a hand on Rutherford Jones's shoulder. "I wish you'd begin at once—on the quiet—to investigate this case."

Rutherford Jones looked at the other earnestly.

"I'll think it over."

"Of course, your work is not to suffer."

"Oh, for that matter, I won't *let* it."

"And I'll pay you in full for your services right out of my own pocket."

"It isn't a question of pay, believe me."

Commissioner Porter banged his fist on the detective's desk.

"Then do as I ask. I'm anxious to beat the dirty crowd who are trying to throttle Tom Murphy. And I want you to help me. I want to break that whelp Day—and a few others of his breed. You can be careful how you go about this investigation. You needn't let Tom Murphy know you're conducting it; or tip off his enemies, either.

"It 'll be a hard job; you're the only private detective in town who can do it.

"You can let me know at once of any discoveries you make. I can see to it that the chief inspector gets the benefit of them. I know it's a damned big favor to ask of you. But I shouldn't ask it if I didn't know, too, that you have a sufficiently big reputation not to care whether you get the credit for solving the Strong case. It's too bad that Tom Murphy should fall down in such an emergency—but I can say for him that it's not his fault."

He flung himself angrily into a chair.

"Will you do it?" he concluded.

"I will," agreed Rutherford Jones.

"Good!"

The commissioner rose and gripped the detective's hand.

"I suppose, first, you'll be going to see that film."

"No—I *have* seen it."

"You have!"

"Yes—I took the doctor along with me. But, as he'll tell you, I saw nothing in it that could be construed as evidence."

"That I call odd—very odd!" The commissioner was palpably disappointed. "I hoped you might spot something Tom Murphy, in his anxiety, might have overlooked."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do, commissioner," said Rutherford Jones, going over to his desk and picking up the telephone on it. "Now that I'm about to take up the Strong case in earnest, I'm going to see that film again. I can't say; I may have overlooked something important."

"I most certainly would," affirmed the commissioner.

To central Rutherford murmured a number at first meaningless to Porter and the doctor, but not meaningless when, a moment later, he inquired:

"Cosmos? Mr. Grimm there?—Gone for the day?—Too bad!—Oh, he hasn't!—May I speak with him?—Who's talking? A friend." After a long pause: "This Mr. Grimm?—Rutherford Jones talking. Say, Mr. Grimm, I'd like to see that film again—When? Why, to-night, if possible. —All right, I'll be around right away."

The detective hung up.

"I can see that film again," he explained, "if I get to the Cosmos Building within the next half-hour. I was lucky to catch Ben Grimm there at this time."

"Very well," said the commissioner, "then I'll leave."

"Going to get young Veers discharged to-morrow?" the detective asked him.

"Yes. Then I'll let you know if he's caught communicating with Vance Workman. I know Condon will keep you apprized of all the other developments."

"And, for my part, I'll let *you* know, commissioner, as soon as I make any discovery. To-morrow I'm going to start out in earnest."

"Well—good luck!"

The doctor and the detective shook hands with Porter, who immediately passed out of the office.

"Got your car outside?" asked Rutherford Jones after the commissioner's departure.

"Yes," Hunter Jackson nodded.

"Then I won't have to keep the director waiting. Come on. I want you with me."

The doctor assented gladly enough.

En route to the Cosmos Building, Rutherford Jones alluded to his seeming reluctance to take up the Strong case.

"It wasn't so much because I'll have to work largely in the dark," he said. "It was because there's a young friend of mine, a plain-clothes man, mixed up in this conspiracy against Tom Murphy. I know how the boy's been led astray. I didn't want to hurt him in any way, even though I knew he was dead wrong, of course. I hung back at first on that account. But now I look at the whole thing differently. I'll undoubtedly be better able to protect his interests when the time comes for a showdown if I won the commissioner's gratitude now."

"Right," agreed Hunter Jackson.

Before long they were ensconced in the little projection-room, where they had seen the moving-picture for the first time, looking at it again. At the last flicker of the film Rutherford Jones turned to the physician with a grimace.

"Did you see anything that escaped us the first time?" he inquired.

"Nary a thing," confessed Hunter Jackson.

"Please run off the film again, Mr. Grimm," the detective requested.

"Certainly," replied the director obligingly.

This time Hunter Jackson watched the movements of the men on the screen more narrowly than ever. When he saw the maskers, clad in dominoes, rush on Harrison Strong, he began, for no apparent reason at all—subconsciously, almost—to count them.

"One, two, three, four, five, six—"

With a shout, he jumped to his feet.

"Stop the film!" he cried to the director. "Mr. Jones"—he clutched the detective's arm—"I've just counted six dominoes on that screen."

The detective gasped.

"W-h-a-t!"

"Start the film over, Mr. Grimm," the doctor begged excitedly. "Let Mr. Jones count them for himself. And please run it more slowly."

Ben Grimm complied unhesitantly.

And Hunter Jackson, in a few moments, observed that he had been correct in his count.

"What do you think of that?" he rapped out.

Rutherford Jones gave a long whistle. He watched the film through to its close. Then he leaped to his feet, almost beside himself with amazement.

"Think of it! Why, I think this discovery's simply staggering! It means that to-morrow I'll have to start at the bottom—all over again—"

He paused, glancing at the director, who was in the act of switching on the lights in the room.

"What do you think?" he asked, somewhat dryly.

Serious of face, Ben Grimm met his gaze.

"At any rate, I know what you're thinking," he said. "Mr. Jones, I give you my word of honor that this discovery is as much a surprise to me as to you. Neither Ned Alt nor myself were aware of the sixth man in domino."

Rutherford Jones eyed the other a full minute.

"Grimm, I believe you," he said at length.

"Good God, it's almost uncanny!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Isn't it?" agreed Ben Grimm. "And to think of no one who saw the film noticing that sixth man before."

"Well," begged Rutherford Jones, "please keep this discovery to yourself. I'm taking a—a somewhat deeper interest in the Strong case than at first. And keep that fact under your hat, too. Now, before I leave, there's just one question I'd like to put to you."

"Fire away," invited the director.

"Had you thought at all of using a sixth man in that scene?"

"No," replied Ben Grimm positively.

"You had six dominoes at your disposal, hadn't you?" cut in Hunter Jackson.

"Yes, I had."

"And I distinctly remember you spoke of the half-dozen who were to play the parts of assassins."

"If I did," Ben Grimm defended himself, "I was speaking roughly at the time."

Hunter Jackson nodded understandingly.

"Well, it's almost uncanny," he repeated.

"It certainly is," Rutherford Jones acquiesced. "Thank you, Mr. Grimm."

He held out his hand, which the other shook.

"You're quite welcome to any help I can give," he returned. "Good-by. Good-by, doctor."

And he wrung Hunter Jackson's hand.

"Remember—not a word!" cautioned the detective.

"All right," Ben Grimm gave assurance.

Once outside the building, Rutherford Jones asked:

"Can you drive me around a bit, doctor, while I talk over this new wrinkle of the case with you?"

"Certainly."

"Understand, though, I don't want you to miss your office hours on my account."

"Oh, for this once I guess it won't matter if I do," smiled the physician. "I'm so doggoned interested in this case now I won't be able to think of anything else, anyway."

He climbed into the runabout after Rutherford Jones, released the brake and started the machine up the street.

"First, I must lay my hands on Krick," began the detective. "I'm thoroughly convinced, after seeing that film, that he's either the accomplice or the murderer."

"So'm I," nodded Hunter Jackson. "No news of him yet, eh?"

"Not a zephyr. Isn't that queer?"

"Um! But say, detective, have you thought of the possibility of Krick lying in some hospital, having met with an accident?"

"By George—no."

"Wouldn't that account for his utter disappearance? Suppose, for instance, he had been run down by an automobile just after the murder?"

"It would; of course it would."

"I suggest that we make the rounds of the hospitals."

"Second the suggestion," enthusiastically.

"See if we can come across him."

"Bravo! I think, too, there's just a bare possibility I may find some incriminating piece of evidence that was on his person."

"Then I'll drive you at once to all the large hospitals where a man hurt on the street is likely to be taken. I'll leave the rest to you."

"Yes; and I know just what I'll do. I'll ask to see any accident cases brought in on the night of the tragedy. Then, if I run across Krick, I'll ask further to see any papers or letters that were in his pockets."

Hunter Jackson little dreamed that his suggestion would be the means of unlocking the mystery as to the whereabouts of the much-wanted man. But he was to be gratified beyond measure by the result of their search.

For at the very first hospital to which he conducted Rutherford Jones, The Hope, they were taken by the head nurse, after a brief parley, to the bedside of a man who, according to her story, had been struck by an automobile on the night of the stabbing, and had been unconscious ever since.

The man, she said, had been brought to the Hope about ten o'clock.

Giving one look at him, Rutherford Jones exclaimed, *sotto voce*, to the doctor:

"It's Krick, all right. I'm sure of it."

"Looks that way," agreed Hunter Jackson, as he took in the features of the unconscious man on the cot.

"Do you know the patient's name?" the detective asked aloud of the head nurse.

She in turn looked at the nurse in charge, who shook her head.

"No," the head nurse responded. "But I have an unsealed, unaddressed letter which I found in one of his coat-pockets. It's signed with initials, which I forget for the moment. Do you think that 'll help to identify him?"

"Will you kindly get it?" asked Rutherford Jones.

The girl demurred.

"Really, sir, have I the right?"

"I'm a detective, miss," he said. "And you know Dr. Jackson here."

She gave way at once.

She disappeared, returning in a few moments with the letter.

Rutherford Jones thanked her and took it. Then with an invitation to the doctor to read it over his shoulder, he drew out of the envelope its contents—a single sheet of paper. On it Hunter Jackson saw scribbled in pencil:

I have D. V. with us. Last night he said yes.

And it was signed with the initials "M. K."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RUSE THAT WORKED.

RUTHERFORD JONES gave a low whistle.

"M. K!" he ejaculated, half under his breath. "Max Krick, by all that's holy! And to Dayton Veers, Jr., too! Doc, let me congratulate you on being a good guesser. If it hadn't been for you I would never have found Krick and this letter."

Hunter Jackson turned to the nurse in charge of the man.

"What's the condition of the patient?" he asked.

"It seems as though he's sinking rapidly, doctor," the young woman replied.

"Eh?" he whispered. "So he may die at any moment?"

She inclined her head.

Rutherford Jones, who had been listening, made a gesture of impatience.

"For the present," he said, handing the head nurse his card, "I want you to promise you will say nothing to any one of my visit to the hospital. If the patient recovers consciousness—or dies—I'd like you to phone me. Will you?"

The head nurse looked up from the bit of pasteboard he had handed her.

"Certainly," she agreed. "What is your phone number, Mr. Jones?"

"It's—they're both on the card—my office and home number."

She glanced back at the card.

"Why, so it—they are. I'm to try both numbers?"

"Please."

"All right, Mr. Jones," the head nurse consented. "I'll ask Miss Zimmerman, who is on in the daytime, to let you know if I'm not here."

"But be good enough to caution her to keep a still tongue in her head."

"It's hardly necessary, Mr. Jones," was the head nurse's response. "I know Miss Zimmerman to be most discreet."

Rutherford Jones nodded.

"Glad she is." He held out the unaddressed letter. "I'd like to take this along."

"Well, I guess you may if you give me a receipt for it."

The detective complied and, accompanied by Hunter Jackson, hurried out of the hospital.

"Continue driving me around a little, won't you?" he begged the physician. "I want to talk some more with you."

"Certainly," agreed Hunter Jackson.

"Now what do you think of the *status quo* of the case?" inquired the detective, after pensively watching for a few moments the traffic through which the physician's car was threading its way.

Hunter Jackson slowed down at a crowded corner then, in obedience to a traffic-cop's signal, rounded it before replying.

"Of the *status quo?* Why, I imagine young Veers and Krick are both implicated, though which is the murderer I can't just say yet. I see rather positive evidence, too, of our friend, Angel Face, and Vance Workman being mixed up in the stabbing."

Rutherford Jones gave a quick nod.

"So do I. And judging from appearances purely, I should say the Krick crowd worked on young Veers's fanaticism to get him into the plot against Harrison Strong. There's the letter to prove it, in a way."

"Yes; but they had more than his fanaticism to work on. Don't forget, he bore the banker a grudge of his own."

"Why, so he did," nodded the detective. "But isn't there some way I can make use of this letter as a decoy to catch Vance Workman?"

Hunter Jackson, who had driven the car into a quiet street, where he encountered little traffic, slowed down and glanced at the man beside him.

"There is."

"How do you mean?"

"Can't you send to him a plain-clothes man, who can throw a bluff about being a go-between for Krick? Have the man tell Vance Workman, who is ignorant of what has happened to Krick, of course, that the secret agent has met with an accident."

Rutherford Jones slapped his knee.

"Capital! But which of the headquarters plain-clothes men shall I send? I'm afraid he may know them all by sight. Say, doctor, do you think I'd make a mistake—if I sent you?"

"Me!" Hunter Jackson smiled. "You can't be in earnest!"

"Why not? You've never run into Vance Workman, have you?"

Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"Never to my knowledge."

"And I don't suppose he knows who you are?"

"Guess not."

"Well, then, I'm convinced you'd be a good man for the job."

"But what if I should encounter young Veers at the *Freedom* office?"

"So much the better! I'll leave it to you to give him a first-class third-degree on the spot—which is more than most of the plain-clothes men I've met would be capable of doing. What do you say?"

Hunter Jackson pondered a moment.

"I'll—I'll think it over," he replied.

"No," insisted Rutherford Jones, "I need you—need you badly. I wish you'd promise me to do it to-morrow morning."

"Can't!"

"Why not?"

"I've told Miss Strong I'd attend the funeral in the morning. I must keep my word to her."

"How about in the afternoon? Or late in the morning? It's all I'll ask of you."

"I'd do it—only I'm afraid of bungling the job."

"You—bungling the job! Why, I'd stake a good bit that you'd make as good a detective as you do a doctor. Remember, please, all the suggestions that have really amounted to anything have, so far, come from you. Oh, that's true! All I wish you to do is—first, to say to Vance Workman that you've been sent to him by Max Krick, who's been injured in an accident."

"What if he gets suspicious?"

"Offer to call up the Hope Hospital and verify your statement."

"But what if he's still suspicious?"

"Hand him the letter Krick failed to mail and watch his face as he reads it. When he gets half through with the letter, start to fire accusatory questions at him. The most I can expect of you is to get him to admit involuntarily that he's been in connivance with Krick and Angel Face and young Veers. Of course, if you can get him to admit more I'll be de-lighted, as T. R. says. And in case you suddenly need help from outside—help, I mean, to head him off so that he won't make his escape—raise one of the front windows and shout. I can have plain-clothes men watching all of 'em."

Hunter Jackson's eyes danced.

"I'll take you!" he promised.

Rutherford Jones gripped him by the hand and passed over the unaddressed letter.

"Thank you, doc," he said. "Then go to the funeral in the morning. But be in your office between eleven and twelve noon. I'll call you up and let you know how matters stand. By that time I hope Krick 'll regain consciousness and young Veers his freedom."

And with that understanding Hunter Jackson drove the detective home and bade him good night.

At the funeral the next morning, a large one as befitted the character of the deceased, he did not see Alma Strong. But he despatched a short note to her in care of André. In it he hinted that, owing to a recent development, Thompson Lambert might be released soon.

Then at precisely eleven-fifteen, while sitting at his desk, he received a phone message from Rutherford Jones.

"Ready to go?" the latter wanted to know.

"Yes. Anything new?"

"I can't tell you yet. Krick's still unconscious and Tom Murphy's at sea."

"Have you told the commissioner what we found out last night?"

"Not yet; but I'm going to soon. At Porter's instigation the chief inspector's let young Veers out. So hustle over to the *Freedom* office and catch the editor before he goes out to lunch, or sees or hears from Veers. And be ready to run into the suspect. Remember, if you get into trouble, open the window and shout, 'Help!'"

"The plain-clothes men will be outside?"

"Yes."

"Right!" said Hunter Jackson, hanging up the receiver.

And to the *Freedom* office he hastened. He did not go in his car. He walked. For he did not want to incur, at the very outset, the risk of arousing Vance Workman's suspicion that he was not all he represented himself to be.

How he should broach the ostensible reason for his visit he did not have the slightest idea.

But he decided to depend entirely on the inspiration of the moment.

He got in to see the editor without any difficulty. As he entered Vance Workman's private office, having first scribbled his name, shorn of its M.D., on a card offered him for that purpose, and laid eyes on him for the first time, he felt surprised at the personal appearance of the man who, far from being the fair-haired Teutonic type he rather expected to encounter, was tall, red-haired and rawboned.

"Mr. Jackson?" he greeted, not getting up or offering his hand or smiling.

"Mr. Vance Workman?" returned the doctor as stiffly.

Hunter Jackson sat down on a chair and hitched it close to the editor.

"Well," inquired Vance Workman, "what can I do for you, sir?"

The doctor pitched his voice lower.

"I've come from Max Krick," he said.

At mention of the name Vance Workman gave no sign that he even knew the man. But of a sudden he began to speak rapidly in German. Quite obviously he was putting Hunter Jackson to a test which the doctor had not anticipated, but which, thanks to his student days at a German medical school, he could meet satisfactorily.

For he readily understood everything that fell from the lips of Vance Workman.

"And where is he now?" asked the editor. "What do you mean by saying you come from him? I can't take your word for it."

To which Hunter Jackson, not trusting his German accent, replied in English:

"You needn't, Mr. Workman!" he said. "Herr Krick is in a hospital—the Hope. If you do not believe me, call up Miss Zimmerman, the head nurse."

The editor reached for his desk phone, then evidently thought better of it.

"The herr has been hurt, *hein?*" The editor lapsed into English.

"Yes," nodded Hunter Jackson. "Struck by an automobile on the night—" He caught himself. "A few nights ago."

"Ah, I was beginning to wonder! Struck by an automobile, eh? Is he seriously hurt?"

Hunter Jackson inclined his head.

"I've brought a message from Krick."

"A message?"

Vance Workman looked at him a shade suspiciously.

"Yes," went on Hunter Jackson, in an attempt to reestablish the confidence in him which his response in English and next his allusion to a message seemed, for some reason, to have shaken. "Among other things, Herr Krick wants me to tell you that his room's been entered and his code-book probably taken."

"I know—I know!" admitted Vance Workman. "What else?"

Ready to play his trump card, the doctor reached for the unaddressed letter in his pocket.

"He also sent a letter."

Vance Workman extended an eager hand to receive it.

Hunter Jackson was on the point of taking the letter out of his pocket and passing it to him when he heard a commotion outside the door of the private office. Some one anxious to see the editor, he realized, was trying hard to force his way past one of Vance Workman's subordinates.

And the next instant, catapulting through the doorway, he caught a glimpse of the athletic form of Dayton Veers, Jr., who, not seeing him, approached Vance Workman angrily.

"So you've done it!" he exploded. "Or, rather, when I wouldn't play your dirty game any longer, you got Cassel to play it for you, eh? You and blondy and the rest—you did, didn't you?"

The doctor stood up and so revealed himself.

On catching sight of him young Veers recoiled, but only for an instant.

"What are you doing here, doc?" he demanded.

Vance Workman, darting a look of suspicion at the physician, sprang, like a cornered rat, at the throat of Dayton Veers, Jr.

At that moment, without a second's hesitation, Hunter Jackson leaped to a front window, opened it and shouted one word:

"Help!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ENTER VON BESSLER.

THEN the doctor threw himself into the fight.

He grappled with Vance Workman, who was snarling at the younger man, "Keep your mouth shut, you damned whelp!" and trying to throttle him. And just as he succeeded in loosening the editor's hold on the other's throat Hunter Jackson heard the sound of heavy footsteps outside the office door and, even before two plain-clothes men burst into the room, knew that help was at hand.

One of the men, whom he recognized instantly as Browning, darted forward and slipped a pair of handcuffs on the still struggling editor, who subsided the minute he felt them close about his wrists.

"There, I guess that 'll hold you for a while!" Browning sneered.

Vance Workman, glancing at him, sank into his swivel-chair.

"How dare you?" he asked in a spent tone. "Who are you, anyway?"

"Have a look," laconically invited Browning, as he displayed his nickel-plated badge of authority.

Vance Workman paled.

"On what charge am I—"

"Oh, do come along," entreated Browning in mock anxiety. "I'll get down on my knees—cross my heart I will—to the commissioner to tell you."

"Shall I put 'em on you, or will you come along with me quietly?" asked the other plain-clothes man of Dayton Veers, Jr., holding out a pair of handcuffs.

Young Veers drew back.

"Don't get excited; I'll come quietly," he admonished, somewhat sarcastically. "So I'm to be rearrested, am I? I see! It was all a frame-up. I was expected to turn up at this office." He wheeled on Hunter Jackson angrily. "Doc, were you at the bottom of this ruse?"

The physician met the young man's gaze coolly.

"Be careful," he begged. "Don't say anything, Mr. Veers, that you'll only be sorry for in the end. I caught what you said about Charles Cassel before you saw me. It's the first remark I've heard you make that causes me to think—perhaps—after all—you are innocent."

Young Veers reeled back.

"Innocent? Of course, I'm innocent! Great heavens, doc, you believe it, don't you?"

But Browning interposed vehemently.

"Oh, stow that line of talk," he said irritably. "Doctor, you've pulled off a fine job here; don't spoil it! Can you spare a little time now to come with us?"

"Where are you going?"

"To R. J.'s office. That's where the commissioner told us to go in case anything turned up."

"Oh, certainly; I was going there."

At the office of the private detective, Hunter Jackson was surprised to see grouped around Rutherford Jones, as he sat at his desk, Nolan, the house-man at the Strongs's; Urban, their first chauffeur; House, their second; Sara Kane, little Don's Irish nurse; Commissioner Porter, and the blond man whom the doctor had encountered at Krick's lodgings.

As he looked at the last, the blond individual had the *sang-froid* to nod pleasantly.

The commissioner, noticing the nod, smiled.

"So you and the doctor are old friends, Von Bessler?" he jibed.

"Oh, yes," the man answered with a good-humored grin. "Though it's the first time I've ever heard the gentleman's name."

Hunter Jackson responded to the other's infectious mood.

"I might say the same thing," he replied, smiling.

At that juncture he was taken to one side by Rutherford Jones who, motioning Commissioner Porter to join them, remarked with an approving jerk of the head in the direction of young Veers and Vance Workman:

"I see you've accomplished a good bit."

"Much more than I'd hoped to," Hunter Jackson nodded, handing back Krick's letter. "I won't need this any longer; I believe you may still find it valuable."

"Tell us all about it," importuned the commissioner, who had come up in time to overhear Rutherford Jones's interrogation and the answer it evoked.

Hunter Jackson acquiesced.

"—and because of young Veers's remark," he concluded in an undertone, "I'm beginning to feel he couldn't have had a hand in the stabbing."

The commissioner considered.

"Sure he didn't see you and make it just for effect?"

Hunter Jackson shook his head.

"I'd go on oath he didn't. Never have I seen a man so thunderstruck as when young Veers caught sight of me."

"Doc," interrupted Rutherford Jones, "I've made a few discoveries, too, since I last saw you. I've had Sara Kane identify Krick as the man who spoke to her in the park."

"You have! How's Krick, by the way?"

"Worse; a good bit worse. I don't believe he'll last out the day. I'm going back to the hospital in a little while. In the event of his regaining consciousness I may be able to get an ante-mortem statement out of him. But I've made another and more startling discovery than the one I've mentioned."

"What's that?" asked Hunter Jackson eagerly.

"That it wasn't Krick who was chased out of the Strong grounds on the night of the tragedy."

"Who said so?"

"Urban. Don't forget the first chauffeur had a good look at the man. And it couldn't have been Von Bessler, because Von Bessler's blond."

"Then it must have been another member of Krick's crowd. Have you told the commissioner about the sixth man in domino?"

Rutherford Jones nodded.

"Of course. Such an important discovery I couldn't keep from him any longer. I called up Mr. Porter after I'd taken the Strong servants to the hospital to look at Krick. It was a good thing I did, too. Then it was I was informed by him that he had captured Von Bessler."

Hunter Jackson turned to Porter.

"What do you think of our discovery of the sixth man?" he asked.

"Why, it's simply amazing," the commissioner vouchsafed. "Makes me see, too, that at least for the present I'd better leave the case entirely in Mr. Jones's hands."

"Then what's your next step?" Hunter Jackson asked the detective.

"First, I'm going to send the Strong servants away," replied Rutherford Jones. "All except Nolan."

"And what's he here for?"

"Wait! I'll tell you in a moment. Considering the fact that I couldn't interrogate all the servants, because of the funeral, I think I've done fairly well. But when I do I expect better results."

He beckoned to Urban, House, and Sara Kane to come over to where he was standing, cautioned them to make a secret of what had passed that morning, and dismissed them.

"I'll do my best to keep my hand hidden, commissioner," he remarked. "But I'm afraid it's going to be a hard job."

Porter shrugged.

"I'm afraid so, too. At first, I hoped I could swing a bluff about your working on another case that dovetails into this one. But now"—again he shrugged—"I've given up that hope. And I can't take any chances with so important a case as this Strong case. I must let you barge right ahead, no matter whose toes I'm stepping on."

Rutherford Jones motioned to Nolan, the Strong house-man, who came over to them.

"Tell the commissioner and Dr. Jackson what you told me," he said.

Nolan shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Yes, sir," he said nervously. "On the night of the stabbing I was going past the pergola used as a dressing-room by the men. It must have been just after Mr. Strong met his death. I happened to glance into the pergola, which wasn't very well lighted, and I saw some one come in, take off a costume, and hurry out again."

"Did you see him reach under the bench in the pergola?" asked Hunter Jackson.

"No, sir. I know what you mean, sir. I didn't see any knife, sir."

"The man was all alone?" the commissioner queried.

"Yes, sir."

Hunter Jackson scowled.

"Why didn't you tell this story to the chief inspector on the night he first questioned you?"

"I didn't think it important—do you, sir?"

"It may prove to be. What's your opinion, detective?"

Rutherford Jones shrugged.

"Who can tell? Thank you, at any rate, Nolan. I don't need you any longer. But, Nolan, promise me you'll keep mum about the fact that I'm investigating this case."

Nolan bowed.

"Yes, sir; I will, sir."

And he passed out of the office with a nod to the commissioner and Hunter Jackson.

"What's next?" asked the doctor, after Nolan's departure.

"The cross-examination of these three birds," answered Rutherford Jones, nodding toward young Veers, Vance Workman, and Von Besslér. "Come; let's sit down and begin it."

The detective crossed the room and seated himself in his swivel-chair. Following his example the other two selected chairs near him and waited for him to speak.

Rutherford Jones did not begin the inquisition at once, but sat looking out of the window—as Hunter Jackson observed, much to the discomfiture of the three men under arrest and the palpable amusement of the two plain-clothes men who now had them in charge.

At length, however, he turned to young Veers.

"Why did you make that remark about Charles Cassel?" he demanded.

Veers evaded.

"What remark?"

"Come—*come!* No chicanery please! About his playing a dirty game for this gentleman."

And Rutherford Jones pointed to Vance Workman.

"I've nothing to say," answered young Veers sullenly.

"Trying to protect your friend; eh? Well, let me warn you—it's a mighty bad way to go about it. I don't think you could have hit on a better way of throwing suspicion on him than by making such a remark."

Dayton Veers, Jr., bit his lower lip in vexation.

"Damn my remarks, anyway!" he growled.

"Let me assure you," Rutherford Jones went on suavely, "that, if guilty, Charles Cassel will be brought to justice, no matter what you or any one else does to prevent it. But, somehow, I don't believe him guilty—well, on account of a discovery I've made."

The other stared at him unbelievingly.

"You don't?"

"No. Do you—*really?*"

Young Veers struck the arm of his chair with a clenched fist.

"No, by God, I don't!"

"Then why'd you make that remark?"

"Because Workman, through a fellow named Krick, tried to get me to help—"

"That's a lie!" burst out the editor.

"What's a lie?" asked Rutherford Jones innocently. Then, with a scowl: "Silence! I'd advise you, Mr. Workman, to wait to hear what Mr. Veers has to say before you brand it as a lie."

"To help in the kidnaping of the Strong child," blurted out Dayton Veers, Jr. "It was the night before the murder that Krick

broached the subject to me. I think he was rather drunk—thought I was, too. To lead him on, although I was horrified, I pretended I would. Then Krick forgot himself—hinted at murder—"

Dayton Veers, Jr., broke off angrily.

"—because I'd written pacifist articles he thought I would become a willing tool of German frightfulness! By God, I'll be a pacifist no longer!"

"Good for you!" cried Hunter Jackson.

Vance Workman rose and shook his manacled fists at Dayton Veers, Jr.

"I defy you to prove that I had anything to do with this murder! I've an alibi for the night it was committed."

"So have I, my friend," said Von Bessler.

Commissioner Porter smiled at them indulgently.

"Perhaps," he snapped. "But I've got a dozen or more other things on you both. After this little séance, R. J., I'll have the extreme pleasure of escorting these gentlemen to jail."

"Well, I won't keep you much longer, commissioner," the detective smiled grimly. "I want to ask Mr. Veers only two more questions." He eyed the young man narrowly. "What really induced you to think of Charles Cassel, if only for an instant, as the guilty party?"

"Oh," replied Dayton Veers, Jr., "I was just carried away by the excitement of the moment or I shouldn't have done it. That Cas—Mr. Cassel was acquainted with him" —he pointed to Vance Workman—"I was well aware. Then, too, I knew he had written the photo-play in which, singularly enough, Mr. Strong was booked to be assassinated— Oh, it's been ever since the inquest that I've been playing with the thought. But I had no right to suspect Cas. Don't you see?"

Rutherford Jones nodded.

"And what was the real reason you hated so to look at the knife which evidently killed Harrison Strong?"

"Can't you see that, too? The instant I clapped eyes on it I suspected Workman's crowd." He turned to the commissioner. "But, Mr. Porter, am I still to be held?"

The commissioner shook his head.

"Not if I get your promise—"

"Yes?" eagerly.

"First—to talk to no one, not even your mother, about this case."

"I promise."

"Second, to stay in the house and see no one except your immediate family, until I send you word that you may go out."

"I promise that, too."

Commissioner Porter rose.

"Very well, then, I'll let you go." To Rutherford Jones he added: "I'm going to tell Tom Murphy everything, after all, and set a trap for some of his men. Come along." He motioned to the plain-clothes men in charge of the prisoners. "I'm off to headquarters. Bring these gentlemen with us."

A moment later Hunter Jackson took leave of Rutherford Jones and young Veers and hurried back to his office. There, in addition to several patients, he found Alma Strong.

"Why, what can I do for you, Miss Strong?" he asked her, once he had conducted the girl into his private office.

She was intensely excited, he noticed.

"I've—I've news for you, doctor!"

"For me?"

"Yes—for you and Mr. Jones. I've received a phone message from Mrs. Bates in Chicago—"

"Mrs. Bates? Who is she? And why'd you come here, Miss Strong? Why didn't you send for me?"

"Because—because I thought the news so important!" the girl breathed. "But to answer your first question—Mrs. Bates is the mother of the late Mrs. Strong. Over the wire she told me she was coming to New York as quickly as possible—and declared positively that she knows—who—who killed father!"

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT MRS. BATES TESTIFIED.

IT was two days later when Hunter Jackson, bringing his runabout to a stop in front of the building in which Rutherford Jones had his office, hurried in to see the detective. For once he found him at leisure.

"Where in the name of Heaven have you been, doc?" was the detective's greeting.

"Attending to my patients—God bless 'em!" smiled Hunter Jackson. "Any word from Mrs. Bates as yet?"

Right after Alma Strong had left his office, having agreed, in the event of Mrs. Bates's arrival from Chicago, to communicate with Rutherford Jones, the doctor had called up the latter and told him of the girl's message; and the detective had, in turn, relayed it to Commissioner Porter.

Now Rutherford Jones shook his head.

"No news yet! But I'm expecting it this afternoon—in fact, any minute. I imagine Mrs. Bates is not young any more, in which case I must make allowances, of course, for a little delay. But the worst of it is, I've got to mark time, I guess, until I see her."

"You've made no new discoveries?"

"Not a one."

"Haven't managed to get anything out of Vance Workman?"

"No—suppressed his paper, though."

"Or out of Von Bessler?"

"No. Both of them disclaim all knowledge of the murder plot. But, just the same, they'll be sent up for a good long stretch."

"Or from Krick?"

"Krick's dead."

"*What!*"

"That's so, I haven't told you. Two days ago, when I returned to the Hope, I found that he had died about the time I was cross-examining young Veers. I don't think it's known who ran down the poor fellow, either. But guess what else I learned at the same time?"

"Well?"

"That Krick hadn't been brought into the hospital at ten o'clock—but at one!"

"Then," exclaimed Hunter Jackson, "he couldn't have had any active part in the murder!"

"Of course not. It was the head nurse's mistake. A man was brought into the Hope, I believe, at ten, and she got him confused with Krick."

"So, I take it, you're back just about where you started?"

"Precisely. I've cross-examined all the Strong servants and those who witnessed the stabbing—to no avail whatsoever. As Tom Murphy says—"

"Oh, by the way, the commissioner *did* do what he said he was going to—told him everything?"

"Porter did. And a more surprised man than the chief inspector was I've never seen. Not so much at the plot against him—he sensed that as a result of the inquest—but at the discovery of the sixth man in the picture. He was simply flabbergasted. But, I must say, he was extraordinarily decent to me, all things considered. He agreed at once to work in harmony with me. But, even with Tom Murphy's assistance, I haven't been able to unearth another clue. So mark time I must, until I get a chance to talk to Mrs. Bates."

Hunter Jackson got up to go.

"And that, I hope, will be right soon," he said. "But, say, has the commissioner attended to Day's case as yet?"

"*Has* he?" Rutherford Jones chuckled. "I guess—yes! Got a private detective posing as a tough in the possession of a valuable clue as to who killed Harrison Strong to hoodwink Day into admitting that he was out to get Tom Murphy. Now the commissioner's got the whole double-crossing crew dead to rights."

"But what about your young friend—the man whom you wished to protect?"

"Oh, I've given him a Dutch uncle for fair—I'll get him off all right."

"Delighted to hear it," said Hunter Jackson, shaking hands in farewell. "I certainly hope Mrs. Bates turns up with some genuinely illuminating piece of evidence."

Later that afternoon he returned to his office, after making several professional calls, to be accosted by his housekeeper.

"Doctor," the woman said, "I've just taken an urgent phone call for you from Miss Alma Strong."

"Miss Strong," he exclaimed, "what did she want?"

The housekeeper shook her head.

"I don't know, doctor. Miss Strong said merely to come at once—that you would understand."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

"I see! Some one she's been expecting from the West has arrived, I guess—some one she wants me to meet."

Nor was the doctor mistaken. In the drawing-room of the Strong mansion, to which he was conducted by the second butler, he came upon Miss Strong, Rutherford Jones, Commissioner Porter, and Thomas Murphy, and, seated in their midst, a gray-haired, though well-preserved woman of over sixty.

"Dr. Jackson, I want you to meet Mrs. Bates," introduced Alma Strong.

Hunter Jackson bent over the woman as he took her hand and murmured a polite acknowledgment.

"All you were about to tell us, Mrs. Bates," the girl went on, "I can give you assurance, you can say before Dr. Jackson, who is discreetness itself."

"Yes," the commissioner nodded, "I can give you that assurance, too. We all owe a lot to Dr. Jackson, who was present at the time of the tragedy and has been a practical help ever since. That's the reason I wanted him to hear your story as soon as I got word from Mr. Jones that you had arrived."

Mrs. Bates turned her eyes on Hunter Jackson, who observed that, being black and penetrating, they explained why a woman of her years had come so speedily all the way from Chicago to do what she conceived to be her part to solve the Strong mystery. He liked her on the spot.

"As may be imagined," she began, "I was terribly shocked by the announcement of Mr. Strong's death wired me by Alma—Miss Strong—and the announcement of it I read in the newspapers. I was ill at the time and so made no effort to come to his funeral.

"I—I didn't think it was entirely incumbent on me to do so. You see, I had not been exactly on the best of terms with my former son-in-law. It was over little Don we quarreled. At the time of my daughter's death I wanted to adopt the child."

She paused, then went on:

"I was shocked, as I say, by the news of his death—in spite of our quarrel. It was partly because I was fond of Mr. Strong, in a way. But chiefly because I knew of some one who had more than once threatened to kill him!"

"Who?" asked Commissioner Porter eagerly.

She shook her head.

"I'm getting a little ahead of my story, Mr. Porter. If I told you, I know the name would mean nothing to you. First, I must tell you something which I must beg you all not to repeat."

She swept the circle with her black eyes. Then, after seeing each of them nod, she continued in a lower tone:

"It—it concerns my daughter. I shouldn't tell it—only I'm convinced it may lead to the apprehension of the guilty party. The newspaper stories of this horrible affair I don't quite understand. May I ask you a question, commissioner?"

"Go ahead, Mrs. Bates," replied Porter courteously.

He was palpably mystified.

"Did the newspapers mention every one connected with the stabbing?"

"Why—no!" answered the commissioner straightforwardly. "I don't mind saying at this time—for the benefit of you and Miss Strong only—that we found another man who, with or without the knowledge of one or more of the five suspects, took part in the scene in which Mr. Strong was killed. But, as to the identity of that man, we are at sea."

Alma Strong exclaimed aloud:

"What's that, doctor?"

"It's a fact," Hunter Jackson assured her. "It was brought out in the motion-picture of the scene. That's the development I hinted at in the note I sent you by André."

The girl drew in her breath sharply.

"But I still don't understand. I don't see how all of us who were looking on could have failed to detect him. Have you any idea at all who that man was?"

"Yes," repeated Mrs. Bates. "Have you?"

"I think that, perhaps, you have," said the commissioner.

"And I believe I have, too," Mrs. Bates said with an emphatic nod. "But to go

back to the story about my daughter. Years before her marriage to Mr. Strong—I've never told anybody this—she eloped with our chauffeur. She was very young then, and he—I will say for him—was rather a fascinating person. It was when we were living in Los Angeles. My husband was still alive. We overtook them on the day of the marriage. Then, to crown it all, the rascal was arrested for a—a crime he'd committed the year before and taken to San Quentin.

"It was all that was needed to open my daughter's eyes. We had the marriage annulled, of course, and without undue publicity. A year later my husband died. Then, several years after that, after my daughter's marriage, I received a letter postmarked San Francisco—a letter from our former chauffeur, who must have got some one discharged from prison to mail it. In the letter, which was unsigned, he threatened the man who—as he put it—had stolen his girl from him. I wondered then if he had sent one to Mr. Strong, too. Do you know, commissioner, whether he did?"

She appealed to the commissioner.

Porter nodded.

"I believe so," he said. "At least, I know that, about a year ago, Harrison Strong received such a letter."

The woman wrung her hands.

"Oh, if I'd only warned him!" she half sobbed. "But, you see, I hadn't told him about my poor daughter's affair—and didn't wish to. Oh, I wonder what he must have thought of the letter!"

"Ascribed it to a crank, no doubt," commented Porter. "So you think, Mrs. Bates, that the man of whom you speak is the guilty party?"

She nodded.

"I do. And I've a particular reason for it, too." She rose and gingerly picked an envelope from a table near-by. "Two days after the—the stabbing, I received this letter in Chicago. It's postmarked New York." She handed the envelope to the commissioner. "Please be careful how you handle it, Mr. Porter," she added. "It has finger-marks on it. The envelope contains only a newspaper clipping, to be sure, but one recounting the murder. Can't you see, commissioner, how natural it was for me, remembering the threat of our former chauffeur, to jump to the conclusion that he had a hand in it?"

Porter grunted.

"Indeed I do!" he ejaculated.

"I thought he's obtained a position in this household and bided his time."

The commissioner shook his head.

"No," said he, "I can vouch for the good character of all of the Strong servants. No—I'm sure the man who killed Harrison Strong came from outside. It seems incredible, I know. How could he have concealed himself in the pergola where the men dressed, overheard them talking about the photo-play and used the extra domino he found there as a disguise in which to commit the murder? But it now appears he must have. I should say offhand that he's a man who little values his own life; a fiend who doesn't count the cost, perhaps, when he wishes to do a thing."

Mrs. Bates nodded.

"I happen to know that William Ziegler's all of that."

"Then, I guess, he's our man. How much he's changed with the lapse of years, of course, I don't know. That he's been seen by the Strong chauffeurs—by one of them in a fairly bright light—I've every reason to believe. And I shouldn't be surprised if they could identify the man they saw as William Ziegler from your description. But"—the commissioner tapped the envelope—"here's the clue I expect to be the most valuable of all. Thanks to this clue I expect to land our friend Ziegler—and prove his guilt—in less than a month."

CHAPTER XXII

CORNERED.

BUT, as it developed, Commissioner Porter was a trifle too sanguine.

For it was a matter of two months before Hunter Jackson, returning one afternoon from a round of professional visits, received word from the commissioner to come to police headquarters.

"At last I've got William Ziegler," announced Porter over the telephone. "And

since you've been following the case so closely from the start, I thought you'd like to be present when I put the screws to him."

"I would," assented the doctor.

And he banged up the receiver joyfully.

In a few minutes Hunter Jackson, having prescribed for a single patient in the waiting-room, started his runabout for Thomas Murphy's office where, in his belief, he would witness the last act in the drama so tragically begun by Harrison Strong's death.

For he had not the smallest doubt that William Ziegler was guilty.

He was positive, to begin with, that the first chauffeur would identify him as the man who had been prowling about the garage on the night of the stabbing. Then, too, within the past two months he knew that not a single bit of new evidence had been turned up. So, in case of the ex-chauffeur's innocence, he began to fear the real culprit would never be apprehended.

Moreover, he had heard from Rutherford Jones, a month previous, that young Veers, having been cautioned to keep a still tongue in his head, had been permitted to move about once more at will; and that the other four suspects who had been placed under arrest, while still held, were believed by the commissioner and the chief inspector to be entirely innocent.

No, it was quite apparent, mused the doctor, that the two officials were also convinced of William Ziegler's guilt. In fact, so certain were they of that fact that, to help establish it, they had requested Mrs. Bates to remain in town with Alma Strong, between whom and the mother of Mrs. Strong had sprung up a great attachment.

Sitting in the office of the chief inspector, Hunter Jackson found three of the Strong servants—Urban, Nolan, and House—and Rutherford Jones.

"Hello, doc!" greeted the detective.

Hunter Jackson looked about the room.

"Where's every one else?" he inquired.

"The chief inspector's with the prisoner and Dave Condon. Porter's gone for Mrs. Bates."

"Why didn't he tell me?" Jackson asked. "I'd have saved him the trouble."

With a grin Rutherford Jones drew up a chair beside him and invited the doctor to sit in it.

"Trouble?" he commented, mimicking the commissioner's deep bass tones. "Trouble? No trouble at all, I assuah you, my deah Mrs. Bates!" Then, a shade more seriously: "Perhaps, I should say, the commissioner's gone *on* her. Oh, I don't mean he's sweet on her or anything of that kind—just admires her tremendously."

With an explosive laugh Hunter Jackson sat down.

"Not really? Well, I do, too, for that matter. But where, by the way, was Ziegler caught?"

"New Orleans."

"By whom?"

"Dave Condon."

"Dave Condon; eh?"

"Yes—and how he did it makes quite a story. Of course, he got help from those finger-prints in ink which the chap he was after so obligingly left on the envelope and from the San Quentin authorities. But, just the same, I've never heard of a more clever bit of work. On the strength of it I've asked Dave Condon to go into partnership with me."

"Good for you. I know myself what a clever man you're getting."

"And I — what a loyal man — which I count of equal value."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

"And I think you're right in doing so. But, say, did Dave Condon wring a confession out of Ziegler?"

"Not yet. But he about established the fact that the man can't furnish an alibi worth anything. I happen to know that, with Murphy's help, he's trying at this moment to force him to confess. But he's going to save Mrs. Bates and her letter as the trump card and until the moment he brings Ziegler face to face with her in this office."

"A good idea."

Rutherford Jones smiled.

"As a cross-examiner, I assure you, Dave Condon's as efficient as a fly-swatter. But, to return to the question of his loyalty, I guess we couldn't have saved Tom Murphy from his enemies if it hadn't been for him."

"Guess not. Murphy's to get all the credit, of course."

"And, doc, I know how much he deserves it. Not for the solution of the Strong case, to be sure, but for the solution of other cases in which his name wasn't even mentioned."

"But aren't you afraid the four suspects being held will make trouble for the chief inspector?"

"Veers won't."

"He shouldn't."

"Nevin won't—because Tom Murphy, in the face of the most damning evidence, has always believed him innocent."

"I see."

"Cassel won't. He's too much of a man. Having knocked around the world a lot he takes life as it comes and doesn't hold a grudge for things that are inevitable."

Hunter Jackson nodded.

"I've always liked Cassel. But what about Richard Orville?"

The detective looked surprised.

"Haven't you heard about him?" he asked.

"Why-y, no."

"He's been given an extension of time on the note by Miss Strong. And thanks to her, too, he's acquired a new partner."

"Who?"

"Robert Yeager."

"Well, I *am* glad to hear it!"

"That girl's a brick. It's given both men a new lease on life. I've heard, too, that Orville's father, with Yeager's assistance, has come back strong. Well, in the first place, Thompson Lambert was the only one of whom I was the least bit afraid."

"You don't think now he'll make trouble?"

"No—you know, of course, his engagement to Miss Strong was broken."

Hunter Jackson nodded solemnly.

"Yes—so I've been told by Miss Strong herself."

"Eh?" Rutherford Jones looked at him curiously. "Did she make any secret of the case?"

"Why-y, no."

"I confess I'm curious to know what it was. But I don't want to press you for the information if I haven't any right to it."

"Oh, for that matter—" began Hunter Jackson.

"Was it over what she intends to do with her money at Don's arriving of age?"

"I imagine so. It was after her visit to Thompson Lambert in prison—a visit during which, I suppose, they broke their engagement—that I heard from Miss Strong's own lips of the quarrel."

Rutherford Jones gave a quick nod.

"Excuse me if I seem inquisitive." He paused, then chucked the doctor in the ribs. "But now that the way's clear, so to speak, I'd advise you to go ahead. Come—come, though! I know you have common sense. Why, I'll bet you've been seeing a lot of her the last eight weeks. 'Fess up now. There's a good fellow. I'll even wager you have an engagement with her for to-night."

Hunter Jackson flushed. But he made a brazen confession brazenly.

"I have."

Rutherford Jones chortled.

"I thought as much."

He looked up at the sound of footsteps and voices in the hallway outside the office.

"Commissioner coming?" asked the doctor.

"Yep, I guess so!" nodded Rutherford Jones.

The commissioner it was—accompanied by Mrs. Bates, whom the five men in the room rose to greet. Her Porter led gallantly to a chair beside the chief inspector's desk, in whose swivel-chair he seated himself.

"I've sent for Condon, Murphy, and the prisoner," he announced.

And hardly had he spoken before the persons he mentioned put in their appearance—Ziegler sandwiched in between the chief inspector and Dave Condon.

The prisoner was of medium height, rather slender and of peculiarly pallid complexion.

In manner he was defiant as, Thomas Murphy and the plain-clothes detective still guarding him, he took his stand before Porter.

"Have you ever seen this fellow?" asked the commissioner of Nevin, the Strong house-man.

The servant shook his head.

"I can't say, sir. If I saw him at all it was in the dark pergola."

"And you?" demanded Porter of House, the second chauffeur.

"I can't, either, sir," protested the latter.

Then the commissioner turned to Urban.

"Well, how about you?"

Urban nodded emphatically.

"That's the man I chased out of the Strong grounds on the night of the murder, sir."

At sound of Urban's voice Ziegler turned quickly so that he could see him.

Then he recoiled involuntarily, and, at the same instant, also catching sight of Mrs. Bates, recoiled again and went livid.

The woman smiled grimly.

"So you remember me?" she asked.

He scowled.

"Yes—damn you!" he snarled.

"Enough of that," thundered the commissioner.

"Why shouldn't I damn her?" went on the prisoner vehemently. "It was thanks to her I lost the only woman who would 'a' saved me. But I've got even. Yes, I killed Harrison Strong—I defy you to do your worst!"

He laughed mockingly.

"I killed him—do you hear me? I always said I would—and I did! But if I hadn't mailed that letter with ink-marks on it, I know you wouldn't have got me! The night I went to his home to knife him I was chased toward the gates by that fellow"—he pointed to Urban—"but I didn't go out. I hid in the vines around the pergola, where I heard all about the movie stunt to be pulled off. I'd learned how to juggle a knife while I was soldiering in the Philippines. So I put on the domino and mask left on the bench in the pergola and followed the others in costume.

"I made up my mind to stab my man in plain sight of everybody—and I did! I didn't expect to get away with it as I did. I expected to be caught as soon as I'd done for him."

Again he gave a mocking laugh.

"But I wasn't. It was a shame I had to pull that stunt on that Nevin guy. But, after I saw it was so easy, I was dead set on beating it—I took pride in getting away. I chased back to the pergola, where I came near running into that fellow"—he gestured toward Nolan—"I saw his face, but he couldn't see mine. Then I stuck the knife under the bench and started out. Near the gate I met up with another fellow, who took me for some one else. That's all I've got to say."

"You beast!" said Mrs. Bates.

As Hunter Jackson, who took her back to the Strong mansion, remarked to Alma Strong, an hour later, as they were sitting alone in the drawing-room, it was one of the most daring murders recorded in the annals of the police department.

"But let's talk about something more pleasant," he suggested.

"Let's," she seconded. "Have the suspects been released?"

"Yes, a half-hour ago."

"Mr. Lambert, too?"

"But—still I insist." He looked down at her with—it later developed—misplaced sympathy. "Let's talk about something more pleasant."

She colored faintly.

"Very well, about your interest in the Red Cross. I want to give you fifty thousand, doctor, for the cause."

He gasped.

"I—I'm afraid I can't accept it."

She ignored his reply.

"And another fifty thousand," she went on, "to start that children's hospital I know you've set your heart on."

But he shook his head again.

"I admire your generosity," he said. "I admire the way you've treated Orville and Yeager and the servants—all of whom you've kept, even André. And your kindness in offering a home to Mrs. Bates, who, dear woman, just dotes on little Don, and wants to be near him—I admire that! But I can't accept those contributions in my own name."

She pouted.

"And why not? I've a perfect right to use the interest of the Strong fortune during Don's nonage—and I'm going to, doctor, just as I see fit."

Again he shook his head.

"I can't—"

"Why not?"

"It won't look right."

She glanced at him appealingly.

"But I do so want to help you, doctor, in some of your noble work. I—"

She blushed and dropped her eyes.

Suddenly he got up and stood over her. He started to speak—then turned away as though fighting for self-control.

"No, I mustn't—I—"

She looked at him with the sparkle of mischief in her eyes.

Of the two she was much the better possessed.

"Mustn't what, doctor?"

But the moment she had uttered the words she seemed sorry and bit her lower lip in vexation.

He met her level gaze.

"No," he said, "I *must*—must tell you. I love you. It wouldn't be right to come here any more if I didn't. Will you—"

"Will you accept those contributions?" she evaded.

"I—I can't, Alma!" he floundered helplessly.

She got up and grasped the lapels of his coat—to woman one of the divers accolades by which she intends to signify, "Rise, Sir Benedick — claim thy bride!" and which, even after years of matrimony, she still uses to designate the man of her choice—her lord and her master.

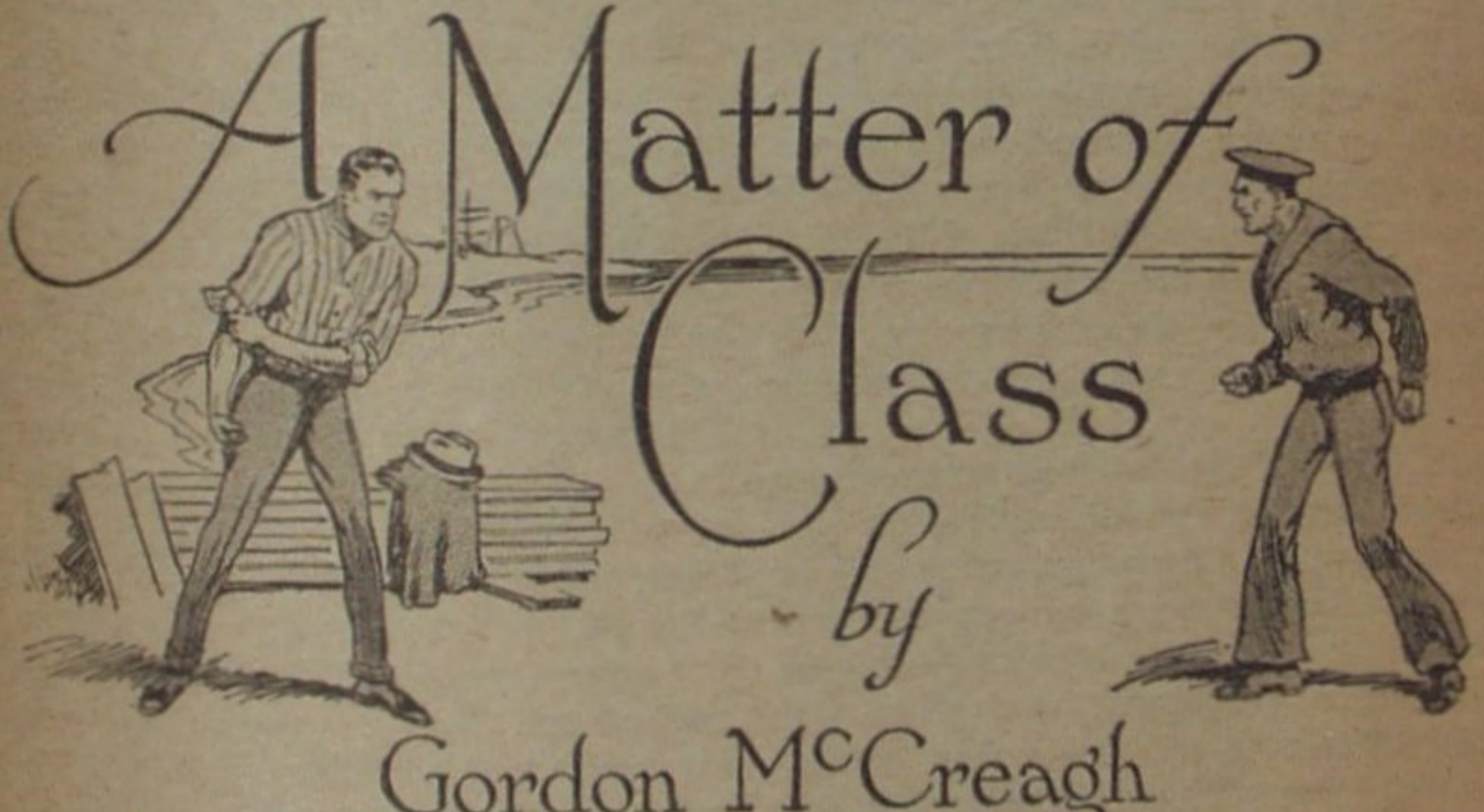
"Not as my husband, Hunter?"

"Alma," he said, some minutes later, looking down at her in his arms, "don't be disappointed if I don't have pretty speeches in my tongue's end every hour of the day. I love—love—*love* you to distraction. But, I'm afraid, your husband's going to be a rather busy man sometimes."

But she only nestled closer.

"Thank God!" she breathed.

(The End.)



THE U. S. S. Republic, battle-ship of the first line, was in dry dock.

Her immense gray sides bulged, towering from the bottom of that great artificial cañon to an unbelievable height up in the sunshine. Gray they were, that is to say, above the water-line, the smart, glossy grayness of new paint over clean-chipped eight-inch vanadium plate.

But below that to any seaman they epitomized the abomination of desolation. The gray was streaked with slimy greens, pitted with rusty reds and spotted with warty browns. Long streamers of leathery weed hung from the most inaccessible places; millions of barnacles and limpets and winkles clung grimly over every foot of the vast surface and clustered with especial tenacity round each succulent waste-pipe outlet. To the squat, dungaree-clad pygmies who sweated in the dim depths below, the swelling bulk looked more like

some overhanging cliff of the sea than the under body of one of Uncle Sam's proudest fighting ships.

Just two years of the Philippine station had done that. Inside in the stillness of the great ship's steel vitals, engineer officers were estimating the accumulated mess at more than eight hundred tons, and were making intricate calculations to determine the extent of loss of speed occasioned thereby. Some said as much as twenty-five per cent, and nodded wisely to each other across the table. The Republic, then, was very much in need of dry dock.

Since dry dock does not call for any of the deeper problems of navigation or administration, most of the officers had fled, rejoicing on a well-earned leave. That was how Junior Lieutenant Forsythe came to be parading the quarter-deck with a binocular strap over his wide shoulder and gloves over his strong hands, monarch of all he surveyed.

He did not actually *have* to spend all of his time on the quarter-deck. He might have stayed below in the ward-room; he might even have dispensed with the uncomfortable gloves; but they and the glasses were the proud badges of his office, and Junior Lieutenant Forsythe was very punctilious about the niceties of routine, for he was very newly arrived from the academy.

As officer of the deck he represented the captain and had "authority in the performance of his duty over every person on board ship, and must be respected and obeyed accordingly." He knew the pompous wording by heart; and he felt the importance of it all. He strode precisely up and down; therefore, between the port rail and the midship after turret, and kept an eagle eye roving from under his smart peaked cap in the most approved manner.

Seven bells struck. Men from shore-leave began to straggle in over the port gangway. They stepped aft, or slouched, according to their several natures, saluted, gabbled the prescribed formula of "repo't 'n board, sir," and a petty officer checked off the names. Forsythe watched them aloofly from his beat. Suddenly he called sharply:

"You there! Come here!"

The man addressed started, shambled guiltily aft, saluted and stood to attention.

"Why didn't you salute the flag as you came aboard?"

The man shuffled on his feet and shifted his gaze.

"I—I forgot, sir."

"Forgot! Can't any of you ever think of a new excuse? You thought I didn't see you, that's what. Render the salute now and don't forget again."

The man obeyed sheepishly and went forward, leaving Forsythe to grumble to himself about the animal types that the navy had to deal with who were always trying to dodge regulations out of sheer inherent cussedness.

Like many another junior before the newness of the Annapolis system had worn off, matters of form loomed very large on his horizon. He strode angrily up and down. He knew that this half-hour before the shore-leave time-limit was going to be a period of petty annoyances. Too well he knew it; and he was irritated in advance.

Suddenly his roving eagle eye blazed with indignation. Two lithe figures were racing across the starboard gangway. They ducked behind a ventilator, dodged from it to the four-inch guns of the secondary battery, and tried to slink across the deck.

Forsythe's voice crackled like a quick-firer.

"Get those two men, Gibbs! Confound their impudence! Grab them and bring them aft!"

"Aye, aye, sir." The petty officer on duty chased after the culprits and presently returned, herding them before him. Forsythe positively quivered as he glared at them.

"What the deuce do you two men mean by coming aboard across the starboard gangway?"

No answer. What answer can a schoolboy give when he is caught breaking rules?

"Come on now. Speak up. And if you say you didn't know any better, I'll put you on report. You're both rated men and you know darn well that the starboard gangway may be used only by officers and their guests."

The offenders wilted under the cold fury of his tone. It was one of the oldest traditions of the service that they had desecrated. A trivial thing in point of fact; but "Discipline *must* be upheld." Presently one of them mustered the courage to stammer:

"Sorry, sir. We—we was on that side o' the dock, sir, an'—it's a long way round, an' it was kinder late, so—"

"Ah-h! So you hoped I mightn't be on deck and you might get away with it, yes? Well, you'll just go ashore again now and go round the proper way. And see that you get in on time, too; I'll watch for you. Let 'em go, Gibbs."

The men went on the double and commenced a desperate race against time around the navy dock. It was a long way round that tremendous chasm, nearly half a mile; and it lacked only three minutes before eight bells. Forsythe watched their frantic race with an angry satisfaction; but his indignation was not appeased.

"Animals!" he muttered savagely. "Senseless and insensate! The only time they'll do a thing is when they know they have to. By golly, the regulations are right. When a man has no sense of decency bred into him the only way to handle him is with cast-iron discipline. Discipline and the imminent fear of punishment; that's the only thing that keeps that class in bounds."

Four years of Annapolis and three months of service had endowed Junior Lieutenant Forsythe with some very fixed views about those inexplicable creatures of lesser mold who entered the navy by way of enlistment. Their petty delinquencies fretted him then to the point of frenzy.

But the trial of Forsythe's soul was not yet complete. The two men whom he had just reprimanded and sent racing round the dock got in just in time. Forsythe returned their salute with a vague sense of disappointment that their punishment had been so light. He was not vindictive by any means; but he felt that their deliberate breach of regulations had merited a heavier penalty than just a healthy race around the dock.

And then, while he was still fretting over the impudence of the thing, right on their heels came three more men over the gangway. They marched to the quarter-deck in a suspiciously solid formation, two of them leaning unnecessarily close to the third in the middle. They rendered the prescribed salutes and their report with stolid gravity and in strict regulation manner and turned to go. But Forsythe's cool, gray eyes were very keen.

"Middle man there, step forward," he called sharply.

After a moment's hesitation, the man obeyed and stood facing him at painfully solemn attention. Forsythe bored him him through with his gaze without saying a word for an interminable ten seconds till the man's careful equilibrium broke down and he swayed uncertainly on his feet and tottered.

"Ha, I thought so!" snapped Forsythe. Then he looked at the man's sleeve. "For a man of your rating you seem to be a singular fool. Haven't you sense enough to understand the strictness of the latest orders on the liquor question?" Then a note of disgust tinged the scorn of his words. "And the captain made a special appeal to you men's honor only two days ago when we docked! There's a copy of what he said on your bulletin-board right now. Pah! Take him away, men. Make a note of his name, Gibbs."

The other two jumped to the assistance of their comrade and hurried him forward. Forsythe resumed his angry prowl, fuming and clucking to himself with little explosions of indignation.

The chief petty officer, Gibbs, strode on the other side of the deck, ill at ease, with something obviously on his mind. Twice he approached as if to say something; but the uncompromising hardness of the officer's face repulsed him. Finally he screwed up his courage to the necessary pitch. He halted in front of his superior and saluted.

"Beg y' pardon, sir. Could I take a very great liberty, sir?"

Forsythe's answer was surprisingly cordial.

"Why certainly, Gibbs." As long as matters were conducted in accordance with regulations he had nothing against any man.

Gibbs was emboldened to lay his heart bare.

"About this man, Weston, sir. I—I'd like to put in a word for him. He's got a first-class record along with his rating, sir, and—I don't know how he slipped this afternoon, sir; but he's got as clean a conduc' sheet as any man on the ship—special first-class. And he's going up for chief next week. This'll lose him his conduc' class and throw him back three months, sir, and —if you could see your way to—"

Forsythe's face had been growing slowly hard again as Gibbs recited his plea. Now he interrupted him.

"That 'll do, Gibbs. I'm sorry; but I can't just quietly forget the matter." Then he shot a finger out at him accusingly and vented one of his sorest points of dissatisfaction. "There are some of you men, Gibbs, who seem to have an idea that irksome rules are invented solely for the worriment of the enlisted men, and that officers are free from them. But I've got to obey the navy regulations just as much as you have; I can't take it on myself in a case like this to punish a man or just to let him go; my orders are to report him. If the enlisted men obeyed *their* orders a little more carefully there'd be no troubie. No, I'm sorry. The thing is out of my hands now."

Gibbs saluted stiffly and stepped away. But dissatisfaction was very obvious in his manner.

"All the same, I know them that would ha' let it by," was the heresy that he muttered to himself when the screen of the after turret was between them.

Within a few minutes of eight bells Forsythe was relieved from duty, and with a thankful grunt of relief he went below to his stateroom. But his irritation required time to wear off. He flung his cap onto his berth and began to tear angrily at the buttons of his jacket and stretched his wide chest, growling to himself. His roommate grinned at him.

"Contact with the 'lower orders' got your usual goat, eh?"

"Oh, dash 'em all!" Forsythe snorted. "Why wouldn't they get my goat? They're so darned petty in all their little delinquencies, so mean-souled about everything, that I just can't hold myself."

The roommate's grin became cynical. He was an officer of longer service and considerably longer understanding.

"All of which almost impels me to the suspicion, friend Forsythe, that you're not very much in sympathy with your men. Poor stuff that; see regulations."

"Ah, regulations are drawn up by old hulks retired from service who've forgotten what contact with the men means. How can we be in sympathy with them when the vast gulf of class lies between us? Now I'm not pulling snob stuff, old man; by class I mean education and upbringing and environment—everything. You know the kind of men who enlist. The ordinary obligations of decency which have been drummed into us all our lives, and particularly during our four years at the shop, mean nothing to them. At all events, they don't show it. How can we guess what their code is, or whether they have any code at all? How are we to get under their hides to understand them, or they us?"

The older man listened to this outburst with weary forbearance. He had heard it all before; the same hot impatience against a condition which was beyond the grasp of inexperienced youth fostered by the traditions of a particularly exclusive naval academy. He tapped the other impressively on the shoulder.

"Friend Forsythe," he said, "your arguments are irrefutable. Your right to get hot under the collar is backed by sound logic. But maybe, some day, by the grace of Neptune, or whatever god it is who looks after your Uncle Sam's navy, there will come understanding. Some officers never get it. They grow up into crusty old martinets who are hated all round. Let's hope, for the good of the service, that your 'class' is different."

"Oh, rats!" said Forsythe. "There are some planes of humanity so far below the surface that they can't be fathomed by certain other planes. We belong to the other plane."

We! Always that we was so prominent in this so youthful officer's sentiments. Though he disclaimed all leaning toward

snobbishness, and honestly, too, it was manifestly evident that four years of the academy, untempered as yet by experience, had hedged him round with the barriers of caste; an attitude of mind which was bad for the harmony of Uncle Sam's navy with a far-reaching badness. In witness whereof—

Forward on the gun-deck, where the men had their quarters, Sam Weston sat on an upturned wooden bucket. He was sober now; deadly cold sober. He knew exactly what he had done and what would be done to him. His bitterness was not at all improved by the cheerful gibes of his messmates.

"Tough egg, Sam. You for a chanst at mast to-morrow. Better start thinking up your excuse, son." It is a matter of much caustic comment in the navy that an excuse is demanded of a man for every trifling delinquency, just like a schoolboy. "Three months on second conduc' list and all shore-leaf docked; I'll tell you your sentence right now. An' if th' executive's feelin' real husky you might lose a rating, too." Another man chimed in with unction: "Well, if you *will* drink the horrid stuff. Poisons yer system an'—how's it go?—wrecks yer moral fiber; impairs yer efficiency; an' woof-woof, all the way down the list to six months in the pie-wagon an' the straight kick."

The last speaker quoted with dramatic imitation and earned the reward of a chorus of guffaws. But Sam bit his teeth over a string of those heartfelt sentiments which have to be spelled with dashes. A little sympathy came to him.

"Tough luck, Sam. You hadn't such an awful smoke-stack at that; he might a' let ye by, the crab."

"Aw, shucks!" growled Sam. "I'm not blaming him for putting me down for a chance; he's just a pup an' he don't know where he stands himself yet. But it's the way of him that gets me all het up. Him that's a snotty just out o' the school, an' he looks at us like we're all animals. Gol blast 'm!"

Sam raised his voice as he waxed indignant over his wrongs.

"'S if he an' his kind never slipped from the water-wagon an' shipped more than they could carry. But they do it in a club, an' they get away with it, 'cos they're in a different 'class' to us poor suckers who fall for the enlistment posters. Those one-and-a-half-stripers make me so sick that—"

"Sh! Pipe down!" warned a voice swiftly. "Here comes Jimmylegs."

Sam choked off his impassioned sermon, and there was a suspiciously innocent silence as the master-at-arms came up. He eyed the group with shrewd wisdom and decided to remain a while in the zone of disturbance. The little eruption was quashed in its very borning; but it had been a swift glimpse into that spirit of discord which inevitably springs like a poisonous fungus in the rich soil of suspicion when it is uncleansed by mutual understanding.

Under such conditions the commonest tragedy of military life hangs maliciously waiting at one's elbow. A word, a look, and it falls with pitiless swiftness. It is called insubordination, and usually it crushes the weaker—that is, the enlisted—man. This time, however, it took another line and fell with grievous suddenness on the officer, to his own great ultimate benefit and the greater glory of the U. S. S. Republic.

Forsythe, as a young officer with no technical specialty, was assigned to superintend the overhauling of the rapid-fire guns on the starboard side, which was a part of the program of minute house-cleaning of a ship in dry dock.

With the early morning call for "gun and deck bright work" followed by the two long blasts which specified "guns," he stepped out on deck, and almost immediately found cause for irritation in the fact that the men were not already at their assigned jobs.

In port, where the need for instant preparedness is not so urgent, there is always a slight relaxation of rigorous discipline. It is a harmless concession, and it tends to keep the men contented. But under the strict régime of the academy, Forsythe himself had been obliged to jump to instant duty with never an excuse. He grumbled to himself, therefore, about "slovenly slackness" and similar heresies. When the men

presently trooped along, laughing and joking among themselves, it jarred on him as being a mark of supreme callousness amounting almost to an impertinence in the face of their transgression.

With this attitude, it was natural that he should find fault with their work. It was quite in human nature, too, that the men, feeling themselves unjustly worried by an officer who galled them in any case by his superior aloofness, should devise sly little ways of annoying him. He found spots deliberately left uncleaned, and was met with the plausible explanation that the offender was coming back to them in systematic rotation of certain parts.

He raved over prolonged absences of whole groups at a time, and was informed with stolid imperturbability that the men had gone to report on "sick call." These explanations were always so legitimate and always made him look so foolish that his irritation swelled to a frenzy of impatience, the more so since he knew that the men were laughing at him and he could never actually charge them with it.

At last he came upon a direct evasion of work. The polishing of the under body of the recoil slide of a three-inch B. L. R., which was difficult to get at, had been shamefully skimped. He pounced upon it with an access of exasperation which amounted almost to a joy at having found something tangible to take hold of.

"What d'you call that?" he snapped. "Look at this!"

The man stood sullenly silent. It was his revolt against this very officer's attitude toward him and his fellows which had bred in him that sulky feeling of "Aw, what's the use," which leads inevitably to slovenly work. His surly silence inflamed the officer yet more. He pushed the delinquent seaman aside and snatched up a rag to show the enormity of the hidden dirt. So energetic was his indignation that the man staggered up against the gun-carriage. His face flamed out red.

"Aw, hell!" he muttered. "That's no way to do."

It was rank insubordination! Excusable, perhaps, under the circumstances, but none the less impertinent. Forsythe's pent-up irritation flared up into a sudden fury. Insolence from one of these creatures of a lower order. In a frenzy he turned and struck at the man!

It was a wild, aimless blow; but none the less a blow. It landed on the man's shoulder and slipped harmlessly over the collar-bone. And then he recognized him! It was Sam Weston!

Weston staggered back, but not from the foolish little blow. The flush of anger which had been on his face vanished in a second, leaving it tensely white. He dropped his cleaning-rag and for a sudden mad instant the knuckles showed white over his fists and his shoulder-muscles bunched up. And then the training of years took him in its grip. Slowly his nostrils relaxed and the red crept back into his face; his blazing eyes lowered and he stooped sullenly to pick up his rag.

In the same moment Forsythe's madness left him. He turned without a word and strode with a pale, set face below to his stateroom. Just as the man had known in the little matter of his intoxication, so Forsythe knew now just what he had done and what would be done to him. He, an officer, had struck an enlisted man! The enlisted man without delay would have recourse to his only redress and report the matter to the executive officer. He, Forsythe, would presently be informed by a senior, with the executive's compliments, that he was to consider himself confined to his room. After that, in due course—he saw the whole pitiless scene unfold itself before his eyes—the officers' court martial, with its circle of serious, emotionless faces, the solemn charge, damnatory and inexcusable; and then—Subject caption: Junior lieutenant's application for resignation from the service forwarded with recommendation for acceptance."

It was all over. Forsythe was no squealer. He sat in his room in grim expectation. He had let his foolish temper get the better of him and he was prepared to take his medicine now without whining. He even laughed mirthlessly to himself.

How long he sat in bitter introspective review he did not know. He was surprised to hear mess-call for dinner sound before

the expected polite summons came to him. His roommate came in, made a few commonplace remarks, and went out again. Forsythe wondered that he had not already heard. He got up and paced the three strides of the cabin back and forth for several minutes; then he squared his shoulders with resolution and went out to face that awful thing, the veiled pity and scorn of his brother officers.

But they greeted him casually, cheerfully, without any hint of shameful knowledge. He passed the executive officer and met a quiet, careless recognition. Forsythe began to wonder why the Weston man was waiting before carrying his tale. To prolong the agony, he reflected, and he smiled grimly to himself. Poor fool! Did the fellow think to see him go about cringing and all broken up? He set his lips and went in to dinner.

After dinner he was off duty. He went back to his room and waited. With quiet resignation he took down a book to read. Six bells struck, and still no summons. Forsythe began to wonder. Was it possible, he said to himself with incredulous speculation, that this Weston person was not going to report the matter at all? Had he so much humanness in his make-up? He regarded the astonishing thing from all angles for a long time. Then he suddenly jumped to his feet and sent for the man himself.

Weston came into the stateroom positively radiating hostility and stood in morose silence waiting for his officer to speak. Forsythe came to the point with commendable directness.

"Weston, I believe I've been doing you an injustice. I lost my temper this morning and—er—well, am I to understand that you intend to do nothing about it?"

After a long scowling delay Weston spoke with sulky repression.

"I'm an enlisted man, sir; I *can't* do anything about it."

"Of course you can. You know that regulations—"

"No, sir, I can't!"

The rude, snapped interruption surprised Forsythe into silence. For a full minute he sat looking at the man, while a confused jumble of his preconceived hard set ideas hammered at his brain for revision. Finally:

"Then, Weston, as man to man I want to apologize to you."

Weston's sulky indifference gave place to a half-hopeful eagerness.

"D'you mean that, sir? As man to man?"

"Certainly, Weston. As one man to another, laying aside all difference of rank, I want to apologize."

Weston's eagerness suddenly blazed into passionate speech.

"Then to hell with your apology! What good does an apology do me? You blasted academy swell-head; you come the highbrow over us; you think we're dogs; you talk to us like dogs; an' you take a kick at us like a dog. 'N then you come chattering to me about an apology! What satisfaction's an apology to me? 'F I was a civilian I'd take my hands to you; an' as man to man I tell you that now; that's all I want—just one slam at you. That's all the satisfaction that 'll do me any good. An' I know darn well I'll never get it; so—aw, shucks, what's the use?"

He bit his words off between his teeth and took a mighty breath to restrain himself. Then he shrugged his shoulders with savage disgust and drew himself erect:

"I request your permission to go, sir."

Forsythe was paralyzed speechless by the outburst. He managed to gasp:

"Very well, Weston."

And with a swish and a slam of the door the man was gone, and he was left alone with his amazement. It was an experience beyond the furthest limits of his comprehension. Even now he could not believe that it had actually happened; he would have staked his soul that the thing could not have been possible to happen.

His first sentiment was a fierce indignation, of course. That an enlisted man, a person of the lower plane, should have spoken to him like that! Then his anger began to give way to incredulous astonishment. The fellow had shown glimpses of feeling of a certain manliness that was inconceivable. Finally, with calmer reflection, came a vague sense of mortification. The man had shot in a few homely truths;

so unpleasantly true that they rankled. And then resentment swept over him again, drowning out all sober judgment.

For three days Forsythe was an unpleasant man to deal with, repellent to the officers and insufferable to the men. Then he developed a sudden unexpected cordiality toward some of the older chief petty officers and began by hints and half-confidences to make cautious inquiries. Immediately the word went round among the men that Forsythe was laying for Weston, that he was fishing for dope about his usual hang-out on shore so he could slip in on him some evening and get him with the goods.

Weston growled like a vicious mastiff. He did not usually drink—he would never have acquired a first-class conduct sheet if he did—but now he began to frequent the back room of a particularly venomous saloon along the water-front.

"Let 'm come," he snarled. "Let some yellow gyrene blow the gaff on me. I don't give a hang. Let 'm come nosing around. He'll get the handling of his pampered life; an' then I'll jump ship. To blazes with the service! 'F I got to serve under gawd-amightys like that, it's no job for me!"

That kind of talk was "bad dope"—because on board every ship there are certain mean-souled gutter sweepings who hope to curry favor by carrying tales. But Weston was in a vicious state of mind. He had been goaded to desperation. "Driven to desertion" might be his excuse if caught, as he most probably would be; but the penalty would be none the less on that account. Having made his hot statement often and with emphasis, a certain bravado then impelled him to swagger openly to his chosen hang-out, literally courting his fate.

It came surely enough. One afternoon as he sat in that pest-house of a back room, where the hot fumes alone were intoxicating, with a glass of untasted "skelly" before him, a warning voice suddenly rasped:

"Duck, fellers! Here's a bull!"

The side door, which was supposed to be locked, opened silently, and a broad-shouldered figure with a pale, grim face stood against the light. There was a moment's tense silence, and then, as certain hard-faced citizens sat still in truculent defiance, and certain other guilty consciences also dressed in "cits" broke for the door, the figure called sharply:

"Petty Officer Weston—here a minute, please!"

Weston got up uncertainly. The plain-clothes figure was unfamiliar and the light was behind him. He beckoned the sailor outside and shut the door. Then Weston saw him clearly, and his face twisted in a fierce scowl. The big knuckles began to bunch up again. But the "civilian" stepped away warily.

"Come with me," he ordered tersely, and set off down the dingy street with a long stride.

Weston followed, half surprised into obedience and half impelled by his pent-up desire to come to grips. He was at the disadvantage of not knowing what the other intended to do; the officer's quick decision had taken the long-planned initiative out of his hands. With time to think, however, his ideas began to run consecutively again, and he quickened his pace to catch up. But the officer always held his advantage by keeping ahead. When one has made up one's mind to beat a man, one cannot very well rush upon him from behind—at least a sailor of the United States Navy does not do these things.

The officer strode through another narrow street, turned sharply and skirted the blank wall of a warehouse, then dived suddenly into the wide gate of a lumber yard. Weston lost him twice as he ducked round huge piles of timber, and he jumped forward in a desperation of haste. He darted round the corner of a great stack of scantlings, and there suddenly was the officer waiting for him in an empty little square walled in all round with high piles of undressed planks. Weston pulled up short in a ridiculous attitude of surprise.

Forsythe was methodically removing his coat. He was pale and very quiet.

"I found this place a couple of days ago," he said. "I fancy we won't be disturbed here."

Weston still gaped at him. Forsythe just as methodically loosed his cuff-buttons and began to roll up his shirt-sleeves.

"Just as well not to waste any time, though."

Weston gasped. A wild suspicion was beginning to take form in his brain that this incredible officer man actually intended to brawl with him—this "high-brow snob," this "academy pup!" He just stood and stammered.

"D'you—d'you mean, sir, that—"

"Yes," said Forsythe very grimly. "Since you didn't report that matter. It's man to man now, Weston; there's no uniform between us."

The sleeves were carefully rolled and tucked in now, and Forsythe stood balanced in an unhandy orthodox attitude with his left arm extended and his right low across his chest.

Weston was still dazed with the wonder of it; but he put up his hands with the instinct of the scrapper, and he almost grinned. Then, while he still hesitated to attack his officer, a flush hit on the cheek-bone stung him.

He grunted with the suddenness of it, stepped forward to swing and received another full in the mouth which wiped the half-grin from his face. He shook his head and bored in. For two minutes it was fast and furious—and wofully amateurish. There was a whirl of swinging arms and wild blows which missed at close range, and furious heaving clinches, with an occasional smack or a thud, and then suddenly the officer was down. Instantly he flung up both arms across his face to protect it from the heavy boots. But the sailor stepped back, breathing hard, and waited. Forsythe rose quickly, and something of the wonder from Weston's face began to be transferred to his own. He was learning things about the code of the "kind of men who enlist."

"I beg your pardon," he muttered.

Weston caught his meaning.

"Aw, what the hell d'you think we are?" he growled. "Thugs—or what?"

While he still growled another blow took him in the neck, and then again there was a furious whirlwind of slugging. The pace was impossible. It was not a long fight. It could not be. The men were reasonably matched in size and weight, but the sailor was infinitely harder and more rugged than the officer. Also, he had fought very many more fights.

In a few minutes Forsythe went down again, doubled up with the awful, choking pain of a heavy drive in the solar plexus. Though unable to straighten himself, he scrambled to his feet and stood with his arms clutched in agony over his stomach, asking to be hit. Weston hit him.

He rolled half-way across the impromptu ring, all cramped up, till he was brought up under the lee of a timber stack. Weston shrugged his shoulders with an air of finality. It was all over, he said to himself. But that was not the high-brow's "class." Fumbling for a hold on the scantlings, he dragged himself up to his feet once more and lurched out toward his misty opponent. Weston swung heavily and put him down for the count.

That is to say, in an orderly ring fight ten seconds would have passed long before the crumpled figure could get up. But presently Forsythe rolled over and crawled blindly to his feet once more and began to stagger about, feeling for his foe.

"Gosh!" muttered Weston. "He eats it up!" And he braced his legs and set himself for a final annihilating swing. Then, as he saw the abject figure lurching toward him with pitiful pluck he suddenly tore the tight white cap from his head and flung it to the ground.

"Gosh ding it—*no!*" he shouted. "I've got to hand it to him. He's white!"

He reached out and took the staggering figure in his arms and lowered it to the ground; then he picked up his cap and raced to find water. Water in that place was not forthcoming easily. When he did find some after many minutes and returned with a capful, Forsythe was already sitting up. But he was not feeling his bumps or groaning with humiliation; he sat hugging his knees, thinking of many new things.

"Here you are, sir," Weston burst out. "This will fix you up in two shakes!"

Forsythe woke from his abstraction.

"Ah, thank you, Weston. That's just what I needed."

Weston was already dipping a handkerchief. Forsythe took it from him and ap-

plied the grateful coolness to his face and neck. It was surprisingly clean, he noticed. He dipped again and repeated; and then once more, slowly; and presently his hand was arrested in mid air and the far-away introspective look came into his eyes. After a long while he suddenly shook himself and took a long breath. Then he got up with a thin, wry smile.

"We-ell, Weston, I guess it was better this way; eh?"

Weston was suddenly enormously shy.

"I—I don't know, sir. It's sure done me a heap o' good. I—didn't think—I never knew you'd—"

"M-h-m!" Forsythe nodded with slow musing. "I guess I've changed a few opinions myself." He began to dust off his clothes with an absent expression. "Ye-es, I'm sure this was best—right from the beginning. I'd have hated to go back to my folks in old Vigo County—broken."

Weston was boyishly eager.

"Vigo County, Indiana, sir? That's *my* home county. Farming folks, near Prairieton."

Forsythe started, and he had to bite his lip to keep back the exclamation which almost burst from him. For it so happened that his people, who belonged to that "other plane," were farming folks too! Presently, in a strained voice:

"How big a farm, Weston?"

"Just under two hundred acres, sir."

Forsythe bit his lip again, and he commenced to lead the way out of the yard without a word. It was not till he had reached the street that he murmured to himself, very softly and very slowly:

"Then the only difference is in the size."

But Weston, of course, could never understand what he meant. He said so.

"I don't understand, sir."

"But I do," Forsythe muttered grimly.

THE TENDERFOOT

I WANTED to go to the end of the world,
Where life is fresh and new,
Away from the tramp of a city's feet,
With never a thing to do.

I wanted the freedom of clean, pure air,
Unsullied by chimney spires;
I wanted to live by the giant hills,
And build my own camp-fires.

Oh, I went my way to the end of the world,
Where life is wild and free;
Now I eat my meat alone in camp;
There's never a soul to see.

And I want to go back from the end of the world,
Back where the street-cars hum;
I want the glare of electric lights,
And the crowd when day is done.

I want the street where the multitude walks,
And the smoke of the chimney spires;
I want to flee from the stillness of death,
And the quiet of dead camp-fires.

The mountains breathe a silence that hurts,
As I ride over hill and plain,
But I long with a heart that almost bursts
For the roar of the city again.

Oh, I want to go back to the city once more,
Back where the soul is aglow
With the fire that burns in the city's breast—
But I haven't the money to go!

Leora Whitehouse.

The Trail of the Beast



by Achmed Abdullah

Author of "Bucking the Tiger," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

TENNANT, an American detective employed by the Agence Ducastel in Paris, met an old chum, Lord Menzies-Kerr, whom he had not seen for seventeen years, and who now limps, and they occupied a suite of rooms together.

He was surprised one day to see Menzies-Kerr and an actress, the daughter of the chief of the French secret political police, Angele Lantaigne, strolling together in the disreputable Quartier des Halles. On being questioned regarding this, the nobleman resented it; and when Tennant's sub-agent announced that an anarchistic politician, Anatole Jarvet, who had just been elected to the House of Deputies by the apache element, had been murdered in the Quartier des Halles, Menzies-Kerr controlled himself only by an effort.

Tennant investigated the murder. He passed through streets crowded with a muttering, uneasy mob of the underworld who believed Jarvet had been murdered by the government for his opposition to the greater army program, which the government thought necessary in view of Germany's preparations for war.

Suspicion pointed toward Angele Lantaigne, who had once been a friend of Jarvet's, as the murderess. Her father, the chief of secret police, ridiculed the suspicion and said he could prove an alibi for her. Nevertheless she was arrested.

In his rooms, Tennant picked up a German book belonging to Menzies-Kerr. A letter fell out, and at a glance his eye registered the words: "And so, my dear Menzies-Kerr, you will see that Anatole Jarvet has sworn revenge against the man with the limp unless—"

Fearing to succumb to the temptation to read the rest of the letter and thus act dishonorably toward his friend, Tennant removed the temptation by burning the letter—and immediately regretted that he had not read the rest of it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLUE ULSTER.

MORNING came with a cold wintry blast that dropped on the Seine with a thin coating of ice, whirled down the boulevards in a flurry of frozen dew, and clad the tracery of the elm trees that border the Place Fontenoy with a romantic vestment of hoarfrost.

It came with coffee and hominy and sausage and buckwheat cakes prepared by George W. Brown's plum-colored paws—a daily shock and grievance to the fat Burgundian cook who presided over the culinary destinies of the apartment shared by Tennant and Lord Menzies-Kerr. It came with a bundle of newspapers, of which Tennant read a number of different political persuasions so as to keep in contact with "the business, the society, and the crimes of Paris," as he expressed it.

Every one of them, from the aristocratic *Gaulois* beloved by the Faubourg Saint Germain to the *Petit Parisien* beloved by janitor and workman, head-lined the Jarvet murder, the arrest of Mlle. Angele Lantaigne, and—very last news, slipped in after

This story began in The Argosy for February 9.

a violent wrangle between the night editors and the foremen of the printing rooms—her subsequent release, thanks to the alibi provided by her father, the chief of the secret political police.

One or two of the more serious papers devoted short editorials to speculating about the political consequences of Jarvet's sudden death, reminding their readers that the day before the murder Anatole Jarvet had been reelected to the House of Deputies; that he was the most dangerous enemy of the Republican Party in the saddle, the leader of the Internationalists, and that without him—"a man as ruthless as Aristogeiton, as coldly logical as Herbert Spencer, as energetic as Pope Sixtus the Fifth, as shrewd as Jacques Cujas, as impassioned as Demosthenes, as scholastic as Descartes, and as foully venal as Judas Iscariot," as the *Temps* put it in a riot of hyperbole—the Internationalist Party would be thrown into chaos.

A frivolous boulevard sheet, mostly devoted to frocks and frills, suggested that, while the murder had really happened, the arrest of Mlle. Angele Lantaigne, the popular ingénue of the Théâtre Alexandre, was a Machiavelian press-agent's trick. But most of the morning papers simply reported and treated the murder as a sensational mystery.

Breakfast over, Tennant devoted his early morning's clear-headedness to vain attempts at a solution of the crime. He had certain well-defined ideas as to the motive behind it—too, as to some of the forces which had been at work. What bothered him was the connection between the late Jarvet, Lantaigne, and Menzies-Kerr—"the gentleman with the limp." For by that last appellation nobody could be meant except the latter, and it was proved not only by Menzies-Kerr's strange behavior at the time when Subagent Doumay had come with news of the murder, but also by the letter which had dropped from between the pages of the German book and a few lines of which he had read—without meaning to.

Menzies-Kerr had not returned from the evening before, but the American banished whatever anxiety he felt by telling himself that the Scotchman, after all, was eccentric and erratic, and that this was not the first time he had spent whole days and nights away from home.

He had never vouchsafed any explanations for his absences in the past—beyond saying, with a grim laugh, that it was *not* a woman who had kept him away—and Tennant doubted if he would in the present case; and the incriminating letter destroyed, his own lips automatically sealed as to its contents, he wondered how he would be able to approach his friend and ask him straight out what was the matter—what he had had to do with the murdered Jarvet and with Lantaigne.

Too, it would be hard to cross-examine the other in an indirect manner, for he knew that Menzies-Kerr was cursed with Celtic supersensitiveness and was quick at smelling insults—imagined ones as often as not.

He put on his ulster and called the darky.

"I'm off," he said. "If Lord Menzies-Kerr comes back, ask him to look me up at the office, George." As an after-thought, thinking that he would trust to circumstances and the moment's inspiration to put the question to his friend in the right manner, he added: "Tell him it's very urgent."

"Yes, suh."

Fifteen minutes later Tennant's roadster was buzzing and slipping across the bridge and up into the gray, stolid, burgess respectability of the streets in back of the Rue Rougemont, where the great Agence Ducastel showed its modest little brass plate to the passing throng, surrounded by wholesale houses, the Paris purchasing agencies of English and American department stores, and a few boarding-houses catering to the trade of clerks and the students of the nearby Conservatory of Music.

He exchanged greetings with the stenographers and subagents in the outer offices.

"Doumay in?" he asked.

"No. He sent word. He remained on watch all last night at the Jarvet house—until six o'clock this morning."

"Guess he's making up for lost sleep,

now," said Tennant, and went to his private office in the rear, which was protected by a double layer of steel walls and doors though only a thin board partition separated it from that of M. Ducastel.

He had a mass of routine work to go through, and it was nearly noon when he heard Henri Ducastel open the door of his holiest of holies, where he sat enthroned amid a splendor of Cordova wall-hangings, carved mahogany, steel filing-cabinets, Turkey carpets, and framed autographed pictures of prominent men and women, some of them crowned heads, whom he had helped out of misfortunes and scrapes during the fifty years of his eventful career—where he sat by the hour, engaged in melancholy contemplation of the past; where, when the mood took him, he gave of the marvelous store of his former experiences in the criminal annals of the world; and where at times, quite suddenly, he would turn his canny old brain on a project, an intrigue, a mystery, and solve it in the twinkling of an eye—to Tennant's professional, unenvying joy.

He heard Ducastel cough, then hum, then sing to himself snatches of a song which had been popular during the days of the third empire and Cora Pearl, and, familiar with the old gentleman's habits, he was not surprised when a moment later he saw him at the door, a broad grin on his face, a twinkle in his eyes, his thumbs in the arm holes of his white, brocaded waistcoat.

"Why this expression of ghoulish delight, chief?" he greeted him.

Ducastel smiled more than ever.

"*Bien!*" he said. "You can tell by my face? More—ah—applied psychology?" he added mockingly.

"No," came the dry, logical answer. "Physiology—this time. Take a good look at your face, chief. There's a mirror over there."

Ducastel did as he was told.

"You are right," he said. "My forehead, my nostrils, my lips, the sweep of my mustache express a feeling of delight—of triumph, if you wish—and the reason—"

"I suppose you got the best of me in something?"

"Right, *mon sympatique Américain!*" exclaimed Ducastel, sitting down across from the other. "You remember, doubtless, your splendid psychological deductions which proved the lamblike innocence of little Angele Lantaigne?"

"You bet—and my deductions were borne out by the alibi supplied by her father."

"Yes—and yet— Tennant, I have it! I, the hoary old man, the weak, defenseless old man whom you youngsters use as—*enfin*—as a machine to pay your preposterous salaries—I have put it over you, the youngest, sharpest, brightest, most celebrated detective from across the Atlantic! *Vive la France!* I did not believe Mlle. Lantaigne innocent last night, though you endeavored to ram your mad psychological deductions down my throat in that brutal cowboy manner of yours"—anything American was characterized as "cowboy" by M. Ducastel—"and, by the fifteen thousand pale-blue guinea-pigs!—I was right. And you—*mon pauvre petit*—" he snapped his fingers with a gesture of pitying contempt.

"You see," he continued, "you will remember that the day before yesterday Anatole Jarvet was reelected, and that yesterday morning the President of the Republic called the House of Deputies to an extra session—a secret session—to discuss most important national affairs."

"Yes—increase of the standing army—supposed to be, wasn't it? Bigger military budget, aeroplanes, strengthening of the Paris fortifications—"

"Yes, yes. Well, this morning I was sipping my glass of *coffee-au-kirsch* at the Café de Naples, when, at the next table, I see some members of the Internationalist, Jarvet's party—Lamotte, Palmier, Brouin, and some others. We converse; and then Steynard comes in and joins us. Raoul Steynard, you know, the editor of the *Etoile*."

"I know. Filthy anarchist sheet; and Raoul Steynard is the biggest blackguard who ever came out of Alsace and said farewell to the German eagle to make his fortune in long-suffering Paris."

"Possibly so. But the *Etoile* is the

party organ of the Internationalists, and Steynard was the close chum and associate of the late M. Jarvet. Well, this same Steynard tells me in that wretched Alsatian accent of his that for to-day—the day following the murder of Jarvet—the latter had been expected by his party to deliver a speech in the House of Deputies which would have blown the government sky-high, and "—Ducastel's voice rose and he gesticulated violently—"the government knew it, my boy! Lantaigne had warned the government!"

"How did he know?"

"Ask him; and he won't tell you. It's his business. He is the head of the secret political police. At all events, he knew, and—"

"Well?"

"Jarvet is assassinated! A danger to the state is providentially removed!"

"Proving what, according to your opinion?"

"According to my opinion?" snorted the older man in disgust. "According to the opinion of every thinking man except obstinate Americans! It proves that Angele Lantaigne murdered Jarvet with her father's full knowledge. Perhaps he supervised the crime himself. You yourself told me that he was at the Café des Reines, three doors from the Jarvet house, at the time of the murder!"

"Coincidence," suggested Tennant, and the other picked up the word like a battle gage.

"Coincidence is the argument of poor theologians; and of fools!"

"Not always, M. Ducastel. Yesterday I was told that Mlle. Lantaigne murdered Jarvet to get possession of some letters she had written to him, and now I hear that she killed him so as to eliminate a danger to the republic. A little slip there somewhere, isn't it?"

"Not a bit of it. She is emotional, high-strung, romantic. Jarvet had loved her, and deceived her. She meets Menzies-Kerr, falls in love with him, is afraid that Jarvet—for he has done the same thing in the past—will blackmail her with the help of her indiscreet letters. She asks for their return. He refuses. She decides to kill him. All right. Somehow, her father learns of her intention. Does he dissuade her? No! He encourages her. He helps her. He knows that, by removing her former lover, she will also remove an enemy of the republic!"

Tennant did not reply. He stared moodily in front of him. What Ducastel said seemed to dovetail; and even suppose he was wrong in so far that it was not she who had done the actual killing, but that—

He was afraid to complete the thought. But he could not forget the cryptic letter marked on Jarvet's blotter, nor Lantaigne's strange refusal to tell him if Menzies-Kerr had been with him every minute of the time between five and six—the afternoon of the murder.

But the next moment he remembered some other things—and they gave him back his good humor and his confidence. He could not be mistaken. Of course there were some missing links in the chain of events as he had thought them out, but fundamentally he was right. He was convinced of it; and presently he would solve the whole wretched mystery.

He turned to Ducastel, who was quietly smiling to himself, pleased with the thought that his old brains were still in working order, and that, for once, he had got the better of his young American investigator.

"Chief!" he said.

Ducastel looked up, suspicious. He knew that tone as a cavalry mount knows the battle trumpet.

"Well?" he asked rather meekly.

"Your reasoning is bully. It dovetails. But you are overlooking a lot of negative testimony. For what about the apache who cried 'Down with the army'?"

And, though Ducastel with a burst of rage declared that he was sick of these mysterious allusions that meant nothing and led nowhere, Tennant continued:

"What about the strange, symmetrical pattern of scratches on the table, on Jarvet's palms, and on the safe? What about the butcher—who came over to testify against Mlle. Lantaigne before he could possibly have known that Jarvet had been murdered? And the letter on the blotter."

Suddenly he paused.

"'The gentleman with the limp,'" he said, as if to himself; and then, rising: "I guess I'll take another look at that blotter," and he left the room.

But when he arrived at the house in the Rue Férou and walked into the library, he found to his surprise that the blotter was not there. He wondered if the headquarters detectives might have removed it, and, seeing Doumay just then coming up the stairs, he asked him what became of it.

Doumay laughed.

"But, *monsieur!*" he exclaimed. "You took it yourself last night when I was on watch."

"I took it?"

"You are overworked, *monsieur*. Your memory is playing you tricks. Don't you remember that you came here late last night—after midnight. You wore your heavy American ulster; not the one you are wearing now, but the other one, the dark-blue one. And don't you remember that you had hurt your foot; that you walked with a limp; and that you would hardly talk to me. Said you had a bad cough?"

"Of course, of course!" replied Tennant, and, sending Doumay on a rapidly improvised errand, he telephoned to his apartment.

"Yes, suh?" came George's voice across the wire a moment later.

"Has Lord Menzies-Kerr returned?"

"Yes, suh."

"You gave him my message?"

"Yes. But he said as he wasn't gwine roun' to your office, didn't have the time."

"That so? By the way, did Lord Menzies-Kerr wear his fur coat?"

"No, suh; he's wearing your blue ulster."

"All right. Thanks," and Tennant rang off with a smothered curse.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAP.

THE early afternoon editions took up the tale of the Jarvet murder where the morning papers had left it. As yet not one of them breathed a word about the fact that the death of the deputy had come at a most opportune moment for the government.

But the French press is even less afraid of contempt of court and of influencing public opinion before the trial than the American, and Tennant was less surprised than disgusted when the *Intransigeant*, yellowest of yellow sheets, took it upon its editorial conscience to investigate, riddle, and destroy the alibi through which the chief of the secret political police had caused his daughter's release.

It appeared that one of their brilliant young reporters had discovered that the Café des Reines had been empty of other visitors at the time when M. Lantaigne claimed that he had been there in the company of Angele and Lord Allistair Menzies-Kerr, and that neither Mme. la Patronne, behind the cash register, nor the solitary waiter, could remember at what time Angele had left the table, nor when she had returned.

"Thus," continued the article, "the alibi of Mlle. Angele Lantaigne stands and falls by the testimony of two gentlemen, both of whom are directly interested in her fate. Her father, and her lover, Lord Menzies-Kerr! Of course the latter, when interviewed shortly before twelve just as he was about to leave the apartment which he shares with M. James Tennant, the celebrated American detective, by our intrepid reporter, objected strenuously to having his name mentioned in connection with that of Mlle. Lantaigne and, with characteristic Anglo-Saxon brutality, proposed to throw our reporter out of the window and to chop his body into small pieces of flesh which a self-respecting ostrich would refuse to swallow if ever again he should dare show his face in milord's apartment.

"Milord!" wound up the editorial in a direct appeal, "it is not by such arguments—the arguments of a hairy and uncouth troglodyte who has chilblains in the place which nature provided for his gray matter—that you will be able to establish the innocence of the woman you love!"

Even the more decent of the papers said *sub rosa* that they considered Angele guilty in spite of her father's alibi, though they

sugared the pill in a typically French manner by suggesting that she had doubtless been justified and should promptly be acquitted. For was she not twenty-one? Was she not as fair as wheat and as blue-eyed as a cloudless summer sky? Was she not a charming girl and a great actress? On the other hand, had not the late M. Anatole Jarvet been a hyena in human form who—to quote the *Petit Canard Quotidien*—had "fattened his obese and nasty body by feeding on the reputations of the women whom first he had loved, then abandoned, and finally blackmailed?"

But the real sensation boomed along when the *aperitif* hour emptied the offices and counting-houses and filled the boulevard cafés with men eager for various-colored drinks to sluice the office dust from their throats, more eager for spiced talk to clear the cobwebs of ledger and catalogue from the corners of their Gallic minds.

It was then that for the first time the whisper ran from mouth to mouth—from costumer to Mme. la Patronne, from her to aproned, hustling waiter, and back again to the latest silk-hatted arrival—that perhaps the government knew more about the Jarvet affair than appeared on the surface—talk peppered with hushed allusions to former political mysteries, with such names as Dreyfus, Esterhazy, Béranger, Déroulède, and Félix Faure.

And it was then that Tennant, walking down the Boulevard des Italiens in search of Menzies-Kerr, who usually strolled as far as the Madeleine as a before-dinner constitutional, realized that the snowball of gossip and rumor and scandal was about to assume threatening proportions.

He had no doubt that, if he wanted to, he would be able to trace the beginning of the rumor to the office of the *Etoile*, the organ of the Internationalists, edited by Jarvet's friend, Raoul Steynard. He saw him, a short, squat, hook-nosed, black-bearded man, at the entrance to the Café Riche, surrounded by a group of admirers. The man was talking and gesticulating violently, and Tennant caught a few words; just what he had expected to hear:

"The government, they did it, my friends—"

He walked on, looking to right and left for his friend. Steadily the crowds were becoming thicker. Steadily the undercurrent of rumor and gossip grew and bloated; and when a stream of ragged newspaper boys careened into the boulevards from a side street, crying their wares, it was like oil on flames.

"*La Patrie!*"

"*La Presse!*"

"Scandal in the House of Deputies!"

"Deputy accuses the government of murder!"

"Lantaigne implicated!"

An excited crowd was asking and answering questions. Papers were snatched, read, commented upon.

"What is it?"

"It appears that the government gave orders to have Jarvet assassinated!"

"Lantaigne turned the trick!"

"Shame! This is worthy of Russia!"

"Ah—our little republican czars!"

Tennant smiled grimly. Here was the echo of the cries which he had heard the evening before near Saint Sulpice. Already it had swept across the bridges; already it was whirling down the great boulevards. Another hour and it would drift into the salons of the Faubourg where politics were made, into the embassies of the foreign powers, the offices of foreign newspaper correspondents to be flashed around the globe. Evidently something very grave had happened in the House of Deputies to give substance to it.

He bought a paper, and read that a deputy of the Internationalist Party had halted the secret deliberations of the house by accusing the government point-blank of having ordered the assassination of Jarvet—and he had added that M. Lantaigne had been the instrument of the government.

The minister of the interior had denied the charge indignantly, had declared his supreme faith in the chief of the secret political police, and had demanded a vote of confidence; and the result of the vote, though favorable to the administration, had been obtained by a dangerously close margin.

Tennant felt curiously ill at ease. Nor was it because of his friend, Lord Menzies-

Kerr. He knew that, whatever the latter's connection with the whole affair, and though it might cause him a lot of trouble and ugly suspicion, his motives would finally be proved to have been entirely honorable, though perhaps quixotic. Menzies-Kerr would be cleared in the end. Tennant knew it, not because his friendship for the man forced his brain to believe as his heart would like him to, but because his sixth sense—his detective sense—told him so.

What disturbed him was the thought that France—which he loved next only to his native America—was about to stew some ghastly mess in her political caldron, was on the eve of one of her usual internal turmoils, at the same moment that the rest of Europe, not to speak of the rest of the world, was trembling on the brink of a volcano; a volcano that had belched out evil odors during the Dreyfus trial, that had rumbled threateningly during the Algeciras convention, that had shown its fiery head two years earlier when Germany—speaking suavely about the Russian danger on her eastern marshes—had suddenly increased her military establishment by twenty divisions of horse, foot, and guns.

France had read the sign—a little late, naturally, being a democracy with a thousand heads—and finally the government had called the house to a secret session to debate on how to strengthen the steel walls which protected French civilization from German kultur.

And, at that very moment, came the Jarvet murder; came one of France's chronic political nerve fits. The boulevards enjoyed it; so did the newspapers, the salons, the foyers of hotel and theater, and the people of France knew that it was nothing but a storm in a tea-pot. But what about the iron-fisted hordes across the Rhine, those hordes, thinking and acting to the will of a handful of men? They were not such experts at national psychology as he, James Oliver Tennant, was at individual. They might misread the signs, and then—

Decidedly he must get to the bottom of the affair, and so he returned to the Rue Férou. Excitement there had died down somewhat, and the cordon of policemen at the opening of the street had been thinned to half a platoon. In passing, Tennant noticed that the butcher-shop of Guillaume Nordeg had its blinds down.

"Nordeg come back?" he asked a blue-coat.

"Yes, and left again."

"All right. Look out for him, and slip me the word as soon as you see him."

The Jarvet house was empty but for Mme. Anne Houlbrecque, the deaf old housekeeper who had received permission to stay until further orders, Captain Xavier Roux, and Subagent Doumay.

"Anybody been here to-day?" he asked the police captain whom he met in the lower hall.

"Only M. Raoul Steynard."

"The editor of the *Etoile?*"

"The same, *monsieur.*"

"What did he want?" asked Tennant, rather surprised.

"Certain documents. Certain very important documents which belong to him and which he had left in M. Jarvet's hands a few days back."

"And he had to have them in a hurry, I suppose?"

"Exactly."

Tennant grinned.

"Good Lord," he said, "Steynard might have thought of something more original. That trick is so old it's got whiskers. I don't suppose you fell for it, Roux, did you?" he asked casually.

"What do you mean, *monsieur?*"

Tennant looked up sharply.

"I mean you weren't enough of a damned fool to let him in; to allow him to look for those important documents and carry them off?"

"Of course I let him in!" came the belligerent reply. "Of course I allowed him to take his own property! Why shouldn't I?"

Tennant gave a low exclamation of rage. He took the other by the shoulders and shook him.

"What?" he cried. "You let him into the house? You mean to say you let Raoul Steynard in? Steynard; Jarvet's old side-kick? You allowed him to search the premises, you infernal, muddle-brained

idiot? You let him take away—*papers?*" He brought out the last word as if it choked him.

"I could not say 'no'!" the police captain defended himself. "Steynard is the editor of the *Etoile*. He is an important member of the Internationalist Party."

"But that's just why you should have kept him away from here; why you should have stalled him! Lord, man, you've got as much use for common sense as a hog has for hip-pockets! You, you—"

"Monsieur Tennant! One moment, please!"

It was Doumay speaking. He had come from up-stairs, and pulled the American into the little salon which opened on the garden.

"I—" he began, but at once Tennant whirled on him.

"And you?" he said. "Why did you let Roux make such a blunder? Couldn't you phone me or Ducastel? What have you got to say for yourself?"

Doumay smiled.

"Monsieur Tennant," he said, "shortly after you came from America and entered the Agence Ducastel, you were kind enough to tell me it is a good idea in criminal cases to give a man all the rope he wants—if you can get a hold of the rope afterward. Do you remember?"

"Yes; something of the sort," Tennant said, puzzled. "What's that got to do with Steynard?"

"You remember also that before I became a private detective, I was—"

"A cracksman, I believe."

"Yes. But not always. One does not become a cracksman in a day nor a week nor a year. One starts lower down. I"—he smiled reminiscently—"I went through the whole gamut of crimes, *enfin!* When I was very small I was an expert pickpocket—the best in Paris," he added with a peculiar mixture of pride and shame.

"And—" impatiently from Tennant.

"I allowed M. Raoul Steynard to search the premises. He searched and searched and searched. The library, the down-stairs salon, the dining-room — everywhere. It was warm in the house and he took off his overcoat and searched some more. I did not watch him. I did not want him to suspect. But afterward, when he returned to the hall where he had left his coat, after he had found what he was after, I—being a Frenchman and of manners most exquisite—I helped him on with his coat, and—"

"I get you!" broke in Tennant, with a ringing laugh. "You went through his pockets while you did the polite act. Doumay, my boy, if I were a Frenchman I would plant a smack on your noble forehead. Being an American I'll content myself with telling you that you are all to the mustard. And now, hand over what you swiped from friend Steynard!"

"Here, *monsieur,*" and the subagent gave Tennant a small package wrapped in oil paper.

Tennant opened it, spread it out, smoothed the creases, and looked. At first he was disappointed, for the "important document" of M. Steynard was nothing but a printed small-scale map of the Far-Eastern French colony of Indo-China.

Looking at it more closely, he noticed that certain portions of the map had been underlined in red ink, and all in the southern part of the colony, Cambodia and Cochin-China. Then he saw that double red lines marked certain rivers, such as the lower Mekong, the Prek Té, and the Vaico; while a number of towns, for instance Kampot, Camau, and Bac Lieu, were accentuated by small red crosses. Finally he noticed that a fine network of red lines ran from the southwest, near Kampsala, toward the northeast, in the direction of the province of Annam.

"What do you make of it?" he asked Doumay. "I mean what do you make of it taken in connection with the fact that very evidently Steynard considered this map most important?"

"I don't know," mused the other. "Of course Jarvet was the head of the Internationalist Party, and Steynard was his chum and associate, and all the world knows that the Internationalists are opposed to colonies, to imperialism. *Monsieur,*" he went on, "there have been rumors before this that some of the native rebellions out there were financed right here, in Paris, by the Internationalists. Perhaps these"—he

pointed at the red crosses—" mark hidden ammunition depots, and the thin lines are meant for lines of attack and communication."

Tennant shook his head.

" Sounds reasonable enough," he said. " Only, look here! Kampot and Camau and Bac Lieu are not the sort of places where anybody with half an ounce of sense would hide guns and ammunitions. Swampy land down there; unhealthy, malarial. Nor would a rebellion spread from the south toward the northeast. Just look at the rivers and the roads. The lines of communication would be all wrong. Such a rebellion could never succeed with Saigon and the French garrison commanding the southeast, and Jarvet wasn't exactly a fool! These red lines mean something entirely different. I am sure of it."

He turned the map over; and gave a low whistle of intense surprise.

" Doumay!" he said. " Look!" He pointed at a small printed square which said: " *Verlag von Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld und Leipzig* "—" Doumay, this map was made in Germany!"

" And?"

" Why should it have been?" continued Tennant. " Suppose Jarvet or Steynard had wanted a map of Indo-China, they could—would naturally have bought one made in Paris. All the bookstores carry those bully government maps. Why the devil did he buy a German map?"

" Perhaps he was in Germany and bought it while there."

" Must have been there recently. Look here; this is dated 1913. Wait; I'll find out." He called to Captain Roux and asked him to send Madame Houlbrecque.

" *Madame,*" he said when the old housekeeper had shuffled into the room, her hand to her ear, " had your late master been in Germany recently?"

" No. He has not been beyond the fortifications of Paris for over three years. He was a very busy man—" and she went on with a lot of senile recollections how M. Jarvet could never be prevailed upon to take a vacation which Tennant cut short with the brusk question if, as far as she knew, M. Jarvet had had any German friends. Had she ever heard German spoken in the house?

Anne Houlbrecque smiled.

" I am deaf, *monsieur*. I could not have heard. But I know what German squareheads look like. There were never any in *this* house! M. Jarvet received but few visitors."

" Do you recollect any of them?"

" Yes, my memory is better than my hearing. I remember them all. There was M. Steynard and the Deputies of M. Jarvet's party. There was that butcher, Guillaume Nordeg—"

" Was he here often?"

" Yes. He and M. Jarvet knew each other well. And there was another man whom I did not know. He used to come late at night, two or three times a week. He walked with a limp."

" A man about my height?" asked Tennant, thinking of Menzies-Kerr and hoping that the answer would be in the negative.

But the reply was a decisive:

" Yes. Just your height, *monsieur*. He wore a felt hat pulled well over his eyes—"

" And a loose coat?" Tennant could hardly keep his voice from trembling.

" Yes."

" As loose as that of the visitor—the woman as you said—whom you saw in M. Jarvet's library a few minutes before the murder?"

" But, yes, *monsieur,*" replied the old woman astonished. Tennant dismissed her and turned his thoughts to his friend, Lord Menzies-Kerr.

Could Menzies-Kerr have been the murderer after all? The Scotchman had been in Indo-China not so long ago, and here was a map of Indo-China made in Germany! What did it all signify?

" Doumay." He turned to the subagent. " This is a prize mystery."

The little Frenchman smiled.

" You'll solve it, *monsieur*, I have no doubt!

" Solve it?" Tennant gave a strange, cracked laugh. " I keep on solving it and my solution is right; but every time I solve it, it pops up again with a new kink in its cursed tail and—"

" *Monsieur?*"

"I am afraid of the last kink—out there." And he pointed due east, in the direction of the frontier, where the sky was reddening as if a mouth of blood had kissed and stained it.

CHAPTER IX.

ANGELE.

THERE was an unconscious wistfulness upon the face which Mademoiselle Angele Lantaigne turned on Tennant, who was sitting across from her in the little rose-and-silver salon of her father's house.

"I am so glad you called on me, Monsieur Tennant," she said, "even without a formal introduction. Lord Menzies-Kerr speaks of you often, and of course all Paris knows you, the celebrated American detective. And father, too, has spoken of you. He admires you."

Tennant looked at her: the low, broad, white forehead; the slightly curved, sensitive nose; the chin, soft in outline yet indicating strength and courage; the great blue eyes showing deep beneath boldly-hooded lids; the mobile lips, coral rather than cherry; the statuesque sweep of the golden hair, accentuating the square contours of the temples and resting on the small, well-shaped head like a glittering crown of curled sun-rays; the head poised with dignity upon a full, white throat; the lithe, girlish body, clad in a loose house-gown of dark-blue silk shot with emerald and dull-silver.

She was very lovely, very appealing, very sympathetic; and Tennant, being a decent, clean man and thus quite unashamed of natural emotions and reactions, said to himself that he liked her tremendously. Paradoxically, he was sorry that he did; for he had come on an unpleasant errand.

"*Mademoiselle*," he said bruskly, "I wish you had not given me such a charming welcome."

"Why?" she smiled.

"Because I have come here not as a friend, but as a detective."

She looked straight at him. Her lips quivered. Then she turned on him with a sudden flash of violence.

"I understand, *monsieur!*" she said in a low voice. "It is because of that murder—Jarvet! You, *monsieur*, know that I was arrested, suspected, accused. But you know also that I was released immediately, that it was all a mistake. But suppose my father had not been able to prove my alibi, suppose I were still in prison, even then you should know that I am innocent if you have one tiny particle of that psychological insight for which you are so famous!"

She said the last words with undisguised sarcasm; and when Tennant tried to justify himself, saying he knew she was innocent and had said so from the first, she went on more vehemently, her small white hands clenched tight, her blue eyes flashing.

"*Monsieur*, I have heard so much about chivalrous American gentlemen that, *bon sang!* I used to believe it!"

"But, my dear lady!"

"Why do you come here as a detective?" she insisted. "It is none of your business to ask me questions about that Jarvet affair, nor is it mine to answer. You do not belong to the police; you are a private detective; you have no right!"

Silently Tennant waived the point that he had the right to ask her questions, since the police had given a free hand to the Agence Ducastel. He preferred putting it on moral instead of legal grounds. He knew that the latter antagonized people, innocent as well as guilty, less than the former. He had made a habit of it throughout his detective career and owed part of his success to it.

"Mademoiselle Lantaigne," he admitted, "I have no right to be here nor to cross-examine you. But I have more than a right. I have the duty to do it. The duty!" he repeated emphatically, "and it is your duty to answer!"

"I do not see it."

"You will presently. Just hear me out. I repeat that it is both your duty and mine, because"—he lowered his voice—"because we are both of us friends of Lord Allistair Menzies-Kerr, who would not like to see him harmed."

"You mean—" she stammered, afraid to finish the thought.

He did it for her.

"I mean that by refusing to answer the

questions which I am going to ask you, you will indirectly cause Lord Menzies-Kerr to be suspected, perhaps arrested, and ultimately—who knows?" He leaned forward in his chair. "I am not a theologian, *mademoiselle*. I have always believed it wise to let sleeping dogmas lie. I merely believe in fair play; plain, average, strictly human fair play. That's all the theology of which I am capable. I guess you, too, believe in being fair and square."

Her deep low voice came like an echo.

"Ask your questions, *monsieur*. I shall answer—fair and square," she added in an undertone.

"Bully for you! Now, first of all, you are not engaged to Lord Menzies-Kerr? All that newspaper talk—"

"Is newspaper talk, *monsieur*. Chaff in the wind. I like Lord Menzies-Kerr. I admire and respect him. So does my father. He is our friend."

"Fine and dandy!"

There was so much boyish, naive enthusiasm in the exclamation that Angele looked up; and then blushed prettily. It did not need a chart and a signal code to be able to tell that Tennant was, somehow, very glad that Angele and Menzies-Kerr were just friends.

The next moment Tennant called himself an impressionable fool. It wouldn't do, he thought, to let his personal feelings get mixed up with a criminal investigation. Straight and to the point: that was the slogan. He turned to her with the calm question:

"*Mademoiselle,* is it true that the late M. Jarvet was also a friend of yours?"

She did not lower her eyes.

"We were more than friends," came her brave reply. "I loved Anatole Jarvet; and I thought that he returned my love."

Tennant murmured an indistinct apology, but she went on, fairly and squarely, as she had promised:

"I met him at a grand opera ball a little over a year ago. And I—after all, *monsieur*, I am not very old."

"Wouldn't exactly call you a Miss Rip Van Winkle," he put in smilingly.

"I had heard about him. I know how the people around Saint Sulpice followed him; how they obeyed and loved and adored him. How they called him the modern Robespierre who would lead the Internationale to victory; who would bring real freedom and democracy, an end to all strife and war and misery and hunger, peace and plenty and happiness to everybody! And, *monsieur*"—there was the ghost of a smile on her lips—"you know the young. We are world-stormers. We believe in change, in revolution, in reform. Revolution against everything—God and the dear saints included. It is both the sweetness and the penalty of youth.

"I made a hero of Anatole Jarvet. I read his articles and his pamphlets. I listened to his speeches. Once in a while, it is true, I would hear a whisper of gossip about him. If it was something nice, I would believe it; if it was something not so nice I would call it a lie and forget it. For he was my hero! Then I met him at the opera ball, and Anatole Jarvet was a very handsome man."

Tennant inclined his head as he thought of how he had seen Jarvet last, crumpled up in his chair, dead, but still with that satanic beauty on the heavy features.

"We met often," she continued. "We talked of love and I wrote him letters; the awkward, passionate, foolish letters of a young girl who does not know. He loved those letters; he told me so. And then one evening as I walked to the theater I saw him with another woman; a woman of the streets. I met him the next day. I reproached him and, *bon Dieu!* I would have forgiven him had he said the word, for I loved him so. But he laughed at me; he told me insulting things."

"I understand," Tennant said gently.

She shook her head.

"No. You do not understand. You are a decent man, a clean man. You do not know what a man like Jarvet is. You do not know what he told me—"

There was a sob in her voice. Tennant felt sorry and guilty, too. He took her hand and petted it.

"Never mind, child," he whispered. "I didn't ask you to crucify yourself."

She swallowed hard. She was determined to go through with her confession,

and there was that in Tennant's face, his voice, and the cool touch of his long, brown hands which made it easier for her than she had thought.

She thanked him with a look, and went on:

"Then I heard from a friend of mine, an older actress at the Théâtre Alexandre, that for years Anatole Jarvet had made it a business—yes, a regular business—to make love to women, to have them write to him, and, afterward, to blackmail them with the help of these foolish, pitiful letters. And so I made up my mind to get them back. I went to him."

Tennant sat up, tense, alert.

"You went to him on the afternoon of the murder?"

"Yes. I was with my father and Lord Menzies-Kerr at the Café des Reines. At half past five I excused myself for a few minutes. M. Jarvet's house is only a step from the little café. I went to him and asked him to return my letters.

"He refused. I insisted. He said they were worth money, more than I could possibly raise; that Lord Menzies-Kerr was very wealthy and I should ask him to lend me the money; and when I said I could not ask him for money, Jarvet replied: 'Never mind the money then. I will give you back your letters if you persuade his lordship to help me with Indo-China. Tell him that!'"

"Were those Jarvet's exact words?"

"Yes. I thought them very strange. I remember them exactly."

Tennant felt tremendously excited. Here was an important piece of news. But, the next moment, his trained detective mind told him that he must not forget the smaller points which, in criminal cases, are apt to suddenly loom large. So he continued his questions.

"Did you notice if M. Jarvet's safe was open while you were there?"

"He opened it just before I left. He showed me my letters, tied together, and again told me he would return them if I could persuade Lord Menzies-Kerr to help him with Indo-China. Then I left and returned to the café. I was not gone over ten minutes."

"One more question, *mademoiselle*, though it may strike you as irrelevant. You know about the butcher Guillaume Nordeg's incriminating testimony against you?"

"Yes."

"Had he any reason to wish you harm?"

"Why, no," came her puzzled reply.

"You knew him?"

"I have seen him."

"Where?"

"When I called on Anatole Jarvet, several weeks ago. They were together in the library. They were looking at something that looked like—"

"A map?"

Angele smiled.

"You are not a detective, *monsieur*; you are a clairvoyant. Yes; it looked like an automobile map."

"Good! Good! And now—a final question—when you returned to your table, was Lord Menzies-Kerr still there?"

"Yes."

"When did he leave the café?"

"About—"

"Angele, I forbid you to answer!" came a sharp voice from the door.

It was Lantaigne, the chief of the secret political police who had come into the room.

CHAPTER X.

"PROVE IT, MONSIEUR!"

LANTAIGNE shook hands cordially with Tennant, and told him, with slight mockery, how sorry he was that he had come home at such an inopportune moment.

"Opportune for you!" grimly corrected Tennant, who, being an American, enjoyed a joke even when it was on himself.

Lantaigne smiled a fleeting, hard smile, like the curly glitter on steel.

"M. Tennant," he said, "we decided the other day that the work of the secret political police and that of private detective agencies run on different lines."

"It was you who decided that; not I!" cut in Tennant; but the other went on, unheeding:

"For reasons which I have no intention

of communicating to you, I also decided that the question which you asked my daughter as I came into the room—at what time Lord Menzies-Kerr left our table at the café on the evening of the murder—belongs to those where your and my branch of criminal investigation are at odds. I have refused to answer that question. I refuse now. I shall always refuse—without an explanation of any sort. And that applies to you, too, Angele!" He walked up to her and petted her cheek. "Promise me, child, that you will not answer this question, ever, unless I give you permission."

The girl looked from her father to Tennant, confused, apologetic; then she whispered the desired promise, and her father kissed her gently.

"You are a good daughter; and now it is time for you to go to the theater."

Angele shook her head.

"I am not going, father."

"Why not?"

"I cannot. My name has been in all the papers, with all sorts of comment. Some try to be decent; try to excuse me. But they all think the same thing. They all still suspect me of this — this horrible crime."

Lantaigne drew her to him.

"That is just why you must go, child. If you do not appear on the boards to-night people will say that you are afraid, and will conclude that you are guilty. It's human nature. Prove to them with voice and gesture that you are innocent. You are brave; you have always been brave. Go!"

The girl smiled. She picked up a large, silver-framed photograph of a young man, about twenty-five, which stood on the center-table. Tennant had noticed the striking likeness between it and Angele.

"Am I as brave as Marcel was, father?" she asked.

"Yes." The man's voice was hushed, as with the memory of grief. "You are as brave as Marcel — who died in the Alps, trying to save a friend's life. You must never forget that, daughter," and Tennant was surprised at the rather hectic note which crept into Lantaigne's voice as he continued: "You must never forget that your brother was a clean, honorable gentleman who died an honorable death."

"I was very young when he died, and he was so much older than I. I hardly remember him."

Her father had regained his composure.

"But you are as brave as he was," he said, "and to-night you must prove it to all the world. Go to the theater; your friends will be there to applaud you."

"You bet!" exclaimed Tennant. "I'll be one of them. I'll be there to-night with the number nine gloves and the lusty voice, and you'll hear me. I learned rooting at football games back home."

When the girl had left the room, smiling her thanks, Tennant turned suddenly to Lantaigne, who was standing beside the door, very polite, but evidently expecting his visitor to leave.

"Close the door," said the American calmly. "My finer sensibilities are hard-boiled and my tact is above the freezing point when I am asking questions."

"I told you I wouldn't reply."

"That about Menzies-Kerr. Sure. I know. But there's something else I've got to ask you, and you might as well make up your mind right now to reply. For it affects you really more than me!"

"Is that so?" Lantaigne tried to appear bored, but did not succeed, and Tennant pressed the slight advantage sharply home, telling him about the blotter which he had found on Jarvet's library table and which Ducastel had read to him.

"That letter was addressed to you. 'Lant' stands for Lantaigne. And look at the rest of the message—cut and broken, but not so very blamed cryptic: 'Unless by Saturday I receive—' and 'the gentleman with the limp will pay the penalty.' It's both a warning and a threat; that's clear, isn't it?"

"I never received such a letter in my life!" cried the other. "Jarvet has not written to me for years!"

"Is that the truth?" Tennant demanded brutally, and Lantaigne replied with a violent flood of words, objurgations, protestations, but clear through it was a note of utter sincerity:

"I received no such letter. I give you my word of honor as a gentleman!"

"I believe you, and I beg your pardon." Tennant bowed.

Rapidly, on the spur of the moment, he concluded that Jarvet must have been killed while he was writing that very letter, and that the assassin must have carried away the unfinished letter as well as the love-letters written to Jarvet by Angele.

But the next minute he returned to the attack with another question about another letter: the one which had slipped from between the pages of one of Menzies-Kerr's German books.

Without meaning to, he had read a few lines. But he had not seen the signature. All right. He would bluff. He would try a shot into the blue, and see if he could wing something.

"*Monsieur*," he said to the chief of the secret political police, "I repeat that I believe you, and once more I offer you my humble apologies. But," lending his words the emphasis of a suddenly lowered voice—"why did you write to Lord Menzies-Kerr? Why did you warn him? Don't deny it. I saw the letter in which you told him that Jarvet had sworn revenge against—"

Lantaigne interrupted him with a quick gesture and a laugh.

"I do not deny it. I did write that letter. Only"—again he laughed—"it is evident that you did not read the whole letter. It was not a warning meant for Menzies-Kerr. It was a warning to be communicated by him to — ah — to the gentleman with the limp!"

"And he is—"

"*Monsieur*," smiled Lantaigne, opening the door, "I understand that you are a famous American detective. Prove it, *monsieur!* Prove it!"

CHAPTER XI.

BIBI LE FARCEUR.

IT was on his way back to his apartment to dress for the theater that Tennant ran across the wizen apache of the Saint-Sulpice gang who had told him a day or two earlier that Guillaume Nordeg, the butcher, had "ways of earning money with which the late lamented Joan of Arc would have been decidedly unfamiliar."

He met him as he was taking a short-cut through one of those packed, crowded, noisy alleys on that side of the Seine where tumble-down mansions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lean against each other for mutual support, and echo to the shrill sounds and shouts and laughter of its motley population; bookbinders and cobblers, news-vendors and fruiterers, dealers in all kinds of second-hand odds and ends, locksmiths and knife-sharpeners and wheelwrights.

The meeting was rather violent. For Tennant, thinking deeply with puckered eyes searching the ground as if for the master-key to the Jarvet mystery, bumped smartly against the apache who came shuffling along from the opposite direction, slightly the worse for his evening libations of the cloudy, green liquor, the high-peaked cap pushed back on his round, close-cropped skull at a rakish, devil-may-care angle, velveteen peg-top trousers tightly encircling the ankles, pointed yellow shoes giving the finishing touch of effeminacy to this parasite of society.

"Ooff!" ejaculated the American as he bumped against the human obstacle, and then came a flood of foul invective on the part of the apache, a savage inquiry if the blankety-blank aristocrat thought that the streets of Paris were specially made so that he could promenade his blankety-blank aristocratic patent-leathers across the defenseless bodies of honest workmen, an invitation to Tennant to pick out his slab in the morgue right then and there, and an instinctive, feline reaching for the ever-ready dagger in the folds of the crimson shawl which was around his waspish waist.

But Tennant was the happy possessor of two valuable qualities: a splendid memory for faces and the circumstances under which he had seen them first, and a never-failing politeness, which he scotched only when brought into contact with the professional, self-satisfied stupidity of the metropolitan police.

Add to these two characteristics a keen

presence of mind, a boyish smile, and a soft voice, and there was small wonder that the apache dropped the handle of his dagger and screwed his features into a semblance of amiability when he heard the American exclaim:

"I beg your pardon! No bones broken, I hope. I had no idea you were ever in this neighborhood. Quite a ways from your regular beat of Saint-Sulpice, aren't you?"

The next instant the apache recognized him.

"Aha! The citizen who took such great interest in our friend, the butcher. And what brings you here. Perhaps—" He winked wickedly and blew a kiss in the air.

Tennant held out his cigarette-case—the calumet of Latin lands.

"Just going home," he replied, while the the other took a cigarette and lit it; then, since it was the apache who had first mentioned the butcher, he thought it safe to pursue the subject gently, and continued with the smooth, ready lie: "I thought of going up to the Rue Férou and buying about three yards of those sympathetic little pork sausages I saw in Nordeg's window."

The apache laughed.

"You'll have to curb your appetite or buy your supper somewhere else, citizen. Guillaume Nordeg has left the neighborhood. He drove away yesterday in a taxicab like a bloated capitalist. His shop is closed."

"What? He has left? Where did he go?"

Tennant's questions came sharp and crackling, like musketry fire, and the apache looked up, tense, suspicious, his eyes narrowing to tiny points, his nervous nostrils dilating. A criminal, the son and grandson and great-grandson of criminals, the comrade and chum of criminals, a hereditary enemy of society, he was quick at catching inflections of voice, quick at sensing who was the hound and who the hare, and, naturally, his sympathies were for the hare every time.

So he stuck his pointed chin forward truculently and snarled that *monsieur* the aristocrat was taking altogether too great an interest in the affairs of the quarter of Saint-Sulpice.

"Go back to your own part of town, citizen," he wound up. "Go back to your silk-hatted gentlemen and your painted, yellow-haired—" Here came an obscenity in vicious, metallic slang. "Back yonder"—pointing toward the lacy spires of Saint-Sulpice—"they do not like types of your kidney. Back yonder they'll tickle your ribs with five inches of forged steel. Go back to your kennel and bark at the moon!"

"Suspicious, aren't you?" asked Tennant calmly.

"Yes. Because you are—"

"An aristocrat? Wrong, my friend. I am an American, *and* a detective. I am Tennant!" He knew that all Paris was familiar with his name, nor was he surprised when a quick flame of fear and hatred eddied up in the other's eye.

"Yes; I am a detective," he repeated casually, and the gangster broke into another flow of foul invective, and extravagant and minute statement of what he—Bibi le Farceur, the acknowledged chieftain of the apache gang known as Les Sacrés Cœurs de Saint-Sulpice—thought of detectives. Detectives! The unmentionable so-and-so bloodhounds in the employ of the unmentionable so-and-so capitalists! People who sent honest men to the guillotine to help that pig of a government! Who had assassinated Anatole Jarvet!"

"Listen!" cut in Tennant's deep, tranquil voice. He had studied the other from his bullet-shaped head to his long, narrow feet. He had arrived at a conclusion, and now, as was his wont, he acted on the psychological result without wasting time in delicate preliminaries. Observe, feel, then hit straight from the shoulder, was his maxim. He put his hands on the man's shoulders, his gray eyes seeking the depths of the other's puckered, purplish-black ones.

"You are a Frenchman, aren't you?" he asked.

"Silly question; *bougre de saligaud!*"

"Answer!"

The pressure of Tennant's fingers on the apache's shoulders tightened, and the man,

primitive, thus admiring strength, looked up with a faint smile.

"Trying to force an answer out of me, are you? *Eh bien, mon petit*, you don't have to use force; nor will I have to defend myself with that little knife of mine. You ask me if I am a Frenchman, and I tell you I am what the intellectuals call a cosmopolitan. I am an anarchist. I believe in the Internationale. To hell with those bloodsuckers of capitalists, be they French or English or German! To hell with—"

"With France?" the question came icy, challenging.

"To hell with the government of France!" cried the man.

Tennant knew that he had won, and continued:

"I did not ask you about the government. The government is nothing; only an expression of temporary opinion by the temporary majority. I asked you, what about France; the land, the traditions, the soul, the courage of France? Would you send all that to hell, too?"

"A poet, are you?" came the sarcastic reply, though Tennant heard the slight tremor which ran through it. "Or are you perhaps a stump-speaker collecting converts for the Republican Party?"

"I am a detective, as I told you, and an American. But I love France. I work for France when I can. I would fight and suffer for France. And you, a Frenchman born and bred"—he continued with a hardly veiled sneer which made the other wince—"what would you do for France, besides cursing the capitalists and kicking against the government and assaulting the bluecoats?"

"I—I—" The man stammered. Then, the blood rushing to his face: "It was the government which I cursed. I did not curse France—no! I said 'to hell with the government,' not 'to hell with France!' I—I am a Frenchman!" And he repeated, wondering, dazed, halting, as if the words contained a tremendous spiritual truth which his stunted, tainted nature could not quite comprehend but was afraid to disregard: "A Frenchman—*nom de Dieu!*"

"First, last, and all the time?" asked Tennant, and then the other's echoing voice, as in a dream:

"First, last, and *all* the time!"

There was a silence. Unconscious of the teeming street life about them, of the people walking past them, staring, whispering, laughing at the strange spectacle of a rough gangster and a well-dressed gentleman conversing together earnestly, the two looked at each other as if to probe each other's soul.

Finally the apache spoke.

"I, too, would work for France. Would I fight and suffer? I don't know. I never had the chance; except three years in an Algerian convict regiment which I drew for nearly croaking a citizen."

"Then tell me. Where did Nordeg go to? It is important that I should know."

"Faith of a mouse! I don't know. But I'll keep my eyes peeled. Yes. I know your name and address. Who in Paris doesn't? Also, you know my name. Bibi le Farceur. The quarter of Saint-Sulpice knows my mug and my signature." he indicated his knife, smiling. "So do the police. And if ever you need me in a hurry—for France, mind you, not for that pig of a government—send word to the *Au Caveau*, a little restaurant in the Rue des Innocents, not far from the Halles Centrales."

And he walked away without another word while Tennant stepped into the nearest post-office, whence he telephoned to the Agence Ducastel.

It was Doumay's voice which answered across the wire.

"Good!" Tennant spoke into the receiver. "You're just the man I want. Remember Nordeg, the butcher of the Rue Férou? All right. He has left—shop closed—and I want him. I want him badly, Doumay! But don't arrest him, nor molest him, nor make him nervous in any way. Why? Oh, I am going to use him for bait to catch—"

"A fish?" came Doumay's laughing inquiry from the other end of the wire.

"No! A bird! What sort of a bird? An eagle, my boy; a big, black, iron-clawed eagle— You don't understand? Never mind! I'm not sure that I do myself—

yet!"—and he hooked the receiver back, left the post-office, and hurried home toward the Place Fontenoy.

CHAPTER XII.

FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.

IT was late when he reached his home. He knew he could not waste much time over his post-prandial coffee and perfecto and would have to hurry into his dress clothes if he wanted to get to the Théâtre Alexandre without missing the greater part of the first act. He had seen the play once before. Angele would come on about ten minutes after the curtain went up.

"Have dinner served right away," he said to the darky who opened the door. "Have my dress suit ready—get a move on."

"Yes, suh," and as he was about to shuffle away: "Lord Menzies-Kerr's come back, suh. He's in the dining-room having his cocktail."

But when Tennant hurried into the dining-room, a dozen eager questions crowding on his lips, Allistair Menzies-Kerr, looking rather handsome and stately and tragic in the orange glow of the light which hung low over the dining-table, got there ahead of him.

"I know," he said, and Tennant knew by the slight Scotch rasp in the man's voice that he was more excited than the words showed, "you've been to see Lantaigne and tried to jolly well pump him and didn't succeed, and now you think I am your meat, don't you?" And he continued, without waiting for a reply: "Save your breath, my South Carolinian friend. I sha'n't answer any of your questions."

Tennant felt slightly nettled at these remarks.

"I only meant to help you," he said stiffly.

"Thanks. I don't need help."

The answer was so ungracious that the American's habitual good-humor suffered a severe jolt—and reared.

"You don't, eh? Then why in blazes did you purloin my blue ulster and masquerade as me? Why did you sneak into the library of the Jarvet house a few hours after the murder and swipe the blotter with the remarks about the gentleman with the limp?"

"And suppose I did? What earthly good did it do me? That particular cat is out of its particular bag anyway. The *Etoile*, Raoul Steynard's paper, got a hold of that bit of news somehow. Here—take a look!"

Menzies-Kerr brought a paper from his pocket and dramatically pointed at the head-lines:

"*Who is the Gentleman with the Limp?*"

Tennant read. He crumpled the paper into a ball.

"Who the devil can have told Steynard?"

Then he considered. The Jarvet house had swarmed with policemen and reporters after the murder and the arrest of Angele Lantaigne. Doubtless, some of them belong to the Internationalist Party. Or perhaps one of them had been bribed; had seen and read the blotter. At all events, no matter how, the news of the cryptic letter had leaked out.

"I hope you had at least sense enough to destroy the blotter?" he asked the Scotchman, who smiled grimly, said he wasn't going to answer any more questions, and told Tennant he would accompany him to the theater—"unless you mind, old fellow. Lantaigne told me you were going."

They ate dinner in silence, and it was in silence that, in festive black and white, sitting side by side in the American's steel-gray, low-slung roadster, they buzzed down the boulevards in the direction of the Théâtre Alexandre—straight toward the dying sunset which was graying slowly into night.

Once or twice, as he slowed the car at a crossing, Tennant turned to his companion, words on his lips.

He was fond of the man. Erratic, eccentric, of unbridled temper, impatient of thwarted desires, supersensitive—yet was there something in the man's dark, northern nature which appealed to the American's mixture—racial, national American mixture—of idealism and love of the practical.

It was his idealism which spurred him on to catapult himself into the life of a man, nominally his friend, yet in reality jealously guarding its intimate sides from him; it was his utilitarianism which made him see that here was splendid human material frightfully wasted, which made him want to snatch this particular brand from the burning, to help the man out of whatever trouble he found himself in—and incidentally assist himself to find the missing links in the Jarvet mystery.

On the other hand, it was this same realization of practical values which told Tennant how useless it was to try to force Menzies-Kerr to talk. Might as well install a dictaphone in the pyramid or between the crumbling paws of the great sphinx; there would be no sound except shivering, ghostly echoes.

He remembered old days, seventeen years ago, in their boarding school at Geneva, when these sudden silent moods had overtaken the Scotchman, rising like a film of white mist out of the heather. Even when under the greatest provocation, when accused of something which he could easily have refuted, he had just bitten his lips and kept perfectly quiet, only his face growing a shade more pale.

It was so to-night. The man was very pale, but the next moment Tennant realized that it was not altogether inner turmoil which caused the paleness. For, bumping against him as the car took a corner, he smelt the pungent odor of opium. Menzies-Kerr must have been smoking the little black pellets freely of late. Again Tennant thought of the stale opium scent which had permeated the Jarvet library the evening of the murder.

A few minutes later the car slid to a stop in front of the Théâtre Alexandre and, going to the ticket-window to ask for their seats, the American noticed that two men in the outer lobby were looking curiously at his friend. They whispered to each other. Faintly Tennant heard the words: "Yes; the gentleman with the limp," and one of them pointed at the clumsy way in which Menzies-Kerr dragged his right foot when walking.

Tennant thought he recognized a reporter of the *Etoile* in the speaker and was going to speak to him, to remonstrate. But glancing at his companion, he noticed that the latter did not seem to have heard the remark, and so he kept his peace and entered the auditorium through the center doors while the two men disappeared through the left entrance which led into the pit.

The curtain must have been up several minutes, for the house was dark, the audience hushed, the play was in full swing and, just as they stepped into their stage-box, which squatted in baroque cream-and-gold outlines a few feet above the orchestra seats, Angele Lantaigne came on—a charming, girlish figure in white Chantilly lace, her hair piled into a glorious aureole, her slender white arms gleaming beneath the foamy tulle of her sleeves—with her opening lines:

"*Nerveuse! Pourquoi voulez-vous que je sois nerveuse, où prenez-vous que je sois nerveuse? Ce n'est pas que cela me fâche, mais on ne dit pas—*"

That was as far as she got.

For, suddenly, a shrill, kitelike whistle cut through the gloom of the house from somewhere in back of the pit. Twice repeated, like a signal, it caused Angele Lantaigne to stop, her arms stretched out rigid, speech frozen on her lips, staring with wide-open, fascinated eyes into the dark sea at her feet as if terror lay waiting there, ready to leap out upon her. It caused the audience to turn like one man, bewildered, nervous, as if to see and hear and absorb that same terror. It caused a shiver of apprehension—apprehension of the unknown, the unexpected—to run down Tennant's spine.

What was going to happen? What was brewing back in the pit? Just a shrill whistle—yes!—but, somehow, he did not like it. This was not a New York audience, roughly gracious, roughly good-humored. This was France—Paris—the thoughts raced through his brain like sheets of foam—

Came again the kitelike whistle.

Then, grotesque, monstrous, cruel, a flat, dead voice boomed out from the back rows:

"*Murderess!*"

Then other voices joined in, by ones and twos, in that same flat, leaden intonation:

"Murderess! Murderess!" repeating the word over and over again, without the slightest inflection or modulation, in an ever-swelling chorus that seemed to rise like a shriek of horror from the abyss of the damned, to glide and shift and swirl forward, toward the stage:

"Murderess! Murderess! Murderess!"

Then an ominous pause—like a monster's gigantic intake of breath—a shivering, sinister silence, followed by another cry, intoned first by only a single voice, then bloated into that same chorus of flat, dead voices:

"To the guillotine! To the guillotine!" syncopated by hisses and groans and accentuated by the staccato stamping of feet and walking-sticks—like an enormous, jagged, resonant mass of hate, poured out in thickly fluid form across the heads of the audience, straight toward the slim, girlish figure who stood there—wide-eyed, immobile, as if turned into stone.

Tennant felt as if something were plucking at the core of his heart. Nor was it altogether pity for Angele. It was something bigger, sweeter, finer than pity; something soft and tender and wonderfully human—

"Angele! Angele!" he strained his voice to a cracked pitch above the turmoil, and she heard. She became less rigid. The ghost of a smile flickered across her pale features. She looked toward the stage-box and caught Tennant's eye; she made a slight gesture, as of thanks, courage, hope—

Suddenly she whirled to the left. Her voice flew free and clear.

"No! No!" to a grimy stage hand who was flitting through the wings toward the electric button which would bring down the curtain. "I shall play—play through!"

She picked up her cue:

"*Nerveuse! Pourquoi voulez-vous que je sois nerveuse—*" to the juvenile who was playing across from her and who had stumbled in a half-faint against a property mantelpiece that was slowly tearing and ripping under his weight, while the people in the boxes and orchestra seats and balconies, admiring her pluck, started applauding frantically, while again from the pit there came the flat, crushing, grotesque chant of:

"Murderess! Murderess! To the guillotine!"

Still Angele was trying to carry her part through, by gesture and movement since her voice was drowned in the turmoil, when one of the men in the pit hurled a heavy malacca walking-stick across the heads of the audience, missing the girl's shoulder by the fraction of an inch. Amidst a chorus of yells and shrieks and curses, somebody rang down the curtain, somebody else found the electric switch which controlled the huge chandelier, turned it, and drenched the house in a flood of white light, and Tennant, looking toward the pit, saw the men who had caused the scene by their organized chant of "Murderess!"

They were sitting in a row—twenty or thirty of them—and he knew several of them by sight: Deputies of the Internationalist Party, political henchmen and hangers-on, ward-heelers from around the Quartier des Halles, reporters of the radical press, and a sprinkling of apaches—looking strangely out of place, with their peaked caps and crimson waist-shawls amidst the sober black and white.

In the center, erect, his hand which had thrown the walking-stick still raised above his head, stood Raoul Steynard, the editor of the *Etoile*, his gross, sensuous, purple-blotched face showing above his snowy shirt like a bloated balloon, and as he opened his mouth to fling a last, vindictive: "Murderess! Murderess! To the guillotine!" toward the descending curtain, the words seemed to drip from his sagging lips like so much deadly venom.

Tennant felt his muscles stiffen. For a moment he was not the detective, intent only on his craft, his search, on ferreting out the last crooked trail of the Jarvet mystery and bringing to the merciless light of day the grave, sinister threat that he felt beneath it, but just a man—an average, clean, decent American whose heart had gone out to that brave little girl.

He clenched his fists. But before he could decide what to do, with utter, unexpected suddenness—for the man through-

out had kept absolutely quiet, as if the whole thing didn't affect him in any way—Allistair Menzies-Kerr passed in front of his eyes like a streak of black and white. In spite of his limp, he cleared the box railing. He rushed through the orchestra seats, evading the ushers who were trying to close in on him and the policemen whom somebody had called in. On he ran, up the aisle, toward the pit.

There! He had reached Steynard. The editor's friends surged about Menzies-Kerr, but he flung himself free. His fist crashed between the man's eyes. But, even as Steynard tumbled back under the savage blow, his voice jerked clear through the sudden silence which had dropped like a pall:

"Ah! Milord Menzies-Kerr, the gentleman with the limp—the accomplice of *mademoiselle* the murderess!"

The next moment, Tennant reached his friend's side.

"Keep away!" he shouted to policemen and ushers. "I am Tennant! What—arrest him—for assault? And what about Monsieur Steynard? Why don't you arrest *him?* It was he who threw that stick at Mademoiselle Lantaigne! Good God, are you all in the pay of the Internationalist Party?"—and he hurried the Scotchman out of the theater, through the outer lobby, and into his motor-car.

Silently, as they had come, they returned, each a prey to his own thoughts. Silently they pulled up in front of their house on the Place Fontenoy. Menzies-Kerr stepped out first, while Tennant reversed the gear to back the machine into the little garage; and already the former had inserted the key into the lock when a man detached himself from the inky shadows of the doorway.

Menzies-Kerr seemed to recognize him at once, for he showed neither fear nor surprise.

"All right," he said, "I'll come with you."

He turned to his friend:

"Don't know when I'll be home;" and, without another word, he walked away by the side of the stranger, a man about his own height, who wore a flopping felt hat pulled over his eyes and an overcoat which was very large around the hips.

Tennant, looking after them, saw that both men walked with the same limp, dragging the right foot as if a heavy weight were attached to it. He was about to follow them, to shadow them, when a frizzy head appeared in the open window above him, and a familiar voice inquired:

"That you, suh?"

"Yes, George. What's the matter?"

"Nuthin' exac'ly the matter, suh. But a gentleman brought a letter for you a while back—an' he said it's mighty impo'tant, suh."

"All right, George. Coming up!" he answered.

A moment later, Tennant, in his room, was opening the sealed letter which his servant had given him. It was a short typewritten communication, and said simply:

> Come to-night at twelve o'clock sharp to the restaurant Au Caveau in the Rue des Innocents. Bring with you the map of French Indo-China which you found in the late M. Jarvet's library. Order a pewter of beer. Drink it. Put the map inside, and ask the waiter to have it refilled. He will bring it back. Inside you will find five hundred thousand dollars in American bank notes.

There was no signature. Tennant thought for a while. Au Caveau, Rue des Innocents, the same place which the apache, Bibi le Farceur, had given him as address if he ever needed his help "for France!"

He looked at his watch. It was a little before ten. Then he called up Doumay.

"Hello! That you, Doumay? Found our butcher yet? No! Keep on looking! By the way, you don't happen to know an expert forger, do you? Yes! An expert forger; that's what I said. You do know one? Bully for you! Send him straight over to my apartment; as soon as possible.

He turned to the servant.

"Mix me a mint julep, George. I deserve one!" And he stretched himself luxuriously on the couch while waiting for the aromatic drink—and the forger.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

A Grass Orphan



by

Franklin P. Harry

YOUNG BENNINGS and the pick-up girl sat on the darkest bench he could find in the garishly lighted riverside park that went by the name of Beauty Beach.

Across from them, in a big, dusty, creaking pavilion, a "Jazz" band squealed and hammered, the dancers fringed by a swarm of rushing, soiled-white-aproned waiters. Glasses clinked and orders were shouted. Just between them and it a flippant crowd jostled; beyond the beshrubberied gateway at the right departing surface-cars alternately shrieked and purred.

The demure little pick-up was sipping timidly at a glass of strange-tasting lemonade but recently set before her, flavored by the adroit wink her companion had bestowed upon the dusky waiter when he had ordered.

How simple that had been! Bennings was immensely tickled with the ease with which he had made himself understood. Twenty-four hours out of the woods and already playing the big game like an old-hander!

"Don't you worry," he lied glibly, smiling up from his watch, "you've got lots of time. I won't let you overstay."

"Oh, please!" she murmured, her shy, disturbing gray eyes meeting his for a moment. "Grandfather will lock the door, and—"

"And what then?" smiled the boy encouragingly.

"Make me sit on the steps all night and send me back home to-morrow. Then I'd lose my only chance to study music."

"Couldn't you tell him your girl friend had a party and persuaded you to stay later? Shucks! Let's dance some more and do some of the amusements and have a real live time."

"No; he said eleven," she said sadly, her eyes hungry upon the crowd. "You don't know my grandfather!"

"If I don't," he said lightly, "I know two of my own, either of them a match for him. Think of it! Two!"

"Heavens!" she laughed, her glass half-finished and her eyes lighting up. A delicious color came creeping into her cheeks and, he noted, a certain amount of reassurance in her voice.

"Fact! And I live with both of them—alternately. They raised me from a little kid. Every six months I change homes. I suppose I'm a grass-orphan."

"A what?"

"Well, I'm not a real orphan, for my father and mother are both living, but they couldn't hit it off together. Each went home to pa, and I was switched about on a six-months basis.

"Ever since then I've 'taken after' mother's father, or father's father, accordcording to who was keeping me at the time, for each took me and decided to bring me up true to pattern."

"The idea!" The girl laughed and jiggled the ice in her glass. "And then?" she asked.

"Well, from then on, naturally, every half-year my view-point was changed. Couldn't have been otherwise, for they are about as near alike as a Plymouth Rock rooster and a brindle bull pup. And each tried his darnedest to fit me to his mold."

"Of course you're joking." Her eyes danced at him. "But how did it turn out?"

"Great!" Bennings laughed, albeit a bit ruefully. "You've heard of dual personalities? Dr. Jekyll stuff, you know."

"Yes," she nodded encouragingly.

"Well, they made me one better. I've got three. Talk about being complex!

"A small part of the whole business is myself, but the most of me is grandfather. The Bennings strain is the strongest, or at least crops up the most. However, when I begin to realize it, the other usually horns in and sets things straight. He—"

"I never heard anything half so interesting. And was it your Grandfather Bennings that made you notice me and dance with me all the evening, when there were so many prettier girls about, and let me have such a good time?"

She said it shyly, yet with a certain amount of impudence that stirred his blood afresh. He regarded her closely. Behind her awkward schoolgirlishness, if he knew women, lay the real thing. He had felt it from the start. Once he had broken down that little barrier of prudishness with which she had surrounded herself, he was sure he would find a good little sport.

"No," he said decidedly, "that was *me!* But Grandfather Bennings was strong with women, that's a fact. Used to be one of those gay dogs that thought they were hitting the high mark by drinking out of their lady's slipper. Claims he's still got an eye for a pretty girl."

He moved over a trifle, intoxicated by her faint perfume.

"But *I* saw *you*," he said.

"That's nice," she sighed, "though you won't find me a bit interesting. I've never had a chance to go anywhere or see anything. I slipped away to come here. It's my first time. Mary met that boy she knew right after we got here, and I just stood about, growing lonesomer and lonesomer." That amused Bennings. "I wouldn't tag after them," she added stoutly. "I can't bear to be a third party."

She pouted deliciously. He watched her until her features relaxed. He was wondering how long it would take to kiss a pout like that away.

"I lost fifteen minutes screwing up courage to come over and speak to you," he confessed. "You're the first girl I ever talked to without an introduction. But that was because I knew every girl in my home town from the time I was born, almost, and this is my first time to get away alone.

"I read and heard a lot; now I'm here to see for myself. I got in last night late. I spent all day to-day changing my hick clothes for something else. Had to start right, you know."

It was evident that he was satisfied with the change. The little pick-up followed him with flattering interest.

"Then, after dinner to-night, I got on a street-car and asked the conductor where I could find the liveliest place about town. Somewhere with a bit of pep to it and a chance to see something different. He mentioned Beauty Beach—and there you have it."

"But no one would ever believe it! I mean," she explained admiringly, "that you look like you've been used to this all your life—your clothes, and your way, and the things you say."

"That's because people are pretty much the same everywhere," he explained patiently, vastly pleased. "This is just like Boville on a Saturday night, only speedier. Here the dial-hand points fifty, there about twenty-six, flat.

"I feel at home, because I knew what to expect. I guess"—confidently—"when it's all summed up, there's not so many new wrinkles that I'm not already hep to."

The pick-up girl's hand, crushing her handkerchief, had fallen upon the seat between them, and Bennings casually dropped his so that his wrist touched her fingers. They trembled, stilled, but were not withdrawn.

Her name was Dorothy, he felt sure. Nothing else would suit. He had named her Dorothy in that first satisfied glimpse he had caught of her, standing wistfully at

the edge of the dancing-floor, so startlingly unlike the other girls about her.

Whatever it might turn out to be, Dorothy, he felt certain, she should always be to him.

There was an indefinable, appealing something about her simple, blue linen dress with its wide side-pockets, its youthful white cuffs and its flat, white collar; about her small, white, rubber-soled oxfords that were practically heelless and which made her look smaller; about her white panama, encircled by a demure, cool-blue band like her dress, from under which he caught attractive glimpses of her dark hair. He was almost certain that she had rolled it up to-night for the first time.

Just a foolish kid, a flapper, a squab, he thought, making believe it was grown up. A regular infant, in this—incubator! That also made him smile. For Beauty Beach seemed all the conductor had claimed for it, and gave promise of being even more.

His eyes saw more than hers, else they could not have kept their innocent gray, and his ears heard and translated things undoubtedly Hindustani to hers.

She saw what she came to see—lights, color, and a good-natured crowd. The surface of things sufficed. Those, and the fact that she had run away to achieve it, seemed to have wrapped her in the folds of a great adventure.

He glanced slant-eyed at her, his hand closing over her fingers, and noted the soft curve of her cheek that was warmer looking now, the fine sweep of her long lashes, the dusky pearl of her throat that the open V of her collar exposed.

She was exquisite! He marveled at his luck.

He had not made his choice in a hurry. Jewish girls, Slavs, Polish, Bohemians; girls unmistakably Irish, and others that might have claimed any other nationality, yet all of the same kind—red-lipped, swagger, bold-eyed, smiling—had filed by him as he lounged and smoked on the dancing-pavilion steps.

They called to him, mutely, after a fashion, yet in the oldest language in the world, and, though he readily understood, he had waited and bided his time. And, in that, the strain of Grandfather Bennings showed strongly.

He saw her.

She did not call, but she was there at the beach, which was all-sufficient. He was no fool. Though timidly, she readily accepted his advances. That was an hour and a half ago.

She was not nearly so timid now. She had learned to laugh, a trifle excitedly the last fifteen minutes, to drop some of her quaint reserve; to dance much closer to him.

He began to plan ahead when she should discover how late it actually was. To her constant inquiries he had shifted the time until he was more than a half-hour behind his watch. A half an hour more! Another "lemonade" or two!

Into the little charmed silence that had fallen between them a strange voice—voices—suddenly spoke. Two men had sauntered up behind them. Taken unawares, the very thing happened that Bennings had feared, and he was too slow-witted to switch her attention.

"Well, let's beat it," suggested one. "I'm on a new job, and I've got to get up early in the morning."

"G'won; it's not late yet. Why, the chickens haven't begun to roost."

There sounded the decisive snap of a watch-case.

"It's half-past ten. It'll take me an hour to get home and hit the hay. If you're not coming—good night!"

"*Half-past ten!*"

The little pick-up sprang to her feet, her eyes wide, a quick hand at her throat.

"Is it?" she cried. "Oh! Look quickly!"

"Y-es," he stammered, glancing at his own watch, "but don't get excited. What's it matter? I'll see that you get home safely."

He caught her hand to pull her back upon the seat.

"It's nearly an hour's ride," she said dully, her hand to her eyes with a queer gesture; "and I had—I *had* to be home by eleven. I thought you just said it wasn't quite ten."

She dropped weakly on the bench beside

him, crumpled, piteous, staring hopelessly at the ground.

"There! There!" Bennings said cheerfully, sliding an arm along the back of the bench and beginning to pat her shoulder. If not the speech, at least the persuasiveness of an older generation crept to his tongue.

"Don't you worry, kid. Life's too short. You just leave it to me. I'll see you through!"

"You couldn't do anything," she moaned, "but make it worse. He said he would lock the door, and he will. Don't you realize what that means? We live in an old part of the town, among the foreigners, and there is not one I could go to at this hour of the night. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow's way off," he reminded her eagerly. "You've never had a real good time—and neither have I. The mischief's done—let's make the best of it. We owe it to ourselves. Let's dance some more, and have a bite to eat. I'll find you a better place to stay than your front door-step.

"We've never had a chance—you or I—let's make this a *big night*. Something we can remember. You might never have such an opportunity again, if he really sends you home. You've got the makings of a rare little scout in you. Come on."

The elder Bennings could not have put it better.

She made a dab or two at her eyes and stared wistfully at the thinning crowd. Again her lips framed that adorable pout, and again he studied them in delightful speculation. Step by step he followed her thoughts.

He liked that tilt of her chin. It meant, he imagined, that she could play a losing game without going to pieces. Once she decided, he could rest easy, for there would be no further fuss or hysterics.

Unconsciously a queer admiration and respect for her had arisen within him, born of the battle she was fighting; a vague, almost chivalrous something that he would have scouted at had he but have realized it. It was something decidedly not "Bennings."

Suddenly she stood before him, one hand thrust in her pocket, the other held friendly out to him, a little swagger lurching her shoulders, her speech choked.

"No, I'll be going," she said firmly, when her voice cleared. "I'll take my medicine, but my conscience will be clear. You've—you've been just awfully kind."

It slew the Grandfather Bennings in him with one blow. Like a cork, that small portion of him that was really himself came to the surface. Probably it wouldn't have had she not tried to smile bravely, with her moist gray eyes, and her chin wavering!

A moment before every one of his senses clamored; now he stood like a boob, his own eyes blinky and his throat growing thick.

"See here, now, you can't go off like that!" he growled. "Of course not. I'll bust something but what I'll get you to town in time."

"Oh, if you only could!" She pounced on his arm eagerly; a pathetically hopeful note in her voice.

He whirled down through the crowd and the beshrubberied entrance.

"A taxi!"

She pointed joyfully. He followed her gaze.

"Right-o!"

They sprinted half a block along the car-tracks. A listless, half-asleep driver sat in the lonely machine.

"Take you up, but I can't wait up there," he said briskly to Bennings's inquiry. "Got to be back here in less than an hour."

He swung the door open, his bored, sophisticated eyes confidently reading them.

"Where?" There was just the faintest flicker of an eyelid as he addressed Bennings. The little pick-up had lost no time in climbing in. "Highlandtown's the nearest place," he added in a lowered tone.

In his sudden lofty mood the insinuation came as an insult to Bennings. Earlier in the evening he would have gratefully welcomed the tip. He dared not risk the folly of offending the fellow.

"Bond and Ann Streets," he snapped coldly, and added, with fine contempt: "An extra five if you make it before eleven!" Then he slammed the door viciously after him.

The car leaped ahead so violently that it sprawled him awkwardly across the seat.

"You'll never be sorry for this!" a tremulous voice breathed in his ear. A sound followed it not unlike a stifled sob.

"Don't cry!" He put out his arm, found her near him in the darkness, and drew her yet closer. "Poor kid," he said huskily.

Her shoulders heaved, her hand was very close to his, he was alive to the faint odor of violets and, with every lurch of the car, to the fact that the brim of her hat was most cruelly sharp when it smote his eyes.

For minutes they bumped over dark, rough streets; they swung around corners that flung her tighter in his clasp; they sped out, at last, upon a velvety, smooth, narrow street, and she put aside his arm gently, sat up, and gracefully straightened her hat.

"Here," she said, glancing out as the taxi halted. "Five minutes' grace," she whispered. "The clock—up there!" He had climbed out and swung her down. "Don't come, please—and, oh! thank you so much!"

He felt the quick pressure of her fingers and she darted away, across the street and down the darker one that intersected.

He stared after her stupidly. The shadows had swallowed her up before he realized that she was gone. Gone, and he had made no arrangement to see her again; did not know where she lived; her name! Was it Dorothy? But she was gone. A sort of panic seized him.

"Hey! Come across! Come across! Chase the skirt after you've delivered!"

Bennings had started after her. The chauffeur leaped from his machine and advanced upon him with outstretched hand and lowering countenance.

"Four dollars, please!" The polite word at the end was so skilfully manipulated that it became maddening. And, matching it: "Five extra, for the time I made."

Bennings willed to meet it by flinging him a ten-spot, and forthwith his hand sought his inner pocket. He felt, and felt again, bewildered.

The contemptuous one read the signs.

"And your watch and stickpin, too?" he sneered in honeyed accents.

"Yes," Bennings had to admit weakly, after a hasty examination. "Gone—cleaned out! Trimmed!"

He continued the hunt mechanically.

"Here!" From a trouser-pocket, through sheer luck and carelessness, he brought forth a couple of bills and a handful of loose change. It was doubly humiliating to piece it out, quarter by quarter, but he finally found that he had the desired amount.

"I could have put you next," the chauffeur jeered, sliding it into his pocket, "but you seemed to know it all. Guess you'll be wise to Jitney Jess the next time you see her. Third time, to my knowledge, that she's pulled off that stunt. Dresses the part all right, don't she? But to think that she missed your pants-pocket!"

Bennings stood petrified.

Surprised, hurt, his little rose-colored dream all torn and bedraggled, the grass-orphan, just himself, held the stage for possibly the longest period he could remember. The taxi-driver seemed to be enjoying it immensely.

"What did you think the beach was—a kindergarten?" he tormented. "You little hick sports ought to bring a nurse with you."

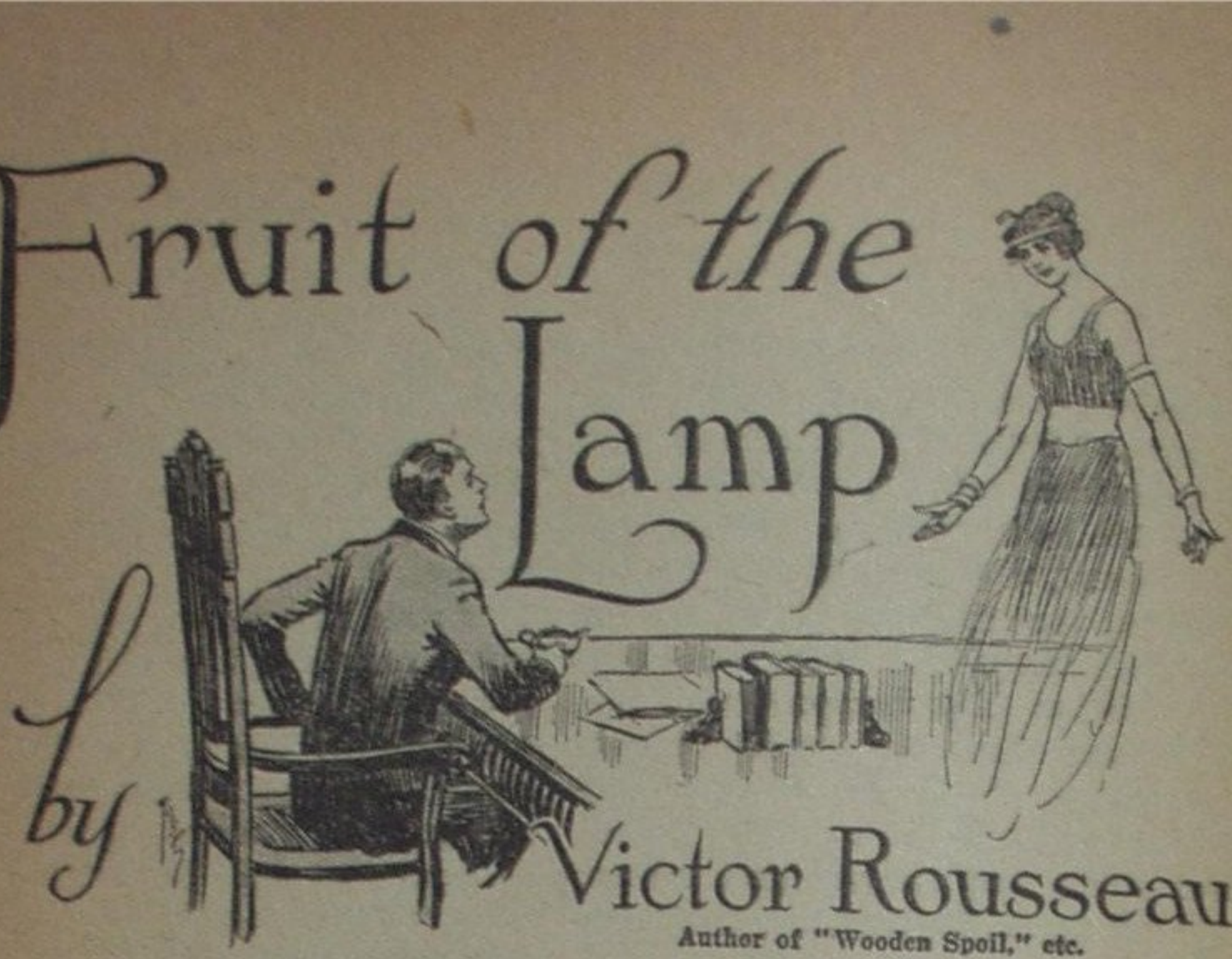
Suddenly a dapper little whirlwind, a sartorial typhoon sprang into life and bore down upon him. It was the antidote for Grandfather Bennings. The unbelievable small-town dude seemed to have two rocks for fists and a force behind them like a catapult in action.

Before the chauffeur could gather himself together, the cool and now smiling youngster had jabbed him in the wind, had nearly split his lip, and had felt out and caught him a peach of a clip on the point of his jaw. The asphalt rose up behind him. Actually whistling, the maelstrom walked over him and then proceeded quickly down the street.

And the latter was not pretense—the whistling—for Bennings's mind was as clear as a bell, his feelings as unruffled as a forest-pool, for the great counter irritant had arrived.

That, may it please you, was his other grandfather—one Timothy O'Toole!

Fruit of the Lamp



by Victor Rousseau

Author of "Wooden Spoil," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

MERVYN WESTFIELD, having lost his fortune and a considerable amount belonging to his *fiancée*, visited the Harlem flat of an ex-Arabian explorer to have a valuation placed upon an ancient manuscript with a view to selling it. He learned that it was worth five dollars; but he was presented with an apparently worthless lamp by the mysterious ex-explorer—who had become a rent collector—and found that when he rubbed it a fairy appeared, Aladdinlike, to obey his wishes.

The fairy, or jinnee, was a beautiful girl who, unfortunately, longed to wed a human. She restored Mervyn's fortunes and the affection of the girl he had been engaged to marry, but developed a habit of appearing in his apartments at hours when no respectable young man should be entertaining a lady. Once, in disappearing, she forgot to take her slipper with her, and Mervyn was desperately put to it to lie himself out of trouble with his *fiancée*, Donna Sellers. He beseeched Ayesha, as the beautiful jinnee called herself, to be more discreet, but the poor spirit could not understand, and one day she appeared and broke up a tête-à-tête with Donna.

"That's quite enough for me, Mr. Westfield," said his *fiancée* with superhuman calm; and after she had left the room Mervyn found that Ayesha, the beautiful spirit, also had vanished.

CHAPTER XV.

REVERSE MAGIC.

MERVYN, seated in his library the following morning, reflected madly upon the events of the preceding night.

He had gone to Donna Sellers's home, and had been refused admittance; he had paced the streets like a lunatic till half past two, then, utterly worn out and bewildered, he had returned home to tumble into bed, there to toss about restlessly till morning.

Williamson, after setting down his coffee and toast, had assumed an attitude, and thus delivered himself:

"Mr. Westfield, sir, I'm sorry to say I'll have to ask you to find another butler at the end of the month."

Mervyn raised his eyebrows in polite surprise.

"To the best of my remembrance, Williamson, you have already presented me with that ultimatum, and afterward requested me to overlook it."

"I've thought it often enough, sir, but I don't know that I've given you notice before. I think not, sir," said the butler humbly.

"Then your memory must be singularly short, Williamson. May I ask why?"

"As your butler, sir," returned Williamson with dignity, "it isn't for me to pre-

This story began in The Argosy for February 2.

sume upon my place to say. As man to man, sir—"

"Go on as man to man, Williamson," replied his master.

"It's on account of them females, sir," said Williamson with dignity. "I don't say as how a single young man can't be jolly with his friends of all the sexes. But when an engaged young gentleman, what's going to marry an angel, entertains circus performers, and other kinds, what walks in on him and walks off with checks for twenty thousand dollars, which respectable men is asked to cash, and be seen side by side in the street with them, and be tickled under the chin with a hat-feather in a public bank"—evidently Gladys had displayed some exuberance of spirits with regard to Williamson—" why, I must give notice, sir.

"And when a man what has worked faithfully for his master for years on end has it says that he drinks, sir, him being a teetotaler ever since he took the pledge at the age of nine, by a performer of circus tricks—why, I feel that I can't stay, Mr. Westfield," the butler added.

"I'm sorry you overheard my cousin's remarks," said Mervyn. "I didn't believe it myself, if that's any comfort to you. But I thought you were at the bank at the time."

"Asking your pardon, Mr. Westfield, it was to my own face that the young person made the remarks," returned the butler, asking me whether I could bring myself to marry the lady clerk at her hotel, provided she was wearing a black veil in a dark room and I was blind with intoxication, sir."

"Oh, Ayesha!" groaned Mervyn under his breath.

"Oh, sir, I'm venturing to appeal to you now as man to man," continued the butler, growing agitated. "If you can't be moved by your innocent angel bride, think of your noble uncle and your saintly aunt. Shun all such company. I know," said Williamson, working himself into a state that bordered on frenzy, "I'm only a butler, sir; but I'm a man for all that, and I have long felt like your father, sir."

With these words Williamson had withdrawn, leaving Mervyn to meditate upon his sins.

Mervyn did not do much meditating upon the subject of Williamson. Beside him lay his mail, of the usual size, with the morning newspaper. Picking up the latter, he was astonished to see, in staring headlines, that a financial panic had occurred on the preceding day. Among the long list of banks that had failed was the name of the Mercantile and Communal.

Prominent among the causes was said to be the financial manipulations of the notorious Mervyn Westfield, who, with low and unscrupulous cunning, had "rigged" the market, gone behind the backs of his confederates, and, in attempting to scoop in a colossal fortune, had only succeeded in ruining himself and the firm of brokers which he employed.

Incidentally. Pequonsets were being offered at 90, and there were no bids.

At the top of the pile of letters was one from Clark. Mervyn tore it open. The letter, which was written by hand, informed him, amid a torrent of invective and reproaches, that the writer, Clark, was a ruined man; that Mervyn was the cause of his downfall, and that he considered it only his due to take possession of all moneys accredited to him upon his books before departing for a place where the detectives would never find him.

As Mervyn flung down the letter, he saw the heading of another column in the newspaper. It announced the flight of Clark and his expected arrest; also, the expected arrest of Mervyn.

Williamson's voice was heard among a babel of other voices outside. There seemed to be a struggle in the passage. Mervyn went out, to find it full of newspapermen.

"Mr. Westfield! Mr. Westfield!" they shouted wildly. "A statement. Your butler won't let us in."

"He is doing quite right," said Mervyn.

"You'd better change your view-point then, mighty quick," snarled a gaunt, red-haired fellow. "You are aware of the importance of a friendly press—"

"In this critical juncture," added another.

"Mr. Westfield, as a personal friend—" began the little man who had obtained an aphorism on a previous occasion.

"Not a word to say, gentlemen!"

"You'll have a better chance to talk now than in the Tombs!" yelled the red-haired man.

"Get out!" roared Mervyn, thoroughly aroused.

A youngish man approached him with a defiant gesture and struck at him. Mervyn aimed an answering blow, which, however, fell short, owing to the youngish man's retreat into the bedroom.

"Come out of there!" shouted Mervyn, pursuing him toward the window, where the youngish man was taking refuge.

As he reached the light, he heard five cameras snap. He spun round, to find that he had been snap-shotted from the hall. The youngish reporter grinned and suffered himself to be led roughly out.

"Just a word," pleaded a vivacious, dark-haired young man. "Are you still going to marry Miss Sellers? What is her view of the situation?"

"Had Mr. Sellers any money invested in Pequonsets?"

"Was it a love match?"

"Is it true you paid Mrs. Sellers's debts?"

Mervyn rushed at the nearest man like a bull. The force of the impact sent him staggering against the next, and the conveyed momentum was transmitted in turn to the man nearest the door of the hall; so that, toppling like tenpins, they went into the passage outside, and Mervyn and Williamson locked the door on them.

Meanwhile the telephone had been ringing furiously. Mervyn took down the receiver. He heard the voice of Uncle Jabez.

"Where's my five thousand dollars?" roared his uncle.

"I don't know, uncle," answered Mervyn. "I have only just heard the news."

"You scoundrel!" shouted Uncle Jabez. "Where's my money and interest? Do you think I sit all day in my office, working for my hard-won earnings, to enable a young thief to squander it?"

"Order, uncle, order!" answered Mervyn, holding up one finger, under the momentary impression that Uncle Jabez could see it. "I only know what I've seen in the papers. It can't be as bad as it seems."

"Damn the newspapers!" yelled Uncle Jabez. "I want my money and interest, or I'll have you arrested."

"You can't, uncle," said Mervyn. "You yourself offered to lend me the money. You took my advice on an investment before I gave it to you. I'm sorry you were so foolish, but you will recall your own words on that subject."

"Will you pay me back my money?" shrieked Uncle Jabez. "Where's my five thou—"

The last word was, however, cut in twain by Mervyn's hanging up the receiver and withdrawing into his library.

"Who's next?" he soliloquized. "It ought to be— Ah! Good morning, Mr. Jeffries."

Mr. Jeffries came in with a much more determined manner than on the occasion of his former visit. He flung his hat on the table and posted himself aggressively in front of Mervyn.

"The total cost of the work which you have commissioned me to undertake is two hundred and nineteen thousand four hundred and seventy-six dollars, with hollow tiles," he said. "Two hundred and seven thousand nought nought eight, without hollow tiles. You will appreciate that present circumstances make it advisable for you to settle as promptly as possible."

"I am afraid you haven't read the newspapers, Mr. Jeffries," said Mervyn. "If you had, you would have realized that, according to their statement, I am a wreck awaiting salvage — for the benefit of my creditors."

Mr. Jeffries flushed angrily.

"I don't appreciate the simile, Mr. Westfield," he answered. "Possibly I am deficient in the sense of humor, for what you say makes no appeal to that quality. The question is, are you going to pay me my money and the money which I have laid out on your account for others?"

"It looks unlikely," returned Mervyn, "although, of course—"

"Damn you!" shrieked Mr. Jeffries, suddenly becoming galvanic. "Pay me my money, do you hear? Think I can live on air? You've got millions salted away, you swindling cheap skate. Are you going to pay me my money?"

"Not to-day," said Mervyn firmly; and, taking the little man by the shoulders, he conducted him, much as if he were a resisting frog, into the hall of the apartment-house, where he left him shaking his fist and vowing vengeance.

Apparently the sight had proved too much for the nerves of the next caller, the furniture man, who came in in such a towering rage that Mervyn had to cow him with a display of fists. The furniture man having been got rid of, Mervyn instructed Williamson to admit nobody else, and to leave the telephone unanswered.

Looking out of his library window, he perceived a small house entrance. He was seen, for a shout went up; then a policeman appeared and slowly urged them off the curb into the roadway, where they stood, looking up at him and making threatening gestures.

"I may as well know the worst," said Mervyn to himself, and rang up Donna in a momentary silence that followed a ferocious and unanswered call from somebody.

"Yes?" he heard the voice of the maid answer.

"Will you tell Miss Donna that Mr. Westfield wishes to speak to her?" said Mervyn.

"Miss Donna says for me to say she says she's out, sir," the maid responded.

"Thank you," responded Mervyn, and went back into the library.

He had expected some such reply, for he knew that he had offended Donna beyond redemption, and only the lamp could save him now. He must summon Ayesha again and bid her work his will; then, if he could not send her back into the astral light forever, he must bear with her.

He had seen this clearly since the beginning of his troubles that morning; in fact, he had meditated upon it since the door was shut in his face that same morning at a very small hour. It was evident that something had gone wrong with the power, probably due to his having left the lamp behind him when he had gone to Brooklyn. He would have to rectify everything, live with the lamp, and, perhaps, bear Ayesha's earthly presence in the guise of his Turkish cousin.

He looked toward the lamp. There it stood on the little table where he had placed it. Its partly polished surface seemed to grin at him. It had, in addition, a certain smoothness—blandness, it might be said.

Mervyn got up and went toward it; deliberately he placed one hand on it and rubbed it briskly.

"I want everything to be as it was this hour yesterday," he said. "Also, I want Donna to love me with all her heart, and never to be distressed about Ayesha or my money, or to ask me questions about them."

He turned away and went to the window. It was true Ayesha had not appeared in answer to his summons, but her vagaries had ceased to perplex him. Mervyn looked down the street.

There stood the little crowd of creditors, and they shook their fists at him.

It certainly seemed odd. Mervyn had a happy thought. He resolved to call up Uncle Jabez and see if he had changed.

He did so, and Uncle Jabez had not changed in the least. On the contrary, so furious were his words that he would have jeopardized his standing in Washington Avenue if a tithe of them could have been heard there. Mervyn, not wishing his uncle to die of apoplexy, hung up the receiver and went back into the room.

He could not understand it. Surely the lamp was not going to play him false at such a critical time!

He placed his hand on it and rubbed it again.

"I want Donna to appear in my library immediately without being frightened or realizing that she hasn't walked here, and I want her to tell me that she loves me," he said.

He drew his hand away and looked about him, but there was no Donna.

Mervyn became frightened and desperate.

"I want to see my left shoe on my right foot and my right shoe on my left foot as soon as I have counted five," he said. "One, two, three, four—five!"

He looked down at his feet. The right and left shoes rested snugly in their accustomed places.

Mervyn tried once more.

"Ayesha! I want you here instantly," he said, rubbing the lamp with all his might. "I want Ayesha here."

He waited, but there was no Ayesha. The lamp had gone back on him. The power was gone.

Then, looking at the lamp closely, Mervyn made a discovery which came as near to raising his hair on end as any discovery can.

The lamp was a different one! It had been changed! A clever but palpable imitation now stood on the side table.

Mervyn dashed for the bell, and Williamson appeared.

"Williamson, who was here last night?" he demanded.

"Nobody, sir," replied the butler. "Not a soul called since Mr. Bland."

"Mr. Bland!" Mervyn exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. He called yesterday, just after you went out with Miss Sellers, sir."

"Did he bring anything? Did he take anything away?"

"No, sir, not that I remember," the butler answered.

"Thank you. You may go, Williamson," said Mervyn.

And, being alone, he walked toward the library shelves and gazed musingly at the books on them. So Bland, who coveted these, had learned his secret and stolen the lamp. How? Why?

Then the explanation came to him. Bland must have learned it from the Arabian manuscript which he had borrowed. And he had come to pry, possibly even to steal the lamp, that day when he sneaked into the library, believing Mervyn to be away.

If Bland had not then suspected the truth, there was no doubt that Mervyn had put him on the right track by his ill-timed boasting about his money. Bland had discovered Mervyn's secret, had entered the apartment and substituted an imitation lamp for that of Aladdin.

Yet, if Bland had done this some twenty hours before, why had he not availed himself of the lamp to remove the books he wanted?

The explanation, Mervyn decided, must be that he had spent those precious hours preparing for flight. Obviously he would fly; for, though no court would believe in the full story, any court would convict the bookseller of the theft, if Mervyn could establish the facts.

"At any rate, I'll save my Caxton," said Mervyn, taking down the precious volume.

And as he held it in his hand his fingers clutched at emptiness. The Caxton had simply vanished from between his fingers.

"Yes, it's Bland all right, and he's at work now," said Mervyn. "I guess it's not too late to find him."

CHAPTER XVI.

A GOOD SPIRIT GONE WRONG.

BLAND was evidently at work; for, even as he stood there, Mervyn saw a number of gaps appear among his crowded books. The Warsaw Talmud faded suddenly into the astral light. The noisy thud of the falling dictionary disclosed the fact that one of the Lazaroni volumes had become dematerialized. Then, one by one, Mervyn saw his volumes vanish.

It was quite an eery sensation to stand there and see the inroads that Bland was making into his books. The library looked as if it had suddenly gone crazy. Volumes thundered down to right and left of him. Here was a little group of valueless publications which Mervyn had preserved for some reason of sentiment, standing like an oasis amid the wastes of shelves; there the great dictionary, flat on its side, kept company with a sixpenny edition of "Lorna Doone" and one of the poetical translations of the Loeb Classics.

Then Bland turned nasty. He picked up Mervyn's fountain pen and drew a lightning cartoon of Mervyn in profile on the wall-paper, facing the book-shelves. He tore up several quires of Mervyn's embossed stationery and strewed them on the floor. He materialized a savage cat in the waste-basket. As soon as Mervyn had chased her out of the apartment and come back, he found two old poached eggs on top of the gas log.

Whether because Bland's imagination

here failed him, or because he only wanted to display his power without pushing things to extremes, nothing more alarming than this occurred, with the exception of a large brass-headed and steel-pointed tack which Mervyn found, embedded bottom downward, in his comfortable chair at a subsequent period. Mervyn put on his hat, thrust on his overcoat, and went out of the house in a fury, resolved to settle accounts with Bland immediately. The creditors and newspapermen were gone.

Of course, he knew that Bland would not be discoverable. No man in his senses would play such tricks and remain within reach of an avenging arm. Mervyn realized before he had half reached Bland's store that the place would be closed. Should he go to his apartment? The matter was agitating his mind when he arrived in front of the book-shop and found it wide open.

He stopped and stared in amazement. He had underestimated Bland's insolence. Inside the store stood Bland, as large as life—which was not very large—lolling in his graceful manner against the shelf of new fiction, and chatting with an old lady in spectacles who was turning over the pages of the latest popular novel.

Mervyn pulled himself together and went in. Bland looked up, saw him, and nodded. Mervyn waited until the old lady had gone. In the back of the little store a young woman was busy cataloguing; she did not raise her head or pay the least attention to him.

Mervyn walked up to Bland and looked him in the eyes.

"You scoundrelly thief!" he said.

"Dear me, Mr. Westfield! Strong language!" answered Bland.

"Strong, but justified," said Mervyn. "Where is that lamp you stole?"

"My dear Mr. Westfield, have you taken leave of your senses?" asked the little bookseller.

"Don't prevaricate, you thief, or I'll break every bone in your body!" cried Mervyn, losing all self-control.

Bland retreated hastily toward the back of the store, snapped open a cupboard, and placed his hand inside. Before he could do more Mervyn had leaped upon him, torn him away, and flung the cupboard wide open.

Inside, where he had expected to find the lamp, he discovered only a little, dry-cell battery, a coil of wire, and a thumb-button.

"My dear Westfield," protested Bland, "I don't know what you expect to find, or whether you are bent upon wrecking my electric heating apparatus, but won't you sit down and try to calm yourself?"

Mervyn, realizing that he was making a fool of himself, collected his wits. He saw that he must match cunning with cunning. He glanced all about him for any place which might conceal the lamp, but found none.

Bland patted him on the shoulder soothingly.

"Now, my dear Westfield, control yourself, I beg," he said. "I understand your state of mind perfectly. Ah, Mr. Westfield, it was a dreadful shock to me to read in this morning's newspapers of your impending bankruptcy. I am so thankful that you didn't let me in on Pequonsets."

There was the same indescribable insolence in the bookseller's voice as of yore, blended with a conscious triumph, and hidden under an aspect of the utmost concern.

"I think I know the object of your journey here," Bland resumed. "You wish now to accept my offer of fifteen hundred for your books. That Warsaw Talmud, that Caxton which I have so long desired—I'd 'crowns resign to call it mine,' Westfield. Come! Fifteen hundred and ten dollars for everything, the ten to cover that cheap Arabian manuscript which you lent me for examination."

"You scoundrel! You damned hypocritical rogue!" burst from Mervyn's lips. "Do you know I can have you arrested for theft?"

Bland retreated a few steps farther, and now the leer of malice upon his face, no longer hidden, gave him the aspect of a satyr.

"What have I ever done to make you treat me in this way?" cried Mervyn.

"My dear Westfield! Really, my dear Westfield, I must ask you not to indulge in such language in the presence of my assistant," he said. "It sounds like—like

a cat in a scrap-basket. It isn't quite as you think. I got an unusual opportunity to have my wishes gratified. In point of fact, I am in an unusual position. I can do anything I like by simply wanting to. Miss Jessie!"

The girl who had been cataloguing rose from her seat and came forward smiling. There was a sort of eccentricity about her costume, and she wore quite a number of bracelets, which covered her forearms like golden brassards; but Mervyn did not think of that when he saw her.

"My cousin Jessie—from the East," said Bland. "Jessie, my dear, permit me to present an old and intimate business acquaintance of mine."

It was Ayesha—Ayesha who curtsied with a disarming smile and sought Bland's face with her eyes.

Mervyn felt choking under the indignity.

"Ayesha!" he cried, stepping toward her. "What are you doing here? Won't you come home?"

"If my lord wills," answered Ayesha, her eyes on the bookseller's face.

"But I'm your lord, Ayesha!" shouted Mervyn, grasping her by the arm. "Where has he put that lamp? Answer me at once and—and come home where you belong and stop this foolery!"

Ayesha burst into tears and sought her handkerchief with her free hand. Mervyn noticed that the D was still in the corner.

Bland looked quite angry. He stepped forward and thrust his face menacingly into Mervyn's.

"Take your hand off my cousin's arm, Westfield!" he demanded; and Mervyn obeyed. He obeyed in a sort of passive helplessness. He realized now that Ayesha had transferred herself, with the lamp, to Bland. The shop was swimming round him.

"Will you take a check for fifteen hundred for your books?" asked Bland, with sinister meaning.

"No," answered Mervyn slowly. "You know where I'll see you first, Bland. But I tell you what I will do. I'll thrash you so that you won't sit down for a week. Lord, why didn't I think of it before?"

His attitude must have been a menacing one, for suddenly Bland, who had been edging away from him, darted round a corner to the open cupboard which contained the electrical apparatus. He placed his thumb upon the button.

"I do wish you'd walk outside the store and not come back, Westfield," he said.

And Mervyn's feet began to carry him slowly but quite steadily toward the door. He struggled madly, but he was perfectly helpless. He saw himself in a little mirror upon the wall, fuming with anger, clenching his fists, but rigid from the waist down. His leg muscles were acting automatically, and he had no more control over them than if he had been a trunk upon some mechanism. Through all the agony of shame he heard Ayesha's merry laugh.

"Truly my lord is great!" she cried, clapping her hands. "Truly my lord is good. Never has his servant had a lord whose heart was so mirthful, or in whose shadow she could abide forever."

Even in his despair Mervyn was conscious of a slightly worried expression that flickered over the bookseller's face at the concluding words. And he felt a sudden hope, clear, though elusive, flit through his heart.

"You've got me, you ruffian!" said Mervyn fiercely. "But I'll best you. I'll—"

The shop door opened and an old lady came in. Bland hurried toward her down a parallel aisle.

"Good day, Miss Hope," he said, rubbing his hands. "Good day, Mr. Westfield," he added, meeting Mervyn where the aisles united, but keeping carefully out of the reach of any sudden blow. "I'm sorry that we can't oblige you this afternoon. It's done by long distance electrical transmission," he added in a low tone. "No, Mr. Westfield, we don't stock those popular tales. Stockbroker's literature we call them in the trade."

He opened the door, stood behind it, and kept bowing and smirking.

"Another day, Mr. Westfield," he said. "Fine afternoon."

He closed the door upon him.

Next moment Mervyn, suddenly free, charged for it like a buffalo.

He felt himself brought up short, about an inch from the glass. It seemed as if he had run into a wall of compressed air. Through the door he saw Bland, who was busy with the old lady, wink with indescribable solemnity.

Mervyn, quite beside himself with rage, withdrew and charged again. He met the same obstacle. And now he saw the bookseller hurrying back toward the rear of his shop. Mervyn might have reflected, but instead he struggled to penetrate the airy cushion with his hands.

Then an extraordinary thing happened. A large, one-volume edition of Johnson's Medical Dictionary, which had been reposing in a dusty sleep inside a box in front of Bland's window, suddenly rose, and, without the slightest undue haste, boxed Mervyn's ears and lay down again.

Mervyn drew back, and as he did so the bottom of one of his waistcoat pockets fell out, and his gold watch tumbled to the curb with a tinkling of splintered glass.

"I guess I've had enough," said Mervyn to himself.

He stooped and picked up his watch, shook it and ascertained that it was broken, and walked away.

His rage had suddenly burned itself out. He understood now the nature of the problem that confronted him. He realized it more and more as he made his way homeward in a brown study. Bland had the whip-hand of him. A man can fight any number of enemies if he has a stout heart and a clear conscience, but he cannot fight against miracles. And Bland's handicap was too great to be overcome.

Like the clean-minded fellow he was, Mervyn resolved to write to Bland and acknowledge his defeat. He had always had a respect for Bland; he was not conscious of having given him offense beyond assuming a very human air of superiority when he found himself free from Bland's clutches. Mervyn was a good loser, and white clear through. He did not doubt that the bookseller would meet his confession of defeat in a decent, manly spirit.

A little restored by these reflections Mervyn entered the apartment-house and walked up-stairs. As he opened the door he heard a voice in the hall that made all his pulses leap. The voice was Donna's.

Donna saw him and, with a little cry, she ran into his arms and raised her mouth to his.

CHAPTER XVII.

MICHAELWOOD APPEARS.

"I HAD to come to you, dearest," she said, after Mervyn had led her into the library. "I tried to make myself believe I didn't care for you after what happened yesterday. But the minute I heard about your losses I knew then that I loved you with all my heart."

She perched herself upon the edge of Mervyn's chair, and if a guilty remembrance of Ayesha stole through Mervyn's mind it was smothered in his new happiness.

"You're all that is left me, dearest," he said. "All the rest have fallen away, but you are true—steel true, Donna."

"I am so glad to hear you say that, Mervyn. Mother was in a towering frenzy this morning, but I just told her, and father, too, that I wasn't going to desert you in your difficulties. I love you all the better for them, dearest."

She put her arm about his neck and rested her cheek against his.

"I've been thinking about your cousin, Mervyn. I call her that out of loyalty to you, although, of course, she isn't. That's just your impulse to protect a poor, unfortunate girl who has given her heart to you. I know how chivalrous you are, Mervyn. And I don't care even if you did think you loved her once, so long as I know you only love me, and that you will never, never take her into your life again."

"Heaven forbid!" murmured Mervyn.

"And so I want you to know that I am altogether yours, dearest," continued Donna. "Through good and evil fortune, but especially through evil, until the good comes again. Only one thing could change me, Mervyn, and that can never come to pass."

"What is that Donna?" asked Mervyn curiously.

"The knowledge that there had ever been a woman in your life before we met," said Donna. "You may have thought you loved that girl in the inexperience of youth, but yours is not the nature to love falsely twice. She was the false love; I, Mervyn, am the true."

She looked so sweet in her solemnity that Mervyn, kissing her, knew what a load was lifted from his heart at last. This was the real Donna, under all the petulance and worldliness, the Donna whom he had seen with the intuition of love; the Donna he had gambled on—and won!

"Shall I tell you what I wished when I rubbed that stupid old lamp yesterday?" asked Donna shyly.

"What, dearest?"

"You'll think it very foolish of me. But sometimes I had felt—not really, you know, but after we had had our little quarrels—that you might not be absolutely the man of my dreams. I mean, the man of my dreams was perfect. I used to picture him before you came as a man of noble birth, with a high-sounding name, and the strength of a giant combined with the manners of a Bayard, prompt to avenge a slight to a woman, and quick to act upon his resentment."

"I'm afraid I'm not absolutely that, Donna," said Mervyn.

"Nobody can be perfect, dearest. When I loved you I knew that you were the only man whom I could ever love in my life. But when I rubbed that lamp I had such a silly wish. I wished—" She hesitated.

"Out with it, Donna."

"I wished that if ever I came here again, and we had a misunderstanding, the fairy of the lamp would bring the man of my dreams to me. And then I would know whether he was really you or not."

"But there can never be any more misunderstandings between us, darling," said Mervyn.

"Of course not," answered Donna.

The butler tapped at the door, coughed discreetly, waited an instant until they had detached themselves, and then appeared.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Westfield, but there's a gentleman and lady outside wished to see you very important," he said.

"I'll go, then," said Donna.

"No, you must stay and let me walk home with you," answered Mervyn. "It's probably a creditor and his fiancée. I'll see them in the hall."

In the obscurity of the hall Mervyn encountered a low-browed, beetling ruffian, whom he knew instantly, by instinct, to be a nailer-up of packing-cases for a wholesale shoe house. Behind him lurked a young woman whom Mervyn could not see clearly. Nor did he care.

"You're Mr. Westfield?" inquired the stranger, thrusting his chin aggressively forward.

"I am. What can I do for you?" asked Mervyn.

The stranger, whose voice was husky, answered in a tone which rose out of the submerged into a bullish bellow.

"You can do what's right," he said. "And what's got to be done. D'jer hear?"

"I suppose you want money," said Mervyn wearily, "but I am not aware of owing you anything. Whom do you represent?"

"Who do I represent?" bellowed the man. "Mr. James Pinkton—which is me. Say, if I'd ha' known at the time what I know now I'd ha' knocked your block off!"

But as Mervyn showed no signs of yielding before the stranger's menaces, the man came to the point:

"Come hither, Glad," he said, pulling at the arm of the young woman behind him.

It was Gladys from Wanamaker's. And even in that shock of absolute despair Mervyn was aware of Donna's frightened face in the doorway behind him.

Mr. Pinkton saw Donna too, and lowered his voice.

"You're wise now, I guess," he said. "If that dame was to know, there wouldn't be much more doing for Mr. Mervyn Westfield, athlete and society man. Now, I'll get it straight to you. The papers says you're bust. I guess that means you're going to beat it, after putting away a million or two. Where do we come in?"

Struggling between his anger and fear that Donna would overhear, Mervyn felt himself utterly at bay.

"You mean you want to blackmail me

out of some more money," he said, hardly able to control his voice. "I've paid that woman twenty thousand dollars already, to keep her mouth shut about an accident for which I was not responsible. I'd never seen her in my life before, but I paid. And now you come for more, you—you—"

"Yep, and you're going to come across with twenty thousand more, and then maybe some!" responded Mr. Pinkton. "See? Now be a good boy, Clarence, and run into your room and write another check. And maybe old What's-His-Name here will get it cashed," he added, indicating Williamson, who, fearing violence, had left his pantry and was standing in the passage in frank uncertainty.

"I will never yield to blackmail," answered Mervyn, white with anger. "Besides, I haven't a penny, anyway. Now be off, the pair of you, or I'll hand you over to the police."

"Is that straight, Clarence? Honest?" inquired Mr. Pinkton, after an astonished pause.

"Williamson, will you please call up police headquarters?" asked Mervyn, stepping toward the hall door with the unmistakable intention of holding it fast against any effort on the part of the conspirators to escape.

"You mean that?" demanded Mr. Pinkton, snarling viciously. "Quick! It's your last chance! Is it twenty thousand?"

"It's Sing Sing, so far as the pair of you are concerned," said Mervyn.

Mr. Pinkton started forward, and, with Gladys clinging to his arm and trying to dissuade him, and producing about as much effect as a mouse clinging to an elephant, gained the library and confronted the amazed Donna.

"What I have to say is short and to the point, miss," he began. "I guess you ought to know what kind of fellow you're going to marry. This Mr. Westfield here kidnaped my girl out of the store after doping her, and brought her here in a taxi, or maybe an aryoplane, and then he told her he didn't like her face and she could go to the devil! This old guy here"—indicating Williamson—"took my girl to the bank and cashed the check Mr. Westfield gave her. And I guess he can tell you whether I'm speaking the truth or not."

Mervyn's glance lit for an instant upon the butler's face. Williamson stood with downcast eyes, and it was not necessary for Donna to appeal to him, for his whole attitude was eloquent of admission.

But if ever Mervyn had had his doubts of Donna's real nature they were resolved then forever. Her breast heaved, her eyes flashed with intensest indignation.

"I don't believe a word of what you say," she answered with scorn which seemed to wither Mr. Pinkton. He stared at her in vacuous amazement.

"Ask him, then," he stammered, indicating the butler.

"You are a wicked conspirator," said Donna. "And you too, young woman. And I hope the police will soon be here to arrest the pair of you."

Acting upon the hint, Williamson, who had not yet obeyed his master's instructions, hurried to the telephone. But before he could take down the receiver Mr. Pinkton, with a bellow of rage and fear, caught Gladys by the arm and yanked her down the hall. Mervyn, dashing after him, ran into Williamson, and both went headlong to the floor, while the confederates, reaching the door, made good their escape.

Mervyn picked up Williamson and went back into the library. Donna was pinning on her hat.

"Donna," he began rapturously, "I never believed that you could have faith in me, things looked so bad, but—"

Donna began pulling on her gloves. She did not answer, but kept her face averted. Mervyn saw a tear fall on one of her hands.

"Donna! You do believe in me, don't you?"

Donna turned round; she was not angry, but her expression was of complete hopelessness. Mervyn felt indescribably small and helpless.

"Donna!" he cried frantically. And then he was silent, for he realized that nothing could explain the matter away.

Donna pulled on her gloves and moved toward the door. But at that juncture a heavy footfall was heard in the hall. Mervyn thought Mr. Pinkton had come

back. He flung the door open and rushed out.

Next instant he came reeling back from contact with the immovable figure of the man who entered.

He saw the sudden astonishment in Donna's eyes and the amazement in Williamson's; for the newcomer had simply set his shoulder to the hall door and forced the lock as if it had been of putty. Then Mervyn, too, stared in wonder at this apparition.

The stranger was a clean-shaven young man of about twenty-five. He was about six feet two or three inches in height, and had the figure of a Hercules. His elongated limbs and slender hands and feet denoted Pilgrim blood, whose blueness was further evidenced by the pale, and yet interesting countenance, now firmly set, beneath a coating of tan. The muscles stood out in knots beneath the stylish suit, which fitted like a glove; and from the neck, encircled by a collar of the new tapering model, and the T-shaped shoulders, to the tails of the modish cutaway, with its fashionable, crenellated breast-pocket, he looked every inch a gentleman and a man.

He thrust his right arm forward with an easy motion, and Mervyn felt as if a bar of pig-iron had jolted him beneath the chin.

"I heard some woman sob!" said the stranger fiercely.

"Who are you, anyway?" demanded Mervyn.

The stranger pulled a gold card-case from an inner pocket, extracted a card, and handed it to him.

"Theodore Eugene Van Tracy-Montmorency, and very much at your service," he answered in a tone indicative of breeding.

"Where do you come from? What do you—"

"Harvard," returned the visitor briefly, and, turning to Donna, bowed with easy grace. Then he glanced askance at Mervyn, yet so fiercely that, angry as he was, Mervyn quailed.

"May I ask if this ruffian has molested you, *mademoiselle?*" he inquired.

"Oh, oh!" wept Donna, covering her face with her hands.

A bee's-eye line leaped from Van Tracy-Montmorency's shoulder, and, landing on Mervyn's lip, sent him crashing to the floor, half stunned. Vaguely he was aware that the visitor held out his arm, that Donna had placed her hand upon it, and that they left the library together.

The gaping Williamson, after hesitating between them and his master, compromised by shutting himself up in his bedroom and beginning to pack his trunk for instantaneous departure.

Mervyn struggled to his feet.

"I know who you are, anyway," he said. "You're the man of her dreams."

He knew that it was hopeless to resist or struggle further, because this was fate. And, sinking wearily into his chair, he reflected that at least fate could have no more in store for him.

No. He was incorrect, for at that moment Mervyn encountered Bland's brass-headed tack. He arose with some alacrity, removed it, and, clinging to the arm, looked feebly round the room.

He heard the door-bell buzz, but he did not care. He waited in dreary hopelessness, until it buzzed again. Then the visitor, having evidently discovered that the lock was broken, entered and came along the hall.

He tapped at the library door. Mervyn looked up to see Michaelwood standing there.

"What do you want?" he muttered.

"I've called for the November rent," Michaelwood answered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN AWFUL ACCUSATION.

AND, as Mervyn made no response but went on clinging to the arm of the chair, Michaelwood looked at him attentively. Then, quite gradually, in the manner of a sunrise, a slow, deliberate grin spread itself on Michaelwood's face till he was wreathed in it.

"Ah! Believe in jinn now; eh?" he inquired.

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Mervyn, galvanized back to activity.

Michaelwood turned, still grinning, to the pen-and-ink cartoon upon the wall.

"Didn't muss up your wall-paper just for fun, I suppose?" he asked.

"What if I did? It's my apartment, isn't it?"

"Certainly. Bust your front door and split your lip and leaned against the arm of your chair with your legs out because it took your fancy?"

"Curse you!" said Mervyn with much feeling.

"I know the signs," said Michaelwood. "Read all about your Wall Street operations." His grin grew wider. "Read about your losses in to-day's papers, but meant to call anyway to get the rent before you bust. Got seventy dollars?"

"I don't know. Look in that drawer," said Mervyn. "No! Stop! I've got till the seventh to pay, and I'm not going to pay before. What the deuce did you wish it on me for? What harm had I ever done you? Wasn't I your friend?"

"Yes—in a way; and no—in a way," said Michaelwood, scraping his chin reflectively.

"What do you mean?" cried Mervyn. "If you've ever had anything against me perhaps you'll let me know what it was."

"You used to bore me," answered Michaelwood. "You'd come to see me and propound your infernally darned silly questions about Assyrian history, when all I wanted was to be left alone to think."

"I see," said Mervyn, very much hurt.

"That's partly why I got married. It was mean enough out there in Babylon, but I knew the minute I got back to New York I'd find you in my place, asking me why Nebuchadrezzar ate grass, and if Sargon was the same as Saigon, or why they put wings on their statues of bulls!"

"Well, you won't be troubled any more," said Mervyn.

"I don't care now," answered Michaelwood. "I got married, in part, to have a natural protector when you called. Now I've got her, I'll leave you to fight it out together. Mrs. M. hates you, Westfield. When I was wavering between putting it on you and the Museum of Pennsylvania she turned the scale. Told me to will you to call and she'd look you over and decide. She decided on you."

"Why?" inquired Mervyn.

"You let the lamp drip on our golden oak table. It's quarter-sawn. Left a spot. Mrs. M.'s a good housekeeper. Made her as mad as Hades!"

"I never touched the lamp until you gave it to me!" cried Mervyn.

"I know you didn't," admitted Michaelwood, a little sheepishly. "It was me. But I'd never have heard the last of it, and what's the use of having a friend if you can't put things like that on him? However, that wasn't the chief thing you did, Westfield. That only started her. You got me to talking about Ayie, and Mrs. M.'s jealous."

"Oh, lord, how many varieties name are there?" groaned Mervyn called her Jessie this morning."

"Bland—the bookseller? Why, I collect his rent too," said Michaelwood. "How does he know her?"

"He's got her—and the lamp, too," said Mervyn savagely.

"What!" shouted Michaelwood. "Got rid of her already? Congrat—"

"Yes, congratulations," said Mervyn bitterly. "It ought to be. However, she's gone off after stirring up everything, and I'm bankrupt, and I've been slugged by a dream-man who's taken away my girl—"

"But she's gone, you know," said Michaelwood sagely.

"Well, I want her back," answered Mervyn.

Michaelwood stared at him.

"You want her back?" he repeated slowly. "What for, Westfield? Haven't you—didn't you—didn't she take to you? Not want to marry you?"

"Oh, yes! She called me her lord, and—say, Michaelwood, she told me all about those little love-scenes between you, and if you don't want me to tell Mrs. Michaelwood you'd better help me out of this fix."

"It's a lie!" shouted Michaelwood, turning white. "She never cared a pin for me, or you, either. All she wants is to marry a mortal and get a soul. That's all those jinn care about. I told you that when we talked the matter over. She's not bad

looking, I admit, but an awful little liar and an absolutely unprincipled person."

"You're not startling me, Michaelwood," answered Mervyn. "However, I want her back long enough just to get things straightened out and to get my girl—I mean Miss Sellers—back, and then she can go into the astral light like a movie fade-out, for all I care!"

"Yes, but she won't, you know," said Michaelwood.

"Of course, I know the power is wearing out," said Mervyn. "But, you see, I've got to get Miss Sellers back, even if I have Ayesha on my hands for the rest of my life. I'd rather have Miss Sellers with Ayesha than neither."

"Hum!" said Michaelwood, apparently in a brown study.

"Now, see here," said Mervyn. "You've got to help me. If you don't—well, I hate to threaten you, but I shall have to tell Mrs. Michaelwood about you and Ayesha."

Michaelwood blenched at the random shot.

"You needn't put it in that way, Westfield," he said irritably. "Of course, I'll do my best for you. Mrs. M. ought to be able to help you but. Come round to-night and we'll all talk it over together. You won't tell her I made that spot on the table?" he added eagerly.

"Not at present," said Mervyn darkly.

Michaelwood, after further inquiries about the rent, took his departure. Mervyn paced his library. He could not decide whether to write to Bland or not. If he wrote, it ought to be all right. But then, if Mrs. Michaelwood would really help him, it would perhaps be as well to await the outcome.

He remembered a casual comment that Ayesha had let drop concerning Mrs. Michaelwood, which had been the reverse of friendly. He wondered just what Mrs. Michaelwood knew; how much she could or would assist him.

And then a most singular thing occurred. The two old poached eggs which Bland had deposited on the gas log had left a sort of scar there which Williamson had not perceived. Now, as Mervyn turned to pace back toward the window, he suddenly perceived a piece of chamois, apparently wielded by an invisible hand, rubbing the spot briskly.

At any other time, and without his experiences, he might have been overwhelmed with terror. Now he only watched the polishing in a disinterested manner. Whoever it was was making a very good job of it. A speck of black lead appeared on the cloth, which the hand folded over and continued to use until the top of the gas log was entirely homogeneous. Then the cloth vanished.

"Now, I wonder what that means," suggested Mervyn to himself.

An instant later a strip of wall-paper unfolded itself from Mervyn's wall, rolled itself up, and deposited itself very neatly in the waste-basket. A new strip, of the same size, appeared out of the astral light and began to plaster itself where the other one had been.

The pattern was not quite the same, for it consisted of carnations in place of roses, but it was presumably the nearest thing that could be obtained; and it was quite uncanny to see how carefully the paper-hanger was adjusting the edges. Mervyn was glad the cartoon had disappeared anyhow.

He could not get the drift of what was happening at all. He looked at the seat of his chair, to find if anything was going to take place where the tack had been, but the seat remained in the same condition as usual.

"Maybe everything's going to change back," he reflected.

As he made this mental observation he was standing in front of his book-shelf. Suddenly he saw the dictionary lift itself up, and at its side, as if by magic—which, indeed it was—there stood the Warsaw Talmud.

Mervyn, profoundly moved, snatched it up. It was indubitably his Talmud. Moreover, the Lazaroni volumes came back into their places like a flash of lightning. One by one all the missing books reappeared. And, last of all, the astral light emitted the precious Caxton.

With a cry of delight Mervyn grasped at it. He had it in his hand when it demate-

rialized. For an instant it flashed before his eyes once more, a quivering ghost; and then it was gone.

Mervyn shouted as a light broke in upon him.

"It's Bland!" he cried. "Bland's—Bland's sorry!"

It must be Bland, for it was exactly like Bland to hesitate over the Caxton. Bland was evidently anxious, for some cause or other, to make amends; but his penitence had not got to the point where he could resign the Caxton.

Perhaps Bland was tiring of the lamp! If Bland wished it on him, Mervyn meant to rub it, and then wish it back as hard as he could. He pictured an animated game of battledore and shuttlecock, with the lamp as compensation prize. But whether or not the law of the lamp permitted it to be wished on any one, it did not clearly appear.

"I'll telephone Bland and find out about this," said Mervyn.

But as he reached the door a man came briskly along the hall, and, taking his stand before him, placed one hand upon his shoulder and swung him round toward the light. After looking into his face a moment he opened his coat and touched a badge with a significant gesture.

"You're under arrest," he said.

"What for?" demanded Mervyn.

"Bank-bursting, fraud, violation of the Sherman Act, embezzling moneys the property of Mr. Jabez Westfield, and uttering fraudulent checks in favor of the Jeffries & Simpson Corporation."

"All right, I'll go with you," answered Mervyn wearily. "Williamson, pack my suit-case and take it to the Tombs," he called.

And from the recesses of his room the broken-hearted, faithful Williamson responded, "Yes, sir."

They had just reached the door when it was burst open with violence, and a second man appeared. At the sight of Mervyn, he leaped forward and caught him by the shoulder.

"I want you!" he shouted.

"You do, eh? What for?" inquired the first man.

"Murder, that's what. Murdering Miss Asia Westfield, his cousin, and converting her property to his personal use. And there's millions in it."

"Well, I've got him on a few charges," answered the first detective, grabbing Mervyn by the collar.

"You leave my prisoner alone. What are they?"

"Bank-bursting, fraud, viola—"

"Pshaw! That ain't nothing. This is murder. This is goin' to be the murder sensation of the year. Millions on millions of dollars that poor Turkey girl owned, and this cold-hearted cousin—what does he do? Takes it, every cent, and puts her away! Murder always comes before bank-bursting."

"And the Federal government comes before the State government," sneered the first detective. "So I'll trouble you to go back where you come from and tell 'em so, with the compliments of Mr. Phineas Hogg."

"I tell you he's mine!"

"And I tell you he's mine!"

One had Mervyn by the head, one by the feet. They pulled until they had elongated him perceptibly; but since neither could succeed in pulling him away from the other, they dropped their burden and went at each other with their fists.

Through Mervyn's mind one desperate scheme had flashed. He must contrive somehow to get to Bland's office and bring back Ayesha. It was no use subpenaing her. Subpenas do not run in the astral light. He must bring Ayesha, by hook or crook.

As the detectives dropped him he saw his opportunity and dashed for the door. The elevator was at the bottom of the shaft. He sprang down the stairs.

He had reached the bottom of the first flight when he knew by the sounds above that his captors had forgotten their difficulties and decided to unite forces. Mervyn gained the street entrance ten lengths ahead of them.

He saw a prowling taxicab, and the taxicab saw him. Fortunately the driver recognized him; it was, in fact, the man who had taken Mervyn and Ayesha to the

Martha Washington that evening after Aunt Jane's party. Deftly he drove his vehicle up to the curb. Mervyn was inside like a flash and whirling away at top speed.

He shouted the address, heedless whether the detectives heard it or not. He knew his respite would be only of a few moments, but—Bland was sorry, and there might be time.

As the taxi stopped in front of the bookstore, Mervyn, springing out, glanced hastily up the street and saw a second taxicab in hot pursuit.

Evidently Bland had lifted the spell, for there was no difficulty in gaining admittance. Yet, before he entered, Mervyn stopped, still in astonishment.

The store was totally changed. Where there had been an ordinary, rather dingy shop-front, two marble pillars supported a Grecian gallery, in front of which, in huge letters of gold, was the sign—

BLAND'S BOOK PARLOR DE LUXE

Inside were costly divans covered with Persian rugs. Round the walls stood rows of costly books. A dozen or more prospective purchasers were wandering about, handling wares each worth a banker's ransom. And at the back, lolling in a sumptuous armchair, was Bland, wearing a velvet coat, and being served with tea by Ayesha.

He looked up nonchalantly at Mervyn.

"Come right in; the current's off," he said with a tolerant, superior smile. "Ah, Westfield, you've come about those books, I suppose. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I've decided not to buy. I've sent them back to you. I'm only dealing in first editions now."

"You go to Gehenna!" shouted Mervyn from force of habit. "And bring me back that Caxton!"

"Dear me, Mr. Westfield, why, that is the one book that I might possibly take off your hands," answered Bland. "I'm specializing in all the rare books of the world. Business is looking up wonderfully. I'm in touch with the British Museum and the Bibliotheque Nationale," he added with a grin. "They're supplying me with everything I want without cost. Distance no object. Eh, Jessiebelle?"

"Oh Lord!" groaned Mervyn, as Ayesha turned her smiling face upon him.

The jinnee was dressed in a flowing tea-gown of yellow satin, embroidered with cream-colored roses. She was armor-plated with great masses of turquoise matrix, and all her jewelry was of the same material, except a gold ring on the third finger of her left hand, which was set with a diamond solitaire.

The sight of Ayesha serving Bland with tea and the bookseller leaning back in his chair, regardless of his customers and wearing an expression of lofty tolerance for the world, imbued Mervyn with the desire to strangle both of them. However, there was no time to spend in such vain and foolish thoughts.

"Ayesha, will you come with me—just for a few moments?" Mervyn pleaded.

As he spoke he was conscious of a hubbub behind him. "There he is!" yelled a voice. And he turned to confront the two detectives, one of whom had a discolored eye and the other a swollen lip.

"This is my cousin whom you accuse me falsely of having murdered!" Mervyn shouted.

"Do you claim to be the prisoner's cousin, Miss Asia Westfield, whom he murdered?" demanded the detective with the black eye, turning to the jinnee.

"Nay, but my lord knoweth that I am not," replied Ayesha with gentle dignity, looking at Bland.

Bland waved his hand.

"This lady is my *fiancée*," he answered loftily. "We are to be married next Wednesday evening at the Little Church Around the Corner. I know this poor mad fellow, officer. Deal gently with him; his losses have turned his brain. I shall be happy to give evidence in his behalf at the murder trial."

So, stricken dumb with a sense of helplessness, Mervyn suffered himself to be led away.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Love's Young Scream





by

Louise Platt Hauck

THE telephone rang for the twentieth time that morning, and Bertha answered it. Her voice rose high and clear above the many and varied noises of the store.

"Hill's Grocery and Meat Market. Yes, Mrs. Stafford; yes, indeed. Bacon, two pounds, sliced *thin*. One package starch, one bottle household ammonia, one dozen lemons. Pot roast? Just a minute—I'll ask.

"Butch, got a nice heel off the round for Mrs. Stafford?

"Yes, Mrs. Stafford, we have it. That's all you think this time? We have some of the finest fresh vegetables this morning you ever saw. Great big red tomatoes, firm as eggs; cauliflower, green beans, green onions, and dandy lettuce. Fruit? Some of the finest pineapples in this town. Better let me make that two, Mrs. Stafford; they're extra fine. Thank you very much. If everything isn't perfectly satisfactory you'll let us know, won't you? Now, wasn't that a shame? Certainly I'll speak to Mr. Hill about it. Thank you very much for telling us. Good-by."

She hung up the receiver and turned to her rapidly scribbled order, changing a word here and there. The young man who leaned against the wooden cage which enclosed her watched her admiringly. He and Miss Brown were old acquaintances; and while he waited for the proprietor to make his appearance, he liked to exchange bantering remarks with the cashier. His card read:

MR. JAMES W. THORNTON,

Representing
The Willis Food Products Co.

"Say, how big a bonus do you get for hauling in business like that?" he asked. "Whatever it is, I'll bet it ain't half what it ought to be. It's a shame for a real live hustler like you to be stranded in a two-for-a-nickel package emporium like this."

Miss Brown's left eyebrow went up and the right corner of her mouth came down, a combination which testified to her humorous appreciation of the salesman's remarks.

"Yes, I know all about that. It's a crime against the community to keep a girl of my talent and charm working in a grocery-store when she might be gracing the palace of a millionaire. All right, I'm agreeable. Bring on your millionaire."

"But say, on the level, now," Thornton persisted, lowering his voice, "wouldn't you change if you got a better opening? Sure, you would. We all would, and do. Now, my people use a lot of girls in the main office, and there ain't one there that can hold a candle to you. What do you say if I speak a good word for you there?"

From her slight elevation Bertha regarded him quizzically.

"Nothing doing, thank you. I'm satisfied here. And let me remark in passing that, as a usual thing, the trade isn't enthusiastic about having its employees lured away by city drummers. If you care anything about landing that fall order from Mr. Hill, better not let him hear you making that generous offer."

Mr. Thornton became reproachful.

"That's gratitude, ain't it now, when I was only thinking of your own good. Of course, if you're pulling down enough here to make you satisfied, I haven't got a word to say. But business must have picked up around here a whole lot since the last order I got, or else Hill is slipping one over on me with the Bramfield people."

"Well, he's not under contract to buy exclusively from your house, is he?"

"No; but if he splits his order this time I'll have to get a magnifying glass to see it. This store don't do enough business to justify ordering from two houses in the same lines."

"Is that so? Let me inform you, Mr. Smarty, that we netted ten per cent this year over last year's sales. We're building up a pretty neat little trade, if any one should happen to ask you."

The salesman glanced up quickly. There was an edge to her tone and a pink in her cheeks which aroused his curiosity.

"Say, what are *you* getting sore about? Blamed if I don't believe you've got an interest in this store—or its owner! Huh?"

"Sure; I've got an interest in both," she replied composedly. "I'm part of the concern, ain't I? Honest, though, Mr. Thornton, this place is making good, and I can't tell you how glad I am of it. You knew Mr. Hill borrowed the money to make his start, didn't you? Well, you can realize what it means to him to have it succeed. Hush! Here he is."

The screen door swung open to admit a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow and a freckle-faced delivery-boy, at sight of whom Bertha smiled maliciously.

"Say, Mr. Hill!" she called, and her clear voice could have been heard at the corner. "Mrs. Stafford complains that Barney tracks up her clean kitchen floor when he brings in the groceries."

Barney rested his iron-bound delivery box upon the counter and raised aggrieved eyes to heaven.

"Now ain't that the limit! And me scraping off two bits' worth of shoe leather every time I take her a nickel sack of salt! It goes to show how 'preciative some folks are. She can get her own stuff after this, I ain't a goin' to deliver it no more."

He sunk his voice discreetly and cast a cautious glance at his employer as he issued this defiance. But Mr. Hill had withdrawn to his own desk with Thornton, and Barney was free to air his injuries still further.

"Mis' Stafford and Mis' Elliott and Mis' Tolin are the three crankiest housekeepers in this town. So darned afraid some one will bring in a speck of dust! It's a wonder to me they let their husbands in for their meals. Should think they'd hand 'em out something on a plate. Gee! I sure do pity that Stafford girl if her ma treats her like she does me."

"Is Nina Stafford home?" Bertha asked with interest. "I didn't know it. When did she come?"

"Yesterday morning; and believe me, she's some baby doll! Clothes? She'll make the rest of you girls look like a pile of last winter remnants marked down for dollar day!"

"Nina always was pretty," Bertha said thoughtfully. "And two years with her aunt in the city has probably made a lot of difference in her. The trouble with Nina used to be that she carried all her assets on the outside of her head, with barely enough inside to keep the machinery going.

"Hello! Yes, Mrs. White. Indeed, we have. Plenty of them. Two dozen? I surely will. Cucumbers? Now I'm just as sorry as I can be, Mrs. White, but we sold the last an hour ago. How'd you like some fresh Lima beans instead? We just got 'em in, and they're tender as butter. A pint? All right, Mrs. White, I'll see that you get them in time.

"Is Nina going to stay all summer, Barney?"

"Dunno," answered the boy, piling his box high with groceries. "She'll blow in here pretty soon, and you can ask her."

"Hustle along with those now, Barney. You're behind this morning," Mr. Hill called. "Bertha, will you come here a minute? I want to go over this order with you. How are we fixed on soaps? Did that line of Violet Velvet move pretty well?"

"Yes; I think we'd better add another gross this time. It seemed to take."

"Now, about these canned mushrooms. We took two cases last time. Better make it four now, hadn't we?"

"No," Bertha said decidedly. "Make it one—or better still, none at all."

"But you say they sold," Thornton protested. "Then why—"

"H. C. L.," she explained concisely. "Folks around here are going to have all they can do to scrape up the necessities. No money for trimmings like mushrooms and pimientos."

"I guess that's right," corroborated her employer. "We'll let the mushroom order slide for this time. But, Thornton, I want to speak to you about something else. That last brand of flour you sent us—the Scarlet Runner—it don't sell, for some reason. It's the same quality as the Peerless Pearl, and the same price, but the women don't want it."

"I know it," the salesman said worriedly. "We're all up in the air about that flour. We sold exactly the same grade last year under the name of the White Champion, but this don't sell for cold beans. We've about decided it must be the name, though I can't figure out what the women have against it."

"It's not the name," Bertha cut in scornfully. "It's the color of the sack. You see," she explained to the puzzled men, "the women in this town, and I suppose in any other, use their flour-sacks for dish towels and dust-cloths. And that red paint you've used so generously on the Scarlet Runner sacks won't come out. 'You may soak, you may soap it, and rub if you will, but the tinge of the scarlet will cling round it still.' And it fades onto the other clothes. Tell your office, with my compliments, that if they will change the color of their sacks they'll sell that flour all right."

Thornton gave a low whistle.

"Well, what do you know about that? Say, Mr. Hill, could you run this joint without her?"

"Without Bert? I should say not," was all the young storekeeper said, but his tone and the glance he gave her set Bertha's heart to singing and her eyes to sparkling.

"Something *do*ing, something *do*ing," hummed the salesman beneath his breath.

The pause in the afternoon's custom had fallen upon the store. The last little girl demanding, "Something for dinner that doesn't have to be cooked mama says," had come and gone, and the first little boy in quest of "twenty cents' worth of cold boiled ham for supper" had not yet appeared. Butch was dozing in his chair, his head apparently resting in a platter of ham and eggs which adorned a realistic poster on the wall behind him. Mr. Hill was working at his desk, Bertha busy at hers.

Presently the screen was opened quietly and a vision floated in. All the hackneyed terms beloved by young writers to describe blond beauty since time was, might well have been lavished on this vision. Violet eyes, hair like a golden mist, teeth like pearls, coral lips, a swaying, graceful figure—and all this loveliness enhanced and set off by a drooping, rose-wreathed hat and a pink, lace-trimmed organdy frock.

Though she came in quietly, the effect of her entrance was electrical. Butch awoke with a jerk and sprang behind the counter, feverishly tightening the strings of his apron. Mr. Hill rose and came forward; and Bertha called in clarion tones:

"Well, Nina Stafford! How are you? I wondered when you were coming in. How sweet you look! Are you home to stay?"

"Thank you, Bertha. Yes, I'm home to stay. How do you do, Mr. Hill?"

In a town like Brenton, the grocer's social position was as desirable as Miss Stafford's own, and she did not hesitate to accept the hand held out to her in greeting. Neither did the warmly admiring glance which young Hill gave her dainty self apparently displease her. She blushed and smiled, displaying a whole galaxy of tiny dimples.

"Mother told me you had bought this store. I think it's wonderful of you to run it all by yourself. I do hope you'll be successful," she said softly.

"Yes, we're doing very well," young Hill replied, forgetting to release the little silk-gloved hand until she pulled it gently away. "It's mighty good to see you here again," he told her. "Brenton had begun to think you meant to stay away forever. I hope we shall have a chance to get better acquainted now."

"I hope so, too," she answered prettily. "But I'd nearly forgotten what I came for. Mother wants five pounds of lard right away. She promised three pies for the Methodist supper to-night, and she ran out of shortening."

Butch wrapped up her purchase, but Mr. Hill himself escorted her to the door and held it open, regardless of the entering flies, while he told her again how glad he was to see her.

Bertha watched the little scene with thoughtful eyes. She knew every tone of his voice, every expression of his face, and both now testified to his pleasure.

From this time on there were no more telephoned orders from the Stafford home. Every morning Nina came to make her mother's purchases. She thought she ought to learn to market, and the early walk did her good, she said.

Richard Hill approved of this state of affairs heartily. He was never too busy to wait upon her himself. The little conferences at the door continued, and hurrying customers exchanged amused or annoyed glances according to their dispositions as they edged around the absorbed pair. All Brenton knew when the young grocer paid his first call on Nina. By the end of the month he was spending nearly every evening with her.

Bertha grew a little silent as the summer wore on. She abated none of her cheerful devotion to her work. She answered the telephone as briskly, as clearly as before. Orders were as carefully attended to, bills as correctly audited. But the merry banter which kept the force of Hill's Grocery and Meat Market in a holiday mood had ceased. Perhaps she was feeling the heat. The town drooped under it, and even Mr. Hill grew a little irritable. One morning he approached his cashier's desk, and spoke to her sharply about her voice over the telephone.

"Heavens, Bert! You needn't shout like that. Mrs. Brainerd won't need the wires to hear you. Put your mouth close to the transmitter and speak lower. Notice Miss Stafford's manner of speaking the next time she comes in."

"Nina Stafford couldn't make herself heard over this phone to save her life," Bertha retorted in quick anger.

"You don't know that," he said coolly. "You've never talked to her yourself, have you? I thought not. Her voice may not be strong enough to summon the hands from the lower meadow, but it's mighty pleasant to listen to. 'A low voice, that excellent thing in woman,'" he quoted dreamily.

Bertha's eyes filled and her breast heaved ominously. She had a sharp struggle with herself before she was able to present her accustomed serene front to the world, but she achieved it. The fierce pain at her heart seemed a physical one.

It was the first time in all her months of service that her young employer had ventured a word of criticism. He had admired her methods, deferred to her judgment, consulted her opinions. And she had so prided herself on the way she had answered the telephone! More than one housewife had told her admiringly that they never had any trouble understanding prices when *she* answered them. She was shrewd enough to realize that Hill's comment was merely the expression of his conception of the difference in the two girls, and this fact was an added barb in the wound.

She stayed after every one had gone that evening, on the pretext of making out the month's bills. When at last Barney had gone whistling away and Hill, with an absent "Good night, Bert!" followed him, Bertha set herself resolutely to face the situation. Honest with herself as others, she acknowledged her feeling for Hill.

"I've cared about him ever since the first day I came here to work. And helping him build up the business; seeing him

discouraged at first and wanting to help him, and then being so glad he was making good—it's all helped to keep him in my thoughts. And I've thought until lately that he—cared—too. He used to say things; to look at me as though he was glad to see me sitting here—I *know* he was beginning to care when—Nina came home. He's falling in love with her.

"Well, why shouldn't he? He has a right to choose his own wife, I should think. But Nina's not the right wife for him. She don't know or care a snap of her fingers about the grocery business. As long as it made enough to keep her supplied with pretty clothes, she'd never ask a question about it. If she was another kind of a girl; if I thought she would make him happy and be a—a partner to him—maybe—I could—give him up—to her—maybe—I don't know."

She laid her head upon her arms, and the room grew very still. Bertha was hearing for the first time the rustle of the wings of the Angel of Renunciation.

When she lifted her face at last, it wore an expression of determination. Like Kipling's mariner, she was a person of "infinite resource and sagacity," and she did not mean to hand Hill over to Nina until she was convinced it was best for them both.

"I'll try it," she announced to the rows of cans and bottles. "I'll certainly try it. If she's the right sort of girl this 'll show it, and I'll stand out of the way. If she isn't—and he finds it out—well, she'll have had her chance."

On her way home through the summer dusk she deflected her course in order to pass the Stafford house. Nina was alone on the porch, rocking and dreaming.

"Why, come up, Bertha!" she called cordially.

"Just for a minute, then. Mother 'll be wondering where I am." Bertha dropped into the chair which Nina pulled forward. "I stopped by to ask a favor of you, Nina."

"Anything I can do, of course," murmured Nina in a prim little voice.

"It's this: take my place at the store for a week. I'm tired out," she explained in answer to the other's look of surprise. "I haven't had any vacation since last summer, and I need a rest. Of course, Mr. Hill would let me go if I asked him, but I don't like to without providing a substitute."

"B-but," faltered Nina in confusion, "I—I'm afraid it wouldn't look—that is, mightn't people talk?"

"Why?" Bertha asked bluntly. "They don't talk about me, do they? And I'll tell every one that you did it because I begged you to. There's not much to do just now. I have the month's bills out and all the back work caught up. It's just answering the telephone and seeing to the orders. Will you, Nina?"

It was evident that Nina would like to, but her indecisive nature prevented her deciding so important a question without many quavers and hesitations. Bertha wearied of them at last and rose.

"I can't stay here any longer, Nina. My head is splitting. Will you or won't you take my place to-morrow?"

"Y-yes, I guess so, if you're quite, quite sure it will be all right."

"I'm quite sure," Bertha assured her, and hurried off toward her home. If her head didn't ache as she had told Nina, her heart more than made up for it.

The next three days were the longest she had ever spent. She kept herself resolutely within the house, forbearing even to walk past the store. Barney came whistling past every evening after work, and for the first two nights she resisted the impulse to call him in. Then the longing for news of the grocery-store overcame her, and she hailed the boy as he passed her gate.

"Barney! Oh, Barney!"

"Hello, Bert! That you? Thought you was down and out. I'm glad you're better; on the square I am."

"I wasn't just what you might call sick," Bertha explained. "Only tired and needing a rest. How are things going at the store?"

"Like the dickens and Tom Walker," was Barney's prompt reply. "That Stafford girl—well, you was dead right when you said her think-tank was nearly empty. Gee whiz! The way she's been bailing up

the orders would give you nervous prostration if you was there! What do you know, Bert? She sent old Miss Thatcher, that throws a fit at the idea of eatin' meat, you know, three pounds of the bloodiest beef we ever had in stock. It belonged to the Green's, and 'bout five minutes before dinner-time in comes Mis' Green and lays us all out for not delivering it like she was promised. Then she sends all Mis' Lew White's groceries clear over to the Sam White's, and Mis' Lew rippin' and tearin' 'cause her sugar hadn't come, and she in the middle of her jelly. This afternoon we've been having a regular procession of dames in to complain that they can't understand a word that Nina says to 'em over the phone."

Bertha pushed back her hair with a hand that shook.

"What — how does Mr. Hill take it?" she asked nervously.

"Well, at first he was so tickled to have the lovely kid perched up where he could see her every time he looked that way, he didn't seem to care none about what she did or didn't do. She'd look down at him and smile, and he'd look up at her and smile, and neither one of 'em give a darn whether anybody got their morning orders before noon or not.

"But to-day the boss's been giving signs of coming to. I heard him ask Nina to please speak a little louder over the phone. But it didn't do no good. She such a perfect lady, don't you know"—the boy contorted his features into what he believed was an expression of extreme gentility—"that she thinks it ain't polite to holler like you do. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"I thought you was shiverin'. Ain't got malaria, have you? Well, the boss tells her that the service is so poor in a little town like this that you've got to yell like everything if you want to be heard. And she comes back at him and says she don't propose to yell to oblige anybody. Gee! And she don't yell, neither. Just keeps on speaking low and gentlelike, and Mr. Hill answers it when he can himself, and bites his lips and keeps still when he can't. He asked to-day when you was coming back."

Bertha gave a long sigh.

"Not till next week, Barney. I promised Nina—that is, she promised me to take my place for the week. I need a rest."

"Sure you do," assented the boy.

"Barney!" she called softly as he turned away. "Will you stop to-morrow evening and let me know how things are going? Thank you. Good night."

The last day of her vacation Mr. Hill was to spend in the city, Bertha learned from her faithful reporter, and she determined to slip into the store herself that afternoon. Butch welcomed her vociferously, and Barney gave her a knowing wink on his way to the wagon. Nina sat wearily in her place, her eyes heavy, her face a little wan.

"Why, Nina, you look dreadful!" Bertha exclaimed with compunction. "Why didn't you send for me?"

"There was no need," Nina answered stiffly. "I'm perfectly well."

"And how do you like the work?"

"I can't say that I enjoy it. Men seem to be very different in their business hours than they are when you meet them socially. I have been very much disappointed in Richard Hill."

"Why, what do you mean, Nina? Mr. Hill hasn't been cross with you?"

Nina flushed.

"I don't think he'd risk being that," she said. "But he's shown very plainly that he has a very low opinion of my business ability. For my part, I don't admire his. I don't believe I care for business men, anyway. They're too absorbed in their work. I've about decided to spend the winter with Aunt Nell again. There's a music professor there—that is, the city offers so wide a field to make friends that one doesn't have to come into close contact with just any one."

"Just any one!" Bertha's eyes held a dangerous glint. She opened her lips to say several things she felt it would be good for Miss Stafford to hear when the telephone interrupted.

"Hello!" Nina called languidly. "What? Yes, I'll wait. It's long-distance," she said over her shoulder to Bertha. "Mr. Hill's calling from the city. You take the phone."

Bertha stretched her hand for it impulsively, then hesitated a brief moment and drew it back.

"No," she murmured; "he doesn't know I'm here."

In a moment Hill's voice came over the wires, plainly audible to both girls.

"Is this you, Miss Nina? This is Hill speaking. Please listen carefully to what I say. I want the amount of our last quarter's account with Blum Brothers. You'll find it in the second drawer of the little cabinet back of you. It's marked with their name."

Bertha found the paper swiftly, and put it into Nina's hand, her finger pointing to the right figures.

"Got it? Good! What? I don't hear you. Speak louder, please. How much? One hundred and ninety-eight dollars? What? Two hundred and forty-eight dollars? Miss Nina, I must have the exact amount. Please speak louder. What? What? No, I can't hear. What? Oh Lord, isn't there any one else in the store? Butch has a sore throat? Well, try again. Put your mouth close to the transmitter and speak clearly. What? No, I can't hear. What? Oh damn!"

Bertha stood fidgeting at her elbow, longing to come to his aid, yet unwilling to interfere. Now, as Nina handed her the receiver with a crisp, "Take it, or I'll hang up!" she seized the instrument and spoke. Her voice fell upon her listener's ear with grateful, satisfying clearness.

"The amount is $234.75, Mr. Hill. It was delivered June 2, and we discounted it. Is there anything more?"

"Thank you, Bert. It is Bert, isn't it? Wait a minute." A perceptible pause, and when his voice came again it held a vaguely disturbing quality. "I'm talking from the Willis Company's office, Bert. Mr. Thornton is here. Have you any message? All right, then. Good-by."

Bertha turned away from the telephone in perplexity. Why should Mr. Hill imagine she would send a message to Thornton? And what was the matter with his voice? It sounded — well, not exactly angry, but queer and strained.

"I'm going home," Nina said firmly. "I've stood a lot here this week, but I will *not* stand to be sworn at! Yes, he did, Bertha Brown; I heard him! I'm glad you're rested, and I'll say good-by."

There was a swirl of pink skirts, a flutter of a white parasol, and she was gone.

Again Bertha stayed late at the store, this time with a genuine task in the shape of a week's confusion of bills confronting her. She was glad, too, of the opportunity to review her conversation with Mr. Hill. Had he learned of Thornton's offer of a better position? Did he suspect her of playing a trick on him by putting Nina in her place?

The door swung open suddenly, and in strode her employer, his face flushed, the hair damp on his forehead.

"Bert!" he exclaimed without preamble. "Are you engaged to Thornton?"

The misery in his eyes set her heart to beating thickly.

"To Mr. Thornton? No," she answered.

"Thank the Lord!" He leaned limply against her desk, mopping his brow with his handkerchief. "You had me going that time. I've been in hell this afternoon."

She looked her bewilderment.

"It was something Thornton said about cutting me out with my partner," he explained. "I thought at the time he was joking. Then I began to remember how often I'd come in and found him hanging around your desk—and I saw you walking together one evening—and your taking a week off just now—I thought it might be to get your wedding things ready—and I—I—" He came to an abrupt halt.

"You didn't like it, Dick? You—cared?"

He drew her suddenly into his arms, resting his cheek on her hair.

"Cared, little Bert? I cared so much that life didn't seem worth living when I thought I'd lost you," he said huskily. "Dear, I've been a blind, conceited fool, and I don't deserve to have you forgive me. But you will, Bert? And, oh Bert! do you think you could love me enough to marry me?"

Bertha, as her lips met his, thought quite confidently that she could.



All Man

by Rex Parson

Author of "The Desert Thrill," "Southwest of the Law," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

MURRAY WARE, in charge of his wealthy father's business in Brazil, allowed a fascinating adventuress, Senhorita Paola do Menao, to inveigle him into a marriage proposal. On receiving a message from his English superintendent, Richard Dilling, that the latter had been seriously hurt in a German settlement, Ware boarded a special train in an intoxicated condition, and, unknown to him, the *senhorita* also took the same train. En route the girl's Brazilian lover attempted to stab Ware and was frustrated by Paola. Chimara, Ware's Japanese servant, stole away from the train when he learned of his master's amazing betrothal.

On arriving at Idulupe, in the heart of a German settlement, Ware found that Dilling had been fatally wounded while endeavoring to telephone the Brazilian authorities that the Germans were arming for rebellion. He promised Dilling, before the latter died, that he would take care of his sister, a beautiful and cultured English girl.

Ware, Paola, and Miss Dilling were put under guard, and in the night Miss Dilling escaped. Urged by Paola, Ware received permission to go before the proper authority to be married next day, and the last question of the ceremony had been asked when his missing servant, Chimara, dashed up to the church in a motor-car, bundled Ware into it, and cut loose for the jungle. After a thrilling ride, they escaped the pursuing Germans, and Chimara took Ware to Miss Dilling's refuge.

Because his master's bride had been left behind, Chimara volunteered to return to the village and Ware let him go. Then, because he wanted Paola and because he feared Miss Dilling might think him a coward, Ware also set out for the German settlement. He was creeping through the dense undergrowth when he heard German voices and a rifle cracked behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

A SHOT FROM THE DARKNESS.

RATHER to his surprise the crack of the rifle in the jungle behind him did not scare Ware as he had thought it would. Perhaps it was because the shooting during the wild auto ride with Chimara had made him realize subconsciously that a man is not necessarily killed or wounded every time some one tries to shoot him. In fact the shot, that he could understand, scared him less than the eery jungle rustlings that he could not understand.

But the shots were broken with a sound which served to frighten him more. A long, shrill whistle behind him meant that there were more guards ahead. He did not need the answering whistle from the road toward which he was running to tell him that his perils were just well begun.

He shifted his course. On this side of the clearing the growth was of much larger sort, without the dense jungle undergrowth. The ground was higher and stonier. As he reached the edge of this he slowed down enough to reduce his chances of another tumble, and groped his way into its shelter.

This story began in The Argosy for January 26.

It appeared that the dog had been beaten. Ware had hardly paused to get some badly-needed breath when the beast came yelping straight toward him. It went right on past without a break in its gait or its shrill barks of pain. Some one had succeeded in administering a blow that had hurt.

Ware heard the animal dashing on and on. Then he heard a shot. It was not from the direction of the road—it was from the point where the dog had presumably emerged from the edge of the wood.

More guards! And yet more whistles were responding to those of the men in the clearing. Men were hurrying up the road. Men were calling for directions from a dozen points quite away from the road. And then some one began to give the directions:

"Stay where you are. Watch the woods. It's the *Amerikaner!*" They had identified him by those white clothes he wore.

For all intents and purposes Ware was completely surrounded. Between the practical certainty that his appearance on the edge of the wood would bring instant death, and the terrors of the jungle night that lay at the end of any attempt to go further through the wood, he would have chosen the rifles of the Germans. Those rifles were human things; the others were unknown, mysterious, ghostly.

But there remained the chance of standing still until they grew tired of such intense vigil as they were now exercising. Man's judgments are always warped by his knowledge of himself. Ware could not imagine any one keeping up a close and straining watch on a black wood for over an hour. He could hardly imagine himself enduring his own situation for that length of time.

Yet that he must do. It seems strange that he found necessary a great act of will to force himself to so trifling a bit of self-control. To understand it fully one would need to have lived Ware's life of self-indulgence, of gratification of every whim, while the gratified whims grew ever more insistent and more morbid in their clamor for exciting activity.

He was far enough from his pursuers so that there was little danger from the slight sounds of ordinary motions. He thought he could light a cigarette without being observed, but, much as his nerves craved the soothing influence of the nicotin, he refrained from taking the chance.

To get rid of the mosquitoes another use for tobacco occurred to his mind. Stripping a cigarette of its paper, he rubbed the fine tobacco over his perspiring face and arms and neck. Cautiously then he seated himself where a tree's trunk gave him a back, and prepared to make the best of the game of tiring out the enemy's vigilance.

Making the best of a highly undesirable situation was a wonderful new experience for Murray Ware. Undesirable situations had always been gotten out of at any cost.

For some little time his pursuers made themselves audible in conversations which did not quite reach Ware in distinguishable form. Then quiet came too gradually to have resulted from a general withdrawal. The men had settled down to their watch. They were men of more capacity for settling down than Ware possessed.

Whether he actually waited an hour or less or longer must remain a matter of conjecture. Time runs slowly to a man in such a position. At all events, the time had been sufficient to work considerable change in his feelings.

His rebellion against having been driven into this situation died, largely for want of the power to sustain any feeling. He began to feel a certain pride in himself for being where he was. The death of a man hardly appealed to him; but the conscious- His eye studied the stump, almost casually a living man brought a variety of self- satisfaction to which he had been almost totally a stranger.

There came even a certain zest for the tremendous adventure of the thing, and a feeling that he was going somehow to succeed. It had been impossible to make any plans for action in rescuing the woman who had become at least half-way his wife. It was impossible now. He had not the slightest means for knowing where she was. The jail on the top floor of the town hall building seemed the most likely place; and the chances a thousand to one for getting himself in rather than her out of it.

There was another possibility. All afternoon, with that fine capacity of his for overlooking ugly things that did not touch his own person, he had been blinking that possibility. He had never believed the worst stories told of atrocities inflicted upon the womanhood of Belgium and France. He could not believe that the sturdy peasantry which had settled in this remote corner of South America could be guilty of anything of that sort. But, having heard the stories, he could not help being affected a little by them. And now, under the stimulus of his new courage, he faced this possibility.

The net results of this contemplation were rather gratifying than terrifying. It was too remote really to get scared about. But the feeling that he could go down in violent death with equanimity so long as he succeeded first in "getting" enough of the perpetrators of such a deed was a feeling that was new as the rest of his sense of being more of a real man than he had ever tried to be.

Unfortunately the test of courage is no more the feelings of a man in comparative security than his words. At least these feelings of Ware's served at length to get him too impatient of watchful waiting for further inactivity. He got up as stealthily as possible, and began slowly and cautiously making his way toward the outer edge of the wood.

He startled himself by the discovery that he had emerged completely from the woods before he knew it, and was sheltered only by the overhanging branches of the outmost row of trees. He stopped dead, his heart jumping. Then, as he realized that his coming had not been greeted by a general broadside, he experienced a brief hope that he had actually outflanked the guard.

His eyes, accustomed now to the utter blackness of the wood, were quite able to distinguish objects for some fifty feet in the clearing under the light of the stars. Somehow he had taken for granted that the soldiers would be at the very edge of the trees. He had not started any; he did not see any.

Not thirty feet beyond him, in the direction away from the road, a wall extended straight down the slope from the wood's edge. It was a crude pile, eking out a wire fence with German thrift, from the stones of the field. For him it had the great advantage that it was of light color, affording a background against which his white garments would not be so visible.

Before starting for it he studied it carefully, to convince himself that no German guard was on top of it or close in at the hither end on his side of it. He turned again to make as sure as might be that there was no one very near and between him and the road. Nothing cast a shadow big enough to worry about against the yellow of the ripe hay stubble; nothing but a stump about four feet high some fifty feet away, straight out from where he stood. His eye studied the stump, almost casually, as he was starting for the wall.

Suddenly his casual look became a stare of sheer terror; he felt his skin growing cold all over his body, the tickling sensation of his hair rising on his head.

He could have sworn that he had seen something about the stump move. No amount of straining of his eyes could make him quite sure whether it really was the stump he had supposed or the figure of a squatting man. At one moment he was sure he could distinguish a head and shoulders, the outpointing knees of a human being sitting Turk fashion. At the next he was convinced that it was a man kneeling. Then he half concluded that it was, after all, but a stump.

The suspense of guessing about it quickly got his nerve. He was on the point of starting once more for the wall, quite sure that, if the object was a German of this quasi-soldiery, he would get instant indication of the fact by moving The indication was too apt to be well aimed, but Ware's nerve was fast oozing from him; he felt that he would prefer the chance of a shot to the harrowing question that the dark thing out there had raised.

Once more he strained his eyes in the hope of making sure one way or other. In another instant he was realizing that he had just begun the lesson of suspense.

A firefly sent its feeble gleam, apparently from right in front of what he no longer

doubted was the face of a man. He was sure he caught the reflection of a pair of glasses, sure too that the ray was extended toward him in a straight line—the line of the top of a rifle's barrel. Lest he make any mistake about it, a quick movement caught the insect and knocked it, glowing brightly as injured fireflies always do, into the grass, with its lambent fire visible.

And now, his vision guided by this faint glimpse, he could make out beyond question that the thing was a man—that it held a gun pointed straight at his light clothes. He was waiting for that light, just discovered spot to make a move to assure him it was not a hitherto unnoticed stone or stark piece of bared tree-trunk. A move—and the gun would fire.

But Ware did not move. It seemed to him that the sound of his own heart-beats must reach the other's ears—that the tremor of his every muscle must show. And, even as he stood still, he knew that his fate depended on the thin possibility that the particular individual who was watching him as tensely as he watched back, was the kind of individual who would not settle his doubts by trying a shot for luck.

It was a thin possibility. Ware tried to conjecture what he himself would do in that other man's place. He would not convince himself that he would not eventually shoot. He might wait a few minutes; he might wait a long while. That would depend on how much care he had to take of ammunition; it would depend upon what he might know of the disposition of his superior officer toward a shot at nothing. But, if he were under orders to shoot at an escaped prisoner, known to be dressed in very light clothes, and saw just what he knew that other man saw, sooner or later—he would shoot.

The other man was waiting longer than he would wait. No—perhaps it was another case of suspense dragging minutes into hours. Yet other men were more patient than he—most of them. God alone could tell just where that man's patience would end.

Merciful Heaven! Was it possible that the mere effort of remaining motionless could strain and weary one so? The perspiration was dropping from his chin, running in rivulets down his back, bathing him from head to foot.

The fellow would never shoot. It was not a man at all. He had let his nerves fool him. He was half-minded to walk straight out to that thing and take hold of it, and—

What had happened? Had the weather suddenly turned cold? He was shivering. He had to clamp his teeth together to keep them from rattling.

No, it was just his nerves. They were going clear back on him. If he could but light a cigarette! He had never before really needed a drink; but was there anything he would not give for one now?

Yes, his nerves were failing. He could not stand thus much longer. He would go mad. Then he would do something that would bring the end in an instant.

He didn't care. Death could have no terror equal to this waiting for it. Ah—the death of a man!

No, he would not need to move. The other fellow would do that for him soon enough. In another ten minutes—or one—or a few seconds—or just one second—

What was beyond—after a man had been shot up and—and had made that horrible noise in his throat—and—was just a—a corpse? God! One of his nurses had taught him some prayers. No, he couldn't remember them. They had never meant anything to him but an irksome task when he was too tired for anything that was not really exciting and novel. He wished he could. He wished he hadn't done some things. He wished—

Well, this was a death for a man. Maybe it would count against some of the other things.

No, *no!* He didn't want to die. He couldn't die. Oh, God! What a fool he had been to come out here, to undertake this impossible thing. What good would it do him to have that ethereal-minded English girl murmuring over his cold corpse—"a death for a man." She wasn't worth this. Paola wasn't worth it. All the women in the world were not worth it.

The thing was getting him. He was going crazy. He could not stand it.

Steady! But he must get away. Better the chance of a shot before he became a gibbering idiot and got shot anyhow.

Why couldn't he fade into the wood again? How about a quick rush? No; that would make a noise and the fellow would shoot quicker than he could dodge.

But that other man couldn't see him any plainer than he saw the other. And there were moments when he couldn't distinguish the darker spot from the surrounding dark; couldn't see it at all. That other man could fade in one of those moments. He could step back at almost any moment, and leave Ware uncertain whether he had ever seen anything at all.

He was going to try it. Nothing he could conceive of in this world or another could be worse than the torture of this suspense.

Silently, slowly, with a thousand pains from cramped and overtaut muscles, Ware drew one foot back. He waited; then drew back another.

No answer from the other man. He took another backward step—two of them—three. Each of them was carefully made, slowly to avoid any possibility of tripping.

Six more—and he ought to have reached the trunk of the tree. Then—a quick dodge behind it—Mr. *Deutscher Soldat* would rub his eyes and try to decide whether he had seen a white spot or dreamed it.

Back another step and another. Was it possible that he was going to escape after all? Back two more.

What was that? The stump was rising—what?

Ware paused; it seemed to him suddenly that his knees were going to collapse under his weight. He could not move if he would.

Then it came—a flash of fire which, to his strained eyes seemed a vivid flare of lightning, a bang which reverberated in his ears like a crash of near thunder.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OPEN WAY OUT.

WARE staggered back two steps, and was brought up sharp by the jagged point of a broken branch projecting from an otherwise smooth trunk. Instinct prompted him to draw himself around the trunk and behind it.

It came to him slowly that he had not been hit. He had thought that all out to the last detail, and had been convinced that there was no chance at all of the other man missing him if the shot were fired. A very dim target he had realized he must be, but of sufficient size so that the most ordinary markmanship could hardly fail to score.

What he had not realized at all—what he must figure out at much greater leisure than he now had—was the fact that, in drawing back under the tree, he had disappeared entirely from the other's view. If the man saw anything when he shot, it was the image the retina of the eye retains from long staring at an object seen with difficulty—which is more than likely a pure figment of the imagination.

But, while he still labored under the delusion that he was mortally wounded, he crawled, ran, stumbled away from the spot in blind, instinctive flight. Fortunately the shot had aroused a dozen of the guardsmen and started them all to the spot where it had been fired. The man who had done the shooting rushed toward the thing he hoped he had hit. The noise of their going prevented any of them from hearing the noise Ware made, though his previous care to avoid noise was still subconsciously operative and kept him fairly quiet in his flight.

He was brought to a halt by the sudden appearance of the stone wall, blocking his path. Chance had led him to remain close to the wood's edge. For some reason the wall had extended a short distance into the grove.

It was still instinct—to get all he could between him and the shouting voices of his would-be captors or slayers—which prompted him to clamber over the rough stones. On the other side, he dropped into a quaking, trembling, nerve-shattered heap of weakness. Stronger nerves than his would have given way under the strain through which he had just passed.

The voices of the pursuers were raised in laughter now. He caught the answer made by one of the first arrivals on the scene to one who came later:

"*Ach*, Louie shot at a ghost!" There was a general chorus of laughter at the man who had fired.

Though the following conversation was not distinguishable, Ware judged that Louie was trying hard to justify himself, and getting a little angry at those who refused to believe him.

"Oh, well," one of them finally decided, "it won't hurt anything to beat around in here a little bit. We'll run him up into the jungle, if he is here. He won't dare get out into the open of the lumber camp again."

The terrible thought that they would come after him spurred up Ware's shaken energies. Once more his brain began to work—with the speed of a brain urged by the fear of death.

The wall was his chance. The men were all occupied with the thought that he had retreated into the wood, with the interest the single shot had aroused. It was his supreme moment for a getaway into the open behind them.

He pulled himself to his feet. Crouching low, he made his way once more to the edge of the trees and peered out. At all events there was no one close by. He made his way a few yards down the slope. Still there was none to block it.

Huddling close to the wall he went on a little farther. Then he was almost startled into helplessness by a voice hardly ten feet behind him and on the top of the wall.

"Well, what you going to do?" the voice demanded.

"You stay there," came back a response, "and watch the woods close. We're going to beat things up a bit."

The realization that he was outside the line of guards—that he had passed this man within arm's reach—seemed weirdly funny to Ware. He wanted to laugh as he had never wanted to laugh at any jest before. He had to stuff his hand into his mouth to keep back the roar that fairly welled up within him—shook him uncontrollably.

Hysteria—he recognized it now. The wild impulse to laugh speeded him on down the grade, with the purpose of reaching some place where he might give vent to it. But, long before he had covered sufficient ground so that he felt safe, he had overcome the half-insane desire.

And now it came to him that, for the present, every circumstance was in his favor, so far as his personal flight was concerned. At an outside estimate, not more than fifty people in this section had ever had a good look at his face. His dress was hardly conspicuous in a tropical community. Unless he was quite mistaken, there were a good many strangers in the town of Idulupe. And he, the dangerous American, was supposed to be safely located and sewed up in the woods.

He was not so foolish as to imagine that his very excellent German was without an accent so distinctly English as to betray him. But there was hardly a reason in the world why he should not be able to walk for miles and pass several hundred of the immigrant population without arousing a suspicion.

"But you can't get a drink," he thought mournfully. He was sadly in need of one. He had lived through a day of excitement such as he could not remember ever to have passed before. He had begun it more than half sick. The moments—or had it been hours—that he had faced that gun in the dark, had sapped his nerve and his muscular strength. Now, with the immediate danger removed and the letting down from its tense excitement, he discovered that his head was aching in a fashion to make all previous headaches seem but touches. He might go a long way—but *could* he?

At all events, he must go as far as he could. He forced himself to walk onto the level ground at the base of the long grade. Here he encountered a fence which made it seem easier to take to the road than to continue across fields.

He had not gone far on the road before he came to a brook. The sound of its gurgling water under a tiny culvert brought tears of joy to his eyes. He got down its low bank, knelt in soft mud without regard to anything in the world but the opportunity to dip his reeling head into the cool water, to reach it with his lips and suck up great drafts of it to slake his fevered thirst.

That helped a little. He got up and re-

sumed his journey toward the village. In the moments when he could forget the aches a little he was tempted to think that such luck as he had had thus far would stay with him to the end of his adventure—that he would somehow find Paola without great difficulty, and get her out of the reach of the Germans.

But those moments were few compared with the long ones when his tortured brain simply wondered why he was doing all this. The cry of his frayed nerves for stimulants which he could not hope to get sent his thoughts continually back to scenes of comfort and luxury where he had been able to get all the drinks he had not then needed.

Just two nights ago he had been sitting at this hour in Port do Sul's Alhambra Hotel, drinking the delicious but potent wine of Paola's selection, his ears ahum with the soft music of a string orchestra with which the soft voice and laughter of the girl made soothing harmony. Now, it seemed he had spent an eternity in hell since then. And as he strove to think into the future, it appeared that the eternity was just begun.

He went on. As he knew that he was approaching the village's limits, his steps lagged more and more. He had no strength, no nerve, to face more dangers. His reeling brain was not a thing wherewith to work out means of learning his sweetheart's whereabouts, means of getting to her, means of getting her away from here. He had not wit enough to outwit the stupidest of animals.

And then he came to that which seemed to require no thinking — which suggested more thoughts than he needed. He had reached the first of the town's homesteads —a prosperous-looking house well back in a wide acreage of pretentious lawn. The sidewalks of the town did not begin yet. But close to the edge of the road stood a splendid automobile.

The first of the village's street lamps was still a block away It was just three years since he had seen the duplicate of the big runabout. But he recognized it more quickly than he would have recognized the girl he had been in the act of marrying ten hours before—for its mate had been one of the few things he had wanted and failed to obtain.

Harry Meade, his college chum, had owned that magnificent German Mercedes with its exquisitely perfect silent engine. Harry had wanted to sell it, having contracted some debts in a big poker bout which would use up his very liberal allowance for six months in advance. He had taught Ware all about how to run it, while Ware tried every plea known to spendthrift students to get the four thousand Harry wanted for it out of his father. A second-hand dealer had finally bought the car.

And now—he could have one like it for the taking. It seemed as if it must be the same car. Evidently its owner had great confidence in his neighbors to leave it thus. From the house came sounds of music and shouts of laughter. No one was in sight.

Here was freedom. With that car he could roll through Idulupe and twenty miles beyond it before its owner had discovered his loss. He could probably pass Salto Grande ahead of any warning telegram. The three hundred miles that would get him beyond German influence would be but a night's run performed with a little speeding and nerve. Somehow he felt that just to hold the steering wheel of that car would restore his nerve.

Why, it was too easy. From this point there was enough grade to coast the automobile half a block before taking the chance of the burr of the self-starter. Release the brake, give a wheel a little push, leap aboard—and liberty!

Good-by to Idulupe! If ever he had had reason to hate a place and everything in it, that place bore the euphonious name of Idulupe.

But Paola—Chimara—Anna Dilling.

Well, Paola was a native Brazilian. She was very beautiful. Even Germans would hesitate to kill her. And what knowledge he had of her life, with the belief he still held in her virtue, gave good ground for the feeling that she might be depended upon to take pretty fair care of herself.

Chimara—if they hadn't got him already they never would!

Anna Dilling—

What was Anna Dilling to him? Why

should he worry over the picture that rose of a fair-faced girl with eyes alight among features drawn in tragedy, while her lips framed that expression of spirit unconquered and not to be conquered by any sorrow of death, "the death for a man"?

And hadn't she said she was not afraid up there in the jungle?

And yet, was he going to leave her up there in the jungle?

Ware was moving about inspecting the big car. What he was really staring at was a new Ware—a being which he could not quite understand.

The old Ware, to whom all was folly that did not contribute to his own pleasure and comfort, whose personal safety was a thing of supreme importance, viewed askance this new set of feelings that seemed to make another person.

"Say, the heat or something *has* got you!" he muttered aloud.

It was just at this instant that the bulldog startled him with a whine. The creature's faculty for taking up his trail and following him without giving sign of its existence was uncanny. Had Ware been really a dog lover he would have guessed that the dog had often followed its master against that master's commands and punishments until he had learned to do so without making his presence too obvious.

"You miserable cur!" Ware found himself exclaiming. "You haven't the guts of that whining pup." And this was the new Ware talking to the old one.

Was he really so susceptible that he had fallen in love with the English girl? He laughed at himself for the idea. He recalled his first conversation with her. Did he imagine that he would be happy married to a walking encyclopedia? He laughed again.

Then he sighed. He might have had the same sort of culture that she had; he rather wished now—

"Well, are you going to get into that car, or just stand here and think about—" He broke off. He did not dare to accuse himself of thinking about a pair of frank blue eyes under an aureola of waving golden hair. Besides, he was married to Paola, or so near it that nothing could excuse failure to finish the ceremony at the earliest opportunity.

And Paola was the sort of wife he wanted: lovely to look upon, soft and gentle, and with passions of fire, ready to fit into the life he had lived and loved, a novelty in the way of the eternal excitements his nature craved. Paola would never become a sort of warning ghost to frighten him from pleasure with thoughts of what she would say or look. Paola would never be a second conscience to drive him into impossible daring and every chance of a "death for a man."

"But this way, you'll never see Paola again, either," he suddenly discovered the inconsequence of his arguments. Yet this obvious fact fell a little flat as an urge against the plan of flight. Paola did not seem quite capable of amounting to an irreparable loss. It was but ten hours since he had been feeling that no price was too dear to pay for escape from marriage with Paola.

He became inwardly quite wretched. It appeared that he could come to no decisions about anything. Hitherto decisions had always been the easiest things in the world to make; he had chosen that which made most for his own pleasure. Now he got the feeling that no choice he could make would satisfy him.

Paola did not satisfy him. Going ahead to rescue her seemed utterly foolish, when it meant leaving such a chance for escape as this splendid car had put right in his way. And yet he doubted if he would ever be happy again with the thought of the look there would be in a certain pair of blue eyes should their owner ever learn of such a flight as this. And the reflection that she probably would never learn of it was singularly disquieting. He could not bring himself to rejoice in the idea of never seeing those eyes again.

No; he could not bring himself to face the thought of being unworthy to meet those eyes again. It had been desperately hard to lie to her as he had lied this morning about that paper he had signed, about the treatment he had said he received.

And then, while he still faltered and balanced and weighed and wondered why he

could not decide, it was too late for a decision. There was the sound of a closing screen-door, the laughter and talk of a parting on the porch of the house. Ware was not quite sure enough of the starting device of this car to risk an attempt at stealing it right under its owner's eyes.

He slipped away. As he walked on into the midst of the low structures that were the stores and business houses of Idulupe, he tried to convince himself that he never would have taken that car anyhow. At all events, he felt a strange relief in the fact that he had not taken it.

Reliefs, however, seemed things of short duration for Ware. The next minute he was walking along the edge of the little square in front of the pretentious town hall. There were really but two sides and a half to the square. Ware was passing the shops. The end of the block would bring him to the corner of what he had called the "municipal building." The side opposite him was entirely open and revealed the lights in the inn across a field of some acres. The side behind him had but two small houses at the end nearest him.

He had reached the middle of this square when he saw a small company of men marching straight across it toward him. Obviously they were practising a drill. As obviously they would come upon him before he could get beyond their flank.

He was in one of the darkest spots on this side of the square. A quick glance showed him that the shop at his side had a large porch. The keeper of it was evidently in the habit of doing some business on that porch. A rude counter ran half the length of it.

Ware lost no time in slipping behind a pillar and thence to the end of the counter. He could not risk the possibility of meeting so large a number of men, some of whom might recognize him. Hardly had he got crouched behind it when, with a whimper of fear at sight of so many men in determined line, the wretched dog joined him.

"Still!" Ware whispered savagely. "*Ruhig!*" he translated, remembering that he dealt with a German dog.

The tramp of the feet on the dry grass thudded nearer. Right at the curb, it seemed, the order was given to halt. Then, instead of the prompt order for some fresh maneuver, Ware's straining ears were greeted with the command to rest.

"We break ranks?" some one asked in a voice that betrayed breathlessness after exertion to which its owner was unaccustomed.

"*Ya*," responded the commander. And there was an instant rush for the seats the low porch afforded. Others clambered to the counter under which Ware and the dog were sitting.

For an instant Ware contemplated strangling the dog. The animal seemed restive under the shuffling of the men over his head. From his throat came that tiny squeak which some dogs make before they decide to bark out loud.

"*Ruhig! Ruhig!*" Ware whispered fiercely; but so low he doubted whether the word reached even the beast's ears. He could not strangle the animal. Nobody could hold him still enough during that process.

"*Ruhig! Ruhig!*" Good God! Was he to have the pack of Germans upon him for that miserable cur? The idea sent him absurdly furious. But he stroked the dog's head in quick, rapid pats that finally seemed to quiet the beast.

For the most part they were a lot of "*bauern*"—peasants in their native land. Now they were noisily cheerful in their joking with one another, each apparently having found something exquisitely funny about his neighbor's manner of marching or holding a gun, which he proceeded to point out in boisterous banter. One youngish member got the crowd into complete uproar by an impromptu imitation of "Meyerbohm," whoever that individual might have been.

"*Ruhig!*" Ware whispered, his teeth shaking with the agony of fear the dog's excitement over this aroused.

"*Ach*, it's all *verdammte Bummelei!*" proclaimed the disgruntled member to be found in every group of men on earth. "What do we think we're going to do? Maybe we could lick the whole Brazilian army right here and now. The whole Brazilian army isn't here nor now. And we

aren't there neither. What will the government do? It will go right on and do as it pleases. What the blazes does it care for a few thousand *Frankfurter-fressern* way back here?"

Whence the discussion resulted which might have been heard almost anywhere on this earth—the same sort of discussion of the war which had bored Ware a thousand times back in the States. Inasmuch as there were no German dailies circulating among these backwoods farmers, and the Brazilian papers hardly got so much news as those of New York, their data was somewhat more scant than that upon which such discussions were based in America. But they were vastly better informed and up to the minute than Ware had even tried to be.

"*Ruhig! Ruhig!*" Some one was coming along toward the group.

"*Ola! Herr Doctor!*" cried one of the guardsmen, or whatever it was these militant soldiers termed themselves. "Say, how's Hans Mueller?"

"Oh, he'll be all right," came the doctor's reply. "He got an awful bang on his skull; but it was thick enough to stand it."

There was a general laugh at the expense of Ware's loquacious guard of this morning. Ware listened eagerly, hoping to learn more of personal events—half hoping that he might glean something that would assist him to locate his bride and Chimara. He did not have to hope long.

"That yellow Japanese!" exclaimed one of the group. "I'd give my gun for one good shot at him."

"Well, I guess he's safe enough with the rest of them now," some one responded. "Of course, if they're lucky, they'll get out of there. But it will be one long six weeks before we're apt to hear anything more of our representatives of the Entente governments."

"Six weeks!" echoed one. "He's been out of there again this very day."

A dozen queries about this were instantly aroused. The speaker proceeded to explain:

"You know Senhor Juao dos Hermanaos, who was so cheerful in having prevented the alliance between this *senhorita* and the American? Well, he isn't so cheerful now. The *senhorita* has vanished. Hermanaos took her for a little *paseo*, and left her for about ten minutes to get her a drink. When he came back all he found was a piece of paper with some Chinese or Japanese scratches on it. *Ach Himmel!* After what I saw this morning, I'd believe the yellow devil flew off with her."

"All the same," remarked somebody, "he's more dangerous to the American than to us. Japan is just waiting to jump the fence. Some day our American friend will wake up and learn that he harbored a spy. I won't gamble on any of the rest of that bunch getting out of the jungle; but I'll bet the little Jap valet comes through."

But the man with the latest sensation was not to be driven from the center of the stage so easily:

"But, say," he resumed. "I think that stuff of Hermanaos is all poppycock. If that girl's father is any great substance with the government, I'm the *presidente*. Did anybody ever hear of the daughter of a Brazilian big-bug eloping with an American like this, or with anybody else? Such things might happen in the Fatherland, as they might happen in America. They just don't happen down here.

"And—you know Blumberg. I was in his store to-day. He lived in Porto do Sul. And he says the only Menaos he ever heard of down there ran a gambling joint until he was killed in a row over his crooked wheels. One of his daughters was a Senhora do Vilas, who made a business of catching rich Europeans and getting a little better than a swell living out of them. The other was only a child then—but—" The narrator broke off significantly.

Ware was grinding his teeth. The hard part of it was that the girl he had half married this morning was so open to just such criticism that it could not be vigorously resented.

"Oh, here comes Schmitter!" The speaker's voice was lowered to a confidential tone. The words were prompted, apparently, by the rumble of what seemed most probably a wheelbarrow. "Don't say

anything until we've drank up the keg. Then ask him about the Japanese.

"You know, Schmitter's bulldog followed the American and the girl over to the hall this morning. And they say the Japanese got him into the automobile and took him along. Schmitter's so sore about it that—"

But Ware lost the criterion of the degree of Schmitter's soreness. The dog was straining every muscle.

"*Ruhig! verdamm dick!*" he raged as he turned his strokes into pressure to keep the beast down. "*Ruhig!*"

Ware caught the thick skin on the dog's neck. He tried to make it choke a bit, while he pushed downward to prevent any movement of the paws.

The result was a wheezing whine. Ware gripped harder. The beast began to struggle backward.

"*Tausend Teufeln!*" burst from lips overhead. "What's under here?"

Two half-choked barks were the answer. Ware let the dog go.

He should have done it in the first place. He was now too late. Before the dog had leaped out, the face of a man, peering over the counter to look under it, was limmed against the dimly lighted wall of the store. And the leap had caught the wrist on which Ware was resting his stooped weight. He had to put out the other hand to catch himself.

The face jerked up and out of sight. Its owner was just a little startled, for his voice held a slight, tremulous croak as he said:

"*Ei, Landsmänner,* there's somebody under here."

CHAPTER XIV.

A JOB FOR THE FIRING SQUAD.

TO any one but the victim of their efforts, the formal and formidable task they made of Ware's capture must have seemed a delicious joke. The first man to leap down and start for the end of the counter was promptly reprimanded by the captain of the company with:

"Hey, you; do you want to get shot? These things don't go so easily. We will do this right."

Whereupon he called off the names of certain men of the company. He went to the trouble of designating them by number.

"*Nun*—the odd numbers to the right end; even numbers to the left. Firing position. Forward! March!" Two score of feet thudded up the step of the porch, a score at each end of the counter. They were crowded into a wedge when they got where they could block any attempt to run out at either end. Their guns pointed everywhere under the counter.

"Now, you, under there, put up your hands and come out. I shall count ten. At ten, you will all fire at once."

Ware did not wait for them to count ten. His obedience to the part of the directions meant for him was perfect in every respect save as to his hands. He could not have got out without using them to do so, on all fours. He stood up before executing that portion of the order. He waited for the next command.

But the captain had lost his power to command. He was staring in blank astonishment. Instead of a military order, he croaked:

"*Mein Gott! der Amerikaner!*"

Ware stood still and looked back into the blinking eyes. During the half minute that had elapsed after the account of Chimara's successful second getaway with Paola, he had experienced a sudden revulsion at his own adventure as he realized its utter needlessness. Then had come the swift events that had taken but a moment to end in his capture.

A bitter smile twisted his lips. This was to be the finish of his attempt to live up to Anna Dilling's quixotic ideals. It served him right for being such a fool.

Of further sentiments he seemed suddenly incapable. He had reached the end of everything. And nothing seemed to have been worth enough to make one sorry it was ended. A dull apathy was settling over his tired nerves and brain, wearied beyond endurance, beyond the power to care.

The startled captain recovered himself. He gave the commands; the men headed

Ware diagonally across the square toward the door of the town hall. Somebody said it was too late to get somebody up who would have charge of a court martial; somebody decided just to lock him up for the night, with plenty of guard to see that there were no more Japanese rescues; somebody remarked that they needed no further evidence as to whether he was a spy. Everybody seemed to agree with this; his position behind that counter where he could listen to every word was proof positive as to what he was.

Ware did not care. It occurred to him that the usual treatment of spies was extremely prompt and entirely conclusive. The idea of standing up before a firing squad was not enough to arouse his feelings. He could not get up any interest in wondering whether these unlawfully militant half-rebels against the nation in which they lived would carry things out to the bitter end in his case. He put it in his thought, that all the betting odds favored their acting as if they were the legitimate army of the Republic of Brazil. They seemed to have entire control of the affairs of this section.

Inside the town hall there was a delay which troubled him more than anything else. The captain reported to some one at a desk in one of the rooms, addressing this personage as "Herr Lieutenant." Ware wanted them to take him on up-stairs and let him tumble upon whatever they had by way of beds in the cells. The captain was very verbose and detailed in his report. Ware grew almost furious with impatience.

There was more delay while they searched him. They performed this ceremony in the corridor that ran between the two short rows of cells. It would have amused him to see the minute care with which they searched his soiled but highly innocuous garments had he possessed any feeling for amusement. It but bored him, because they seemed to expect him to wait and put the things back on again after they were through.

There was one more moment of rebellious anger, when he saw the bed provided for his repose. It was simply a beautifully polished and finished mahogany plank. He thought he would see what could be done to bribe the warden into giving him a mattress of some sort and some bed linen. But the official stayed outside in conversation with the men who had taken him. Ware threw himself upon the hard bench; got up again and rolled his coat into a pillow; lay back down—

He woke from a dream that he was in a railroad wreck and the whole top of the car had fallen upon his back. He turned on one side to relieve the pressure on his shoulder-blades and spine, and went to sleep again. A long while after he dreamed that he had been pushed off a precipice and was falling into an unfathomable depth which seemed bottomless until he struck the bottom with a thud.

He woke and climbed back to the bench. Once more he dreamed that Chimara was calling him to breakfast. He was very wroth with Chimara. He swore at him and bade him shut up, and finally discharged the invaluable servant. Then he woke up with a horrible wonder as to how he was going to get along without the Japanese. It took him a little time to make out just where he was. Finally he perceived that the warden had brought him a cup of coffee and a chunk of very dark bread and had gone out again in disgust.

The coffee was not the worst he had ever drunk. At least the bean had not been adulterated. It stirred up a trace of appetite which led him to sample the black bread. One thing to be said in favor of black bread is that it hardly becomes more unpalatable by drying. Ware surprised himself by eating all of it.

Then he lay back down on his hard bed and took one more nap. He had no means of telling what time it was when he woke; his watch had been taken from him. The sun seemed very high, as nearly as he could judge by the angle of its shadow on the frame of the one window he could see from his cell.

He was very stiff and sore from the hard bed. But his brain was cooler and his nerves steadier than in many a day. Comparative physical well-being was of small use to him, however. There were many things for his cleared brain to think about;

none that was more comfortable than a severe pain.

Now, the question of his fate was of interest to him. Now he cared whether they stood him up and shot bullets through his heart. He wanted to live.

What would they do with him? Why weren't they doing it? Wasn't it strange that they should have let most of the morning go without any sort of trial? Not that he expected much chance in a trial; the thing would be a mere travesty of the forms of justice. But why weren't they at it?

Perhaps he should be glad of the delay. So long as he stayed here unmolested, he was being left alive. But he could not be glad. Until things had definitely settled themselves, he would be in a suspense worse than the worst settlement.

And, when they had been settled, when the hour was all set for the final act in his little drama, he was not sure that he would care to wait. Some men seem to be able to meet death with a serene confidence as to what lies the other side of it.

Ware had no beliefs; nobody had ever tried very hard to give him any. He tried now to convince himself that if there were anything beyond he would stand a better chance for having made some effort to play a man's part at the last. He tried harder to make himself believe that, since he had to die some time, it might be the better to die for having played the man than for some of the very useless things he was most likely to do with more of life.

He could not see that. He did not want to die now. He felt much too well.

He could not believe that he was going to die. It would not fit into his notions of some sort of justice ruling over things, that his one attempt to do something a little brave and not wholly selfish should be the thing to bring him to his death.

Surely he had a perfectly definite and clear story to tell. He could explain Chimara's presence; those who had seen the arrival of the Japanese in that court-room, or whatever it had been, must know that it had been as much a surprise to him as to any of them. He could prove that he could not possibly have planned such an escape as he had been forced into by the valet.

The warden came with his lunch. To the coffee and the bread was added a thick soup. And again Ware began by tasting, kept on, though his taste rebelled, and stopped only when his bowl was empty. He thought he had forced himself to eat. He wanted to be in good trim for his trial; wanted to have all his faculties ready to make a plea that could not fail to carry conviction.

"When do they take me to try me?" he asked of the man who came to take away the five dishes he had used.

It took him an hour to get over the answer. The man had simply said that he did not know. But the look of dour hate and the shrug of the shoulders bespoke an ugly joy in the refusal of information. It chilled hope; it brought home to the prisoner that he was not going to be tried before men with open minds presuming innocence until guilt were proven.

But his spirits would not stay down. Artemus Ware had provided his son with the kind of constitution a man needs to rise from poverty to millions. Fifteen hours of sound sleep had helped that constitution repair a lot of the damages its owner had been trying for some years to do to it. And Murray Ware would not have been Murray Ware if he had inclined to see things darkly. A gloomy man would have stopped to think. Then he would have had to better his ways to satisfy his mind, or go vastly deeper into debauch to drown his gloom.

And so he planned the speeches he would make, the arguments he would deduce from the facts, the ways he would show that those facts were the only ones which could fit into such others as they themselves knew without his telling. And, because they carried absolute conviction to him, he grew more and more confident that he would convince his judges.

But the sheer excitement of it had him at a pitch where he could not force down half the exact duplicate of his lunch which was brought him by way of a dinner. He tried then to sleep. He felt sure that his fate would be decided that night.

All afternoon he had caught echoes of band music somewhere near the square. It was the Germans' method of utilizing the

Sabbath holiday for military practise, just as thousands of American squads of home-guards would be utilizing their Sundays a few months later.

He could not sleep. He got up and paced the cell. Five short steps, five back. Suppose they should decide to keep him locked up here! He stood still, aghast. Somehow he had not worried over his confinement. He had had too much else to think and worry over.

But a month of it—two months! It was useless to think beyond that. He would be stark, raving mad long before the second month began.

He turned his thoughts to the other three whose fates had been so mixed with his. He was not worthy of getting free. All his thoughts of to-day had been for his own fate. He was still inordinately selfish. And he would be punished.

Good Lord! This would not do. He was getting into a blue funk. He would look like a craven spy or any other miserable sort of scoundrel. His condemnation would be written in the fear on his own face. He tried to pull himself together.

A footstep sounded outside the little prison. The door was flung open. There were two pairs of feet—three. He held onto the bars of his cell, his hands shaking. His hour had come.

In a daze he let them handcuff him and lead him out into that room where he had written a letter intended to threaten his own government. In a daze he got down the stairs. In a daze he entered another of the rooms like that in which he had yesterday morning stood with Paola to be married. A number of men whose figures distinctly betrayed civil life were endeavoring to look extremely military. He searched their eyes and decided that none were friendly.

There were exchanges of a few words. A man got up and began to read something from a laboriously written sheet of paper. Ware tried to listen. Suddenly he felt his last ounce of courage dying. He could not understand what they were reading. His fine knowledge of German was deserting him.

"Now, let's hear this *senhor*"—the speaker held out his hand for a slip of paper which was given him—"Senhor Juao dos Hermanaos," he read the name.

There was a slight stir at the door. Two men brought in a third. Ware looked once more into the eyes of the man Paola had called her uncle, and they seemed like flames of unquenchable hate. The man took his stand and went through what was presumably a form of oath.

Ware was now at a total loss. The testimony was given in Portuguese. All he could understand was that the hate in the eyes which hardly left his face for an instant was turning into hate triumphant; that the words seemed to be making a profound impression.

It seemed monstrously unfair to Ware. He felt robbed of his rightful defense. No story he could tell could be arranged to correct Heaven knew what lies this man was telling. He could but guess that it was all some echo of the weird tale he had heard told over his head while he had lain hidden under the porch-counter.

And he could read in the faces of the Germans that they were being completely convinced by the story. At last he could keep silence no longer.

"I don't speak Portuguese," he cried. "What's this man telling about me anyhow?"

"*Ruhig!*" thundered the lieutenant who was conducting this mock trial. "What difference does it make whether you understand? He is speaking to us."

A hard smile spread over the face of the native witness.

"*Parla Portugueze,*" he asserted with a shrug of contempt for Ware's pretense of inability to understand. Of course it was the one thing Ware certainly could understand of the language of the country. As a query it had been put to him a thousand times by men who wanted to talk with him.

"I do not," the protest against the lie sprang instant to Murray's lips.

"He understands that well enough," commented one of the Germans. And again Ware understood something else. He was not to have even a pretense of fairness shown him. To base a belief that a man spoke a language on the fact that he knew

the meaning of the two words for "he speaks Portuguese" was the limit of unconcealed injustice.

And yet, as the trial proceeded, and German witnesses came whose talk Ware could understand, that which puzzled him most was that his judges seemed sincere in their utterly biased conclusions about him. When he was finally put on the stand in his own behalf, he could hardly believe his own ears as he listened to questions to which the answers should have been to them as obviously the opposite of their implied belief as to himself.

It took him half an hour of reasoning to convince them that he could not possibly have planned the rescue Chimara's unwise and overzealous fealty had brought about in the midst of a marriage ceremony—and some of them remained unconvinced even then.

He had no better luck in proving that his hiding under the porch-counter on the square had not been for the sole purpose of acquiring knowledge of their plans, although there were men from the guard at the wood to back up certain details that showed how he had escaped and might be expected to hide from a company of soldiers.

But it was not until they had examined and cross-examined and twisted him up in his German on a thousand points, and then gone back to search out his real and supposedly sinister purpose in leaving Port do Sul—that memory helped him to realize that there was no intention to be honest with him.

"You know why I came," he suddenly flared. "You composed and sent the telegram that brought me. Miss Dilling never heard of it until I got up there to her brother's death-bed."

And there came the sort of thing that happens once in a while to reveal a whole lot of other things. His startling assertion was met by gasps of astonishment or equally honest laughs of incredulity from the lips of all but two of those present. One of those two was the lieutenant. And he met it instantly with a furious:

"That's a lie! What is the use of listening to a man who dares to accuse us of such a trick? We're wasting time. Come on—the verdict!"

"One moment, lieutenant." It was a little man who stood up to interrupt. He seemed swelling with something very important. Ware had the notion that a thing was to be sprung upon him which would clinch his guilt.

"Well, Mueller, what is it?" impatiently assented the officer.

"I want to ask something," asserted Mueller. "With your permission I will speak in English."

And Ware suddenly remembered his loquacious guard of yesterday morning. The lieutenant nodded, the scowl of impatience with the old man's fussiness and pomposity growing deeper on his brow.

"Might it would be, Mr. Vare"—the old man turned on Murray—"we should a chance have to send back this young lady. Would you like we should send word she is your wife or not maybe?"

"Word to whom?" Ware asked. The question was prompted by extreme caution of the trap the old man's manner indicated.

"*Ach*—you ask me to who! It is, I think, you have never heard of her uncle, Geral Paolo dos Menaos." It sounded as if he expected consternation to arise from the pronouncement of the name. Mueller shot forth the words as an accusation of unspeakable villainy.

At least he puzzled Ware. Murray was still in that condition where all Portuguese names sounded more or less alike. He had to stop and think out the difference between Paolo dos Menaos and Juao dos Hermanaos, the only person ever designated to him as an uncle of his bride.

"Paolo dos Menaos?" he finally repeated. "I guess you're right. I never did hear of him. Who is he?"

"Only he is the most influential man in Port do Sul, ain't it?" sneered the amateur inquisitor.

"Not that I know of," Ware responded, still speaking a little cautiously. "The most influential man I know in Porto do Sul is Pedro de Lunez. He's the lieutenant-governor, or something of the sort, of the province. Who is this Paolo dos Men-

aos? Where does he live? You seem to know all about him."

"*Verdammter* bluff!" the old man sneered again, this time to his comrades.

"All right," Ware suddenly exploded. "I'll give you the chance to call my bluff. Here"—he drew from his pocket a handful of notes—"go send a telegram to Paolo dos Menaos. Ask him if he ever heard of me. Ask him if he has a niece named Paola do Menao.

"There may be such a man with such a name. But my business has got me acquainted with all the prominent families of Porto do Sul. And I know there's nobody with that name big enough for me to have heard of. A *geral*, a general, you say he is?

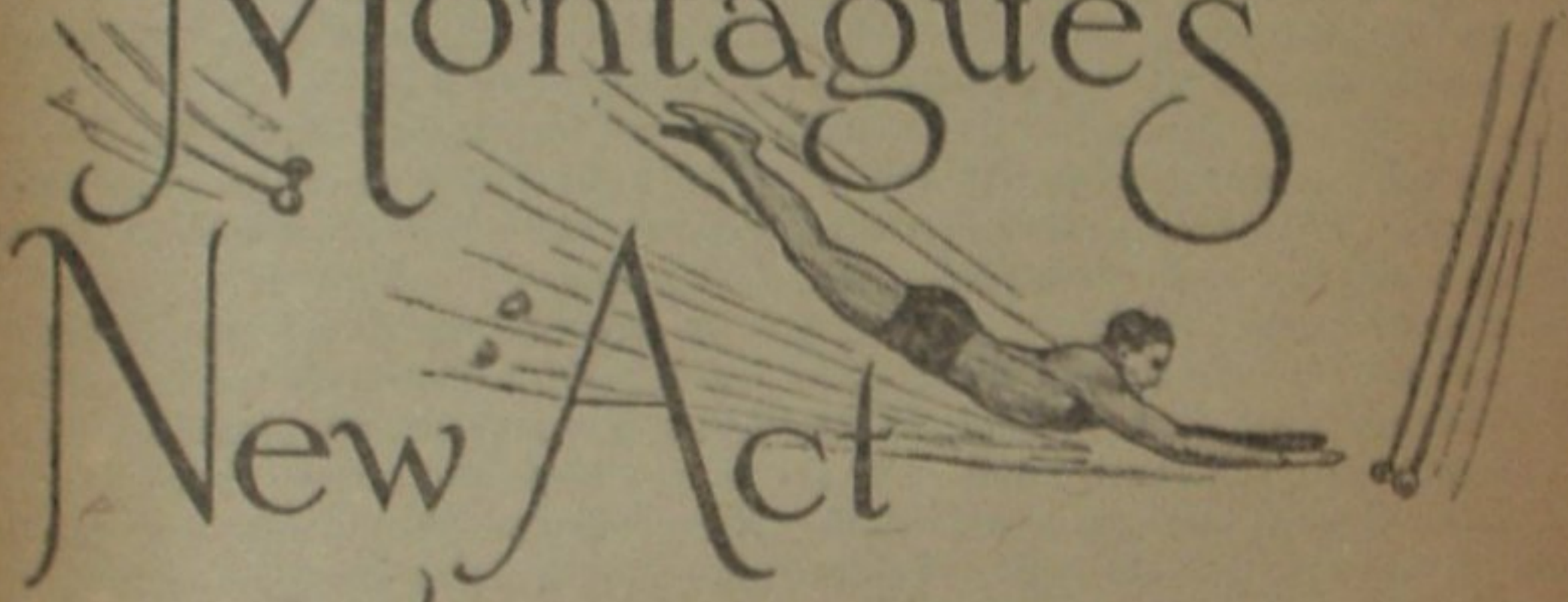
"Here—take some more money. Telegraph the operator at Porto do Sul to answer at once if there's a general by that name. If there is, why—oh, go ahead and shoot me for a spy."

"*Verdammte Bummelei!*" growled the lieutenant. "We'll shoot you for a spy all right. You can take him out."

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

Montague's New Act

by Carl Mason



I.

AUGUST THIRTEEN!

"Strange how some little unconscious action or trivial incident will suddenly awaken a train of thought," I mused as I stood in my rooms, staring at the postmark on a letter from my mother which I had just torn open.

It was the date in the circle which brought the whole affair to my mind and recalled the favor I had promised Montague.

"Andrews," he had said to me while he was packing his trunk, "if I'm not back in a year from to-night I wish you'd go down to the bank and get the contents of my lock-box. The lease expires then. There's nothing of great value in it. Keep what you want and destroy the rest. You'll find some old letters and clippings which may give you a theme for one of your stories."

He handed me the key, told me the password and said that he had left instructions for me to act for him.

I was sorry to lose such a good companion, but as he seemed so set on getting back to England, his old home, I did not express my whole feelings, not wanting to cast him into one of the fits of depression he was subject to.

And now a year had passed. From that night I had neither heard from nor seen him. To-day was August 13.

I think it was Montague's appearance which first attracted me when I saw him at the club where we both lived. He sug-

gested so much vitality held in reserve; dignity so delicately poised. His broad, powerful shoulders; his erect, almost stately carriage; his white hair, worn rather long; his immaculate dress; all made him a mark for admiration from both feminine and masculine eyes.

Even if he was quite a few years the older, some time later, when we did meet by introduction, we almost instantly seemed to be drawn to each other and soon became close companions.

When I say that we became close companions, I must explain. Although we were a great deal in each other's company, neither ever made a confidant of the other —at least Montague never made one of me. He always seemed to hold me at a distance about some things.

Whenever there were any allusions made to his past life, the lines in his face would tighten, his eyes narrow somewhat, and he would either change the subject instantly or lapse into a moody dejection which would sometimes last for days.

It did not take me long to understand that here was a subject he did not care to touch upon—something that seemed to give him pain—and out of respect for his feelings I would not press the topic. Consequently I never found out who Montague —a name I always believed to be assumed —really was.

He was, I soon learned, a keen observer; a student of human nature. His deductions were always keen and cutting as a scalpel, going right to the heart of things. He was continually studying men's faces; their gestures; their mannerisms.

He did it all so earnestly that it soon appeared to me to be no mere diversion or amusement. Once or twice I almost came to the conclusion that he was really searching for some one particular person.

To my knowledge he neither received a letter nor wrote one during the time I knew him. He never seemed to be extravagant, either in his pleasure or way of living. On the other hand—while apparently without vocation—he always had plenty of money to supply his needs.

One thing Montague was extremely careful of—his physical condition. He was always early to bed and early to rise. He exercised regularly in the gymnasium at the club or at the Y. M. C. A. On the "horses" or the horizontal bars there were none, not even the instructors, who could surpass him. Some there were who ventured the opinion that at some time in his youth he may have been a professional gymnast or performer.

One day, while he was under the spell of one of his moods of depression, he gave me a fleeting glimpse of another side of his nature which heretofore I had never noticed.

It was when one of the young chaps at the club was giving a farewell dinner before his wedding. Montague and I were near the door of the banquet-room and as we passed we noted the groom-elect's face all wreathed in smiles.

"He looks happy," I remarked.

"He has a right to be," answered Montague. "It's the greatest event in any man's life."

It wasn't so much what he said, but the way he said it, that made me feel for him. There was such a note of sadness in his voice as if at some time the iron of a great disappointment had entered deep into his soul. From this I concluded that in the past some searing misfortune must have fallen to his lot.

It was I who suggested taking the small furnished apartment up in Harlem. June had set in hot and sticky, and the little cubby-hole rooms at the club were already stuffy and oppressive. Montague thought it a capital idea and we made the change to two bedrooms, a bath and a small kitchen—which we seldom used.

Montague occupied one of the bedrooms and I the other. There was no choice for each had a window opening on to a wide, well-lighted, airy court which separated our building from the one fronting on the other street by a good twenty feet.

"Talk about comfort," I remarked several evenings later, when I came home from my work on the paper. "Why, the asphalt's melting on the streets down town, it's so hot."

"Hot!" Montague exclaimed, knocking the ashes from his pipe into the tray on

the window-sill near where he was sitting. "Why, I've been as comfortable as can be. There's always a breeze here."

Dusk was just blending into night and as I glanced out of the window through which the air was playing, a man across the court in the room opposite, turned on the light and stood outlined as in a frame.

Montague, attracted by the sudden flare, also looked up. For a moment I thought I saw him start. But if he did, he immediately regained full control of himself and for the time being I completely forgot the incident.

The next few days found Montague in one of the worst of his moody spells. He seldom left the house, but kept to his room smoking and reading, with what seemed to me no interest in either.

Shortly after, thinking to arouse him from his apathy, I proposed a visit to the circus, which was then playing its annual engagement at the Garden. But as he very politely, yet emphatically, refused by offering some transparent excuse, I did not press the invitation.

Then came the fatal night.

The heat was terrific and had been for more than a week without relief. The nights were as bad as the days, with little or no breeze. Even up in our little apartment we began to feel uncomfortable.

Toward evening however, clouds began to bank up in the west giving some hope. But they just hung on the horizon from lack of wind to move them and served only to increase the discomfort by intense humidity.

I threw my window wide open to catch any vagrant breeze which might be stirring. As I glanced out I noticed that there were no lights in any of the windows of the house across the court excepting the one directly opposite Montague's.

It was only a struggling, pale, yellowish-blue gas flame turned very low, but vaguely outlining the room between the heavy curtains, which at that time of the season, I remember, seemed very inappropriate and depressing.

I turned away with a feeling little short of a premonition that something very terrible was going to happen. Aside from the weather there was nothing which could have induced the mood.

In order to cast off this sinister spell I lighted a cigarette and sat down to wait for some of the boys from the office who were coming for our weekly session of "penny ante."

None of us could afford to play high, so we usually played long—the game often continuing well into the morning with a light lunch some time during a lull in the amusement.

While I was smoking and waiting Montague was in the bath. Later, after we had begun to play, he came into the room for a few moments, clad only in his pajamas and dressing-gown. He spoke very cheerfully, wishing all of us "good luck." But I noticed at the time that his humor seemed rather forced, also that he carefully avoided the window.

Montague never joined in our game, so after watching several hands he bade us good night and retired, leaving his door which opened directly into my room, ajar.

The game was not a spirited or exciting one that night. The cards did not seem to run right and the betting lagged dismally. Only occasionally did one of us have a good hand and then usually when there was no one to stay in the pot.

"Deal me out this round," said Bob Whitcombe about midnight as he pushed back his chair and arose stretching himself. "I'm going to see if it won't change my luck. I haven't had a pair in two hours."

He lighted his pipe and strode over to the window where he stood enjoying the fragrance of the tobacco and letting the air play on his face.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed a few minutes later, as a vivid flash of sheet lightning spread itself across the heavens. "Did you see that? We're going to have some storm."

A rumble of thunder followed this speech and large drops of rain began to spatter on the window-ledge and fire-escape. Then came that lull which nearly always precedes a storm of great violence.

The breeze ceased. The rain stopped as quickly as it had come and a deadly, ominous hush fell on all outside.

Suddenly this deathlike stillness was punctuated by a scream.

"Great God!" exclaimed Bob, staggering back, his face as white as the walls. "Did you hear that?"

"What was it?" we all shouted, starting up from the table.

"Over there," said Bob, shaking with great agitation as he pointed to the room with the tiny gas light in the apartment across the court. "There was a man over there a moment ago. He was about to close the window when some one from behind the curtains struck him down. I never saw such a look of horror on a man's face in all my life."

Other heads were now appearing at all the windows despite the downpour of rain which began at that moment.

Bob had received an awful shock from the sight he had witnessed. It was several minutes before he fully recovered his composure, and only for the coolness and the presence of mind of Montague—who having heard the commotion, had entered the room and was pressing a flask of liquor to Bob's lips—I do believe the boy would have fainted dead away.

We left Whitcombe in Montague's care and hurried over to the other building. The police had not yet arrived and the occupants of the other apartments, attired in a varied assortment of hastily snatched-up garments, were making an attempt to open the only door which led to the scene of the crime.

However, their efforts were without reward as the door was still barred on the inside by some extra heavy bolt, proving conclusively that the assailant must still be in the room with the victim—for no one had been seen to leave by the window which was the only other way of escape.

Finally the police, who now arrived, forced the door and with drawn revolvers cautiously stole into the room, fully prepared to meet some unknown foe. But there was none. Save for the victim there was no one in the room.

By the dim light of the flickering gas flame I saw on the floor over against the base-board, just beneath the window partly covered by the curtain which in his fall he had torn down, the huddled up body of a man.

Satisfied that the assailant was not about, the officers turned their attention to the figure on the floor. It was lying partly on its side, the face toward the window, the right hand hidden beneath the body.

That the man was dead was plainly evident. But the manner in which he had come to his end was not apparent until the body was turned over.

From the left breast, driven to the hilt, protruded a heavy, wicked looking dagger.

At the same time it became clear that the victim had made some effort to defend himself for, as the police moved the body, a revolver of heavy caliber fell from the dead man's right hand. The murderer must have been too quick, however, for not a cartridge in the weapon had been discharged.

All search, no matter how minute or careful, failed to bring to light the slightest evidence on which to establish either the motive for the crime or the identity of its perpetrator. How the murderer had entered the room, or how an escape had been effected after the fatal stabbing, has never become known. No one was seen to come and stranger still no one was seen to go.

The door, bolted from within, proved conclusively that the assailant had not left the room that way. The window, the only other avenue of escape, had been continually watched by many eyes from the very moment when the scream had sounded and Whitcombe had witnessed the blow struck.

No one had been seen to depart that way. Every inch of the walls and the ceiling had been carefully examined and sounded many times. Even the floors had been torn up, in the hope of finding some clue to the mystery, but all without result.

The identity of the victim was easily and quickly determined. "Captain Bonda"—at least so he was billed—was one of the featured performers of the circus then playing at the Garden. The posters described him in glowing terms as—"The World's Renowned Champion Marksman."

Further than this little could be learned of the man's private life. Circus performers, for the most part, are nomadic wandering from town to town year in and

year out, first with one tented aggregation then with another, oftentimes changing their names as well as their acts.

That the mystery of Captain Bonda's death was never cleared up was no fault of the police department. The best men on the detective force were put to work, but the case, baffling even them, after several months was finally marked on the records as unsolved.

It was perhaps a month or so after the death of Captain Bonda that Montague first expressed a desire to return to his old home in England. About a week later, one evening when I came from my work at the office, I was surprised to find him packing his trunk. It was then he asked me to look after the contents of his lock-box at the bank should he not return within a year.

That year is up. To-morrow I shall fulfil my promise.

Perhaps in writing the above facts last night I may have produced the impression that at the time I held some suspicion that Montague was in some way connected with the Captain Bonda mystery. But I assure you, up until this morning when I opened his lock-box at the bank, nothing was further from my mind.

I found in the little steel case what I least expected—a large, well-filled envelope, carefully sealed and addressed to me. That was all.

Noting the care Montague had exerted in preparing all this I felt there must be something in the packet which was intended for my eyes alone. Therefore I refrained from breaking the seal until I reached the seclusion of my own room.

In order that you may experience the same sensations and surprises, I herewith give you the letter—or rather a short history of Montague's life—as he had written it to me in his clear and distinctly legible handwriting, starting off "Dear Andrews." Later I shall also describe the photographs which accompanied it.

II.

Last night I told you I was going to my old home in England. That was a subterfuge. England is not my old home, nor am I going there.

My one regret in leaving is that my departure will sever our companionship. We have been friends for quite a while, and as you have so patiently and silently tolerated my many moods and eccentricities I feel that I owe you an explanation for some of my actions.

When you read this I shall be far away. If you care to you may use what I am about to tell you as a theme for one of your stories.

Montague is not my right name. I know you have suspicioned that long ago. What it really is does not matter now. That I have suffered, and that I have had one great misfortune in my life, I also know you must have suspected. I want to thank you for respecting my feelings enough not to have tried to open old wounds.

This is not intended as a confession. I am simply relating facts, and as I am going to tell you everything, I may as well start at the beginning.

Twenty years ago, as you can judge from my present physical condition, I was in my prime professionally. My people before me have all been performers of one kind or other. If you were to trace them back you would find some to have been with the earliest wagon shows of the United States and even mountebanks or conjurers in Europe and the Orient.

Naturally, as a child, I was brought up and trained along the same lines. My earliest recollections are of the circus; the spangles on my mother's bodice; the blare of the bands; the smell of animals and sawdust.

Pride begins young. At five I felt it respond to the applause from the tiers of seats when my mother, swinging head downward from her trapeze, would catch my tiny wrists as I sped through space hurled by my father from his swaying bar high up in the crown of "the big top."

Time, like everything else about the circus, moves fast.

At twenty I was recognized as one of the foremost in my profession. It was about this time that I originated the trick which established my fame.

Perhaps my early experience and the training of my parents really suggested it to my mind and it was the danger of the act, I suppose, which appealed to both the audience and myself. The least false move, the slightest miscalculation would bring disastrous results—perhaps death. But the applause by which every performer's salary is gaged, meant much to my income and my own satisfaction as an artist.

A year or so later May Belle came into my life.

I can still recall when first I saw her—a slight, trim little figure in pink tights standing over near the exit leading to the dressing tents. She was intently watching me as I sat in my trapeze high up under the canvas, wiping my hands, preparing to go through my number. It was her first view of our show, she having joined us only the day before at Memphis.

At that moment the band stopped playing; the clowns left off their droll comedy; all the performers stood stock still; a hush fell on all that gathered throng.

This was always done for effect; to concentrate all eyes on me—to impress upon the audience that the big moment of the show had come and that one jarring note might cause me to misjudge the distance and fall to possible death, for in those days we scorned nets as a safeguard.

You perhaps have seen the act I am describing, for I soon had many imitators who afterward even improved and elaborated on my feat, which is still to-day always a good attraction for any circus.

During this electrical silence I dropped down to the bar of the trapeze and, hanging by my hands, swung back and forth several times to gain momentum and then, releasing my hold, flew whirling about through the air and caught another swinging trapeze more than twenty feet away.

The moment I grasped the bar was always the cue for the band to play, and the rest of the performance once more to resume its interrupted course. My act never failed to bring a storm of applause from the most blasé crowd.

That day, as I hurried on my way to the dressing tent, May Belle was still standing where I had first seen her. Her sweet, girlish face was pale with excitement and fear caused by my daring. As I passed I smiled to her.

"Say, mister," she said, "some day you're going to miss that bar."

I made some answer and laughed at her fears. Yet I knew that she was speaking the truth—that some day I would miss the bar.

That was my first meeting with May Belle, but not my last. Six months later we were married and began laying our plans for the day when together we could retire from the dangers of the show business and settle down on a little farm somewhere in Virginia, where she had come from. But our hopes were never realized.

Many of the uninitiated think that married life in my profession is seldom happy. Personally, I do not hold the same opinion. I believe the proportion of disappointing marriages is no greater in public than in private life. One thing I am certain of, that May Belle and I were ideally mated.

Five years of good luck was ours—something rare in the show business. During all that time we never wanted for employment, nor were we compelled to accept separate engagements. But the old saying about a long lane without a turning soon proved true.

One cold, rainy day in early spring—only our third week out—at Cincinnati, while hurtling through space from one trapeze to the other, I suddenly realized that May Belle's first words to me were about to come true. As I flew through the air they sounded in my ears just as distinctly as when she had spoken them, more than five years before:

"Say, mister, some day you're going to miss that bar."

Instinctively I felt that day had come. Too late I discovered that I had not attained sufficient momentum to carry me across the intervening distance. I did not miss the bar by very much. In fact, I touched it. With a sickening feeling I felt its cold, clammy dampness as it slipped from my frantically grasping fingers. All through that downward rush I heard May Belle's agonizing scream, for she understood what had happened.

Fate often tempers misfortune. It did for me. The heavy rains of the morning and the night before had turned the lot into a veritable bog and it was the soft, spongy ground which saved my life.

As I lay in the hospital with May Belle watching over me, one thought began to filter through my benumbed mind—that my days on the trapeze were over, for a while at least, perhaps forever.

There were several reasons to make me believe that. A shattered shoulder, fractured ribs and a broken left arm were some, but greatest of all was the old and seldom discredited belief that one "good" fall not only breaks the bones, but the nerve as well, of any aerialist.

I had many times scoffed at this tradition, but that day, as I lay on my cot, I was convinced that it was no fallacy, but an undeniable truth. I knew that I would never again swing from a trapeze up under the canvas of the big top—and I never did.

I shall not bore you with the details of my recovery. May Belle, of course, continued on with the show. When I was able I soon set about perfecting something in which we could work double. All those many months I toiled hard, practising and developing the necessary skill the new act demanded. You can imagine our joy when the next spring found us working together again.

It was during this season that we met Garcia.

I never liked the man from the very start. He seemed so self-centered; so cock-sure of himself and everything he did. Perhaps it was his skill as a marksman which made him so egotistical. However, to give him the credit he deserved, he really put over some very remarkable feats with the rifle and revolver, soon becoming quite an attraction with the show.

Garcia was a Spaniard, I believe. At least he had all the appearance of one. He was swarthy of complexion; well proportioned physically; impulsive and quick in his movements and decisions.

While we never came to open enmity at that time I soon gained the impression that Garcia had no more love for me than I for him. Yet I suppose neither of us could have offered then any explanation for this secret hatred.

Despite the existing feeling we were much in each other's company, times when I noticed that May Belle was very nervous and ill at ease, something foreign to her nature. I could not quite understand her and put it down that, knowing the quick temper we both had, she feared some action or word might suddenly break our silently agreed upon armistice. But I was far from the real cause of her worries.

Thus things continued until one day in July when Garcia failed to put in his appearance for the street parade. He had suddenly left the show the night before at Morango, Illinois.

"I'm so glad he's gone," exclaimed May Belle when she heard the news, and her mood seemed to change instantly, as if some great load had been lifted from her.

All that morning, and during that afternoon, while we were awaiting our call, she was more care-free and light-hearted than I had seen her for months. Also through our act together she smiled in a way that told me she was happy and later, when she left me to do her part of the program alone, she blew one farewell kiss.

May Belle, in the vernacular of the profession, did an "iron jaw" act, a feat which is now very common, but still popular. Hanging only by her teeth to a leather strap attached to a twisted rope cable she would be hoisted to the top of the big tent, and there like a dervish, would dizzily whirl about with outstretched arms, all the while swinging pendulumlike high above the ground.

That there was grave danger for May Belle you can readily understand. But what one of the many performers of the circus does not daily risk life and limb that the audience may be thrilled and amused? Danger and skill are what the crowd mostly comes to see and therefore must be supplied.

It was Wingo, one of the clowns, who broke the news to me.

"Brace up, old man," he said as he came into the dressing tent and consolingly laid his hand on my shoulder. "I've got some mighty bad news for you."

Even through the thick mask of grease paint on his face I could read that something terrible had happened out in the arena.

"Not about May Belle! She didn't—" I choked up with fear, as if some one had suddenly grasped me by the throat.

"Yes," he sadly answered. "Something went wrong with the rope—it broke while she was up—I think she's badly hurt, old man."

Wingo was right. May Belle was badly hurt—so badly that she died in my arms on the way to the hospital. But not before she told me all about Garcia.

Despite my protests against any exertion, as her voice grew weaker and weaker, in almost inaudible whispers, she related how he had tried to win her away from me; how, fearing to tell me of her trials, she had fought the battle alone, repulsing his advances time and again; how only the night before Garcia had vowed that if he could not have her no one else would.

It was all very clear then. Garcia had fulfilled his threat. Out of revenge he had partly cut the rope, knowing that sooner or later under May Belle's weight the few remaining strands would break and let her drop to certain death.

The pain and anguish I suffered I shall pass over. May Belle's death was a blow from which I have never recovered. One thing made me cling to life—the hope that some day I might met Garcia and serve him as he had my wife.

I left the circus immediately and never again went back to it as a performer. May Belle and I had saved quite a neat sum against the day when we were to retire, so financially I had plenty. While I had every physical comfort, mentally I was the most unhappy of men. However, Time, that great healer of all wounds, mental or physical, gradually alleviated my sorrow to some extent, but failed to eliminate the hope of finding the cause of my misery.

I made every effort to locate Garcia. But all in vain. I sought him everywhere in this country, only to arrive at the decision that either he was dead, or changing his name and destroying his identity completely, he had lost himself in Europe.

Still I did not give up the hunt. I fell to studying men's faces; their mannerisms; their gestures; in the hope that some time I might accidentally find the person I was seeking. I felt that, if still alive, a performer of Garcia's ability would sooner or later seek the greatest market for all theatrical wares—New York.

With this thought in my mind I came here to live. That my deduction was correct you shall presently see.

When you suggested that we take the small apartment in Harlem I readily consented because I was glad to have your companionship, which has been one of the few bright spots in my later years. I also knew that the neighborhood was frequented by theatrical people of all kinds, and to be there would give me further opportunity to prosecute my never-flagging search for Garcia.

You may well imagine my surprise when one evening, shortly after we made the change, I saw the one I had sought for so long standing in a window across the court and directly opposite my own. It appeared as if Fate had played right into my hand.

I recognized Garcia instantly. That he, too, knew me was proven later when he was found dead, clutching his weapon.

You will undoubtedly remember that shortly after you very kindly invited me to go to the circus which was then playing at the Garden. I refused, giving the excuse that such entertainments bored me. The truth of the matter was that I had already been to the performance that same afternoon and had established beyond a doubt that Captain Bonda and Garcia were one and the same person.

Why he continued to live so near me for the next few days I cannot understand, unless he was of the opinion that I had not recognized him and that some time the opportunity to be rid of me for good might offer itself.

During that time it only remained a question which one would first catch the other off guard. I was well aware of his skill as a marksman, and for that reason never ventured in front of the windows—something I knew he was watching for whenever he was not occupied at the circus. That he

feared me was substantiated by the heavy bolt he had placed on his door.

You, of course, recall the night of the storm. What happened you well know.

After all, I suppose if the complete evidence could be shown, it would be conclusively proven a case of self-defense. So I may as well tell you. I killed Garcia or Captain Bonda, as he was then known.

III.

HERE, after a few formal phrases by way of closing, Montague's manuscript ended. The thing struck me as peculiar.

"Impossible!" I exclaimed to myself as I put the papers aside.

For me the disastrous affair of that night was no nearer solution than before. True, Montague had established two things—a motive and the claim that he had killed Captain Bonda.

But how? That was the question.

I sat thinking the whole thing over for many minutes before I remembered the photographs in the envelope.

The first one I took out was of a young, very handsome woman, hanging by her teeth, swinging high up under a tent. This was undoubtedly May Belle performing the feat which afterward brought about her untimely end.

The moment I looked at the other picture I knew instantly that I had solved the mystery. It was of the act Montague had perfected by much practise after his fall from the trapeze.

The same young woman of the other photograph was in the scene. Clad in a tight-fitting bodice and fleshings, her wonderfully rounded arms outstretched, forming a human cross, she was standing confidently erect, her back against the wall.

More than twenty feet away was Montague, also in tights, his right hand uplifted and drawn back, about to hurl one of the many large, heavy knives with which he was outlining the young woman's slender form as he drove the dangerous blades deep into the wall, each time barely missing her flesh.

I understood it all now. Even after those many years Montague's skill had not deserted him when on that stormy night he had so unerringly cast his dagger at Garcia.

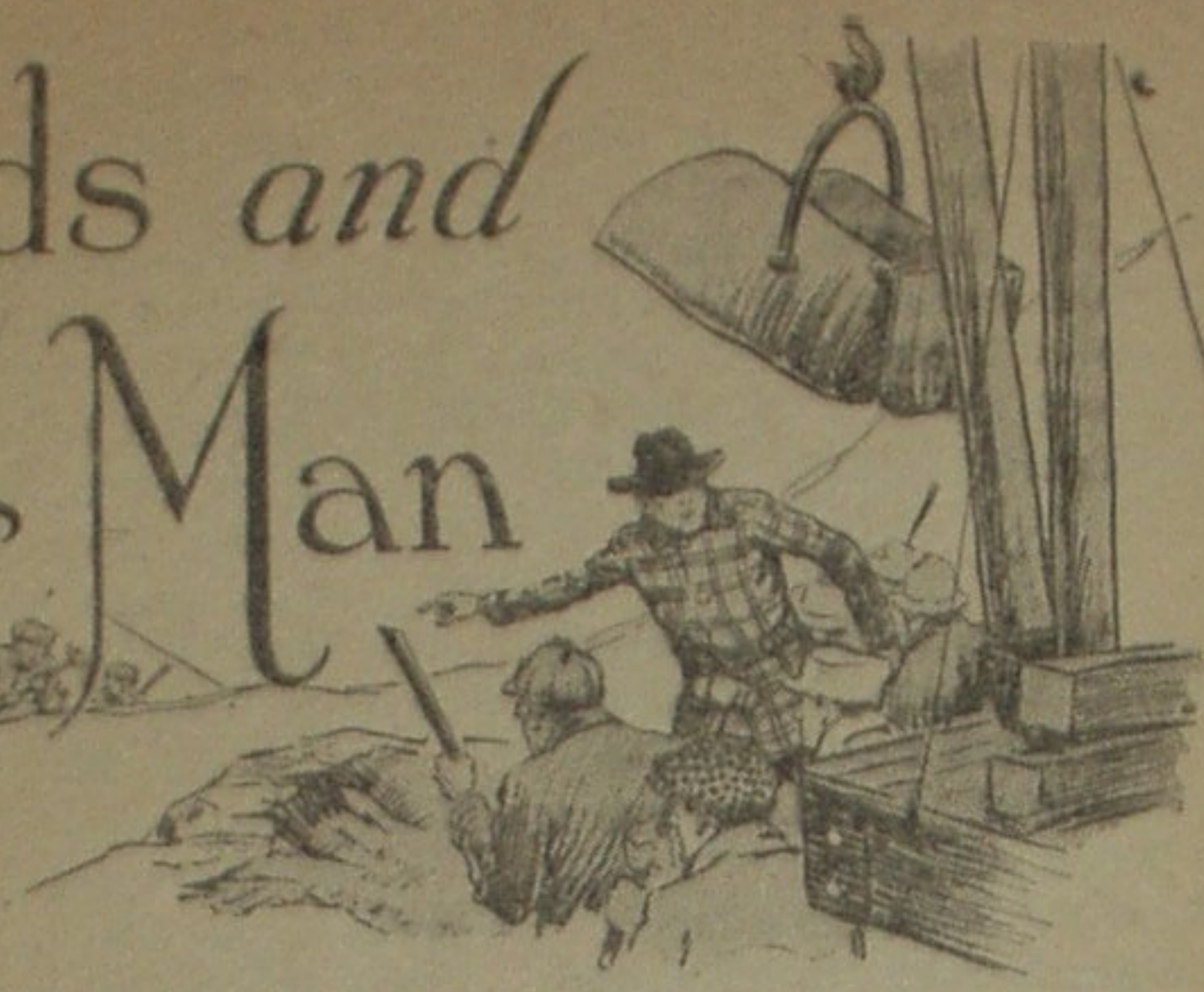
BEYOND THE WALL

HOW high the wall around the garden is—
Austere and gray!
Hardly a vine dares raise a wistful spray
Above its heights, to hint the hidden ray
Of glory shut in there.
How cold it is!
And yet I know the sun is very warm
And falls in round, gold patches on the flowers
And poplars tall;
And mad young breezes patter through the leaves,
And bright birds call
And flutter through the roses, and it's May
Beyond the wall!

How high it is, the wall around your heart—
How gray and cold!
Hardly a soft word past its fastness slips
And struggles upward to your wistful lips,
So firm and young and fair;
And yet I know—
I know, within, your heart is very warm;
For lovely thoughts, like brilliant butterflies,
Leap in your eyes,
And mad, young songs, and half-unguessed desires
Like sudden fires
Sear through your mind, and undreamed yearnings call
Beyond the wall!

Theda Kenyon

Odds and the Man



by Varick Vanardy

Author of "Alias the Night Wind," "That Man Crewe," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHEN TAGGART LAID DOWN.

DAN RANDALL had been gone from the stone house less than an hour (having taken Ellery Cuthbert with him as a prisoner), when Taggart's men appeared in a body before the house.

Dan had been delayed somewhat by the disposal of all that remained of poor old Pitou. Masses would have to be said for him later. The prayers of Yvonne had to suffice for the present; but no dead man could have had the beseechings of a gentler or purer soul than hers.

The men formed in front of the house, and Orme Crosby called out a summons. Jules replied from the hole in the cliff above the house-front.

He told Crosby, in his mixed dialect, but nevertheless quite plainly, what the situation was, and what would happen to Taggart if explosives were used, as Crosby threatened. The result of it was that after a parley, and some hesitation, Crosby laid aside his weapons, and entered the house himself.

Jules kept him "covered" during every moment of the time he remained.

Crosby stood beside Taggart's cot, which had been moved against the inner side of the door, as Dan had directed.

"What's the matter with you, Ben?" he demanded.

"My back's the matter. 'Tain't broken, but it might as well be. Maybe I'll pull out; I don't know. I feel all right enough, if I keep still. Say, Crosby."

"Well?"

"I've been thinkin' this thing over. Mebby it's 'cause I'm helpless, an' down an' out; I dunno. Mebby if I had my feet under me, an' my two arms workin' for me, I'd be just as hell-bent for coppin' out this thing to a show-down as I ever was. I dunno. I ain't the man I was, in my heart an' head, any more'n I am in my arms an' legs. An' so I've been thinkin' that mebby we'd better lay down our hands, an' let Dan rake in th' pot."

"I never expected to find you a quitter, Ben," Crosby replied.

"I ain't one. But I've got sense enough to know when I'm licked."

"Maybe you're licked; but I ain't. Where's Cuthbert?"

"He's licked, too. An' if I can read signs as well's I used to, Ace Wadleigh 'll join th' down-'n-outers before he's three days older. It's up to you 'n me to git down on our marrers, an' beg, Orme. You hear me?"

"Maybe it's up to you, but it ain't up to me. I ain't one of the beggin' kind."

This story began in The Argosy for January 5.

"Ain't you? Well, what have you got to stand pat on? Not a thing. Them old deeds was burned up, in Buxton's store; you know that. I had the others, that Gaffney made out—and I lost 'em, 'r somebody stole 'em. It's all one, so long 's they're gone. You give Randall time an' he'll find a way to prove that the pass is hisn. He ain't no damn fool, Randall ain't. We was the damn fools when we played him for one. I'm ready to testify f'r him, now, if it comes to a testify."

"You damn traitor!" Crosby half shouted at him.

"Uhuh," Taggart responded placidly. "You can call me them things, now. You wouldn't 'a' been so spry about it, yesterday, mebby. But that ain't the point."

"What is the point, then?"

"The point is this, Orme: We want to save our bacon, don't we? Dan's got us flat broke if we don't lay down, an' if we don't do it now. I've heard our men grumblin'. They'd desert, an' go to him in a holy minute, if they had a chance, an' you know it. An' you can't hold 'em without me. I'm the only man that can hold 'em, an' I ain't goin' to try. That's flat."

"Huh! I'm more than half inclined to go back outside, right now, and put a shot of dynamite against that door, while you're behind it, you low down, sneakin'—"

"Hold on, Orme. You might a heap sight better go outside and tie yourself to a tree, an' then hire Duprez to build a fire under you, than do that. Why, if you done that, Crosby, Dan Randall would—I dunno what he wouldn't do to you.

"Go head an try it if you wanta. But don't you call me any more names, 'cause if you do, I'll tell Jules to plug you. An' Jules's fingers is itchin' to do it, right now.

"Turn him out, Jules, before I order you to shoot him. Maybe he'll blow up the place, but I don't think so. He ain't got sand enough.

"Git out, Crosby. You're rotten.

"Say!" he went on, after a moment, when Crosby made no reply. "What are you fightin' for, anyhow? What are you goin' to git, if you could win? Do you suppose that old Gregory is goin' to let you an' me have a slice of this thing, once he gets his own paws clinched onto it? Not much he ain't! An' Ace Wadleigh! Where 'll he be at?"

"That's what I want to know. He's no quitter. He's—"

"He's a skunk; that's what he is. If it hadn't been for him, you 'n me, 'n El Cuthbert woulda stuck to Dan. Where 'll the M. and J. be at when Dan gits this cut-off to goin'? Tell me that. I wouldn't give fifteen cents f'r the hull line of it, except the Carrollton division.

"Take it from me, Orme, Dan Randall's got things up his sleeve that he ain't showed us yet. He's got the cards stacked, an' we're the suckers, from Suckerville. You'd better hedge on this deal, while there's time."

"How?"

"How! Go out there an' march them gazaboes back to the camp. Then take a white flag in y'r paw an' go up to th' captain's office an' ask f'r a confab with Buxton. Tell him that you'n me have decided to chuck up th' sponge, an' that we'll turn our hull outfit over to Dan, an' no questions asked.

"Tell him to tell Dan that we'll accept any offer that Dan 'll make to us. Bullieve me, you'll git a heap sight better terms that way than any other. Tell him that you'll go through the pass an' help him to lick the tar outa Ace, an' his bunch, an' ole Gregory, an' hisn."

"Perhaps the men won't stand for such a thing."

"Won't they? Ask 'em. Put it up to 'em, if you want to. Put it to a vote. You'll find that they'll go over to Dan Randall with a cheer that 'll make these mountains shake. An' say!"

"Well?"

"How long do you s'pose it 'll take Dan to finish that job if he has our outfit—an' mebby Ace's, too—to help it along? Why, man alive, he'll have trains runnin' over Magician Pass before the season's well begun."

"But, what will we get out of it? You, an' me, an' Cuthbert?"

"We'll git whatever Dan's inclined to give us. That much, an' no more."

"It 'll be the icy fist, then."

"No 't won't. It 'll be pretty close to what we ought to have, take it from me. I know Dan Randall. He's as soft as a girl, if you touch him in the right spot."

"You mean that we must just lay down, and roll over and beg. That's what you mean, Ben."

"That's just exactly what I do mean. We ain't got a leg to stand on; an' if we wait till Dan gits through, there won't be a piece of sod to put the leg onto if we had it. That's what. Cuthbert's outa business; I'm outa business; you're outa business without us; Wadleigh is plumb outa business without any of us to stand by him—an' there you are.

"Then, there's another thing. That Gaffney job ain't any too sweet-smellin' to suit me. Them forged deeds, if they should turn up, spell stripes an' bars for some of us.

"You give Dan Randall back the pass, an' then tell him the truth about that directors' meetin', and the girl, an' you'll find that you've touched that right spot I was talkin' about. What d'ye say, Orme? Is it a go?"

Crosby was silent. Then he nodded his head, slowly, three times. Then he turned about, and, without a spoken word more, passed outside.

CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST DITCH.

JULES, watching closely every move that Crosby made after he left the house, saw him call the men around him. Jules could not hear what was said, but within ten minutes after that, Crosby's men marched away again as swiftly as they had come; and there was something about the manner of their going—a certain jauntiness that had not been with them upon their arrival—which told the quick-witted Jules that they were more pleased than disappointed to go.

He so reported to Taggart; and for a few moments afterward Taggart was thoughtful. Then he called Jules to him again.

"Look here, Jules," he said. "You ain't got any too much reason to trust me, have you? You ain't liked me very sumptuous, in the past, have you?"

"*Non, m'sieu',*" was the placid reply.

"Well, I've got a suggestion to make to you, anyhow."

"*Tres bien, m'sieu'.*"

"I want you to light outa here on the trail of Dan Randall. Catch him if you can. Anyhow, git to the pass, an' git into it somehow—I suspect that you know how to do it all right—as quick as the Lord'll let you. See?"

"I see, *m'sieu'.*"

"But you don't feel like goin' an' leavin' Yvonne here, alone with me. I don't blame you any for feelin' that way, an' I'm comin' to that, presently."

Jules nodded, studying the man with close scrutiny.

"You heard all that was said between Crosby an' me, didn't you, Jules?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

"Well, all that I want you to do is to tell Dan Randall all that you heard, and all that you thought about it, just as soon as it can be done. See?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

"Tell him that there ain't no strings tied to it—or to me, either. Tell him that I'm just layin' down my hand an' gittin' up from the table, an' pullin' outa the game. And tell him that if he wants to stake me to a bank-roll, so's I can set in agin, I'm ready to accept it, an' to play accordin' to the rules that he recognizes. Have you got that much all clear in your mind, Jules?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

"Oh, don't be so damn polite. It ain't necessary. Now, as to the other thing I was goin' to say. I can't move. I'm as helpless as a baby-calf that ain't found its legs yet. But all the same, mebby you don't believe that. Mebby you think I'm puttin' on, an' that me 'n Crosby had some sort of a secret understandin' in that confab of ourn. We didn't, but you ain't sure that we didn't. Well, I'm goin' to tell you how to make sure."

"*Oui, m'sieu'.*"

"You just tie me up, hoof an' horns, as

tight as you wanta, before you go. Then you give Yvonne a gun, an' tell her to set right down there till you come back, an' if she sees the slightest thing, inside the house or out of it, that suggests to her that I ain't playin' on the level, *to shoot me*. How's that?"

Jules nodded. He turned to Yvonne, who was standing near, and she nodded also. Her eyes had been drilling into Taggart's very soul while he was talking.

"M'sieu' Taggart mean what he say," she said soberly. "He spik the truth now. You go Jules. You need not tie *m'sieu'*."

Ten seconds later Jules had left the house.

He did not overtake Dan, but he came upon Miron's men within half an hour after Dan had passed them, for, with the prisoner, Dan did not make very great speed. Miron knew Jules, and passed him on readily.

Randall and Buxton were together when Jules found them at the pulpit. Buxton had just finished making his report concerning affairs at the east end of the pass that morning.

In effect they were about the same as the experiences that Dan had met with, only that no prisoners had been taken. Wadleigh's men had been driven back. Seven men of Wadleigh's forces had taken the opportunity to desert, and come over to Buxton and Dan; and those men reported that Wadleigh had met with an accident of some sort, but whether it was serious or not they did not know.

Their report was, however, unconfirmed. There was no telling whether it was true or not.

The one noticeable thing about conditions in the pass was that work had not been halted in the least degree. Drills were hammering, dynamos were humming, iron was ringing upon iron, just as merrily as ever.

The Janver Cut-off was going forward just as rapidly as before.

Dan listened to what Jules had to say, with incredulous amazement, at first, then with interest. And confirmation of the truth of it came almost at the moment that Jules finished.

A messenger arrived from the west end of the pass.

"Three men have come forward, down below," he told Dan. "They brought a white flag, so we talked with them. One was Crosby. He says he wants to see Mr. Buxton, or you, sir, or both of you together."

Much has happened since the dawn of that day.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when Crosby and the two men he brought with him were admitted to the inclosure behind the fort at the west end of the pass.

Jules was stationed where he could hear all that Crosby might have to say, but where he could not be seen.

But Dan could see Jules by turning his head from time to time during the conference, and Jules's frequent nods of his head were sufficient assurance that Crosby was telling substantially the truth.

It was nearly dark by the time that all of the men who had gathered at the mouth of the pass, under the command of Taggart, Cuthbert, and Crosby, had been signed on, and had been divided into groups and squads and gangs, at the direction of Randall, and were marched through the pass to their several stations.

So ended one phase of the fight for possession of Magician Pass.

Dan knew that he would have nothing more to fear at the Janver end of it. He had the signed confession, properly witnessed, of Crosby, relative to the forged deeds, and to the part that Peter Gaffney had played in it.

But Crosby had made no mention of the name of Joyce Maitland.

Dan, from motives best understood by himself, alone, had avoided any mention of her. Jules had forgotten, or neglected, or determined not to speak of the one remark he had heard Taggart make in reference to Joyce.

Cuthbert, still a prisoner under guard, sore to the quick, ugly, resentful, and as bitter as gall, had refused to take any part in the confession, and had cursed Crosby, and Taggart, and Dan and everybody connected with the affair except Ace Wadleigh, roundly.

"Ace Wadleigh an' me ain't through yet!" he yelled at them. "Gregory ain't through either. You'll see. I'll swear till I'm black in the face that that confession of Crosby's is a lie from beginnin' to end. So'll Wadleigh. So will about a hundred more of us."

Dan preferred not to argue with him, and left him; but Dan Randall knew Ace Wadleigh better, perhaps, than any of them did, and he realized that Cuthbert had spoken the literal truth so far as he was concerned.

Ace was not one to give up.

He would fight to the last ditch. The contest for the possession of the pass was not over yet. Dan realized that.

His decision in that regard was confirmed in a startling manner within thirty seconds from the time of his parting with Cuthbert.

He stepped outside of the shack where Cuthbert was confined, and closed the door of it after him. Buxton and Crosby and three of his foremen were with him.

He came to a stop a few yards from the door, and parted his lips to make some remark concerning what had just occurred, when all of them were startled by the sullen roar made by a succession of explosions which came from down the pass to the east of them.

Every man there knew what it meant. There was no mistaking the sounds of it.

Wadleigh was making an attack, and he was using dynamite.

Wadleigh was endeavoring to blow up the fort that guarded the eastern entrance to Magician Pass. Possibly he believed that Taggart would be doing the same thing at the opposite end—or he had determined to go it alone, in any event.

Dan Randall gave his orders quickly.

"Get down there, Bux," he shouted. "Crosby, now is your opportunity to prove yourself. Stay with Buxton, and take his orders. Bux, order out every man who is not engaged on the work. No shooting! No killing or wounding, if it can be avoided. Drive Wadleigh and his men out. Drive them into Magician, and then out of it again. Keep after them. Let this night be the finish. I'll be with you by the time you get at it."

Dan ran to the little building that he called his headquarters.

He discovered there that the explosions down below must have been even worse than he supposed. Neither the telephones, nor the telegraph wires were working.

He had known by the noise of them that the shots set off were many, as well as violent. He had no doubt now that Wadleigh had somehow succeeded in planting his mines so that the whole front of the east fort had been destroyed.

In his dash down the pass toward the scene of the conflict he overtook and outdistanced scores of his own men who were rushing in that direction to take part in the fight.

Skinners, with their mules and whips; hard-rockers, with their hammers, sledges, and steel drills; graders, with their shovels and picks; railers, with their sledges and spikes; it looked as if every man among them had picked up the first article he could lay his hands upon to use as a weapon.

For a time they needed them, too.

It turned out afterward that Wadleigh's men had been ordered to shoot—and many of them did shoot toward the defenders of the pass, with Winchesters and revolvers; but they shot high, purposely.

It went on record afterward that not one man of either party was hit by a bullet that night; but the broken heads, the smashed jaws, the torn faces, and dislocated bones and joints that resulted from that fight, short and sharp as it was, were too many to be counted definitely.

Many of the attacking party were beaten down by the hoofs of the charging mules of the skinners. Many more sustained cut and bleeding faces that were laid open, often to the bone, by the terrible whiplashes.

There were hundreds of hand-to-hand fights; scores of impromptu wrestling matches; dozens of personal contests between respective bullies who stripped for it, and around whom rings were formed to abide by the decision of that particular fight, and to enlist their further efforts on the side of the victor of it at the end.

But the utter rout that followed, as the result of the conflict, was inevitable.

Wadleigh's men were bested at every turn.

They broke and fled in whole sections before the fight had continued twenty minutes after the arrival of the reinforcements from up the pass. In twos, and tens and sometimes by the score, they seized upon the opportunity to go over to Dan's side, and turned about to fight against their own numbers.

Then came the stampede of those who remained loyal to Wadleigh, or who were afraid to desert him.

They were chased into the open ground below the entrance to the pass; they were pursued into the very town of Magician. Those who were overtaken were pummeled until they yelled for mercy—or until they agreed to go to work for the Janver Cut-off.

Captain Badmington, with his few men, rode out to the scene of the conflict—and arrived only in time to discover that it was over and done with.

In the beginning, Wadleigh led his hosts, and shouted encouragement to them from everywhere, seeming to be omnipresent in his capacities. It was certain that he had not been injured so that he could not fight.

At the end of it, however, Ace Wadleigh had disappeared.

Search for him as they might—and did—not a trace of him could be found; and when, at least, comparative quiet had been restored, when the men who had been fighting against each other were laughing together and retailing accounts of the deeds they had performed, or witnessed, during the mix-up Ace Wadleigh was nowhere to be found.

There was just one sad fact connected with the whole affair.

Those first explosions, when the fort was blown up, had killed three men outright, and a dozen others had been injured more or less severely. In the fight that followed no one had been mortally injured, although there were scores who would find themselves temporarily disabled.

Where was Wadleigh?

Nobody seemed able to supply any clue about him until a big and burly Irishman shouldered his way through the knot of men who surrounded Randall, and announced:

"I dunno where he is now, sor, but the last I seed av him, he was hot-footin' it f'r the sky-line toward th' north, an' there was a breed-Injun wid him that I hadn't seen before."

Dan wondered if the "breed-Injun" could have been Lightfoot. But he did not ask the question.

CHAPTER XLI.

THINGS THAT DID NOT BURN.

DAN RANDALL, with Jules beside him, rode into Magician that same night.

He went directly to the barracks, and to Captain Badmington, and laid Orme Crosby's signed and witnessed confession before that official.

Then Jules was sworn, and related all that he heard said between Taggart and Crosby, at the stone house at White Lake. And the memory of Jules was profound.

After that, Randall took the oath himself, and told his own story, and at the end of it, Captain Badmington opened a drawer of his desk and drew forth from it two packages, wrapped in oilskins. He laid them both down on the desk in front of him.

"Mr. Randall," he said, "these two packages have been in my possession ever since the day that Sergeant Hurley arrested you and brought you here to this office. I have examined the contents of both of them."

He lifted one of them in his hands and removed the wrappings. Then he ran the documents it had contained idly through his fingers.

"This one," he continued, "you have believed was burned in the stove, in Buxton's store. In reality, when you tore it away from the possession of Mr. Wadleigh, and threw it over your head behind you, it fell directly into the grasp of Mr. Buxton. There was a third package of this character, if you will take the trouble to recall the fact, in your own possession. It was some sort of a fake-package, I believe, that Wadleigh had made up, and had substituted for this one before you left Janver to come here. There was such a fake-package, was there not?"

"Yes, captain."

"You had referred to it in your talk with Buxton before your arrest. You were very cold and worn out by your exertions at that time. In returning it to your pocket you missed the pocket and dropped it to the floor without being aware of the fact. Your fingers were half-frozen at the time. Buxton picked it up and laid it on the counter behind him. Do you understand me, Mr. Randall?"

"I am beginning to, captain."

"When this package here was thrown into Buxton's hands he put it into one of his pockets. Nobody noticed the fact. You were keeping things moving at about that time, were you not?"

"I believe I was, sir," Randall smiled a little at the recollection.

"Buxton remembered the package that you had said contained nothing but waste paper. It was on the counter, within his reach. He seized it, and threw it into the fire. You know the rest of that story."

"Yes, sir. It is rather wonderful, isn't it? All this, I mean?"

"Perhaps. It was certainly fortunate for you. Buxton is my personal friend, as possibly you know. He lost no time in telling me all the details, and in placing the old deeds in my hands. I knew, almost at once, exactly where you stood in the matter relating to Magician Pass."

"Thank you, captain."

"Something else happened there at the store that day. It relates to this other packet."

"Yes, sir?"

"It dropped to the floor during your fight with Taggart. He dropped it. He did not know that he had done so. Neither did anybody else appear to know about it. It was seen by Sergeant Hurley, who picked it up. Now, Sergeant Hurley is not usually forgetful, but he forgot all about this packet for some days after that—until he accidentally came upon it again. Then he brought it to me. It contains the forged deeds."

"Wonderful!" Dan murmured in an undertone.

"I am familiar with your signature, Mr. Randall. When I was a young man I worked in a bank and I rose to the position of paying-teller. I was considered an expert in the matter of signatures, and forgeries of signatures. I do not need these confessions of Taggart and Crosby to assure me that the signatures to these deeds are forged."

"I don't know how to express my thanks, sir, for—"

"Never mind that, Mr. Randall. Acting upon my advice, Mr. Buxton kept silent in regard to all that I have told you. I deemed it best to permit events to shape themselves somewhat more definitely before I acted in your behalf. The result has proved that I was right."

"Indeed it has, captain. You see—"

"Please let me continue, Mr. Randall."

"Certainly, captain. Excuse me."

"I did take it upon myself to have something in the nature of a warning whispered into the ear of Mr. Lionel Gregory. He has not been active in your affairs since I did that. The first attack upon you would not have occurred had I done it a few hours sooner. And, now, there is just one thing more."

"I am overwhelmed as it is," Dan replied.

"Well, this clinches matters, I believe. The records of your deeds were not destroyed that night when poor Sutherland was burned to death. Those particular books which contained them happened to be in the safe. Your title to the right of way across Magician Pass seems to me to be perfectly clear, Randall. I congratulate you."

"God bless you, Captain Badmington."

"The same to you, sir, and thank you. God's blessing is the one great thing in our lives. Without it we can do little; with it we may accomplish much. Good night, Mr. Randall. But wait. What information have you concerning the whereabouts of Boniface Wadleigh?"

"None whatever, save that he escaped from us to-night, and was last seen bound northward along the eastern slope of the Lantowas in the company of a breed-Indian who might have been Lightfoot. But that is only a guess of mine."

"Thank you. I shall issue a warrant, and a reward for his apprehension in the morning. It was he who gave the order for the use of those explosives in the attack of

to-night, by which three men were killed and others severely injured. This Dominion will not countenance such things as that. There is nothing more, I believe."

"Yes, sir, there is one thing more," Dan said impulsively. "It is something that concerns myself intimately. It is something that you should know concerning me. I am not—"

The captain held up one hand warningly and stopped him.

"All in good time, Mr. Randall. Perhaps I know what you would speak about; possibly I do not. In any case, it can wait—and I much prefer that it should. I will say this much, however."

"Yes, sir."

"I know who Peter Gaffney was, and what he was called before he came out here. I also know why he came here—which I am sure you do not know. If your communication that you were about to make has any reference to him, or to the contents of the belt he was wearing when he was frozen to death on the mountain, I must ask you not to make it now. There will be a more appropriate time later on. And now, Mr. Randall, I will shake hands with you and bid you good night."

Dan Randall stood very still after the captain had gone. Jules and Sergeant Hurley remained in the room, waiting in silence. Then Jules stepped forward and touched him tentatively on the arm. Randall turned.

"Thank you, Hurley, for all that you have done for me," he said. "Come, Jules. We must start at once. *Mam'selle* is somewhere up there in the mountains, and we must find her."

CHAPTER XLII.

A CRY FOR HELP.

JULES, ever silent unless there were need for words, made no remark until they were almost at the entrance to the pass. But he knew that *m'sieu'* had not spoken idly when he had said: "We must start at once." At once with Randall meant now; but all the same, Jules had different ideas.

"*M'sieu'*," he said, as they were about to enter the pass, "do you mean that we go to-night for to fin' *mam'selle?*"

"Yes," Dan replied, "at once. As soon as I have seen Buxton, to tell him about it."

"But, *m'sieu'* weel listen un leetl moment to somethang w'at Jules hav' to say?"

"Of course, Jules. What is it?"

"Thees: Dat groun', heem not ver' hard when M'sieu' Wadleigh go 'way with dat breed-man. Heem not ver' hard now, jus' sam'. You understand, *m'sieu'?*"

"No. You mean that it would leave some sort of a trail? Of course. I had not thought of that."

"Non; you had no thought of dat, *m'sieu'*. But in de night we not see dat trail. *Een le matin,* when the sun shine, we see heem plain. *Non?*"

"Yes, Jules. I understand you. We will wait until it is light before we start."

"*Merci, m'sieu'.*"

"Do you think that you will be able to find and to follow their trail, Jules?"

"For sure, *m'sieu'*. *Certainment. Pourquoi non?* Jus' like you read a book. But de hardes' part will be to fin' de trail, een de firs' place. An' so, *m'sieu'*, when eet ees light, an' you wak' up, you fin' Jules gone already. But Jules be lookin' for dat trail. You see, *m'sieu'?*"

"Yes."

"You come then jus' sam', *m'sieu'*. Right out dere, where Jules point heem finger now. You fin' Jules waitin' for you. Then we go on, *bientot*—queek."

"All right, Jules. I understand. You will be out there as soon as dawn begins to show, and by the time I get there you will have found the trail. Good. That is better, and I know you well enough to know that you can follow the trail once you have discovered it. But wait a moment. Tell me what you think of it all."

"I do not know how to answer dat."

"Was it Lightfoot, do you think, who came here to-night after Wadleigh?"

"No. I not know why I theenk not; but Jules theenk not, jus' sam'. But Jules theenk othair theeng, *m'sieu'*."

"What else?"

"I theenk dat Lightfoot send dat man, mabby so. Lightfoot afraid come heemself, mabby so, et send othair man."

It was not long after daylight the following morning when Dan Randall found Jules waiting for him half a mile north of the eastern end of the pass. The faithful fellow stood up quickly when he saw Dan approaching, and announced as soon as he was near enough:

"I fin' dat trail, *m'sieu'*. Heem not ver' plain, but I see him, all right, jus' sam'. Dat snake Lightfoot, heem not mak' one part o' eet. I know who mak' dat othair trail. Lightfoot hav' one frien', mabby so."

They started on together without further converse, and several miles had been covered, and they had begun to ascend to higher levels along one of the mountain ravines, when Jules spoke:

"I go across de pass las' night, *m'sieu'*, to de stone *maison* by de *lac*. Yvonne, she gone from dere, *m'sieu'*."

Dan stopped short in his tracks.

"Yvonne gone?" he exclaimed. "Where?"

"*Je ne sais pas, m'sieu'*, unless she theenk she fin' Mlle. Joie. Yvonne feel ver' bad 'bout Mlle. Joie, *m'sieu'*. I theenk she she go to fin' her, mabby so. Triton—heem M. Taggart's *homme*, you know—heem not een dat fight las' night. Heem go back to de house.

"So, Yvonne, when she fin' dat Triton ees dere to tak' care of M. Taggart, she jus' say notting, an' what you call, light out. But she tak' theengs to eat with her. So Jules theenk she go to fin' *mam'selle*. *M'sieu'* weel remember that Yvonne hear all that old Pitou said about dat place under the black rock?"

"Yes."

"*M'sieu'* theenk heem able to travel jus' leetle bit faster?" Jules asked.

"Three times faster than we have been going, Jules, if you will. Go just as fast as you like. I'll keep up with you."

It was a big promise, as Dan soon discovered, notwithstanding the fact that Jules had crossed the pass twice during the preceding night and had had no sleep.

Up hill and down dale, over rocks and through woods, across ravines and athwart hog-back ridges, up precipitous cliff-sides, along precarious ledges, through thickets that were almost impenetrable, they made their way onward.

Sometimes the trail was plain indeed; at other times they nearly lost it utterly.

There were occasions when Jules lost precious moments seeking it; there were others when they ran with all speed along level places where the trail could be plainly followed.

They forded icy torrents of water that still were fed by the snows that lingered at higher points above them. They floundered through enormous drifts of snow that had not yet succumbed to the thaws; and so, at last, just before sundown, they crossed the backbone of the range and stopped for a moment upon a flat space, whence there was an uninterrupted view in nearly all directions.

But when Dan would have stood up boldly in order to look about him, Jules pulled him backward, below the highest point of rocks.

"We mighty clos' to dat flack rock, *m'sieu'*," he said. "Mabby dat Lightfoot be on de watch. Heem see us, then heem be warned. *Non?*"

"Is it so near as that?" Dan asked.

"*Oui, m'sieu'*."

"Then why don't we go ahead? What is the use of waiting here?"

"*M'sieu'* ha' forgot, mabby, what dat captain say down een Magicienne? Heem say dat M. Wadleigh hav' keel three men, an' purty near keel some othairs. *Non?* M. Wadleigh know that.

"Mabby so, now, eef you stan' up dere where he can see you, heem shoot you. Lightfoot, heem shoot Jules, mabby. Dat other man, heem shoot both of us. *Non?* We wait here until night. *Non, m'sieu'?*"

"But Jules, to be so near and not to go to her!" Dan exclaimed.

"Eet ees better to wait, *m'sieu'*, than to be keeled, an' not go at all. An' mabby Yvonne dere, too, by now. I theenk so."

"You think that Yvonne has got there?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'*. She start las' night. Dat road on the othair side much better than on thees side. Yvonne geet dere queek. If we show ourselves now we be shot, mabby so. Then there ees nobody for to help *mam'selle* an' Yvonne. Then those bad men, an' dat Wadleigh, they do jus' what they like—eef *m'sieu'* an' Jules are dead."

"You are right, Jules. I see it now."

"Purty soon we go on, when they no can see us." Jules seated himself upon the rocks and produced his pipe, having first taken note of the direction of the wind.

Then, just as night began to fall, they were brought to their feet with a sudden start.

A woman's voice rang shrilly out upon the increasing gloom in one wild cry for help.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

DAN RANDALL could not have described afterward how he covered the space that intervened between him and the source of that call for help.

He and Jules had both recognized the voice of Joyce Maitland and the effect of it upon them, keyed up as they were, was electric in its character.

Darkness had not yet fallen. The condition was that which we describe as "dusk."

The Black Rock, well named, loomed directly in front of them, a hundred yards away. Between it and them there was a depression in the top of the mountain, which nature, by some upheaval of the past, had filled with a jumble of sharp-edged stones of varying sizes. These were not easy to cross in haste, but both Dan and Jules forgot that fact when they heard the call for help.

They skimmed over the tops of those smaller rocks, practically side by side; now one of them would be a yard or so in advance, then the other, and so they leaped down at last upon a huge flat stone as level as a floor, directly under one side of the big, black boulder the size of a small house.

There Jules darted on in advance of Dan.

They turned at a sharp angle around one end of the rock and ran down a steep incline, which was, however, wide and smooth, and which wound around the rock in a curve as symmetrical as if the craft of an engineer had planned it. Like a spiral staircase without the steps, and much less steep, it proved, eventually, to be the pathway that old Pitou had described with almost his last breath.

The cry for help was not repeated.

More than likely Joyce, after that one impulsive appeal, had remembered how futile it would be to call for help at a place so remote as the black rock.

The two men ran lightly, almost noiselessly. In descending the winding path they were very nearly side by side.

It was almost dark under the shadow of the rock and the gloom became deeper as they descended; but soon Dan could see some sort of a glow ahead of him and then Jules put out a hand and restrained him, and they came almost to a stop.

Dan would have shaken himself free and rushed onward had he not discovered at the same instant that they were directly upon the scene they sought.

A space suggestive of an amphitheater of small dimensions was directly in front of them. A small building made of hodge-podge stones roughly piled together and the chinks between them filled with earth occupied the center of it. A wide doorway, through which a team of horses might have been driven with ease, stood open, and out of it a bright light gleamed.

A tableau of startling realities was there, too, plainly revealed to them by the light within the house. Their point of approach to it was such that nearly the whole interior of the room was visible to both.

By common consent they stopped, for they realized that their nearness was not suspected. They saw, too, that there was no immediate danger.

Apparently Ace Wadleigh and the man who had been his guide from Magician Pass had only just arrived. It had not occurred to Dan that he and Jules had so nearly overtaken them. Jules had known it, but he had said nothing. He had strained himself and Dan, too, to their utmost efforts to catch up with the two men before Black Rock was reached, but he had known at the last that it could not be done.

Evidently Wadleigh and his companion had found Yvonne already there, without in the least expecting to see her; and the fact of their coming had been as great a surprise to Yvonne as to them.

When Dan and Jules came upon the scene, Yvonne was standing over near one corner of the room, facing the wide-open doorway. She held a small automatic pistol in her right hand (it was one that Dan had given her long ago, and had taught her how to use). The muzzle of it was pointing directly at Ace Wadleigh, who had come to a stop a few paces inside the door—apparently when he had been in the act of rushing forward to seize her.

Probably he had intended no more than to throw Yvonne out of his way, for, beside her, and a little to the rear, upright, pale, courageous, with tightened lips and frightened eyes, stood Joyce.

Just behind Wadleigh, nearer to the door, half crouching, and with one hand upon the haft of a knife that was thrust under a belt at his hips, was as villainous a looking specimen of the breed-Indian as could be imagined. Save for a nervous twitching of the fingers that clasped at the knife-hilt, he was as motionless as the others.

Over against the far wall of the room, directly opposite the open doorway, was a rude cot covered with weather-tanned skins of animals, and blankets, and upon the cot, where he had half raised himself by the support of one hand and arm, was Lightfoot.

He was drawn and haggard, cadaverous in appearance, and wasted almost to a skin-wrapped skeleton. But his eyes had lost nothing of their savage brilliancy, and they were gleaming furiously at Ace Wadleigh.

Such was the tableau.

Dan Randall, watching the scene for a time that seemed interminable, but which was actually less than half a dozen seconds, gathered himself for a leap forward, but at the same instant he felt the grip of Jules's hand upon his arm—and then Jules glided past him through the open doorway, and with a cat-like spring, gripped the wrist of the Indian that held the knife.

Wadleigh whirled about in his tracks, drawing as he did so; but not in time to do any damage with the weapon he would have used.

Dan's hands shot forward. One of them gripped Wadleigh's throat, the other seized the wrist of the hand that held the weapon, and bent it backward with a sudden wrench that snapped it like a pipe-stem. The weapon fell to the floor of the stone cabin. Wadleigh followed it, felled by a blow of the same clenched hand that had broken his wrist.

Jules raised himself from atop of the prostrate form of the Indian, at the same moment; the Indian stayed where he was, and Jules, half apologetically, said:

"Jules not do dat. Heem fall on hees own knife, *m'sieu'*; but eet ver' good, jus' sam'."

Lightfoot fell back upon the cot, the fury gone out of him. He closed his eyes. A slow grimace, like a smile, distorted his thin lips. He lay very still.

Jules went nearer to Wadleigh, and stood over him in silence. Ace made no attempt to rise, nor to speak. His eyes were open, but he did not seem to see Jules; he kept them fixed upon Randall, whose back was turned to him.

Yvonne let fall her hand that held the weapon. Her eyes were riveted upon Dan, but mingled with the look of adoration in them, was expectancy, also. Dan was a god to her, in some ways. She expected great things of him in that moment. She was not disappointed.

Dan's eyes were only for Joyce. He looked toward her, and she met his gaze steadily.

He saw her lips part slightly, as if to speak, and he opened his arms and took a step toward her.

"Come to me, Joyce," he said. "I want you. Come."

She sprang forward with a glad cry. His arms enfolded her. She nestled against him. He held her the tighter, protectingly, with his face lost sight of in the profusion of her hair, which had fallen from its fastenings over her shoulders.

Yvonne clasped her hands together as one does when one prays, or gives devout thanks to God for a great blessing. Her lips moved in thankfulness. The one prayer that had been her constant and earnest supplication, was answered.

She dropped her eyes again, and they saw something else.

With a cry she threw herself forward, full upon the outstretched figure of Ace Wadleigh, whose weapon was discharged at the same instant, though harmlessly. Yvonne had discovered his stealthy act in time. With one broken wrist, he still had one hand to use for evil deeds.

Then, when it was over, gentle little Yvonne hid her sweet face upon Jules's broad chest, and wept silently, with tears of infinite joy.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WAYS OF TRANSGRESSORS.

LIGHTFOOT'S light had gone out forever when he closed his eyes upon the certainty of the outcome of that strange scene. He was quite dead when Joyce, releasing herself from Dan's embrace, crossed hastily to the cot.

"He was good to me," she explained. "Not at first; but afterward. He was cruel to me, in the beginning, and there were times when I was filled with terror because of him. But all that passed very quickly.

"That day in the pass, after the storm, when I was trying to get to the pulpit, where I knew I would find fuel and food, I—I gave out very suddenly, I think. I lost consciousness; and when I came to myself I was in some sort of a grotto among the rocks. The front of it was sealed with snow. There was a fire, burning low, near the small opening. I could see beyond it, and knew that it was night.

"There was food beside me. It was not very choice, but I was ravenous. I ate, and I quenched my thirst with snow. I could not understand what had happened, but I knew that I had been saved, and that whoever had done me that service would return. The small fire kept out the worst of the cold. I realized that I was safe for the moment, and I was content to wait.

"I ate again. Then I slept. How long, I do not know. The following day was far advanced when I awoke. Lightfoot, the Indian, whom I disliked and feared, was shaking my arm.

"He ordered me to rise. He made me eat of more food that he had brought to me. He would not tell me where he had been, but I knew. He had with him that small, black satchel that I gave to you, Dan, to hold your papers when you wished to carry them about with you. I knew that you kept it in your office. That fact told me that Lightfoot had been there, and had stolen it.

"Lightfoot thought the satchel was locked, and he did not dare, then, to break it open. He did not know about the hidden spring that releases the catch, which was the very thing that made you want it for your papers. When we started for this awful place, he made me carry it. He was laden with provisions that he had brought with him from Janver.

"We floundered in the snow. We stumbled across barriers that seemed impassable. Often I fell from exhaustion. It was at such times that Lightfoot was brutal. Sometimes he pounded me, and beat me, and even kicked me into activity again, after the manner that Indians treat their own women. But, brutal as it was, it doubtless saved my life.

"We got here somehow—in the middle of the night—years and years afterward, it seemed to me. While Lightfoot started a fire, I fell down in utter exhaustion upon that couch.

"When I awoke, Lightfoot was still sleeping—there, on the floor, before the fire-place, wrapped in blankets. He had thrown blankets over me, too.

"I arose, quietly. My act did not arouse him. I tiptoed to the door and opened it. The sun was shining, and there was a touch of warmth in the air. I recognized the smell of the chinook wind, but up here it did not have much effect.

"Then—wait, Dan, please—I began to remember things. I remembered your satchel that I had been forced to carry, and to which I had clung because it was yours. There had been scarcely any weight to it, at all, still, I would have dropped it many times if it had not belonged to you.

"And then I remembered that I had dropped it, at the very last—at the moment when we had descended a steep and winding path and come in sight of this stone hut.

"I turned my eyes back into the room to see if Lightfoot had picked it up. It was not there, and, Indian though he was, he was still sleeping. I had not roused him.

"I remembered that I had been within sight of the house when I dropped the satchel, and, as it was night then, it could not be very far away. I went outside, I found the winding path down which we had come. I came upon the satchel in the middle of it.

"I touched the spring, Dan, and looked inside. I saw what it contained. Instantly I realized the danger of permitting Lightfoot to know. I knew that he might awaken at any moment, and come in search of me. But there was no place to hide it, where he would not find it the moment he searched.

"Dan, I deliberately sat down in the snow, upon the spot where the satchel had been dropped, to obliterate the marks of it. No trace of it was left when I got up, and I hurried back here, bringing it with me. Lightfoot, wonder of wonders, was still sleeping. He must have been worn out, indeed, by his superhuman exertions in bringing me here.

"But he stirred as I approached, and I thrust the satchel under the blankets where I had been sleeping.

"He started to his feet. He saw the open door, which I had not had time to close.

"'You been outside?' he demanded. I told him I had, and he went out without saying another word.

"I watched him and saw him follow the trail I had made. He bent forward, at the spot where I had seated myself in the snow, and appeared to examine it. Then he came back into the hut.

"'What for you set?' he demanded. I shrugged my shoulders and did not answer.

"'Where ees dat bag?' he asked me, then. 'You no breeng him here las' night. Where you drop heem? -Hey?'

"I shrugged my shoulders again and he asked no more questions. He fixed the fire. He got things to eat, out of the pack he had brought. He made me work, too, scowling so that I was frightened if I manifested any inclination to refuse. All the while I was in terror lest he should discover what was hidden under the blankets.

"To all of the questions I asked him, as to why he had brought me here, he made no answer. He rarely spoke at all, save in monosyllables; but his eyes followed me constantly, and gradually I became deathly afraid of him.

"Later, he went out, and I knew that he was searching for the satchel. I knew that he would not find it, and I dreaded the consequences. During his absence I found another hiding place for it.

"But he did not return during all of that day, or all of the night following; and it was far into the next day before I made up my mind that he did not mean to come back.

"I believed that I could find my way back to Janver, but it was too late to start that day. At night I barricaded the door, so that he would have to ask to get inside if he came back.

"But he did not come; and in the morning, as soon as it was light, I started out. The weather had moderated. It was not very cold. I believed that I could find my way out of my troubles. I felt that I would rather die on the mountain than to remain here alone with Lightfoot.

"I found him, Dan. He had gone to some cache of his to bring more provisions. Returning, he had slipped and fallen. The burden he carried had fallen upon him. He had been a long time in the open. It is wonder how he lived through it at all.

"Both legs and one of his arms were broken. He had tried to drag himself back to this place, but had not accomplished half the distance. Then he resigned himself to die. He was unconscious when I found him. But I knew that he lived.

"I remember that I had seen an old toboggan-sled, here, in the cabin. Doubtless, one that had been used some time in the past to bring in supplies. Don't ask me how I got him here, at last, but I did it. It was three days after that before he came back to consciousness. In the meantime he raved, constantly, in his own dialect. But his broken bones rendered it impossible for him to leave his cot.

"Dan, dear, from that day to this one, I have cared for him, tended him, nursed him. It has been awful, awful! But there was no other way. There were no remedies here. There has been nothing that I could do. He would not hear of my making an attempt to bring help. Oh, Dan, Dan, I am glad that you came. Wait, dear, I am almost done.

"Lightfoot, in his stolid fashion, appreciated what I did for him. He told me a great many things about Taggart and the others, and about Ace, that I did not know; and a man called Gaffney, too.

"He warned me, also, to go away from here as soon as he was dead. He told me, all too plainly, that terrible things would happen to me if I remained. Taggart had ordered him to bring me here, if it could be done, and to hold me here until he could come here himself. Lightfoot was to fasten me in while he went to inform Taggart of his success; and then (really I do not understand it all) Ben Taggart was to make use of me in some way to forward his own schemes against you and Ace.

"To-day—this morning—Lightfoot asked me to go away and leave him. To send help to him as soon as possible, but to go. I think he knew that he was dying. I was ready to start, and was at the door, when dear little Yvonne came. We had decided to wait until to-morrow, and then to go away together. When Lightfoot heard that, he smiled and said:

"'Ver' good. To-morrow, Lightfoot be dead!'"

"Yes, he probably knew that he could not live another day," Dan replied. "But what of that other one? I never saw him before. Who is he?"

"I don't know," Joyce said. "I never saw him before, either."

"I know," Jules interjected. "Heem called Bad Pierre. Heem come from up Athabasca country. Heem come to Janver with dat bum—Gaffney—to guide heem. Dat how M'sieu' Wadleigh know heem. *Non? Oui.* Then, heem fall on hees own knife, when I grab hees wrist.

"Look, *m'sieu'*," he added, addressing Dan, directly, "heem I see ver' many times with M'sieu' Wadleigh, jus' about de time when de bum mak' de writings to look sam' as you write."

Ace Wadleigh, who was seated upon a stool in a far corner of the room with his broken wrist bound and with Jules keeping watch over him, spoke up, in his cool, leisurely, and insolent manner, with the ghost of an ironical smile on his lips:

"I can ease your minds in regard to Bad Pete," he said. "I see no reason why I should not do so. Jules is correct about his coming to Janver as Gaffney's guide. But Gaffney's money had given out. He could not pay Black Pete. So Black Pete decided that he would work for me, for some ready cash.

"That is all you need to know. I sent for him as soon as I could, after the thaw. I promised him a big reward if he would find out what had become of Joyce. He and Lightfoot had been as chummy as two Indians ever can be. I suppose Lightfoot must have told him about this place, or have had him here, some time, perhaps. Anyhow Pete found them both, and without letting them suspect that he had been here, came to me with the report. He said that Lightfoot was as good as dead, then, and that probably Joyce would be all alone by the time we got here."

Joyce took a step forward, toward him.

"What would have happened, Ace, if you had found me here alone, and unprotected?" she asked him, gazing steadily into his eyes.

For a moment he returned her gaze; then he dropped his own.

"What I intended to make happen, and what might have happened in such an event, does not matter, now," he replied, slowly. "You were not alone. The incident is closed. The only person I found here whose end I envy lies there." He pointed toward Lightfoot's body, on the cot. "He died a natural death."

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW ONE MAN COULD HATE.

THEY buried the two bodies in one grave, made large enough to receive them side by side. Jules fashioned two

rude crosses of wood to stand at their heads. Yvonne passed a solemn hour in the service of each one of them, counting her beads, and murmuring prayers for the repose of their souls. And surely none could have had a more earnest intercessor than she was.

That took place the following morning.

Two hours before noon they started upon their return, taking the way by which Yvonne had come, it being much shorter and easier.

But, before they started, Dan sent Jules and Yvonne and Joyce outside to wait for him, while he remained alone in the larger room of the cabin with Ace Wadleigh. With his one-time friend whom he had loved and trusted.

"Sit still, Ace," he said calmly. "I am not going to take you back, and hand you over to justice. Justice will overtake you of its own accord, soon enough—unless you can think up a way to square yourself with it. So far as I am concerned, you are free to go wherever you please as soon as I have finished with what I have to say to you."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for your generosity," Wadleigh replied, with a half sneer. "I am not sure whether I want to, or not."

"You need not. I neither wish for thanks from you, nor deserve them. What I am doing now is done for the Boniface Wadleigh I used to know; not for the man you are now. But, more than anything else, I do it for my own sake."

"I hope you're not going to preach."

"No. Ace, I wonder if you knew who Gaffney really was?"

"Of course I knew. I found it out the night after he had finished signing those deeds with your name. He got drunker than usual that night, after it was over. If it had not been that he hated you, and feared you, too, for what he had done to you, he never would have committed those forgeries for me."

"So I supposed—after I had found out who he was," Dan remarked.

"When did *you* discover it?" Wadleigh asked. "I am quite willing to admit that I would have gone away from here, even now, after you have set me free, leaving you to believe, still, that you were a murderer. When did you discover that you were not one?"

"It was never a murder, Ace. I supposed that I had killed a man, and fled. I had nothing to blame myself for—other than for the consequence of what I believed I had done. I had cause enough to kill him, God knows.

"I believed, even when I ran away, that I could stay where I was and be acquitted, if all the truth were known. But to do that meant a revelation of all the unhappy history of my sister, who had been his wife. I preferred to do as I did. We will drop that part of the subject now."

"But you haven't told me yet how and when you found out that Guy Fenney did not die by your hand. You couldn't have recognized him when you found him at the pulpit. You never knew him, did you? You never saw him until that night you thought you killed him, did you?"

"No."

"Well, how did you find it out? How did you discover that there was never even an indictment returned against you?"

"What? Not even that? No indictment against me?"

"You did *not* know *that*, did you? And I have told you the news. I'm sorry. However, it doesn't matter. If there had been an indictment, you could have had it quashed, now. Still—"

"Why, then, was I pursued, Ace? Why were officers sent after me, even into the far north?"

"You weren't pursued. Officers were not sent after you. I only made you believe so. You might have remained Daniel R. Vanderveer all this time, with never a soul to object to it, or to ask you an unpleasant question, if you had chosen to do so—or if I had been decent enough toward you to put you wise. Great Scott, man, don't you suppose that the law would have found you, if the law had wanted you?"

"I do suppose so, now. I had not thought of it, in just that way."

"I hated you, Dan. I always hated you. I hate you now. I can't help it. It is inside of me. You had everything that I did

not have, and that I wanted with all my heart and soul.

"You had millions, in money. You had that phenomenal strength. You had that wonderful physique. You had kindness of heart, generosity of spirit, graciousness of manner, largeness of soul, bigness of intellect, unbounded capacity for whatever you undertook; and you had them all in bulk; a surfeit of them.

"I had not one of them. I had smatterings of each, but the completion of none. So, I envied you; and, envying, hated you. That is what has brought me here, where I am now, an outlaw; the thing that you thought *you* were but which could not crush *your* spirit, even at that.

"Then there was Joyce. Because of her I hated you ten thousand million times more than ever before. Oh, let me talk on, while I am in the humor for it. We may as well have a show-down, now; there will never be another opportunity. And I'm not talking because I hate you any the less, for I don't. More, if anything."

"Go on, then."

"I knew Joyce before you did. She was in Janver while you were up in the Great Slave country, and I was keeping you there with my lies. I wanted her. I loved her. She was getting used to me, and beginning to believe that she might love me some day, until you came down from the north, and found her in the snow beside her dead guide—and brought her in to Janver, where you found me again.

"That's all. If wishes could slay a man, you would wither up to nothingness right now, and disappear through that crack under the door with not so much as a memory left of you. Fine state of mind to be in, isn't it?"

"I cannot even imagine it, Ace."

"Of course you can't. That's another reason why I hate you. Now, suppose you reply to my question that I have asked you several times."

"What was it? I have forgotten."

"When did you discover that Guy Fenney was alive? Was it the similiarity of the names that suggested it? Gaffney—Guy Fenney?"

"No. His own confession, written out at length, detailing the entire story of it all, even to the reasons which would have justified me if I had killed him, were in that belt that was strapped around his body over his undershirt, when you left him at Devil's Pulpit, to die. It told, also, that he was seeking me, to kill *me*."

"Oh—I see—pity I didn't think to look for that sort of a thing on him—well, you'd better go now, hadn't you, if you want to make Bluerock before dark? That is, if you still intend to leave me here."

"Yes. I will go now. There are provisions enough here, to last you for days to come, if you choose to remain. Jules has set the broken bones as well as a doctor could do it. I have put some money in that tobacco jar, over the fire-place. You can take it with you, or leave it there, as you prefer. I have thrown it aside. That is all. If you escape the redcoats, I wish you nothing but honest success for the future."

There were no good-byes uttered on either side.

Dan swung around and left the cabin, closing the door after him.

Wadleigh watched him go, an odd and insolent smile upon his face as he did so.

CHAPTER XLVI.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE.

"WHAT do you think of it, sweetheart?"

"It's just grand. That is the only word I can think of, Dan, dear; and that one doesn't half express it," Joyce replied, looking fondly at him, and bending forward in the saddle to pat the arched neck of her horse.

"Does look good, doesn't it?" Dan nodded his head in an emphatic gesture as he spoke.

They were at the top of the Ridge, exactly at the spot where Dan had halted to fasten on his snowshoes that night before the great storm. They had ridden out there to see the late afternoon train as it issued from Magician Pass on its way to Janver.

The "it" referred to the train itself.

coming, every night for a week, and they found it just as wonderful this seventh night as it had been on the first occasion.

"We'll have the Black Gorge route running in thirty days," Dan told her a moment later.

That was another remark that he had made to her every evening of the seven. But it was just as new, and just as interesting, and just as wonderful as it had been with its first utterance; and her reply was the same:

"Won't that be fine? And I can ride through the gorge on the first train with you?"

"Of course, sweetheart. Come, now; let's go back. Yvonne will be wondering if we are going to be as late as we were the other evening."

June had come, and with it their wedding day; also the day of the official opening of the Janver Cut-off over Magician Pass. Both events were now seven days in the past.

In the Black Gorge to the west of Janver more than a thousand men were at work, driving one another for the premiums, and doing their utmost to win the praise of the man they worked for.

They could not get used to that new name. They liked Dan Randall best. Dan never saw nor heard the other one, save on addressed envelopes, and when men journeyed out from the East to see him and to consult with him.

Of Wadleigh there had never been a sign since that parting with him at Black Rock, on the mountain. The police had not taken him. There was little doubt that he had made good use of the thousand dollars that Dan had left inside the tobacco-jar over the fireplace.

Taggart, paralyzed from the hips down, had, nevertheless, gone back to contracting, and was a big factor in the pushing of the Black Gorge branch of the cut-off. Dan, when he received back the control of the M. and J. R. R., overlooked Taggart's and Crosby's past mistakes, and took them back on precisely the same conditions that they had enjoyed before that epoch-making directors' meeting.

Cuthbert, evidently doubtful of what might happen to him, had disappeared, none knew whither. Buxton had been best man at the wedding. Also, he was general manager of the railroad, as well as the owner of a very comfortable block of stock, which Dan had insisted upon awarding to him.

When Joyce and Dan dismounted at the door of their home Jules was there to take charge of their horses. Jules had never been quite so happy as he was in those days of summer.

Yvonne opened the door for them when they went up the short path to it. Her sweet face seemed prettier than ever as she smiled and curtsied and then impulsively caught at their hands and kissed them. But Joyce caught the little woman in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks, and Yvonne laughed aloud with pleasure, blushing with pride at the caress, for she knew that it was solely prompted by affection.

Frequently, all four of them went over to the stone house at White Lake for a week-end, and then Jules would have a great time rollicking with his dogs, and manufacturing "things" with tools—for that was the pastime in which Jules found the greatest pleasure.

Dan had never needed all the papers concerning which he had been so careful to instruct Yvonne that night before the storm. The confession of Gaffney, otherwise Guy Fenney, had obviated that. But he kept them, "jus' sam'," as Jules would have put it.

They never spoke of Ace Wadleigh, although Dan caught himself thinking about the man often, wondering if he would ever turn up again, and when, and in what manner.

In their own snug living-room, by themselves, with the door closed, Joyce went up to her stalwart husband and lifted her face for a caress, and he put his strong arms around her and held her close and in silence.

Then Yvonne came to the door and summoned them to partake of the evening meal.

(The End.)



The Log-Book

By the Editor

DID you ever happen to be one of a house-party, or gathering of any sort, when some one in the circle launched out on the telling of a story that would obviously take him some time to finish? Haven't you thereupon become restless and noted the bored looks on the others around you? Sociability means the frequent interchange of ideas from one to another composing a group; the telling of a story by any one implies that the rest must perforce keep quiet and listen to the end, whether the thing interests them or not. The only person certain to have a good time is the story-teller himself, goodness only knows why. I have often wondered why persistent talkers do so enjoy hearing themselves, when they must know that nobody else does.

Why, then, if listening to stories is such a hardship, should reading them be so enjoyable as to give magazines like THE ARGOSY, composed of nothing but stories, such huge circulations? I'll tell you why. The stories you read in THE ARGOSY are first sifted through the editor's sieve, and only the good ones get by, whereas in a social company you are at the mercy of any bore who manages to get the floor.

I grant you that once in a blue moon there is a raconteur worth listening to, but they are as rare as soft snaps in the trenches or manuscripts worthy of acceptance in the editor's daily mail. A magazine is made up of the nuggets that are found by patiently searching for them through a big mass of slag. And now to tell you of the treasure we have unearthed for your next ARGOSY.

If a man fell in love with a beautiful girl whom he believed to be the embodiment of every virtue, and then found her dancing in a low Alaskan dive with dissolute men, what ought he to do about it? This is the problem that confronts *Ormond Rayne* in our absorbing serial of the frozen North that begins next week, entitled

"HIS MAID OF THE NORTHLAND"

BY GEORGE M. A. CAIN

We can assure you that *something* is done. In fact, such a number of things are done by everybody concerned—actions that involve life and death, honor, love, and heroic sacrifice—that their recital by this master-author will, we predict, please you mightily. This is a distinctly unusual story; as different from ordinary stories of Alaska as *Rose Hornby* is different from ordinary heroines.

If you have ever envied the captains of finance that roll up the avenue in their luxurious limousines, the adventures and misadventures that befell *Wilfred Hartley* in our complete novel for next week, entitled

"ALONG MYSTERY TRAIL"
BY FRANK BLIGHTON

may cause you to wonder if, after all, our gilded plutocrats *are* to be envied. For if *Hartley* had been an ordinary chap, probably nothing at all would have happened to him. Thugs don't sit up nights thinking out ways of getting money from ten-dollar-a-week clerks. This is a mystery novel, with a charming love story interwoven, that will keep you guessing from start to finish.

In "THE ABSCONDER," by Henry Leverage, a bank-clerk plans a getaway with stolen money with such painstaking attention to details that detection seems impossible. But he overlooks one trifling matter. Keep your wits about you when you read this story next week, and see if you can figure out just where he "fell down" before you get to the end.

"MISS PUTTY FACE," by Loring Brent, is the second in a series of true-to-life motion-picture stories, the first of which in the February 2 issue, was entitled "Any Little Girl." In that story you learned how a pretty stenographer became a movie actress. Read this one, and see if a screen favorite's life is always a bed of roses.

"A DAUGHTER OF THE SEA," by Charles Wesley Sanders, another of next week's short stories, concerns the daughter of a captain who was educated and "finished" at a fashionable Eastern school, and what she did when a life-and-death situation, that only the school of experience prepares one for, confronted her.

THE REWARD OF MERIT

I may tell Mrs. Harding that THE ARGOSY as a weekly is meeting with most decided success.

Hamilton, Ohio.

Please find enclosed money order for my renewal to THE ARGOSY. We like the weekly much better, as we do not have to wait so long to read the continued stories. I am trying to get another subscriber for you. Trusting I am not too late in sending in my subscription, and hoping you may still meet with success for THE ARGOSY, I remain, (MRS.) MABEL HARDING.

THE LOG-BOOK AS A HERALD OF GOOD THINGS TO COME

"The Man with the 44 Chest" appeared complete in THE ARGOSY for October, 1914, and will be sent on receipt of twenty cents.

New York City.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for about four months, but I like it better than any other magazine I read. I always read the Log-Book first to see what is in the next issue. Every week in the Log-Book I read some more praise for E. J. Rath's story, "The Man with the 44 Chest," so I think that I should read it also. I would be very much obliged if you would send me the price of THE ARGOSY in which it appeared, as I want to get it. My favorite authors are George Foxhall, Fred Jackson, Rex Parson, and Edgar Franklin. Hoping for an early reply, I remain as ever a true ARGOSY fan,

G. F.

P. S.—If you print this in the Log-Book, kindly withhold my name and address.

A BIG SOLDIER FOLLOWING

Readers of THE ARGOSY in khaki are numbered by legions, so we think our Ohio friend will not need to be deprived of his favorite after enlisting.

Mount Sterling, Ohio.

Regarding your letter about THE ARGOSY, which was received some time ago, I was on my ranch in Montana at the time, where I watched for THE ARGOSY every month with great interest, for it was always interesting, and I think it will be even better as a weekly. I would give my book every month after I was through with it to the other boys. We all liked it. I am at my parents' home now; going soon to enlist in the war, where I hope it will be arranged so I can get it while there. I think several of the other boys would have subscribed, but almost all are thinking of joining the army or being drafted, and mail is very uncertain then, being moved so often.

M. NAPPER.

ROOTING FOR SELTZER AND MARIANNE GAUSS

Mr. Lambert is evidently keen for adventure tales, and will be happy to know that we have a

big supply of them on hand, including new ones by the authors of the two favorites he names.

Costalia, Iowa.

I am a subscriber for THE ARGOSY now, and would not give it up for all the other magazines I have seen. "Riddle Gawne" and "The Spirit of the Feud" are my favorites. Whatever you do, give us some more like those.

LAWRENCE M. LAMBERT.

A CANADIAN ENTHUSIAST

It certainly is much more convenient to get one's reading matter regularly from the same source, and THE ARGOSY covers such a wide field in its stories that there is no lack of variety.

Stratford, Ontario, Canada.

I note that my subscription to THE ARGOSY expires on December 8, and I am enclosing six dollars in payment for another year. Some time ago I received notice from you saying that THE ARGOSY would now be four dollars a year, and to renew my subscription as soon as posible. I noticed, however, on another sheet that the Canadian rate was six dollars. Not knowing which is right, I am sending the six dollars anyway, and if it pays for more than a year, it is all right, and if it doesn't, it is all right, too.

THE ARGOSY in weekly form is fine, and suits me better than as a monthly, as when it was a monthly I had to buy two or three magazines a month extra to keep a supply of reading matter on hand. I like the class of stories you run very well, although the last serial, "The Green Opal Ring," hardly seemed to be as good as the general run, or perhaps it didn't just happen to suit my own ideas of a good story. Wishing THE ARGOSY every success, I am,

JAMES E. ROBERTS.

GUARDING THE ARGOSY

Strict pains are taken to see that nothing that can possibly offend any religious belief is contained in any of THE ARGOSY stories, and the trend in all of them is aimed at only that which is pure and uplifting. I am sorry if our Oakland reader thought that we were seeking to slip in any other doctrine.

Oakland, California.

This letter is not going to be one of the honey-and-molasses kind, and will probably not be published at all; but I must get it off my chest, anyway, and feel sure that there will be a few readers agree with me in this complaint, namely—there have been several stories in THE ARGOSY within the past two or three months, such as "The Sin That Was His," "The Spirit of the Feud," "Wooden Spoil," *et cetera*, in which the authors have brought into them such a decided streak of heathenism for what they intend to represent Christianity or religion. Now, this is my request. That if the writers of the stories for THE ARGOSY do not know what the Word of God teaches, please leave out all substitutes for His teaching, for this old world is already o'erflowing with heathenism and doctrines of men, instead of the pure and undefiled. Yet about nine-tenths of the people seem to think this an age of civilization and progress; "the blind leading the blind." Yet they saw, "we see"; therefore their sin remaineth. Please leave it out of the stories.

Fred Jackson's stories are usually quite interesting; but in his last one, "A Woman's Prey," I admired the strong character of *John Bolt* up to the time in which he learned that *Mrs. Waring's* husband was not dead and he took her anyway—just as hundreds of persons are living in sin in the reality and not fiction. Too bad.

We buy THE ARGOSY at news-stands, as we travel around too much to subscribe.

(MRS.) ZORA LOU Q.

THAT MUCH DISCUSSED OPAL RING

Another letter of praise for "The Green Opal Ring," which, you may have noted, one or two readers have mentioned as not caring for especially. But in the aggregate the votes are greatly in its favor.

Seattle, Washington.

As a reader of THE ARGOSY, I want to tell you my opinion of "The Green Opal Ring." For a "thriller" it certainly is ahead of anything I ever read. My only objection is that it was not published complete in one number. When I read the last chapter, I think I cannot wait a whole week for the next. A friend says she shares with me this opinion, and also remarks that the plot is well sustained throughout. I hope El Comancho will not keep us waiting long for another story. Surely he has not missed his calling.

(MRS.) I. F. TROWBRIDGE.

ALWAYS READY TO OBLIGE

Several readers asked that we state in how many parts a serial would be run, I suppose in order to be able to decide whether to start it at once or wait until the whole was complete.

New York City.

Some time ago I wrote you making a request that you state the number of parts to your serials. On buying THE ARGOSY every week since then I have looked for my letter in the Log-Book, but have failed to see it. But I did notice that in your December 15 issue you gave the number of parts in your serial stories. I do not know if this was due to my request, but I certainly appreciate it. That was my only objection to your magazine. I enjoy the Log-Book very much, as all the letters are very interesting. I hope you will give us plenty of Fred Jackson's stories.

DOUGLAS CLIFFORD.

A BELATED ANSWER TO THE EDITOR'S REQUEST

I wish I might get some concise statements from those of you who don't care for short stories as to your reasons for this attitude. You know there are any number of people in the world who won't read anything else in a magazine, and the United States is supposed to excel all other countries in the art of short-story writing. "Black Thunder's Rider" appeared in THE ARGOSY for November 10, 1917.

Midland, Michigan.

I have read THE ARGOSY for several years, and my files are complete from October, 1910, on. I

have never had to find fault with it, except to find too many short stories at times; but others like them. Why should I kick? There is seventy-five dollars' worth of reading in your serials and novels for six months, and look at the little I must pay for them!

Of your writers, let me name my favorites: Zane Grey, William Wallace Cook, Charles Alden Seltzer, Albert Payson Terhune, and Victor Rousseau. There are a score of others. Must I name them? "Riddle Gawne" was great and "Wooden Spoil" its near equal. "Genius of Victory" simply swept me off my feet.

You wish to know my opinion of "Black-Thunder's Rider"? Let me say that you have placed your readers in a peculiar position. *Lone Wolf* could see no other way out; what mere mortal could? It is the things in life outside the pale of ordinary happenings that make fiction so attractive. Why spoil the good taste Mr. Yerrington's tale left in my mouth by asking me to reason out a different ending?

This is more than I intended to write when I began. Excuse me, for this is my first letter to you. I met THE ARGOSY on board a train seven years ago. The fact that it was all fiction attracted me. I have "stuck," and always shall.

Yours, in all good wishes,

S. NICHOLAS.

HIS FIRST KICK

Since Mr. Bondurant wrote his letter the number of serials running in THE ARGOSY has been cut from six to five in spite of the fact that some of our readers have asked us to give them eight. The style of telling "The Green Opal Ring" was a departure from the usual, I admit; but as so many have written in to praise the story, I would not say that this was fatal to the interest aroused by it.

Quyotoa, Arizona.

I have been an ardent reader of your ARGOSY for several years, but this is my first kick since the magazine has changed to a weekly. There are too many serials running at once. In October 20 there are six out of fourteen; two would be enough. In two stories of that issue the plot seems to be mixed. The first chapter starts off fine, then the second goes back to some years before and tells about some one else. I like action from the start. "The Green Opal Ring" starts fine, but the second chapter is a failure. Why not let the girl explain all of that after she meets the hero? The author takes up too much time. Wishing you success, I remain,

W. K. BONDURANT.

ONE ARGOSY EQUIVALENT TO THREE RIVALS

Cutting out three other magazines to concentrate on THE ARGOSY is a compliment which I highly appreciate, and I feel sure my Louisiana friend will have no cause to regret the decision.

West Monroe, Louisiana.

Enclosed you will find money order for a year's renewal of THE ARGOSY. I was taking about three other magazines, but decided to spend that amount on one. Of course, I chose the best one. Very much pleased over the change you have made. Now, I have nothing but good things to say for THE ARGOSY. I think it is improving all the time. I like and read all the stories, regardless of authors. Never mind the knockers—we all have them—and you know better what the majority of us want than they. You are proving that all the time. With best wishes for your success,

EARL L. HILL.

HOW MANY OF YOU GUESSED RIGHT ON "THE OTHER TRENT"?

If Mr. Resch had only returned the faultily bound magazine and given his full address, we would have sent him a perfect copy. I wish more of you would write in and tell me what you think of "The Other Trent."

Jersey City Heights, New Jersey.

I guess you will be surprised to hear from me so soon, as my last letter has not yet appeared in the Log; but this time I am sending in a kick, so get after the binder or the printer or some one. After reading the Log, the serials, and the shorts, I sit down by the fire for a few hours' reading. I read Victor Lauriston's novel, "Crooks," up to Chapter VI, on page 432, then comes page 417 to 432 over, then 449 to the end. Don't you think I have a good right to kick? So as it is not your fault I will let up on you, and come along with some more boosts.

"The Fifth Ace" is a dandy, so is "Petroleum Prince." "The Other Trent" appears to be better than "Playing the Man," if that is possible. Let us have some more stories like "Claim Number One." One of the best stories I ever read in THE ARGOSY was "The Golden Octopus," by J. Dwyer. I don't remember seeing any stories by him in some time. Wishing you the best of success, and hoping that they print the whole of "The Scapegoat" next week, I am,

A. T. RESCH.

KEEPING THE COVER NICE

We are particularly proud of our covers. Since THE ARGOSY has been a weekly we flatter ourselves that we have had some classy ones.

Weedman, Illinois.

I am going to take this opportunity to tell you how much I think of THE ARGOSY. I read it through from beginning to end. Also the Log-Book, and I enjoy it almost as much as the stories. Think "Riddle Gawne," "The Green Opal Ring," and "Where's the Woman?" are fine. Well, in fact, I like them all, but some better than others. Give us some more by Fred Jackson. I think he is fine.

Changing THE ARGOSY to a weekly is a good idea, as it is too long a space between one month and another. Keep the cover nice. That is what first attracted me. When, a few years ago, I was waiting for a train and decided to buy something to read, seeing THE ARGOSY with a nice cover, I bought it, and have been reading it ever since. Wishing you every success,

VERA C. IRISH