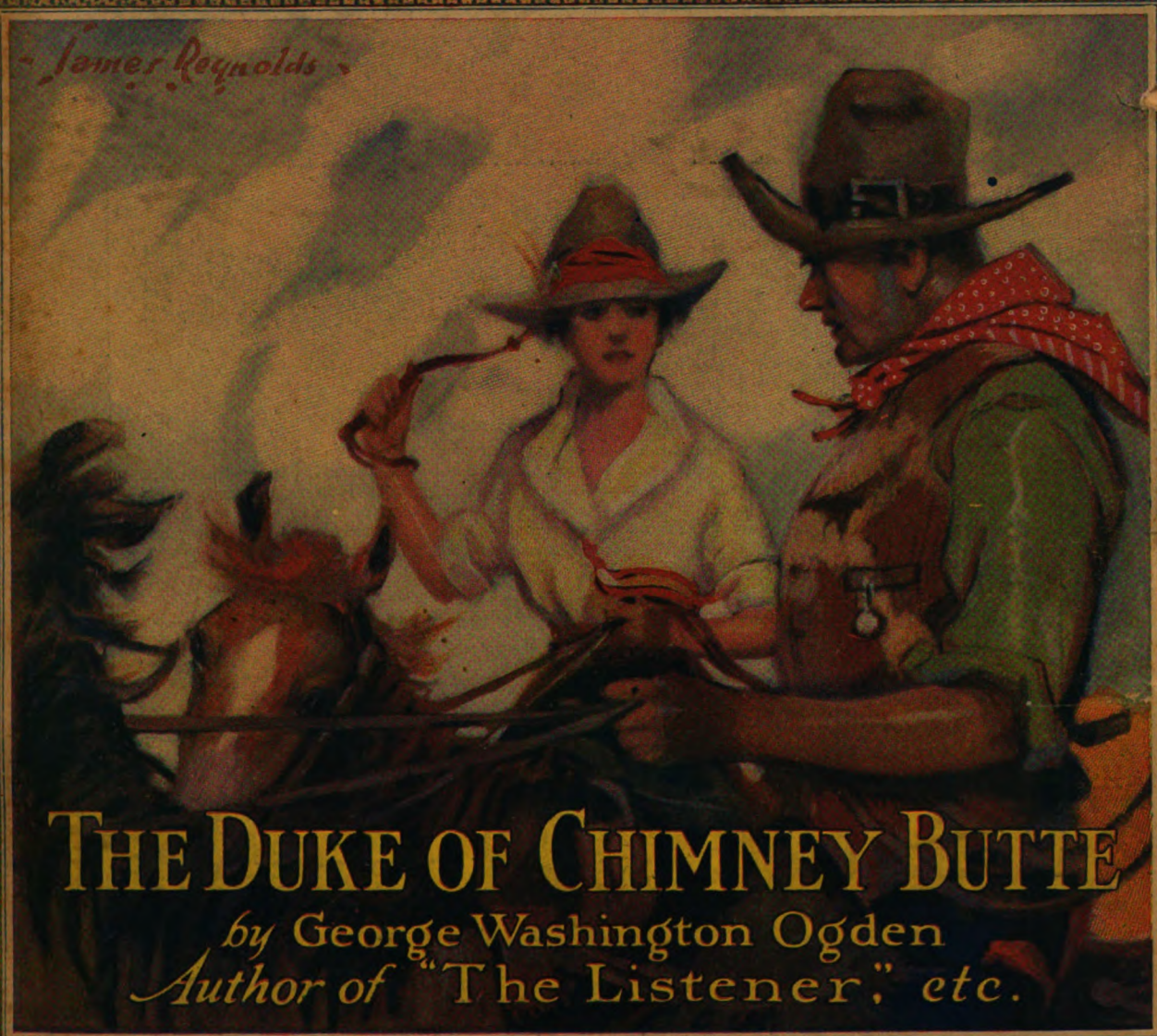
ARGOSY

and Railroad Man's Magazine

Issued Weekly



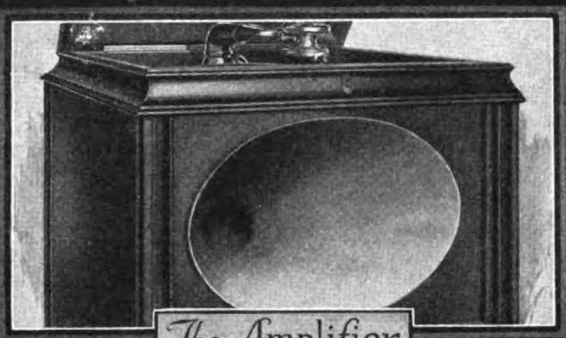
THE DUKE OF CHIMNEY BUTTE

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Listener," *etc.*

10¢ MAY 2 $4.00

The BRUNSWICK
Method of Reproduction



The Amplifier

How We Banished Metallic Sounds

BEFORE The Brunswick Phonograph ever came to market, Brunswick executives were insistent upon a vital betterment: Reproduction.

We had been making phonograph cabinets for others for years. We had won top place during the past 74 years in the woodcrafting art. To stake our reputation on a Brunswick Phonograph was a momentous undertaking.

And so tone reproduction was studied for months. We tried every known method, the ones then accepted as supreme.

But every phonograph we ever heard in all our tests had good tones and bad tones, alternating in annoying frequence.

Higher Standards

Our task was to do away with the so-called metallic sounds. These, we found, came from metallic construction. Tone waves must vibrate to attain their volume. And so, as a superlative feature of The Brunswick Method of Reproduction, we evolved the scientific Brunswick Amplifier under our own patents. It is built entirely of moulded wood.

This achievement, all acknowledge, is one of the great steps in the progress of phonographic art. It brings out tones hitherto lost. It banishes the raucous.

Another amazing advancement is the Ultona, our own all-record player—in-built, not an attachment. This reproducer, at a turn of the hand, presents to each make of record the proper needle and diaphragm. Each record is played at its best.

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction is one of the greatest triumphs of The House of Brunswick since its establishment in 1845.

Hear—Then Judge

You owe it to yourself and to your family, as you decide upon *which* phonograph, to become acquainted with The Brunswick. In your own town there is a Brunswick Dealer who will be glad to play this super-phonograph for you.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER COMPANY

General Offices: Chicago and New York

Branch Houses in Principal Cities of United States, Mexico and Canada

Canadian Distributors:
Musical Merchandise Sales Company,
Excelsior Life Bldg., Toronto

The Brunswick

BE A CERTIFICATED ELECTRICIAN

I WILL PERSONALLY TRAIN YOU

A real position like this—for you

The country needs thousands of trained **Certificated Electricians** to fill good positions—and at big pay. It's all a matter of knowing how, and I will teach you by my up-to-date, modern instruction. You can learn at home without interfering with your regular work, by my highly successful method of **Home Instruction** in **Practical Electricity.** Prepare NOW, and be ready in a few months to earn

$46 to $100 a Week

A Real Opportunity for *You*

Wishing is never going to make your dreams come true. You've got to **study**—to **learn.** A man is worth $2 or $3 a day from his neck down—and no more; but there is **no limit** to what he can be worth from his neck up.

A trained mind is what gets the big pay. It is this training that you need, and I can train you in a few months. Are you ambitious to make a real success—then send me the coupon—today.

FREE Electrical Outfit

To every student who answers this ad I am giving a Splendid Electrical Outfit of standard size Electrical Tools, Instruments, Materials, etc., **absolutely free.** I will also send you—free and fully prepaid—Proof Lessons to show you how easily you can be trained at home to enter this great profession, by means of my new, revised and original system of mail instruction.

Free Employment Service

I am continually receiving requests from employers to send them trained Electrical men. I assist my students to secure good positions. I keep in touch with them for years, helping and advising them in every possible way.

Send for This Book

My book, "HOW TO BECOME AN EXPERT ELECTRICIAN," has started thousands of young men on the way to splendid success. A new edition of this book has just been printed. I want every young man interested in Electricity to have a copy, and will send you one ABSOLUTELY FREE AND PREPAID. Write me today.

How I Train My Students

As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works I know exactly the kind of training a man needs to enable him to get and hold good positions, and to earn big pay. I have trained hundreds of men who are holding splendid electrical positions. Many are now successful **Electrical Contractors.**

I give each of my students personal attention and a complete and thorough training. I give him a SPLENDID ELECTRICAL OUTFIT FREE, and much of the training is done by actual work. When my students graduate and receive their Certificate they are ready for a real position. But **still more,** at any time you wish you can come to our splendidly equipped **Electrical Shops** for special training. No other school can give you this.

WRITE NOW—DON'T DELAY

Delay never got you anything. Action is what counts. Get started—and get started now. Write me, or send me the coupon, right NOW.

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Chicago Engineering Works
Dept. 175 **441 Cass Street** **CHICAGO**

YOU CAN DO IT

USE THIS "FREE OUTFIT" COUPON

Chief Engineer
COOKE, Dept. 175
441 Cass St.
Chicago, Ill.

SIR: Send at once—fully prepaid and entirely free—complete particulars of your great offer for this month.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

ARGOSY

AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

Vol. CVII ISSUED WEEKLY NUMBER 3

CONTENTS FOR MAY 3, 1919

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
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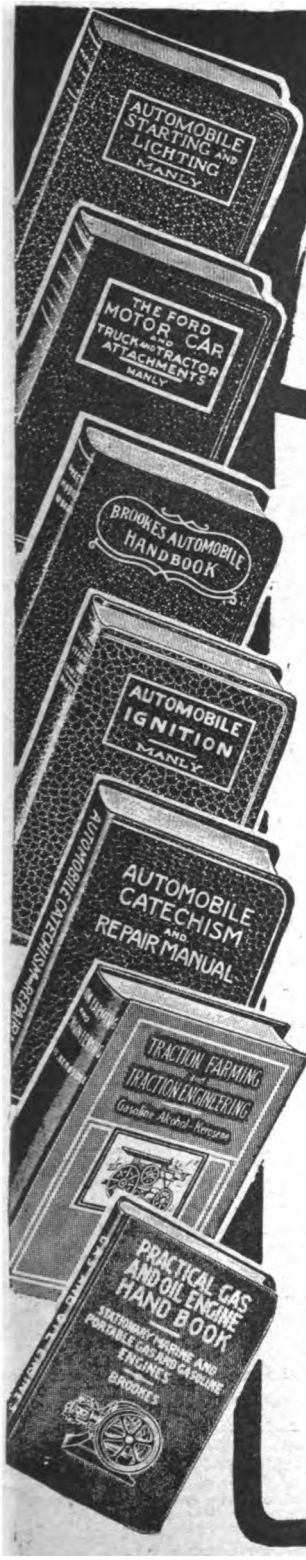

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FOR HOME STUDY

Nothing like these books for accurate information—handy—complete, easy to understand. Make repairs, care and upkeep of automobiles and gas engines simple as A B C. Brought right up to date. Invaluable to dealers, garage men, repair men and automobile owners. Order direct from this advertisement on 5-day money-back plan.

Brookes' Automobile Handbook By L. E. BROOKES. 1919 edition, edited by H. P. Manly. 700 pages, 339 illustrations and diagrams. Covers all latest developments, automobiles and trucks. Methods of upkeep, care and repair, construction and operation. Pocket size, leatherette, gold stamping..... **$2.00**

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The Ford Motor Car and Truck and Tractor Attachments By HAROLD P. MANLY. Covers every feature of the Ford adjustments, repairs, upkeep and care. Pocket size, 256 pages, fully illustrated. Leatherette, red edges, gold stamping..... **$1.50**

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Practical Gas and Oil Engine Handbook Complete manual of useful and practical information on the care, maintenance and repairs of gas and oil engines. With special reference to the DIESEL and other new oil engines. By L. E. BROOKES. 270 pages, 81 illustrations. Pocket size..... **$1.50**

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Order direct from this page—on our money-back plan. Cross name of each book wanted and send in with the price quoted. We prepay postage and send the books on our money-back plan—keep the books five days; if not entirely satisfied return them and money will be refunded immediately. **Order Now.**

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1004 Michigan Avenue, CHICAGO, ILL.

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Enclosed find ($), for which please send me prepaid the books checked in this adv. (or list attached). It is agreed that I may return same in five days if not entirely satisfied, and money will be refunded in full.

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Write for FREE Illustrated Catalog

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $3.25 less 2% cash discount
The Argosy Comb'n: The Argosy . . . All-Story Weekly.	1.75	

May 24th Argosy Combination Forms Close May 1st

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Departments of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS: ACT QUICK. ESTABLISH A PERMANENT BUSINESS that will make $3600 a year easy. I want 100 new agents for Comer raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Cooper made $1059 in three months. Grace Irvine $17 in one day. McCrary $4200 last year. Maher $51 one afternoon. No investment required. No delivering. No collecting. No experience. I furnish everything. I finance you. Fine raincoat or beautiful raincape free. Also 65 samples of stylish materials. Write quick for details. Comer Mfg. Company, Dept. Y-117, Dayton, Ohio.

$50.00 A WEEK AND YOUR OWN SUIT FREE. A wonderful offer to advertise our classy tailoring. All extras free; delivery charges prepaid. Self-measuring blanks, style charts, sample book, etc., free. Send no money. Just write your name and address on a postal. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 201, Chicago.

YOU CAN DO AS WELL AS PASKO, OF NEW YORK. He took in $3922.50, one County; DeVol, Nebraska, $1159.50; Everett, Ohio, $816.00; Reesman, Wisconsin, $1156.00; Collins, Canada, orders $1542.50 worth in twenty days. New, Modern Bathing Outfit. All homes without bath-rooms want it. You can sell it. No plumbing, no sewerage. Installed anywhere. Make $78.00 weekly. Send for proof. Robinson Mfg. Co., 4982 Factories Building, Toledo, Ohio.

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INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blow outs. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

SELL HISTORY OF GREAT WORLD WAR; ALSO LIFE THEODORE ROOSEVELT; both complete; official; $2 books; your profit half; make $5 an hour; both outfits free. Send 10 cents postage for each. Globe Association, 338 Como Building, Chicago.

SALES AGENTS WANTED IN EVERY COUNTY TO GIVE ALL OR SPARE TIME. Position worth $750 to $1500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Co., 77 Bar Street, Canton, Ohio.

AGENTS—GET VALUABLE APPOINTMENT. Your sales guaranteed. Own a 200% net profit business. **Improved Kalomite,** astounding, new, repeat order household necessity, washes clothes snow white; no rubbing, different, unusual. All or spare time. Equitable Corporation, Desk G, 233 W. Huron St., Chicago.

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HELP WANTED

BE A DETECTIVE—EARN FROM $150.00 TO $300.00 PER MONTH. Travel over the world. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

THE WAY TO GET A GOVERNMENT JOB is through the Washington Civil Service School. We prepare you and you get a position or we guarantee to refund your money. Write to Earl Hopkins, President, Washington, D. C., for book RJ 2001, telling about government positions with lifetime employment, short hours, sure pay, regular vacations.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, $140-$200. Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LANDSEEKERS! GOOD LAND OPPORTUNITIES in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties, Michigan. Big yields of grain, fruit, truck. No swamps or stones. $15 to $30 per acre. Easy terms. 10 to 160 acre tracts. Railroad, markets, schools, churches. Good fishing, hunting, fine climate. We help settlers. Largest company. Twenty years experience. Write for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

Agents: Marvelous Dye Soap; brilliant, fast colors; quick, big profits; $75 weekly on Repeat Orders. Women amazed, buy regularly. **Egyptian Queen** Dye Soap a wonder; dyes silk, cotton, wool, one minute. Absolutely different; beautiful colors, light or dark; no boiling, will not stain hands. Perfect results; no experience necessary; all or spare time; write today; wonderful offer. Other Valuable Products. Address, Peerless Products Co., Dept. 310, 618 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—2 IN 1 REVERSIBLE RAINCOAT. TWO COATS IN ONE. One side a handsome black raincoat, reverse side fine dress coat. Something new. Not sold in stores. Steam vulcanized. Guaranteed waterproof. Big seller. All styles and sizes for men, women and children. Write for agency. Guaranteed Raincoat Co., 1507 North Street, Dayton, Ohio.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure **Free,** and make $35 to $50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 284, Chicago.

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WONDERFUL STARTER FOR FORDS—No Cogs—No Ratchets—Takes no power from engine. Retails $15.00. Agents coining money. Exclusive Territory. Simplex Company, Desk A, 9 S. Clinton Street, Chicago.

AGENTS, GET IN ON THE BIGGEST OF ALL. Ho-Ro-Co plan makes 100 to 140 per cent profit. Products guaranteed to satisfy or money back. Free sample case offer. Write at once. Ho-Ro-Co Manufacturing Company, 118 Locust Street, St. Louis, Mo.

$20.00 DAILY DISTRIBUTING PRIZE PEACE PICTURES. "Liberty and Peace," "True Sons of Freedom," "Human Liberty Bell," "Foch," "Pershing," Honor Roll. Enormous demand. Samples Free. Also portrait catalog. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1034 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

FIBRE BROOMS OUTWEAR FIVE CORN BROOMS. Guaranteed one year. Sample $1.25 postpaid. Agents wanted, men and women. $1.00 an hour easy. Keystone Fibre Broom Co., 618 Duquesne Way, Pittsburg, Penna.

FREE CATALOG—BIGGEST AND BEST LINE COLD CREAM, face powder, perfumes, remedies, soaps, extracts. Big profit. Write today. Western Laboratories, 1900-A W. Van Buren Street, Chicago.

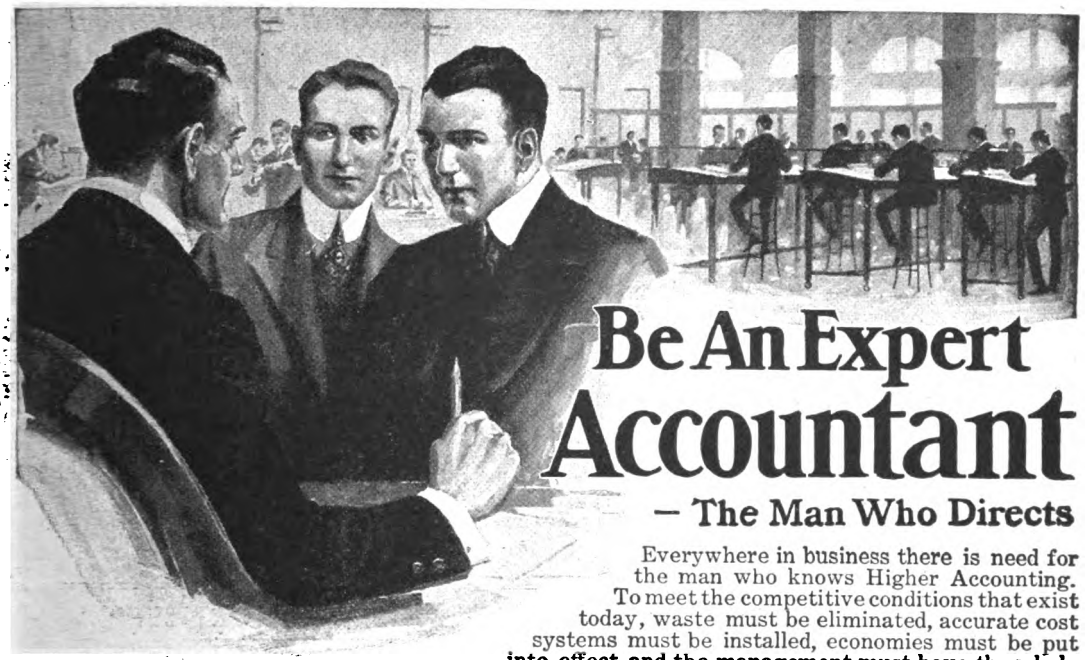
AGENTS—SELL CLASSY PICTURES, BATHING GIRLS, Art Poses; three samples, 12 cents, refunded if dissatisfied. Roseleaf Club, Desk 8, St. Louis, Mo.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$289.00 Made Less Than One Month. L. Francis, Pennsylvania, did it. You can do the same. Business all around you. Big money right from start. New; different; dignified. Go in business for yourself as expert lawn-mower sharpener. E. Zabst, Michigan, sharpened 2178 mowers—made 75c to $1.50 per mower. Klaus, Ohio, sharpened 114 mowers first week. Collings, Iowa, made $625.00 one season in odd hours. Others making money, building permanent business. You can do as well or better. Write this day. Get all the particulars. Address The Root-Heath Mfg. Co., Dept. 29, Bell and High Sts., Plymouth, Ohio.

Classified Advertising Continued on Page 6.



Be An Expert Accountant

— The Man Who Directs

Everywhere in business there is need for the man who knows Higher Accounting. To meet the competitive conditions that exist today, waste must be eliminated, accurate cost systems must be installed, economies must be put into effect and the management must have the whole situation charted and shown in figures whenever wanted. The bookkeeper cannot do this. To analyze a business, a man must be to accounting what the highly trained lawyer is to the legal aspects of commerce.

Over 500,000 American concerns today need the services of Expert Accountants. That shows where opportunity is. Write today for information about the course in Higher Accounting given by the La Salle Extension University.

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can now be found employed in the executive departments of practically all the large railroads, business houses and commercial organizations in the United States. Many prominent business concerns can be named in each of which 100 to 900 or more LaSalle students or graduates from our several specialized departments are employed in responsible positions. For instance—

Pennsylvania R. R.	1168
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U. S. Steel Corporation	273
Baltimore & Ohio R. R.	696
Armour & Company	207
Chicago & N. W. Ry.	455
Ford Motor Company	169
Swift & Company	221
Standard Oil Company	856

Among the numerous firms and corporations employing 50 to 100 or more LaSalle students or graduates are the following.

Western Electric Company
International Harvester Co.
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Wells Fargo Express Company
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More than 145,000 men in active business life including a large number of corporation officials have been enrolled and are reaping the benefits of LaSalle training and service. Over 20,000 new students now enroll annually. The LaSalle organization consists of 800 people, including a staff of 300 business experts, professional men, text writers, special lecture writers, instructors and assistants. LaSalle students and graduates occupying responsible positions can be found throughout the entire English speaking world.

Free Consulting Service

As a LaSalle student, you will also be entitled to the free use of our Consulting Service which gives you the privilege of calling on our staff of experts in any department at any time when you need special help or counsel. LaSalle Extension University is a clearing house of business information and through its many highly specialized departments is organized and equipped to render a practical and distinctive service which cannot be supplied by any other institution of similar character.

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Our staff of experts in the Science of Accounting will give you their direct personal instruction by mail, guiding you step by step until you have mastered this paying profession. You will study text books, lectures and accounting methods prepared by authorities—men who are actually employed or retained as expert advisers by leading industries. The underlying principles and the most modern methods of Business Analysis and Organization, and the Principles of Accounting, Auditing, Commercial Law and Scientific Management all made clear. You will be given special preparation for the C. P. A. examinations and made ready to command a higher salary or to enter business as a Consulting Accountant. You can get all this in your spare time while you hold your present position. How better could you use your hours of leisure?

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No large fees. No large sum to pay down. This instruction is offered on a convenient monthly payment plan. Our courses are for the ambitious man no matter how small his present income. Send the coupon below for full, detailed information.

Mail The Coupon Today

Make the knowledge of these LaSalle experts yours. At least send for information about this course which has helped so many men to rise quickly to positions of greater profit and prestige and which you can easily master by home study.

No matter where you may be or what position you may hold, LaSalle Extension University can put you on the road to greater success. This has been proved by the record of its students and graduates. The information we will send will tell you just what knowledge you require to become proficient in Higher Accounting and how we will teach you in the shortest possible time. It will point out the possibilities that are wide open to the man who has the training demanded by large business organizations. We will also send valuable book "Ten Years' Promotion in One." Mail coupon now.

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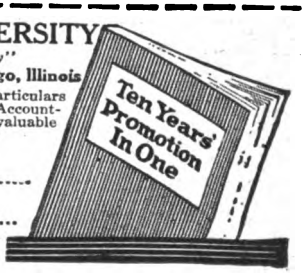
Address.....

City.....State.....



Classified Advertising Continued from Page 4.

"I'm as Good a Man as Jim!"

"They made him manager today, at a fine increase in salary. He's the fourth man in the office to be promoted since January. And all were picked for the same reason—they had studied in spare time with the International Correspondence Schools and learned to do some one thing better than the rest of us.

"I've thought it all out, Grace. I'm as good a man as any one of them. All I need is special training—and I'm *going to get it.* If the I. C. S. can raise other men's salaries it can raise *mine.* If it can bring a better home with more comforts to Jim and his family it can do it for *us.* See this coupon? It means *my* start toward a better job and I'm going to mail it to Scranton tonight!"

Thousands of men now know the joy of happy, prosperous homes because they let the International Correspondence Schools prepare them in spare hours for bigger work and better pay. You will find them in offices, shops, stores, mills, mines, factories, on railroads —everywhere.

Why don't *you* study some one thing and get ready for a real job, at a salary that will give *your* wife and children the things you would like them to have?

You can *do* it! Pick the position you want in the work you like best and the I. C. S. will prepare you for it right in your own home, in your spare time—you need not lose a day or a dollar from your present occupation.

Yes, you *can* do it! More than a million have done it in the last twenty-six years. More than 100,000 are doing it right now. Join them without another day's delay. Mark and mail this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Scranton, Pa. **Montreal, Can.**

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2213, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card Writer
- ☐ Sign Painter
- ☐ Railroad Trainman
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
- ☐ Auto Repairing
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Italian

Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

Canadians may send this coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada

I want, through this advertisement, to establish as friendly business relations with you as I possibly can. I want you to realize also, that it is my earnest effort and intention to give you full honest value for every dollar that you spend with me. This is the only way I can succeed. My advertisement has appeared in this magazine continuously for more than four years.

I am building up my business on the foundation of good value and square dealings. I am saving thousands of satisfied customers thousands of dollars, by supplying, perfect—late style—visible writing—typewriters, at remarkably low prices.

All my transactions are handled throughout by personal correspondence. I assure you every courtesy and consideration in your dealings with me. Your order will have my prompt, careful, personal attention. I will be glad to do business with you.

Harry A Smith

ALL LATEST IMPROVEMENTS

TYPEWRITER SENSATION

Free TRIAL—Use As You Pay

Send me only $4.00 a month until the low total price of $53.15 is paid, and the machine is yours

This is absolutely the most generous typewriter offer ever made. Do not rent a machine when you can pay $4.00 a month and own one. Think of it—Buying a $100.00 machine for $53.15. Cash price, $50.35. Never before has anything like this been attempted.

STANDARD VISIBLE No. 10 SMITH PREMIER

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The Duke of Chimney Butte*

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Listener," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE ALL-IN-ONE.

DOWN through the Bad Lands the Little Missouri comes in long windings, white, from a distance, as a frozen river between the ash-gray hills. At its margin there are willows; on the small forelands, which flood in June when the mountain waters are released, cottonwoods grow, leaning toward the southwest like captives straining in their bonds, yearning in their way for the sun and winds of kinder latitudes.

Rain comes to that land but seldom in the summer days, in winter the wind sweeps the snow into rocky cañons; buttes, with tops leveled by the drift of the old, earth-making days, break the weary repetition of hill beyond hill.

But to people who dwell in a land a long time and go about the business of getting a living out of what it has to offer, its wonders are no longer notable, its hardships no longer peculiar.

So it was with the people who lived in the Bad Lands at the time that we come among them on the vehicle of this tale. To them it was only an ordinary country of toil and disappointment, or of opportunity and profit, according to their station and success.

To Jeremiah Lambert it seemed the land of hopelessness, the last boundary of utter defeat as he labored over the uneven road at the end of a blistering summer day, trundling his bicycle at his side. There was a suit-case strapped to the handle-bar of the bicycle, and in that receptacle were the wares which this guileless pedler had come into that land to sell. He had set out from Omaha full of enthusiasm and youth-

ful vigor, incited to the utmost degree of vending fervor by the representations of the general agent for the little instrument which had been the stepping-stone to greater things for many an ambitious young man, according to the agent.

Lambert reflected, as he pushed his punctured, lop-wheeled, disordered, and dejected bicycle along, that there had been none of the ambitious business climbers at hand to add his testimony to the general agent's word.

Anyway, he had taken the agency, and the agent had taken his essential twenty-two dollars and turned over to him one hundred of those notable ladders to future greatness and affluence. Lambert had them there in his imitation-leather suit-case—from which the rain had taken the last deceptive gloss—minus seven which he had sold in the course of fifteen days.

In those fifteen days Lambert had traveled five hundred miles, by the power of his own sturdy legs, by the grace of his bicycle, which had held up until this day without protest over the long, sandy, rocky, dismal roads, and he had lived on less than a gopher, day taken by day.

Housekeepers were not pining for the combination potato-parer, apple-corer, can-opener, tack-puller, known as the "All-in-One" in any reasonable proportion.

It did not go. Indisputably it was a good thing, and well built, and finished like two dollars' worth of cutlery. The selling price, retail, was one dollar, and it looked to an unsophisticated young graduate of an agricultural college to be a better opening toward independence and the foundation of a farm than a job in the hay fields. A man must make his start somewhere, and the farther away from competition the better his chance.

This country to which the general agent had sent him was becoming more and more sparsely settled. The chances were stretching out against him with every mile. The farther into that country he should go the smaller would become the need for that marvelous labor-saving invention.

Lambert had passed the last house before noon, when his sixty-five pound bicycle had suffered a punctured tire, and there had bargained with a Scotch woman at the greasy kitchen door with the smell of curing sheepskins in it for his dinner. It took a good while to convince the woman that the All-in-One was worth it, but she yielded out of pity for his hungry state. From that house he estimated that he had made fifteen miles before the tire gave out; since then he had added ten or twelve more to the score. Nothing that looked like a house or human habitation was in sight, and it was coming on dusk.

He labored on, bent in spirit, sore of foot. From the rise of a hill, when it had fallen so dark that he was in doubt of the road, he heard a voice singing. And this was the manner of the song:

"Oh, I bet my money on a bob-tailed hoss,
An' a hoo-dah, an' a hoo-dah;
I bet my money on a bob-tailed hoss,
An' a hoo-dah bet on the bay."

The singer was a man, his voice an aggravated tenor with a shake to it like an accordion, and he sang that stanza over and over as Lambert leaned on his bicycle and listened.

Lambert went down the hill. Presently the shape of trees began to form out of the valley. Behind that barrier the man was doing his singing, his voice now rising clear, now falling to distance as if he passed to and from, in and out of a door, or behind some object which broke the flow of sound.

A whiff of coffee, presently, and the noise of the man breaking dry sticks, as with his foot, jarring his voice to a deeper tremolo. Now the light, with the legs of the man in it, showing a cow-camp, the chuck wagon in the foreground, the hope of hospitality big in its magnified proportions.

Beyond the fire where the singing cook worked men were unsaddling their horses and turning them into the corral. Lambert trundled his bicycle into the firelight, hailing the cook with a cheerful word.

The cook had a tin plate in his hands, which he was wiping on a flour sack. At sight of this singular combination of man and wheels he leaned forward in astonishment, his song bitten off between two words, the tin plate before his chest, the

drying operations suspended. Amazement was on him, if not fright. Lambert put his hand into his hip-pocket and drew forth a shining All-in-One, which he always had ready there to produce as he approached a door.

He stood there with it in his hand, the firelight over him, smiling in his most ingratiating fashion. That had been one of the strong texts of the general agent. Always meet them with a smile, he said, and leave them with a smile, no matter whether they deserved it or not. It proved a man's unfaltering confidence in himself and the article which he presented to the world.

Lambert was beginning to doubt even this paragraph of his general instructions. He had been smiling until he believed his eye-teeth were wearing thin from exposure, but it seemed the one thing that had a grain in it among all the buncombe and bluff. And he stood there smiling at the camp cook, who seemed to be afraid of him, the tin plate held before his gizzard like a shield.

There was nothing about Lambert's appearance to scare anybody, and least of all a bow-legged man beside a fire in the open air of the Bad Lands, where things are not just as they are in any other part of this world at all. His manner was rather boyish and diffident, and wholly apologetic, and the All-in-One glistened in his hand like a razor, or a revolver, or anything terrible and destructive that a startled camp cook might make it out to be.

A rather long-legged young man, in canvas puttees, a buoyant and irrepressible light in his face which the fatigues and disappointments of the long road had not dimmed; a light-haired man, with his hat pushed back from his forehead, and a speckled shirt on him, and trousers rather tight.

That was what the camp cook saw, standing exactly as he had turned and posed at Lambert's first word. Lambert drew a step nearer, and began negotiations for supper on the basis of an even exchange.

"Oh, agent, are you?" said the cook, letting out a breath of relief.

"No; pedler."

"I don't know how to tell 'em apart. Well, put it away, son, put it away, whatever it is. No hungry man don't have to dig up his money to eat in this camp."

This was the kindest reception that Lambert had received since taking to the road to found his fortunes on the All-in-One. He was quick with his expression of appreciation, which the cook ignored, while he went about the business of lighting two lanterns which he hung on the wagon end.

Men came stringing into the light from the noise of unsaddling at the corral with loud and jocund greetings to the cook, and respectful, even distant and reserved, "evenin's" for the stranger. All of them but the cook wore cartridge-belts and revolvers, which they unstrapped and hung about the wagon as they arrived. All of them, that is, but one black-haired, tall young man. He kept his weapon on, and sat down to eat with it close under his hand.

Nine or ten of them sat in at the meal, with a considerable clashing of cutlery on tin plates and cups. It was evident to Lambert that his presence exercised a restraint over their customary exchange of banter. In spite of the liberality of the cook, and the solicitation on part of his numerous hosts to "eat hearty," Lambert could not help the feeling that he was away off on the edge, and that his arrival had put a rein on the spirits of these men.

Mainly they were young men like himself, two or three of them only showing gray in beards and hair; brown, sinewy, lean-jawed men, no dissipation showing in their eyes.

Lambert felt himself drawn to them with a sense of kinship. He never had been in a cow-camp before in his life, but there was something in the air of it, in the dignified ignoring of the evident hardships of such a life that told him he was among his kind.

The cook was a different type of man from the others, and seemed to have been pitched into the game like the last pawn of a desperate player. He was a short man, thick in the body, heavy in the shoulders, so bow-legged that he weaved from side to side when he walked, like a sailor. It seemed, indeed, that he must have taken to a horse very early in life, while his legs were

yet plastic, for they had set to the curve of the animal's barrel like the bark on a tree.

His black hair was cut short, all except a forelock like a horse, leaving his big ears naked and unframed. These turned away from his head as if they had been frosted and wilted, and if ears ever stood as an index to generosity in this world the camp cook's at once pronounced him the most liberal man to be met between the mountains and the sea. His features were small, his mustache and eyebrows large, his nose sharp and thin, his eyes blue, and as bright and merry as a June day.

He wore a blue wool shirt, new and clean, with a bright scarlet necktie as big as a hand of tobacco; and a green velvet vest, a galloping horse on his heavy gold watch-chain; and great, loose, baggy corduroy trousers, like a pirate of the Spanish main. These were folded into expensive, high-heeled, quilted-topped boots, and, in spite of his trade, there was not a spot of grease or flour on him anywhere to be seen.

Lambert noted the humorous glances which passed from eye to eye, and the sly winks that went round the circle of cross-legged men with tin plates between their knees as they looked now and then at his bicycle leaning close by against a tree. But the exactions of hospitality appeared to keep down both curiosity and comment during the meal. Nobody asked him where he came from, what his business was, or whither he was bound, until the last plate was pitched into the box, the last cup drained of its black, scalding coffee.

It was one of the elders who took it up then, after he had his pipe going and Lambert had rolled a cigarette from the proffered pouch.

"What kind of a horse is that you're ridin', son?" he inquired.

"Have a look at it," Lambert invited, knowing that the machine was new to most, if not all, of them. He led the way to the bicycle, they unlimbering from their squatting beside the wagon and following.

He took the case containing his unprofitable wares from the handle-bars and turned the bicycle over to them, offering no explanations on its peculiarities or parts, speaking only when they asked him, in horse-parlance, with humor that broadened as they put off their reserve. On invitation to show its gait he mounted it, after explaining that it had stepped on a nail and traveled lamely. He circled the fire and came back to them, offering it to anybody who might want to try his skill.

Hard as they were to shake out of the saddle, not a man of them, old or young, could mount the rubber-shod steed of the city streets. All of them gave it up after a tumultuous hour of hilarity but the bow-legged cook, whom they called Taterleg. He said he never had laid much claim to being a horseman, but if he couldn't ride a long-horned Texas steer that went on wheels he'd resign his job.

He took it out into the open, away from the immediate danger of a collison with a tree, and squared himself to break it in. He got it going at last, cheered by loud whoops of admiration and encouragement, and rode it straight into the fire. He scattered sticks and coals and bore a wabbling course ahead, his friends after him, shouting and waving hats. Somewhere in the dark beyond the lanterns he ran into a tree.

But he came back pushing the machine, his nose skinned, sweating and triumphant, offering to pay for any damage he had done. Lambert assured him there was no damage. They sat down to smoke again, all of them feeling better, the barrier against the stranger quite down, everything comfortable and serene.

Lambert told them, in reply to kindly, polite questioning from the elder of the bunch, a man designated by the name Siwash, how he was lately graduated from the Kansas agricultural college at Manhattan, and how he had taken the road with a grip full of hardware to get enough ballast in his jeans to keep the winter wind from blowing him away.

"Yes, I thought that was a college hat you had on," said Siwash.

Lambert acknowledged its weakness.

"And that shirt looked to me from the first snort I got at it like a college shirt. I used to be where they was at one time."

Lambert explained that an aggie wasn't the same as a regular college fellow, such as they turn loose from the big factories in

the East, where they thicken their tongues to the broad *a* and call it an education; nothing like that, at all. He went into the details of the great farms manned by the students, the bone-making, as well as the brain-making work of such an institution as the one whose shadows he had lately left.

"I ain't a findin' any fault with them farmer colleges," Siwash said. "I worked for a man in Montanny that sent his boy off to one of 'em, and that feller come back and got to be State vet'nary. I ain't got nothing ag'in' a college hat, as far as that goes, neither, but I know 'em when I see 'em—I can spot 'em every time. Would you mind lettin' us see one of them do-it-alls?"

Lambert produced the little implement, explained its points, and it passed from hand to hand, with comments which would have been worth gold to the general agent.

"It's a tooth-pick and a tater-peeler put together," said Siwash, when it came back to his hand. The young fellow with the black, sleek hair, who kept his gun on, reached for it, bent over it in the light, examining it with interest.

"You can trim your toe-nails with it and half-sole your boots," he said. "You can shave with it and saw wood, pull teeth and brand mavericks; you can open a bottle or a bank with it, and you can open the hired gal's eyes with it in the mornin'. It's good for the old and the young, for the crippled and the *in*-sane; it 'll heat your house and hoe your garden, and put the children to bed at night. And it's made and sold and distributed by Mr.—Mr.—by the Duke—"

Here he bent over it a little closer, turning it in the light to see what was stamped in the metal beneath the words "The Duke," that being the name denoting excellence which the manufacturer had given the tool.

"By the Duke of—the Duke of—is them three links of saursage, Siwash?"

Siwash looked at the triangle under the name.

"No, that's Indian writin'; it means a mountain," he said.

"Sure, of course, I might 'a' knowed," the young man said with deep self-scorn. "That's a butte, that's old Chimney Butte, as plain as smoke. Made and sold and distributed in the Bad Lands by the Duke of Chimney Butte. Duke," said he solemnly, rising and offering his hand, "I'm proud to know you."

There was no laughter at this; it was not time to laugh yet. They sat looking at the young man, primed and ready for the big laugh, indeed, but holding it in for its moment. As gravely as the cowboy had risen, as solemnly as he held his countenance in mock seriousness, Lambert rose and shook hands with him.

"The pleasure is mostly mine," said he, not a flush of embarrassment or resentment in his face, not a quiver of the eyelid as he looked the other in the face, as if this were some high and mighty occasion, in truth.

"And you're all right, duke, you're sure all right," the cowboy said, a note of admiration in his voice.

"I'd bet you money he's all right," Siwash said, and the others echoed it in nods and grins.

The cowboy sat down and rolled a cigarette, passed his tobacco across to Lambert, and they smoked. And no matter if his college hat had been only half as big as it was, or his shirt ring-streaked and spotted, they would have known the stranger for one of their kind, and accepted him as such.

CHAPTER II.

WHETSTONE, THE OUTLAW.

WHEN Taterleg roused the camp before the east was light, Lambert noted that another man had ridden in. This was a wiry young fellow with a short nose and fiery face, against which his scant eyebrows and lashes were as white as chalk.

His presence in the camp seemed to put a restraint on the spirits of the others, some of whom greeted him by the name Jim, others ignoring him entirely. Among these latter was the black-haired man who had given Lambert his title and elevated him to the nobility of the Bad Lands. On the face of it there was a crow to be picked between them.

Jim was belted with a pistol and heeled

with a pair of those long-roweled Mexican spurs, such as had gone out of fashion on the western range long before his day. He leaned on his elbow near the fire, his legs stretched out in a way that obliged Taterleg to walk round the spurred boots as he went between his cooking and the supplies in the wagon, the tail-board of which was his kitchen-table.

If Taterleg resented this lordly obstruction, he did not discover it by word or feature. He went on humming a tune without words as he worked, handing out biscuits and ham to the hungry crew. Jim had eaten his breakfast already, and was smoking a cigarette at his ease. Now and then he addressed somebody in obscene jocularity.

Lambert saw that Jim turned his eyes on him now and then with sneering contempt, but said nothing. When the men had made a hasty end of their breakfast three of them started to the corral. The young man who had humorously enumerated the virtues of the All-in-One, whom the others called Spence, was of this number. He turned back, offering Lambert his hand with a smile.

"I'm glad I met you, duke, and I hope you'll do well wherever you travel," he said, with such evident sincerity and good feeling that Lambert felt like he was parting from a friend.

"Thanks, old feller, and the same to you."

Spence went on to saddle his horse, whistling as he scuffed through the low sage. Jim sat up.

"I'll make you whistle through your ribs," he snarled after him.

It was Sunday. These men who remained in camp were enjoying the infrequent luxury of a day off. With the first gleam of morning they got out their razors and shaved, and Siwash, who seemed to be the handy man and chief counselor of the outfit, cut everybody's hair, with the exception of Jim, who had just returned from somewhere on the train, and still had the scent of the barber-shop on him, and Taterleg, who had mastered the art of shingling himself, and kept his hand in by constant practise.

Lambert mended his tire, using an old rubber boot that Taterleg found kicking around camp to plug the big holes in his outer tube. He was for going on then, but Siwash and the others pressed him to stay over the day, to which invitation he yielded without great argument.

There was nothing ahead of him but desolation, said Taterleg, a country so rough that it tried a horse to travel it. Ranch-houses were farther apart as a man proceeded, and beyond that, mountains. It looked to Taterleg as if he'd better give it up.

That was so, according to the opinion of Siwash. To his undoubted knowledge, covering the history of twenty-four years, no agent ever had penetrated that far before. Having broken this record on a bicycle, Lambert ought to be satisfied. If he was bound to travel, said Siwash, his advice would be to travel back.

It seemed to Lambert that the bottom was all out of his plans, indeed. It would be far better to chuck the whole scheme overboard and go to work as a cowboy if they would give him a job. That was nearer the sphere of his intended future activities; that was getting down to the root and foundation of a business which had a ladder in it whose rungs were not made of any general agent's hot air.

After his hot and heady way of quick decisions and planning to completion before he even had begun, Lambert was galloping the Bad Lands as superintendent of somebody's ranch, having made the leap over all the trifling years, with their trifling details of hardship, low wages, loneliness, and isolation in a wink. From superintendent he galloped swiftly on his fancy to a white ranch-house by some calm riverside, his herds around him, his big hat on his head, market quotations coming to him by telegraph every day, packers appealing to him to ship five train-loads at once to save their government contracts.

What is the good of an imagination if a man cannot ride it, and feel the wind in his face as he flies over the world? Even though it is a liar and a trickster, and a rifler of time which a drudge of success would be stamping into gold, it is better for

a man than wine. He can return from his wide excursions with no deeper injury than a sigh.

Lambert came back to the reality, broaching the subject of a job. Here Jim took notice and cut into the conversation, it being his first word to the stranger.

"Sure you can git a job, bud," he said, coming over to where Lambert sat with Siwash and Taterleg, the latter peeling potatoes for a stew, somebody having killed a calf. "The old man needs a couple of hands; he told me to keep my eye open for anybody that wanted a job."

"I'm glad to hear of it," said Lambert, warming up at the news, feeling that he must have been a bit severe in his judgment of Jim, which had not been altogether favorable.

"He'll be over in the morning; you'd better hang around."

Seeing the foundation of a new fortune taking shape, Lambert said he would hang around. They all applauded his resolution, for they all appeared to like him in spite of his appearance, which was distinctive, indeed, among the somber colors of that sage-gray land.

Jim inquired if he had a horse, the growing interest of a friend in his manner. Hearing the facts of the case from Lambert —before dawn he had heard them from Taterleg—he appeared concerned almost to the point of being troubled.

"You'll have to git you a horse, duke; you'll have to ride up to the boss when you hit him for a job. He never was known to hire a man off the ground, and I guess if you was to head at him on that bicycle, he'd blow a hole through you as big as a can of salmon. Any of you fellers got a horse you want to trade the duke for his bicycle?"

The inquiry brought out a round of somewhat cloudy witticism, with proposals to Lambert for an exchange on terms rather embarrassing to meet, seeing that even the least preposterous was not sincere. Taterleg winked to assure him that it was all banter, without a bit of harm at the bottom of it, which Lambert understood very well without the services of a commentator.

Jim brightened up presently, as if he saw a gleam that might lead Lambert out of the difficulty. He had an extra horse himself, not much of a horse to look at, but as good-hearted a horse as a man ever throwed a leg over, and that wasn't no lie, if you took him the right side on. But you had to take him the right side on, and humor him, and handle him like eggs till he got used to you. Then you had as purty a little horse as a man ever throwed a leg over, anywhere.

Jim said he'd offer that horse, only he was a little bashful in the presence of strangers—meaning the horse—and didn't show up in a style to make his owner proud of him. The trouble with that horse was he used to belong to a one-legged man, and got so accustomed to the feel of a one-legged man on him that he was plumb foolish between two legs.

That horse didn't have much style to him, and no gait to speak of; but he was as good a cow-horse as ever chawed a bit. If the duke thought he'd be able to ride him, he was welcome to him. Taterleg winked what Lambert interpreted as a warning at that point, and in the faces of the others there were little gleams of humor, which they turned their heads, or bent to study the ground, as Siwash did, to hide.

"Well, I'm not much on a horse," Lambert confessed.

"You look like a man that 'd been on a horse a time or two," said Jim, with a knowing inflection, a shrewd flattery.

"I used to ride around a little, but that's been a good while ago."

"A feller never forgits how to ride," Siwash put in; "and if a man wants to work on the range, he's got to ride 'less'n he goes and gits a job runnin' sheep, and that's below any man that *is* a man."

Jim sat pondering the question, hands hooked in front of his knees, a match in his mouth beside his unlighted cigarette.

"I been thinkin' I'd sell that horse," said he reflectively. "Ain't got no use for him much; but I don't know."

He looked off over the chuck-wagon, through the tops of the scrub-pines in which the camp was set, drawing his thin, white eyebrows, considering the case.

"Winter comin' on and hay to buy," said Siwash.

"That's what I've been thinkin' and

studyin' over. Shucks! I don't need that horse. I tell you what I'll do, duke "—turning to Lambert, brisk as with a gush of sudden generosity—" if you can ride that old pelter, I'll give him to you for a present. And I bet you'll not git as cheap an offer of a horse as that ever in your life agin."

" I think it's too generous—I wouldn't want to take advantage of it," Lambert told him, trying to show a modesty in the matter that he did not feel.

" I ain't a favorin' you, duke; not a dollar. If I needed that horse, I'd hang onto him, and you wouldn't git him a cent under thirty-five bucks; but when a man don't need a horse, and it's a expense on him, he can afford to give it away—he can give it away and make money. That's what I'm a doin', if you want to take me up."

" I'll take a look at him, Jim."

Jim got up with eagerness, and went to fetch a saddle and bridle from under the wagon. The others came into the transaction with lively interest. Only Taterleg edged round to Lambert, and whispered with his head turned away to look like innocence:

" Watch out for him—he's a bal'-faced hyeeny!"

They trooped off to the corral, which was a temporary enclosure made of wire run among the little pines. Jim brought the horse out. It stood tamely enough to be saddled, with head drooping indifferently, and showed no deeper interest and no resentment over the operation of bridling, Jim talking all the time he worked, like the faker that he was, to draw off a too-close inspection of his wares.

" Old Whetstone ain't much to look at," he said, " and as I told you, mister, he ain't got no fancy gait; but he can bust the middle out of the breeze when he lays out a straight-ahead run. Ain't a horse on this range can touch his tail when old Whetstone throws a ham into it and lets out his stren'th."

" He looks like he might go some," Lambert commented in the vacuous way of a man who felt that he must say something, even though he didn't know anything about it.

Whetstone was rather above the stature of the general run of range horses, with clean legs and a good chest. But he was a hammer-headed, white-eyed, short-maned beast, of a pale water-color yellow, like an old dish. He had a beaten-down, bedraggled, and dispirited look about him, as if he had carried men's burdens beyond his strength for a good while, and had no heart in him to take the road again. He had a scoundrelly way of rolling his eyes to watch all that went on about him without turning his head.

Jim girthed him and cinched him, soundly and securely, for no matter who was pitched off and smashed up in that ride, he didn't want the saddle to turn and be ruined.

" Well, there he stands, duke, and saddle and bridle goes with him if you're able to ride him. I'll be generous; I won't go halfway with you; I'll be whole hog or none. Saddle and bridle goes with Whetstone, all a free gift, if you can ride him, duke. I want to start you up right."

It was a safe offer, taking all precedent into account, for no man ever had ridden Whetstone, not even his owner. The beast was an outlaw of the most pronounced type, with a repertory of tricks, calculated to get a man off his back, so extensive that he never seemed to repeat. He stood always as docilely as a camel to be saddled and bridled, with what method in this apparent docility no man versed in horse philosophy ever had been able to reason out. Perhaps it was that he had been born with a spite against man, and this was his scheme for luring him on to his discomfiture and disgrace.

It was an expectant little group that stood by to witness this greenhorn's rise and fall. According to his established methods, Whetstone would allow him to mount, still standing with that indifferent droop to his head. But one who was sharp would observe that he was rolling his old white eyes back to see, tipping his sharp ear like a wildcat to hear every scrape and creak of the leather. Then, with the man in the saddle, nobody knew what he would do.

That uncertainty was what made Whetstone valuable and interesting beyond any

outlaw in the world. Men grew accustomed to the tricks of ordinary pitching broncos, in time, and the novelty and charm were gone. Besides, there nearly always was somebody who could ride the worst of them. Not so Whetstone. He had won a good deal of money for Jim, and everybody in camp knew that thirty-five dollars wasn't more than a third of the value that his owner put upon him.

There was boundless wonder among them, then, and no little admiration, when this stranger who had come into that unlikely place on a bicycle leaped into the saddle so quickly that old Whetstone was taken completely by surprise, and held him with such a strong hand and stiff rein that his initiative was taken from him.

The greenhorn's next maneuver was to swing the animal round till he lost his head, then clap heels to him and send him off as if he had business for the day laid out ahead of him.

It was the most amazing start that anybody ever had been known to make on Whetstone, and the most startling and enjoyable thing about it was that this strange, overgrown boy, with his open face and guileless speech, had played them all for a bunch of suckers, and knew more about riding in a minute than they ever had learned in their lives.

Jim Wilder stood by, swearing by all his obscene deities that if that man hurt Whetstone, he'd kill him for his hide. But he began to feel better in a little while. Hope, even certainty, picked up again. Whetstone was coming to himself. Perhaps the old rascal had only been elaborating his scheme a little at the start, and was now about to show them that their faith in him was not misplaced.

The horse had come to a sudden stop, legs stretched so wide that it seemed as if he surely must break in the middle. But he gathered his feet together so quickly that the next view presented him with his back arched like a fighting cat's. And there on top of him rode the duke, his small brown hat in place, his gay shirt ruffling in the wind.

After that there came, so quickly that it made the mind and eye hasten to follow, all the tricks that Whetstone ever had tried in his past triumphs over men; and through all of them, sharp, shrewd, unexpected, startling as some of them were, that little brown hat rode untroubled on top. Old Whetstone was as wet at the end of ten minutes as if he had swum a river. He grunted with anger as he heaved and lashed, he squealed in his resentful passion as he swerved, lunged, pitched, and clawed the air.

The little band of spectators cheered the duke, calling loudly to inform him that he was the only man who ever had stuck that long. The duke waved his hat in acknowledgment, and put it back on with deliberation and exactness, while old Whetstone, as mad as a wet hen, tried to roll down suddenly and crush his legs.

Nothing to be accomplished by that old trick. The duke pulled him up with a wrench that made him squeal, and Whetstone, lifted off his forelegs, attempted to complete the backward turn and catch his tormentor under the saddle. But that was another trick so old that the simplest horseman knew how to meet it. The next thing he knew, Whetstone was galloping along like a gentleman, just wind enough in him to carry him, not an ounce to spare.

Jim Wilder was swearing himself blue. It was a trick, an imposition, he declared. No circus-rider could come there and abuse old Whetstone that way and live to eat his dinner. Nobody appeared to share his view of it. They were a unit in declaring that the duke beat any man handling a horse they ever saw. If Whetstone didn't get him off pretty soon, he would be whipped and conquered, his belly on the ground.

"If he hurts that horse I'll blow a hole in him as big as a can of salmon!" Jim declared.

"Take your medicine like a man, Jim," Siwash advised. "You might know somebody 'd come along that 'd ride him, in time."

"Yes, *come* along!" said Jim with a sneer.

Whetstone had begun to collect himself out on the flat among the sage-brush a quarter of a mile away. The frenzy of desperation was in him. He was resorting to the

raw, low, common tricks of the ordinary outlaw, even to biting at his rider's legs. That ungentlemanly behavior was costly, as he quickly learned, at the expense of a badly cut mouth. He never had met a rider before who had energy to spare from his efforts to stick in the saddle to slam him a big kick in the mouth when he doubled himself to make that vicious snap. The sound of that kick carried to the corral.

"I'll fix you for that!" Jim swore.

He was breathing as hard as his horse, sweat of anxiety running down his face. The duke was bringing the horse back, his spirit pretty well broken, it appeared.

"What do you care what he does to him? It ain't your horse no more."

It was Taterleg who said that, standing near Jim, a little way behind him, as gorgeous as a bridegroom in the bright sun.

"You fellers can't ring me in on no game like that and beat me out of my horse!" said Jim, redder than ever in his passion.

"What do you mean, rung you in, you little, flannel-faced fist (fice—dog)?" Siwash demanded, whirling round on him with blood in his eye.

Jim was standing with his legs apart, bent a little at the knees, as if he intended to make a jump. His right hand was near the butt of his gun, his fingers were clasping and unclasping, as if he limbered them for action. Taterleg slipped up behind him on his toes, and jerked the gun from Jim's scabbard with quick and sure hand. He backed away with it, presenting it with determined mien as Jim turned on him and cursed him by all his lurid gods.

"If you fight anybody in this camp today, Jim, you'll fight like a man," said Taterleg, "or you'll hobble out of it on three legs, like a wolf."

The duke was riding old Whetstone like a feather, letting him have his spurts of kicking and stiff-legged bouncing without any effort to restrain him at all. There wasn't much steam in the outlaw's antics now; any common man could have ridden him without losing his hat.

Jim had drawn apart from the others, resentful of the distrust that Taterleg had shown, but more than half of his courage and bluster taken away from him with his gun. He was swearing more volubly than ever to cover his other deficiencies; but he was a man to be feared only when he had his weapon under his hand.

The duke had brought the horse almost back to camp when the animal was taken with an extraordinarily vicious spasm of pitching, broken by sudden efforts to fling himself down and roll over on his persistent rider. The duke let him have it his way, all but the rolling, for a while; then he appeared to lose patience with the stubborn beast. He headed him into the open, laid the quirt to him, and galloped toward the hills.

"That's the move—run the devil out of him," said one.

The duke kept him going, and going for all there was in him. Horse and rider were dim in the dust of the heated race against the evil passion, the untamed demon, in the savage creature's heart. It began to look as if Lambert never intended to come back. Jim saw it that way. He came over to Taterleg as hot as a hornet.

"Give me that gun — I'm goin' after him!"

"You'll have to go without it, Jim."

Jim blasted him to perdition, split him with forked lightning from his blasphemous tongue.

"He'll come back; he's just runnin' the vinegar out of him," said one.

"Come back—hell!" said Jim.

"If he don't come back, that's his business. A man can go wherever he wants to go on his own horse, I guess."

That was the observation of Siwash, standing there rather glum and out of tune over Jim's charge that they had rung the duke in on him to beat him out of his animal.

"It was a put-up job! I'll split that feller like a hog!"

Jim left them with that declaration of his benevolent intention, hurrying to the corral where his horse was, his saddle on the ground by the gate. They watched him saddle, and saw him mount and ride after the duke, with no comment on his actions at all.

The duke was out of sight in the scrub timber at the foot of the hills, but his dust

still floated like the wake of a swift boat, showing the way he had gone.

"Yes, you will!" said Taterleg.

Meaningless, irrelevant, as that fragmentary ejaculation seemed, the others understood. They grinned, and twisted wise heads, spat out their tobacco, and went back to dinner.

CHAPTER III.

AN EMPTY SADDLE.

THE duke was seen coming back before the meal was over, across the little plain between camp and hills. A quarter of a mile behind him Jim Wilder rode, whether seen or unseen by the man in the lead they did not know.

Jim had fallen behind somewhat by the time the duke reached camp. The admiration of all hands over this triumph against horseflesh and the devil within it was so great that they got up to welcome the duke, and shake hands with him as he left the saddle. He was as fresh and nimble, unshaken and serene, as when he mounted old Whetstone more than an hour before.

Whetstone was a conquered beast, beyond any man's doubt. He stood with flaring nostrils, scooping in his breath, not a dry hair on him, not a dash of vinegar in his veins.

"Where's Jim?" the duke inquired.

"Comin'," Taterleg replied, waving his hand afield.

"What's he doin' out there—where's he been?" the duke inquired, a puzzled look in his face, searching their sober countenances for his answer.

"He thought you—"

"Let him do his own talkin', kid," said Siwash, cutting off the cowboy's explanation.

Siwash looked at the duke shrewdly, his head cocked to one side like a robin listening for a worm.

"What outfit was you with before you started out sellin' them tooth-puller-can-opener machines, son?" he inquired.

"Outfit? What kind of an outfit?"

"Ranch, innercence; what range was you ridin' on?"

"I never rode any range, I'm sorry to say."

"Well, where in the name of mustard did you learn to ride?"

"I used to break range horses for five dollars a head at the Kansas City stock yards. That was a good while ago; I'm all out of practise now."

"Yes, and I bet you can throw a rope, too."

"Nothing to speak of."

"Nothing to speak of! Yes, I'll *bet* you nothing to speak of!"

Jim didn't stop at the corral to turn in his horse, but came clattering into camp, madder for the race that the duke had led him in ignorance of his pursuit, as every man could see. He flung himself out of the saddle with a flip like a bird taking to the wing, his spurs cutting the ground as he came over to where Lambert stood.

"Maybe you can ride my horse, you damn granger, but you can't ride me!" he said.

He threw off his vest as he spoke, that being his only superfluous garment, and bowed his back for a fight. Lambert looked at him with a flush of indignant contempt spreading in his face.

"You don't need to get sore about it; I only took you up at your own game," he said.

"No circus-ringer's goin' to come in here and beat me out of my horse. You'll either put him back in that corral or you'll chaw leather with me!"

"I'll put him back in the corral when I'm ready, but I'll put him back as mine. I won him on your own bet, and it'll take a whole lot better man than you to take him away from me."

In the manner of youth and independence, Lambert got hotter with every word, and after that there wasn't much room for anything else to be said on either side. They mixed it, and they mixed it briskly, for Jim's contempt for a man who wore a hat like that supplied the courage that had been drained from him when he was disarmed.

There was nothing epic in that fight, nothing heroic at all. It was a wildcat struggle in the dust, no more science on

either side than nature put into their hands at the beginning. But they surely did kick up a lot of dust. It would have been a peaceful enough little fight, with a handshake at the end very likely, if Jim hadn't managed to get out his knife when he felt himself in for a trimming.

It was a mean-looking knife, with a buckhorn handle and a four-inch blade that leaped open on pressure of a spring. Its type was widely popular all over the West in those days, but one of them would be almost a curiosity now. But Jim had it out, anyhow, lying on his back with the duke's knee in his ribs, and was whittling away before any man could raise a hand to stop him.

The first slash split the duke's cheek for two inches just below his eye; the next tore his shirt-sleeve from shoulder to elbow, grazing the skin as it passed. And there somebody kicked Jim's elbow and knocked the knife out of his hand.

"Let him up, duke," he said.

Lambert released the strangle-hold that he had taken on Jim's throat and looked up. It was Spence, standing there with his horse behind him. He laid his hand on Lambert's shoulder.

"Let him up, duke," he said again.

Lambert got up, bleeding a cataract. Jim bounced to his feet like a spring, his hand to his empty holster, a look of dismay in his blanching face.

"That's your size, you nigger!" Spence said, kicking the knife beyond Jim's reach. "That's the kind of a low-down cuss you always was. This man's our guest, and when you pull a knife on him you pull it on me!"

"You know I ain't got a gun on me, you—"

"Git it, you sneakin' houn'!"

Jim looked round for Taterleg.

"Where's my gun, you greasy pot-slinger!"

"Give it to him, whoever's got it."

Taterleg produced it. Jim began backing off as soon as he had it in his hand, watching Spence alertly. Lambert leaped between them.

"Gentlemen, don't go to shootin' over a little thing like this!" he begged.

Taterleg came between them, also, and Siwash, quite blocking up the fairway.

"Now, boys, put up your guns; this is Sunday, you know," Siwash said.

"Give me room, men!" Spence commanded, in voice that trembled with passion, with the memory of old quarrels, old wrongs, which this last insult to the camp's guest gave the excuse for wiping out. There was something in his tone not to be denied; they fell out of his path as if the wind had blown them. Jim fired, his elbow against his ribs.

Too confident of his own speed, or forgetting that Wilder already had his weapon out, Spence crumpled at the knees, toppled backward, fell. His pistol, half-drawn, dropped from the holster and lay at his side. Wilder came a step nearer and fired another shot into the fallen man's body, dead as he must have known him to be. He ran on to his horse, mounted and rode away.

Some of the others hurried to the wagon after their guns. Lambert, for a moment shocked to the heart by the sudden horror of the tragedy, bent over the body of the man who had taken up his quarrel without even knowing the merits of it, or whose fault lay at the beginning. A look into his face was enough to tell that there was nothing within the compass of this earth that could bring back life to that strong, young body, struck down in a breath like a broken vase.

He looked up. Jim Wilder was bending in the saddle as he rode swiftly away, as if he expected them to shoot. A great fire of resentment for this man's destructive deed swept over him, hotter than the hot blood wasting from his wounded cheek. The passion of vengeance wrenched his joints, his hand shook and grew cold, as he stooped again to unfasten the belt about his friend's dead body.

Armed with the weapon that had been drawn a fraction of a second too late, drawn in the chivalrous defense of hospitality, the high courtesy of an obligation to a stranger, Lambert mounted the horse that had come to be his at the price of this tragedy, and galloped in pursuit of the fleeing man.

Some of the young men were hurrying to the corral, belting on their guns as they ran to fetch their horses and join the pursuit. Siwash called them back.

"Leave it to him, boys; it's his by rights," he said.

Taterleg stood looking after the two riders, the hindmost drawing steadily upon the leader, and stood looking so until they disappeared in the timber at the base of the hills.

"My God!" said he. And again, after a little while: "My God!"

It was dusk when Lambert came back, leading Jim Wilder's horse. There was blood on the empty saddle.

CHAPTER IV.

"AND SPEAK IN PASSING."

THE events of that Sunday introduced Lambert into the Bad Lands and established his name and fame. Within three months after going to work for the Syndicate Ranch he was known for a hundred miles around as the man who had broken Jim Wilder's outlaw and won the horse by that unparalleled feat.

That was the prop to his fame—that he had broken Jim Wilder's outlaw. Certainly he was admired and commended for the unhesitating action he had taken in avenging the death of his friend, but in that he had done only what was expected of any man worthy the name. Breaking the outlaw was a different matter entirely. In doing that he had accomplished what was believed to be beyond the power of any living man.

According to his own belief, his own conscience, Lambert had made a bad start. A career that had its beginning in contentions and violence, enough of it crowded into one day to make more than the allotment of an ordinary life, could not terminate with any degree of felicity and honor. They thought little of killing a man in that country, it seemed; no more than a perfunctory inquiry had been made by the authorities into Jim Wilder's death.

While it relieved him to know that the law held his justification to be ample, there was a shadow following him which he could not evade in any of the hilarious diversions common to those wild souls of the range.

It troubled him that he had killed a man, even in a fair fight in the open field with the justification of society at his back. In his sleep it harried him with visions; awake, it oppressed him like a sorrow, or the memory of a shame. He became solemn and silent as a chastened man, seldom smiling, laughing never.

When he drank with his companions in the little saloon at Misery, the loading station on the railroad, he took his liquor as gravely as the sacrament; when he raced them he rode with face grim as an Indian, never whooping in victory, never swearing in defeat.

He had left even his own lawful and proper name behind him with his past. Far and near he was known as the Duke of Chimney Butte, shortened in cases of direct address to "duke." He didn't resent it, rather took a sort of grim pride in it, although he felt at times that it was one more mark of his surrender to circumstances whose current he might have avoided at the beginning by the exercise of a proper man's sense.

A man was expected to drink a good deal of the overardent spirits which were sold at Misery. If he could drink without becoming noisy, so much the more to his credit, so much higher he stood in the estimation of his fellows as a copper-bottomed sport of the true blood. The duke could put more of that notorious whisky under cover, and still contain himself, than any man they ever had seen in Misery. The more he drank the glummer he became, but he never had been known either to weep or curse.

Older men spoke to him with respect, younger ones approached him with admiration, unable to understand what kind of a safety-valve a man had on his mouth that would keep his steam in when that Misery booze began to sizzle in his pipes. His horse was a subject of interest almost equal to himself.

Under his hand old Whetstone—although not more than seven—had developed un-

expected qualities. When the animal's persecution ceased, his perversity fled. He grew into a well-conditioned creature, sleek of coat, beautiful of tail as an Arab barb, bright of eye, handsome to behold. His speed and endurance were matters of as much note as his outlawry had been but a little while before, and his intelligence was something almost beyond belief.

Lambert had grown exceedingly fond of him, holding him more in the estimation of a companion than the valuation of a dumb creature of burden. When they rode the long watches at night he talked to him, and Whetstone would put back his sensitive ear and listen, and toss his head in joyful appreciation of his master's confidence and praise.

Few horses had beaten Whetstone in a race since he became the duke's property. It was believed that none on that range could do it if the duke wanted to put him to his limit. It was said that the duke lost only such races as he felt necessary to the continuance of his prosperity.

Racing was one of the main diversions when the cowboys from the surrounding ranches met at Misery on a Sunday afternoon, or when loading cattle there. Few trains stopped at Misery, a circumstance resented by the cowboys, who believed the place should be as important to all the world as it was to them. To show their contempt for this aloof behavior they usually raced the trains, frequently outrunning those westward-bound as they labored up the long grade.

Freight-trains especially they took delight in beating, seeing how it nettled the train-crews. There was nothing more delightful in any program of amusement that a cowboy could conceive than riding abreast of a laboring freight-engine, the sulky engineer crowding every pound of power into the cylinders, the sooty fireman humping his back throwing in coal. Only one triumph would have been sweeter—to outrun the big passenger-train from Chicago with the brass-fenced car at the end.

No man ever had done that yet, although many had tried. The engineers all knew what to expect on a Sunday afternoon when they approached Misery, where the cowboys came through the fence and raced the trains on the right-of-way. A long, level stretch of soft gray earth, set with bunches of grass here and there, began a mile beyond the station, unmarred by steam-shovel or grader's scraper. A man could ride it with his eyes shut; a horse could cover it at its best.

That was the racing ground over which they had contended with the Chicago-Puget Sound flier for many years, and a place which engineers and firemen prepared to pass quickly while yet a considerable distance away. It was a sight to see the big engine round the curve below, its plume of smoke rising straight for twenty feet, streaming back like a running girl's hair, the cowboys all set in their saddles, waiting to go.

Engineers on the flier were not so sulky about it, knowing that the race was theirs before it was run. Usually they leaned out of the window and urged the riders on with beckoning, derisive hand, while the fireman stood by grinning, confident of the head of steam he had begun storing for this emergency far down the road.

Porters told passengers about these wild horsemen in advance, and eager faces lined the windows on that side of the cars as they approached Misery, and all who could pack on the end of the observation-car assembled there. In spite of its name, Misery was quite a comfortable break in the day's monotony for travelers on a Sunday afternoon.

Amid the hardships and scant diversions of this life, Lambert spent his first winter in the Bad Lands, drinking in the noisy revels at Misery, riding the long, bitter miles back to the ranch, despising himself for being so mean and low. It was a life in which a man's soul would either shrink to nothing or expand until it became too large to find contentment within the horizon of such an existence.

Some of them expanded up to the size for ranch owners, superintendents, bosses; stopped there, set in their mold. Lambert never had heard of one stretching so wide that he was drawn out of himself entirely, his eyes fixed on the far light of a nobler life. He liked to imagine a man so inspired

out of the lonely watches, the stormy rides, the battles against blizzard and night.

This train of thought had carried him away that gentle spring day as he rode to Misery. He resented the thought that he might have to spend his youth as a hired servant in this rough occupation, unremunerative below the hope of ever gaining enough to make a start in business for himself. There was no romance in it, for all that had been written, no beautiful daughter of the ranch-owner to be married, and a fortune gained with her.

Daughters there must be, indeed, among the many stockholders in that big business, but they were not available in the Bad Lands. The superintendent of the ranch had three or four, born to that estate, full of loud laughter, ordinary as baled hay. A man would be a loser in marrying such as they, even with a fortune ready-made.

What better could that rough country offer? People are no gentler than their pursuits, no finer than the requirements of their lives. Daughters of the Bad Lands, such as he had seen of them in the wives to whom he once had tried to sell the All-in-One, and the superintendent's girls, were not intended for any other life. As for him, if he had to live it out there, with the shadow of a dead man at his heels, he would live it alone.

So he thought, going on his way to Misery, where there was to be racing that afternoon, and a grand effort to keep up with the Chicago flier.

Lambert never had taken part in that long-standing competition. It appeared to him a senseless expenditure of horseflesh, a childish pursuit of the wind. Yet, foolish as it was, he liked to watch them. There was a thrill in the sweeping start of twenty or thirty horsemen that warmed a man, making him feel as if he must whoop and wave his hat. There was a belief alive among them that some day a man would come who would run the train neck and neck to the depot platform.

Not much distinction in it, even so, said he. But it set him musing and considering as he rode, his face quickening out of its sombre cloud. A little while after his arrival at Misery the news went round that the duke was willing at last to enter the race against the flier.

True to his peculiarities, the duke had made conditions. He was willing to race, but only if everybody else would keep out of it and give him a clear and open field. Taterleg Wilson, the bow-legged camp-cook of the Syndicate, circulated himself like a petition to gain consent to this unusual proposal.

It was asking a great deal of those men to give up their established diversion, no matter how distinguished the man in whose favor they were requested to stand aside. That Sunday afternoon race had become as much a fixed institution in the Bad Lands as the railroad itself.

With some argument, some bucking and snorting, a considerable cost to Taterleg for liquor and cigars, they agreed to it. Taterleg said he could state, authoritatively, that this would be the duke's first, last and only ride against the flier. It would be worth money to stand off and watch it, he said, and worth putting money on the result. When, where, would a man ever have a chance to see such a race again? Perhaps never in his life.

On time, to a dot, the station-agent told the committee headed by Taterleg, which had gone to inquire in the grave and important manner of men conducting a ceremony. The committee went back to the saloon, and pressed the duke to have a drink. He refused, as he had refused politely and consistently all day. A man could fight on booze, he said, but it was a mighty poor foundation for business.

There was a larger crowd in Misery that day than usual for the time of year, it being the first general holiday after the winter's hard exactions. In addition to visitors, all Misery turned out to see the race, lining up at the right-of-way fence as far as they would go, which was not a great distance along. The saloonkeeper could see the finish from his door. On the start of it he was not concerned, but he had money up on the end.

Lambert hadn't as much flesh, by a good many pounds, as he had carried into the Bad Lands on his bicycle. One who had previously known him would have thought

that seven years had passed him, making him over completely, indeed, since then. His face was thin, browned and weathered, his body sinewy, its leanness aggravated by its length. He was as light in the saddle as a leaf on the wind.

He was quite a barbaric figure as he waited to mount and ride against the train, which could be heard whistling far down the road. Coatless, in flannel shirt, a bright silk handkerchief round his neck; calfskin vest, tanned with the hair on, its color red and white; dressed leather chaps, a pair of boots that had cost him two-thirds of a month's pay. His hat was like forty others in the crowd, doe-colored, worn with the high crown full-standing, a leather thong at the back of the head, the brim drooping a bit from the weather, so broad that his face looked narrower and sharper in its shadow.

Nothing like the full-blooded young aggie who had come into the Bad Lands to found his fortune a little less than a year before, and about as widely different from him in thought and outlook upon life as in physical appearance. The psychology of environment is a powerful force.

A score or more of horsemen were strung out along the course, where they had stationed themselves to watch the race at its successive stages. At the starting-point the duke waited alone; at the station a crowd of cowboys lolled in their saddles, not caring to make a run to see the finish.

It was customary for the horsemen who raced the flier to wait on the ground until the engine rounded the curve, then mount and settle to the race. It was counted fair, also, owing to the headway the train already had, to start a hundred yards or so before the engine came abreast, in order to limber up to the horses' best speed.

For two miles or more the track ran straight after that curve, Misery about the middle of the stretch. In that long, straight reach the builders of the road had begun the easement of the stiff grade through the hills beyond. It was the beginning of a hard climb, a stretch in which west-bound trains gathered headway to carry them over the top. Engines came panting round that curve, laboring with the strain of their load, speed reduced half, and dropping a bit lower as they proceeded up the grade.

This Sunday, as usual, train crew and passengers were on the lookout for the game sportsmen of Misery. Already the engineer was leaning out of his window, arm extended, ready to give the derisive challenge to come on as he swept by.

The duke was in the saddle, holding in Whetstone with stiff rein, for the animal was trembling with eagerness to spring away, knowing very well from the preparations which had been going forward that some big event in the lives of his master and himself was pending. The duke held him, looking back over his shoulder, measuring the distance as the train came sweeping grandly round the curve. He waited until the engine was within a hundred feet of him before he loosed rein and let old Whetstone go.

A yell ran up the line of spectators as the pale yellow horse reached out his long neck, chin level against the wind like a swimmer, and ran as no horse ever had run on that race-course before. Every horseman there knew that the duke was still holding him in, allowing the train to creep up on him as if he scorned to take advantage of the handicap.

The engineer saw that this was going to be a different kind of race from the yelling, clattering troop of wild riders which he had been outrunning with unbroken regularity. In that yellow streak of horse, that low-bending, bony rider, he saw a possibility of defeat and disgrace. His head disappeared out of the window, his derisive hand vanished. He was turning valves and pulling levers, trying to coax a little more power into his piston-strokes.

The duke held Whetstone back until his wind had set to the labor, his muscles flexed, his sinews stretched to the race. A third of the race was covered when the engine came neck and neck with the horse, and the engineer, confident now, leaned far out, swinging his hand like the oar of a boat, and shouted:

"Come on, come on!"

Just a moment too soon this confidence, a moment too soon this defiance. It was the duke's program to run this thing neck and

neck, force to force, with no advantage asked or taken. Then if he could gather speed and beat the engine on the home stretch no man, on the train or off, could say that he had done it with the advantage of a handicap.

There was a great whooping, a great thumping of hoofs, a monstrous swirl of dust, as the riders at the side of the race-course saw the duke's maneuver and read his intention. Away they swept, a noisy troop, like a flight of blackbirds, hats off, guns popping, in a scramble to get up as close to the finishing line as possible.

Never before in the long history of that unique contest had there been so much excitement. Porters opened the vestibule doors, allowing passengers to crowd the steps; windows were opened, heads thrust out, every tongue urging the horseman on with cheers.

The duke was riding beside the engineer, not ten feet between them. More than half the course was run, and there the duke hung, the engine not gaining an inch. The engineer was on his feet now, hand on the throttle-lever, although it was open as wide as it could be pulled. The fireman was throwing coal into the furnace, looking round over his shoulder now and then at the persistent horseman who would not be outrun, his eyes white in his grimy face.

On the observation-car women hung over the rail at the side, waving handkerchiefs at the rider's back; along the fence the inhabitants of Misery broke away like leaves before a wind and went running toward the depot; ahead of the racing horse and engine the mounted men who had taken a big start rode on toward the station in a wild, delirious charge.

Neck and neck with the engine old Whetstone ran, throwing his long legs like a wolfhound, his long neck stretched, his ears flat, not leaving a hair that he could control outstanding to catch the wind. The engineer was peering ahead with fixed eyes now, as if he feared to look again on this puny combination of horse and man that was holding its own in this unequal trial of strength.

Within three hundred yards of the station platform, which sloped down at the end like a continuation of the course, the duke touched old Whetstone's neck with the tips of his fingers. As if he had given a signal upon which they had agreed, the horse gathered power, grunting as he used to grunt in the days of his outlawry, and bounded away from the cab-window, where the greasy engineer stood with white face and set jaw.

Yard by yard the horse gained, his long mane flying, his long tail astream, foam on his lip, forging past the great driving-wheels which ground against the rails; past the swinging piston; past the powerful black cylinders, past the stubby pilot, advancing like a shadow over the track. When Whetstone's hoofs struck the planks of the platform, marking the end of the course, he was more than the length of the engine in the lead.

The duke sat there waving his hand solemnly to those who cheered him as the train swept past, the punchers around him lifting up a joyful chorus of shots and shouts, showing off on their own account to a considerable extent, but sincere over all because of the victory that the duke had won.

Old Whetstone was standing where he had stopped, within a few feet of the track, front hoofs on the boards of the platform, not more than nicely warmed up for another race, it appeared. As the observation-car passed, a young woman leaned over the rail, handkerchief reached out to the duke as if trying to give it to him.

He saw her only a second before she passed, too late to make even a futile attempt to possess the favor of her appreciation. She laughed, waving it to him, holding it out as if in challenge for him to come and take it. Without wasting a precious fragment of a second in hesitation the duke sent Whetstone thundering along the platform in pursuit of the train.

It seemed a foolish thing to do, and a risky venture, for the platform was old, its planks were weak in places. It was not above a hundred feet long, and beyond it only a short stretch of right-of-way until the public road crossed the track, the fence running down to the cattle-guard, blocking his hope of overtaking the train.

More than that, the train was picking up speed, as if the engineer wanted to get out of sight and hearing of that demonstrative crowd, and put his humiliation behind him as quickly as possible. No man's horse could make a start with planks under his feet, run two hundred yards and overtake that train, no matter what the inducement. That was the thought of every man who sat a saddle there and stretched his neck to witness this unparalleled streak of folly.

If Whetstone had run swiftly in the first race, he fairly whistled through the air like a wild duck in the second. Before he had run the length of the platform he had gained on the train, his nose almost even with the brass railing over which the girl leaned, the handkerchief in her hand. Midway between the platform and the cattle-guard they saw the duke lean in his saddle and snatch the white favor from her hand.

The people on the train-end cheered this feat of quick resolution, quicker action. But the girl whose handkerchief the duke had won only leaned on the railing, holding fast with both hands, as if she offered her lips to be kissed, and looked at him with a pleasure in her face that he could read as the train bore her onward into the west.

The duke sat there with his hat in his hand, gazing after her, only her straining face in his vision, centered out of the dust and widening distance like a star that a man gazes on to fix his course before it is overwhelmed by clouds.

She raised her hand as the dust closed in the wake of the train. He thought she beckoned him.

So she came, and went, crossing his way in the Bad Lands that hour of his small triumph, and left her perfumed token of appreciation in his hand. The duke put it away in the pocket of his shirt beneath the calfskin vest, the faint delicacy of its perfume rising to his nostrils like the elusive scent of a violet for which one searches the woodland and cannot find.

The dusty hills had gulped the train that carried her before the duke rode round the station and joined his noisy comrades. Everybody shook hands with him, everybody invited him to have a drink. He put them off—friend, acquaintance, stranger, on their pressing invitation to drink—with the declaration that his horse came first in his consideration. After he had put Whetstone in the livery barn and fed him, he would join them for a round, he said.

They trooped into the saloon to square their bets, the duke going his way to the barn. There they drank and grew noisier than before, to come out from time to time, mount their horses, gallop up and down the road that answered Misery for a street, and shoot good ammunition into the harmless air.

Somebody remarked after a while that the duke was a long time feeding that horse. Taterleg and others went to investigate. He had not been there, the keeper of the livery-barn said. A further look around, exhausting all the possible hiding-places of Misery. The duke was not there.

"Well," said Taterleg, puzzled, "I guess he's went."

CHAPTER V.

FEET UPON THE ROAD.

"I ALWAYS thought I'd go out West, but somehow I never got around to it," Taterleg said. "How far do you aim to go, duke?"

"As far as the notion takes me, I guess."

It was about a month after the race that this talk between Taterleg and the duke took place, on a calm afternoon in a camp far from the site of that one into which the pedler of cutlery had trundled his disabled bicycle a year before. The duke had put off his calfskin vest, the weather being too hot for it. Even Taterleg had made sacrifices to appearance in favor of comfort, his piratical corduroys being replaced by overalls.

The duke had quit his job, moved by the desire to travel on and see the world, he said. He said no word to any man about the motive behind that desire, very naturally, for he was not the kind of a man who opened the door of his heart. But to himself he confessed the hunger for an unknown face, for the lure of an onward-beckoning hand which he was no longer able to ignore.

Since that day she had strained over the brass railing of the observation-car to hold him in her sight until the curtain of dust intervened, he had felt her call urging him into the West, the strength of her beckoning hand drawing him the way she had gone to search the world for her and find her on some full and glorious day.

"Was you aimin' to sell Whetstone and go on the train, duke?"

"No, I'm not goin' to sell him yet a while."

The duke was not a talkative man on any occasion, and now he sat in silence watching the cook kneading out a batch of bread, his thoughts a thousand miles away.

Where, indeed, would the journey that he was shaping in his intention that minute carry him? Somewhere along the railroad between there and Puget Sound the beckoning lady had left the train; somewhere on that long road between mountain and sea she was waiting for him to come.

Taterleg stood his loaves in the sun to rise for the oven, making a considerable rattling about the stove as he put in the fire. A silence fell.

Lambert was waiting for his horse to rest a few hours, and, waiting, he sent his dreams ahead of him where his feet could not follow save by weary roads and slow.

Between Misery and the end of that railroad at the western sea there were many villages, a few cities. A passenger might alight from the Chicago flier at any of them, and be absorbed in the vastness like a drop of water in the desert plain. How was he to know where she had left the train, or whither she had turned afterward, or journeyed, or where she lodged now? It seemed beyond finding out. Assuredly it was a task too great for the life of youth, so evanescent in the score of time, even though so long and heavy to those impatient dreamers who draw themselves onward by its golden chain to the cold, harsh facts of age.

It was a foolish quest, a hopeless one. So reason said. Romance and youth, and the longing that he could not define, rose to confute this sober argument, flushed and eager, violet scent blowing before.

Who could tell? And perhaps, rash speculations, faint promises. The world was not so broad that two might never meet in it whose ways had touched for one heart-throb and sundered again in a sigh. All his life he had been hearing that it was a small place, after all was said. Perhaps, and who can tell? And so, galloping onward in the free leash of his ardent dreams.

"When was you aimin' to start, duke?" Taterleg inquired, after a silence so long that Lambert had forgotten he was there.

"In about another hour."

"I wasn't tryin' to hurry you off, duke. My reason for askin' you was because I thought maybe I might be able to go along with you a piece of the way."

"Why, you're not goin' to jump the job, are you?"

"Yes, I've been thinkin' it over, and I've made up my mind to draw my time to-night. If you'll put off going till morning, I'll start with you. We can travel together till our roads branch, anyhow."

"I'll be glad to wait for you, old feller. I didn't know—which way—"

"Wyoming," said Taterleg, sighing.

Morning found them on the road together, the sun at their backs. Taterleg was as brilliant as a humming-bird, even to his belt and scabbard, which had a great many silver tacks driven into them, repeating the letters LW, in great characters and small. He said the letters were the initials of his name.

"Lawrence?" the duke ventured to inquire.

Taterleg looked round him with great caution before answering, although they were at least fifteen miles from camp, and farther than that from the next human habitation. He lowered his voice, rubbing his hand reflectively along the glittering ornaments of his belt.

"Lovelace," he said.

"Not a bad name."

"It ain't no name for a cook," Taterleg said, almost vindictively. "You're the first man I ever told it to, and I'll ask you not to pass it on. I used to go by the name of Larry before they called me Taterleg. I got that name out here in the Bad Lands; it suits *me*, all right."

"It's a queer kind of a name to call a man by. How did they come to give it to you?"

"Well, sir, I give myself that name, you might say, when you come to figger it down to cases. I was breakin' a horse when I first come out here four years ago, headin' at that time for Wyoming. He throwed me. When I didn't hop him agin, the boys come over to see if I was busted. When they asked me if I was hurt, I says, 'He snapped my dern old leg like a 'tater.' And from that day on they called me Taterleg. Yes, and I guess I'd 'a' been in Wyoming now, maybe with a oyster parlor and a wife on my hands, if it hadn't been for that blame horse." He paused reminiscently; then he said:

"Where was you aimin' to camp to-night, duke?"

"Where does the flier stop after it passes Misery, going west?"

"It stops for water at Glendora, about fifty or fifty-five miles west, sometimes. I've heard 'em say if a feller buys a ticket for there in Chicago, it 'll let him off. But I don't guess it stops there regular. Why, duke? Was you aimin' to take the flier there?"

"No. We'll stop there to-night, then, if your horse can make it."

"Make it! If he can't I'll eat him raw. He's made seventy-five many a time before to-day."

So they fared on that first day, in friendly converse. At sunset they drew up on a mesa, high above the treeless, broken country through which they had been riding all day, and saw Glendora in the valley below them.

"There she is," said Taterleg. "I wonder what we're goin' to run into down there?"

CHAPTER VI.

ALLUREMENTS OF GLENDORA.

IN a bend of the Little Missouri, where it broadened out and took on the appearance of a consequential stream, Glendora lay, a lonely little village with a gray hill behind it.

Only enough remained in the town to live by its trade.

Close by the station there were cattle-pens for loading, and two long tracks for holding the cars. In the autumn fat cattle were driven down out of the hidden valleys and entrained there for market, and in those days there was merriment after nightfall in Glendora. At other times Glendora was mainly a quiet place, the shooting that was done in its streets being of a peaceful nature in the way of expressing a feeling for which some plain-witted, drunken cowherder had no words.

Into this atmosphere there had come, many years before, one of those innocents among men whose misfortune it is to fall before the beguilements of the dishonest; that sort of man whom the promoters of schemes go out to catch in the manner of an old maid catching flies in a glass of suds. Milton Philbrook was this man. Somebody had sold him forty thousand acres of land in a body for three dollars an acre. It began at the river and ran back to the hills for a matter of twenty miles. Finding no market for the brown coal to which he had acquired title, he resolved to be a cattle baron, and with what money he had left he fenced in the entire forty thousand acres, and then built him a house.

Soon he had cattle grazing within his fences, which were guarded by men who rode the long lines of wire with rifles under their thighs, and at once his contentions and conflicts began. And following these feuds the trees which he planted around his house, the grass which he labored to set withered and died in spite of water from the river, strangers to the harsh elements and unnutritive soil. His wife broke under the long strain of never-ending battles, and died the spring that her daughter came eighteen years of age.

The girl had grown up in the saddle, a true daughter of her fighting sire. Time and again she had led a patrol of two fence riders along one side of that sixty square miles of ranch while her father guarded the other. She could handle firearms with speed and accuracy equal to any man on the range.

All this information pertaining to the

history of Milton Philbrook and his adventures in the Bad Lands the landlord at the hotel in Glendora told Lambert on the evening of the travelers' arrival there. The story had come as the result of questions concerning the great white house on the mesa, the two men sitting on the porch in plain view of it, Taterleg entertaining the daughter of the hotel across the showcase in the office.

Lambert found the story more interesting than anything he ever had imagined of the Bad Lands. Here was romance looking down on him from the lonely walls of that white house, and heroism of a finer kind than these people appreciated, he was sure.

"Is the girl still here?" he inquired.

"Yes, she's back now. She's been away to school in Boston for three or four years, comin' back in summer for a little while."

"When did she come back?"

Lambert felt that his voice was thick as he inquired, disturbed by the eager beating of his heart. Who knows? And perhaps, and all the rest of it came galloping to him with a roar of blood in his ears like the sound of a thousand hoofs. The landlord called to his daughter:

"Alta, when did Vesta Philbrook come back?"

"Four or five weeks ago," said Alta, with the sound of chewing gum.

"Four or five weeks ago," the landlord repeated, as though Alta spoke a foreign tongue and must be translated.

"I see," said Lambert, vaguely, shaking to the tips of his fingers with a kind of buck ague that he never had before. He was afraid the landlord would notice it, and slewed his chair, getting out his tobacco to cover the fool spell.

For that was she, Vesta Philbrook was she, and she was Vesta Philbrook. He knew it as well as he knew that he could count ten. Something had led him there that day; the force that was shaping the course of their two lives to cross again had held him back when he had considered selling his horse and going West a long distance on the train. He grew calmer when he had his cigarette alight. The landlord was talking again.

"Funny thing about Vesta comin' home, too," he said, and stopped a little, as if to consider the humor of it. Lambert looked at him with a sudden wrench of the neck.

"Which?"

"Philbrook's luck held out, it looked like, till she got through her education. All through the fights he had and the scrapes he run into the last ten years he never got a scratch. Bullets used to hum around that man like bees, and he'd ride through 'em like they *was* bees, but none of 'em ever notched him. Curious, wasn't it?"

"Did somebody get him at last?"

"No, he took the typhoid fever. He took down about a week or ten days after Vesta got home. He died about a couple of weeks ago. Vesta had him laid beside her mother up there on the hill. He said they'd never run him out of this country, livin' or dead."

Lambert swallowed a dry lump.

"Is she running the ranch?"

"Like an old soldier, sir. I tell you, I've got a whole lot of admiration for that girl."

"She must have her hands full."

"Night and day. She's short on fence-riders, and I guess if you boys are lookin' for a job you can land up there with Vesta, all right."

"We didn't expect to strike anything this soon," Lambert said, his active mind leaping ahead to shape new romance like a magician.

"You don't look like the kind of boys that 'd shy from a job if it jumped out in the road ahead of you."

"No, I'd hate to have anybody think we would."

"Ain't you the feller they call the Duke of Chimney Butte?"

"They call me that in this country."

"Yes; I knew that horse the minute you rode up, though he's changed for the better wonderful since I saw him last, and I knew you from the descriptions I've heard of you. Vesta'd give you a job in a minute, and she'd pay you good money, too. I wouldn't wonder if she didn't put you in as foreman right on the jump, account of the name you've got up here in the Bad Lands."

"Not much to my credit in the name, I'm afraid," said Lambert, almost sadly. "Do they still cut her fences and run off her stock?"

"Yes; rustlin's got to be stylish around here again, after we thought we had all them gangs rounded up and sent to the pen. I guess some of their time must be up and they're comin' home."

"It's pretty tough for a single-handed girl."

"Yes, it is tough. Them fellers are more than likely some of the old crowd Philbrook used to fight and round up and send over the road. He killed off four or five of them, and the rest of them swore they'd salt him when they'd done their time. Well, he's gone. But they're not above fightin' a girl."

"It's a tough job for a woman," said Lambert, looking thoughtfully toward the white house of the mesa.

"Ain't it, though?"

Lambert thought about it a while, or appeared to be thinking about it, sitting with bent head, smoking silently, looking now and then toward the ranch-house, the lights of which could be seen. Alta came across the porch presently, Taterleg attending her like a courtier. She dismissed him at the door with an excuse of deferred duties within. He joined his thoughtful partner.

"Better go up and see her in the morning," suggested Wood, the landlord

"I think I will, thank you."

Wood went in to sell a cowboy a cigar; the partners started out to have a look at Glendora by moonlight. A little way they walked in silence, the light of the barber-shop falling across the road ahead of them.

"See who in the morning, duke?" Taterleg inquired.

"Lady in the white house on the mesa. Her father died a few weeks ago, and left her alone with a big ranch on her hands. Rustlers are runnin' her cattle off, cuttin' her fences—"

"Fences!"

"Yes, forty thousand acres all fenced in, like Texas."

"You don't tell me?"

"Needs men, Wood says. I thought maybe—"

The duke didn't finish it; just left it swinging that way, expecting Taterleg to read the rest.

"Sure," said Taterleg, taking it right along. "I wouldn't mind stayin' around here a while. Glendora's a nice little place; nicer place than I thought it was."

The duke said nothing. But as they went on toward the barber-shop he grinned.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOMELIEST MAN.

THAT brilliant beam falling through the barber's open door and uncurtained window came from a new lighting device, procured from a Chicago mail-order house. It was a gasoline lamp that burned with a gas mantle, swinging from the ceiling, flooding the little shop with a greenish light.

It gave a ghastly hue of death to the human face, but it would light up the creases and wrinkles of the most weathered neck that came under the barber's blade. That was the main consideration, for most of the barber's work was done by night, that trade — or profession, as those who pursue it unfailingly hold it to be—being a side line in connection with his duties as station agent. He was a progressive citizen, and no grass grew under his feet nor hair under his hand.

At the moment that the duke and Taterleg entered the barber's far-reaching beam, some buck of the range was stretched in the chair. The customer was a man of considerable length and many angles, a shorn appearance about his face, especially his big, bony nose, that seemed to tell of a mustache sacrificed in the operation just then drawing to a close.

Taterleg stopped short at sight of the long legs drawn up like a sharp gable to get all of them into the chair, the immense nose raking the ceiling like a double-barreled cannon, the morgue-tinted light giving him the complexion of a man ready for his shroud. He touched Lambert's arm to check him and call his attention.

"Look in there—look at that feller, duke! There he is; there's the man I've

been lookin' for ever since I was old enough to vote. I didn't believe there was any such a feller; but there he is!"

"What feller? Who is he?"

"The feller that's uglier than me. Dang his melts, there he is! I'm goin' to ask him for his picture, so I'll have the proof to show."

Taterleg was at an unaccountable pitch of spirits. Adventure had taken hold of him like liquor. He made a start for the door as if to carry out his expressed intention in all earnestness. Lambert stopped him.

"He might not see the joke, Taterleg."

"He couldn't refuse a man a friendly turn like that, duke. Look at him! What's that feller rubbin' on him, do you reckon?"

"Ointment of some kind, I guess. Come on."

Taterleg stood with his bow legs so wide apart that a barrel could have been pitched between them, watching the operation within the shop with great enjoyment.

"Goose grease, with *pre*-fume in it that cuts your breath. Look at that feller shut his eyes and stretch his derned old neck! Just like a calf when you rub him under the chin. Look at him—did you ever see anything to match it?"

"Come on—let the man alone."

"Wrinkle remover, beauty restorer," said Taterleg, not moving forward an inch upon his way. While he seemed to be struck with admiration for the process of renovation, there was an unmistakable jeer in his tone which the barber resented by a fierce look.

"You're goin' to get into trouble if you don't shut up," Lambert cautioned.

"Look at him shut his old eyes and stretch his neck! Ain't it the sweetest—"

The man in the chair lifted himself in sudden grimness, sat up from between the barber's massaging hands, which still held their pose like some sort of brace, turned a threatening look into the road. If half his face was sufficient to raise the declaration from Taterleg that the man was uglier than he, all of it surely proclaimed him the homeliest man in the nation. His eyes were red, as from some long carousal, their lids heavy and slow, his neck long, and inflamed like an old gobbler's when he inflates himself with his impotent rage.

He looked hard at the two men, so sour in his wrath, so comical in his unmatched ugliness, that Lambert could not restrain a most unusual and generous grin. Taterleg bared his head, bowing low, not a smile, not a ripple of a smile, on his face.

"Mister, I take off my hat to you," he said.

"Yes, and I'll take your fool head off the first time I meet you," the man returned. He let himself back into the barber's waiting hands, a growl deep in him, surly as an old dog that has been roused out of his place in the middle of the road.

"I guess he's not a dangerous man—lucky for you," said Lambert.

The allurements of Glendora were no more dazzling by night than by day, there being few visitors in town, no roysstering, no sounds of uncurbed gaiety. Formerly there had been a dance-hall in connection with the saloon, but that branch of the business had failed through lack of patronage long ago. The bar stood in the front of the long, cheerless room, a patch of light over and around it, the melancholy furniture of its prosperous days dim in the gloom beyond.

Lambert and Taterleg had a few drinks to show their respect for the institutions of the country, and went back to the hotel. Somebody had taken Taterleg's place beside Alta on the green bench. It was a man who spoke with rumbling voice like the sound of an empty wagon on a rocky road. Lambert recognized the intonation at once.

"It looks to me like there's trouble ahead for you, Mr. Wilson," he said.

"I'll take that feller by the handle on his face and bust him agin a tree like a gourd," Taterleg said, not in boasting manner, but in the even and untroubled way of a man stating a fact.

"If there was any tree."

"I'll slam him agin a rock; I'll bust him like a oyster."

"I think we'd better go to bed without a fight, if we can."

"I'm willin'; but I'm not goin' around by the back door to miss that feller."

They came up the porch into the light that fell weakly from the office down the steps. There was a movement of feet beside the green bench, an exclamation, a swift advance on the part of the big-nosed man who had afforded amusement for Taterleg in the barber's chair.

"You little bench-leggid fist, if you've got gall enough to say one word to a man's face, say it!" he challenged.

Alta came after him, quickly, with pacific intent. She was a tall girl, not very well filled out, like an immature bean pod. Her heavy black hair was cut in a waterfall of bangs which came down to her eyebrows, the rest of it done up behind in loops like sausages, and fastened with a large, red ribbon. She had put off her apron, and stood forth in white, her sleeves much shorter than the arms which reached out of them, rings on her fingers which looked as if they would leave their shadows behind. "Now, Mr. Jedlick, I don't want you to go raisin' no fuss around here with the guests," she said.

"Jedlick!" repeated Taterleg, turning to Lambert with a pained, depressed look on his face. "It sounds like something you blow in to make a noise."

The barber's customer was a taller man standing than he was long lying. There wasn't much clearance between his head and the ceiling of the porch. He stood before Taterleg glowering, his hat off, his short-cut hair glistening with pomatum, showing his teeth like a vicious horse.

"You look like you was cut out with a can-opener," he sneered.

"Maybe I was, and I've got rough edges on me," Taterleg returned, looking up at him with calculative eye.

"Now, Mr. Jedlick"—a hand on his arm, but confident of the force of it, like a lady animal-trainer in a cage of lions—"you come on over here and set down and leave that gentleman alone."

"If anybody but you'd 'a' said it, Alta, I'd 'a' told him he was a liar," Jedlick growled. He moved his foot to go with her, stopped, snarled at Taterleg again. "I used to roll 'em in flour and swaller 'em," said he.

"You're a terrible rough feller, ain't you?" Taterleg inquired with cutting sarcasm.

Alta led Jedlick off to his corner; Taterleg and Lambert entered the hotel office.

"Gee, but this is a windy night!" said the duke, holding his hat on with both hands.

"I'll let some of the wind out of him if he monkeys with me!"

"Looks to me like I know another feller that an operation wouldn't hurt," the duke remarked, turning a sly eye on his friend.

The landlord appeared with a lamp to light them to their beds, putting an end to these exchanges of threat and banter. As he was leaving them to their double-barreled apartment, Lambert remarked:

"That man Jedlick's an interesting-lookin' feller."

"Ben Jedlick? Yes, Ben's quite a case."

"What business does he foller?"

"Ben? Ben's cook on Pat Sullivan's ranch up the river; one of the best camp cooks in the Bad Lands, and I guess the best known, without any doubt."

Taterleg sat down on the side of his bed as if he had been punctured, indeed, lopping forward in mock attitude of utter collapse as the landlord closed the door.

"Cook! That settles it for me; I've turned the last flap-jack I'll ever turn for any man but myself."

"How will you manage the oyster parlor?"

"Well, I've just about give up that notion, duke. I've been thinkin' I'll stick to the range and go in the sheep business."

"I expect it would be a good move, old feller."

"They're goin' into it around here, they tell me."

"Alta tells you."

"Oh, you git out! But I'm a cow-man right now, and I'm goin' to stay one for some little time to come. It don't take much intelligence in a man to ride fence."

"No; I guess we could both pass on that."

The duke blew the lamp out with his hat. There was silence, all but the scuffing sound of disrobing. Taterleg spoke out of bed.

"That girl's got purty eyes, ain't she?"

"Lovely eyes, Taterleg."

"And purty hair, too. Makes a feller want to lean over and pat that little row of bangs."

"I expect there's a feller down there doin' it now."

The spring complained under Taterleg's sudden movement; there was a sound of swishing legs under the sheet. Lambert saw him dimly against the window, sitting with his feet on the floor.

"You mean Jedlick?"

"Sure. He's got the field to himself."

Taterleg sat a little while thinking about it. Presently he resumed his repose, chuckling a choppy little laugh.

"Jedlick! Jedlick ain't got no more show than a cow. When a lady steps in and takes a man's part there's only one answer, duke. And she called me a gentleman, too. Didn't you hear her call me a gentleman, duke?"

"I seem to remember that somebody else called you that one time."

Taterleg hadn't any reply at once. Lambert lay there grinning in the dark. No matter how sincere Taterleg might have been in this or any other affair, to the duke it was only a joke. That is the attitude of most men toward the tender vagaries of others. No romance ever is serious but one's own.

"Well, that happened a good while ago," said Taterleg defensively.

But memories didn't trouble him much that night. Very soon he was sleeping, snoring on the *G* string with unsparing pressure. For Lambert there was no sleep. He lay in a fever of anticipation. Tomorrow he should see her, his quest ended almost as soon as begun.

There was not one stick of fuel for the flame of this conjecture, not one reasonable justification for his more than hope. Only something had flashed to him that the girl in the house on the mesa was she whom his soul sought, whose handkerchief was folded in his pocketbook. He would take no denial from fate.

He lay awake seeing visions when he should have been asleep in the midst of legitimate dreams. A score of plans for serving her came up for examination, a hundred hopes for a happy culmination of this green romance budded, bloomed and fell. But above the race of his hot thoughts the certainty persisted that this girl was the lady of the beckoning hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUSE ON THE MESA.

EVEN more bleak than from a distance the house on the mesa appeared as the riders approached it up the winding road. It stood solitary on its desert promontory, the bright sky behind it, not a shrub to ease its lines, not a barn or shed to make a rude background for its amazing proportions. Native grass grew sparsely on the great table where it stood; rains had guttered the soil near its door. There was about it the air of an abandoned place, its long, gaunt porches open to wind and storm.

As they drew nearer the house the scene opened in a more domestic appearance. Beyond it in a little cup of the mesa the stable, cattle-sheds, and quarters for the men were located, so hidden in their shelter that they could not be seen from any point in the valley below. To the world that never scaled these crumbling heights, Philbrook's mansion appeared as if it endured independent of those appendages.

"Looks like they've got the barn where the house ought to be," said Taterleg. "I'll bet the wind takes the hide off of a feller up here in the winter time."

"It's about as bleak a place for a house as a man could pick," Lambert agreed. He checked his horse a moment to look round on the vast sweep of country presented to view from the height, the river lying as bright as quicksilver in the dun land.

"Not even a wire fence to break it!" Taterleg drew his shoulders up and shivered in the hot morning sun as he contemplated the untrammeled roadway of the northern winds. "Well, sir, it looks to me like a cyclone carried that house from somewheres and slammed it down. No man in his right senses ever built it there."

"People take queer freaks sometimes,

even in their senses. I guess we can ride right around to the door."

But for the wide, weathered porch they could have ridden up to it and knocked on its panels from the saddle. Taterleg was for going to the kitchen door, a suggestion which the duke scorned. He didn't want to meet that girl at a kitchen door, even her own kitchen door. For that he was about to meet her, there was no doubt in him that moment.

He was not in a state of trembling eagerness, but of calm expectation, as a man might be justified in one who had made his preparations and felt the outcome sure. He even smiled as he pictured her surprise, like a man returning home unexpectedly, but to a welcome of which he held no doubt.

Taterleg remained mounted while Lambert went to the door. It was a rather inhospitable appearing door of solid oak, heavy and dark. There was a narrow pane of beveled glass set into it near the top, beneath it a knocker that must have been hammered by a hand in some far land centuries before the house on the mesa was planned.

A negro woman, rheumatic, old, came to the door. Miss Philbrook was at the barn, she said. What did they want of her? Were they looking for work? To these questions Lambert made no reply. As he turned back to his horse the old serving woman came to the porch, leaving the door swinging wide, giving a view into the hall, which was furnished with a luxuriance that Taterleg never had seen before.

The old woman watched the duke keenly as he swung into the saddle. She shaded her eyes against the sun, looking after him still as he rode with his companion toward the barn.

Chickens were making the barn-yard lots comfortable with their noise, some dairy cows of a breed alien to that range waited in a lot to be turned out to the day's grazing; a burro put its big-eared head round the corner of a shed, eying the strangers with the alert curiosity of a *niño* of his native land. But the lady of the ranch was not in sight or sound.

Lambert drew up at the gate cutting the employees' quarters from the barn-yard, and sat looking things over. Here was a peace and security, an atmosphere of contentment and comfort, entirely lacking in the surroundings of the house. The buildings were all of far better class than were to be found on the ranches of that country; even the bunk-house a house, in fact, and not a shed-roofed shack.

"I wonder where she's at?" said Taterleg, leaning and peering.

"I'll go down to the bunk-house and see if there's anybody around," Lambert said, for he had a notion, somehow, that he ought to meet her on foot.

Taterleg remained at the gate, because he looked better on a horse than off, and he was not wanting in that vain streak which any man with a backbone and marrow in him possesses. He wanted to appear at his best when the boss of that high-class outfit laid her eyes on him for the first time; and if he had hopes that she might succumb to his charms, they were no more extravagant than most men's are under similar conditions.

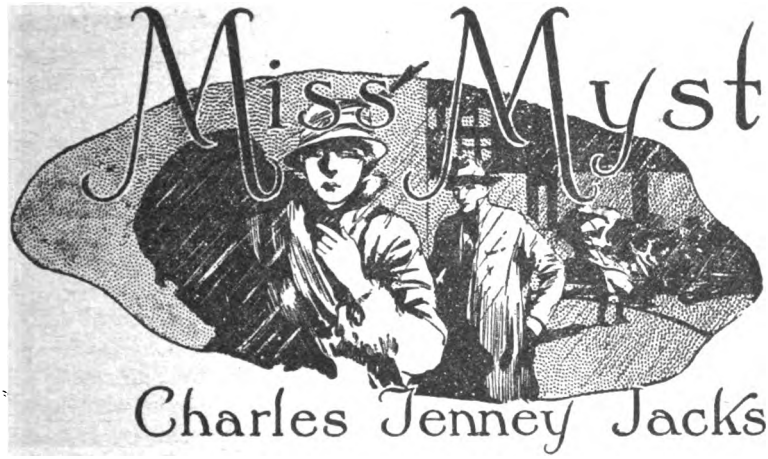
Off to one side of a long barn Lambert saw her as he opened the gate. She was trying to coax a young calf to drink out of a bucket that an old negro held under its nose. Perhaps his heart climbed a little, and his eyes grew hot with a sudden surge of blood, as he went forward.

He could not see her face fully, for she was bending over the calf, and the broad brim of her hat interposed. She looked up at the sound of his approach, a startled expression in her frank, gray eyes. Handsome, in truth, she was, in her riding habit of brown duck, her heavy sombrero, her strong, high boots. Her hair was the color of old honeycomb, her face browned by sun and wind.

She was a maid to gladden a man's heart, with the morning sun upon her, the strength of her great courage in her clear eyes; a girl of breeding, as one could see by her proud carriage.

But she was *not* the girl whose handkerchief he had won in his reckless race with the train!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



HILDRETH raised his eyes from the black wallet on the floor to the girl. She had not stirred as the man by her side on the car seat, after one swift, cunning look over his shoulder, arose and thrust his way through the crowd in the aisle to the front exit.

Hildreth had not yet seen her face turned to the fogged window and the rainy night, merely a profile, proud, clear-cut, but wearied to utter dejection; and the nervous little gesture of her gloved hand raised to put back the veil above her ear. He felt that she did not belong here on this steaming, crowded street-car in the rush hour, among the parcels and dank raincoats of the straphangers, and her mood caught his own despondent fancy.

He himself was wet from the autumn storm, and he saw the sparkle of water on her brown hair and the black jet of her hat; and when he leaned to pick up the black packet, which she had most evidently dropped, her sleeve brushed his cheek, and it was soaked and heavy.

"Out of the storm, too," he mused. "Rotten luck for anybody."

His fingers were on the thing behind her feet when he realized she had arisen as if with a sudden resolution to be off anywhere, away from the dreary crowd. But when he arose, also, to restore the packet with a murmured apology, a basket-laden woman sank into the vacant seat, and he merely caught a glimpse of the girl at the front exit as he struggled to reach her. The packed aisle had him blocked for the moment, and as he raised his arm to force a way the black wallet in his hand caught his eye.

It was half-opened; within the soft leather and silk lining were the edges of a thick press of Federal bank-notes. The uppermost one—new, unwrinkled, unused—was for one thousand dollars.

In his own mordant and desperate mood Hildreth, with a swift unthinking cunning, swept the bill-case within his coat. The crowded homegoers had not given him or it a second's glance. But as the car jarred on slowly over the intersecting rails the young man looked back.

A tall young woman, heavily veiled, standing near the rear, was watching him with an amazed intensity, he thought—and almost of relief. He shrugged impatiently as he reached the front platform, hesitated.

"A thousand!" he muttered. "What wouldn't it mean—to *me?*"

And Hildreth paused with a savage, vindictive revolt against the decent world he had known. Then swinging out from the step he saw the girl who had sat ahead of him, motionless in the rain.

Apparently she had not moved. There in the rain, among the bulbous black umbrella tops of hurrying pedestrians, the police and the traffic, the blurred lights of State Street showed her face raised in a sort of terror to the gray deeps of the slanting storm above her. Slender, delicate, one hand to her lips, as if suddenly overcome with a portentous realization that numbed her brain.

"Lost it," Hildreth grumbled. "She knows now. Some stenographer, confidential secretary, entrusted with this money—frightened to death that it's missing!"

He dropped off, stopped uncertainly a moment. A stranger, without friends, identity or abiding place in Chicago—the night and the storm could swallow him. He glanced acutely at the money case, turned the bills' edges. Five at least were for a thousand each, then many of five hundred under a rubber band, as some paying-teller must have passed them out to a girl messenger.

Hildreth dropped the thing into his top-coat pocket. It seemed to press against his side with a mocking, malignant jeer at him—his hopes, despair, and acute need at a time of his own crisis. Thousands—dropped to his hand without question or possibility of discovery.

A walk of half a block, a turn of a corner, and he was a free man again, his honor saved, his good name and his family's restored; he could take the night flier East to home, and be himself again to-morrow, without question; debonair, the witty and lovable chap of his mother's and sister's set. It just needed such a little thing to pull him out—a few thousands were enough and here was a small fortune.

It was Hildreth's luck—Lionel's luck, for he had never had a rough-and-tumble smash in his life until that affair of Jimmy Brandon's last summer which had driven him into this present corner, trapped; his mouth sealed for his friend—and he had dropped out of his own life with a smile, to make good again, as he had promised himself so buoyantly—until now.

The entire melancholy incongruity of it all flashed through his mind as he stood with his fingers in his pocket on the bill-case. A little thing—such a little thing—can make or break one. He had half-turned away, shutting his eyes against some new, sudden, despicable aspect of his surrender, when he saw the girl again. He almost cursed under his breath; then he was conscious of a growing wonder.

There she was, strolling on slowly in the slant of the rain. Only a glimpse of her face, pale, with dark eyes wide, the collar of her rough coat upturned, the pink of her ear showing delicately among the coruscations of water drops on her hair when she passed the blaze of a jeweler's window with the thousand facets of its display reflecting upon her. She even seemed pitifully interested for a moment in the diamond cases, as one consciously trying to distract an overwrought mind by a pretense of forgetfulness.

Hildreth stepped slowly along behind her. He became conscious of a merciless analysis of her; she was too well groomed, a personality too distinctive to be wandering in a Chicago street in this aimless fashion; already a man or two—even in the storm—had turned to glance at her.

"And the money?" argued Hildreth. "One would think she'd be in a panic—her face was tragic when I first saw it. She ought to be appealing to the police, trying to find that car number, or something. Well, *did* she lose it?"

He thought swiftly of the other girl—the veiled girl in the car aisle who had given that one acute, comprehending glance at him as he descended. Then his black rebellion came; he need not inquire of either of them, of none in the world; he could slink away in the crush of the street.

Yes, that was it—*slink!* And instantly Hildreth knew it was useless to bully himself. *Slink!* It occurred to him that he didn't know how. He had stood four-square to every man until his partner, Brandon, got him into this fix—and he had gone West last summer to make that good, too. And he would—that he happened to be in Chicago, broke, to-day, was merely an incident—a thoughtless oversight and stubborn reluctance to let his people know.

He looked again across the street to the girl.

"Oh, bother! She's dazed—walking as in a stupor! Stunned—trying to think how to account to her employers! Trying to buck up!"

He hastened as she turned out of State Street. He just wanted to see her face again ere he addressed her. Two blocks distant among the wind-swept, gloomy office buildings he almost touched her arm. Once the storm staggered her; he reached a

hand, then dropped back a pace. Aimlessly, mechanically, she seemed wandering in the sleety rain.

"I'd like to know where she's going first," Hildreth thought; "but then a fellow oughtn't to let her suffer so—really not any longer than necessary. She's my sister's sort—alone in the storm; tired—oh, frightfully tired! As if she didn't know it was raining and didn't care!"

She was near the river now, past the Loop, and looking into the first window of the small shops and cheap restaurants. Hildreth slowed his pace among the slovenly homegoers, trying curiously to glimpse her face. Not since his first look on her dumb trouble which had made keeping the money an impossible idea had he been able to maneuver himself before her without attracting notice which he did not yet wish to do.

Abruptly she turned into an eating-place. One of those porcelain-lined bathtubish, immaculate cafés, where one gets a ticket at the door and carries one's own dishes to a table armchair—amazingly clean and joyless as a plumber's display window.

"Works here?" muttered Hildreth. "Cashier—perhaps?"

He followed within as the girl accepted a blue ticket from the person at the desk cage. She moved on a pace among the crowding patrons near the service-counters and then gazed about, bewildered.

"Doesn't really know what to do next," growled the young man. "Neither would my sister—here. Else she's still perfectly blanked in her mind about losing the money!"

The stranger had put back her rain-sparkling hair, looked at the ticket, then at the servitors attentively, as if debating just what she might spend. The irrelevance of it struck Hildreth with new wonder.

"*Did* she lose it?" he argued. "I was sure of it, but now? Well, little Miss Mystery—I'm going to know!"

She seemed to be gathering a decided composure now, looking at the glass compartments, the bawling waiters, the containers and urns in a film of steam from the foods. And suddenly Hildreth knew the girl of the storm was hungry, desperately hungry, weak with it all, perhaps—shaken, unnerved and faint, despite the iron hold with which she clung to her courage.

But she seemed still uncertain what to do in this place. Whether to ask for what she wanted, or wait and see how the men crowding around the counters were served. Then she turned and looked quietly, doubtfully into Hildreth's face.

They were calm eyes, very dark gray—not brown, as he had thought. And she still had that nervous little trick of putting a small gloved hand to her rain-wet hair and holding it back from a slightly flushed cheek. The fine grace of it all swept Hildreth; if she had spoken he could have foretold the exquisite and well-bred modulation of her voice: he knew at once she was the sort of girl who had no doubt of herself at all, but could not repress her uncertainty at being where she was.

But she didn't speak. Merely regarded him gravely, but before she could withdraw her glance he had removed his hat, bowed, and spoken with a composure as grave as her own.

"I beg your pardon, but—I followed you in here."

"Yes?" She looked inquiringly, measured him a moment; and then startled the young man into embarrassment by suddenly laughing. A real laugh, almost a delighted little laugh in her weariness—as if nothing had happened before for ages to make her smile, and it was suddenly a brave and hopeful omen to discover that she could still laugh.

"I—beg your pardon—" Her eyes laughed again, even as some growing bitterness steeled her lips—"but you see it never happened before to—me."

"What?"

"A man — following me. Accosting me—"

"See here!" he blurted out, but with a flush to his eyes. "I—you—I—followed you some blocks. In the rain—I was on the same car with you, and—" His hand was upon the black packet in his pocket, and he stopped, suddenly finding himself becoming angry at her, at himself, and growling away irrelevantly. "See here! Why did you come in this place?"

She had taken a studied look at his confusion.

"In here? Why, to eat! Tell me—are you a plain-clothes man?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Hildreth.

"I think so. But, really, I haven't done anything—yet. Just going to, you know."

"What are you driving at? I'm not a policeman of any sort," he muttered a trifle sulkily. "You ought to know. But, first—why did you turn in here?"

She shrugged coldly; then, with composure, as if it really couldn't make any difference, she retorted, with a clear-eyed glance at him:

"If it's of any interest, I came in here deliberately to beat these people out of a supper. I didn't know just how to do it—I thought it might be done—slipping out with the crowd, or—" She looked about at the heavy-jowled eaters in the armchairs. "You see, I am sure I could do it—some way. And if they caught me I don't suppose it would be very bad. But as I'd never done it before, and you interfered, I thought you must be a—detective who'd rather read my guilty mind!"

She laughed again, and with a sort of wild relief, and then added: "Of course I'm hungry—and, of course, I've no money—not a cent."

He was staring at her in some stupefaction.

"I never was in Chicago in my life before," she went on evenly. "And haven't a friend within hundreds of miles. I suppose there are other ways of getting on except being silly, but"—she looked at him with quick arch dignity—"but this is all, isn't it?"

And she was turning away rather icily.

"Bluffing it out," thought Hildreth, "she lost the money, all right! It's queer, but she's riding it through on her nerve. She's been too scattered to think what to do yet! But coming in this joint—and not a cent of change—*that* doesn't ring right."

The girl had gone to the serving tables, taken a heavy plate and stood watching the white-aproned men, as if again rather uncertain of procedure, and Hildreth was filled with another sense of anger and injustice — in some way or other she had laughed at him, rebuffed him. She hadn't even appealed to him as a gentleman to assist her.

He saw her carrying a dish to a chair in the further end of the blue-and-yellow porcelain-lined room and sit down quite alone. And suddenly Hildreth himself laughed shortly.

His hand went down in his trouser-pocket. He had been broke to-day—quite flat. With a sense of coming back to earth, to his own dismal fortunes this week, he remembered that, apart from the thousands of new crisp bills in the black packet, he had not a cent. He hadn't thought of it since he left the street-car.

"Her money," he muttered; "or, at least, some one's in her charge. I wonder what the little lady will do? Faint—weep over her corned-beef hash? Embrace me? Anyhow, I'm broke to-night, and she'll have to pay the bill for the two of us."

The girl was so intent on her hunger that she did not see Hildreth again until he had deposited his own plate and coffee cup at the chair just to her left. Then she looked up to discover him placing a paper napkin carefully on his knees. He did not need to look to know that she had stiffened with a sharp intake of her breath. When his glance did go to her, her eyes were averted, her pale face stony.

And he suddenly found the matter intolerable. Turning with an air of decision, he took the black packet from his pocket, tapped her chair-table with it, and blustered out:

"See here! I've been rather fooling you—you didn't give me a chance to explain! You upset me by laughing. When I mentioned the street-car I thought you'd understand." He tapped the board again with the black packet. "I picked this up under your feet on the car and then madly chased you blocks to — to get — laughed at, you see!"

She regarded him and the case quite curiously.

"Yes?"

He stared at her again and bit his lip. Then he flung the leather inner flap wide open. The thick press of bill-edges with the rubber band across the middle of the first

one thousand-dollar note lay on the chair-arm between them. The girl was staring, then nervously fingering her veil.

"Your money," Hildreth muttered casually. "I think some twenty thousand or so. I looked in it, you see. I—it made me sort of hesitate, and then I saw your face through the rain—you seemed dazed, and —well, I knew at once you'd lost it—and didn't know where. And you acted so oddly since—telling me you were a stranger here and all that — I think, when you found you'd lost your employers' money, you just planned some desperate move — to disappear, somehow, and—well, that's all I could make out of your actions—just blind bluffing—trying to pull yourself together and think."

Her lips were parted, her breath coming slowly. Then her eyes were burning upon his.

"You — did this?" she whispered. "Found it—brought it back to me?"

"I—well, I had a sudden wild panic to —to jump the track—to—get away. If it hadn't been for your face—the tragic thing in it—I—oh, well! Good Lord, you are the calmest thing I ever knew!"

She had her hands to her eyes; gradually they slipped down to cover her quivering chin. And she sat in unmoving silence then. Hildreth felt the need of some rough and nonsensical kindness to break the strain. He feared some sort of hysteria might envelop her, now that she had been brought back to earth. And then, as another thought struck him, he found himself laughing a bit wildly himself.

She sat forward, her chin in her gloved hand, watching him.

"You see the queer thing," he went on, smiling, "is that I *am* broke. I don't think you are. But I—well, it's no matter. It's all a screaming joke! Rotten and funny. It's—but the way you've bluffed it out is magnificent. It's just wandering in this joint along and aimless that's puzzling."

She would not speak, and he went on uneasily after the pause:

"I rather think you'll have to pay for my supper-check! Thirty-five cents they've punched." He laughed again absently.

She was speaking with a cool, mechanical quality now, as if quite sure of herself again.

"You found my money. It had dropped from my bag to my feet under the car seat. Well, and you pick it up instantly and rush to give it to me. It took you a long time, didn't it?"

He flushed again with doubting resentment.

"I know. But, see here—if I hadn't seen your agonized face out the car window, I'd—I'd have been on my way back to New York—grabbed the first taxi and put this whole affair a thousand miles behind me. Funny, isn't it?"

"Yes," she was saying slowly, but as one who is not listening.

"My name," he went on, to break some curious pain in the pause, "is Hildreth—Lionel Hildreth. I am an irrigation engineer—or I was trying to be—and a little bump came. It's a long yarn—ridiculous for me to be penniless in Chicago—just as silly as for you to claim you were. But, no matter—really, not at all. I'm a healthy young cub."

Her eyes were narrowing slowly, watching him.

"One can see—" she said measuringly. "Yes—very."

He writhed impotently, for there seemed a trace of ironical surprise that any man would be so exactly decent.

"See here," he went on. "I called you out on the street—the mystery girl—for you've acted so strangely. But—I gave you my name; you might do as much—don't you think"

"Not the least objection. Aileen Travers —rather stagy, isn't it?"

He looked again into her gray eyes—they were entirely fearless, but he thought they ought to be just a trifle soft with gratefulness.

"Aileen—Travers? It—sounds like a mountain river. I'm just back from Colorado, and they sing down the hills just like that."

She smiled slowly at his sudden confusion that he had said it. Then she went on evenly: "The rest is: I've been doing bits around the motion-picture studios in Los Angeles. Good photographic face, they

said, but "—she shrugged—"a girl with no money and trying to live on the extra work they hand out is—it isn't just safe and pleasant. I ran away from home in Michigan to try it two years ago; and finally I ran away to get back. I just didn't want to wait, or pay the price. And I got to Chicago to-night—and lost my hand-bag—tickets and change at the station. I could have wired mother, but I—*couldn't*. I wanted to put my arms around her first and cry. Mothers understand, you know."

Hildreth had listened quietly.

"But this money, Miss Travers! You just said it was *your* money!"

"I know," she smiled. "A horrible temptation—but I couldn't—after you—meeting you, and you believing I couldn't."

And while he was staring at the black wallet, thinking of the other girl who had watched him take it, Miss Mystery suddenly laughed with wonderful music.

"Oh, you—such a boy! I never saw a thousand dollars in my life!" And because he was so silent she went on:

"Why, then, we're both broke again, aren't we? Oh, the supper-checks! Look at that thousand dollars!"

And she clapped her little hands while Hildreth began to count the money.

"There are twenty notes for one thousand each—ten of five hundred. Thirty thousand dollars in new bills, Miss—Travers. Movie stuff—only it isn't!"

"You have no money?" she said.

"Not a red!"

"We can't go offer to pay two-thirty-five-cent checks with a five-hundred-dollar bill! They'd call the police! That cashier is watching us all the time as it is."

"I know," he retorted soberly. "That's just it! Oh, money!—it would get me out of a frightful scrape—back East! And"—he stopped suddenly—"how'll we ever—find the owner? Do you remember a rat-eyed man who sat by you in the car?"

"Yes—he kept watching me, and watching behind, too—all the time. I was too dull and despondent to notice much. Yes, a rat-eyed man. And the packet couldn't have been there before he sat down—I remember dropping my veil and having to find it under the seat."

Hildreth was still before her excitement.

"Look here—little lady. We could keep this, couldn't we? Fifteen thousand apiece—"

"Not," she whispered slowly, "after what you did—bringing it to me."

"Not," Hildreth pursued, "after what *you* did—refusing it! Oh, I hope we can't find the rat-eyed man—or any one! Perhaps we can't! Perhaps there's no clue; we'll have to advertise, but—"

"Oh, it's too much to let go. The chap who lost it will be at the police with his yarn, and the newspapers 'll publish it to-morrow!"

"I know," muttered Hildreth. "I hope it's some dashed profiteer with his millions who'll give us a thousand—just for your sake—a plucky girl like you, Miss—Miss—I just can't recall your name."

"My studio name? Miss Aileen Travers."

"Miss Mystery," he murmured, "will do. I wish we were comfortable common crooks. And it's lucky for the chap who owns this that I saw your eyes—so troubled and raised to the storm! And even yet I have a grand idea that we'll never find him. The wallet's empty save for the money—no papers, no clue. Fate is with us, Miss—Mystery!"

Hildreth suddenly shook the pack of bank-notes resolutely. And from them fell—a white card. He heard the girl gasp sharply. Was she hoping, after all, that the owner of the black wallet would never be revealed?

He saw her pale face bent over the card. Silently she tossed it to him. Upon it, in fine, hurried script, was penciled:

MILLY—316.

Hildreth turned the card. It was a florist's with a stand in the lobby of the Hotel Plantagenet. The young man looked at the girl with rather a lugubrious sigh.

"Funny, isn't it? I was just drawing

my first nice, dishonest breath, and here comes the clue. It means a room number, certainly. Oh, Milly!" he laughed soberly. "Do you realize that we owe seventy cents here—and I pawned my watch three days ago? We daren't offer a five-hundred-dollar bill, you see, Miss—now, I can't recall your name again—Miss Mystery! Like a singing river, that's all."

She was slipping a gold seal ring from her glove. "Don't you suppose these people would hold this for our checks until—"

"Yes! And to-morrow I'll go shovel snow to redeem it." Hildreth arose with nervous buoyance. "Come on! We'll have to be careful, but we must know about Milly."

She had gathered the thirty thousand dollars into its case and stood back while Hildreth was explaining casually. Then, at the door, he raised a finger.

The cashier had slipped Miss Travers's ring into the cash till and was looking wonderingly after the two. And then they were again in the rainy night walking on, talking, with sudden hopeful and excited interest, of each other.

She was brave and jubilant now with youth and adventure; and when, before the brilliant entrance of the great hotel on Michigan Avenue, he felt a pressure on his arm and glanced down, she turned her head from the radiance and laughed.

"It's amazing and glorious," he murmured, "you and the storm!"

She was instantly herself in the lobby, waiting among the well-dressed throng. She saw him first at the exclusive little flower shop, then, rather annoyed making his way to the counter of the information clerk. And she noticed the start of the dapper little man behind the grill-work.

His eyes narrowed on Hildreth watchfully; he asked and listened. He turned to speak to another office man, and even as they conferred, Hildreth turned and Miss Travers saw by his glance a just perceptible warning of danger.

He seemed to nod to the further side of the lobby, and, taking the cue, she went directly there, sat down among the evergreen screens to the ladies' waiting-room, and looked back.

The thirty thousand dollars was locked within her damp, heavy traveling coat. Certainly none of them about her would know that she had it, or knew Hildreth or his mission. She saw him now the center of a cautious argument. And presently the group separated; Hildreth walked to the main entrance, lit a cigarette, and was looking casually about. An instinct of danger warned the girl not to approach him, but, rising, she let herself be seen. He nodded slightly, turned to the avenue entrance; and, after waiting five minutes, Miss Travers descended by the ladies' way. As she expected Hildreth was half a block down the street, and when she reached him, he merely walked on with, at first, no notice of her.

She had an impression that he, at least, was being watched; and they walked easily on until, lost in the theater crowds, he spoke casually.

"You did that splendidly. I have almost an impression now that a house-detective is shadowing me. So, please don't look around. We can talk as we are without recognition."

"A house-detective?"

"Yes. They were on me at once about Room 316. Got the name from the register, but at the first inquiry about Milly—Mrs. Millicent Strong, I take it—these people were on my neck. It just occurred to me in time to bluff 'em—I told 'em I was a reporter from the *Herald*. I think I got away with it, too!"

"But," she whispered from the intervening space they kept as two strangers in the crowd, "I don't understand!"

"I do—partly. Two people were arrested in Room 316 this evening. Crooks, high-class professionals, it seems. Milly is the woman of the gang. They're at headquarters now, and, say—one of them was arrested on a Blue Island Avenue street-car this afternoon!"

"The rat-faced man!"

"Must be. It was our car, and the same hour I first met you. But the money—it isn't possible he lost it accidentally! Those people are not so clumsy."

"Then he—dropped it! He was expecting arrest!"

"Didn't want the goods found on him. Then it's stolen money, Miss Aileen."

"Don't!" he heard her gasp.

"If they're following us," he went on, "under some idea that we're connected with the gang—"

"Please—*please*—Mr. Hildreth!"

"You see we've got the money — and we're strangers—broke!" he laughed shortly. "I wish you could give it to me, and then disappear until—"

"Where? I haven't a dollar!" She took his arm now at last, timidly looking up. "No, I'm going to stick by you. We could explain—we could offer to give it back—to the rightful owner."

"Yes, but meantime—the central office men hounding you—I could not stand that. You'd spend the night in jail, at least."

They were talking more easily now. Hildreth's glance back had not discovered the keen-eyed man who had appeared to follow him at the avenue entrance of the Plantagenet.

"There's a possibility," Hildreth muttered, "that it is the crooks' money, and in that case—but it can't be! There was a job somewhere, but the funny thing is that the hotel people don't appear to know it yet. Or else everything's being covered to save the name of the house. Of course they don't relish publicity."

"Do you suppose we'd learn anything at the police station? You—as a reporter—could ask a bit, couldn't you?" He appeared to doubt, and the girl went on with practical, clear-voiced sanity: "I am carrying the money. You could find out what you could and meet me. Oh, it's ridiculous with this fortune on us that we can't even drop in some drug-store and buy a soda!" She laughed a trifle wildly.

"I don't know," muttered Hildreth; "I mustn't get you in it."

"But, see here! Suppose there was some sort of mistake. That this Milly was innocent—that she isn't even a crook at all, and was just held because some money had disappeared. We ought to know, you know."

He stopped in the misty sleet turning to snow and considered.

"Well, the central station is just three blocks ahead. You walk ahead, cross the street, and keep moving, but watch for me to come out. If, by any chance, I can talk to, or even see these people—perhaps it will help. But, please, no sentimentality, Miss—Aileen-of-the-Storm—your Milly is probably the worst of the trio."

But the girl of the storm stood watching Hildreth's tall form disappear within the gloomy portals of the central station with a queer little tremor of her firm chin. She walked slowly on a block in the sleety snow, then back, around the corner, anywhere to avoid attracting attention as a loiterer.

She was wondering after a while at Hildreth's long absence, when, as she crossed the street again, a block distant from the police station, she was aware of another woman who had stepped from a dripping hallway to watch her now with deliberate intensity. It occurred to Miss Travers that she had passed her before unnoticing. But now she saw a tall, heavily veiled girl, who spoke with studied directness, as if satisfied after her scrutiny.

"You are the girl who was with him, ain't you?"

"Pardon me—but with whom?"

"The man who found the money."

"The money?" Miss Travers looked clearly, striving to retain the impression of suffering ruthlessness in the other's all but hidden face.

"Yes—the man who just went in there!" The stranger pointed swiftly. "I don't remember you, but him—I saw him pick it up—on the street-car. Oh, yes—and now he's here, ain't he?—tryin' to put that job on Eddie! Oh, I know—but the central office men don't! They don't even know a job was pulled—nor the hotel folks don't, either!"

"What," retorted Miss Travers clearly, "do you mean by all this?"

The tall young woman seemed to set her teeth with a snap. She almost flung a furred arm in the other's face.

"Don't bull me—*you* know. That boy with you got the money! And I don't care—good Heaven, I hope it chokes him! If they hook this on Eddie, it means life—my kid—Eddie. He's done time twice—see!"

"No, I don't," said Miss Travers.

"Habitual. All right—we pulled it. I'm just asking you, miss, as long as the money's missing, to keep it missing. If your friend pipes the thing off to the police, Jimmy the Rat will squeal on us. You see Eddie was recognized at the hotel before he could do anything—he had to give the stuff to this damned stool-pigeon to get to me—outside of the hotel, you understand. And the Rat thought it was only a few hundreds we'd lifted; and when he saw on that street-car that Chief Hennessy's men were just waiting to pick him up at either end of the car he just canned the wallet.

"I was there—back in the crowd, and couldn't do a thing. Your friend picked it up, and I was relieved. If the Rat had been taken with it on him, he'd have squealed that it was Eddie's job, and we'd have had the goods on us. I'm tellin' you all this, miss, just for God's sake, to save my kid! They ain't got anything on him now, at all, but if this job comes out—well, it's life for Eddie—and the river for me. Honest, miss—you see! I'm in love with my pal—that's all. I ain't goin' to stick in if he goes up, doin' it all."

"Oh," breathed Miss Travers wearily, "I don't understand. You stole this wallet from somebody? Well, hasn't he complained yet?"

The girl's black eyes flashed, narrowed mysteriously.

"No. That's what gets me. Not a word. Eddie frisked him in the barroom of the Plantagenet after gettin' wise to what he had. We knew it was worth goin' for, but how much we never had time to see. It was snap-work—and Eddie just had time to slide it on to the Rat. Then the plain-clothes men took my kid. I knew when the Rat made his getaway there was trouble. I followed and got on the same car, and then the Rat got rid of the stuff."

"But the money?" said Aileen sharply. "And the man who was robbed—didn't he make an outcry?"

"No. Not yet, anyhow. That's what knocks my block off. And that's what saves us, too. Them house-detectives and the office men just took Eddie out of the Plantagenet because one of them suddenly recognized him—not for liftin' this swag. See? We don't want this deal to come out. Throw it in the river, for God's sake, or go give it back to the guy that lost it—anything, so's this last job ain't put on my kid!"

"You are telling me a lot, aren't you?"

"Yes. But you—somehow—looked like the last bet. I know you two got the money. Did you happen to lamp it over? How much?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

The other girl fell back staring, speechless.

"You—no! I thought maybe it was a couple. This lamb just made a foolish flash talking with Eddie in the café! Thirty thousand!—what a chance! He must be crazy! Why don't he squeal if he lost that much?"

"You know who he is?"

"Yes. Eddie studied him all day yesterday and to-day, trying to set up his lay. He's a California man—a banker, I think. Clemmons—H. G. Clemmons—Room 422, the Plantagenet. Oh, he must be asleep, doped, or crazy! We got a man at the hotel now tryin' to fix this thing, and he swears Clemmons ain't said a word—just ain't missed it, I guess."

"Clemmons—" murmured Aileen—"H. G. Clemmons. Well, I'm glad I know. There comes Mr. Hil—my friend. Maybe you better go now."

"I want to know," muttered the other, staring at Hildreth. "It's a showdown for me. Been tryin' to straighten my kid up. Oh, yes—believe me, I want to quit this—just almost got Eddie to stop framin' 'em. He swore he would, after this job — and now, if he's convicted—it's life."

Hildreth had come up and heard the last words. He looked quickly from one girl to the other standing there in the sleet storm. Miss Travers erect, firm, and watchful; Eddie's pal trembling now, seeming on the verge of hysteria.

She was trying to enunciate some savage outburst or appeal, when Miss Travers spoke quietly—and suddenly she couldn't remember Hildreth's last name.

"Lionel! Here, this is Milly. And quite upset — really! Now, what happened inside?"

"Blessed if I know! Don't know enough about police affairs. I tried to tell 'em I was a reporter, and then I did meet a real one, doing police. And I confided to him I just wanted to see the two men they arrested at the Plantagenet to-day for a robbery. And what do you think—what thundering mystery is this? This newspaper chap looked it up at the office, and he said the two men had been released an hour ago, with a warning to get out of town. The police didn't have a blamed thing on 'em—well as they knew 'em!"

"God!" whispered the girl of Eddie the Dip. "Oh, my God! Let's go!"

Hildreth was staring bewilderedly at her. "Now, what?"

Miss Travers suddenly clapped her little gloved hands. "Oh—nothing! You better go, Milly! Get your kid square, if you can—and keep him square!"

"Oh, Miss—Miss Mystery—that's who you are! I don't care for nothin' now! Not even a split on that thirty thousand! Oh, nothin'—just to slide away and scold my kid again, and try and try! Oh, Gawd—thank you!"

And she vanished in the dirty sleet of the Chicago night.

Hildreth stood still staring after her.

"Milly? Well, this is funny! Was there a robbery, after all? Everybody denies it at the station—the crooks, the hotel people, the detectives, the newspapermen — and yet— Aileen! Aileen Travers! Look in that crazy wallet again and see if you and I haven't been dreaming! Nobody knows anything about the thirty thousand that you and I counted over in that miserable quick-lunch place—and soaked your ring to pay for the eats! Nobody. Say aren't your feet wet? And I'm hungry again! Let's go see if any person in this city could be induced to take one of those thousand-dollar bills! I'll bet they wouldn't!"

"There's one man would—Lionel!" she laughed. "One I know of."

"Who?"

"H. G. Clemmons, Room 422, the Hotel Plantagenet. Well, hold on, now. If Milly is right, why, maybe *he* wouldn't! Would you believe that two wet vagabonds like you and I, Mr.—Mr. Lionel, could tramp about in a storm all night long trying to get somebody to accept thirty thousand dollars in hard cash?"

"Don't be silly! Who's Clemmons?"

And on the way back to the hotel she told him all she knew.

Hildreth shook the sleet from his topcoat in the lobby of the Plantagenet at midnight, with a confident air. He squared his broad shoulders, gave instructions to the room clerk, and then beckoned to his companion.

"Tired, little girl? You must be—dreadfully. I'm beat out myself, and you've had a worse day."

"Why, I'm not tired—now. And, anyhow, we ought to be through with this in twenty minutes, and then—"

"Go eat?" Hildreth fingered in his pockets gloomily. "Maybe we can go dine again on that ring at the bathtub place. Oh, yes — clerk? — did you get Room 422—"

"Mr. Clemmons is in, sir. Sick, I think. Wants to know who you are."

"Tell him—" Hildreth stopped. "Tell him a—lady—Miss Mystery—and a gentleman—Mr.—Dub." He laughed excitedly. "Oh, just tell him—*friends*—with the best news in the world!"

The hotel person looked them over sharply as he telephoned to the room. They didn't look so bad—except rather wet, a young man and a young woman with drawn, tired faces, but both eager with life.

"All right, he says—Mr. Clemmons. Boy—to the main elevator with the lady and gentleman!"

Three minutes more and Hildreth rang at a room door down a long, soft-carpeted hallway. So warm it seemed, so beautifully luxurious—after the corned-beef hash at the porcelain palace. Aileen was touching his arm when the door opened; she had just whispered:

"You better take it—you. You do things so wonderfully well."

"No, you. You tell him—he must be a bonanza king, who never misses such a rotten little roll as thirty thousand. Probably will think we're pikers for even bothering him with such a trifle."

She was laughing tremulously. And then,

as the door opened wider, they saw a man step back. A pale, tall man of middle age, whose eyes were set in desperate circles. And as he stepped back he accidentally struck the elbow of an arm which he had held behind him, against the woodwork, and a blue automatic pistol fell to the rug.

He did not speak, nor move—merely stood staring, nerveless, dumb, at the weapon. Not until Miss Mystery sighed, with some quick wondering relief, did H. G. Clemmons look up from his dull stare at the pistol on the Oriental rug. Then he raised wide, bloodshot eyes to them.

"I thought," he whispered in a listless voice, "it was—the people from the Coast. Yes—for me! But I couldn't use the gun—I tried—I tried just a second ago when I heard your footsteps. Who—who are you?"

"Well—" Hildreth looked uncertainly in at the splendid suite with the sleet beating across Lake Michigan on the front windows—the bitter gale out of which they had drifted. "I—we—the point is, Mr. Clemmons, did you lose anything to-day?"

"Lose anything?" He started forward mechanically, nerveless. "The money—you don't mean—the thirty thousand?"

"Yes. What sort of a wallet was it?"

"A black, silk-and-leather lined. Twenty bills for a thou— Oh, my God! You don't mean—" He staggered to Hildreth's side, put a thin, white hand on his wet sleeve and stood muttering wordlessly.

And then, with a laugh—clear, mischievous—perhaps madly indiscreet, little Miss Mystery stepped forward.

"Here it is! Is that it? Of course it must be!"

"You see"—muttered Hildreth—"we know all about it. We've been on a mad chase all night. Funny, isn't it? Oh, man—sit down—you're weak!"

But little Miss Mystery had the tall, frail man by the arm and was leading him to one of the great leather chairs before a real open fire. The raindrops, turning from sleet, still sparkled on her flushed cheeks.

"Never mind, Mr. Lionel! Mr. Clemmons is the man! If he isn't, he'd be a wonderful actor! Oh, a most wonderful chap for the movies!"

And the two adventurers stood with their steaming clothes by the fire and watched Mr. Clemmons sit staring at the money on the table. He tried to finger it—and failed. Then he sank apathetically into his chair and was still. He remained that way so long that they felt uneasy, as if his spirit was passing.

"It's all right," said Hildreth. "Bully! Right-o! Even Milly must be kind of happy somewhere, somehow! Oh, yes—indeed!"

"I wonder," whispered Clemmons at length, "if you hadn't better call them."

"Call them? Who?"

"The police. I was tired of it. I wanted my kiddies—and Edith. It was just them that kept me all night from—from—just my kiddies. But when you rang I stood there—with the—gun and—then a girl laughed just outside the door—just happiness, like a child—or mountain water falling—and I—couldn't!"

They looked at him in the warm silence. Hildreth reached to brush the wet snow from the girl's hair.

"That's her name," he murmured, "and yet I can't remember it!" Then he looked uncertainly to the storm-lashed windows. "I think we'd better be going—it's a rotten night."

The tall, frail man sat higher, pointing at the bank-notes on the ebony table.

"You brought it back. I don't just know how I was robbed. I drank a bit with a man, and I never do such things—home. Then up here in my rooms I missed my money—everything."

"Well, why didn't you raise an alarm? That's the one mystery remaining to clear up—except—Aileen! If you'll tell us why you lose thirty thousand and say nothing, we'll go quite cheerfully."

"It's the bank," muttered Clemmons slowly. "I—took it. I was in a fix with my irrigation project down in the San Joaquin. Oh, what folly! My friends wired me this morning that I could come back—restore the money, and the bank, for reasons of its own—would say nothing. Then—this afternoon—I lost it!"

"And you never said a word?"

"How could I? If the papers and the

police had my name—why, I was an embezzler—and there was Edith and the kiddies—who don't know yet. I could give back the money and be saved, but—broke—I was done for!"

"Broke!" laughed Hildreth, looking about the suite. "You? Whew! You should see the bathtub joint. And Miss Mystery's ring—her mother's ring—in for seventy cents' worth of eats!"

Her clear laughter followed: "Oh, well! To-morrow's another day—and, Mr. Clemmons—good-by and good luck!"

She was turning to the door when the tall man looked up.

"Won't you stay just a minute? I need—somebody. Somebody young and strong and brave—like you two—just a minute. I am dazed. I don't ask you to explain. It's just honest, that's all—and it's sending me back to California to square things myself—just you two who came laughing to my door out of the storm."

"Oh, well," said Hildreth, "it's been fun—just to wander—with her. And there was Milly, who wasn't a bad sort. We sent her away with a smile! And if it hadn't been for your darn money I'd never met Miss—Mystery, and I haven't solved it all yet. She used to be a girl in the movies, and then things got kind of rotten."

"And you?" Clemmons had arisen in slowly gathering comprehension after his stupor of the soul. "Mr.—what's the name?"

"Hildreth. I'm a civil and irrigation engineer—and our little firm went bump last summer—just trying to help out a friend. But I'm young yet—going to get it all straight soon!"

"Irrigation?" The tall banker was musing by his fire. "That's what I was trying—to finance a little river that comes down from the Sierras to the San Joaquin. It stuck me last year bad, but I'm going back—to conquer it!"

"That's the stuff!" cried Miss Mystery. "Oh, isn't it splendid to hear a man say that?"

"Or a woman," murmured Hildreth. "Any little girl who's tried!"

Clemmons smiled wanly at last. "Yes. And, say, Hildreth, come on out West and help me. It's a little valley that hasn't any name where the big scheme is. It 'd be a beautiful spot for a motion-picture, too. Oh, say—why don't you come—you two?"

"A little valley with a river?" muttered Hildreth, and stared at her after that silently.

"A little wandering river without a name," she whispered, "waiting for the engineers and bankers to adopt it."

"Just that"—the tall financier turned his melancholy eyes eagerly upon them—"and I want to name it now—something beautiful! To remember how I managed to—drop that gun—when this girl laughed outside my door. Mr. Hildreth, what is—her name?"

Hildreth laughed slowly, and then thought with a queer puzzled frown, looking joyously at Miss Mystery.

"There it slipped my mind again—that movie name she told me! Funny, isn't it? But it 'd make you think of your river, Mr. Clemmons, up in the Sierras—and her laughing, too. And it's going to sing for me all my life, just like the little river that runs down to your valley from the hills."

Alias the Angleworm

by Frank Blighton

Author of "Romance in the Raw," "After Midnight," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

ON COMING INTO COALPORT.

"NICE little borough you have on this end of the line," said Jimmy Stuart to the conductor of the suburban trolley. "What no-man's land did you fish it out of and how much ink did it take to black it up?"

"You keep it," said the man in uniform, "and I'll keep the town on the other end of the route."

The car jolted around a short loop and came to a stop before a cigar-store. Jimmy reached for his suit-case and the chap to whom he had spoken also swung another and heavier case of black sole-leather to him as the passenger got off.

"I thank you," said Jimmy, "for giving me the town. I'll take it—by storm—since it looks like that kind of weather, anyway. Where would you advise me to locate?"

"It depends on your line. This case feels as if you might have a baby automobile in it. The Mansion House is one block to your right."

"They're burglar's tools," said Jimmy, lugubriously. "Not designed for that profession, originally, but I'd like to pry off somebody's safe-door if I can't sell the town for ready cash, and elope with some of your lady passengers."

He looked toward a very attractive young lady as he spoke who was getting out the front end.

The conductor grinned. "She is nice," said he. "'Lo, Tom," said he again, this time addressing a tall, saturnine-faced man, who was appraising Jimmy out of the tail of his eye, as he picked up his case and trudged away.

The tall man frowned as Jimmy remarked: "Don't let too many fares stick to the bell-cord, old top," ere meandering up the chief grimy thoroughfare of Coalport. Even on a day of brilliant sunshine and with an electric tang in the autumn air, Jimmy Stuart saw that the place whereon he had stumbled would never in the least resemble those gaudy colored folders put out by the most optimistic real-estate promoter not yet immured in a home for incurable hopefuls.

Shrouded by the fine drizzle of early spring rains just beginning, the coal-mining town, flanked by artificial mountains of blue-black refuse, with its main thoroughfare populated chiefly by sooty-faced men in dingy clothing, and with its buildings partaking of the same stygian hue, was depressing to the average new-arrival.

Jimmy's depression, however, was all on the surface. He had been in a few places in his errant but active existence and it was his way to wear his disposition, so to speak, inside out.

He trudged up to the Mansion House, climbed the long flight of steps to the big veranda, and stalked inside. The drizzle deepened and he registered by the light of a gas-jet which the clerk lighted.

The clerk was smoking a pipe—a fact which the newly arrived guest knew without looking at him. Jimmy gave him a cigar.

"Thank you," said the man behind the desk. His face looked like that of "Uncle Sam" transplanted on that of a fox.

"Brother," whispered Jimmy, confidentially, "I see we belong to the same lodge. Being astray in the forests of Coalport, it is your duty to tell me the name of the 'big smoke'—the leading citizen."

"Henry Phelps, cashier of the First National, is the man you want to see."

"Nix," chided Jimmy. "He wants to see me. And I shall gratify that yearning of his after I've met all comers on your bill of fare."

"It's just across the street—the bank. What might you sell?"

"I might sell clothespins or corn-salve," said Jimmy, "but I don't. Those drummers always have a seedy look, and did they ever give you a good cigar?"

"No. This *is* a good seegar."

Jimmy seemed pensive. "I wanted to give it to a girl I saw on the trolley, but the conductor wouldn't introduce me."

Jimmy left the clerk thinking of many things besides the depressing weather.

About an hour later, Mr. Henry Phelps, peering through the gilded lattice of his financial bailiwick, beheld a cravat that might have been cut from Joseph's coat of many colors.

Below the cravat was about four-feet-nine inches of sturdy anatomy; above it the grave, alert face of a man who might have been anywhere, so Mr. Phelps judged, between nineteen and twenty-five years of age.

It was hard to say, chiefly owing to the straight nose, firm chin, and cheeks with just enough red in them to give a boyish tone to a face which a pair of sedate gray eyes belied by their gravity.

Mr. Phelps was himself a mild-mannered and kindly-faced man of around fifty; with silver hair, a rather benignant face and forehead, wearing gold-bowed spectacles.

"Yes, I'm Mr. Phelps," said the cashier. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"You can tell me the name of the typewriter your bank uses," said Jimmy, with a directness that held no hint of his recent ebullient nonsense.

Mr. Phelps gave a semiapologetic smile. "I can't because we don't use any."

"You don't?" Jimmy looked around at the elegant interior. "Why not? This looks like a very substantial bank."

"W-e-l-l," drawled the other, "we've been here over fifty years, now; I've been cashier for more than twenty-five—"

He stopped midway of the explanation. Jimmy Stuart was doing something quite unprecedented. In fact, during his quarter of a century Mr. Phelps had never seen a visitor to the bank behave in just this way.

Jimmy was still looking at him and listening, respectfully; but he had also suddenly flicked the ornate and costly cravat he was wearing outside his waistcoat, allowing it to drape in full view, and Mr. Phelps blinked.

The next instant the man standing before the cashier's window began to unknot his cravat and then loosen the buttons to his collar.

"Go on, please," said Jimmy, blandly, "for I'm very much interested in what you're saying, Mr. Phelps."

His tone, while suave, was also sincere.

"W-e-l-l, as I was saying, I've been here for twenty-five years and we never felt that we exactly needed a typewriter; our business got along all right without a typewriter; and it wouldn't be fair to you to take up your time or mine—"

Again he paused and blinked.

Jimmy Stuart having completed unbuttoning his collar, suddenly hurled the collar and costly cravat over his shoulder back of him and stood looking at him with the utmost gravity through the window.

CHAPTER II.

ULYSSES FINDS HIMSELF.

"I SEE," said Jimmy. "Well, Mr. Phelps, my own experience is parallel to yours, although not so long. I used to get along without a collar and necktie. I also got

along without shoes and stockings. But," continued his eccentric visitor, " when I first arrived in Coalport less than two hours ago, and walked a block from where the trolley-car stops to the Mansion House, I saw a very nice shop with collars and neckties in the window. You're the first business man I've talked to since I arrived. So, I can only make a guess that this shop that sells collars and ties is one of your depositors."

Mr. Phelps felt himself on firmer ground. " Yes, it is."

" And across the street was a store with shoes; and next to it was one with stoves—gas and coal stoves. Now, just suppose we all got along without the things we didn't need. If everybody took the same view of things your bank takes about a typewriter—just got along without them because they could—folks wouldn't wear collars or neckties or shoes, or use stoves. But, in that case, where would the bank deposits be—where would the bank be—where would *you* be?"

Mr. Phelps looked his reply rather than voiced it.

" Well, what do you think of it?" reiterated Jimmy Stuart.

" I think," quavered Mr. Phelps, unsteadily, while a glaze of incipient tears crept into his eyes comporting perfectly with his tone, " that it's a shame that a bright young man like you comes into this bank to humiliate a man of my time of life!"

" Not to humiliate you—to interest you in the topic of your bank's need for a typewriter, as you think. To do that, I first tried to get you interested in me. You see, you have prestige in this community."

Mr. Phelps refused to be mollified. Jimmy soft-pedaled again.

" Believe me, I had no intention of hurting your feelings. Maybe "—his mouth quirked in a half-smile—" maybe I didn't come in to try to sell you a typewriter—but just to get out of the rain. Anyway, Mr. Phelps, I won't take up any more of your time than to wish you a more pleasant business future than the weather-man wished on me the first day I come to Coalport."

In spite of the quarter-century of experience gained cashiering among the culm-banks that festooned Coalport, Mr. Phelps was in rather a quandary as Jimmy retrieved collar and necktie and walked out.

A few doors further along the sign " Boston Store " caught Mr. Stuart's eye. He stepped into a hall to put on his collar and cravat before entering.

A gentleman with a head smooth and shining save for a fringe of black hair over his ears came forward. Jimmy mentioned " typewriter." The gentleman shook his head.

" We have one," he explained, " and it is good enough for us. I'm afraid you can't interest us."

Jimmy looked chapfallen. " May I look at it?" he asked.

The other man was willing. Jimmy went to the rear.

The typewriter was on a desk. Jimmy briskly inserted two sheets of paper with a carbon intervening and picked out a phrase with the timidity of a novice on a tight wire.

He withdrew the sheets, handing his observer the carbon, reading:

> The quick, brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The man seemed puzzled.

" The sentiment," Jimmy facetiously explained, " although delicious, is not original with me."

His manner indicated that it was a dreary day for selling anything and he was just going through the motions. Later on he switched to cravats, permitted a transient admiration of his own, and vanished into the thick weather again, after slipping the bit of paper on which he had written carelessly in his coat-pocket.

For a time he wandered around. In and out of buildings he went, trying, always fruitlessly, to interest people in typewriters. If people had them they were deaf to his importunities; if they did not have them, although Jimmy sought to persuade them that their financial salvation lay in procuring one without delay, his arguments, while ingenious, lacked " punch " enough to allow him to open his case.

He came, at last, opposite a hallway of a building immediately back of the hotel,

on the opposite side of the block. It carried a sign:

PUBLIC STENOGRAPHER.

Here he made a reconnaissance.

He padded back in the lot behind this building. Between the soot from coal breakers that permeated the air, the low-lying clouds, and the deserted appearance of the premises adjacent to and in the rear of the hostelry, in the semidarkness he prowled about until there was nothing else to see, save a tumble-down shed adjoining the Mansion House in which stood a decrepit carriage.

Jimmy walked into this and surveyed the vehicle with the eye of one about to purchase a five-thousand-dollar automobile.

His grave and preoccupied manner—had any one been observing him—would have been hard to understand, ere he returned to the hallway with the sign which indicated there was still one more typewriter user in the merry little municipality on whom he had not as yet called.

He briskly ascended the stairs and entered the room indicated by the sign. Here he got his first big surprise of the afternoon, for at the far end by the front window was sitting the selfsame young lady whose personality had caused him to remark it when talking with the clerk at the Mansion House.

Jimmy peered again to be sure. She was as dark as Niobe, and even when framed against the dingy window pane, with an incandescent struggling against the omnipresent gloom, she seemed as enticing as Circe.

And Jimmy, who had dabbled a bit in mythology, suddenly felt somewhat as the fabled Ulysses must have felt when he first beheld the charmer for whose sake he delayed his home-coming, after voyaging with Jason and some others in search of the "golden fleece."

Jimmy promptly adopted the antiquarian rôle, not wholly because of his repeated failures to get people sufficiently interested in typewriters to ask to see what was in his case. Rather because of the girl's repressed but wistful and eager glance at him as he walked toward her.

And, the further he walked toward her, the more the semisepulchral day outside was left behind, with its burden of drudgery and disillusion, until it was so remote that he might have entered another world.

Like Ulysses on a voyage, he navigated himself and case toward twin torches—for her dark eyes were both clear and brilliant. And, for the first time since calling on Coalport people he did not mention "typewriter."

Why should he, when Ulysses never had a typewriter?

Jimmy wasn't altogether sure that his mythical prototype could even spell, although he was thrilling to the propinquity of this girl—thrilling with that mysterious enchantment known only to sanguine youth—as he took off his hat and asked:

"May I dictate a letter to you?"

"You may," said she, her wistfulness merging into an engaging smile, "if you don't go too fast."

"This is such a sad letter," avowed Jimmy, torn between a desire to grimace and the "kick" her musical voice gave him, "that the tempo of my dictation will be that of a funeral march. In fact, if Coalport had a crematorium, I should burn my fond hopes of business hereabouts, instead of embalming them in the mails, temporarily."

He seated himself and fished nervously in his vest-pocket.

She was already reaching for paper, and noticed his action. "You may smoke, if you care to," said she, "for I rather like to smell a good cigar occasionally, and I think men claim smoking makes them think better."

Jimmy thanked her, bit off the end of his perfecto, applied a match, puffed a moment, and began: "Dear boss—"

"Pardon me—do you want a carbon copy?"

Jimmy did, at all hazards. He wanted everything which would give him more time in her presence, although he left that unvoiced.

"It's twenty-five cents extra, you know."

"I didn't know it," said Jimmy; "but what's one cigar, more or less?"

"Shall I take it on the machine?"

"Whichever you prefer."

She seated herself at the keyboard just a trifle self-consciously, due, as he divined, not to thoughts of herself, but his work.

"Dear boss," Jimmy began again, "were you ever an angleworm?"

CHAPTER III.

UNEXPECTED ELEMENTS.

SHE looked at him with a half-dismayed expression—or was it doubt? Being in doubt himself, Jimmy frowned at the floor. Then:

"Shall I paragraph that?"

"If the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Angleworms don't come in soon enough to interfere, it may not be a bad idea," said her client—"and also use a question-mark. I don't think my boss ever was an angleworm."

Her slight barrier of business reserve melted at his infectious absurdity. Jimmy liked her laugh, and wished he knew her name. That wish was his first false step.

"New paragraph," he resumed. "If you ever were an angleworm, did you ever go on the warpath looking for some rooster to bite—or ready to bite all roosters you could crawl up to? Another paragraph?"

He paused. The door opened, and a mail carrier came in, shuffling a handful of letters with the desperate air of a gambler about to deal cards for a huge stake.

One missive fluttered to the corner of the desk near which Jimmy was dictating to his amanuensis. It balanced on edge long enough for him to read the name. "Vivian Baldwin."

Thus Jimmy got his first wish.

Like many another person who gets what he wants, Jimmy wished he hadn't got it at all.

More than that. He wished he hadn't so impulsively assumed the name and rôle, temporarily, of a dead-and-gone intrepid Greek adventurer.

There were reasons for his sudden revulsion—reasons existing before he had ever come to Coalport — on account of which the mere sight of the surname "Baldwin" made Jimmy Stuart's brains begin exploding much as if some one had inserted and set off a capsule of TNT in his left ear.

Thus was he rudely yanked out of the temporary elysium his fertile imagination had created on entering this office and seeing this girl, and thrust against the realities of life harder than ever.

He turned away his face lest she see the flinty change which swept over it, in spite of the contrary effect mere sight of her had created before, for his face was hardening into granite, now that he knew her surname.

To collect his chaotic thoughts he puffed vigorously on his expiring cigar, and his roving eyes followed the footsteps of the departing mail-carrier along the floor.

The glance was as errant as some phases of his life had been, and without other intention save to keep him from looking at her until he again had himself well in hand.

He knew she was waiting for him to resume dictating. He felt, rather than saw, her dainty hand reach out and take the letter; he heard the snap of her bag as she put it inside, just as the postman opened the door to the hall and walked out, closing it behind him.

Then Jimmy, ere his eye left the sill beneath the door, suddenly felt fey.

A little word, "fey," expressing premonition of hidden and coming evil, carrying with it situations so noxious that they sometimes breed lasting grief or disaster irremediable.

Tense and strained already by the shock sight of her name had created, the fey feeling made his eyes waver uncertainly around the floor until they happened to encounter the legs of the same bookcase he had remarked before.

It had not moved from its place across the corner of the room, where it made a sort of a triangle. But, as Jimmy's glance roved beneath the bottom of it, he saw a pair of large, although disreputable, shoes, and thought he saw one of them move.

He watched those big shoes, fascinated as a bird looking into the twin eyes of a serpent. The simile wasn't so bad. Two brass eyelets from which the polish was worn off supplied the ophidian with orbs.

Next instant he was sure they had shifted, although very slightly, just as Jimmy was now certain the shoes were not a discarded pair thrust beneath the bookcase, for they were man's shoes and of large size, the toes turning up slightly.

His erstwhile Circe never wore shoes like those.

The "eyes" shifted slightly, because whoever was in those shoes—and somebody was in them, because they were lace-shoes, and laced up, and the strings knotted in a slovenly way—had shifted his weight from one foot to the other, as if to ease the strain on the legs above the feet filling the shoes during a rather long vigil.

All this happened in the proverbial twinkling of an eye—the "eyes" on the shoes. Jimmy smiled outside, while inside he was very much less facetious than he had been on entering.

Her name had "touched off" a series of mental pyrotechnics inside his cranium, and this discovery of the moving foot added an element of the dramatic and suggested probabilities containing every element but humor, including complications.

Miss Baldwin had been alone, apparently, when he came in. The first query that came fluttering from the mental fireworks was: "Does she know this other fellow is there, listening to what is said?"

Jimmy rather shrewdly decided that she did not.

Public stenographers are not usually actresses of such sterling ability that they have to hide their histrionic genius under a modest sign in a dingy coal town.

Had Miss Baldwin, therefore, known of the presence of the individual behind the bookcase, it was very, very doubtful if her perfect poise and casual manner—although eager—would have seemed so unfeigned when Jimmy came in.

She had, it is true, been a little nervous.

But she had accounted for that by asking him not to "go too fast" while dictating. Besides, what motive could she have in secreting some one in the room to listen to his dictation when her present customer did not himself know he was going to be a customer, when he had first opened the door to her office?

She couldn't have known that Jimmy would do anything of the sort, even had she guessed he was coming into the office to dictate—a fact that was highly improbable—for Jimmy hadn't known that he would dictate until he had been more than halfway to her desk. It had been a sheer impulse—even a perverse one.

It had been bred of his spontaneous imagination, in part, and in part again, of his unvoiced comparison of her to certain ladies of whose antiquity there was so little doubt that she might not have been flattered by the comparison.

All of which went flashing through his brain like the shutter of a cinematograph.

"I put a period after word 'parts,'" said she.

"Quite right," muttered Jimmy, with a frown that might mean anything or nothing. "Would you mind reading it back to me? I'm afraid my mood makes me wander a little."

As she did so he rose, puffed vigorously on his cigar, and paced back and forth with his hands in his trousers. Jimmy had seen certain men of affairs do such things.

His irresolute air and apparent aimless wandering brought him quickly to the end of the case. He saw that it stood on casters, was rather modern, and purposely built high to allow a brush or mop to be manipulated beneath it.

Also, within a couple of feet of one end, was another door, leading into what seemed to be a back room. Jimmy paced back again toward the machine, puffing his cigar.

"Thank you," said he. "Now, one more paragraph. Hoping to have better news when I write again, I am, as ever, yours optimisically, and I'll sign it after you direct an envelope to Mr. Asa Chenilworth, Miners' Bank Building, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania."

While she complied, Jimmy thrust the ribbon copy of the letter into his pocket, signed and carefully folded the carbon, inserted it in the envelope, and sealed it.

Then he paid her.

She thanked him, smiling shyly, and observed: "If I won't offend you, I'd like to say that is the most unique letter I've written since I went in this business."

Jimmy bowed. Then, with a ghost of his old facetiousness: "You took it excellently, considering the glare of my necktie, which is enough to strike a strong man blind. I had to take it off in one of my interviews this afternoon.

"Some of these days," he continued, glancing furtively at the shoes under the bookcase, "something is going to happen to me or to some one, while I wear that necktie. I hope it don't happen in Coalport."

"Oh, nothing ever happens in Coalport, except pay-day," returned Miss Baldwin, with a feminine finality eminently ingenuous.

"I may have brought it into town with me," murmured Jimmy; "and if it hasn't happened yet, it may be that it's merely delayed—or overdue. Anyway, I have a feeling that something not only may but will happen," persisted the quondam Ulysses, enjoying hugely the "kick" his statement might have for the big-footed eavesdropper. "You mentioned pay-day. What happens then?"

She had risen and was closing her desk. The proceeding automatically caused the typewriter to dive into the interior of it, submarine-fashion.

"Well, if the day is bright and sunshiny, the foreign residents go out to do their shopping. Then, for a few hours, Coalport looks more picturesque."

Jimmy "stalled along," resolved to see her safely out of her office, at least, in spite of the furor sight of her surname had roused in him. The size of the shoes the eavesdropper was wearing argued that the man filling them was at least his own size.

"You mean these—what do you call 'em soft-shelled Slovaks? — who are my only rivals in picking cravats," he jocosely returned. "I've seen 'em out in Pittsburgh."

She was reaching for her hat. Under any circumstances save those which her name awoke, the enticement her sheer grace exercised on the late self-appointed Ulysses would have been at least equal to what Circe cast on the Greek original.

Miss Baldwin was a girl with both individuality and personality.

Her half smile gave her face an insouciant lure—and the source of its magic came from within.

Jimmy had admired her profile on the street-car. Its vivid beauty intrigued him because it required no adornment. Her dress was a simple serge, yet, as she raised her arms to pin on a hat which Jimmy knew never "trotted faster than 2.39," her unconscious pose was that of a Greek nymph.

He turned away his gaze to turn it on those nefariously suggestive shoes. They moved again, this time uneasily.

Tense and troubled moments Jimmy had known before, although none comparable to this, as he picked up his case and followed her to the door leading into the hall, which she opened, while her other hand hovered over the electric switch.

Jimmy stopped short and stared at the bookcase.

"'World's best literature,'" said he almost dreamily as she inserted the key in the lock from the outside. "That's nice! I wonder—"

His voice trailed off while he still stared at the volumes with a speculative eye.

"Of what are you wondering?" she asked innocently.

"Oh, nothing much. Just wondering that the good people of Coalport don't suspect what a lot of exciting things might be hidden behind the covers of books — like these!"

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT ADVENTURES OF AN ANGLEWORM.

THIS soft-spoken but no less Parthian arrow, barbed with a hot *double entendre* so deliberate, seemed merely to confirm Miss Baldwin's recent statement that "nothing ever happens in Coalport."

Nothing happened with regard to his recent amanuensis, who evinced no sign of discerning anything in her late client's remark beyond the words themselves.

Jimmy couldn't say what effect those same words had on the individual wearing the large and disreputable shoes behind the bookcase, for the back of the bookcase was

not glass, as he had hoped it might be, and the individual did not seem in any hurry to come out of where he was before Jimmy followed Vivian Baldwin out of her office door, which she promptly locked.

"I'm afraid," said she, withdrawing the key and putting it in her bag with the letter, "that you have the blues worse than I had them before you came in. You're my only customer to-day, and you brought me a little luck in other ways—at least it followed you in. That letter that came while you were dictating was from my brother. I haven't heard from him in some time. Do you ever go to the movies?"

"I'm rather fed up on them," said he, with a slight shudder which she did not see. He had a little difficulty in adding: "Do you?"

"I play the piano, evenings, in the theater behind the Mansion House. That's our best hotel, you know."

"I'm registered there as James Stuart. Since you mentioned blues, I'll go right back and insert Indigo between the two halves of my name. May I ask yours?"

She told him while they tripped down the stairs to the echo of her laugh. At the foot she paused with sisterly *camaraderie*.

"Norman, my brother, has a sense of humor, too. Since you gave me business and brought me luck, I'd like to return the last, since you seem to have lost yours. If you care to drop in to the theater this evening, I'll bring down some special music and play for you. No one will know the difference, for we don't play cue music as they do in city theaters. I've played since a young girl."

"In that event," smiled Jimmy recklessly, "have the local Belasco hold out one for me in the baldest spot in the bald-headed row, and I'll hold down that spot and listen to you. And nobody but you will know the difference."

He glanced up the dark stairway irresolutely after she had tripped away.

The drizzle of the afternoon had dwindled to a mist.

"I wonder," muttered Jimmy, "if a rooster that wears such big shoes as I saw behind that case sleeps in 'em—like a horse?"

Jimmy quickly decided that it was none of his business how the intruder slept.

He had seen the young lady out of her office because, with a man hiding in it, it had seemed no more than fair. If the chap behind that case had ways of getting in there surreptitiously, he also had ways of getting out.

If he were not a simpleton, he would get out after such a pointed reference as Jimmy had made on pausing in front of the case ere leaving the room with the girl.

After all, Jimmy's interest was not, primarily, for that chap.

Unless he had happened to be Norman Baldwin, Miss Vivian's brother, who had written her. Norman, according to his sister, "hadn't been heard from for a long time."

James Stuart knew a man by that same name, and he had known him before coming to Coalport at all—to his sorrow. The man giving that name had treated him very, very shabbily indeed, and it was the coincidence of the surname which had interrupted Jimmy's otherwise rather roseate moments which the arrival of the letter caused.

It was so utterly unexpected and so singularly sinister—all things considered. But on the whole, the discovery, bald and brutal as it was, comported rather well with the way a man of that name had treated him before coming to Coalport.

In the eyes of the world, the fellow's actions were those of a downright scoundrel.

The added brutality was due to learning that the chap was the brother of a girl who looked like a Greek nymph, in spite of a cheap serge dress—a girl who was evidently well bred, yet not too formal to be human and sympathetic.

He decided not to linger and invite a possible brawl with this other individual who had been skulking behind the bookcase, but to go straight back to the hotel.

If his presence, as seemed probable, had kept the skulker from doing little save shift his weight from one foot to the other, it ought not to delay a supper which he felt fairly well qualified to eat, in spite of the cavalier way he had been treated as to business.

Jimmy, therefore, walked straight back to the Mansion House without more ado.

Then, as all good angleworms should, he paid for supper, lodging, and breakfast in advance from a roll of bills that he produced, and from which he tendered a twenty, and received the key to room No. 36 on the floor above the office, in the rear.

"Will you please have my bag and case sent up while I eat the alleged supper?" he asked.

The clerk, noting various Greeklike symbols on the register, assured him they would be in his room ere he emerged.

Then he cogently observed that "business must be good in Coalport," while giving Jimmy change for a five-dollar bill, after asking him if he didn't have something smaller than a twenty.

When Jimmy again emerged from the dining-room, after having been duly warned by Miss Murphy, the Hebe who served him, that the "griddle for the flannel-cakes got cowld at nine o'clock sharp ivery morning," he reached for his hat on the rack by the door, prior to starting for the register desk to pluck a young toothpick from a great, circular forest growing near the clerk's favorite lounging place.

A sandy-haired, slender young man not as tall as himself was standing where Jimmy stood when registering, talking to the clerk; and the way he suddenly lowered his voice when Jimmy picked up his headgear made Jimmy look at his feet.

The sandy-haired young man bore buttoned shoes.

CHAPTER V.

CHIEFLY "ANGLEWORM GOLF."

JAMES INDIGO STUART walked straight over toward the desk.

As he did so, the sandy-haired young man walked away, moving toward the street door leading into the lobby.

"Night, Tim," said the departing youth.

"Night, Mike," said Clerk Timothy, as Jimmie selected his toothpick and started to roll a birdshot commandeered from the round pit where the pen stood, over the leaves of the register.

"Ever play golf?" he asked the clerk.

"Never had no time for it."

The smile accompanying the remark, although bland, was a little too bland for the type of face the clerk wore — at least it seemed so from the view-point of a blue angleworm.

"Well, I played it on some good links out near Monterey Bay, which is in golden California. If you ever saw that golf-links, with the blue bay in the background, and then had to stay overnight in Coalport to catch up with your business, you'd play golf like I'm playing it now."

"I never could spare the time from my business to play no sech game as golf," said his *vis-à-vis*, "although I have played a little poker now and then."

"Well, business is a shy bird sometimes," said Jimmy. "I'm going to try a new course — the rain made this page so damp that it interferes with my stroke."

He turned back the register aimlessly a few leaves.

The clerk sighed, but whether at the memory of the jack-pots that had bloomed and died or because he had never played golf at Monterey, it was impossible to say.

"Smoke?" said Jimmy, as he saw the clerk clawing for his pipe.

"Thanks."

"By the way," said Jimmy casually, "may I ask your surname? I heard that little bantam rooster that just went out call you 'Tim,' so I infer that you were christened after the tall grass."

"Bugbee is my fambly name," said the clerk, as Jimmy laid his birdshot on a line and, after bending the toothpick at the thick end in the form of a driver which only an angleworm would use, suddenly sent the shot over—and into the ink-well.

"You see," said Jimmy, "the course isn't very well laid out, but I 'holed in one,' just the same. He pointed to a name, "Jason Tredway," which happened to lie near where he had posed his birdshot for the strike which had sent it spinning into the ink-well.

"There's a lot in names," went on the angleworm confidentially, apropos of nothing in particular. "And there's a lot in handwriting. I heard a lecture on it once."

Mr. Bugbee seemed very much flattered, and no less interested than flattered—perhaps, on the whole, even more so—although he did not particularly desire that his interest become too obvious.

His eccentric guest, who seemed a man of the world, might possess a cash value. The guest played golf; Mr. Bugbee played poker.

There was a poker game that ran nights not far from the hotel.

Mr. Stuart had intimated that it might be a dull night without golf links. Coalport wasn't so dull as it looked—provided the stranger within its sooty environs had a roll like Jimmy displayed, and the "open sesame" to the cigar-store's back door near the trolley terminal.

Mr. Bugbee had the sesame. Jimmy had the wherewithal. More than one casual conversation, such as this, had resulted in "oat money" for Mr. Bugbee.

Mr. Bugbee was also a man of the world.

He had started, when rather young, out to see the world.

With him was one quadruped that had four feet, as well as forefeet and hind feet, a tail, and other equipment, including a mane.

Mr. Bugbee called this quadruped "a hoss," and he sold it as such to a man he met on his travels. By the time he reached Coalport he had enough horses to stock a livery stable, which he still owned—and wished he didn't—owing to automobiles and oat bills.

This was the time of the month when oat bills loomed up.

And, in still another way, Mr. Bugbee felt a peculiar interest in Jimmy Stuart's incipient lecture on handwriting. The name toward which Jimmy had pointed, Jason Tredway, was that of a once local celebrity, a nephew to the city marshal, Tom Tredway.

So Mr. Bugbee was all attention when Jimmy began:

"Jason is an ancient name," said he. "It recalls the old, original Jason, who was a prince of Thessaly. With the aid of Medea, he brought away from Colchis the famous golden fleece guarded by the sleepless dragon."

"What kind of fleece was that?" asked Mr. Bugbee blandly.

"The same old golden fleece that passes current for chips in your local poker game," said Jimmy suavely. Then a weird look passed over his face. "My gracious—I just remembered—"

He whipped out his watch.

The hands pointed to half past seven.

"I just remembered that I have to go to my room to work up the details of the day's business," said Jimmy. "It isn't often I have such an active day. Call me at eight to-morrow, please. Good night, Mr. Bugbee."

He smiled engagingly down on the clerk from the first landing as he turned on the stairs leading from the lobby and office, *en route* to Room 36.

Mr. Bugbee looked up with the half-dazed expression of a yokel who is just "coming out" after having been used for exhibition purposes by some professional hypnotist.

Jimmy kept on going.

When the latch to Room 36 clicked so plainly that it could be heard where the clerk still stood, Mr. Bugbee began fingering his vulpine chin, after which he cocked one eye aloft at the plaster of Paris centerpiece on the ceiling of the hotel lobby, as if wondering whether or not it could be exchanged for some of the extremely rare commodity Jimmy Stuart had last mentioned.

This attitude was always a bad sign regarding the state of the livery stable finances. Mr. Bugbee held it so long that it almost signified he feared involuntary bankruptcy. It was a hard, cruel, bitter world that let fresh, young typewriter salesmen come into Coalport and carry away all the local currency.

Doubly cruel and hard, because the salesman's sudden exit also took away the rare opportunity of an interesting conversation on many topics that interest a man of the world! Business must be very good with Mr. Stuart for him to have to retire so early to his room as half past seven o'clock to figure up his profits.

"He plays golf, too. And he travels out to Californy. He knows handwriting, and

listens to lectures on it. I wonder how many typewriters he has to sell a day to get hold of so much fleece? Golden fleece," ruminated Mr. Bugbee enviously—"that's what he said was the kind that bought chips in a poker game.

"And he was talking about Jase Tredway, too. Lord knows, he ain't never had much golden fleece, 'less'n he fleeced somebody else out of it. If he hadn't been nephew to the city marshal, they'd locked him up long ago, instead of lettin' him pull all that raw stuff in the poker game. He'll come to some bad end yit!"

Mr. Bugbee caressed his chin more vigorously.

"Business," he told himself, "must be awful good when a typewriter salesman smokes seegars like this. Business means money, 'nd money is another name for golden fleece."

He was still staring up at the centerpiece as if it might be interested in the trite truths purveyed by one who deemed himself only a little angleworm, with an aggressive temperament.

CHAPTER VI.

"INSPECTOR" BUGBEE SEEKS EVIDENCE.

MR. BUGBEE roused from his long, long reverie, and became a man of action.

He came out of the hotel office, crossed the lobby, and went up-stairs with a celerity that suggested he was "bent and determined" on using methods to "roust out" his guest and get him into the poker game as spectacular as the guest had used in trying to sell a typewriter to Cashier Phelps.

Mr. Bugbee knew what Jimmy had done in the bank, down to the most minute detail. Mike Burns, the sandy-haired, slender paying teller of the First National, who had been talking with Mr. Bugbee when Jimmy finished his supper, had retailed a veracious and first-hand account of the opening episode in Jimmy Stuart's Coalport career.

Mike Burns had not stopped with the facts to which he was an eye-witness. He also voiced opinions of Jimmy, opining he might be advance man for a gang of burglars.

"Take it from me, Tim, I'm right. He didn't come into our bank to sell a typewriter at all. That was only his 'cluck.'"

Mr. Bugbee was not inclined to credit it.

"I sent him over," he explained. "He asked me the name of the big smoke, and I told him Henry Phelps. He's got too much money and he smokes too good seegars for a burglar's job."

"Maybe I'm wrong," said Mike thoughtfully. "I hope I am wrong. He's shining up to Viv Baldwin. I know Viv and I know Norm, her brother. I like Viv myself. I was out to her house and spent an evening a few nights ago. If this fellow is wrong, then we ought to look out for Viv until Norm comes home. Don't you think so?"

Recalling Mr. Stuart's mention of a girl he liked well enough to give a good cigar, Mr. Bugbee agreed.

"We'll keep an eye on him, then," said Mike, "and also keep this strictly between us, unless we get something on him that might look good to the authorities. Norm is too white a boy to come back and find Viv all snarled up by some fresh drummer."

Mr. Bugbee promised.

It was just here that Jimmy, emerging from his supper, spying what he had previously termed a little "bantam," took a slant at his shoes.

Mr. Bugbee remembered this conversation, in detail, after he also concluded that his guest, after a series of maneuvers almost as peculiar as those in which he had indulged in the bank, had suddenly broken off their talk.

It now seemed to the clerk that maybe the guest was trying to divert Mr. Bugbee's attention from what might be his real purpose in coming to Coalport.

Hence, Mr. Bugbee decided to do a little "inspecting."

His note for oat money was shortly due in the First National, and Mr. Burns might aid him in renewing it, if he aided Mr. Burns.

Reaching Room 36, Mr. Bugbee applied his eye to the keyhole, noting a light shining through the calico mask over the transom. The key was in the lock, so Mr. Bugbee next applied his ear.

He heard a rustle of papers. A business man, figuring up his business, generally uses papers. Mr. Bugbee was disappointed. Mike's suspicions and opinions, thus far, were not established by the evidence.

Then he heard the papers being rustled again, the suit-case being locked, the bed being turned down, the pillows being punched, the shade being raised, after which the window was also opened.

The rest was silence. Hearing some one come into the office, Mr. Bugbee hurried down-stairs to see whom it might be. His face, en route, registered what directors of "By Heck!" film drams term "incipient despair."

It was still a cruel world—for a poker-playing livery stableman.

From all of which it will be plain that even a stranger in Coalport may not escape the usual suspicion, rebuffs, and disillusions common to strangers elsewhere.

Especially the disillusion.

Jimmy entertained no more dreams of himself as an intrepid Greek adventurer on retiring to figure up the kind of business he had not done in Coalport. He had gathered not a hair of the golden fleece on which he had focused Mr. Bugbee's attention, and on which the clerk was reflecting when his mentor retired so abruptly.

On entering his room, Jimmy locked the door, pulled down the shade, and did a little inspecting of the apartment before doing anything else. No shoes or other signs of intruders being visible, he proceeded swiftly to undress, shave, and perform the ablutions of a well-groomed man, from the skin out.

He paused when partially dressed to open the heavy, leather case.

He reached into a small compartment in the back of it and withdrew a thing which was neither a part of a typewriter nor yet a volume of the "world's best literature."

Two broad and extra-heavy rubber bands were on it. Without removing them he snapped the thing to his right forearm on the inside, a little above the wrist.

"You've only got six pages, and none of them are more than thirty-eight hundredths of an inch thick," he whispered to the thing, "but I'll make a bet your voice is loud, and that when you speak once, almost anybody that hears you will be willing to discuss literature with me, if I ask them to."

The flat, blue automatic, thus adjured, did not speak.

Jimmy saw no reason why it should, just then, and one very good reason why it should not. If Mr. Bugbee heard an unwonted noise in Room 36, it might startle his nerves. Nerves are necessary to a poker-player, and from Mr. Bugbee's manner, Jimmy had an idea the clerk might intend to "set in" later.

Jimmy finished dressing some time before Mr. Bugbee appeared outside his door. His movements were deft, sure, swift. He abandoned the gorgeous cravat for a bow of faultless black-crape silk, knotted *au fait* under a turn-down collar with straight edges; and when he was fully attired in semiformal evening dress, even to the fedora with a black-silk lining that extended to the brim's edge beneath, he lacked only a top-coat to look what the world calls an irreproachably dressed young man.

Then he glanced at his watch.

It lacked three minutes to eight o'clock.

Jimmy withdrew a portfolio from his suit-case and began inspecting its contents.

One of them was a photographic copy of a letter, typewritten on stationery of the First National Bank of Coalport, bearing the signature of Henry Phelps, cashier, in his official capacity.

Jimmy Stuart frowned down upon the letter, in which the name of "Norman Baldwin" loomed as large as Mr. Bugbee's oat bill in that worthy gentleman's mind, simultaneously.

"Now," quoth Jimmy, who did not wear his disposition inside-out when communing with himself in private, "why did that old rooster try to make me believe that his bank didn't have the least possible use for a typewriter? Why did he next pull out the sob-stuff stop when I pretended to take him at his word, and then go into the indignation tremolo when I hinted that his prestige in Coalport—and elsewhere—was greater than my own?"

It almost seemed from Jimmy's frowning face that he was becoming indignant himself. Even an angleworm will turn.

Worms without angles have been known to turn, and the fact is duly chronicled in the world's best literature.

Jimmy, wondering where he should turn next, suddenly took all the specimens of typewriting gathered in Coalport when trying to sell machines, and began comparing them with the photographic copy of the letter.

He began with:

> The quick, brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

And ended with the last specimen obtained before he had gone into the lot back of the Mansion House and inspected the phaeton under the shed, ere visiting Vivian Baldwin's office.

None of the typewriting was the same.

With the air of one saying farewell to all he holds dear on earth, Jimmy placed the ribbon copy of the letter he had dictated to Vivian Baldwin alongside the photographic copy of the one bearing Cashier Phelps's alleged signature.

It was patent, even to the non-expert, that the same machine had typed both letters.

Mr. Bugbee, using the ear in his inspection, since the eye was estopped by a tiny key in a keyhole made for it, heard these sequential rustles as Jimmy put all the specimens back into his portfolio, and then took up something else.

It is the little things in life that count.

But for that little key, Mr. Bugbee would have had a clear and unobstructed vision of a symbol of more golden fleece than he had seen his guest display.

Jimmy was sitting half sidewise to the door of his room, staring moodily at a piece of paper. The words "Twenty-eight thousand dollars" appeared on it, and also the figures "$28,000." And over it was a protectograph stamp for the same sum.

The check was also "certified," by the cashier of the Pittsburgh bank on which it was drawn, to be good for the sum for which it was drawn; and the signer, although not using the name of "James Stuart," had signed in a handwriting so similar to that signature on the Mansion House register that even a non-handwriting expert would have known it was the same man.

But the check was not drawn to the order of "Norman Baldwin," neither had it been indorsed on its back by him. The first name so appearing was "Adolphus Smith," and below was a deposit stamp, signed by "John Snodgrass."

The man in the room carefully attached several other papers together with brass fasteners having big heads and long, pliant legs, which could be spread apart or pushed together again at will.

Several of these he dropped in his pocket, abstractedly, as he returned the papers to his portfolio. The papers referred to a man calling himself Norman Baldwin, and all carried the same legend:

> Whereabouts at present unknown.

Then, as narrated, Jimmy punched his pillows, turned down the bed, turned out the light, raised his shade and window, as one does who likes fresh air while he reposes.

Mr. Bugbee, also as narrated, at this point went back to the lobby, leaving Jimmy sitting pensively on the ledge of the window, now and again looking down through the clearing mist to the roof of the old shed below, and now and again feeling for possible wrinkles in the right sleeve of his coat.

It did not wrinkle any more than any garment might in damp weather.

Jimmy kept on thinking for a quarter of an hour, as men do when their thoughts are somber and they are very much absorbed in trying to decide things.

He was thinking how much more "indigo" there was in this particular day than Miss Baldwin had dreamed when she had tactfully asked him to get rid of the "blues" by coming to the theater, and he had impulsively accepted. For a young man calling himself Norman Baldwin had given Jimmy the original of that photographic letter in Pittsburgh, and thereafter Jimmy had been shorn, through its use, of much golden fleece.

Jimmy liked music very much. He had also liked Vivian Baldwin, when first seeing her on the car, very much; and when next

seeing her in her office he had been so deliriously happy that he had insanely called himself by an ancient alias different than he was now using.

He had even forgotten his quest for a moment or so, which was to locate the original of the typewriter on which that letter had been written, and which purported to have been signed by Henry Phelps. And, moved by the exquisite thrill of her exquisite propinquity, desiring to be near her for a few moments to forget other things, he had dictated the absurd letter which he had no intention of mailing at all.

He knew now that he was no intrepid Ulysses any more than Vivian was a Circe, in spite of the appeal she had made to him. She was a normal, sensible, lovable American girl, and Jimmy was a boy of the same nationality; at times inclined to be facetious, audacious, with a ready tongue, generally self-possessed, and, until recently, possessed of more golden fleece than he now was by some twenty-eight thousand dollars.

CHAPTER VII.

FILMS AND ACCOMPANIMENTS.

FROM where he sat Jimmy could see the rear of the Olympian Theater, and it seemed Olympian chiefly in name. He could look past both sides of the building to the bright street beyond, on the opposite side of the block from the Mansion House.

Cheap and abundant fuel served to give Coalport an abundance of light at night, if the sun was shy on illumination during the day. That street looked positively cheerful.

Jimmy thought of the girl and her invitation.

Even although the letter presented by a man calling himself Norman Baldwin had been used to cheat and defraud, Jimmy wanted to be entirely just to his sister. She may have known of the letter being written without knowing what uses it was to serve outside Coalport.

From all the facts thus far gathered, it seemed very improbable that Vivian had ever seen much of that missing golden fleece. He conjured up her eager, wistful air when he came into her office; he recalled her reference to her own blues; that he was her " first customer " that day, and her thanks for " the business."

The thanks hit Jimmy hard. Her shy sympathy and tact in trying to dissipate his blues, because he had helped to drive hers away, hit him harder. Vivian, with her cheap serge dress and hat, was as genuine and unspoiled as he had deemed her at first sight—no matter how seasoned and cold-blooded a scoundrel Norman had been or would be.

He ceased vacillating and stepped toward the door.

Then he stopped.

If he went to the theater, he would have to pass Mr. Bugbee's desk. And Bugbee, when Jimmy had come out from supper, had been talking to an individual whom Jimmy disliked instinctively; and the clerk's bland but foxy face also revealed that the pair had been discussing Jimmy.

Jimmy, on guard during all of the time that followed before coming back to his room, didn't particularly fancy passing a prying, shrewd old Yankee in changed raiment and with a gun up his sleeve.

The gun had been an afterthought. Jimmy remembered the shoes behind the world's best literature; and the fact that the skulker had not come out at the time was no basis for supposing that he might not come out afterward and follow Vivian again.

Shoes of the caliber Jimmy had seen behind that bookcase argued that the man wearing them was at least Jimmy's size; but would such a skulker " fight fair " if confronted?

Having failed in whatever purpose was in his mind when coming into her office owing to Jimmy's subsequent arrival there, he might follow her home when she left the theater to do whatever was in his mind to do when he came into the office.

Jimmy having decided to go to the theater, now decided to go, if possible, without allowing Mr. Bugbee to know he had gone. He withdrew the key from his lock so that he could come back in the regular way if he wished.

He returned to the window and peered

down at the roof of the old shed. Having been in the lot during the afternoon, and having inspected the shed from within and from motives which had nothing to do with his present look at it from above, Jimmy could orient himself very easily.

It was no trick at all to drop to the roof, some four feet from his sill; to walk along it to the far end and thence to the ground, without a sound and without ruffling his clothing.

Once on the ground it was very simple to walk directly over toward the Olympian Theater, pass between it and the adjoining building, emerge quite the best-dressed man on the street, walk to the box-office, and ask for his seat.

Walking into the theater, Jimmy felt slightly better. He wondered what the bantam and Mr. Bugbee would think of this. The bantam, from the way he strutted out of the hotel when Jimmy walked over to the desk from the supper-room, evidently held Jimmy in some slight disdain; while Jimmy felt that no rooster of that size could route a mere angleworm like himself, even in the character of James "Indigo" Stuart.

He dropped that middle name the moment he leaned back in his seat and caught Miss Baldwin's gratified smile of welcome flashing to him from a small, oblong mirror on her piano.

He returned her bow and smile in kind.

A delicious, rippling rhythm came to his ears—to him a haunting melody, touched with romance.

He was almost happy until he thought of those sinister shoes.

They returned as if to vex him, but vanished as a stream of calcined light spotted the screen just above his head with the announcement:

"KING ROBERT OF SICILY,"

In

Nine Parts.

Jimmy forgot the shoes instantly.

"I wonder," he mused, "what ghoul so viciously dismembered the king?"

Then, while Miss Baldwin played her special music, her auditor, dismissing the picture for the moment, preferred to close his eyes and picture her as he had first seen her on the trolley, inbound to Coalport; and recall as well the mood that had wrapped him round like incense sweet as the music she played—at once stupefying and exhilarating. His thoughts returned to his adventuring since coming to Coalport, and in them there persisted the image of a tall, saturnine-faced man, with a coal-black mustache, and wearing a hat so black it reminded Jimmy of the wing of a bat—because it flitted always somewhere behind him.

At last Jimmy had concluded that he was being followed. Why any one should "trail" him when he was engaged in following a "blind trail" himself he hadn't the least idea; in fact he wasn't altogether sure.

To make sure, he had walked into the lot, inspected the shed, the ancient phaeton within it, and, peering through the wheels, he had discerned the black hat still in the offing, simultaneously with the wearer's discernment that he was also being watched by Jimmy.

That was the last Jimmy saw of the hat for a time.

It had not been visible on the street when he went back to the office of the public stenographer. That, primarily was one reason why Jimmy climbed the stairs. He had inspected that stairway before going back into the lot and behaving as mysteriously as if he had some reason for going there.

He had half hoped to find the black hat and its wearer in the hall on his return, and had given him plenty of time to be there. The wearer of the hat had not been there.

It was even possible—although hardly probable—that the wearer had been in the shoes behind the bookcase. But that theory no longer held good, once Jimmy and Vivian had reached the street.

The wearer of the black hat had been across the street.

Thereafter Jimmy pretended not to see him at all, although he was reasonably sure he had been followed back to the hotel.

The music changed again. Jimmy's thoughts centered upon one Adolphus Smith, to whom the certified check had been made out. He wondered if it had been Adolphus who had been in those huge, disreputable, and slovenly tied brogans which he had seen beneath the bookcase.

Vivian was now playing "A Dream of Love," by Liszt, and Jimmy opened his eyes to film the girl playing it, with a tug and an ache to the left of his "wishbone" that had never been so violently acute and persistent until coming to Coalport.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PRELUDE" BY "TIM" AND "TOM."

INSPECTOR BUGBEE, having failed to gather confirmation of Mike Burns's opinions outside the door of Room 36, danced back into the lobby just in time to see the same saturnine-faced man shamble into the office who had appraised Jimmy Stuart on his arrival in Coalport.

Jimmy, being in a pensive mood as well as in Room 36, was not able to see what Mr. Bugbee saw, and hence unable to understand that the hat this man wore was far blacker than a bat's wing.

It was so much blacker that Jimmy's simile was not even good.

The man wearing it also walked with a slight stoop, like a longshoreman gripping an invisible truck which he was eternally pushing past ahead of him. He was Thomas Tredway, city marshal and ex-freight handler, and the habit of years remained with him despite his elevation to office.

"'Lo, Marshal Tom," greeted Inspector Bugbee. "What brings you here? Ain't they a quorum down to the seegar-store?"

"'Lo, Tim. Why, there ought to be. I've been too busy to go down. Thought I'd drop in and see you on a little matter on my way down. What do you know?"

"A little matter" might mean almost anything. It might even mean that the marshal had dropped in to get a cash stake. Officially his office closed at six. So Mr. Bugbee temporized.

"I don't know much, Tom. What's on your mind?"

"Nothin' much. Say, Tim, what's that young fellow do that come to town about noon to-day and is stopping with you?"

"Stuart?" The marshal nodded. Mr. Bugbee rubbed his chin. "Why, he sells typewriters, I guess, for he's got one in a case with him."

"What makes you think he has? Did you see it?"

"Why, I heard he started in at the bank to sell one. I sent him to Henry Phelps when he asked me the name of the big smoke in Coalport. Phelps is hooked up about as well as anybody that lives here. Mike Burns told me this Stuart tried to sell Henry a typewriter, but only hurt Henry's feelings. Why?"

Although friends and cronies of long standing, they began their interchange like poker-players fiddling around a big jackpot about to be opened. Scenting "action" of some sort with regard to his guest, Mr. Bugbee then and there decided that some one must come to the rescue of his oat-bill note, which was for a hundred dollars, and nearly due.

His inspecting to date had revealed nothing to confirm what Mike Burns had hinted, therefore even the meager dividend of getting Mr. Burns to assent to renewal of the note seemed a long way off. Jimmy had also sidestepped the poker game by retiring to his room.

Mr. Bugbee, however, was still clerk of the Mansion House, and he had been a man of the world before that. Marshal Tredway was paid to police Coalport. He was not. If the marshal wanted information, Mr. Bugbee was a poker-player!

Mr. Bugbee, too, recalled the gift of certain "seegars," which his present financial status forbade his buying by the box. They were the kind of seegars that mellowed a man, and he relit one which he had left behind when he started inspecting.

As he did so, Mr. Bugbee's usually crafty face assumed an expression of utter and childlike candor.

"What kind of a fellow is he?" asked Marshal Tom. "Say, gimme a cigar like you're smoking."

"Why, Tom, he's the kind of a fellow that smokes seegars like these. I'll save

one for you if he gives me two to-morrow. He give me two to-day. I'm saving all my seegar money toward an oat bill."

"You've talked with him quite a little, ain't you?"

"All the spare time he's had, I guess, outside of his business. I talked with him when he registered first; I talked with him both before and after supper; and we'd be talkin' yet, I guess, but he excused himself and went to his room about half past seven to figger up his business and *re*-tire. He seems to be a right smart young man—none smarter."

"Well, if he's smoking such good cigars, and can afford to give 'em to you, how does he buy them?"

"With golden fleece," returned Mr. Bugbee, both placidly and unhesitatingly.

"How many cigars like them you're smoking did he buy with the money he made selling typewriters to Henry Phelps?"

"Did anybody ever buy seegars that ever tried to sell anything to Henry Phelps to git the money with? I will say for Henry, though, that he ain't no tighter than the bark to a tree."

Marshal Tom smiled acidly.

"How many cigars did he buy with the typewriters he sold to your old phaeton out in the back shed?" he waspishly retorted.

Mr. Bugbee inwardly felt like a man in a big "roodle pot" suddenly about to be "called" with only a "kilter"—which is Coalportese for any five cards ranging from the deuce to the nine and including the five, but without anything else, even similarity of color or pairs.

Dissimilarity, indeed, is requisite to the composition of a true kilter, and it is not considered good form among poker-players to be caught with one. It is considered much better form—in fact, it is the hallmark of a real poker-player—first to win the pot and then display the kilter without having to display it before any one wins the pot.

The penalty for bad form regarding kilters is invariably forfeiture of the pot. Mr. Bugbee deftly sidestepped the penalty, for the moment.

"Marshal Tom," said Mr. Bugbee, "I didn't know he did until you mentioned it. I don't know why he went in there, but I'll ask him when I git you that good seegar from him to-morrow. 'Scuse me a minit; I got to fix that furnace."

Mr. Bugbee slipped down to the cellar, banged the furnace door without a pause, slipped up the outside cellar stairs leading into the shed behind to inspect his phaeton, at the same instant Jimmy Stuart dropped from the roof and started across the lot for the Olympian Theater, with the sole object of avoiding being seen by Mr. Bugbee.

Jimmy came to the ground so close to Mr. Bugbee that the clerk could have reached out and touched him.

Only, in the misty darkness, Mr. Bugbee didn't recognize Jimmy at the instant, as he lacked the flaming neckwear he had worn during the afternoon, and thus lost a truly golden opportunity of making two touches—one of and the other from his guest in Room 36—then and there.

It was not until Jimmy emerged from the space between the buildings and on to the lighted street that Mr. Bugbee discerned him well enough to recognize him. By then the crowd forbade the "touch" that Mr. Bugbee might otherwise have made, for it swallowed up Jimmy around the front door of the theater.

Mr. Bugbee in a trice was back in the shed inspecting his phaeton. None of its parts was missing, nor, like those of King Robert, had they been anatomically dismembered in the slightest.

Mr. Bugbee leaped back into the cellar, made enough noise with the furnace to rouse the envy of Vulcan—another Olympian—and came back into the lobby of the hotel to wash his hands ere resuming his "cards."

It was no longer a kilter hand. So he relighted his seegar again and blew the smoke over into the face of the marshal, who glowered down at the feet of him.

The marshal continued to teeter one foot and then the other, until King Robert of Sicily made his appearance before the man under discussion. Then Marshal Tom asked:

"Is this here Stuart a confidence man, Tim?"

"He inspires it in people," said Mr.

Bugbee, " providing they inspire it in him. And if he thinks people deserving of his notice and conversation, he gives 'em good seegars. You hain't got an idea, Marshal Tom, how good these seegars are. Wait till you smoke one of them—you only smelled it yit."

Marshal Tom grunted.

A grunt is something which has been long used. King Robert of Sicily may have used it. It is as yet undefined, in precise terms, although it often substitutes for conversation.

It serves the purpose of a " white chip," pokerishly speaking, when you think the other party to the jack-pot for which the " prelude " is going on has a kilter hand.

CHAPTER IX.

" SHOW-DOWN."

"TIM," said Marshal Tom, " I'll show-down with you on this Stuart for twenty bucks."

" How you going to tell who wins the pot, Tom?"

" The man with the most information, up to the time I come into the door to see you, wins; and we both come clean, all the way."

Mr. Bugbee promptly " covered " the twenty with the one Marshal Tom slapped on the counter, adding: " You know me, Tom." It was one-fifth of the needful oat money, and he had been saving it, as stated. " Dern the automobiles," said Mr. Bugbee to himself, as Tom began reciting his official litany.

" I suspicioned this fellow when he first got off the trolley, cracking to the conductor with a lot of smart stuff and looked at Viv Baldwin when she got off the car. I knew he was up to something. I trailed him, after dinner, all over town. And derned if he didn't ketch me at it. But I ketched him, too. He didn't sell a typewriter to anybody all afternoon—didn't even open his case to show his typewriter. What typewriter salesman ever did that?"

Producing a memorandum, Marshal Tom proceeded to back up his statement by reading a list of firms and individuals called on by Jimmy up to the time he stopped to look at the sign, " Public Stenographer," ere going into the lot.

" First," said Marshal Tom, " he looked at the sign; next, he acted awful suspicious. I knew that Viv wasn't in her office just then, for I'd seen her down by the First National, talking with Mike Burns, just before this fellow came to her hallway."

Mr. Bugbee gazed sorrowfully at his twenty. Tom had good cards. He nodded morosely. " Go on, Tom, what next?"

" Now, Stuart, as he calls himself, didn't go up to Viv's office then? Why?"

" How should I know?" asked Mr. Bugbee, secretly rejoicing as he thought of the same query he would propound to the marshal about the golf that the same man had played on the hotel register!

" You shouldn't know," said Marshal Tom, " unless he told you why he didn't go in there, until after he went back around into the lot and into the shed where your old phaeton is. And you already told me he hadn't told you that—and you'd ask him to-morrow when he give you another cigar."

Mr. Bugbee nodded again.

" Now, whilst he was in that lot, I caught him peeking out at me," said Marshal Tom wrathfully. " And so, of course, I had to vamose. And whilst I did, I said to myself: ' Young fellow, I'll ketch you yet, if you go into Viv's office when you *do* come out of the lot.'

" So I sent a certain party into Viv's office before Viv got back, and with instructions to see and hear, but not to be seen or heard."

" Who was that party?" demanded Bugbee.

" That don't make any difference, Tim. I'm comin' clean with all that I know up to the time when I come in the door to-night, and so are you. That was our agreement."

" It sure was," said Mr. Bugbee. " Go on."

" Before Stuart got back out of the lot, Viv come back up-street, went into her office, and lit her 'lectric light. I was acrost the street and I seen her. Then out comes this smart Aleck, and he goes straight up the stairs and into her office. But he don't try

to sell her a typewriter. Instead, he dictates a fool letter, all about roosters and angleworms, and asks his boss if he ever was an angleworm and if he ever bit a rooster.

"Then he tells Viv to direct the envelope to the letter to Mr. J. N. L. Worth, Miners' Bank Building, Pittsburgh. He pays her, and they go out, after he says she's got some nice books in the case in the corner." Marshal Tom grinned dourly. "And the party that was taking it all in was right behind that there same case," said he triumphantly, "*and he never dreamed it!*"

"Gosh!" tremoloed Mr. Bugbee. "Tom, I don't know; it looks like you got me hooked. But we'll—we'll see!"

"You bet we'll see," said Marshal Tom grimly. "I ain't been down to the game in the cigar-store to-night, Tim, because I been too busy telephoning on long distance down to Pittsburgh. I got the man that's superintendent of that Miners' Bank Buildin on the wire and talked to him. He ain't got a typewriter firm in the building by the name of Worth, or any other typewriter firm. Now, I done all this after trailing him back to the hotel from Viv's office, after he left it with her. Viv seemed to take a lot of stock in him—she laughed and tossed her head when she went away.

"And he stood there, looking around; and then he picked up that case that he hadn't opened all afternoon—not even in *her* office—and come straight back here. And he ain't mailed that letter, either. I knowed that if he went out after supper, you'd know it, because he'd have to come right by your desk to do it."

"When you come in to-night, Tom," equivocated Mr. Bugbee, "he was in his room, just as I told you, because I'd just come down from there the minute you got in. If he went out the door of this hotel since you come in, he must 'a' done it when I was down fixin' that furnace."

"He didn't go out the door," said Marshal Tom, "and he didn't even come down to the office. Now, what do *you* know about him?"

Mr. Bugbee held nothing back, even to the handwriting lecture, and he even mentioned the words, "golden fleece," when pointing to Jason Tredway's signature on the register, some nine weeks before. "I wonder if Jase might know him?" said Mr. Bugbee. "Jase was down to Pittsburgh for a while, wasn't he?"

"Started for there," said Marshal Tom, "but met up with some big New York people in Erie, who gave him a good position. He's travelin' out of New York now most of the time. Mike Burns knows the firm he's with. Jase dropped into town to-night for a short visit. I hardly knowed him. He's growed a mustache; but then, I was so busy with this here smart Aleck and phoning to Pittsburgh to see much of Jase. He's going away to-morrow."

"Well," said Mr. Bugbee nervously, "who wins this pot?"

"I'll call it a stand-off."

From that syllable Mr. Bugbee played his cards like an adept at the great American indoor pastime. He had his failings; but when it came to poker, Mr. Bugbee was an adept without a shadow of dishonesty.

Marshal Tom knew it, and so did every other poker-player in Coalport. And Marshal Tom was also an honest, conscientious, albeit unlettered man, and a hard-working official, famed for keeping Coalport spotless in ethical matters, no matter how much carbon polluted the atmosphere.

By virtue of integrity, his knowledge of human nature and his untiring efforts to anticipate crime, as well as to ferret it out, Marshal Tom was the police force of Coalport, and would be until he retired voluntarily.

So when Mr. Bugbee, instead of picking up his twenty dollars as Tom repocketed his, instead shoved it over toward him with a quiet "You win—this," the proponent of this show-down was fairly petrified at the sheer unexpectedness of it.

CHAPTER X.

"SHADDERED."

SUCH abject surrender was a most suspicious circumstance, for if there was any room for debate, Mr. Bugbee was there like a Daniel Webster who had never read any law but Hoyle.

"You're holdin' out on me," accused Marshal Tom.

"I never used a hold-out in my hull life," rejoined Mr. Bugbee, but without the rancor which such a statement would usually have roused. "I come clean. All the way. You and I agreed to show down on what we knew, up to the time you come in the door—didn't we?"

"We did. And I did."

"And I did, Tom, on my word of honor. So, you win that twenty dollars, and I win enough to cancel my oat bill. But, that ain't saying I expect *you* to pay it!"

"Tim Bugbee, air you aimin' to tell that feller what I told you?"

"Not for forty oat bills. Did I ever tip off a hand at poker?"

The argument could no more be carried on than if the decision had gone against Marshal Tom in the United States Supreme Court. Tom had played poker with Tim. Judges have been known to err—and reverse themselves afterward.

"Then," said Tom, with the courtesy of one who knows he is outgamed at his own game, "what air you aimin' to do, Tim?"

"Meet a note at the bank for a hundred dollars. I had twenty saved up. The note's due to-morrow. You got the twenty. My cards was luckier than yours."

Between sixty dollars and pride, Tom did not waver. He had stood to lose twenty. He had won that amount. The oat bill money was counted out, without a tremor. "Is that enough to call your hand?" asked Marshal Tom.

Mr. Bugbee pocketed it and said that it was ample.

Then he told what he knew and how he knew it, "coming clean" from worry and facts, simultaneously.

"As a livery-stablekeeper, Tom," said the marshal when he had finished, "you air the best poker-player I ever met. My advice is to sell the stable. I can't arrest him. He ain't done a thing that's criminal. He's got a right to make a fool of hisself, under the constitution. He's paid for that room and there's no law against his leavin' it the way he did or going where he wants to go."

"As the police-force, Tom, you're the best freight-handler that ever was promoted to the job, and if you like my poker-playin' so well that you want to buy my livery-stable, I'm open to an offer. Also, I may say, you're the best 'fleece-lined' policeman I ever run up against in my born days—and your name ought to be Jason, instead of your nephew's. If you hain't got enough golden fleece to buy the stable, seein' how Jase is now fixed with such a nice job, mebbe he'd lend it to you."

"What air you aimin' at, Tim Bugbee?"

"Golden fleece. What are you, Tom?" Mr. Bugbee countered.

"I wish I knew where that fellow was, right now, and what he intends doing. I can't arrest him for what he intends to do, even with what information I've got from you this far; but, if I could shadder him, and he started to do anything wrong, or I had reasonable cause to think he was about to do something wrong, I'd grab him and lock him up."

"Mike Burns told me he thought he was one of these advance guards of gangs that rob banks," said Mr. Bugbee. "But that ain't why he dolled up and went out. Didn't you jest tell me that he got off the same car with Viv Baldwin when he rode into town?

"Well, he told me the reason he had that first good seegar to give me, when I told him about Phelps, was that he hadn't give it to a girl he liked well enough to give it to, if the conductor 'd give him an introduction to her—which he didn't. You shaddered him to her office.

"Now, if I can keep that second seegar, Tom, that I promised you one of if he gives me two more, to-morrow, like he did to-day, I'll tell you where he is, right now, and you can shadder him to your heart's content."

Magnanimity sometimes crops up in the most unexpected places.

The marshal accepted. Mr. Bugbee opined that James Stuart had gone to the theater and would be found somewhere near the piano which Miss Baldwin played, and in so doing revealed why he had begun life with one alleged horse and had reached Coalport with enough to stock a livery-

stable, which might be the death of him yet.

Timothy Bugbee, in short, was a very shrewd Yankee. The Uncle Sam part of his face testified to his honesty. The foxy half of it was eloquent of why he was a better poker-player than Tom Tredway.

The marshal rose to go.

" Much obliged, Tim. I'll be back, pretty soon. I'll have him shaddered out of the theater. If he goes home with Viv, well and good. He'll have to come back here from her house, if he's on the level—unless the shadder I set on him finds out something in between that warrants me locking him up."

As " A Dream of Love " came to an end, and as the audience left the Olympian Theater, having witnessed all there was to be seen of King Robert of Sicily when the last of his nine parts dissolved in a " Good Night " surrounded by a wreath of flowers, Jimmy Stuart also departed through the exit nearest the piano in company with Miss Baldwin.

They walked along the side of the building until they emerged on the street in front of the theater at a point just where he had come through the lot.

Marshal Tom was back in the shadows, toward the lot. He saw Jimmy with the girl.

Jimmy didn't know he was still being " shaddered."

He only knew that under the flaming arc lights in front of the theater beyond the point of egress of the crowd who had filed out the front doors and filtered homeward, at the edge of the pavement nearest the curb, squatted an old Sicilian woman with rings in her ears, her skirts spread fanwise around her, grinding out " Maggie Murphy's Home " on an organ, whose age vied with that of the phaeton he had inspected under the shed that afternoon.

Bugbee phaetons were once the pride of the élite. This old woman was anything but élite, as she held up her dirty palm, with an ingratiating smirk, seeking as those ty of the last two people to emer while in the theater.

Miss Baldwin's hand rested lightly on Jimmy Stuart's left arm. He had insisted on " seeing her home." She misunderstood the insistence, for Jimmy was still thinking of the footgear behind the bookcase, with the two brassy eyelets which had stared snakily back at him after he had felt fey.

His late amanuensis and erstwhile mythological ideal was thinking of things that girls have always thought—and always will—when a sturdy young cavalier, garbed with clothes which are in themselves a delicate compliment to her invitation to " get rid of the blues," override protestations which come from the lips and not from the heart.

Seeing the Sicilian woman, Jimmy paused.

Something of his afternoon's audacity smiled on his lips, and Vivian Baldwin was very pleased at the smile. Her experiment, as she thought, had succeeded. On the contrary, Jimmy was still wearing his indisposition inside-out and he was so forlorn as to be almost wobegone.

He stopped. " That tune," said he to Vivian, " is one my father sometimes whistles. He heard it before I was born, I judge, from two men named Harrigan and Hart. Just a second!"

He thrust his right hand into his trouser-pocket where he had transferred the remnants of the change he had received when paying his bill to Clerk Bugbee.

He felt quite safe, for no one else was in sight. If that black hat or those shoes of the bantam were abroad, they were all hiding out. Even the mist had fled and the night was so benignant that it seemed to apologize for the afternoon.

The semiformal evening dress he had donned necessitated the use of a stiff cuff; and as he thrust his hand into his pocket, the crone's greedy eyes, watching up to catch his every gesture from where she squatted beneath him, gleamed like the eyes of a snake as he dropped a coin which would have bought a " seegar " of the brand Mr. Bugbee did not hesitate to term " good."

Ignorant that the blued finish of his concealed automatic had been exposed to the gleam of the overhead arc for the frac-

tion of a second while he fumbled in his pocket for the right coin, Jimmy Stuart walked on listening to Vivian, who said:

"I can't scold you for a good impulse, but, really, that woman has plenty of money—even a bank account. She's a miser and she's the janitor of the building where my office is. Recently she was charged with some petty thefts. She'll do anything underhanded to get money. Marshal Tredway got her with a suspended sentence."

Jimmy nodded. "You never can tell," he bromidically rejoined.

They walked on. Behind them the crone with the hand-organ kept turning the crank. When they rounded the corner and were out of sight, she rose, picked up the organ, and stepped awkwardly but briskly between the theater and the building adjoining.

Keeping on in an opposite direction to that which Jimmy had used in coming from the Mansion House, she paused, at last, at the old shed in which was the Bugbee phaeton.

Walking in, she deposited the organ in what would have been the tonneau of the vehicle had it been an automobile. Two men loomed up near.

They listened to what she said, rather eagerly.

In the darkness one of them gave her a bill. The crone stole away into the night.

CHAPTER XI.

"TABLEAUX" À LA ANGLEWORM!

AT a street crossing where Coalport seemed to come to an end, Jimmy Stuart and Vivian Baldwin turned down a little lane a few yards to a cottage in a group of pine-trees. There was a breeze now, and the air, while cooler, was not too cool.

"This is my home at present," said Vivian, "and I am ever so much obliged to you for coming along."

Commonplace enough words. Yet the native dignity in her tone and the charm of her voice made them glow like rare jewels.

"You are very welcome," said he, turning his face up to the stars to hide things he feared it might hint. He seemed composed enough. And he registered thanks that she didn't gush over the stars and call them "exquisite" to a man who knew they were merely pitiless.

Instead: "I see mother is still up. Would you care to meet her for a moment? She is rather lonely since Brother Norman went away. Oh, I forgot to tell you—the letter which came to-day while you were in my—"

In spite of all resolves, he was again Ulysses. This voyage had hidden furies who lashed the mariner, cruelly. He interrupted her.

"Isn't it rather late to disturb your mother?" he equivocated. "Perhaps, some other time—"

She smiled enigmatically. "The present is the only time we ever know. It was now when we were on the trolley-car. It was now when you dictated—"

"The defiance of an artificial angleworm?" grinned Jimmy.

"—And it's now, now."

As they stepped to the porch, a lady rose to meet Vivian. She had been sitting on a rocker. If his resolutions regarding a young scoundrel calling himself Norman Baldwin had been somewhat less indurated on seeing his sister, they fairly fluxed at sight of the gracious, delicate little lady who was his mother. It was patent, even in the dim light, that she was an invalid.

Jimmy bowed low over her hand, explaining that he had taken the liberty of not taking Miss Vivian's frequent refusals as final, but without saying why he had ignored the obvious proprieties.

Mrs. Baldwin absolved him. "Vivian was telling me of you. I very much wished, at dinner, that I might have the pleasure of seeing you before you left Coalport. You remind me of my son, Norman. He is about your height, I judge, although, perhaps, not quite so heavily built."

Jimmy appeared diffident, but struggled [illegible] knowledge of the needed amenity.

Only too well did he know her son Norman!

Desperately he rose to the occasion, after seating himself in a chair by Mrs. Baldwin's rocker. Enmeshed again, in the net of common courtesy, he replied with the punctilio common to such occasions that he would be very pleased, indeed, to meet the young man, if a suitable opportunity ever arose.

And he meant what he said—although not in the way they understood it—and he hated himself so cordially that he had to do something to relieve the inward pressure or burst into so many parts that King Robert of Sicily would reincarnate through sheer " poison envy."

There was little to do to anything or any one, save the chair on which he sat. It was of wood, with a veneered seat of one piece, punched with various holes, and with rows of big-headed brass tacks around the edge, and a group of them in the center, though a few had become loose at some time and fallen out.

The heads of these tacks were very like the heads of the brass fasteners with which he held together certain papers pertaining to a man who had called himself Norman Baldwin.

To make sure, Jimmy withdrew two of the loose ones from his pocket and tried fitting them in the holes near the center. They seemed made to order for serving as spurious tacks, and he was glad.

He did not spread apart the brass legs of the fasteners, for he wanted some one to pick up that chair some day and have two of these phony tacks fall out—and he wanted whoever did it to wonder how they came to be there.

It was the only revenge he could take!

Being human, he had to have some vent for his feelings when Mrs. Baldwin observed that she hoped the opportunity would " soon arise " for her son to meet one so like him, in so many ways.

" Norman has a lively sense of humor, and Vivian tells me you, too, can make fun when things don't seem to go just right. You boys must be much alike!"

Jimmy, now an automaton in very truth, made replies which passed muster as those of a somewhat bashful yokel, while he fiendishly figured on the astonished and pained perplexity that would appear on the face of the precise and supposedly conscientious face of Mr. Cashier Phelps, when that gentleman discovered what Jimmy Stuart would do to *him,* in return to what had been done to Jimmy—when his plans were fully matured. Phelps was probably in on the game.

" I have a photograph of Norman," said Mrs. Baldwin, placidly, " and I feel that I must offer you a cup of tea before you go, as well as show it to you. The hour is late; otherwise—"

Jimmy rose to go.

He expressed himself in choice terms as to the genuine pleasure he would feel, were it otherwise with " business."

Vivian's laugh drowned his speech, then and there.

" The angleworms are all tucked in their little beds, by now, and even the roosters are with the sand-man." She turned to Mrs. Baldwin:

" Mother, it isn't good form to discuss or reveal business secrets. Otherwise, I wish you could have had a second carbon of that letter! I wanted to scream at every sentence, from start to finish."

" You go and bring Norman's picture out while I make a cup of tea. Mr. Stuart, meanwhile, will consider himself forcibly detained. He must not even rise from that chair until we both return."

Jimmy meekly complied as they went inside.

He peered up the road. The mist had entirely vanished, just as Norman Baldwin had " faded out "—for reasons.

The one thing now to complete his utter discomfiture would be for Norman to come walking back to his mother's hearth—a thing most improbable but not entirely impossible, since Norman might reason that no one would be silly enough to think he was fool enough to do anything like that—after what he had already done!

Then, unless he was actually going " off his chump," some man's figure *was* coming toward the crossing where Coalport ended and this little lane began, and, turning down the lane, toward this, the sole house in it.

Inwardly resolved not to meet the erring son and brother, and about to leap from the chair and sprint anywhere—everywhere

—but to get out of that locality at all hazards, the rash youth who had attempted to emulate Ulysses suddenly faced his erstwhile Circe, who stuck her head through the door, demanding:

"Are you still there?"

"Haven't wiggled," moaned the young man, clutching the legs of his fake tacks beneath the chair-seat, and wondering how futile the automatic up his sleeve could be without its inventor's knowledge.

The figure coming straight down the path was now in full glare of the cluster of Coalport arc lights. Jimmy, on arriving, had thought Coalport the dimmest little town in the world. It was, but not by night.

He felt a sudden relief. Then, paradoxically, the scene of the office bookcase smote him again. What if the wearer of those sinister shoes were coming down the lane?

"In case it is *that* rooster," decided Jimmy, grimly, "I'll be ready!

The deadly weapon came down, responsive to his fluxing of the heavy rubber bands. He balanced it in his right palm.

Then he leaned back and fairly gloated.

"This is rich! Here comes old King Brady himself. He's been jumping in and out on my spoor ever since I first jumped off the trolley."

There was a flash from the figure—a heliograph from the arc lights, whose cousins in front of the Olympian Theater had betrayed the man on the porch.

"With a smoke-wagon sticking out in front, eh?" muttered Jimmy. "Well, Ulysses Indigo, as there's no other house on this line and only two ladies live here, he must be after *you!*"

TABLEAUX VIVANTS.

Characters (off-stage): Mrs. Baldwin—"Vivian, where *is* Norman's latest photograph? I can't find it anywhere!"

(On-stage—upper center, in door leading from porch, bearing cup, half turning to speak over shoulder): Vivian—"Mother, I know *just* where it is, but you can't find it in the dark. Wait a minute, and I'll—"

(On-stage—lower center, coming up porch steps which face door in which stands Vivian, his back to audience, facing Vivian, but looking at a would-be Ulysses and speaking to a man registered as James Stuart): Marshal Tredway—"Hands up!"

(Left-center-stage, otherwise almost in line between Vivian and Tom, sitting in chair, James Indigo Stuart, who obeys as he replies): Jimmy—"Who shot you in the ear with TNT?"

CHAPTER XII.

BAFFLED!

MARSHAL TOM TREDWAY wore the conventional costume of the stage "heavy" from time immemorial—or at least from Tony Pastor's time. He was attired in a black slouch hat, a black mustache, dark clothes, and, as said, carried a deadly and naked weapon. James Indigo Stuart wore a solemn look.

"Please don't speak to me in such a tone as that," replied Vivian, as she turned her head and saw who had spoken. "What on earth is the matter? I'm only bringing a guest of mother's and mine a cup of tea!"

"I'm the little angleworm this big rooster is looking for," said Jimmy gravely. "Don't worry. I'm not looking for him and sha'n't bite him. But, what shall I do with my hands, now they are up?"

"Keep them up. Stand up and turn around. I want that gun that you've got up your sleeve! Excuse me, Miss Vivian. I can't take any chances."

"You've taken all mine!" said Jimmy, complying.

"No back talk."

Marshal Tredway, to emphasize the order, jammed his gun in Jimmy's back. He felt the right sleeve, thoroughly. Then the left.

"All right. Come round in front then," said Jimmy.

Marshal Tredway reddened. Honest to the core, his greatest fault lay in that he took things too seriously, when doing what he thought was his duty.

He fumbled at Jimmy's clothing with a dexterity any detective might have envied, meanwhile repeating: "I said, 'No back talk.'"

"I heard you. But you got me wrong. You ought to do your dictating to Miss Baldwin. I can tell you she's a very competent—"

He stopped, not because of his position,

but because, for the moment he had reincarnated from the angleworm back to Ulysses.

This must be the last time he would see this adorable girl, and he resolved, then and there, to make it the last. To make it the last he must not say anything which might make her feel that he didn't want it to be the last.

Marshal Tredway finally accepted his invitation to "come round in front." He repeated the official attempt to confirm a story told him, for-and-in-consideration-of one-dollar-to-her-in-dirty-hand-paid-lawful-money-of-the-United-States, legally speaking, at the time of payment, and now "awful" money because it had got him into an awful situation.

Right there, Marshal Tom began to suspect every one but the man he was searching futilely. He began with Mr. Bugbee. Mr. Bugbee had done things this night that no living man had ever seen done before by Mr. Bugbee.

The only thing up Jimmy's coat-sleeve was his shirt-cuff.

Neither was there any other semblance of a gun on him anywhere. Still, while things had "gang agley" for the marshal of Coalport, he was far from being as dumb as he looked.

The Sicilian crone had her faults. But, she wouldn't dare lie to Tom Tredway, not even to get a dollar, because he had been instrumental in getting her a suspended sentence for a petty theft, and she was nominally in his custody "on probation."

Besides, he had promised her nothing when he had told her to keep an eye on Jimmy, from her vantage point of the Olympian Theater's front, while he "shaddered" from the rear.

That let out the old crone.

Marshal Tom eyed the chair suspiciously.

He was trying to figure things out. The crone hadn't lied. Then Jimmy must have had the gun up his sleeve when leaving the theater. Marshal Tom had started almost at once after the supposed desperado. He had kept him in view two blocks behind, all the way. Jimmy hadn't done anything but keep on walking with Viv.

Marshal Tom had stopped behind the lights at the last crossing and waited behind a tree, just out of earshot, and watched Jimmy and Viv look at the stars. Jimmy hadn't thrown the gun up to stick on the face of the moon—that much was certain. He had merely walked to the porch.

Marshal Tom eyed the chair suspiciously.

It had slender legs, a veneered seat, save where clusters of brass tacks festooned it, but no gun was to be seen on, under, or near it. Marshal Tom pulled his electric torch and searched the floor. While he did this, Jimmy said:

"The north star seems to be able to hold itself in place again, and I don't want my tea to get any colder than your trail. Here goes!"

Without waiting for permission, he lowered his arms and drank, with the chastened air of an angleworm bravo who has just come to grief.

Marshal Tom came back. "I owe you an apology, sir."

Jimmy looked toward Vivian. She stepped closer.

"Mr. Stuart, may I present Mr. Tredway, who is officially the marshal of Coalport?"

Jimmy grasped the extended hand. "My dear old King Brady, I envy you. I never had a chance in my whole life to fall off the cover and run amuck! Please take a chair!"

He thrust the rocker forward, and Mr. Tredway complied.

Then he tipped up his own for close inspection, apparently.

"I was enjoying this chair of mine so much before the north star began to teeter and threaten to ruin everything—you saw how I had to hold it up? Well, as I was saying, I was enjoying this chair, *so* much!

"It has the loveliest brass tacks all through it. They're like old friends—those tacks. They seem so much like the paper-fasteners I use in business. Heads just the same. See? You could hardly tell them apart."

He gravely held out another of the fasteners, tilted back his chair, and resumed his seat.

The city marshal of Coalport might have

fallen foul of a fate as deplorable as the monarch of Sicily, then and there, had it not been for the entrance of Vivian's mother, registering bewilderment.

"Vivian, I cannot find Norman's photo anywhere! What *can* have become of it?"

"Why, mother, it was on the mantel night before last!"

"Are you sure, dear?"

"Rather. It was the night Mr. Burns called to see me."

If angleworms were not so cold-blooded, Jimmy Stuart might have been said to chill. This time he was emphatically not fey.

Something more noxious, and very much as if he had been King Robert, caught by a faithless subject with his royal dagger in the wrong place, while an assassin's poignard struck for his own wormy heart.

Mention of the name of Burns reminded Jimmy again of the lines: "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley." But that was Bobby Burns. Who was this other Burns who had called on Vivian and why did he call?

Mr. Tredway stirred, uneasily. Jimmy patted his knees as the marshal rose. "Well," said Tom, "I guess I'll be getting back."

Jimmy rose as well. He wanted to get away before he had to gaze on Norman Baldwin's photographic counterfeit.

Vivian came to the rescue of the amenities. "Mother, Mr. Tredway was passing and came up on the porch for a moment."

"Oh!" Mrs. Baldwin fluttered over. "Why, how do you do, Mr. Tredway? Pardon my oversight—I was a little distrait over not finding my son's picture. I suppose it's mislaid."

"I think," said Jimmy, after a decent interval, "that I'll keep Mr. Tredway company back as far as my hotel. Mrs. Baldwin, I believe it is not good form to compliment one to whom you've not been formally introduced.

"Therefore, I must ask you to assure your daughter that the Olympian gods, themselves, never spent an evening in a theater named after them, listening to music written especially for them, and were then privileged to meet with others of their own circle and drink nectar. Much less a salesman—who hasn't sold a thing all day." A long, but needful speech, to square a round but robust angleworm.

Mrs. Baldwin forgot her son's missing picture.

If the metaphor seemed a trifle sophomoric, it was no less sweet to her ears; while the subtle appeal to breeding was evidence that even a salesman may be a gentleman.

Mrs. Baldwin thought so. Being a lady, she didn't say so in so many words. Instead, her farewell was in such good form that Jimmy, for the first time, nearly collapsed. The mother of that scoundrel who called himself Norman Baldwin! It was incredibly more stupefying than sight of the sinister shoes behind the world's best literature.

Mrs. Baldwin retired, mercifully, after making her adieus.

Vivian walked over toward Jimmy, and, under pretense of her farewell whispered: "It was nice of you to be so magnanimous and laugh it off. Mother's physician has warned us all against any shocks to her. Her heart, you know—"

This time the insistent ring of the telephone bell just inside the door saved Jimmy from the same ailment—in a doubly more acute form.

"One moment," whispered Vivian, darting within the house.

"Hooked again!" mentally moaned Jimmy, resuming his seat. He could not flee, after her two words, without turning "good form" into King Robert of Sicily—as exhibited in Coalport—where they also "screened" coal as well as pictures, judging by the color of Marshal Tom's toppiece.

CHAPTER XIII.

"OPEN-SESAME."

AS Vivian called: "Marshal Tom, some one wants to speak to you," and as the marshal went in, Jimmy, for a instant, fumbled with his sleeve, as if the wrinkles that the gun had made needed smoothing out.

And as Vivian emerged and came back toward him, he knew that whatever he had

intended to do or say to a young man calling himself Norman Baldwin must hereafter remain unsaid.

Norman was not the North Star; but; having held up his own hands at Marshal Tom's command to support that planet in theory, Jimmy must now forever elevate them, sight unseen, and behave as if the brother of this girl and the son of his invalid mother had never wabbled once in the orbit from which an honorable young man should never deviate.

"Bobby Burns was right," he told himself. Hereafter he would stick to Walter Scott. If he had started out with "Ivanhoe"—but, again, there were no more castles, only jails held dungeons, and the navy used up all the armor-plate.

Marshal Tredway listened for at least ten minutes, to his message.

How the man he had just searched managed to conjure intelligible conversation in the interim with the girl who had so infatuated him while under such a frightful three-way strain as he was enduring, was more than Jimmy understood, then or afterward.

Yet, in a blind way, he engineered some fragments.

Not that so much was said, for, now and again, they both paused to listen to Marshal Tom, just inside the door, peering out from where he held the receiver and making monosyllabic replies which conveyed nothing of what was conveyed to the marshal, until he suddenly said:

"I'll be right down—yes—with me, now."

Then the worthy officer, who had kept Jimmy in view for all but a fragment of an instant since his spectacular arrival, came out on the porch, glowering in a forbidding way.

"That," said he in a sententious but guarded tone, "was a call from Mr. Bugbee. Viv, can you sneak down with Mr. Stuart and me? Pretend you gettin' medicine, or something?"

"I'll see if mother is asleep. If she isn't —I'll manage it, somehow."

As she went into the house, Tredway turned to Jimmy. His jaw set, hard. "I'm sorry, Mr. Stuart, to have to ask you—"

"But, why include Miss Vivian?"

"Ain't got no option. Dang that Tim Bugbee, anyway. He's in the game down to the cigar-store, and the stuff he wanted to tell me on the telephone, he said he didn't dast to tell me from there; and he didn't dast to go out to telephone me from the hotel, because he didn't dast to tell it to me while I was here. This here is a party-line, and somebody might be listening in. But, he said I *must* bring you both down."

"He knew you were coming up here?" asked Jimmy, much mystified.

"He did."

"And the errand, of course?"

"He knowed that, too."

"Thank you. You didn't find a weapon. I promise never to use one to resist your authority."

"That," said Tredway, "ain't what's worryin' me, a bit. There's a lot of other things—"

Vivian reappeared, wearing a hat whose curves immortalized the man from whose name is derived the word "tantalizing." Jimmy saw, thankfully, that the pins were already in place.

Jimmy had arrived in Coalport, wearing his disposition inside-outside, or the reverse. It was now upside-downside, as well. Marshal Tom, when out of ear-shot of the house, asked:

"Would you mind my asking a few questions, Mr. Stuart? It may help and may hurt. I'm speaking as the marshal of Coalport."

"I'll answer, until my counsel who isn't here to tell me to do what I ought not to do, doesn't," said that harassed young man.

Marshal Tredway didn't ask many questions. Just the name under which he had registered at the Mansion House and if he sold typewriters.

Jimmy facetiously said: "Not in Coalport." Later on under other questions, he told of selling twenty-eight in one day to one man in Pittsburgh.

"Would you mind telling me his name?" asked Marshal Tom.

"Some day," said Jimmy, "when I'm wearing my other necktie. I don't like to discuss business without that necktie."

"Do you always sell them by pulling it off?"

Jimmy said he was bound by no fixed rules in making sales.

Marshal Tom thanked him, gravely, and then said: "Now, Viv, if you don't mind?"

"I'm entirely at your service, Mr. Tredway."

"Viv, I've knowed you sence you was a little girl, but I'm Marshal Tredway, right now."

"I understand." She was walking with her hand on Jimmy's right and her other hand tucked beneath one of the police force of Coalport.

"Who was you talking to down-town this afternoon before Mr. Stuart come to your office, between four and five o'clock?"

"Why, with Mr. Burns, down at the First National Bank."

"Do you mind telling me what about, Viv?"

"Not in the least, Marshal Tom. He was out to our house night before last, calling on me. He knows Norman rather well, you know. And he asked me the other night how Norman was getting on. I told him I hadn't heard from him for some time. He told me when I did to remember him to Norman.

"To-day, when I was going past the bank, he saw me and asked me again. I went in and told him I hadn't heard anything from Norman, yet. Then, he asked if Norman was sick and why he didn't write. I told him I might hear any mail and would be sure to give him Norman's message, as well as his address, when I next heard."

"And then you went back to the office?"

"Yes. And I was in there a little time, and in came Mr. Stuart and began dictating. And then in came the mail-man and left a letter from Norman—but, I haven't seen Mr. Burns since."

"Thank you, Viv, that's all. I can't make head or tail of this, at all. I guess Mr. Bugbee has handed me all the bees in his name. My head feels like it, anyway. Now, Viv, would you mind standing just acrost the street from the cigar-store, whilst Mr. Stuart and I go inside for a minit? We won't be long."

"Can't I go with you? I don't like to stand outside."

"Viv, I think as much of you as I do of my own daughter. If it was her, I'd say: 'No!' to your first question and ask her to please do exactly what her daddy wanted her to do."

"I'll stand wherever you say, Marshal Tom."

"One moment," said Jimmy. "Marshal, if this has anything to do with me, I'm ready to waive any rights I have, take the third degree, or go anywhere you say, rather than have Miss Baldwin annoyed."

Marshal Tom's jaw clamped. "We'll go to the cigar-store, Mr. Stuart, and we'll be back as quick as we can. But, I'm much obliged to you for your offer."

Circe seemed endowed with a new but no less gripping beauty to her Ulysses-by-compulsion who followed Marshal Tredway across the street. No words! Life was made before language.

Marshal Tom raised his hand to give the open-sesame to the open session in the back room. The front of the store was dark. A partition of thin wood ran to the ceiling.

As he did so, Jimmy knew that the hour had come to carry out his resolution to uphold a young man, no matter what transpired when they met, and treat him as if he had never wabbled in his orbit any more than the north star had really "teetered," when Jimmy had put up his hands on Mrs. Baldwin's porch.

His half-expectation that Norman, after writing Vivian, might come brazenly back to his mother's home, had not borne fruit. Norman hadn't come. The reason he hadn't was because Mr. Bugbee, purveyor-extraordinary to the poker-game, had found some one with more golden fleece upon which to experiment in procuring "oat money" than the guest assigned Room No. 36 at the Mansion House.

Mr. Bugbee was, even now, engaged in raising oat money, and "raising" a young man giving the name of Norman Baldwin, at one and the same time. Those voices came clearly through that thin partition in the midst of the universal hush of

the other players, as Marshal Tredway's official hand fell on the door with its unofficial signal.

CHAPTER XIV.

PROVING " BOBBY BURNS " WAS " RIGHT "!

THE door opened.

Marshal Tom walked in first. Jimmy followed, and the door closed.

The man who had opened it did not even glance their way.

Nor did any of the players.

Around the circular table, with its green-baize top and its seven niches for chips, were the faces of three men that Jimmy confronted, quarter-profiles of two more, and the backs of two more.

In the center of the three who faced Jimmy was Mr. Bugbee.

On Mr. Bugbee's right hand sat the " bantam."

On Mr. Bugbee's left sat the man calling himself Norman Baldwin, but in the six weeks that had elapsed since Jimmy had set eyes on him, he had undergone an astonishing metamorphosis.

His mustache was a very lusty infant for that age, and the barber who now shaved him stopped when half-way up each cheek, as if to encourage the hair on the temples by not further intimidating it by proximity to a razor.

He also wore a pair of horn spectacles containing lenses of very low magnifying power.

Jimmy waited, wordlessly. So did Marshal Tom, much to his surprise, until he remembered the unwritten law of poker-players. No man in a pot must have his attention distracted.

Mr. Bugbee appeared slightly abstracted, when his protagonist, with the spectacles, kept coming back at him, iterating his " once more " with nefarious surety.

The bantam and the others were also mere spectators, but no less intent on the outcome.

Mr. Bugbee rubbed his chin. " Take the golden fleece, Jason," said he with mythical politeness.

" Tim, may I speak to you in private jest a minit before you chip in the next pot?" asked Marshal Tredway.

Mr. Bugbee got up and started around the poker-table.

The light over it was hung very low to hide faces and reveal hands, cards, and chips.

Mr. Bugbee, therefore, did not see Jimmy, who was standing to the left of and a little behind Marshal Tredway. Neither did the bantam who, with the other players was watching the winner rake in a goodly store of chips, without taking the trouble to stack them.

Instead, he smiled, in a self-complacent and superior way, as if Coalport sports were, indeed, only an imitation of those from whom he had gathered fleece in the city where Jimmy had last seen him.

Half-way around to the marshal, espying Jimmy for the first time, Mr. Bugbee screeched: " Well, well, well! How's the stranger? So, you got tired of golf and come down to set in a little while, did you? Here's a telegram that come after you went out—I mean to bed."

Jimmy took it, shaking his head and keeping his eyes on the winner of the last pot. Just what lay behind so many cross-rifts of events and the curious eddies of human lives, aside from his own, he could not conjecture. He was in as utter ignorance of this visit or why Bugbee, according to the marshal, had insisted that it be made by both Vivian and himself, as was the winner of the last pot that he was no longer to be considered anything save a twin brother to the North Star—in Jimmy's esteem.

Whereupon, then and there, everything that had occurred before or since Jimmy Stuart came to Coalport which concerned these matters seemed immediately to vindicate the remark of Burns about the " best laid schemes o' mice an' men," and also seemed to " gang agley " at the same time.

And, it wasn't really " good form."

For there were so many things involved—animate and inanimate, elements, events, emotions — that it was much the same as if everything and everybody had been eating TNT all along, and had all decided to explode together.

Beginning with golden fleece, Indigo, King Robert, angleworm, golf, and the soft-shelled Slovak cravat.

Continuing with Circe and Ulysses, car-conductors and soot, not forgetting Cashier Phelps and his able aid, Mr. Mike Burns.

Adding to all the foregoing, one phaeton, one hand organ, one pair lace shoes with two brass eyelets, the world's best literature, Marshal Tom, Clerk Tim, as well as the latter's latent abilities as an "inspector."

It was extremely fitting, therefore, that Mr. Bugbee, having cornered all the loose inspection in and around the Mansion House a little earlier in the evening, should now try to give everything that deft, mutilated appearance which only King Robert of Sicily could display heretofore, when exhibited in Coalport.

Mr. Bugbee, in short, touched off all the unsuspected TNT by merely mentioning "stranger," "golf player," and "telegram."

Yet, his motives were pure as the driven snow.

It is not "good form" to mention a man's name in a poker room on the occasion of his first visit, even if you know it.

Such carelessness has been known to breed complications, which subsequently prevent "regulars" from gathering golden fleece from others or each other.

In this instance, nevertheless, Mr. Bugbee's rigid adherence to the proprieties of poker-room etiquette bred an immediate explosion—and a terrific one—not of itself, wholly; but chiefly originating in Jimmy Stuart's facetious habit of wearing his disposition inside-out or *vice versa* on coming into Coalport.

Hence, no real blame can be attached to Mr. Bugbee for what next happened.

The North Star, alias a scoundrel who had given the name of Norman Baldwin, hearing Mr. Bugbee mention "stranger," "telegram," and "golf-player," suddenly peered across the table and into the eye of Alias the Angleworm, who was standing by Marshal Tom, but a little to the left and behind him.

The scoundrel rose, slowly, and kept looking at Jimmy, his face, where visible, taking on a hue like mud and mustard, mixed.

As Jimmy took the telegram from Mr. Bugbee, the scoundrel dropped his hand to his hip-pocket and whipped out an ugly, murderous pistol, while Marshal Tredway —to whom all of Mr. Bugbee's maneuvers were equally as perplexing as to Jimmy— was watching that transaction instead of what was happening on the other side of the poker table. Tom Tredway was wondering who had sent that telegram; what was in it; if Mr. Bugbee had read it, and was now on tap with another "tip" to him, as the police force of Coalport, to "jug" his man.

All of the other habitués of the game, including the bantam, were likewise looking at the drama on the side.

But the man who raised the pistol did not aim at Alias the Angleworm at all. Jimmy didn't know why, any more than he facetiously guessed he might have changed himself in and out so many times since coming into Coalport that even Norman Baldwin didn't know him.

That idea, however, was self-evidently more preposterous than many things which Jimmy had since done had appeared to be to Marshal Tom—at whom the weapon was actually leveled.

"You dirty, white-livered, double-crossin', *blankety-blank-blank!*" gritted the pistol-holder. "You *will* write me a letter, 'hoping to see me at home soon'—and then try to frame me, cold, for my wad!"

The roar of a pistol filled the room.

Shock!

Then, the deadly, noxious fear which petrifies all right-thinking men who are numbed by the intrusion of death—which ever stalks in the midst of life, unseen.

Aftermath of amazement. No one killed.

Instead, a scoundrel, who would have died in his tracks but for an invalid mother and a lovely, sympathetic sister, was reeling back with clanging pistol echoing up from the floor, while he clasped the hand from which it had been cleanly shot away by an extremely good bit of shooting from the man standing by Marshal Tredway, who had to shoot between the heads of two other poker players to do what he had done

—and whose nerves since coming to Coalport had been taut and strained rather badly.

And he had shot with the same pistol which the marshal of Coalport, who had known he had it, had searched and failed to find; and who had, thereafter, watched him like a hawk to see that it hadn't subsequently been retrieved—for the marshal was "an old bird." Being such, he now ignored Jimmy's miracle in his behalf, as if he had never sought that weapon, at all.

Came a shower of tattoos on the door, signifying that open-sesame had exploded, too.

Marshal Tom raised a warning hand. The stillness of death already hovered over the room, suffused with the acrid stench of gunpowder.

"*Norman, open the door!*" came a woman's voice, anxious yet not panicky.

Marshal Tredway looked reproachfully at Mr. Bugbee. "Take back them bees you give me out'n your name a while back 'nd gimme the bugs, instead. I like 'em better. And I need 'em. I told Viv where to stand but not where to stay."

His voice trembled a little.

Either the push-button controlling the lock on the door next blew-up or some one leaned on it, for in came Vivian. Directly opposite her was the wounded man, toward whom Mr. Bugbee was looking without replying to Marshal Tom's request.

CHAPTER XV.

PROVING MIKE BURNS WAS "WRONG."

MR. BUGBEE seemed to need a little "inspecting" himself.

At least his eyes wandered over to the craven leaning against the wall, with a pistol lying at his feet, who was moaning like a mewling kitten while trying to bandage a slightly-injured hand which bled freely, when he should have been giving thanks that he had not murdered another in an ignorant rage bred of a total misapprehension of the facts and the appearances.

Toward him Vivian glanced casually, lifting her shoulders in the slightest of shrugs as if such a thing was to be expected, and then she looked over toward Jimmy with the recent anxiety in her eyes dying before a diviner emotion.

At which, the bantam, himself hungrily seeking a second glance from her, turned livid. Beads of sweat sprang out under the crest of reddish hair on his narrow forehead, brushed back ridiculously like a bantam cockerel's "comb."

Mr. Bugbee seemed unable to forget what had been told him in a spirit of levity earlier that evening, in spite of what had happened so utterly antipodean, an instant before. Mr. Bugbee seemed to insist on taking Jimmy Stuart's lecture on "handwriting" seriously, in spite of having just before already "blown the whole works" with nothing stronger than his good intentions.

Jimmy wasn't so sorry, for it served to divert, for the nonce, his need of looking at Vivian Baldwin after shooting her brother in the hand to keep him from shooting Marshal Tredway.

As Mr. Bugbee, therefore, spoke again, Jimmy Stuart tore open and read his telegram.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Jason," sepulchrally whispered the Mansion House clerk to the craven with the bleeding hand, "what do you want to pull a gun on your uncle, Marshal Tom, for? Ain't he raised you from a baby? Ain't he fed ye, clothed ye, and bore with ye, year after year? Your Uncle Tom wasn't after that golden fleece you got—*I* was the one!"

Just here two things struck Jimmy Stuart more forcibly than had his discovery of the shoes behind the world's best literature in Vivian Baldwin's office. One was the name on the register at the Mansion House, which had inspired his own "lecture" on handwriting to Mr. Bugbee — the name written there as Jason Tredway.

The other was due to the telegram which he had just read.

In fact, things cleared up like magic, since the sooty mist that had beclouded Coalport since his arrival had evidently left for some other old port.

The man he had supposed, all along, to be Norman Baldwin was not Norman, at all—he was the marshal's own nephew—

and, from Mr. Bugbee's short but no less impressive statement, a scapegrace for years.

Hard on this came fresh TNT explosions.

Vivian spoke, addressing Marshal Tom, reproachfully.

"Marshal Tom, are you still in official character?"

"No, Viv. Why?"

"Did you have any news from Norman? I thought he was in here, and you wanted to give me a surprise. His letter, you know—the one I got this afternoon when Mr. Stuart came into the office—says he will be home in the morning."

Then, for the first time, she caught sight of the bantam.

"Oh, Mr. Burns. I was wondering when I'd see you, or if I would before Norman saw you, himself. Now, you know what you asked me. By the way, did you see anything of a photo of Norman's that was on the mantel when you called night before last?"

The bantam made as if to rise.

Jimmy stepped forward. Until this instant he had not known the bantam was Burns. Knowing it, he now knew much more than any one else.

"Sit down, Mr. Burns! and keep your hands on the table—*in plain sight.* That's the idea. Now, please remember there is a lady present—and don't try to put your hands under the table nor pick up that gun Jason just dropped. Jason, you sit down, too."

Mike sat down, with a feeble air of a bantam defying a mere worm which he has held in high disdain from the first; but the man who had spoken knew his bravado was leaking faster than the blood dripping from Jason's hand, although the bank teller demanded: "Are you a detective? If you are, show me your authority!"

"Cackle to my other necktie during business hours, to-morrow. I'm too busy, or going to be."

Jason started to speak.

"No, he ain't a detective—he's—"

"Silence!" said the man who had shot the pistol from the would-be murderer's deliberate hand. "I'm— Well, at present no matter who I am. I'm the merry little angleworm that's running this show, until Marshal Tredway sends every one but you two scamps home. Mr. Bugbee and Miss Baldwin may remain, for a moment, if they wish to do so."

When they had gone, Jimmy invited Miss Baldwin to sit down.

"Now," said he, "let me first explain to you that yesterday Mr. Burns mailed Norman's missing photograph to Pittsburgh, to a certain banker, in the hope of detecting a trace of a crime in which he recently took part. That photograph was received by the banker, who has just wired me that this photograph of Norman Baldwin is *not* the photograph of the Norman Baldwin whose name was mentioned in a certain quite glowing letter, setting forth that gentleman's impeccable character, and trustworthiness, typed on First National Bank letterhead, and purported to be signed by Cashier Henry Phelps."

"Why," gasped Vivian, "Mr. Burns dictated that letter to me in my office, some six weeks or so ago, and told me that he was going to get Norman a good position. Didn't Norman get it?"

"This other young man got it—at least he presented it, through me, to a certain bank in Pittsburgh, after I introduced him there; and after he had first bought twenty-eight typewriters from me in one order—the first day I started to sell them," said Jimmy, with a rueful smile.

He looked over at Jason Tredway. "Your hand needs bandaging, but it will get well more quickly if you have a clear conscience," said he. "Do you want to listen to me—and correct me if I don't get things quite right?"

"I won't lie no more, for nobody," said Jason, with a vengeful glance toward Burns.

"It won't do any good if you do. Now, Jason, you didn't buy those twenty-eight typewriters I sold you for yourself or with your own money, did you? You bought them for that rascal of a stock-broker, John Snodgrass, and with his money, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"But, you told me when you bought them that your name was Norman Bald-

win; that you came from Coalport, and that you knew Mr. Henry Phelps, cashier of the First National since you were a little boy, didn't you?"

Jason bowed his head.

"And, afterward, I introduced you, with the letter you had from the Coalport First National Bank, to a certain bank in Pittsburgh, did I not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Never mind the name of the bank or the man I introduced you to," said Jimmy, with a wry smile. "That will come later. I want Marshal Tredway to know the facts. And, after that, you came, one day, to the bank and opened an account, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the cashier read your letter and also called up the First National and asked for Mr. Phelps, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who answered that telephone call?"

Jason looked at Burns. "I thought you told me they couldn't find anything out—that Snodgrass told you this here fellow was a boob?"

"Answer my question, please," said Jimmy.

"Mike Burns answered it, and said that he was Phelps and that the letter was O. K."

"And afterward, you dropped in to the bank, one day, and asked the president to meet a certain Adolphus Smith, who had a check for twenty-eight thousand dollars on a certain bank account—you did that, too, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much money had Snodgrass given you to put into that bank in your own name?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

Just here Mr. Bugbee nearly expired at the mere thought of so much golden fleece and all the oat money it would buy for a livery stable owner, who had to play poker to keep his loved animals from famine.

He automatically resuscitated himself, however, through sheer curiosity to learn how such a scamp as Jason could have become such a man-of-the-world since Mr. Bugbee had come to Coalport.

"Did the president grant your request?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Adolphus Smith got his check certified?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did that check go?"

"To Mr. Snodgrass's office."

Jason, under the probe, then told how he had subsequently checked back to Mr. Snodgrass forty-nine thousand dollars, being allowed the other thousand for his "work"; how Mike Burns got a similar amount; and how Mike, who had run down overnight to Pittsburgh for an hour on Saturday—always a busy half day in a big city bank—had impersonated Adolphus and had been likewise given a thousand, ere returning to the culm-banks and the other bank that festooned and adorned Coalport.

"This telegram," said Jimmy to the marshal, "tells how the detectives of the Bankers' Protective Association have also captured Snodgrass, with the loot, in St. Louis. He's the last of a bad gang of professional, master check-raisers, at large. You may lock up Mr. Burns, for he's a bad egg. The man whose account was robbed, with a check raised from twenty-eight dollars to twenty-eight thousand, will not press any charge against your nephew, if you will be responsible for him and have him appear before the grand jury, when his testimony is needed."

"Gosh!" said Mr. Bugbee, when the other three had gone out. "This here poker game makes me think of the ten-little-Injun game I used to play, when a kid. There was seven of us little Injuns playin' for the golden fleece. Long comes Tom and you and makes nine. Then, in busts Viv—makin' ten. And now, there's only three of us little Injuns left."

CHAPTER XVI.

AND STILL "ALIAS."

"MR. BUGBEE," said Marshal Tom next morning to the clerk of the Mansion House, on whom he "dropped in" a little before noon, "what on earth ailed you, last night, when you phoned out to

Miss Baldwin's 'nd insisted that I bring Viv and Mr. Stuart down to that poker game?

"You like to got me all jammed up and all shot up, too. Jase, he afterward told me that this young Stuart fellow took him out to the links, to see him play golf. And when you mentioned 'golf-player' and 'telegram'—you made Jase think, when he first looked up and seen Stuart, that I had brought Mr. Stuart down there to 'rest my own nephew!"

Inspector Bugbee bridled.

"Why, Tom, I was doing some detective work, myself, before you come in here last night and asked me a lot of questions. I told you what Mike Burns told me. Afterward, I told you how I seen Stuart go off'n the roof. Then that old organ-grindin' shadder you set on him told you he had a gun up his sleeve. Then, thinking he might be a burglar, you started out after him—is that right?"

"So far, yes."

"After you'd gone, I went down to the poker game. And there set Jase, and he had such a lot of this yere 'golden fleece' that I begin to smell a rat. I remembered how Stuart was pointing to Jase's name and talking about golden fleece 'nd playing golf with toothpicks. And I says to myself, and then I also took time to tell Mike, on the side, that I suspected he wasn't no burglar, *but he was a detective.*

"And Mike said I might be right, but he hoped I was wrong; because *he'd* heard that Norm Baldwin was mixed up in some jam down in a bank in Pittsburgh. *Then,* I telephoned you. For I wanted you to have Viv come down with you, and let Mike tell *her* what he'd just told *me,* in front of *you.* And, I wanted to see if it couldn't be squared, 'nd the detective run out of town.

"You never can fergit them kilter hands, even when you're trying to help somebody," said Marshal Tredway, morosely. "You send me hell-hootin' after a feller that had a gun up his sleeve, all the time, but *I* couldn't find it. Supposin' he'd had it there when I looked, and *I* took it away from him and *then* brought him down, as you said? Where'd I be, right now?"

Mr. Bugbee rubbed his chin. "'Twan't no kilter hand, for I had good cards, all the way. And how'd I know Jase was in Dutch again? Didn't you tell me he was workin' for a New York firm and Mike Burns knew 'em? Say, how come you to overlook that gun, anyway?"

"Lucky for me you told me one thing true," said Marshal Tredway. "You said Stuart was a smart fellow. He was and is and he's a good fellow, too, 'nd a darn good shot on top of it—or I wouldn't be here. Why, he seen me comin' down to the house. It seems he already had a couple of these long-legged brass fasteners he uses in his business, stuck through the chair-bottom Seein' me coming with my own gun out, he slipped his, which was on two big, broad, thick, rubber bands, *underneath* the chair-bottom, spread out the fastener legs, and then let me make a monkey of myself."

"How'd he get it back on him, agin?"

Marshal Tom snorted. "Why, Mr. Bugbee, he done that little trick after I'd watched him like a hawk to see that he didn't do anything like that, because you telephone. As a town marshal, I call you a *good* detective—for my back wasn't turned a minit, except then."

"Thank you, Tom. I'm only a liveryman and a pore one. That's why I play poker with you to get oat money."

"You're the best liveryman that ever harnessed up the bee in your name to the bug in the other half of it, hitched them both to a lot of wild ideas, and then drove a town marshal half crazy by invitin' him to ride with you, for just one evening. You was kilterin' all the time. But, Stuart's a white boy—all the way—and modest."

"All but the neckties," amended Mr. Bugbee. "But, I like to hear you talk about kilterin', when you don't know his right name, yit."

"Neither do you!" challenged the marshal. "And I'll lay a bet, right now, you don't."

"I know his right alias. It's the 'big smoke.'" Mr. Bugbee seemed to enjoy baiting his friend.

"No 'tain't. He's Alias the Angleworm. I know he wrote a letter, yesterday, in which he told his boss he was an angleworm and was out to bite a certain rooster, if he crossed his trail. Sounded plumb

foolish, last night. But to-day, well, Mr. Bugbee, you can git some lunch ready for Mike Burns, whenever you want to. He's in jail."

"You got me wrong on that kilter, all the way," chuckled Bugbee. "When I called this Alias the Angleworm the 'big smoke' this morning, he was scared plumb to death. Give me a *hull box* of them seegars not to mention his real name—and I don't even know it. Smoke?"

He held one over the desk and Marshal Tom forgave and forgot after the first puff. As a poker player Mr. Bugbee was a connoisseur of good tobacco.

Norman Baldwin, his sister, and Jimmy were sitting in the office near the world's best literature when Jimmy mentioned the one mysterious incident as yet unsolved since he had come to Coalport.

He spoke of the shoes.

"What shoes?" asked Vivian.

He told her, and Norman looked very thoughtful during the recital.

"It couldn't have been Burns," said the returned brother, who had been in Peru with an engineering project harnessing a waterfall for some four months.

"No," said Jimmy, "it wasn't Burns, because he was in the bank, and there isn't any other member of their gang in Coalport. But, who else in town—"

Vivian suddenly grew hysterical.

Norman rushed for water, and, while he was getting it, Alias the Angleworm found himself "hooked again" in trying to support the young lady, who seemed fairly obsessed by the shoes and what they signified.

Try as he would to get back to selling typewriters, Jimmy simply couldn't until Vivian's streaming eyes were filled with laughter instead of tears, and by the time Norman gave her a drink of water, she calmed enough to solve the sole remaining mystery.

"Yes, they're a man's shoes, *but a woman wears them.* That old Sicilian miser that was turning the crank on that horrid organ last night—don't you remember, I told you she was the janitress of this building? She is always snooping around!"

"I wish to announce," replied Jimmy, "that I have just acquired another alias. I am now King Robert—in more parts than I thought I had last night when I refused to look at myself wearing my dagger in the wrong place. Being what I now am, I shall refuse to bite *that* old rooster!"

Vivian went off into another gale of laughter so infectious that Jimmy joined. But Norman still looked thoughtful. "It was mighty good of you to stick by a chap's sister, when you thought her brother was a rotter."

"I had to," said Jimmy. "I had no choice. You see, my name isn't James Stuart; and I'm really an angleworm, because my father is the man that manufactures the typewriter that I don't sell in Coalport; and he owns the bank in Pittsburgh to which I don't introduce strangers wearing your name any more; and he said I must worm this out from every angle—no matter where it led. The shoes stood in that corner of the room—you can see the angle under the world's best literature."

"That's all nonsense, you know," said Norman, warmly. "See here—don't minimize yourself. We all like you better as you are."

"You haven't heard it all. My father also puts the soot in the Coalport air that Tom Tredway rubs in his hat, by chasing me around the streets so fast he sets up a whirlwind that brings it all down on his devoted head."

Norman grinned, threw up his hands, and declared: "Jimmy, you're incorrigible."

"So father tells me, and I wish you'd tell me something. You own those books in the corner. Is there anything in them that tells anything authentic about how a chap can get rid of a fellow who's brother to the sister that the chap likes? I've been trying to do that all morning with you.

"If you admire me for being such a devoted little angleworm, why don't you rush out and ask the ones under Mr. Bugbee's phaeton if I'm what I seem to be, or if I'm merely the echo of that necktie I wore yesterday? I want to tell your sister my real name. She *thinks* I'm merely—well—what I *know* I am when I look at *her!*"

(The End.)

He Swallows Gold

by H. Bedford-Jones

I.

"WE all of us," said Huber Davis reflectively, "like to show off *how* we do things; we like to tell people about our methods; we like to exposit our particular way of managing affairs. Each of us thinks he is a little tin god in that respect, Carefrew. That's the way of a white man. A Chinaman, however, is just the opposite. He does *not* want to show his methods. He does things in a damned mysterious way—and he never tells."

Carefrew sucked at his cigarette and eyed his brother-in-law with a sneer beneath his eyelids. Only a few hours previously Carefrew had landed from the coasting steamer, very glad indeed to get out of Batavia and parts adjacent with a whole skin. His wife was coming later, after she had straightened up his affairs, and he would then hop aboard the Royal Mail liner with her, and voyage on to Colombo and Europe. Ruth Carefrew, however, knew little about the deal which had sent Carefrew himself up to Sabang in a hurry.

"You seem to know a lot about Chinese ways," said Carefrew.

"I ought to," admitted Huber Davis placidly. "I've been dealing with 'em here for the past ten years, and I've built up a whale of a business with their help. You, on the other hand, got into a whale of a mess through swindling the innocent Oriental—"

"Oh, cut out the abuse!" broke in Carefrew nastily. "What are you driving at with your drivel about Chinese methods? I suppose you're insinuating that they'll try to get after me away up here at Sabang?"

"More than likely," assented Huber Davis. "They have fairly close connections, what with business tongs and the Heaven-and-Earth Society, which has a lodge here. They'll know that the clever chap who carried out that swindling game in Singapare, and then managed to put it over the second time in Batavia, is named Reginald Carefrew. They'll have relatives in both places; probably you rained a good many of their relatives—"

"Look here!" snapped Carefrew nastily. "Let me impress on you that there was no swindle! The Chinese love to gamble, and I gave 'em a run for their money—that's all."

Huber Davis eyed his brother-in-law with a trace of cynicism in his wide-eyed, poised features.

"Never mind lying about it, Reggy," he said coolly. "You'll be here until the next boat to Colombo, which is five days. In those five days you take my advice and stick close to this house; you'll be absolutely safe here. I'm not helping and protecting you, mind, because I love you—it's for Ruth's sake. Somehow, Ruth would be sorry if you got bumped off. No one else would be sorry that I know of, but Ruth's my sister, and I'd like to oblige her. I don't order you to stay here, mind that! It's merely advice."

Under this lash of cool, unimpassioned truths Carefrew reddened and then paled

again. He did not display any resentment, however. He was a little afraid of Huber Davis.

"You're away off color," he said carelessly. "Think I'm going to be a prisoner here? No. Besides, I honestly think there's no danger, in spite of your apprehension. The yellow boys have nothing to be revengeful over, you see."

"Oh," said Huber Davis mildly. "I understood that several had committed suicide back in Batavia. That makes you their murderer, according to the old beliefs."

Carefrew laughed; his laugh was not very good to hear, either.

"Bosh!" he exclaimed. "Those old superstitions are discarded in these days of New China. You'll be saying next that the ghosts of the dead will haunt me!"

"They ought to," retorted Huber Davis. "So you think the old beliefs are gone, do you? Well, we're not in China, my excellent Reggy. We're in Sabang, and the Straits Chinese have a way of clinging to the beliefs of their ancestors. You stick close to the house."

"You go to the devil!" snapped Carefrew.

Huber Davis merely shrugged his shoulders, as though he had received all the consideration which he had expected.

"Li Mow Gee," he observed, "is the biggest trader in these parts, and I know he has a raft of relatives back your way. I'd avoid his store."

Carefrew, uttering an impatient oath, got up and left the veranda.

Huber Davis glanced after his brother-in-law, a sleepy, cynical laziness in his gaze. One gathered that he would not care a whit how soon Carefrew died, except possibly that his sister Ruth still loved Carefrew—a little. And except, of course, that the man was his own brother-in-law, and at the ends of the earth a white man upholds certain ideas about caste and the duty of white to white, and so forth.

II.

SINGAPORE is called the gateway of the Far East, but the real portal is the free-trade island harbor of Sabang, at the northern end of Sumatra.

At Sabang even the mail-steamers stop, coming and going. From England and India, coal is dumped at Sabang; the wharves and floating docks are many and busy; the cables extend from Sabang to all parts of the globe.

From the harbor heads runs brilliant blue water up to the brilliant green shores, and under the hill is snugly nestled a city whose Chinese streets convey a dull-red impression. Here, as elsewhere, the Chinese are the ganglia of trade and activity. The Dutch government likes them and profits by them, and they profit likewise.

One of the narrow Chinese streets turns sharply, almost at right angles, and is called the Street of the Heavenly Elbow for this reason. At the outside corner of the elbow is a door and shop sign, opening upon a narrow room little wider than the door; but behind this is another room, widening as one goes farther from the elbow, and behind this yet another room which broadens into a suite of apartments.

Such was the shop of Li Mow Gee. As is well known, Li is one of the Four Hundred surnames, and betokens that its owner is at least of good family, also widely connected. Li Mow Gee was both; to boot, he was very rich, considerably dissipated, and his private affairs were exactly like his shop—they began at a small and obscure point, which was himself, and they widened and widened beyond the ken of passers-by until they comprised an extent which would have been incredible to any chance beholder. But Li Mow Gee saw to it that there were no chance beholders of his private affairs or shop either.

Li Mow Gee was not the type of inscrutable, omnipotent gambler who somehow manages to control fate and carry out the purposes of destiny, such as appear to be many of his race. He prided himself upon being a "son of T'ang"—that is, a man of the old southern empire whose ancestry was quite clear and unblemished through about nine centuries.

He was a slant-eyed, yellow-skinned, wrinkled little man of fifty. He had a bad digestion and an irritable temper, he was much given to rice-wine and wives, and he possessed an uncanny knowledge of the

code of Confucius, by which he ruled his life—sometimes.

Upon the day after Reginald Carefrew arrived in Sabang the estimable Li Mow Gee sat in his private back room, which was hung with Ch'ien Lung paintings, whose subjects would have scandalized Sodom and Gomorrah. Li Mow Gee sucked a three-foot pipe of bamboo and steel, and watched a kettle of water bubbling over a charcoal brazier. At the proper moment he took a pewter insert from its stand, slipped it into its niche inside the kettle, and watched the water boil until the pewter vessel was well heated. Then he poured hot rice-wine into the thimble-cup of porcelain at his elbow, sipped it with satisfaction, and clapped his hands four times.

One of the numerous doors of the room opened, to admit a spectacled old man who was a junior partner of Li Mow Gee in business, but who was also Venerable Master of the local lodge of the Heaven-and-Earth Society. As etiquette demanded, the junior partner removed his spectacles and stood blinking, being blind as a bat without them.

"As you are aware, worshipful Chang," said Li Mow Gee after some preliminary discourse, "my father's younger brother has become an ancient."

Mr. Chang bowed respectfully. A son of T'ang never says of his family that they are dead. But Mr. Chang had heard that Li Mow Gee's father's younger brother had committed suicide, with the intent of sending his avenging ghost after one Reginald Carefrew.

"You are also aware," pursued Li Mow Gee, refilling the steel bowl of his pipe, "that the brother-in-law of my friend Huber Davis has arrived in Sabang for a short visit. As a man of learning, you will comprehend that I have certain duties to perform."

Mr. Chang blinked, and promptly took his cue.

"You doubtless recall certain canons of the law which bear upon the situation," he squeaked blandly. "It would give me infinite pleasure to hear them from your lips."

Li Mow Gee had been waiting for this. He exhaled a thin cloud of smoke, and quoted from his exact memory of the writings of the Confucian canon:

> "With the slayer of his father, a man may not live under the same sky; against the slayer of his brother, a man must never have to go home to seek a weapon; with the slayer of his friend, a man may not live in the same state."

Li Mow Gee smoked for a moment in silence, then continued:

"Thus reads the Book of Rites, most venerable Chang. And yet our friend Huber Davis is our friend."

"If the tiger and the ox are in company," quoth Mr. Chang squeakily, "let the ox die with the tiger."

"Not at all to the point," said Li Mow Gee in irritated accents. "Do not be a venerable fool, my father! I desire that a messenger be sent to my bazaar."

"Speak the message, beloved of heaven," responded the elder.

"In our safe," said Li Mow Gee slowly, "is a three-armed candlestick of white jade, bound in brass and having upon its three arms the characters signifying chalk, charcoal, and water. It is my wish that this precious object be taken to my bazaar and placed there near the door, with a sign upon it putting the price at nine florins; also, that our clerks be severely instructed to sell this object to no one except Mr. Carefrew."

Mr. Chang wet his lips.

"But, dear brother," he expostulated, "this is one of the precious objects of the Heaven-and-Earth Society."

"That is why I desire your permission to make use of it," said Li Mow Gee. "Am I to be trusted or not? Is my sacred honor of no worth in your eyes?"

"But, to be sold to a foreign devil!" the junior partner exclaimed.

"That is my wish."

Mr. Chang threw up his hands, not without a smothered oath.

"Very well!" he squeaked angrily. "But when this swindler, this murderer of honest folk, sees it for sale in your bazaar at so ridiculous a price, he will buy it and take it away, and laugh at Li Mow Gee for a fool!"

"If he did not," said Li Mow Gee, pouring himself another thimble-cup of wine, "I should be a most wretched and unhappy man!"

III.

A CHINESE candlestick is meant to hold, upon a long, upright prong, a candle painted with very soft red wax, so soft that the finger cannot touch the paint without blurring and marring it. Otherwise, it is like Occidental candlesticks in general respects.

Reginald Carefrew, who had plenty of money in his pocket, but who had left Singapore in something of a real hurry, walked into the Benevolent Brethren Bazaar in search of silks and pongees to take home to Europe. The bazaar, which bore no other name, confined itself almost exclusively to such goods. In the front of the shop, which was upon one of the half-Dutch streets overlooking the harbor, were strewn about a few objects of brass, bronze, and the cheap champlevé cloisonné which are made for tourists.

Almost as he entered the place, however, the vigilant eye of Carefrew discovered a very different object, placed in a niche which concealed it from view of the street. It was no less than a candlestick of three arms, a most unusual thing; also, it was made chiefly from jade, highly carven, while the upright prongs and the trimmings were of brass. Altogether, a most extraordinary and wonderful candlestick—priced at nine florins.

Carefrew, naturally, thought that his eyes lied to him about the price. With excitement twitching at his nerves, he walked back and bought several bolts of silk, ordering them sent to him at the residence of Huber Davis.

Then, casually, he inquired about the candlestick of the smiling clerk.

It was, he learned, a worthless object, left here for sale long years ago by some now forgotten Hindu native, or maybe Arab; one could not be certain where years had elapsed and the insignificance of the object was great, but of course the books would show, should it be desired that the affair be looked into.

Naturally, Carefrew did not desire the affair looked into, because some one was then sure to discover that the candlestick was real jade. There was no doubt about that fact, and he was too shrewd to be deceived. A passing wonder did enter his mind as to how yellow men, especially men of T'ang from the middle provinces, could have supposed the candlestick to be worthless; but, after all, mistakes happen to all men—and other men profit by them. The candlestick was not a wonder of the world, but was worth a few hundred dollars at least.

So Carefrew laid down his nine florins, and carried his purchase away with him, wrapped in paper.

Carefrew found the bungalow deserted except for the native boys; the siesta hour was over, and Huber Davis had departed to his office. After a critical inspection of his purchase, resulting in a complete vindication of his former judgment, Carefrew set the triple candlestick on the dining-table and swung off to Chinatown again.

It was the most natural desire in the world to want to complete that princely candlestick with appropriate candles; particularly as Carefrew was now on his way to Europe and would have little further chance to get hold of the real articles.

Being down-town, Carefrew dropped into the office of Huber Davis, and found a letter which had come in that morning by the coast steamer from Batavia. The letter was from Ruth, confirming her passage on the next fast Royal Mail boat. Upon the fourth day from this she would be at Sabang, having taken passage as far as Colombo for herself and Carefrew, whose loose business ends she was arranging.

"I suppose," inquired Huber Davis in his cool, semi-interested fashion, "you did not take her into your confidence regarding your late financial ventures?"

"Why in hell would I want to bother her about finances?" retorted Carefrew, with his bold-eyed look. "She doesn't understand such things."

"Damned good thing she doesn't, perhaps," reflected the other. "Well, see you later! By the way, here's the receipt for that thirty thousand you laid in my safe."

"I don't want receipts from you," protested Carefrew virtuously.

"Maybe not, but I want to give 'em to *you*," and Huber Davis smiled.

"Damned rotter!" reflected Carefrew as he passed on his way.

He was not acquainted in or with Sabang. It was not hard to see what he desired, however, and presently he succeeded beyond his expectations. A dirty window filled with dried oysters and strings of fish and other things, after the Chinese fashion, carried also a display of temple candles. They had only appeared in the window that morning, but Carefrew did not know it, and would not have cared had he known it.

Carefrew stopped and inspected the candles, which were exactly what he wanted. There was a half-inch wick of twisted cotton, around which was built the candle, two inches thick. The outside was gaudy red and blue with sticky greasepaint, and at the lower end was a protruding reed four inches long.

By this reed one might handle the affair without marring the paint, and into this reed fitted the upright prong of a candlestick. The whole candle was bound inside a big joint of bamboo, which held it without harm.

Noting that there was one candle on display, and that there seemed to be but two more with it, Carefrew entered the shop, found the proprietor, and priced the candles. The proprietor had brought them from Singapore ten years previously and did not want to sell them. However, Carefrew offered a ten-florin note, and carried them home.

He was, for the moment, a child with a new toy, completely absorbed in it, and utterly heedless of all the rest of the world. Another man might have had weights upon his conscience, but Reginald Carefrew was not bothered by any such.

He laid the three bamboo cylinders upon the dining-table, after it had been laid for dinner, and opened them, cutting the shrunken withes that held them securely. The glaring red candles lay before him, and for a moment he pulled at his cigarette and studied them. Knowing what sort of candles they were, he tentatively touched them with his forefinger. The touch left a red blotch at the end of his finger, so soft was the greasepaint.

One by one he set them carefully upon the three prongs of his jade candlestick. One could not blame his ardent admiration. Even to an eye which knew nothing of Chinese art, the picture was exquisite; to one who could appreciate fully, it was marvelous. Candles and candlestick blended into a perfect thing, a creation.

"And to think that it cost me," said Carefrew to his brother-in-law, when Huber Davis appeared, "exactly nineteen florins—ten of which were for the candles!"

Huber Davis gazed at the outfit appraisingly, a slight frown creasing his brow.

"If I were you," he said after a moment, "I'd get rid of it, Reggy. You certainly picked up something there—but it doesn't look right to me. You don't catch John Chinaman handing out stuff like that at a bargain price, not these days!"

"Bosh!" ejaculated Carefrew. "A pick-up, that's all—one of the things that comes the way of any man who keeps his eyes open."

Huber Davis shrugged his shoulders. "Got the red stuff on your hands, eh?"

Carefrew smiled vaguely—his smile was always vague and disagreeable—and glanced at his hands. He rubbed them, and the red spots became a fine pink rouge.

"I'll light 'em up," he said, "and then wash for dinner, eh?"

Huber Davis said nothing, but watched with cold-growing eyes as Carefrew lighted the three wicks. He was somewhat long in doing this, for they were slow to catch. When they did flare, it was with a yellow, smoky light that sent a black trail to the ceiling. Carefrew turned to leave the room, but the voice of his brother-in-law brought him about quickly.

"Wait! I had a letter to-day from my agent in Batavia, Reggy. He said that Ruth had been in the office—he was helping her straighten up some of your affairs."

A subtle alarm crept into the narrow eyes of Carefrew as he met the cold, passionless gaze of Huber Davis.

"Well?" he demanded suddenly. "What is the idea?"

"You didn't say anything was wrong with Ruth," said Huber Davis calmly. "But my agent mentioned that her right arm looked badly bruised—her sleeve fell away, I imagine—and she said it had been a slight accident. What was it?"

Carefrew's brows lifted. "Damned if I know! Must have hurt herself after I left, eh? Too bad, now—"

He turned and left the room, whistling. Huber Davis gazed after him; one would have said that the man's cold eyes suddenly glowed and smoldered, as a shaft of sunlight suddenly strikes fire into cold amethyst.

"Ah!" he muttered. "You damned blackguard—it goes with the rest, it does! You've laid hands on her, and yet she sticks by you; some women are like that. You've laid hands on her, all right. If I could prove it, by the Lord I'd let out your rotten soul! But she'll never tell."

Presently Carefrew's gay whistle sounded, and he sauntered back into the dining-room.

"That's queer!" he observed lightly. "The red ink wouldn't come off. I'll get some of your cocoa butter after dinner and try it on. Hello! Real steamed rice, eh? Say, that's a treat! I despise this Dutch stuff."

IV.

Huber Davis, who had an excellent general agency, always dealt with Li Mow Gee in silks and fabrics—that is, he dealt with Li Mow Gee direct, which meant that he was one of a circle of half a dozen men who did this. Not more than half a dozen knew that Li Mow Gee had any particular interest in the silk trade.

Two days after Carefrew had brought home the candlestick and appurtenances thereof, Huber Davis sought the Street of the Heavenly Elbow, and entered the dingy cubby-hole which opened upon the widening shop of Li Mow Gee. That morning Carefrew had carefully tied up his temple candles again and was preparing to pack his purchases of silk.

After a very short wait Huber Davis was ushered through the fan-shaped apartments to the hub and kernel of Li Mow Gee's enterprises, where the owner sat before his charcoal brazier, heated his rice-wine, and gazed upon his nudes—to call them by a polite name—with never-flagging appreciation.

Li Mow Gee greeted him cordially and ordered tea brought in. Huber Davis said nothing of business until the tea had been poured, and then he did not make the usual foreigner's mistake of drinking his tea. He knew better, for Li Mow Gee followed the tea ceremony implicitly.

When he had concluded his business in silk Huber Davis took from his pocket a sheet of note-paper upon which were inscribed three ideographs.

"I wish you would do me a favor, Mr. Li," he said. "My brother-in-law is visiting me, and the other day he picked up a candlestick bearing these characters. For the sake of satisfying my own curiosity, I copied the characters and put 'em up to my clerk, but he said they were very old writing, and that only a university man like yourself could decipher them correctly. So, if you would oblige me—"

Li Mow Gee took the paper and glanced at the three ideographs. He wrinkled up his dissipated eyes and gazed at Huber Davis. Then he picked up his pipe and began to smoke.

"Your clerk was a wise man, Mr. Davis," he said quietly. "You have heard of the Heaven-and-Earth Society, no doubt?"

Huber Davis started. "You mean—"

"Exactly, my friend. How your esteemed brother-in-law picked up this candlestick I cannot imagine; but it is marked with the emblems of that society, of which I am a member."

Huber Davis whistled. He knew that not all the power of the Manchu emperors had availed to stifle that secret fraternity, and he knew that Reggy Carefrew was playing with hot coals. But he kept silence, and presently he had his reward.

"If we were not friends," said Li Mow Gee reflectively, "and if the ties of friendship were not sacred and honorable things, I would say nothing to you. Even now it may be too late; as to that I cannot say, for others may know that your brother-in-

law made this purchase. But, because we are friends, for your sake I shall try to help you."

"I appreciate it," said Huber Davis, not without anxiety. His anxiety was warranted. "If you will give me advice, it shall be followed implicitly, I assure you."

Li Mow Gee smoked until his long pipe sucked dry.

"Well, then, bring to me that candlestick and whatever else was with it—candles, perhaps. I will make good whatever sum your honorable relative expended, and I will see to it that the matter is adjusted in the right quarters in case trouble has arisen. But, remember, time is an element of importance."

"In half an hour," said Huber Davis earnestly, "I shall return with the things."

Li Mow Gee picked up his cup of tea, signaling that the interview was ended.

Huber Davis dropped business and hurried home. If he could have reconciled it with his conscience, he would have let matters alone in the confidence that before a great while Reginald Carefrew would be removed from this mortal sphere; but Huber Davis had a stiff conscience. Besides, there was Ruth. If Ruth still loved this swindler, Huber Davis intended to protect and further him—for her sake. There was a good deal of the old conventional spirit in Huber Davis.

He expected trouble, and was prepared to handle it firmly; but he wanted to avoid a scene if possible. So, finding Carefrew engaged in packing, he lighted his pipe and watched for a few moments without broaching the subject on his mind.

"How much," he said at last, "do you expect to get for that candlestick if you sell it?"

Carefrew looked at him in surprise.

"Eh? Think I have some judgment, after all, do you? Oh, I ought to get a hundred easily."

"Well, see here," proposed Huber Davis, "I *do* like the thing, Reggy. Tell you what: I'll give a hundred and twenty-five, cash down, if you'll turn it over. Eh?"

Carefrew grinned. "Hundred and fifty takes it," he said.

"You nasty son of—" thought Huber Davis. With an effort he controlled himself and produced his check-book. By the time he had written the check Carefrew had unpacked the candlestick. Huber Davis remembered the negligible remark which Li Mow Gee had made about the candles.

"Throw in the candles," he said, waving the check to dry it. "I want 'em."

Carefrew assented with a laugh. "You are welcome, old boy! I've never yet got that damned red stuff off my hands; nothing touches it. It 'll have to wear off. *And* it itches!"

Huber Davis paid little attention to him, but picked up the wrapped candlestick, took the two-foot bamboo sections, and started off down the hill.

"Now, you dirty whelp," he mentally apostrophized his relative, "I've got you out of a cursed bad situation, only you don't know it and would never believe it!"

Upon reaching the funny-bone in the Street of the Heavenly Elbow, he sent in his name and was ushered quickly to the presence of Li Mow Gee.

"There's the stuff," he said, with a deep breath of relief. "And I'm in your debt, Li. I'll remember it."

Li Mow Gee smiled slightly, ironically, as though Huber Davis might stand more in his debt than was known or dreamed of.

"Don't forget the price," he said quietly. "Accounts must be kept straight, my friend. What was the cost of this thing?"

"Nineteen florins, but don't bother about that," returned the other, saying nothing of his payment to Carefrew.

"Pardon me, but it must be made all straight." Li Mow Gee counted out nineteen florins from his pocketbook, which Huber Davis accepted. "Now a little wine to our friendship, eh?"

Huber Davis drank a thimble-cup of hot wine and took his departure, feeling that his hundred and fifty dollars had been well spent, having pulled Carefrew out of a bad situation, and thereby benefited Ruth.

Li Mow Gee, alone with his charcoal brazier and his pictures and his pipe, left the wrapped candlestick as it was, but took the three candles in their bamboo wrappings and opened a door in the wall where no door appeared to sight. He entered a

long, narrow room which contained a great many queer little bottles, many of them old Chinese flasks carved from agate or amethyst, and a long table; the room did not appear in the least like a laboratory.

When he had laid the candles upon the table Li Mow Gee carefully cut the wrappings, but left each candle lying in its cradle of bamboo. Then he took a large glass bottle from the corner, and poured oil over each candle until the bamboo cradles were filled. When he lighted a match and ignited the oil one realized that the table was of ironwood.

Li Mow Gee stood placidly watching while the three candles became reduced to scorched and smoking masses of black grease, then blew out the lingering flames, cleaned the débris from the table into a brass jar, and returned to his own apartment.

When he had emptied six cups of wine he clapped his hands four times, and promptly the venerable Mr. Chang appeared, removing his spectacles and blinking.

"I return to your keeping the honorable candlestick of our lodge," said Li Mow Gee, "and I thank you for the loan, venerable master."

"Are the spirits of the dead satisfied?" queried Mr. Chang.

Li Mow Gee poured himself another cup of wine and positively grinned.

"If they are not," he said, this time in English, "they are damned hard to please!"

It will be observed that Li Mow Gee was out nothing whatever—except certain obscure labors—for while he had paid Huber Davis nineteen florins, Carefrew had paid nineteen florins to agents of Li Mow Gee. And this, according to Oriental notions, was the acme of honor and propriety.

V.

THE Royal Mail boat, the "through packet" on which Ruth Carefrew was coming, held due for Sabang late in the afternoon. Upon the morning of that day Huber Davis went to the wireless station and sent a message to Ruth, aboard the steamer, to prepare to leave ship at Sabang and cancel passage.

Then Huber Davis returned to his own bungalow, and met Dr. Brossot as the latter was leaving.

"Well," inquired Huber Davis quickly, "what's the trouble?"

The physician shrugged his shoulders.

"It has come, that's all. Java has been swept, the west coast of Sumatra has seen them die by thousands, and now—it is here."

"The influenza?" said Huber Davis.

"It can be nothing else. High temperature, and you say he had chills yesterday; much pain, everything according to the ritual. I am sorry, Mynheer Davis; his room had better be quarantined, of course."

"You think it is dangerous?"

"No. The danger, of course, lies in the pneumonia afterward. We must wait and see."

After this, events moved fast. At noon the doctor arrived again, in response to a hurried message from Huber Davis. An hour later the two men sat in the study of Davis.

"But, Brossot," said the latter, staring at the doctor, "what the devil was it, then? You say there was no pneumonia—"

The honest Dutchman shook his head. "*Mynheer*, upon my word of honor, I don't know! I shall call it heart-failure; that's what we all say, you know, to conceal our ignorance. The Chinese would say that he had swallowed gold, another polite way of saying the same thing. If you want an autopsy—"

Huber Davis rose, paced up and down the room, his brow furrowed.

"That's not half bad, that Chinese saying," he muttered. "No, Brossot, no autopsy. His wife arrives this afternoon, you know; my sister Ruth. Swallowed gold, did he? I believe it's the truth, at that!"

But he never thought again about the red grease-paint on those candles, and he did not know anything about Li Mow Gee having a little laboratory—in the Chinese style—opening off his apartments. Nobody knew about that laboratory, except Li Mow Gee; and Mr. Li never boasted of his methods.

The Ship that Crumbled

by Loring Brent

Author of "Peter the Brazen," "The Black-Sander," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

DONN RILEY, wireless operator, down and out after a protracted spree, was engaged for the excessive stipend of six hundred dollars a month by Captain Josiah Murdock, of the Barracouda, a tramp steamer with an evil reputation. Making a night of it, Riley, dining at an expensive restaurant, was mightily fascinated by a girl who left him a warning note not to follow her. He had not seen her face, nor had he talked with her, yet there was about her an elusive charm which fired his blood.

Dropping the balance of his advance money in Chang Tung's gambling-house, he saw there a Spaniard whom he recognized as the companion of the girl in the restaurant—one Luis Cordella, who, when Riley followed him, admitted that he had been sent by Captain Murdock.

As they went toward the pier they met a girl, whom Cordella addressed as "Miss Murdock," and when Donn refused to leave at the Spaniard's insistence, the latter stabbed him, then rushed off. The girl, unaware of Riley's wound, told him she was going to Mazatlan, and that she would see him again in San Blas. Then she was gone, and a moment later he was treated to another surprise in the person of another girl, Margaret Anderson, who departed as suddenly and abruptly as she had come.

It was all very mysterious; and when, half fainting, he had been taken aboard by Murdock, the captain, after asking Riley if he were armed, put this amazing query:

"I want you to tell me the whole truth. Now, wasn't it my daughter who stabbed you?"

"You're mad!" snapped Riley, with a nervous laugh.

CHAPTER IX.

LUIS, THE TEMPERAMENTAL.

CAPTAIN MURDOCK snapped his teeth together. The suspicion died out of his eyes. He began speaking in a rough, unnatural voice, as though he had not yet recovered control of himself.

"I think you are telling me the truth, Riley. Since I left you this afternoon I have gone through the tortures of hell. I may tell you some time. It is impossible now. I—I'm too unstrung. That girl accused me—Riley, she accused me of being worse than a murderer!"

Donn Riley nodded. "I supposed you had had a quarrel," he said quietly.

"A quarrel?" shouted the old man. "Cæsar! You would think she was a judge of the Supreme Court! She said she would do anything to stop this ship sailing."

"Why?" asked the wounded man dryly.

Murdock made an impatient gesture with his hands. "I refuse to talk about her. I have washed my hands of her! Take off that tourniquet. Something to drink?"

"No, thanks, captain."

The old man looked stupefied. "You don't mean to say you've stopped drinking?" he ejaculated.

"For the time being, anyway."

"What in hell for?"

Riley shook his head. "I drank enough in the past two weeks to float a ship."

This story began in The Argosy for April 26.

"Well, I was expecting you to drink a toast with me to a prosperous voyage. Now, take it easy; you may've cut an artery. I'm glad to hear that, in a way, Riley. I don't want drunks in my crew. They don't last in the tropics. Can you handle a revolver?"

"I'm a fairly straight shot."

"Ever use your fists?"

"Only on necessary occasions."

"Good! I want men with backbone, not brawlers. Remind me to give you that spare revolver before you go." His voice was rumbling in his throat again; it seemed to be habitual with him. "Tough crews any ship gets nowadays. A man of your stamp is a godsend."

Donn Riley had worked the tourniquet splinter loose. He felt the hot blood rush into the upper part of his arm in a fiery flood. He compressed his lips.

"Ha! No artery touched. You can be thankful. Now brace your legs. Get a good hold on your lower lips. This stuff burns like fury." He poured on the iodine.

But the pain had come back so sharply with the inlet of the new blood that he could not distinguish the sharper bite of the antiseptic. His entire arm, to his fingertips, tingled with the attack of a million vicious needles.

"Hurt bad?"

"A little." He hesitated. "Why are we getting away in such a deuce of a hurry, skipper?"

The old man gave him a dark glance of doubt. "I found it necessary," he replied stiffly.

Riley framed his lips in a silent "Oh!" of comprehension. "How long since the old hooker has been in this port?"

Captain Murdock was fumbling in a great drawer set in beneath his bunk. "A good many years, twenty maybe. I don't know. She has been running wild on the lower coast most of the time, as you kindly told me this afternoon."

"I see now," said Riley.

"What do you see?"

"That we're going south with no cargo."

The eyes of the older man glinted for an instant. He stood up with a heavy nickeled revolver in one hand. He spun the cylinder and presented it, butt foremost.

"You can also see that I'm putting my faith in you. What I am wondering is, are you or are you not grateful? Understand me. I can't have meddlesome men in my crew. It's my business to ask questions, theirs to answer them. I'm giving you this pistol for *my* self-protection. If I have need to call on you, I expect you to stand back of me. With that and with both fists. Your quarters are just abaft the wireless-room, on the port side. You may or may not find everything shipshape. If it isn't, you make it shipshape. That's what I'm hiring you for."

Donn Riley acknowledged all this with a grave nod. His blue eyes were thoughtful. "I'm sure there'll be no trouble back there," he murmured. "But it will relieve me to know whether or not that murderous Spaniard is sailing with us."

"Why, of course he is sailing with us!" snapped the old man.

Donn Riley went directly from Captain Murdock's quarters to the wireless-room. The condition of the apparatus was sufficiently unspeakable to remove all traces of the hostility and doubt that had been aroused by the old man's last statement.

And the sad state of affairs here accomplished nothing more than the addition of another atom to his growing load of suspicions.

He lit himself a cigarette, and stared ponderingly at the aluminum helix coil through a small haze of blue smoke.

Captain Murdock had hired him for some purpose far removed from that of operating the Barracouda's bent and rusted radio-key. Otherwise, why had he taken him at such a stupendous salary?

He had not been flattered by the offer, even at first. He recalled the old man's words: "A gentleman at random won't do!"

Also to be considered was the hurried flight of the freighter—forty-eight hours ahead of time. And south-bound, with no cargo! And at night! He arrived at the inevitable conclusion: the Barracouda was bent on a voyage of good for no one. She always had been a ship of mischief; evil was branded into the very core of her.

Donn Riley dropped his right hand

thoughtlessly into the ragged pocket of his coat. His fingers touched polished metal. Why had Murdock presented him with the revolver? Crews were crews, not much worse as a lot now than in peace times. Why had Murdock taken that elaborate precaution?

There were a number of other questions he would have liked to have answered. He flicked an ash to the linoleum. Was there any connection between the girl he had seen that morning on the bridge of the Barracouda—Miss Murdock beyond doubt—and the young woman he had seen at dinner at the St. Francis with the man he had thought to be Luis Cordella?

As he pondered this, a metallic clatter sounded on deck outside. For a moment he imagined that the funnel had toppled over—the sound had the same hollow ring as such a catastrophe might have caused. The room trembled.

He started out to investigate, then paused as he heard voices.

"—the paint cans and brushes here. Yes; beside the new funnel."

"Ah! we are getting away soon."

They were talking in low tones. Riley, with his eyes aslant, strained his sensitive ears. He caught a fragment of a sentence.

"—the old madhouse—to hell!"

The voices drifted away.

Riley pursed his lips in a silent whistle. A new funnel—what did that mean? Obeying his original whim, he went out on deck to satisfy his curiosity. He nearly collided with a man in the dark.

Furtive hands pawed over him.

"*Señor,* I crave your pardon," began a voice.

Donn Riley caught him by one arm and drew him under a deck light. His breath went in with a whistling.

"Luis Cordella!"

The man who had attacked him—who had left a knife sticking into his arm less than an hour previous—cringed against the deck-rail. His face was white, his handsome black eyes were glittering fearfully, and his lips were working.

"*Señor,*" he exclaimed in distress, "how can I confess my bitterness? Can I hope to apologize? My brain went mad! *Madre de Dios*—you should strike me dead!" He was wringing his hands.

"Why in the devil did you do it?" demanded Riley, in honest astonishment.

The Spaniard tapped his forehead with a finger. "How can such acts be explained?"

"You think you're a madman, do you?"

"Indeed, it seems true, *mi amigo!* I have those moods—those wretched moods."

Donn Riley gave him a look of full-hearted contempt. "Then let me give you a warning: The next time you happen into one of those moods in my vicinity I intend to become violent myself. I cannot trust myself either, Luis Cordella. Unless you have a hankering to be buried at sea, watch your step!"

"Nor could I blame your violence, *señor.*"

"There are some things I do not understand, and I'm not by any means satisfied. But as long as you come out with it like a man, and admit that you're crazy, I'm willing to let you off. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

"Perfectly, *señor!*"

"In your right senses now, eh?"

"Assuredly. But why?"

"Then answer the question Miss Murdock put to you some time before your fit started."

"But I recall no question, *señor,*" protested the consul to Pinar del Rio earnestly.

"And if it sends you into another of those convenient moods, damn it, I'll just drill you, Luis!"

"That question evades me, *señor.*"

"I'm growing mighty moody, Luis!"

"*Señor,* I am totally ignorant."

"Answer that question!"

"Positively no!"

"You won't answer it?"

"Yes, yes. You mean—"

"She said you were presumptuous. Why did she say that? Is it possible that you are in love with Miss Murdock? Or that she has—has accepted your attentions?"

"Señorita Murdock has promised herself to me."

"If she were here I think she'd slap your face properly, Luis."

"By the sacred blood of our Savior, I speak the truth, *señor!*"

"Then take your hand off that knife!"

He gripped the Spaniard's right wrist, brought it down hard on the teakwood rail. Bringing his half-numb left hand into play, he crumpled the wrist again, and a third time.

Steel splashed into the water between hull and wharf alongside.

Donn Riley, with fists at sides, glared at him. "You little whelp! You dirty little whelp!"

Señor Cordella's handsome, dark face was filled with horror. He extended his open palms penitently. "*Señor,* how can I express—"

"I've a mind to have you put in irons! I've—"

He was interrupted by the booming voice of the old man. "More trouble? Cæsar! What men to have aboard a respectable ship!" The Barracouda's master and owner looked worried and irritable.

"This Spaniard tried to stab me again."

"Again?"

"I threw the knife overboard."

Luis Cordella gave to both of them a shamefaced look. "What can I explain, *mi capitán?* I have these wretched moods."

"It's beyond me," muttered the captain, growing more annoyed each second. He raised his voice angrily. "Look here, Luis, if you come near this man again I'll clap you in irons. Riley, I give you that authority."

"*Mi capitán,* you are forgetting—"

"I am forgetting nothing!" roared the old man.

"I repeat, you are forgetting who—"

"Will you hold your tongue, Luis? Now, Riley, what is this mess about?"

"It is a personal affair entirely," said Riley stubbornly.

"Luis?"

"The *señor* presumes to doubt my affections for the *señorita,* your adorable daughter, *mi capitán!*"

The old man gasped. His eyes had become very small and hard. "Luis, get to your stateroom, *si usted gusta!*" he added sarcastically. "I'll have no talk of that girl aboard this ship! Affections, indeed!" He snorted. "Luis, please leave us! When you have quieted down, come to my quarters for a drink. But not sooner!"

"*Si, mi capitán,*" muttered the Spaniard.

CHAPTER X.

THE MADHOUSE.

WITH drooping shoulders the consul to Pinar del Rio removed himself. When the thin figure had vanished beyond the glow of the pale deck light, Captain Murdock produced a deep groan.

"That fellow is a dreadful care." He threw out his hands. "But I was on my way here to speak of another matter." He seemed to be having difficulty suppressing his anger, as if he were engaging himself in an exceedingly unlikable task. "I was hasty with you," he added.

Donn Riley, fixing a curious glance upon him, nodded attentively.

"By God! I wish you could see my side of this thing, Riley. There's so much I'd like to confide in you. But I can't! You keep thrusting me back. Can I afford to give you my complete trust—or are you going to be squeamish?"

"I don't know," said Riley.

"I ought to tell you what's to become of this ship, Riley!"

"Yes, captain."

"What would you think if I told you I myself don't know what's to become of her? Well, I don't! She sails with a blank charter. Do you know you threw a scare into me this afternoon? You did! I am superstitious myself. You said she was named after a fish. You said she had a rotten soul. Riley, I have my fortune tied up in this ship."

"I suspected so. Have we a cargo in sight?"

"You can keep it under your hat. She's chartered out of San Blas. I can talk to you with confidence. I realized that."

"If she only carried a fat insurance," murmured Riley.

"I'd sink her in a minute!"

"So would I, sir."

Captain Murdock examined him with a straight gaze of suspicion. His face was still lined deeply with his former anguish,

For some reason he was suffering keenly. Donn Riley could appreciate that at a glance.

"I've taken a deep fancy to you, Riley. Good God, a man must have some one to talk to! There's too much on my mind for one man to carry. And that girl! You were looking at her photograph. She's wild —unmanageable — like quicksilver. With queer little ideas. That girl's too honest for her father." His rumbling voice stopped. He looked old and worn and unhappy.

There was a helpless air about him that somehow caught Donn Riley's sympathy. Yet he felt shocked, as though he had been listening to the blurted confession of a criminal.

"And the way she treats men, good men—she laughs in their faces! If she would marry some good man—not a man of our stamp, Riley—but some straightforward, honest, upright man, it would take the load off my mind. I tell you, she's a responsibility!"

Donn Riley murmured sympathetically. That Captain Murdock classed him as something between a rascal and an irresponsible adventurer did not irritate him, because he realized that that was the class into which he had permitted himself to fall. And he had taken another step away from respectability. Captain Murdock's frank admission, his very existence upon this ship, testified to that. He had cast his lot with scamps—lawbreakers, madmen!

He had heard of ships called madhouses, but this was his first contact with one of them. She was sailing without a charter; she was packed full of an ominous mystery, of evil that could fairly be felt. She seemed to be peopled with the unhappy ghosts of other dark voyages.

Her owner was speaking again, almost plaintively. "I should like to know what is going to become of us. Riley, will you look me in the eye? You give me confidence when you do that. There's something about you that inspires it.

"I think you're clean inside. Well, you are wondering why I slammed that door in your face, aren't you? It was none of your fault.

"You had a perfect right to ask that question. It was manly of you to ask it. Because you are decent — *decent!* That rotten Spaniard is mad about her. Mad! Good Lord! I don't know whether she hates him or not. She is a wise one. But she knows, as well as I know, that Cordella has me—like this!"

He extended a clutched hand.

"In there. Like that. You understand now. He can undo me if he pleases. He is a power down there, Riley. And I think she is playing with him—to please me. Think of me standing for that! Ugh!"

His forehead was a mass of white wrinkles.

"My daughter—and that rotten Spaniard!" He was silent for a long while.

Rain fell in a fine shower, hissing on the deck, gurgling in the gutter. Fore and aft the donkey engines were wheezing and gasping to the groaning accompaniment of straining rope. An odor of stale bilge water and old oil rose up in a vapor almost visible from the noisy engine-room. They were giving her a dock test.

Far in the distance through the pitch black night Riley could make out the swimming glow of a ferry-boat from across the bay. He guessed that the time was past midnight.

The fleshy jowls of Captain Murdock hung down in pads. His eyes were fixed gloomily at Riley's feet. He drew himself together with a shudder.

"Riley, you have seen my daughter. Don't deny it."

Riley thought it over and nodded glumly. He was still marveling at the great change that had come over Captain Murdock since afternoon. The breezy, cock-sure, and prosperous mariner had suddenly been transformed into an anxious old man.

"Well, she's threatened to come aboard either at San Blas or Pinar del Rio. Of course I told her not to. But she'll be there —at one of those places. She'll keep her word; I know her.

"It gives me the shudders to think of that girl crossing Mexico alone. I said I'd not let her come aboard, and I meant it. You can see I've changed my mind.

"Maybe you've helped me t'wards a solution without knowing it. Perhaps because

you're a man I see I can trust. And if I can trust you, why, so can she."

His voice choked. He went on in lower tones: "I can't think of her in the hands of that man. She's too good for him, Riley."

Riley nodded gravely. He was very much interested, and his expression of sympathy was genuine.

"I'm going to ask you to look out for her, Riley."

"Whatever I can do—" began Riley.

"You can do a great deal. You can watch out for her. You can see that she's not alone with that Spaniard. I'm going to ask you to take her off my hands."

Donn Riley straightened up with a gasp. "You're not quite yourself to-night, captain," he muttered, somewhat embarrassed.

"That's because you don't know me," contradicted the other, a little wildly. "That's because you don't know what I've gone through this afternoon—since we parted. I am a planner. I've thought this all out. I saw that there's the making of a man in you; the making of a good man.

"Don't think I'm aiming to flatter you, Riley. Nothing of the sort. I'm trying to think of you in light of her. And I'm trying to think of you in light of that damned Spaniard. In one sense you are the lesser of two evils.

"Since this afternoon, he's threatened to marry Ellen when they meet again. What do you think of that? Do you wonder I'm not myself to-night? Ridiculous? Rubbish! You don't know that man. You think he's mad. He's a pretender. He laughs at you; he's dangerous; vicious!"

Captain Murdock's eyes seemed to bore straight into the younger man's soul.

"I am much older than you are, Riley. I don't know what deviltry you've been up to since you've felt your oats. But here is my suggestion to you: Make this the last adventuring you go in for. It 'll be enough to last you for a lifetime. I'll guarantee that. When I've finished with you, you're going straight back to that man you talked to over the phone this afternoon, and you're going to get your old job. But before you leave this ship you are going to marry my daughter!"

Donn Riley threw back his head and laughed. "This ship is loaded to the waterline with madmen. And I'm going to go ashore before the rats start to leave. I'm going to quit this she-devil before it's too late."

Captain Murdock's eyes, however, were as sane as his own.

"It is already too late. I've given orders that no one shall leave this ship. Those orders will be carried out to the letter.

"You are going to see this through. I've stored my faith in you. I've put myself in your hands. I've talked to you more in this past half-hour than I ever talked to any man. I depend on you to stand by me. I've put this thing up to you as man to man. I want your unqualified answer."

Donn Riley folded his arms. "To what? Whether I stick by you or whether I marry your daughter?"

"Both are cut from the same piece of cloth."

"You honestly trust me to that extent?"

"I said all that before."

"But we're both neglecting to take Miss Murdock into consideration."

"She will be obedient," snorted that hapless young woman's father.

"I think we ought to consult her," ventured Riley, in tones as level as he could command. "It's unfair to her. We're not living in the middle ages, you know. Perhaps she loves Cordella. Certainly she knows what you've told me about him. Then why is she taking such a risk?"

"She's willing to take the risk—to poke her nose into my affairs," grumbled the captain.

"Then I'll accept both propositions," said Riley firmly. "I'll stand by you. If Miss Murdock finds the water so hot that she must throw herself away on me to save herself—I'll stand by her in any case."

Captain Murdock extended his hand. "The next three months of both our lives—dedicated to God knows what! It has a bad taste. After that—we're quits."

"The fat is in the fire," said Riley lightly. "What crime is number one?"

"'We get away before dawn.'"

"So I heard. Does that explain that new tin funnel—those cans of paint?"

"In case we are followed. My chief built it himself this afternoon and evening. A very clever man, Riley. You must be good friends."

"In case we are followed," repeated Riley with a frown of misunderstanding. "Followed by what?"

"The destroyers."

Riley whistled softly. "Up to her old tricks, eh? But why?"

"Chiefly because we are leaving San Francisco without clearance papers."

Riley was too dumfounded to interrupt him.

Murdock hurried on: "You wondered why I had changed so since we parted this afternoon. Do you wonder now? That girl is driving me into my grave—with her honesty and her flag flapping. On top of the worries of her—this!

"The inspectors were snooping around 'tween-decks when I came back from the hotel. They've condemned her. Unfit for sea duty. What do you think of that?"

"I thought you were foolish to bring her into San Francisco in the first place. Rotten boilers. Rotten hull. She's nothing but a floating coffin, as I told you. I think we're a pair of fools. And there's trouble a-lee."

He paused and bit his lip.

"What did you mean by that reference to 'flag flapping' patriotism? Has that got anything to do with this cruise? Are we bound on a job for that damned Hartman gang?"

"Hartman gang?" muttered the old man incredulously.

Donn Riley snorted. "You've been sailing on the lower coast for twenty years and you don't know the Hartmans?" he demanded. "The most damnable pack of thieves and smugglers, and international crooks since Captain Morgan bombarded Acapulco! What are they up to now? Some new-fangled deviltry? Are you one of them, captain? Or an understrapper?"

"You make me tired! Didn't I tell you we are sailing with a blank charter? Certainly, I've heard of the Hartmans!"

"What has that to do with flag-flapping?" asked Riley sternly.

The captain became several shades more indignant. "How do I know?"

"Then why do you mention it? In one breath you speak of a blank charter out of San Blas; in the next you blubber about Miss Murdock's patriotism, as if it's something to sneer at. What are you driving at?"

"I'm all shaken up by this afternoon. I'm holding out nothing. If she suspects we're taking a cargo for Hartman from San Blas to Pinar del Rio, let her suspect it. I have no suspicions at all. I get a fat freight. I carry the cargo. My business—not hers."

"Even if it should turn out to be a Hartman cargo?"

"Well, what of it?" demanded the old man petulantly.

"Only that it goes into the ocean! What kind of a cargo would come out of San Blas—south-bound? Bananas? Or mahogany? D'you imagine for a moment I don't know what kind of a place San Blas is? It's a stinking little tropical hole with a dozen scattered shacks. There's an eight-mule stage runs into the interior. A 'dobe cathedral. A couple of tequila street-stalls. What has San Blas to ship south? Or Ocos? Or even Mazatlan? I wonder! Murdock, you couldn't drive me off this ship now if you used a blacksnake! I intend to see this thing through!"

The old man waved his fists. "You're going to stand by me!" he roared.

Donn Riley jerked his thumb toward his chest, jabbing himself on the breastbone with loud thumps. "First of all I'm going to stand by my principles!"

"Bosh!" snorted Captain Murdock.

CHAPTER XI.

A SIMPLE SIREN.

AS the captain's indignant figure strode out of sight Donn Riley pushed himself away from the rail. Some one settled against his hand and held him there. He was surprised, and he said so.

"You did your shopping in a hurry," he added, giving the ardent Miss Anderson a smile.

Her large, blue eyes were upon his in the frankest admiration.

"I hurried back to see you," she said, with a little laugh.

"I am flattered, Miss Anderson," he replied with gravity.

"Aren't you glad?" she pouted.

"Flattered and delighted!" he amended.

Now that he was no longer diverted by visions of bleeding to death—visions which had arisen between them during their first meeting—he took the pains to appraise Miss Anderson—as young men have a way of appraising the young women they encounter under such exceptional circumstances.

In her guileless little way she was much prettier than he had at first imagined. She was small and young and—inviting, perhaps. He thought he recognized in her a type—the type that is built to be cuddled. There was a freshness about her helplessness, a wistfulness in the way she looked up at him, that prompted the kind of love-making whose origin is not entirely within the heart.

Her lips formed a rosy bud, or the shyest of smiles, depending upon their mood. Her eyes, dreamy and velvety azure, seemed to brim with impulse. Her cheeks were peaches and cream.

Donn Riley found himself marveling at the presence of so much innocence among such a cut-throat crew.

"I do get so lonely," she was saying in her sweet, young voice. "I have no one to talk to at all. Oh, of course I can talk to father, but he *is* so moody!"

"It's a shame to drag you along—all alone—on this kind of a ship!" exclaimed Donn Riley indignantly.

"I'm old enough to have a beau if I want one!" she added. "I'm almost eighteen!"

"It's an outrage," agreed the adventurer with a twinkle. "By rights, you should have at least twenty beaus!"

Miss Anderson bit her lip. "You're making fun of me. I don't know whether to feel complimented or—or hurt."

"I'd willingly make the twenty-first!"

"Then I would get rid of the other twenty at once!" she retorted. "I never told any other man that I thought he was —very nice!"

"You make me feel uncomfortable," said Riley, lifting his arms and screwing up his face in a splendid imitation of despair. "If you knew what a scoundrel I am at heart; if you knew how I am swayed by criminal tendencies—"

"And conquered?" she added with a soft laugh.

He looked at her severely. "Yes—conquered!"

"Gracious! You don't look wicked!"

"Miss Anderson," he replied sententiously, "when you are a little older—"

"If you knew how hateful I feel when people say that!" she cried.

"When you have barked your pretty little elbows, and your nice little shins on the sharp corners of this old world—"

"The way you've barked your pretty little elbows, and your pretty little shins?" she took him up.

"I am beginning to suspect, to suspect very deeply," he rejoined, "that your intuition will save you from the fate that Old Man Experience had in store for me.'"

"He did a beautiful job, I think," she answered demurely.

"Miss Anderson?"

"Yes, Mr. Riley."

"Can I tell you something about yourself?"

"There's really nothing you can't do if you set your heart on it, I suspect, Mr. Riley!"

"Now, just what do you mean by that?"

"Did you or did you not appoint yourself as my twenty-first beau?"

"Emphatically yes!"

"You were going to tell me something about myself. You're going to tell me how forward I am."

Donn Riley became penitent immediately. "Nothing of the sort!"

"But you do think so, don't you?"

"Not a bit!"

Miss Anderson winked her eyes several times. Her lip drooped. She put out her hands impulsively. "If you do think so, I'm awfully, awfully sorry. I don't mean to be forward. But I'm lonely — dying of loneliness! There's not a soul for me to talk to. I'm told to keep away from all of the men on the ship. Why, I can't sit down on a chair all day—and all evening—

by myself and look pleasant and good and sweet and kind and everything! I want to have a good time. I want to play and be amused. I'm not a nun! Heavens!" She smiled.

"It certainly isn't fair," he agreed earnestly.

"And you don't blame me for talking to—to a strange man?"

"The strange man was mighty lonely himself," said Donn Riley.

"You were? Honestly?"

"Honestly, Miss Anderson!"

She hugged her arms delightedly. "Isn't that nice! Now, if you can convince the old man—"

"The old man and I are not on speaking terms at present," he told her.

"You know I'm not supposed to be having anything to do with you—any one. I'm supposed to be tucked in bed—fast asleep. Oh, dear, what an existence!"

He was sympathetic. "Of course, stolen sweets—"

"Isn't it fun?" she cried. "Now, on the trip north, there was another girl. Oh, but she was heavenly! She's my ideal. She's a perfect princess! You should have met her, Mr. Riley. You'd have fallen head over heels in love with her! She—she was just everything that a girl ought to be!"

Unless Donn Riley was mistaken, he had already performed that acrobatic feat of falling head over heels in love with the tenant of Miss Anderson's shrine.

"Sounds almost too good to be true," he murmured. "Who did you say she was?"

"The old man's daughter. Have you met her?"

"I saw her," he confessed.

Much of the sunlight died out of Miss Anderson's blue eyes. Perhaps her ideal's standing underwent a slight depreciation in this new light.

She remarked: "Ellen is *years* older than I am!"

"What was that?"

"Well, she's twenty-two; she told me so herself!"

Donn Riley chuckled. "Isn't she ancient!"

Miss Anderson elevated her round little chin. "I think my twenty-first beau is showing a great deal of interest in other girls," she said coolly.

"Can't he even *look* at other girls?"

"I have a very jealous disposition."

"Then I promise to be very careful in the future. When we're apart I shall devote every instant to thinking of you. It would be so easy to do that, too, Miss Anderson."

"You can be awfully nice when you want to," she murmured sweetly. "Mercy! Why haven't I met you before?"

"And fate is usually so kind to lovers!" added Donn Riley in the same tones.

"I do wish you would take me seriously, Mr. Riley."

"I thought you wanted to be amused," was his injured reply.

She doubled up her fist and looked at it thoughtfully, then patted her other palm with it. Her eyes were very alluring when they returned to his.

"Somehow I don't feel so much like being amused now. I feel very serious—and—it's curious, isn't it, Mr. Riley?"

Mr. Riley conceded that it was, indeed, very curious.

"I wonder what it would seem like up forward if the evening was nice and there was a moon."

"It would probably be too wonderful for words," he assured her. "Moon or no moon."

"Then I'll meet you up there as soon as you're through with your work."

"But, Miss Anderson—"

"Don't be horrified," she said calmly. "I'm so lonely I can't be held responsible for the things I say. I just don't care what I say. You're nice, and—I'm no infant, Mr. Riley!"

CHAPTER XII.

A TALK WITH THE CHIEF.

HE watched her out of sight, then walked to the doorway of the neglected wireless-room. With his hands over his head against the jambs, he surveyed the apparatus, and his smile slowly died.

It was in wretched shape, meaning hours of hard work.

He observed that the motor generator commutators were black as ink, covered with a rich scum of caked oil and carbon dust. The lead-in insulator was cracked where it joined the roof. One of the prongs of the aerial switch was broken off at the slate base.

The head phones were lying on the floor, probably cracked, or with the magnetism jarred out of them. He examined the storage batteries, part of the emergency set, used in case the steamer's dynamo went out of commission. The acid solution had receded far below the tops of the plates. He shook his head despairingly.

There was no crystal for the detector; the starting-box was hanging from a single screw; the room was rank with salt moisture. It needed a thorough airing and drying.

He went next door—his stateroom—and turned on the light over the washstand. A horde of tiny mosquitoes rose singing from the unmade bunk. The sheets were damp, dirty. The atmosphere here was one of mold, the heavy, sour, fragrance suggestive only of tropical habitations and dungeons. He shook out the sheets, flattened some of the singing blue devils with a tattered copy of a Spanish newspaper, switched off the light, and went out on deck.

The cargo cluster in the after well had been extinguished. He went aft to investigate. The great beamwise hatch had been battened down and tarpaulined.

One man was standing there, almost hidden in the darkness, leaning out over the rail. The rain was streaming down on him, drumming on the hatch cover with a soft, hollow note. Riley heard some one stumbling along the pier.

"Stand by that stern line!" The second mate's voice was irritable.

"Aye, sir. Getting there as fast as I can," came an equally petulant reply from the pier.

"How soon do we pull out?" Riley called down to the mate.

He was conscious that the man had turned his head, was trying to establish the identity of the strange voice.

"I don't know. Ask them up forward. I'm not running this ship. Who is that?"

"The wireless operator."

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," rejoined the mate, no less irritably than before. "Have you got a raincoat? I'm freezing down here."

"Aren't there any oilskins forward?" asked Riley. "There should be."

Somehow he felt it his duty to pacify this irked seaman.

"There's a lot that should be on this ship that ain't," was the retort in a high whine of complaint. "This ship is a madhouse. I wish to hell I was ashore, I do."

He was leaning out at an almost reckless angle. "Have you found that stern line yet?" he shouted into the rain.

"Aye, sir!" said a disgruntled voice on the pier.

The second mate addressed himself to Riley again. "I am freezing stiff. Have you anything on you?"

"Not a drop," answered Riley in humility. He could not make out the other's comments plainly, although several pointed phrases stood above the patter of falling water, bearing generally upon the damnable crews that were put on ships nowadays, and the equally unblessed ignorance of the gentlemen who were sent to preside over wireless cabins in particular.

Donn Riley left him to his sour mood, and sought the engine-room. He was beginning to suspect that the Barracouda was going to sea with as unpleasant a lot of sour-faces and skull-duggerers for a crew that any ship had ever been cursed with. Rounding the after cabin he barked his shins on a long cylinder of thin metal.

It sent out a tinny clamor, vibrating with the sound of shivering sheet-metal. More cautiously he picked his way among stacks of labeled cans—for the Barracouda's disguise, no doubt.

It struck him, as he paused at the narrow iron doorway over the engine-room, that this voyage could never begin. The whole scheme of it was like a waking thought born of an unfinished nightmare, plausible enough to stupefied senses, but incredible—wild—on clear analysis. And the more he pondered the wilder the scheme appeared.

He slid down the polished hand-bars of

the steel stairway extending into the cramped engine-room, and landed on the steel grating through which the engine was thrust.

This venerable mechanism he appraised with the dubious eye of one who understood. Leaking steam from valves or piston packings made a sizzling sound and floated upward in little wisps.

The engine was of the steeple-compound type, sheathed with strips of aged larch which were bound in place by bands of corroded brass.

Riley saw some one stirring under the perforated steel floor.

A man in overalls was bending down with his hand on a grease cup, "squeezing down the dope" into one of the main bearings.

"Hello below!" called Donn Riley cheerfully.

The engineer craned his neck. His face was stone white underneath a layer of sweat and oil and dabs of grease. And his blue-lidded eyes seemed extremely luminous.

He waved his hand. Whether it was a gesture of dismissal or one of invitation, Riley could hardly determine. So he waved back and waited.

After a while the engineer climbed the ladder to his side wearing an expression that seemed to struggle between hostility and open annoyance at the interruption.

The face and its liquid expressions were vaguely familiar to Riley.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the engineer, wiping his hands on the hips of his overalls.

"Just looking her over," confessed Riley, grinning.

The other disposed his hand against a stanchion. He seemed inclined to doubt Donn Riley. "Yes?" he said doubtfully. "Well, what do you think—of this?" He tossed his free hand limply toward the steeple-compound.

"I'd hate to tell you," replied Riley, with a broader grin. "Some engine!"

"Engine?" snorted the engineer nasally. "A bundle of scrap iron, I call her. Say, are you in the forward crew?"

"I'm the wireless operator."

"Yah? The last one we had got drunk all the time. He quit this morning. Wasn't much good. Quarreling with the old man every other minute."

At the conclusion of this loquacity the engineer relapsed into his former moody silence. Riley was silently remarking upon two things: the strange fashion in which his companion's eyes went bright and then exceedingly dull by turns; the other, that in his past wanderings he had somewhere met this fellow.

The knowledge persisted to evade him. As for his changeable eyes, those were the symptoms of an opium eater. That flashed a suggestion into his head. China!

"Is the old man hard to get along with?" he asked casually.

"Not if you know how to handle him."

Riley nodded attentively. "Been sailing with him long?" Where had he seen this fellow before?

"I brought her up from Panama."

"Oh, then, you're the chief?"

"That's the way they have me down in the articles." He seemed suddenly uneasy. "D'you know where we're bound? I heard San Blas. Banana country.

"To tell the truth, I don't think the old hooker 'll float long enough to reach Cape San Lucas. Making water like a straw hat. Lying right here alongside, I've had those damn bilge pumps going ten hours to-day. Believe me, if it wasn't for the bonus money, I'd have signed off this afternoon."

"He pays good bonus money," admitted Riley.

"He has to, take it from me."

"You did a good job on that false stack," encouraged Riley pleasantly.

The chief engineer shot him a sharp glance. "Should have been spending my time calking up leaks," he grumbled.

"What's it for?" asked Riley, still smiling his engaging smile.

"Do I know? Do you know? Does anybody know? I suspect, like all other things in this world, it's to do somebody some good. Yes; I mean good. This is a good ship in spite of herself. But I wish you could see what a crimp shipped down here for a fire-room crew. Cutthroats!"

The brilliance in his eyes subsided, leaving them empty of all expression but his former slight uneasiness.

"You're a Scandinavian, aren't you, chief?"

"What makes you ask that?" the engineer asked sharply.

"You have a European accent. I knew you weren't French."

"My name is Anderson," said the chief immediately. "I am Norwegian by birth, American by adoption, since you are curious."

"It didn't use to be Anderson," said Donn Riley amiably.

The chief engineer bit his lip and blinked. "What in hell are you driving at?"

"Your name wasn't Anderson when I knew you before," persisted Riley. "What was it?"

"I'm sure you're mistaken. Look here! Who's running this engine-room, you or me?"

"I'm not questioning your authority," agreed Riley. "The only thing I'm questioning is your nationality. You used to run into Chinese ports, didn't you?"

"I—I believe I did."

"Remember a little fracas out Nangpo Road in the fall of—let me see—the fall of 1911? You and some of your pals from one of the P. and O. liners?

"An Englishman was black-jacked. And if I'm not mistaken you were the first of your gang to make tracks for Customs Jetty. Faintly recollect that, Mr. Anderson?"

"Look here! Are you a secret-service agent?"

"If I were I wouldn't let this ship out of here to-night. She's breaking a dozen laws. No; I'm only a plain American citizen, a plain bum, if we stop to split hairs. You just aroused my curiosity, that's all."

"The old man knows who I am," asserted the chief doggedly.

"So I suspected. It *is* Reynard, isn't it?"

"I left England ten years ago."

"Got citizenship papers?"

"What if I haven't?"

"The only real grudge I have against you—aside from your part in that affair with the English quartermaster in Shanghai—is your connection with that Hartman gang."

"Well, what do you intend doing? The old man knows about it."

"And that," agreed Riley, in tones that could be taken to mean almost anything, "should satisfy the most particular."

An electric bell suddenly filled the stuffy little engine-room with startling clamor.

Wearing an expression of the most profound relief, the engineer strode past Donn Riley and gripped the shining steel control-levers.

The small, wood-sheathed engine shuddered. Every object in the room seemed to be jumping or thumping.

Reynard, with his hand on the engine-room telegraph, turned and looked slantwise across his shoulder. There was a queer grin at his bloodless lips.

"You keep out of this engine-room!" he shouted. "You can't call me a traitor, damn it! I'm as good a patriot as anybody on board this boat! That's more'n you can say!"

"You're right," Donn Riley shouted back.

"If I catch you down here again," snarled the chief, "I'll brain you! By God, I will! You can tell the old man I said so!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CALL OF THE KEY.

WHEN Donn Riley reached the deck in a state of deep-reaching irritation grounded upon the maniacal leer of the chief, which still was the most sharply defined feature of that inconclusive interview, he found that the steamer was slipping out stealthily from her slip, preparing to defy the port laws in a fashion that, if successful, would add another glittering jewel to her crown of dishonor.

The long pier, like a gigantic clot of black shadows, was moving backward into the night. The breast line fell with a weltering splash alongside, creating a commotion to those on board that might be com-

pared to the keen annoyance experienced by a house-breaker who unexpectedly capsizes a chair.

The line of mistily sparkling lights on the Embarcadero was describing a grand semicircle, arching from right to left.

Astern was impenetrable blackness. A chilly wind, faintly odorous of the ocean, blew against Donn Riley's cheeks, bearing with it the last stinging drops of the rain.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Donn Riley entered the wireless cabin, shutting the door softly. The thumping of the venerable engine reassured him, somehow lending to this utterly incredible venture a note of probability and reality.

That they had actually cast off and pulled clear of the wharf convinced him that Captain Murdock, in spite of his anxiety, would not be likely to falter in the tight pinches that the future might have in store for them.

The Barracouda had gotten away neatly. Her captain had wasted no time. He had made up his mind and acted. And this, as he realized, was only the first of a series of daredeviltries to be flaunted in the face of reason, not to mention a variety of maritime statutes.

For the time being, Donn Riley merely looked, listened, and marveled. He was reasonably sure that his part in these large proceedings was forthcoming shortly, just how quickly it was impossible to guess, unless one knew precisely the inner workings of the reckless commander's mind.

He was conscious now of an inward glow of excitement, almost amounting to a choking exultation. His past adventurings had been mere nibblings in comparison. This ship might be flying the black flag for all he knew of her mission.

He was one of the crew of an ocean terror! And she was bound, not improbably, on the most ticklish voyage of her extremely dark career. The tidbit of these introspections, which he did not yet have the effrontery to consider calmly and fully, was, to be sure, the madcap daughter of his captain. How the tangled problem that her presence would create might be sifted, and solved, and reasonably answered, was now too obscure to contemplate. That a rational solution would eventually present itself, perhaps by the person most intricately concerned, was the simplest excuse at his command for sidestepping the issue.

As he had expressed himself to the captain, and as he still devoutly maintained to himself, the proposed plan of saving Ellen Murdock from the nauseous attentions of the Spanish consul, was a ridiculous proposal. He had no intentions now, nor would he when the crisis arrived, of shouldering the responsibilities embodied in the indubitably charming Miss Murdock.

He conceded that she was a splendid girl, a divinity no doubt. He could enumerate, point by point, any number of her graces. The sympathetic sweetness of her nature was known to him; it had been revealed by her voice, her gestures, her very act, indeed. But he was quite sure, susceptible to such feminine charms as he readily confessed himself to be, that her matchless perfection was not for him. Nor could it ever be.

The explanation he gave himself for this was of a few hours' standing. In accordance with a whim, of a character generated only by such imaginations as his, he had promised to the unresponsive head and shoulders of a young woman he had gazed upon in the dining-room of the Hotel St. Francis, to abstain from such vices as were known to corrode the soul of mankind.

So deeply had the backward glimpse of this lovely creature been seared into the willing wax of his resolutions; so obviously had her vital wholesomeness and virtue contrasted with his own faultiness, that he had in the strangest of fashions pledged himself to regenerate himself, simply in order that he might occupy a place of merit in the eyes of her—this girl whose features he might probably never gaze upon.

Hours ago he had dismissed as rankest heresy the intruding suspicion that the lovely head and shoulders of the girl in the St. Francis dining-room were the personal property of Ellen Murdock. Certain discoveries hinted that both might be one and the same, yet it was not his half doubt for these that caused him to dismiss the suspicion.

His sole reason, indeed, for believing that the girl at the St. Francis and Miss Murdock were different beings, was that Miss Murdock, despite her loveliness, owned a countenance absolutely at variance with the one his imagination had created! Because he had not been afforded a glimpse of the other girl's face, he had drawn it entirely from imaginative pigments, or figments!

Yet his meeting again of Ellen Murdock was, in spite of all that, something to look forward to with tingling anticipation. Her reaction to her father's suggestion of marriage was worthy of profound speculation. At all events, the future was an intoxicating view, a venture for a red-blooded individual—madmen and tropical stars—a rotting hulk for a fling in sapphire oceans! What if she was a floating madhouse? Here was adventure corked in a bottle and ready to be decanted like a ripe, rich, and dangerous wine—for him a sip of stark and bloody experience!

In that light the Barracouda's vices swiftly became virtues. Murdock became a cutlassed Morgan, no longer a scamp of dark harbors; Cordella ceased being a madman to conform (temporarily) to the measurements of a debonair and romantic *caballero*, Reynard was transformed into an uncannily shrewd and plotting devil who drew his inspiration for misdeeds from a tin box of Khorassan opium!

Even the Hartman pack received their glamour—strictly a group of businesslike cutthroats with headquarters somewhere in Mexico, men who would perform any sort of criminal act for others or for themselves (though always for money). It was a thrilling symposium. And putting to sea in a sinking ship struck the keynote.

Donn Riley, with his cheeks flushed, went to work with energy, first truing up the gummed commutator, then repairing the aerial switch, finally connecting the head phones into the detector circuit.

In the tool-box he came across a silvery fragment of metallic silicon, which he inserted deftly between the detector prongs, snapping a mandolin E-string along the jagged edge for the necessary high-resistance contact.

With these arrangements completed, and the various switches set to their proper adjustments, his labor was rewarded, as soon as he established the receivers upon his ears, by a vigorous grating noise—radio signals from some near-by station.

Donn Riley's trained ears recognized them at once as the high-power stridulations of KPH—the Marconi station at San Francisco. KPH was striving to transmit a message through "static" to Honolulu.

He adjusted the tuning handle, setting it for longer waves. Immediately the powerful vibrations of KPH were diminished, and a shrill, flutelike note—the high-pitched voice of some war-ship at sea—took its place.

Depositing the receivers on the instrument ledge, Donn Riley drew out a handful of blue, paper-bound booklets, all of which bore the imprint of the government printing office at Washington. One of the baby-blue booklets contained a list of international radio call letters, every wireless station on board ship or ashore having assigned to it a distinctive call.

He thumbed through the well-used pamphlet several times before he considered that the Barracouda was perhaps not of United States registry. He tried Peru, the Argentine, and, finally, Mexico. And it evolved that the ancient blockade runner, registered with a scattered list of Mexican shore stations, had had designated as her call the letters XYL.

Below decks a bell rang briefly. The larch-sheathed engine seemed to thump with closer regularity. He was surprised to note that the hands of the wireless-room clock pointed to 1.55.

His former nervousness revisited him. Had the old hooker been able to get away with a clean pair of heels, or was she now apprehended and followed? Had the elements of such a problematic situation not been so serious he might have smiled. The Barracouda, with those decayed boilers of hers, would be approaching the impossible if she exceeded ten knots. The most sluggish war-ship in port could double that snail-pace without half trying.

Opening the door he thrust out head and shoulders and peered into a wall of black-

ness. The rain had stopped entirely, giving place to a dense fog. They should be well through the Golden Gate by this time, he supposed, although in the numerous passages he had made in and out of that world-famous entrance, he had been too busily engaged inevitably to reckon the time.

Astonishment slowly grew upon him until it exploded in a sharp gasp. He reexamined the deck to make certain. From fore to aft, not a single light was lit!

He snapped off the wireless-room lamp hastily and walked forward. Here he was enfolded by the darkness of a tomb. Not even the green and red sidelights were burning! Nor was the usual spectral glow at the mastheads in evidence.

The Barracouda, then, had reverted to her oldest and most successful trick—blockade running! It was dangerous business. These were war times. The entrance to the Golden Gate was commanded for miles by deep mines of the electric-release type, and this area was checkerboarded into tiny squares for the convenience of terribly accurate mortars hidden behind the bulwark of hills. Besides, there were destroyers! *Where* were the destroyers? A chance shot from that mist-filled void—the game would have been misplayed!

Where were the destroyers?

Donn Riley shivered unpleasurably as he calculated the flight into the rusty hips of the cargo tramp of an armor-piercing shell, of the type designed to explode upon entrance—the kind of shell which was so successfully being employed on the Atlantic to supplement the splendid work of depth bombs, in crumpling up the tin fish!

What would such a shell exert its explosion upon in the cankered heart of this hulk? It would twist rusted beams and stanchions into bow-knots; it would blast away garboard strakes like wet tissue-paper! And it would elevate the shells of boilers higher than a sea-gull ventured in its wildest flights!

These pleasant suppositions were set aside by a gruff salutation from the flying-bridge. Slightly accustomed to the blackness, his eyes discerned very indistinctly a muffled figure overhead.

"You down there, Sparks?"

"Aye, sir!" He had recognized the strained voice of Captain Murdock.

"What have you picked up?"

"Nothing of consequence."

"Nobody's called us yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Haven't heard any destroyers asking mysterious messages, or coding?"

"Not a pipe out of a gunboat, except a position report from some large war-ship. Pretty far away. Oahu, I should say. Couldn't make her very plain."

"Good! Stand by your instruments. I'll station a deck-hand outside your door. If any one calls, tell me at once. They're bound to call us, Riley," he added irritably. "You sit tight and say nothing to them till I come."

"Dim light on starboard beam, sir," interrupted the lookout in singing voice.

"Hush! You'd wake the dead, you idiot!" growled the captain. "Well, that's Point Bonita light, Riley. When—*if*—they call, let me know at once. Look out for fresh paint. We're working now."

Donn Riley hastened back to his apparatus with a guilty heart. For the past twenty minutes he had not been listening in. A thousand stations might have been calling XYL in that interval without his being the wiser.

He adjusted the head band, pressed down on the receivers until they created partial vacuums inside his ears, and sensitized the detector. Luckily, he had found a wonderfully delicate fragment of silicon.

Static—heat lightning and invisible electric discharges in the upper atmospheric stratas—hissed and spattered and clicked in the cold receivers, giving sounds not unlike those caused by drawing diamonds sharply across panes of glass.

Through this interference he could hear the faint, slow voice of KHK—the station at Honolulu—his old station. It was like the whisper of memory, rising, falling, now silent, again loud and urgent. How many times he had caused the piercing voice of KHK to go trumpeting forth into the uttermost corners of the Pacific!

As chief operator of that splendid installation, he had permitted himself, in one of

those fool spells of his, to neglect duty. He had gone down the toboggan with breathless rapidity, striking bottom in the cheapest and most notorious of Embarcadero rooming-houses.

KHK had been the pleasantest of berths, and rich in opportunity. Some day he hoped to go back. His comfortable bungalow on the green flanks of Maui-lepi-lepi, with the brilliant blue of Waïdalde Bay commanded from his veranda hammock, the sprinkling of delicately etched coconut palms on the farther shores, the severe black steel masts of the station thrusting themselves in great dignity toward the crystal blue sky—these were aspects of that snug berth that he could now afford to regret.

He slid the tuning handle up and down the scale, concentrating all of his alert attention on the tissue-steel diaphragms of the sensitive head-receivers, wooing intelligence from them that only the most highly trained ears could understand.

Donn Riley knew that he was nervous, gradually becoming feverishly excited. The career of the devil-ship was under way; her entire safety for the time being at least was reposed in him.

Ineffectively he endeavored to stay the trembling of the fingers manipulating the inner inductance coil. He was shaky, anxious. A feeling of icy insecurity held him for a moment, then passed.

For diversion he seized a handful of damp papers which were scattered over the ledge—scraps of old message blanks—and cast them into the waste-paper basket, industriously clearing his desk for the action that was doomed to come some time before morning.

An hour passed.

KHK was having something to say to the exceedingly polite and able operator—a Japanese—on an incoming Toyo Kisen Kaisha liner. The Japanese operator humbly desired to state that he had on his hook seventy-nine messages from illustrious passengers which must be retransmitted at once, via KHK, to San Francisco.

He added, penitently, but with large importance, that the majority of the messages were war messages, highly essential: it was imperative that they be put through the air without pause.

KHK replied complainingly. Couldn't he hold the ungoldly flock of business for an hour before dawn, when the static might have removed itself to the other side of the hemisphere?

Then the San Francisco station cut in scathingly: "You give me a pain in the neck. Tell him to begin shooting. *I'll* take his business without your bothering to relay it. Tell him to repeat each word twice, and to use all the juice he can squeeze out of the generators. He's coming in here fine—on a freak—like a ton of bricks. K!"

"Good boy!" murmured Donn Riley.

As KHK conveyed the gist of the San Francisco station's florid comments to the Jap mail liner, an imperative knock occurred on Donn Riley's door. It brought him back to earth in a heap. His mind had been wandering to that hammock overlooking the divine blue of the little bay.

He pushed the door outward.

"Who is there?"

"Sparks—let me in!"

These were the worried accents of Captain Murdock.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE SCHEME.

HE entered without sound, closing the door very quietly, as if he were afraid that the slightest creak might be overheard by a prowling destroyer.

"It's late. Late! Have none of them tried to raise us yet, Riley?"

"Haven't had a call," Riley told him in reassuring accents. "San Francisco and Honolulu are monopolizing the air, trying to get some messages through the static from an inbound T. K. K. mail liner."

"Dammit!" sputtered the worried man. "Do you know the call letters of this boat? They may've been dinning you for hours—right at our very heels."

"I have ears, captain," Riley reminded him, "and eyes. She's Mexican registry, as I discovered. Her call is XYL. No; not a whimper from a soul."

Captain Murdock, with severely straight lips, shook the water from his faded brown cap, stamped his feet, grunted, and frowned portentously.

"*Very* well," he uttered with finality, "if they don't begin calling us, we'll begin shooting it into the air for them. Our time is valuable. This fog was a godsend. If they wait till morning to discover that we left without kissing the port captain good-by, sunup will find nooses at our necks or shackles at our wrists and ankles. What do you think of that? Are *you* hankering to be chained to a stanchion in the locker, or—"

"I'll have to confess," cut in Donn Riley amiably, "that what you're saying is going over my head like a tent. Why must we shoot a confessional into the air when we've made such a neat getaway? I'm satisfied!"

"Are you?" drawled the captain in deep, sarcastic tones. "Have you a vague idea of just about how far away from port we'll get before some wiseacre tosses a solid shot across our bows? *I* have, sir!"

Donn Riley scratched his handsome large nose thoughtfully. His mind had been so filled with the excitement of getting away that the consequences of such criminal procedure had been grossly neglected. Once at sea, he had supposed, they would be as safe as children tucked in bed.

"Well?" he asked, properly humbled.

"I take it for granted—considering that I have all reasons to suspect that you are a crack operator—that nobody has missed us as yet," began Murdock seriously. "Now, I'll tell you what my scheme is in case they miss us before—long before—dawn. If they don't miss us—then we revise the scheme.

"I'm laying a course due west—straight out. 'Twould fetch us up on the coast of Japan if I held to it. But, of course, when I get far enough out I'm going to lay tracks for San Blas.

"*Now*, if San Francisco or a naval station—the big one at Mare Island, for instance—begins squealing for us, you're to waste no time. Right back at them you come with your S. O. S. In other words, the instant they find that we've escaped—*we are a sinking ship*. Get that?"

"You're talking Greek to me, sir," answered Riley.

Captain Murdock made an impulsive gesture of annoyance. To him, perhaps, the scheme was as transparent as a glass of spring water.

He went on: "With the start we have, it's going to take them a good two hours to find us, to catch up with us, according to our present reckoning, isn't it, Riley?"

"Yes, provided they have to send a destroyer through the fog all the way from the bay," assented Riley. "But how about the destroyers which may be all around us? We may be walking straight into a hornets' nest of 'em, captain!"

"Maybe. But I'm trusting to luck. I've nailed a horseshoe upside down over my doorway. I've touched wood ninety-seven times to-night. And nobody saw us slip out, did they? And this fog came from no place in the universe but the heavenly portals, did it?"

"Everything has moved like clockwork," agreed Riley.

"*Very* well. Using the same reasoning, I don't *think* the destroyers are nosing around outside to-night. Most of them, as you know, cluster pretty closely around San Diego. And it's a long, long run from San Diego to the spot I've picked out as the Barracouda's final resting-place. Well, do you begin to see daylight, young fellow?"

"I'm beginning to see shadows moving through the fog, sir," replied Riley. "In other words, as soon as we find out, by wireless, that our flight has been discovered by the port authorities, we at once tell them we're in a sinking condition and going down like a bombed U-boat!"

"Neatly expressed," said the captain approvingly. "We're ready to founder any instant, once they begin asking where we are. So, instead of wirelessing them the usual 'Go ahead' signal, you start immediately describing to them the sinking of the old Barracouda—and by God! I hope she floats forever, just to spite them."

"I understand," acquiesced Riley with a quick nod. "My job is merely to describe a sinking ship, or a ship sinking, so graphically, with such wealth of fine detail, that

they will almost see the waves closing over our mastheads."

"Precisely!" grunted Murdock.

"The only logical objection I can raise to that," went on Riley slowly, "is that a dozen ships will at once put to our assistance. Why, every destroyer on this side of the Pacific will come hell-bent. Then what, sir?"

The captain gave him a look of scorn. "But they don't know *where* we're sinking!" he almost shouted.

Riley nodded his instant comprehension. "I see. We give them a fake position—tell them we're fifty miles southwest of the Golden Gate, for example, when, as a matter of fact, we're nearly sixty miles due west of our supposed point of foundering."

Captain Murdock clapped his large hands. "What do you think of that scheme? Worked it out all alone, Riley! Will it work — from the wireless point of view?"

Donn Riley wrinkled his forehead. "I can't say yes positively. It will, only on one condition. If the gunboats in the Pacific have direction finders, as we call 'em, attached to their regular equipment, they can find us."

Captain Murdock's expression plainly revealed his ignorance of this new wireless fad.

"Direction finders," explained Riley, "will point out a ship as readily as a compass will point out the magnetic pole. Of course, they're not precise; they're good within ten degrees sometimes. Too close for comfort, though. I know that the gunboats on the Atlantic are being equipped with direction finders as an aid in spotting submarines."

"But they must hear the U-boat's wireless, eh?" put in Captain Murdock.

Riley nodded. "Every morning or evening the subs come to the surface, rig their aerials, and flash doings of the day to the big stations at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. The shore stations of the Allies and most Allied war-ships are equipped with direction-finders. They hear the subs, one at a time, get an approximate bearing on them, then compare notes.

"In the Admiralty Building, in London, is a big chart stuck full of tiny, red-headed pins. Each of those red pins indicates approximately the position of a U-boat. So you can see how nicely our exact position could be found by the stations roundabout here, no matter how cleverly we lied, provided they cared to go to the trouble."

Captain Murdock was examining him with great interest. He shook his head doubtfully. "Are those gadgets hard contrivances to operate?"

Riley nodded. "It takes a man who knows both wireless and navigation. He must be able to box a compass forward and backward."

"Well, then," summarized the captain, with a deep breath of relief, "we'll presume that you are going to make your description of the sinking so damned realistic and exciting that they'll forget all about their new-fangled dingdabs. They'll just crawl all over each other getting ships to the empty spot on the ocean where we say we're sinking."

"That's up to me," confirmed Riley. "What next?"

"What next? Did you hear me mention fresh paint when you came forward a couple hours ago? By morning we will no longer be aboard the rusty, God-forgotten, disreputable tramp, the Barracouda, of Salina Cruz, Mexico. By morning a brand-new ship—all but her clanking old insides —will have grown up out of this ocean in place of her. She'll be a trim, smart steamer; she'll be the Barnegat, of Boston, bound from Cordova, Alaska, to San Juan del Sur, for example, to pick up a cargo of mahogany for the Boston cabinetmakers!"

"When did we clear Cordova?"

"Three weeks ago, light. Discharged a cargo of copper-mine tools from Baltimore."

Riley considered this. "What happens if a destroyer picks us up in the morning and sends a crew aboard? Have you covered that? I'm willing to go the limit, but by flashing that fake distress call I'll have violated my oath as a licensed professional operator. There's a twenty-year sentence attached to that trifling misdemeanor."

Captain Murdock threw up his hands. "Do you know what's attached to the tri-

fling misdemeanor of blowing port without my clearance papers, of changing the name of my steamer and giving her a false registry, of engineering this whole confounded, cursed, blasted scheme?"

Riley admitted that he had given that subject some serious consideration.

"It's a chance we've got to take," went on the captain anxiously. "If they send a crew aboard they may or may not find out that I've a forged set of clearance papers, clearing the Barnegat, of Boston, sailing light out of Cordova."

"They may not be particular," added Riley.

"It's simply a chance we've got to take," repeated Murdock sententiously. In a grim voice he concluded: "You've broken the law already. So've I! The devil take the hindermost, eh? We're both in the same boat. If we stick together, we'll somehow pull through without a scrape or scratch. We're smashing the law right and left. And we've got to be like this—"

He laid his two thick thumbs together.

"You know the old family proverb, Riley: 'United we stand; divided we fall.'"

Riley confessed familiarity with that old proverb. He added: "According to my hazy recollection, that old proverb was the watchword, the slogan, that bound the States together during the sessions of the old Continental Congress."

Captain Murdock looked angry suddenly. He flared at him: "Are you flapping the flag again, too, Riley?"

"No, sir; I'm only reminding you of a certain obligation. I mentioned it. I simply reaffirm my statement."

"Bosh!" snorted Captain Murdock. He grumbled to himself. Then: "Do you intend to snap the Stars and Stripes in my face all the rest of this voyage? You irritate me!"

"I'll try to remember not to irritate you, sir," replied the wireless operator gravely.

They exchanged glances in the same cool, frank, soul-exploring fashion that had caused restraint on both sides when they had first introduced themselves that afternoon.

And neither of them was more satisfied with the results of his exploration than on the former occasion.

Captain Murdock dropped his eyes and grunted heavily.

Donn Riley kept his where they had been and grinned slightly.

Then Captain Murdock exclaimed peevishly: "Come out here on deck. I want to show you something."

He turned out the radio-room light himself and pushed Riley ahead of him into the open.

CHAPTER XV.

SIGNED "ELLEN M."

IF anything, the fog was thicker than it had been two hours ago. No stars were showing. Not even a whitecap, or a streak of foam, was visible on the area of slow-moving water.

"Thicker than soup," muttered Captain Murdock approvingly. "If my luck will hold! If it will only hold! Come here, Riley. Now, look down over the side."

Donn Riley looked.

A dim, purple light—most indistinct of all colors at night, because of the shortness of the purple light ray—was hanging over the rail on rubber-covered wires. By the ghostly glow of it he made out a long scaffolding, almost floating on the water, and made fast to the hand rail by small manila ropes.

Several men—four or five, he would say at a guess—were crouching on the broad plank, with life-ropes around them, industriously splashing on over the rusty, gray hide, fresh-smelling paint of an unknown color. By that light it might have ranged from lavender to blood-orange without his knowing its secret.

"Every man-Jack in the crew, excepting a man at the wheel, two men and a coal-passer in the firehold, and the chief and us two, is at work, painting this ship. A gang forward is finishing up the upper works. Another scaffold has been rigged on this side forward; two of them are rigged on starboard.

"This afternoon, right after that smart inspector told me she wasn't fit to use as

a sewage barge, and that I'd be looking out on the world in general through one-inch iron bars if I tried frisking the old hulk out of the bay, I paid a mighty important visit to a ship-chandler who knows how to keep his mouth shut.

"I bought white block-letters; enough for the stern and both cutwaters. To-morrow morning, when the sun comes up, this ship will have changed her skin, her name, her appearance."

"Everything but her rotten heart," agreed Donn Riley.

Captain Murdock chuckled. "You're right; everything but her rotten heart. What can change that—till she crumples up on the bottom of the sea? Well, her upperworks are now painted dirty white—the color of spring snow. You'll open your eyes in the morning to find them a fine, ripe orange. She'll be a fine-looking ship—if I do say it myself!"

The operator considered. "Theoretically she ought to be," he admitted. "But in the morning, if some ship fetches us at the crack o' dawn—a destroyer, say—you'll find a blotch as big as a house that somebody overlooked."

Captain Murdock grunted negatively. "I'm going over every square inch of her with a pocket flash-light. A man will follow me around with buckets of paint. Can you think of any other loopholes I've overlooked?"

"How about the water-line? You can't make paint stick over salt water. Besides, any ship to leeward of us will be able to whiff this fresh paint a hundred miles."

The captain contradicted him with great emphasis. "We're as high out of water as it's possible to lift her by the boot-straps. All our tanks are empty. They're painting as close to the water-line as they can reach without getting their brushes wet. Just before dawn we'll fill all tanks, fore and aft. She'll settle a good two feet, because they built enormous tanks in her. That 'll put the ragged edge clear under.

"As for whiffing her a hundred miles to leeward, I've got so much Jap drier in this paint that it's fairly dry when it leaves the brush. You can rub your hand over it five minutes afterward without its sticking."

"Even in this weather?"

"Yes, Riley; in any weather. Well, what do you think of my scheme?"

"If you and I applied our talents to a legitimate enterprise," rejoined Donn Riley with a chuckle, "we could corner the world!"

"That we could, Riley! I'll never do it, not only because I'm no longer young, but also I've paid my last visit for a long while to the States. As for you—" He stopped.

"As for me?" said Riley encouragingly.

"No one knows you, anyhow, in connection with this undertaking. As for you? Why, you're going to go back and settle down and lead a decent married life—and corner the world all by yourself!"

The sea captain, now that his desperate scheme was beginning to bear fruit, was keyed to his buoyant mood of the afternoon. He seemed exultant, revealing it by occasional nervous laughter. The worry seemed to have left him entirely. But he spoke gravely:

"You had better get back to your instruments. You have already shown me that you are a man of intelligence and—imagination. So I propose to leave the details of the S. O. S.-ing to you—entirely to you. Shut your door. You'll not be interfered with; I'll be prowling around outside, somewhere near by. In case you need me, use your lungs."

"Our false position—" began Donn Riley.

"Ah! We are sinking six to seven miles due west of the Devil's Slide, which is about three miles to the south'ard of Point San Pedro. But bear in mind that every minute we can gain will add to our margin of safety."

"Had we best sink of ordinary causes, such as a boiler giving way, or—well, by a timed bomb in a cargo hold?"

"I leave such details entirely to your intelligence and imagination. I am a man of no imagination. We sink quickly. The naval men know this ship well enough to realize that once she starts for the bottom, it's only a matter of seconds before she reaches it."

Riley started away from him.

"And—one other point, Riley—"

"Yes, sir?"

He heard the captain clicking his teeth in the darkness. "I understand the wireless code quite well—at least well enough to know what you say on the spark. If I should hear you giving us away—I'll not be accountable for what happens to you. I'm in no mood for treachery!"

"Very well, captain," replied Donn Riley quietly, shutting the door behind him and adjusting the head-phones to his ears.

That warning, he realized, had not taken him entirely by surprise. Not only was Captain Murdock in a naturally nervous mood; but, in light of what had already passed between them, it was only sensible to presume that the Barracouda's master would be on the lookout for treachery.

That Murdock was engaged in some treasonable undertaking he did not for a moment doubt, for more than one proof indicated positively that the steamer was headed for the Southern Ocean on an illegitimate voyage. The next step along this line of reasoning was to suppose that the Barracouda was probably enjoying a very minor rôle in a scheme the dimensions of which could not even be guessed at.

The plan already half formed in the back of Donn Riley's head was simply that if he could retain his captain's good-will, an opportunity might later present itself whereby he might be of inestimable service. He was sorry now that it had been necessary to provoke the captain almost to the point of antagonizing him, merely to squeeze out the unsatisfactory information now in his possession. He would not, he told himself, have lent himself to this night's business had he believed that the law-breaking was over with.

As a matter of fact, the law-breaking was hardly begun. Leaving port without clearance papers, transmitting fraudulent distress signals, altering the name and character of a ship—all these were insignificant, he believed, in contrast to the unknown scheme which inspired and explained them.

His supposition that Captain Murdock's main plan was of the most sinister kind fitted itself, as far as he personally was concerned, to an infinity of deeds and sacrifices. For the time being, indeed, he was quite justified to commit any criminal acts if by so doing he could cement the captain's trust in him.

And to Riley, whose official capacity was that of a professional wireless operator licensed by the Federal authorities, there was no crime in the entire category of high-sea crimes quite so heinous as that of transmitting a false distress message.

He had taken his oath, with his palm on a Bible, when the license had been given to him, that he would never be disloyal to his country. If the steamer should be held up and taken over before reaching Mexican waters, his implication in her numerous misdeeds would close the gates of prison behind him for a long time.

That thought was not reassuring. The most trying phase of the ordeal, he supposed, lay between now and sunup. The false distress message would exact the last drop of his nerve-power. He was thankful now that his brain was not clogged with the fumes of alcohol. That unknown girl to whom he had given so absurdly his silent promise was responsible. He wondered if he would ever see her again.

His eyes were half closed, but the deep black pupils, in their irides of brilliant ocean-blue, were sparkling excitedly. His brow was drawn up into a dark frown, making him look very efficient just then.

He tapped the detector wire to heighten the sensitivity of the silicon contact, changed the coupling of the tuner coils, pulled a pad of blank paper toward him, and began writing.

He was composing a piece of the most ridiculous drama that had ever come into his experience. And had he not been the owner of a most constructive and serious imagination, he might have paused at the end of the first sentence, thrown up his arms, and laughed at the utter foolishness of it.

But with his brows darkly knit, his lower lips between his white teeth, his head inclined a little to one side, he wrote on, throwing himself enthusiastically into the part. Executing that part was going to demand the steadiest of hands, the coolest of heads.

Occasionally he paused in his narrative to listen to the passage of messages from the incoming Jap liner to the San Francisco station.

KPH, still roaring closely in his ears, was not having such an easy time of it as he had promised. The Jap liner was now repeating each message a half-dozen times, and yet KPH was finding it difficult to read his signals through the hiss and clatter of the static.

And in the midst of one of his swift and sharp retorts to the polite Japanese operator, KPH stopped sending. The air became absolutely silent.

" Minute," he said, after a brief interval. " Phone's ringing."

Donn Riley dropped his pencil and took a long breath. Had his time arrived? Who could be telephoning to the San Francisco station this time of night excepting the port officers?

Then the great spark of KPH began roaring in his ears once more. He was shivering. His hand was trembling visibly. His heart was hammering on his ribs.

There was no mistake. The Barracouda's criminal departure from the pier had been discovered, for very distinctly, as if experimenting with their queer formation, KPH was pounding out the call letters of the steamer:

XYL — XYL — XYL — de — KPH — KPH—KPH!

Donn Riley drew the sheets of his masterpiece closer. He reached for the starting handle, drew it up slowly, then released it. He had just remembered that the dynamos of a sinking ship would be out of commission, so that he would be compelled to use his storage batteries and the auxiliary outfit. The main apparatus and the auxiliary or emergency apparatus had an entirely different sound, easily detectable by any listening station.

Then San Francisco began calling him again, swiftly, as if growing impatient, punctuating his signals with: " Here—message! Here—message!"

The KPH operator, after calling for nearly twenty seconds, finally said in exasperation:

" I can't hear you, XYL. Don't know whether you answered or not. But here's a message for you:

To Donn Riley,
Aboard S. S. Barracouda, at sea.
First way port. Come to fifth house on right-hand side of street on south side of plaza as you leave water-front, alone.
(Signed), Ellen M.

KPH paused a moment, tapped his key, then repeated the message. He added:

" Donn Riley, what are you doing aboard that old hulk? Have you gone crazy? When did you leave Frisco? What happened in Honolulu? Slip me some details, sonny. This is Ferguson."

Donn Riley, his thoughts diverted so unexpectedly from one exciting channel to one even more disturbing, said nothing. He felt that he was rapidly growing angry, without exactly understanding the reason therefor.

Why, he demanded with some heat, had Ellen Murdock gone to such lengths? Couldn't she have advised him in a subtler, more ingenious fashion? She had deliberately scattered his name, coupling with it the name of the notorious ship upon which he was sailing, to the four quarters of the eastern Pacific. There was utterly no excuse for it. There were dozens of ways of forwarding such information—such really trifling information — without resorting to such clumsiness.

It was really stupid of her, he thought. Unless—and at this point he grew angrier. She had gone about signaling to him in a way that was altogether too deliberate. It was suspiciously deliberate. The only reason he could assign for it was that she had purposely laid bare his presence on the Barracouda, for the express benefit of whatever naval stations might be listening—and the shouting voice of the high-powered KPH could readily be heard from Alaska to Mexico.

He suspected, morever, that by transmitting that damning message to him she had accomplished a twofold purpose — one, linking him up with this mischievous enterprise; the other, cunningly giving the naval stations an opportunity to discover whether or not the Barracouda had left port.

He cooled down slowly by compelling himself to cool down. He had always been hasty at drawing conclusions. This time he would let matters stand until he reached San Blas—the "first way port." Her explanation might be sufficient. At all events, he would share the message with no one aboard.

And at this point in his cogitations the powerful spark of KPH began hammering in his ears again.

Donn Riley tapped his key experimentally. A fat, lavender-blue spark was spat between the brass points of the gigantic Marconi emergency coil. He stopped and listened again, breathing rapidly.

KPH was still after him, pausing every few seconds. Finally he sent a second message broadcast into the air:

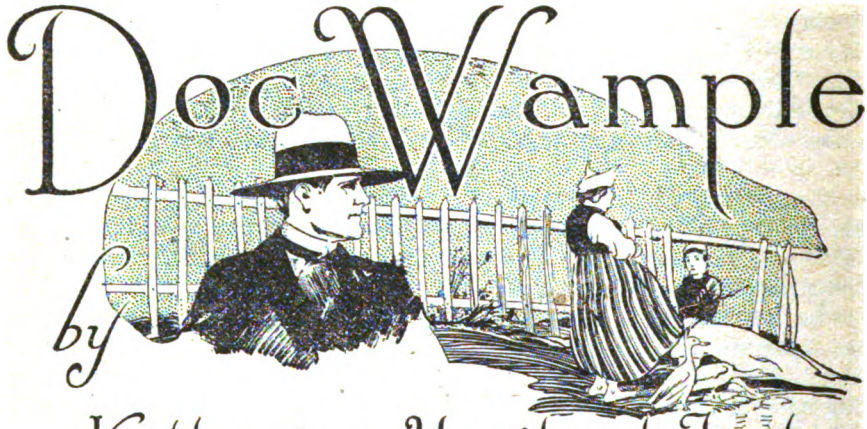
CAPTAIN MURDOCK,
S. S. Barracouda, at sea.
Naval authorities port of San Francisco demand to know your whereabouts. Advise instantly.

There was no signature.

Donn Riley, composing himself with a great effort, dropped his fingers to the key.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Doc Wampler



by Katharine Haviland Taylor

I.

"HE'S liver growed," said Mom Heffelfinger, whose waist, to quote George Meredith, "was dimly defined by her apron string."

"Liver growed," she echoed heavily.

The sallow, little boy, whose disease was so diagnosed, drew a shaking breath. He felt that death was very near, for Mom Heffelfinger was the diagnostician of South Hebron, and her word was authoritative.

Had she not said that Jim Spinny had the apnoma (falling-off disease), and had not Jim fallen off until Pete Trimmer said there was "nossing more to embalm still zan skin and bone"? Yes!

"What for doctoring would youse give, still?" asked Mrs. Hollinger, the mother of the invalid.

"Powwow," replied Mom Heffelfinger; "powwow him good, once." She looked sternly on the invalid, who cowered. Her dignity was so large that she was awe-inspiring.

"Wear flannels on him yet," she added.

Little Stallman Hollinger cowered still lower, the eyes of the diagnostician were searching. He felt that she could see the small, green apples in his small Dutch stomach, and his conscience was very heavy. He realized that when one was liver growed, one passed away, still; and that, passing away, there was no hope for Heaven, when one's stomach and conscience held green and stolen apples.

Two large tears rolled down his putty-colored cheeks. His mother, seeing them, was as upset as her flat and emotionless nature could be.

"Wait once," she said comfortingly, "you're got empty, ain't? I got some nice souse in the pantry. Wait once."

Stallman waited. He liked souse, and although suffering, was hungry. He heard his mother's bare feet slap heavily into the pantry, and then through the kitchen. He heard the door flop after her, and judged that she had gone to have a word with Mrs. Mitzel, over the fence which divided their yards.

The season was June, and their voices dulled and blended with the hum of the bees; but now and then he caught a word and sentence.

"He's fell away wonderful," came in his mother's heavy tone.

"Now sink!" said Mrs. Mitzel.

"And he makes wonderful," came in his mother's voice.

"Mebbe, fer all, he'll pass away like Jimmy Spinny," said Mrs. Mitzel, comfortingly. Then their voices mingled again with nature's and he lost them.

"To pass away still!" To go, not behind, but in the hearse! No more of this life's joys! No more inspecting of the "corp," but being one! No more funerals, fishing, or picnics. (Their joys diminishing in the order written.)

More hot tears slipped down Stallman's cheeks and mingled with the souse. Stallman gulped.

He heard his mother moving about in the big kitchen. She was singing more energetically than wisely, the refrain of a hymn of which she was fond. "In the Valley of Death," was the cheering chorus.

"In the walley, in the walley, in the walley of dess!" she bellowed.

"The walley of dess!" echoed Stallman. A sob mixed with a too large mouthful of souse, and he choked convulsively.

"Ach!" said his mother, who had hurried to him from the kitchen, "I'm that worried that I'm clear funny!"

She thumped him on the back, and went, sighing heavily, back to the kitchen. Her heart was with her little, putty-colored son, but "the Mr." must be fed. She put four loaves of bread, three pies, a plate heaped with doughnuts, a large platter of fried ham, pickled beets, fried potatoes, and a pot of coffee on the table, and then going to the door, called loudly in the direction of the adjoining field:

"Pop! Come eat yourself!"

Pop came. He settled, and began to wield his knife. Mom stood, passing him what he would have, and longed to go to her small boy, who was "making wonderful."

One of the "neighbor men" entered; he said his how-do-you-do, and settled, broad hat still on.

"My wife went to York once," he said. "She's wanted to go wonderful this long time. I sez, 'youse go': she can go so long as I have pies and doughnuts and hard-boiled eggs. I cook the coffee good myself, already."

"Yep!" said Pop Hollinger. "For what good do they make but to cook still; ain't?"

"I sink!" agreed the neighbor man.

They all laughed uproariously, for this was subtle humor. Mom Hollinger pretended a vast displeasure, and said, with an airy wave of her hand, "Youse dunno when you're got it good, and mebbe, fer all, you'll lose once a good cook. Sink I'm going to stand down and cook fer a man where talks that funny?"

"Mom!" came in the feeble tones of the invalid, "I feel fer an apple dumpling!"

"Wait till Pop has et himself," answered his mother. She sighed deeply. The neighbor's expression was sympathetic.

"Fer what ails him?" he inquired.

"Liver growed, once."

"Say not!" said the man. "Will yez have Doc Wampler, him where—"

"I don't hold fer doctors," interrupted Pop, "and this, where learned to doctor in a furrin country still!" Pop closed his lips tightly, Doc Wampler disposed of.

"That there girl where wisits Miss Hill, her niece mebbe, or whatever her an' doc read wonderful much of a furrin language, Eyetalian or French," remarked the neighbor man.

"It wonders me," said Pop Hollinger, his speech somewhat thickened by a large piece of pie, "how he can want fer such a dumb language where nobody in South Hebron can understand still!"

"I sink too!" said Mom.

"An' they set in the parlor on week-days yet!" contributed the neighbor man.

"I should sink that would spite Miss Hill!" Mom wagged her head solemnly after this. There are sins and sins, but to "Set up in the parlor regular—"

"Spite Miss Hill? Her where reads novel books and whatever? An' loans 'em away yet!" The neighbor man was getting as near excitement as he could. He went on: "I found one on Jim once. It read, once, 'Wanity Fair'; I took it to her good, an' I sez, 'Youse set an' read still when youse oughta scrub; but that makes nossing to me; but you're got nerve to loan 'em away to my son yet, where oughta work fer me, instead of book readin'!"

"If she was my woman I'd beat her up!" said Pop.

Mom looked toward him with respect. It recalled a time when she had been beaten up. The event had left her sore, conquered, and with something approaching a love for "the Mr."

"Preacher, he reads it down good about them novel books, he—"

"Mom!" broke in the invalid, "I want fer a hard-boiled egg wis winegar on, still!"

"Wait, once, till Pop's et himself," answered Mom.

II.

Bob Wampler, "him where learned to doctor in a furrin port still," sat in Miss Hill's parlor. As always, when with Miss Hill's niece, Marjory, he was acutely conscious of his hands and feet and of their positions. Bob's thoughts were chaotic. After many sleepless nights he had decided to ask the goddess to come down from Olympus and marry a country doctor.

Last night, as he stood by his window, looking out across the peaceful fields, it had seemed possible—possible because he recalled all her treasured interest in him, and several revealing, and very sweet, impulsive acts.

To-day his decision seemed incredible. He had said good-by to his aunt, who was very much of the soil, and, book under his arm, had gone toward Miss Hill's, his aunt's crude voice echoing in his brain, and another, cruelly sweet in contrast, beating in his heart.

Marjory had met him at the door, with a manner which, to one more assured, would have spelled victory. He, however, had hardly noticed it for a great perturbation was his, and a great fear.

They had read, and now—now—the time had come. Bob coughed. He wished for one moment that Marjory were more like the young women of South Hebron, so that he could have been helped by the condescending tolerance he felt toward them.

"Well?" said Marjory, smiling. He raised conscious eyes to hers and answered her smile stiffly. Then, without introduction, he said, "I love you."

Marjory still smiled. "I thought I'd noticed it," she said.

"I know that I have no right to ask it, but—but—I love you very much, and I *must* ask you to marry me!"

"That makes me think," said Marjory, "of some one's phrase, 'apprehensive cordiality.' Yours is a rather apprehensive proposal. Are you afraid I will accept you?"

She was teasing him, and there were dancing lights in her eyes; but when she saw his and their expression, she sobered and caught her breath convulsively.

"Bob," she went on, "why do you think you're unworthy? I think that you're splendid!" He reached for her hand and held it for the shortest second against his lips. Then he straightened and began: "Marjory."

"Well?"

"You see all these people around you, these Dutch you laugh at so—I'm Dutch, Marjory."

"Oh, Bob! What nonsense!"

"You know my good aunt—" Bob faltered, but he felt that he had to make the girl before him see, measure, balance, and then decide.

"Yes, Bob. But every one has an aunt or a cousin who writes poetry or reads Laura Jean Libbey, or does something equally tragic."

"But suppose the great majority are so-called 'tragic'; suppose all your own instincts are so?"

" Bob! You! Why, I've never known any one so always the gentleman—so truly so."

Bob smiled.

" It is an accomplishment, not an instinct," he said. " I rise when you come in the room, feeling as I do so, not that it is a natural move, but that it is a great politeness. Can't you see that I am sometimes too polite, overly so; and can't you see why? My mother stood behind my father's chair, and passed him the ' smear,' and, if I hadn't gone away, I should expect my wife to do the same—and in me are all the instincts or crudeness, and the thickness of the nature that has worked in the fields only. I would love you truly—and against my will, hurt you many times and deeply."

He stopped. His hands were closing and unclosing with nervous jerks.

" What has ' smear ' and all this to do with you and me, Bob? You aren't thick and crude. Your unusual accomplishments abroad show brilliance."

" Not brilliance," said Bob.

" What was it?"

" It was my Dutch capacity for plodding, and my Dutch strength, which came to me from my forefathers who tilled these fields."

These had been long speeches for Bob. His rôle was the adoring, and silent adoration was what he gave. She was so dainty, sweet, light, different—so everything, that he would be, and could never be.

" But, Bob," began Marjory, " after you leave here you won't feel the influence of these people. Gradually you will forget them, and they will grow to be like some strange dream."

" I'm not going to leave here," said Bob.

Marjory looked at him startled, and seemed to see as she looked a broad hat on his head, and the dull garb of the Mennonites. His face was set and heavy.

" Not leave here?" she repeated after him. " Why, Bob! You can't stay here! That would be madness! South Hebron after a capital of Europe!" went on Marjory, unmercifully. " Why, you could have got a medical training suitable for these people at a veterinary school!"

" I am one of ' these people,' " said Bob Wampler. He shifted his feet and glanced up and saw her look to be utterly despairing. " My father—"

" Well, what?"

" He said to me as he died, ' Bob, these people are suffering, not only from overworked bodies, but from underworked brains. They are cruel to their women, because they have never learned to imagine.' He said something of St. Luke—his work, and what the profession should be. And then he said, ' There will be men in the cities, but here—here where a man's work is doubly hard, where a man with opportunity can open the souls while he heals the bodies—there will be no one."

Bob was looking down at his hands.

" Your father would never have asked you to do that," said Marjory quietly, " if he'd known what promise you were to show. If he'd known how great you could be, and will be if—"

" You're wrong, Marjory. It will take a good doctor to amount to anything here. He told me to get the best, and then to come home to my people."

" It would be hard for a woman to live here," said Marjory. " She would have to love much to do it."

Some one was coming through the hall, and then Minnie Wampler, Bob's aunt, appeared in the doorway.

" Aw, youse," she said. " I come to say for Bob to go to the Eagle House for supper. Miss Hill, she was setting in the garden, and she says for me to walk in." The last was an explanation to Marjory. " I've wanted this long time to go to Sarah's for supper, and I won't be back till nine," she added.

Marjory was silent. Silent while she contrasted this person with her own aunt. It seemed incredible that this woman could be of the same blood as Bob—incredible and tragic.

" He's that sneaky," she went on, turning to Marjory, " he won't eat no hard-boiled eggs, pies, nor nothing!"

" Won't you have dinner with us, Bob? I'm sure aunty will be glad to have you."

"That's what I sez," answered Minnie Wampler, "seeing how youse set up and walk out and all; and it would cost him twenty-five cents to eat himself at the Eagle."

"We will be very glad to have him," Marjory assured her.

She felt a sudden sickness. It was very well to say that Bob was not of these people, and to love Bob when she forgot them; but surrounded with his "stilling" and "yetting" relatives—confronted with their complacent crudities—she looked at him and wondered.

Perhaps he was right.

Perhaps the breach was too great. She looked at him again and softened. Nothing could make any difference; but, for his own good, staying among these people was impossible.

She could see him as he grew older; shriveling from the lack of interests; going out at all hours to visit people who resorted only to him after the powwow doctor had failed; working endlessly for little money and no thanks.

Marjory's face took on a look of determination and was greatly changed by it. Its softness was gone, and in its stead was a calculating purpose.

"You see?" said Bob, after a long silence.

"Yes," answered Marjory.

"But these are my people," he added heavily. "I am one of them."

Again Marjory seemed to see the dull garb of the sect. Bob's face was as set as a Dunkard elder's, when, sitting with others, he decides to put a member out of the church.

Suddenly Marjory spoke, briskly and to the point.

"Bob, dear," she said, "I love you, but I cannot love you here. I know that this is not the place for you. You have two days in which to decide which you love the best, South Hebron or me."

III.

Two days had passed, and to-morrow Bob would tell her that he had decided to give up South Hebron. He could not lose her.

Bob stood in a small, attic room of his aunt's house, leaning on a bureau and looking out of a little paned window into the quiet village road below. There was a gray horse tied to his aunt's fence, switching its tail nervously and stamping.

"Away from all this," thought Bob, "with *her*."

Several chickens spluttered in the dust of the road below, and a child came down the street, singing a bit of a Dutch mother-song, and he, the man, tired and sore, had won.

The night before he had lain in the hot room tossing, thinking of the sweet softness of Marjory, and then of a crippled child who might have walked if the right doctor had been near. His father's words—Marjory's lips. His ache to go into the world to make his mark, and with that, his ache for the woman he loved. And Bob had won, the part that ate and slept and walked—the flesh.

He was going into the world where he longed to work, and he was going with the woman he loved as his wife. Below in the street, he saw a girl, just out of childhood, walking toward the house. She paused at the gate, and then he heard through the house the clang of the bell. Absolute silence followed and he remembered that his aunt had gone visiting.

He went down the stairs reluctantly. He didn't want to hear voices of the neighborhood, for they awoke that voice that he was stilling—the one that called:

"These are thy people, who need thee much. Sick in soul as in body. And yet too young to know the light. Home of thy people and service."

IV.

"HELLO, Maggy!" said Bob, as the door swung open heavily. "How are you?"

He recognized her as the child of a stern-faced neighbor, and saw, in her quelled look the fruit of such parentage. Then he forgot himself and his decision; for the subdued little Dutch girl was clinging to the side of the doorway and sobbing.

Again Bob stood by the window of his room. It was later, and the sun lay in golden streaks across the road. There was

a dismal peace in the scene. Broken fences, and worn houses, the scent of early flowers, privation, and yet in some strange way peace, peace of the known and of the accepted cross. In Bob's ears was echoing the story of the little girl who sobbed, a drab story of a drab and commonplace happening, made bitter by a too-late repentance. Her words rang through Bob's head.

"When Pop, he knows, he'll turn me out, and where can I go once? Now I can't hardly work in the fields. They turn blacklike afront of me, and Pop—and Pop he'll kill me!" Then she had sobbed bitterly, with gasping, racking sobs.

"Why did you come to me?" asked Bob.

"Because you—well, I know you ain't no good doctor, but you looked kind, and I thought—"

Looked kind! "These are thy people, who turned to thee in need." Bob hid his eyes in his arm. He remembered that the little girl of the drab story had kissed his hand when she had left, assured of peace and care in a distant city. And he remembered her promises to be good, which to him rang true.

Marjory danced before him, a lovely vision, tantalizing, soft, and with sweet eyes and warm lips.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "I cannot lose you. Oh, God! Oh, God!"

V.

"So you come to tell me that you love South Hebron the best?"

"Please!" begged Bob, and choked.

"I think I am better off without such a love," continued Marjory, as if she hadn't heard him. "I want a man to love me alone."

"No *man* loves a woman better than his duty, or will let himself," said Bob. Then he looked away. If she smiled—smiled once—he would relent—he would. He drew his breath deeply and clenched his hands.

There was a soft rustle at the door and Miss Hill appeared. Back of her was a little boy whose skin was putty-colored. She smiled gently as she said, "Here is a small boy who needs the doctor. He says he must see him." She vanished, and the boy wiggled in the room, entering with a sidewise, ill-at-ease walk.

"Shall I go?" asked Marjory, with an edge of sarcasm in her tone.

"Shall she?" Bob asked of his patient.

"No," said the boy, "it makes nossing. She is only a woman."

"You are 'only a woman,'" echoed Bob, his eyes twinkling. Marjory's did not. That—said now by him—was an insult.

Why hadn't he sent the child away? That he should turn from her to a small boy, she resented. She settled and picked up a magazine, but turned its pages idly.

"I'm liver growed," began the little boy, "an' I sink I will pass away, still." He stopped, breathing hard, terror written on his stolid face.

"No," said Bob, "I don't think that you will."

"The powwow doctor says I'm liver growed," stated the child in a tone that left no room for dispute. "An' afore I pass over I want youse to know that I stole apples off of youse. They say when you confess a sin still, it is better, and gives you more chance wis God."

"That orchard is open to the boys of South Hebron."

"Zen fer all, I didn't steal 'em?"

"Yes, you stole them," said Bob, "because you thought you were robbing me. Do you understand?" The relief that had been on the boy's face faded as he comprehended.

"Yes," he answered slowly.

Marjory looked up. She was disappointed in Bob. Why didn't he comfort the child without more moralizing. The case was pathetic. The boy was suffering, suffering deeply.

"But, sonny," went on Bob, "I have the cure for liver growed. I found it in a book called 'Life.' When you feel liver growed, you try to remember all the mean things you've done, and try to fix them up. When you've stolen apples, you tell the fellow whom you stole them from; and when he forgives you it's all fixed up."

"Honest, now, doc?"

"Honest." There was a silence while Bob looked at the small boy with a speculative eye. "Then," went on Bob, "you take a dose of castor oil, and say, 'I will try to be a better man and help Mom and not steal apples.' Now, don't you feel better?"

"Yes, still," said the putty-colored boy, and he gulped.

Suddenly the tears ran down his face.

"I was that scared to pass over!" he whimpered. "Youse can be a dumb doc, like they sez, but, whether I got the dare or not, youse can doctor me!" There was a light of adoration in the eyes he lifted to Bob.

"We are going to the drug-store," the latter told Marjory, "to administer the oil and the oath; and then I'm coming back."

She saw him going down the street, the child clinging to him. Her eyes filled. After what seemed many minutes she heard his step in the hall. He entered without speaking.

"Oh, Bob!" she whispered. "Oh, Bob!" Her whisper broke his control.

"God, Marjory! I can't lose you!" he cried. "I can't! There's nothing but you, nothing!"

His voice rose and broke, and he reached toward her blindly. From the street came the strident cries of children; they were chanting as they skipped. Bob paused, his arms dropped against his sides.

He turned from her to stand looking out of the window into the street garden.

"Why don't you go?" asked Marjory.

"I haven't strength yet—I am waiting for it."

He heard the swish of skirts, and then he felt her very near. She stood by him, pressing close to his arm; but he did not move, he dared not.

Marjory was a modern young woman, and her only acquaintance with the Bible was made through the hearing of lessons in the Episcopal church; but now, strangely, with the memory of a little boy who had gone away, comforted and made well, went through her head words that she had heard on certain Sunday mornings.

"Bob," she said slowly, then stopped. He turned, white and with his lips twitching—"Thy people shall be my people—"

After moments when the world for them had stopped, she drew away from him and saw that his eyes were wet.

"What fer fuss to make over a woman!" she said, with half a laugh and half a sob.

There was no answering laughter in Bob's face, but a reverence—adoration and a real man's love. He tightened his arms about her yielding body and answered huskily: "But what fer woman! Oh, Marjory! What fer woman!"

MAY TIME

MAY TIME!
The bluebird's playtime!
Hear him riotously singing,
On the highest boughs a swinging,
Or with glad wings glancing over
Meadows sweet with new-blown clover,
Saucy is his song and shrill!
Hear him! Flourish, shake, and trill!

May time!
The world's heyday time!
Dappled skies and dreamy weather
Drift across the land together,
Whispering with lazy laughter
Hints of summer hastening after,
While the hours steal away,
And to-morrow is to-day!

Anonymous.

The Devil's Riddle

by Edwina Levin

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

ESTHER BOWLES, uneducated but naturally gifted, fell in love with Jim Barnes, a medical student, who for five years lost all track of the girl, during which time she had become a barnstorming actress. Burton Davis, manager of the company of which she was a member, was very much in love with Esther, who, in good faith, had accepted from Davis a fifty-dollar loan. Burton had taken one Grenville into his company on the latter's promise to finance their return to New York.

Barnes, practising at Elvira, Pennsylvania, finally traced Esther to Sangford, a one-night stand, but after a joyful meeting he left in black rage when he overheard one of the company taunting Esther with the acceptance of the fifty dollars from Davis, a married man.

Thereafter Esther lived in a daze; Barnes returned her letter unopened, and at Elvira he became engaged to Aline Potts, a shallow and mercenary small-town product, who, with her friend, Daisy More, was engaged in a flirtation with a telegraph operator. Then the company disbanded, and Esther went to live at Ma Frank's theatrical boarding-house. She had purchased a really stunning outfit on her credit at a modiste's (actually sponsored by Davis), and after an unsuccessful round of the agencies met Paul Evers, the artist, at Becton's. He was coming for her in his car when Burton's wife, Belle, phoned that she, too, was on the way. Then Davis himself arrived, and insisted on entering Esther's room. Suddenly there was a woman's voice in the hall below.

"My God!" gasped Burt. "It's Belle!"

Esther sat down on the bed, weak with alarm.

CHAPTER XVII.

TOO STRONG A CURRENT.

FOR a moment Burt stood irresolute as his wife's voice sounded in the hall below, then turned toward the closet.

"Don't you dare go in there!" Esther cried. "Sit down."

"Lock the door," he commanded. "I told her I was going up to the agent's. Lock the door, I tell you!"

"I can't. What would Ma think? And the rest? They all know you're here. Some of them know she's your wife."

"Then I've got to get out." The man was in a panic. "That woman is a hell-cat."

"She's almost up the stairs. She'd see you. Sit *down!* There's nothing wrong about your coming up to see me. I've worked for you. You've come to see me about a part."

"The hell I have! You don't know Belle. She knows I haven't got no part to offer you now. And, besides, I lied to her. If I had told her the truth—"

"Which door?" Belle's shrill voice called down the stairs.

"Girl!" Davis whispered fiercely, "she'll ruin you! I don't care for myself—I'm used to it; but you — the whole house will—"

"Last door on your left," Ma Frank replied to Belle.

Before Esther realized what was happening Davis was on the fire-escape and out of sight.

This story began in The Argosy for April 19.

"Miss Bowles?" Belle pushed the door open without waiting for an invitation.

Esther rose stiffly.

"Now, don't be huffy, girly, over what I said about your date," the woman gushed. "I was only kiddin' you. No wonder you have dates, you're such a swell dresser. This is a nice room you got. What do they tax you for it?"

"Ten dollars," Esther answered as Belle seated herself in the only rocker.

"Board and room?"

"Yes."

"That ain't bad. How's the eats?" She caught sight of herself in the mirror and began patting her hair.

"All right."

"I believe I'll make Burt move over here. Housekeepin's all right for them that likes it; but not for mine."

"Mrs. Davis—Miss Benton—I'm—"

"Call me Belle. All my friends do, and we ought to be friends. Burt thinks so much of you. He says you're some plucky kid; and you can act, too. The old lady down-stairs said you had company. What was the large idea—to keep me out?" She pulled her hat to a tipsy angle.

"I did have—but—"

"Well, get your duds on. Come on, have breakfast with me."

"I've just had breakfast."

"Well, we can wait a while. I want you to go over on Sixth Avenue and see that cerise dress on me. It's only a few blocks from here. I want to stop in at the agent's, too, to see if there's anything doing. I was talkin' to a stock man yesterday 'bout going to Duluth. Burt ain't got a thing yet. He's hopin' to get 'A Pair of Dice' this year. But, anyhow, we get along better when we work separate."

"Miss Benton," Esther broke in desperately, "please don't ask me to go out with you—I'm—sick."

"Stuff and nonsense," laughed Belle. "You're lazy. You want to go back to bed; but nothin' doin'; get your things on. You ought to see the agent yourself; get something to tide you over the summer. Unless you got a *friend*," she smiled significantly. "If Burt gets hold of a new show for this fall, I expect he'll be looking for you. He thinks you are a great little actress—my God, but it's hot in here! Why don't you raise that other window?"

Esther got upon her feet. She could hardly stand. She was sick with horror. She must get rid of this woman somehow. Oh, if she were only dressed to go out!

"Gee, but you're neat in your room!" exclaimed Belle. "Not a thing out of place. You ought to see my room. I got a closet; but my clothes are all over the place. Where you got that swell rag you had on last night? In the closet?" The woman went over and started stripping off Esther's kimono. "Go on, dress."

"No, no!" cried Esther, frantically pulling the kimono back.

"My Gawd!" cried Belle, backing away in astonishment. "How you scared me. What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"I'm nervous," Esther smiled faintly.

"Well, you must be, to jump at a fellow that way. No wonder, if you stick in this room. Who's the kid? Little sister?" She went over to the dresser and picked up Esther's picture as a little girl.

"No, mine."

"Humph! Hurry." She turned back to Esther, who was taking the rusty black suit out of the closet.

"For Gawd's sake! You ain't going to put on *that* freak!" She sailed over to the closet, snatched the black suit out of Esther's hand, and took down the new French frock. "Believe me, this is some rag! What else you got?" She pushed Esther away and dragged out the pink silk crape negligee with white down trimmings. "Some doll!" she cried. "What'd you pay for this?"

For a moment Esther did not answer; then, her overwrought nerves giving way, she sank down limply on the bed.

Belle ran to the door in a panic. "Somebody come quick. Miss Bowles has fainted."

In less than five minutes the entire population of Ma Frank's boarding-house was on the scene. A jumble of voices, bathrobes, and kimonos filled the room.

Suddenly Esther stood up, wild-eyed.

"Leave me, everybody, please! I'm all right."

Ma turned like an enraged dragon.

"Get out, every one of you! What do you mean, buttin' into a lady's room like this, anyways?"

"Yes, get out, everybody," Belle echoed importantly. "Who do you think you are to come butting into a lady's room like this? Get out, everybody! It's stifling in here."

Everybody turned to go as Belle sailed over to the window, threw it up with a bang—then stood still.

"Well, I'll be damned!" she exploded after a full minute.

The departing company turned back.

"You all see that girl there?" she hissed. "Well, come here." They crowded over to the window. "Look down there on that fire-escape! My husband!"

She turned back toward Esther and made a sort of running leap for her. As she reached for the girl's throat, Harold Weatherby's arms closed around Belle from behind.

"Let me go!" shrieked the infuriated woman.

"Come to me, deary." Ma Frank opened her arms, and the poor, bruised girl staggered into them. "I wouldn't believe wrong of you sweety, not if I saw it with my own eyes."

"My husband on the fire-escape!" screamed Belle.

"What's the row?" Maida Ayers, the two-dollar star, arrived in curl papers, with kimono half-caught together over her trailing gown. Her bitter eyes searched the room.

"It iss ze big bell-cow woman," volunteered the Princess Rachel with a shrug.

Slowly Maida made her way to the storming woman and stood looking at her with a smile of unutterable triumph. When Belle's eyes rested on her she became suddenly quiet. The two stared silently at each other. The whispering and jabbering ceased. Everybody felt that something important was going to happen.

Esther's face was hidden on Ma Frank's voluminous bosom; Harold Weatherby still held Belle's arms to her side.

"Maida!" Harold cooed, when the silence became oppressive, "I love this woman, and I don't care who knows it. That's why I hold her in my arms thus and before all the world."

"So!" Maida barked at Belle, taking no notice of the frivolous youth. "So!" Her voice was pitched in her deepest contralto, her curl papers were at their most queenly height. "Your chickens have come home to roost, Belle Benton! Big bell-cow! Ha, ha! It takes the French to fit the word to the deed. And you bawled, did you? Years ago, when *I* found *my* husband in *your* closet I told you that your chickens would come home to roost! But I didn't make a bell-cow of myself! I didn't *bawl*. I just walked out. And I loved him. I loved him as you never could love anybody."

"And I loved you, Maida—as God is my witness, I did!" Burt had come quietly into the room. "She tricked me—pushed me into that closet just as you came in."

"Yes, I believe you did love me, Burt. You were just a boy. Twenty-two years old, and so irresponsible!" A tender light came into the woman's hard face. "Just a boy, and like all men, easily flattered. Well, it fixed me; I didn't bawl; but it made a wreck of me. I didn't care for anything. Yes, Belle Benton, I threw my career, my morals and my looks away when you stole my husband and my faith in humanity.

"People"—she turned to the eager listeners—"you've heard me boast of being a two-dollar star. I was, for one season—fifteen years ago. I was to make my Broadway début the following season. You probably wouldn't think it now; but I was said to be the most beautiful girl on the American stage. You see these lines? Age didn't put them there. Drink, smoke, sleepless nights did it—yes, and dope. I'm two years younger than Burt, and ten years younger than this creature, this viper, for all I look twenty years older. I had more than beauty in those days—I had personality and magnetism. I drew then as powerfully as I now repel. All the bitterness and hardness of me now was then sweetness and softness."

Burt sat down on the foot of the bed and sobbed aloud. The woman turned and looked at him. The softness crept back into her eyes. She reached out and laid her hand gently on his head. There was a

curious dignity about her—a compelling sympathy that none of them had seen before.

"Don't cry, Burty boy, you are not all to blame. I know how this snake coiled about your throat and strangled you. You were weak, that was all. Fifteen years since I had my hand on your head," she mused, a catch in her voice.

"Maida, as God is my witness, I didn't even think I loved her," the man sobbed. "I tried to get away from her, but she kept phoning me and pestering the life out of me, and that night she had somebody phone me she was dying and calling for me, so I went over. She was in bed, acting awful sick till you—"

"Ah!" Maida cried. There was a wild note of exultation in her voice. "And she had the same somebody phone me that you were in love with her, and I'd find you in her room!" Everybody crowded around to hear.

"And when she heard you knock on her door she jumped out of bed like a shot," Burt went on, "shoved me into the closet, and stood against it. You came in and—well, you wouldn't even listen to me—you just—went—"

"To the devil!" the woman finished bitterly, the fire dying out of her face and voice. "I wasn't a bell-cow; but I was a miserable weakling. You can take comfort in that Belle Benton. I can see your whole nasty scheme now. This is probably just such another dirty game. Well you won in my case; but listen to me:

"Through all these fifteen years that I've been playing the kerosene circuit, tramping, grip in hand, through the snow to find cheap lodging-houses, drinking, doping to forget—all through these years I've never closed my eyes without cursing you. Even the dope couldn't shut it out of my mind. You may want to hear it. It's a sweet thought to hold over a woman every day for all the years of her life."

A crazy look came into the drug-filmed eyes of the actress. "'Come, great demon of the unblessed! Lay the shadow of your hand on Belle Benton. Make a woman of her instead of a snake, that she may feel as I feel. *Then smite her as she has smitten me.* Set the vultures on her heart every day and renew it every night, until she shall be worn out with the torture. *Then curse her body.* May life bring her only despair, and death find her a festering sore, loathed by herself and all mankind. Then, dear devil, let me be there!' Her time has come. I feel it. This is the first step. Let me be there at the last, to heave her festering body into a hole for the worms!"

Horror was written on every face as Maida Ayers closed her curse and walked out of the room without another word.

Belle Benton was white and shaking. Harold Weatherby had fallen away from her. She steadied herself by the bed. She tried to laugh. Everybody drew slightly away, as if the hideous curse had already begun its work on her body. Burt was a blubbering bundle of grief. Esther had lifted her head and stood as if stricken. Ma Frank still held one fat arm around the girl, the other she lifted toward the door.

"Go!" she gasped. For once words seemed to fail her.

"Oh, I'll go all right!" Belle burst into a loud, harsh laugh. "If anybody thinks I'm afraid of the ravings of a crazy dope-fiend they've got another think coming. Oh, I'll go, old lady. But I'll publish your name all over this country for upholding such characters. Decent women will be afraid to come here when I get through with you."

"Go!" shrieked Ma.

"And as for you"—she looked at Esther—"well, you can have him when I get through with him, which will be as soon as I've dragged your name through the divorce courts. Ta, ta! Watch out for some free advertising, girly!" she called back.

Ma motioned the people out, and Harold Weatherby took Burt's arm.

"Come, old man, to my room."

"It's all right, deary," Ma Frank soothed when the girl fell across the bed, shaken by dry sobs. "Ma Frank is your friend. That woman is a she-devil, and we're all on your side. I wouldn't believe nothin' wrong of you, sweety, if I was to see it with my own eyes."

Honk! Honk! Honk!

"There's a automobile in front of the

house—lemme run an' see out the front parlor. I'll be right back." She trotted out as fast as she could and was back almost at once.

"It's one of them big lemonsines and a swell gentleman in it. He seen me at the window and asked if Miss Bowles was here. Get up, sweety. I'll tell him to wait till you dress."

Esther tried to stop her.

"I'll be right back, deary," Ma answered from the hall.

"Mister," she called, "can you wait kindly a minute? She's got to dress. It won't take her a minute seein' she's used to makin' quick changes, an' I'll help her."

"Tell her I'll get Mr. Grenville, and will be back in about ten minutes. Say to her that I came early because I decided to go over to Newark first."

"All right, I'll tell her."

Ma went back, all excitement.

"I can't go, Ma—I'm too upset."

"Sure you can! What's to hinder you?" She began taking off Esther's kimono.

"Oh, Ma, please! I *can't* go!"

"There, your dress is buttoned. Where's your shoes? You got 'em on."

"Ma, I—"

Honk! Honk! Honk!

"There he is!" Ma as nearly ran to the window as was possible for her.

"She'll be right down, sir — she's all ready. Just got to put on her hat." She trotted back. Esther had not moved.

"Where's your hat, deary? Here, put it on. Such a sweet one. They're waiting, sweety, two swell gents."

Mechanically Esther put on the little poke bonnet. Ma pressed her gloves and the silver purse into her hands and pushed her out of the door and down the steps.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WORLD WILL I GIVE THEE.

"WHAT'S wrong, Esther?" Philip Grenville had been studying her all the way out of town. The two sat together in the back of the long-bodied car.

"Wrong?" she repeated vaguely, without turning her head.

"Yes."

"Nothing."

"Come now, child, that won't do. Something is wrong—very wrong. I'm not curious, but I feel in a way responsible if things go wrong with you."

"That's why I'd rather not tell you." She ran a hand through her hair.

"You admit something *is* wrong, and that I am responsible. Don't you think I am the one to help you out of it?"

"There isn't any help you can give."

"As bad as that?"

She made no reply. Philip thought long. Once or twice he turned to look at the delicate girl at his side. He recalled the rusty suit he had seen her wear on the road, and he marveled at the change clothes can make.

He looked at the full, white brow, the sensitive mouth and nose. There was something fine within this girl who proudly forebore to babble into the ears of a sympathetic listener; accepted her troubles in tearless silence, asking no help; depending as she had once said she did, on no one, but herself and God. Herself and God! Here the man's thought paused. Such nonsense!

And yet, was it not a good thing for this girl, alone in life, proud and self-contained, to believe that she had but to go away in secret and tell all her woes and perplexities to an All-wise, All-powerful Being who who would immediately adjust them? What matter to her if God never heard? The help she received lay in the throwing off of the load—the shifting of the burden.

And he, Philip Grenville, had robbed her of her only prop. He had caught her faith staggering under a great blow administered by her fellows, and he had with his club of realism, completed the death they had begun.

"Esther," said Grenville at length, "I helped you to get rid of God. I'm not sure I did you a service. Let me give you what I have in place of God."

"What's that?" she asked.

"Education. A world light."

Like a flash she turned. Her eyes shone. Her hands came together on her breast.

"It's what I always wanted," she breathed. "Always—"

Her fire died, her eyes sought the open road.

There came the voice of Evers:

"Philip must be expounding some of his bad philosophy to you, Miss Bowles," he called above the rush of wind and noise of the machine. "He's making you miss this glorious scenery, I'm afraid."

"I'm trying to make love to her, Mr. Evers!" Philip cried. "But her coldness, together with your constant interruptions, make it next to impossible."

"I beg pardon," laughed Paul.

"Philip, I didn't intend to tell you," Esther said after a pause, "but you know what happened last night?"

"Yes."

"Worse happened to-day." She paused, then finished bluntly. "Burt's wife came up to my room unexpectedly. Burt was on my fire-escape. She found him!"

"Good God!" A sudden sharp pang shot through Philip Grenville's heart. So, after all, she had not been guiltless! He knew about the things that Burt had given her; but he had somehow believed this woman could go unscorched through the fire. He wondered that he should care. Perhaps because it was not his habit to put faith in women. His mother and Esther—that was it. He did not like to find his judgment at fault. Or perhaps here was the result of his teachings. He did not like that thought, either.

"I was wrong to rob you of your God."

The girl turned and looked at him with blank eyes. What had the taking away of God to do with Belle's finding Burt on the fire-escape? Slowly his meaning became clear.

"I see—what you—think—" Shame and anger struggled together in her. Cold reason followed, and her eyes fell. "But why shouldn't you think it?"

"I was wrong?" The man half stated, half questioned. He searched her face eagerly.

"Of course."

He sighed out his relief. Suspicion came with the next breath.

"You wouldn't lie to me, Esther?"

"Why should I?" A blaze of fury leaped out against her will. "You set me up to it. You said: Pay, if I had to; one way or another I've nothing to lose." Her face was white with the effort she made at self-control. "Have I?"

"No, nothing."

"I was desperate. Insane. Perhaps if Burt had been more—well, he isn't my kind of a man. I didn't seem to care about being good any more, but—well—"

"I see—I see—" Philip hastened with intense relief. "Why did the fool get on the fire-escape?"

"I don't know; I wonder if there *is* a God, and if He made Burt do that to jerk me back?"

She seemed to ponder that as something new. Philip did not voice his thought that, if so, God seemed to use rough measures.

"Mothers have to punish their children," she said, as if in answer to his query. "Severely, too—but, no, I had already made up my mind to quit the 'skin game' and earn my way. No, it wasn't to jerk me back, for I had my face set right already. It was just my fate."

"Do you want to tell me all about it?" the man asked.

When she had told the whole story he said:

"Well, you can't go back to Ma Frank's, that's certain."

"No, it doesn't seem as if I could," she agreed. "I couldn't face that bunch; but I don't know what else to do. I've paid my board for four weeks there, and I have only about four dollars left. If I could get a job."

"You can."

"Who with?"

"Paul. He is crazy over you. You are exactly the type he has been looking for for years."

"I couldn't do it, Philip."

"You can make him pay you anything you want," Philip rushed on. "He is the fashion. He will make you the fashion. He's not mean with money. It goes as easy as it comes. I'll be your manager—fix your salary, and such like. I sha'n't be afraid to stick the price up, as you would," he smiled.

"Philip, I can't do it—I can't." She clasped and unclasped her hands.

He looked at her in blank astonishment, then burst into such fits of laughter that Paul Evers called back to know the joke. He was more amused than the occasion seemed to warrant, but Esther's sense of humor dominated and she joined him. The laugh lightened her troubles.

"You *are* a little goose, Esther," Philip said when he could speak. "You are so old, so world-wise; so free from false modesty in some ways, and so young and prudish in others. It is astonishing! Oh, well, that's what makes it a delight to be with you. Just think, though, of the pretty frocks you could have to wear!" His eyes twinkled as though he reserved some secret joke from her.

"That wouldn't make up," she answered seriously. "I've found that pretty clothes and admiring looks don't go far toward making up to you when the spirit inside of you isn't satisfied."

"A few hours a day posing will pay for a nice little suite of rooms in a nice little hotel, and all the leisure you want for study. My services as master and manager I donate," he finished grandiosely.

"That would be fine," Esther mused, "to have all the time I wanted, here, where books are free, and—and you to help me—but—"

"Here's an excellent place to have lunch," said Paul, stopping before a wayside inn.

They entered, and the waiter piloted them through the eating, drinking, merry throng. She wondered if they felt so merry as they seemed—if they had no canker deep buried in their hearts. Perhaps they had. Perhaps that was why they drained so many glasses. "Drink and be merry."

The artist was ordering champagne—the one drink she really liked. She had tasted it but twice—once when a manager had given a wedding supper to two of his people, and once when Burt had sent her a bottle. He had laughed about her expensive tastes, saying there was no danger of her ever becoming a "soak."

Poor old Burt! So he had had his little tragedy, too. Whoever would think it—to see him? As Maida had said: "So irresponsible!" Poor Maida! How horrible to throw oneself away like that! Beauty, talent, youth—all burned out by drink! And—

"What will you have as an appetizer, Miss Bowles?" the artist was saying.

"No—no—" she answered hastily, "nothing. Nothing to drink, thank you." Beauty, talent, youth—

"Cancel the wine order, waiter," Evers commanded.

"Oh, no, don't do that; you drink—you and Philip. Please! Don't let me—"

"What you hate we forbid at our table," he replied lightly.

"Now, Miss Bowles," Paul Evers said as the first course was brought, "will you tell me why you hesitated about posing for me?"

"She objects to the 'altogether,'" laughed Philip.

"Oh!" the artist ejaculated. "Why didn't you explain, Philip?"

The expression of his face somehow shamed her. She felt as if she had called his attention to something vulgar that he had not before thought of. She went crimson, and again Philip laughed as though at a private joke.

"You see, Miss Bowles," Paul said, "we rarely—almost never use the same model for a complete picture. I frequently use one for the head, another for the torso, and perhaps another for the hands, and still another for the feet. Sometimes more than that, though not often. Beauty, as you heard me describe her, has your head, but she is long-limbed. I have the model for her torso, and was merely waiting for her head."

"I should have told you, Esther," laughed Philip, "but you are such a little goose. I should think you might use Miss Bowles for other pictures, too," he said to the artist.

"Oh, yes, indeed," Paul Evers's rarely beautiful smile flashed out. "If Miss Bowles will—"

"I should love to," Esther replied. "I need work badly, and—"

"Then we will begin to-morrow, if that suits you." He poured her a glass of water.

"It does suit me very well."

"I may say," put in Philip grandly,

" that Miss Bowles has done me the honor to make me her manager, so that you may take up the business details, such as salary, *et cetera,* with me, Mr. Evers." He twisted an imaginary mustache.

" Very well, Mr. Grenville," Paul laughed. " We will arrange contracts and such to-morrow morning before the lady's arrival at his studio, if you will do me the great honor of spending the night with me."

Esther entered into their frivolous spirit, and soon her soft laugh rang out gaily at the sallies, the thrusts and parries of these two accomplished men.

The coming of the waiter with coffee brought them back to earth. Philip remembered that he had not written his sweetheart in three days. Esther wondered when Belle would begin divorce proceedings, and if the doctor would see an account of it in the New York papers. The artist, who had been absently breaking his cheese into bits, spoke suddenly into his coffee cup.

" Who first taught man that he was created in a shameful image?" he questioned of no one in particular. " Who taught woman that it was a sin to reveal her God-given beauty?"

Esther looked up in astonishment. Philip, knowing the man, showed no surprise at this abrupt turn.

" Don't ask me," he answered frivolously.

CHAPTER XIX.

A POPPY BURSTING INTO BLOOM.

SOMEBODY was banging away on the piano; several couples were dancing, and Jimmie was singing when Esther let herself into Ma Frank's boarding-house at ten o'clock on the night of her decision to move.

Loud handclapping and laughing; a livelier tune and more riotous dancing proclaimed the care-free hearts within that stuffy room, with its green, upholstered furniture, red carpet, and coarse lace curtains. They were out of work, all of them—some of them out of money; but they had had their dinners and were sure of their beds. What more could one want?

To-morrow? Why, to-morrow might bring anything—a great inheritance, or a Broadway engagement! To your true actor-temperament to-day *is.* Yesterday never was. And to-morrow is sure to bring Broadway. That hope touches with gold even a dark to-day. It puts music into the rattle of elevated trains and seasons boarding-house hash.

Esther slipped quietly past the door and up the stairs, but Ma Frank was watching for her.

" Sweety," she whispered through the keyhole of Esther's door.

" Come in, Ma." Esther opened the door and Ma waddled in.

" Sweety, I been waitin' for you ever since you went out. Did you have a nice time?" There was pathetic anxiety in the big, round, red face.

" Yes, Ma," Esther answered vaguely.

" That's good." Ma sat heavily on a straight chair. " What I wanted to say, lovy, is that I suppose you'll be a wantin' to move now that everybody 'd be a whisperin'. I got as swell boys and girls as you can find anywheres, and they're all on your side, and don't believe a word that devil-woman said, especially after what that poor, sweet Maida give away on her; but folks is folks, and as long as they is they will whisper, which is that upsettin' to a delicate thing like you; and that poor Maida leavin' this very afternoon to be leadin' lady for a company down South that plays a different play every night for four weeks, and then goes to another town.

" Miss Ayers gone?" Esther asked with keen disappointment. She was gathering up her few pictures and toilet articles.

" Yes, sweety, she got a telegram right after you left, and caught the two-forty-five train, all dressed and packed and gone in one hour, and that nice Mr. Davis most crazy 'cause he didn't get to see her, which I couldn't even tell him her address, her not mentioning it to me, but just saying she was goin' down to Texas and would send me them ten weeks' board, which I don't care if she don't, me bein' none too good to her."

" I wanted to see her, too," Esther regretted, " to apologize for laughing at her."

" Which I guess she's forgot, seein' she

said to tell you to keep a stiff upper lip and not to do like she done." Ma got up and went over and sat on the bed. "That chair's too small."

"Poor girl!" Esther said.

"Which, if you are goin' to move—"

"Yes, Ma, I—"

"An' seein' as you've paid me—"

"Don't worry about that Ma, you needn't bother—"

"Which I'm not bothered, seein' I have spent it, and ain't got it to give back. What with carryin' so many people on tick—but I've got a swell place over on Forty-Fifth Street, without board—a swell hotel, with nothin' but the big ones in the profession stoppin' there, an' artists an' cartoonists an' writers gettin' big money. Which my Lillie thought we better not put my name to it; but just let her run it, which she does, and nobody knows I has nothin' to do with it. So I thought you could just as well take one of them rooms till you got the worth of your forty dollars—an' I was tellin' my Lillie to-day you'd be splendid company for her—"

"Oh, Ma Frank!" the girl cried, flinging her arms around the old woman. "I *know* God made you! You *couldn't* have just happened!"

"My goodness gracious, deary! Course God made me! Whatever put such a notion into your head as maybe so God didn't make me? My goodness gracious!" Ma patted Esther's hand and held her close.

After a moment Esther gently disengaged herself.

"You ain't goin' to-night?" asked Ma.

"Yes, I think I will."

"Why don't you wait till mornin'—it's so late?"

"Only ten-thirty and it isn't far. Just tell me the name of the hotel."

"The Dunston, which is one swell place, an'—" Ma continued in a long, rambling, inconsequential talk, punctuated by reiterated directions.

Esther rose from her seat on the bed.

"Well, I'm all ready, Ma," she said soberly, rising and wiping her eyes. "You've been awfully good to me."

"No sich thing. Don't you talk—"

Esther laid her head on Ma Frank's voluminous bosom and put both arms around the fat waist.

"I'll never say again there is no God!" she murmured.

Lillie Frank Dunston, a dark, solemn-faced young woman, showed Esther up to a very small but very modern and well-kept room, looking out upon the street.

"This is really a fourteen-dollar room, but mother said I was to let you have it for ten," she explained.

That night Esther Bowles had her first lesson in the loneliness of the great city. At Ma Frank's everybody had met at table and talked informally. Now, although the hotel was full of people, she knew not a soul. A silence reigned. Only the clacking of the elevator or the hurried footsteps of a bell-boy down the hall gave evidence of life. The very atmosphere was different from anything she had before known.

There was a rap on Esther's door, and before she could say a word Ma entered, panting furiously.

After a voluble greeting, and, despite Esther's protests, ordering a dinner to be sent up directly, she retailed her news.

Burt had called, and Ma had told him that Esther had gone with a show up in Canada—had left on the midnight train.

"An' that other man he called up with his devil's books. I tells him the same, what with flingin' folks together he ain't much good for no young girl to know; if he do wear pretty clothes which I like. An' that swell Mr. Evers, then he calls up an' says will you come to his studio to pose at two o'clock, an' I come to tell you it's all right if you go, sweety, which, when I was in burlesque, I had a sweet figger, an' I used to pose myself when I wasn't on the road, an' it's a respectable business which anything most is respectable for a respectable girl as knows how to behave herself. It bein' the girl an' not the job."

Having delivered herself of her sympathy and advice, Ma took her leave. And Esther knew that whatever the world had robbed her of, it had given her a woman friend worth having.

The old lady had been gone but a few minutes when Philip was announced. Paul

had given him Esther's address. She went down to the parlor at once.

"Who sent you here?" He took her hand, then motioned for her to sit.

"Ma Frank."

"Well, it's all right—have you a parlor?" he said, sitting as she did.

"Oh, no, I have a darling little room, though."

"You must have a parlor if I am to have charge of your education. I couldn't visit you in your bedroom."

"Oh, Philip, I can't afford it. I have a fourteen-dollar room now. They let me have it for ten dollars. I really can't afford that; but Ma owes me over thirty, and—"

"Here's a week's advance salary that I, as your manager, demanded this morning." He handed her five new twenty-dollar bills.

"Philip! I can't take it." She drew back, appalled.

"Why not?"

"I've made up my mind—"

"Be careful. Don't make up your mind to things you'll have to go back on. It's bad for your character." He still held out the money to her.

"But—"

"If you were to play a part to-night," he interrupted, "you wouldn't hesitate to ask for an advance, if you needed it, would you?"

"No."

"Same thing—you're going to pose—play a silent part this afternoon. I made an appointment at two-thirty. That will give you time to do a little shopping. Get your hat on." He pressed the bills into her hand. "You'll need a new spring suit and maybe one or two other things. Put on that little new blue frock. You look quite nice in it."

"I don't want to." She rose to go.

"You needn't, after to-day." He smiled down at her.

Esther returned in ten minutes, and they walked over to an exclusive shop on Fifth Avenue.

No sleep came that same night to Jim Barnes. He had that day received a communication from Sam, in which was a letter from Esther that the cow-man had for once received on time. Barnes read Esther's letter first—as a man starving:

SAM:

You seem to be a sort of mother, father, sister, brother to me. When I am in trouble of any sort I always want to write to you. I don't believe a woman living can keep going without somebody to care if she is hurt. Oh, Sam, you know how I always believed in God and doing right—well, I don't any more. I've gone through hell, Sam, to keep good as I understand goodness; then the only man I ever loved flung me off like a rag because somebody said in his presence I was no good! That's how I know there is no God! Don't you see, it might better have been true? I couldn't have lost any more than I have lost, and I might have had an easier time, and decent food and clothes all this while.

Well, I've got the name now. I've got nothing to lose and a lot to gain by living up to my reputation, so good-by to the Esther Bowles you have known. I'm done for! Unless—well, I wrote him a letter night before last. Maybe—no, nothing good is for me, but what I snatch. I'm not going to the gutter—I'm pretty close to that now; but I'm going to climb the ladder of success. No God has ever bothered about me one way or another, so I guess I've nothing to fear from Him. And even if there is a God, He can't do any worse by me than He has already. We are going into New York Saturday night. I'll write you when I get settled. Maybe you won't care to hear from me any more; but I want you to know that I shall always bless God for giving me one real friend. I pray Him to make my man see the truth and— Oh, you see I haven't really given up God! It seems as if I can't, exactly. Even when my brain tells me there can't be a God, I know there is! Sam, do you ever pray? Always your little friend,

ESTHER.

With her letter Sam had sent a line in his painful scrawl that said:

Ef I allowed you was the man I'd kill you quicker 'n I would a snake. I don't allow you air. I'm goin' to take a trip east fur the pleasure of killin' a skunk. I'm a sendin' you her letter and this note so es ef you be him you'll be on your guard. I never shoot when a man's back is turned.

SAM TUTTLE.

And Barnes knew no more of Esther's whereabouts than did Sam.

He got up and stood still, every muscle tense.

"If she goes wrong," he said aloud, "killing would be too good for me!"

He sat down suddenly, dropped his head in his hands, and sobbed as only a strong man can sob.

CHAPTER XX.

"WHOM WILL YOU MARRY?"

BARNES had failed, through telegrams, both to Sam and Miss Mattie to get Esther's address.

Meantime preparations for his wedding went forward rapidly. A day was set for the following month. But Aline's secret romance had proved a pale and sickly affair from the first. The doctor had not seemed the least bit worried over not seeing her every night. Her elaborate excuses and apologies fell flat. He seemed hardly to hear her.

Then her mother put up no opposition when Aline invented reasons for going out. That lady was too absorbed about samples and hemstitched sheets and fashion books to look after her daughter; while, as for Mr. Potts, he never concerned himself over anything but banking reports and the war.

To make matters still worse, the telegraph operator actually seemed to look at Daisy's doll-baby prettiness more than he did at Aline's. Altogether it was not a bit exciting. Aline much preferred looking at the samples and the fashion books with her mother.

"I don't think he's so nice," she confided to Daisy one day.

"I do," flared the other; "he's a lot nicer than the doctor, I think."

"Oh, the doctor!" sighed Aline; she had given up calling him Jim. "He's so—so solemn! And he used to be so gay and lively. I don't ever know what to say to him any more."

"They say a man always gets like that after he's married," sagely remarked Daisy, her blue eyes wide with the wisdom she propounded. They were taking a walk, arm in arm.

"But he's not married yet."

"No, but it's the same thing — being engaged."

"Oh, dear, do you suppose he'll get worse?" Aline's brown eyes were gloomy with foreboding.

"I don't know."

"I always feel so *young* with him."

"I shouldn't care to marry a doctor," Daisy mused.

"Why not?"

"Oh, they have so many women hanging around them all the time!"

"Patients," Aline defended. They stopped before a shop window.

"Yes, of course; but some of them are young married women, and so good-looking, and they tell all their troubles to the doctor, and, of course, it's only polite for him to kiss 'em and console 'em."

"Not his patients!"

"Course *his* patients. Not somebody else's. There's that Professor Lawson's wife; she's just crazy about Dr. Barnes, right now."

"Daisy!"

"It's so. Mama says she isn't any more sick than I am, and she goes up to his office every day, when she knows he will be there, and she gets him off in the corner and talks low to him for hours. She does the same thing in the drug-store and everywhere."

"I don't believe it!" Aline raged. Her brown eyes grew black. Her fluffy light hair quivered about her small pale face. "And you're a bad, gossipy girl, Daisy—just like your mother."

"My mother's not any more gossipy than your mother is, and everybody knows she set you up to catch Dr. Barnes, and she don't even care if he is crazy in love with a show-girl! Mama saw the name of the show on the envelope."

"What's that?" asked Aline sharply.

"Nothing—nothing," Daisy stammered, her rosy face going white. "I—I was just fooling, because I was mad."

"Look here, Daisy More!" Aline grasped her shoulders and looked straight into her chum's face. "Look at me. You were not fooling. You were mad, and you let something out, and now you're scared, and I want to know what it is."

"Oh, mama would kill me!" Daisy began to whimper.

"If you don't, I'll go right now and ask her."

"Oh, don't do that!" the girl pleaded. "I'll tell you, if you promise—cross your heart, never to tell."

"Cross my heart."

"Well, some show-girl sent him a big, fat letter. It came the day after you were engaged, and the next day he sent her one just as fat, and after he had put it in the letter-box he came back and was all excited and wanted it back; but it was in the mail-bag, and mama couldn't get it out.

"Well, the show-girl must have got mad at him, for she never wrote back; but he has sent three letters to her in care of three different theatrical papers, and one to General Delivery, New York, and they've all come back. Mama said he must be crazy about her, and she thought she ought to tell your mother, but your mother got furious mad at my mama, and said it was against the law for a postmistress to tell things like that, and if you ever found it out she would report mama and make her lose the post-office; and mama says your mother is bound that the doctor will marry you, and she don't even care about the show-girl."

"I'm going right home and ask mama." Aline faced back and started toward her home.

"You said you wouldn't tell. You crossed your heart!" Daisy ran after her in a panic.

"I said cross my heart I wouldn't tell *your* mother. I never said a word about mine." Aline's wilful young beauty took on shrewish lines as she fairly strode on. She entered the house almost in hysterics.

"So you've heard that nonsense," Mrs. Potts replied coolly, when her daughter burst in on her with the story.

"Is it true?" stormed Aline.

"I don't know whether it's true or not," Mrs. Potts replied calmly. "What difference does it make if it is? He's going to marry *you*." Mrs. Potts was sewing.

"He's not!" Aline stamped her foot in fury. "I won't have a man that's in love with another girl." Her delicately pointed face grew sharp and hard.

"Listen, my dear. Sit down." Then Mrs. Potts told her daughter some very plain truths about men and the women they love and the women they marry.

"Dr. Barnes is a fine young man," she went on. "Papa says he is the coming man of the county, perhaps of the State. He has done a big thing in surgery, and has the attention of the most prominent men of his profession. Soon he will leave Elvira—probably go to New York or Philadelphia.

"As the wife of a great surgeon you would be in the very cream of society. Papa has plenty of money; but even in America it takes more than money to get you into society. We might take you to New York and never be heard of. As a prominent surgeon's wife and a wealthy man's daughter, you will have things your own way. It has been the dream of my life to get you into real society. Suppose you break with the doctor, whom will you marry? One of papa's clerks, or a shoe or dry-goods salesman, or one of the boys in the ice-cream parlor, or a small farmer?"

"I could go somewhere and meet somebody," the girl protested. "If we have money, surely—"

"Yes, we could go somewhere; but *would* you meet somebody? We have no wealthy or influential friends in the cities who might invite you and introduce you into society. Papa has come up from the ranks, and his friends are there. My people have a degree of culture, but are fearfully poor."

"We could travel." Aline sat down petulantly.

"And who would introduce us into society? You see lots of people when you travel; but how many of them do you know?" Mrs. Potts's brown eyes looked calmly out of a thin, pallid face at her daughter.

"We could go with one of those parties you see advertised in the papers where everybody is like one big family."

"And which consists of school-teachers who have saved for years for the trip, and clerks and chauffeurs and ladies' maids."

"Well, how does one ever get acquainted with good people?" Aline got up as though she could not sit still.

"Sometimes chance brings it about, but not often. Usually one has to have what papa calls 'pull,' which means influential

friends or relatives. Or if one does something big—paints a great picture, writes a great book, or performs a great operation. That is the only way, unless one is born to it.

"Your way is right here in your grasp. You are lucky. You have no pull; you have done no big thing, you don't even have to go out of Elvira for your chance. You are especially favored of the gods. There's nothing you can't do, nowhere you can't go, when Dr. Barnes has come into his own. You can't afford to be foolish, my dear, and throw away your one big chance—perhaps the only one you may ever have. Let the doctor's past alone."

"But this is *not* his past. It's happened since we have been engaged."

"Shut your eyes and your ears and your heart to it. Think of your future. This is something that must sooner or later come into every woman's life."

"Has papa—have you—"

"Yes, dear."

Aline was silent. But that night she called off a date with the telegraph operator and phoned Dr. Barnes to come over.

She made no reference to the thing that was uppermost in her mind, but chattered of everything else she could think of. Strangely, he mentioned it.

"Aline, I think I ought to tell you that there's been another woman," he began haltingly.

She was silent. Had he told her that the night before she would have flown into a rage, broken the engagement, and proposed an elopement to the telegraph operator. Now she bit her lip and waited. They were sitting in a big swing on the broad lawn near the house. Her heart pounded wildly.

"I—I loved her, Aline." The man was plainly embarrassed. "I still—"

"You needn't tell me unless you want to," she interrupted softly.

"I think I ought to tell," he began.

"I don't. I understand, and if you don't mind I'd rather not hear." Her voice was very gentle; but it was a hard, cruel little face that the soft spring darkness hid. In her heart she wanted to bite and scratch and tear him.

"Very well; as you say." And after a little while he went home.

"The great big brute!" she cried when alone in her room. "To ask me to marry him, and then think he could tell me a thing like that! I hate men! Hate 'em! Hate 'em! They must think a lot of themselves—these men—to think they can do such things, and then tell us about them! And expect us to love them!"

She raged and stormed around like a caged panther. "But wait till I marry him! I'll show him that two can play that game! I'll have a lover, that's what I'll do!"

Her mother could be sweet and shut her eyes if she wanted to, she reflected as she cooled down a little; but not Aline Potts. If it wasn't that this is the best way to get even with him, she wouldn't marry him. But, as her mother said, he was sure to be a great doctor and go to a big city to live, and she could have everything in the world.

"I hate him! I hate all men!" she raged again. "The doctor is the biggest bore I ever saw. He never has a word to say—just sits and let you talk and talk until your tongue is about ready to drop off, and then he gets up and takes his hat and says: 'I must go.' And I suppose he thinks he's shown a person a nice time! Oh, how I hate him! And he's never given me a single present except a measly little old ring."

She went off to bed in a fury.

Dr. Barnes did not sleep. His last hope had vanished. Dimly he had hoped she would release him; but she had not cared to hear. She had accepted his confession as a matter of course, and seemed entirely satisfied to go on with things.

And last, but not least, he wouldn't bolt. He was not built that way.

CHAPTER XXI.

"GOOD-BY, FRIEND."

PAUL EVERS was charmed with his new model. He made several sketches of her that afternoon. "Her color! Glorious!" he exclaimed as impersonally as if she had been a Venetian vase. "See, Philip, that wonderful hair against the white

background. What is it? Copper, or—no, it's deeper, richer than gold, yet not red. I know—copper with gold in it!"

He drew a deep sign of content as he sketched rapidly.

Where a vain, small-minded girl would have blushed, simpered, and obtruded self under such undisguised admiration, Esther felt conscious only of gladness that she was satisfactory.

Philip, sprawled on a big divan, looked on, well pleased.

"Can you come to me about eleven every morning?" Paul asked her when they were through. "You shall lunch with me here in the studio, and I'll let you off at three."

"Only four hours' work a day for a hundred dollars!" she cried, rising rather stiffly.

"You'll find that quite long enough to pose."

"Esther!" exclaimed Philip from the other side of the room. "You mustn't say things like that. Don't let the man think you are exercised over his measly little hundred per. Why, he's been praising you so that I was thinking of demanding more, and you've spoiled it all. Ah, *mon Dieu!*"

She dined again that evening with the two men, who delighted in the admiration she excited. After the Hippodrome, which filled her with such breathless delight and wonder that all thought of self was crowded out, Philip called a taxi and they turned toward her hotel.

One of the first things she must learn, he told her, was *how to live.* Refined surroundings, comfort, breed a refinement all their own. There was another important thing to which she must give full value; that the true definition of Broadway is "bluff." When she asked a man to hand out a hundred good iron men every week, for her services, she must look like it and act like it and live like it.

"If he sees you eating your breakfast at Bectan's, your dinner at the Claymore, clothed in expensive simplicity and a smile of prosperity, he will feel cheap that he can pay you no more," smiled the Frenchman.

"Philip, why are you interested in me?" laughing at his first "lesson."

"You're a novelty to me. You please my eye and interest my mind. You're much better than a book. You *are* a book that I am writing; and I don't know how it's going to come out." He stretched lazily back in his seat.

"I'll bore you soon, perhaps." Esther sat more upright. She had not yet learned to take ease in a cab.

"Perhaps. But you're interesting now. Also, I want to watch the buds of learning unfold in a fertile brain. It must be interesting. Then there's always that element of suspense, of wonder. Shall I fall in love with you? Or you with me? Or what if we should fall in love with each other?"

"Oh, Philip, you are too absurd," laughed Esther.

"Then, there's Paul," he went on gaily. "We may be able to wring a thrill out of him."

"But you think I'm not quite so safe with you?" He was charming, undoubtedly.

"That's the fascinating suspense! Are you? You see, in the beginning of this book you are—" He hesitated.

"In love with another man," she supplied.

"Exactly; and I with another woman."

"Do you believe one can truly love more than once?" she asked.

"My dear child! How young you are! Why, I've been in love dozens of times."

"How could you?"

"That's the beauty of the French temperament. We love madly while the sweetness lasts; at the first hint of bitter, we cease. It saves one such a lot of pain." The car came to a stop.

"I wish I could do that," Esther replied seriously as the cabman got out to open the door.

"That may be included with the French and English lessons. We must fix a time and stick to it. How would nine to ten thirty suit you?"

"Very well."

"Splendid. Good night. Don't fall in love with me too soon, Esther. The book might lost interest if the suspense were ended. And you want to squeeze me dry first!"

"I won't let you know it if I do," she laughed as she stepped into the elevator.

Staring out into the street far below her window, Esther went over the events of the past five years. It all seemed vague and unreal. That time in the little shack in Montana with Jim seemed like a dream. Then there were those awful years on the road with success far away. How she had wanted to wear expensive clothes and live in soft places and know people of refinement? They were coming to her at last, and she felt cold. No elation, no triumph warmed her.

There came a tap on the door.

"Who is it?" she called.

"I—Maida Ayers," a deep feminine voice answered.

Esther ran to the door joyfully and opened it, then fell back in surprise as the woman appeared in the opening.

A wild light in eyes that looked out of a haggard face made her a startling figure, tall and gaunt in the doorway.

"I've quit the dope," she hissed. "Do you hear me? I've quit!"

"Oh, Miss Ayers!" gasped Esther.

"And I want to do murder!" Maida went on tensely. She stepped inside, closed the door, and stood with her back against it. Involuntarily, Esther retreated into the room.

"Oh, I'm not going to hurt you," Maida said grimly; "but I may kill myself before morning. I've been walking the streets all evening."

"I thought—Ma said—" began Esther.

"I told her," the woman broke in. "I didn't want to see Burt again. Is there anything between you and him?" she asked suddenly, advancing toward Esther.

"No. Of course not."

"I didn't think so; but I wanted to know. That devil—she's probably tired of him and—" She hesitated and seem to forget what she had started to say.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Ayers?" Esther motioned toward a seat.

"I couldn't sit down if I knew I'd go to the chair if I didn't. Where was I? Oh, yes, I came here for two reasons. Two? Yes, two. I wanted to tell you not to let that devil get you as she has got me. Some day I'm going to kill her; but not yet. Death is relief. She has got to suffer first. The other thing I came for was to ask you if you would deliver a message for me to Burty."

"Of course I will." Esther stood behind a chair, pale and nervous. The woman seemed on the ragged edges of desperation. At any minute her reason might snap. "Don't you think you are wrong to quit short off like that?" the girl asked.

"No; it's the only way to quit anything. I made up my mind this afternoon. I haven't had a thing in seven hours."

"But you can't hold up," protested Esther. "The strain on your nervous system is too great. You can't stand it here where it is to be had. You ought to go away to some big ranch miles from a town, or any place where you can't get it. The air would help you, too."

"I don't know any such place," replied Maida.

"I know the very place," said Esther eagerly. "Sun River Valley, Montana—seventy-five miles from Great Falls. I have a friend there who could get you a place to board, and he would do it gladly."

"Who is he?"

"Sam Tuttle."

"I'll go. But I've got to work first. I'll get a job, go on the road for a while, and get a little bank-roll; then I'll go. What's his address?"

Esther started toward her desk, and Maida stopped her.

"You see this?" the woman drew a little bottle out of her purse. "The solution of everything is in that. I'd have used it long ago, but I've got to live to see Belle Benton suffer."

"What is it?" asked Esther, her eyes dilated in horror.

"Kick-off drops," whispered the other, as though it were a sweet morsel under her tongue. "I keep it ready all the time."

Esther stared at the little bottle in horrid fascination.

"If I were to take it now," the woman smiled grimly, "I'd be gone before you could get help." Her eyes fairly caressed the bottle.

She looked up and, seeing the fear in Esther's eyes, lifted the poison as though to put her words into action.

With a sharp cry, Esther took a step forward, snatched the bottle from the woman's hand, ran to the wash-bowl, and poured the stuff out.

There came a scream like that of an enraged panther, and with one bound Maida was upon her, burying her long fingers in the girl's shoulders.

Esther struggled out of her grasp and ran toward the phone; but the other caught her.

"What did you do that for?" she hissed, her eyes insane.

"I thought you were going to drink it!" gasped Esther, tearing at the strong fingers that gripped her.

"Do you know what you've done?" Maida went on. "You've robbed me of the only protection I've had when I'd be under the dope. You said the other day that men cheated me. You lied. I've sunk to everything but that—dope and drink, but not that. And I've carried that stuff to kill myself with if I ever forgot. And that's what I wanted you to tell Burt. Whatever else I've done, I've been true to my womanhood.

"Some folks may not think a woman can drink and dope and take care of herself. I have. And I've kept that stuff to finish up with if ever I couldn't. And now you've tried to rob me of the way out, but you haven't done it; for I'm going to kill you, then go to the electric chair. It's better than this hell on earth."

Esther's hold on her hands suddenly relaxed. All the fight went out of the body and face. A faint smile came into her eyes.

"It can't be worse," she said.

"What can't be worse?" Maida asked suspiciously.

"Whatever comes after this."

Her cool voice and calm eyes seemed to restore the other to reason. Maida's hands lost their hard grip; she straightened up, then her arms fell by her side.

"You see what I am—what dope has done to me?" she said in a voice in which there was no trace of insanity. She spoke coolly and turned away with a deep resignation in her manner.

"I'm going to my room. I've got the stuff there. I've kept away because—but it's no use, I can't quit when it's where I can get it."

"Do you want to try it up in Sun River Valley?" asked Esther.

Maida paused with her hand on the door.

"I said nasty things to you the other day—accused you of things that I know now were lies. I tried to kick you down when you needed help. To-night I wanted to kill you, and now—you're big and fine. Give me the address," she broke off suddenly.

Esther went to her desk and wrote on a card:

DEAR SAM:

This is a friend of mine, Miss Maida Ayers. Help her, for my sake and her own, all you can.

ESTHER.

Maida still stood at the door. Esther crossed over to her and extended the card. Maida took it and read.

"Friend," she said softly. "A friend of yours. No woman has called me friend for fifteen years. Tell Burt what I told you—that I have kept good. And tell him I believe in him, and am sorry."

"Why don't you see him yourself?" asked Esther. "He was looking for you this afternoon."

"I knew he would," she laughed softly. "That's why I hid. Vanity. He was too upset to-day to remember much about my looks. He would see next time. And I want him to remember me as I was—young and lovely."

Tears gathered in Esther's eyes as she looked at the emaciated woman. She held out her hand, and, seeing Maida's eyes, she lifted her mouth for the taller woman to kiss.

"Good-by, *friend*," Maida said huskily. "I'll come back," and the next instant she was outside the door and had pulled it shut after her.

Esther stood still, thinking. Then, lifting her arms, she let them drop in a gesture of helplessness.

"*Good-by, friend,*" she repeated softly. "You'll never come back."

CHAPTER XXII.

RAINBOW'S END.

THE days that followed were as a dream to the starved soul of the girl who had left love in the valley and toiled and longed for life beautiful. At eight o'clock each morning, carefully manicured and coifed, she was ready for her vocal practise or other lessons.

Then came the most wonderful part of the day—that hour and a half with Philip and the great masters of literature and art. After that came her hours with Paul. His splendid idealism, his intense love and appreciation of beauty in all its forms, seemed to resolve discord into harmony.

She went about everywhere with the two friends, who, opposite as the carrot and the lily, were inseparable.

They, on their side, delighted in her quick perceptions, her hunger for knowledge, and withal her lightness of manner that had always in the back of it, however, a note of sadness.

All her dreams and more had come true, and she was sick and weary, and had no longer the desire for it. She made a great show of enjoyment. It was as if life had starved her; then, suddenly, when she had lost the taste for food, spread a great feast before her.

"If anybody ever finds the end of the rainbow," she mused with a grim smile, "it will be the wrong end."

But if Esther Bowles had brooded in the days when shut in by the desert wastes, or later when bounded by "one-nighters," she allowed herself no such luxury now. We moil over our troubles; we strive to forget our suffering.

By sheer force of will and constant, unremitting excitement, she kept her thought in an upper stratum of her mind. Always at the bottom of her consciousness lurked a vague gnawing of a hurt that was refused admittance—crowded out by the press of indefatigable work and strenuous pleasure.

A great emptiness was always with her. She, alone of the three, saw the thing clearly, stripped of theories and false notions. She knew perfectly well what the world thought of her. She knew that her position—in artistic as well as in that ultra society that ran after Paul Evers, and took her up to please him—was absolutely dependent upon the artist's favor, and would cease with his friendship unless she were fortunate enough to find another rich man to uphold her. She also knew that such another man she was not likely to find. One with money—yes; but she knew that on the day when Paul Evers remembered that she was a woman the house of cards in which they lived would come tumbling down.

Several times Esther had tried to write Sam, but events crowded so upon each other, and more important was the fact that when she came to write him she would have to think—think with that deeper mind that we call the heart. And that was what she most wanted to avoid.

Sam would want to know all she had been doing, and that would recall things she must forget. But at last she forced herself to it. She owed it to him at whatever cost to herself.

Sam, meantime, had haunted the post-office. Nor had he changed his mind as to what he would do when once he got Esther's New York address.

"Hey, Sam, they got a letter in there for you," remarked a cow-man on the post-office porch as Sam rode into Lowery the third time in one week. "Hit's from old Edwards's stepdaughter."

But the letter was not there. One Joe Hays had taken it out, saying he would be passing Sam's ranch next week, and he would "drap by" with it.

Sam rode out to the Hays ranch and got his letter. Considering that he had been so concerned about it, and for so long, he might naturally have been expected to open it at once; but he did no such thing. Putting it in his pocket, he turned his horse homeward. Once he took it out and studied the superscription; looked at the picture of the hotel on the envelope, and put it back in his pocket with grim eyes and set mouth.

After supper he opened it. Again he

studied the picture of the Dunston Hotel—ten stories high, he counted—and his eyes narrowed. Then, on opening the letter, he noted the rates given on the stationery—monstrous! How could she afford to stop at such a fine hotel?

First she told him about Maida. If she came out, would Sam do all he could to help the poor thing? A woman who would retain her moral balance under the influence of drugs, when she had nothing to live for, even—who would try to stop short off, as she had done, because of restored confidence—was worth helping. "But I'm afraid, Sam, that she will reach the end before she does you," Esther finished rather sadly.

Then she told him about herself. She had a good job and more money than she had ever seen before. She had all the things she had wished for—books, beautiful clothes. She was taking piano and vocal lessons. She finished:

> I seem to be living on top of things, in a sort of upper world, from which I would drop if I ever let myself remember. But I won't. *Now is!* That's what Philip Grenville says, and *now is all that matters.* Tomorrow will bring its own. Yesterday is forever gone. I must not—will not—remember it. *I'll live to-day!* While I can! As I never lived before. I'd like you to know Philip. He is a Frenchman with too much money and no God; but a wonderful man, and a good friend to me.
>
> Don't worry about me. I must stop now and go to my music lesson. *Au revoir,* good friend. Your loving,
>
> ESTHER.

Sam rode in to Vaughn, the nearest railroad station, that night, and caught the two o'clock train to Great Falls. When he reached there the following morning he bought a new blue suit.

"No sense in gettin' black," he thought, "but I'd like to be put away decent. New York State may furnish hit; but I ain't takin' no chances. I allow they bury murderers es cheap es they kin git out. Them Easterners ain't spendin' no more'n they kin help."

He slung his holster under his arm, where the police wouldn't get sight of it, and gave it an affectionate pat.

"I allow that Frenchman 'll be the fust one," he mused as he boarded the train for New York, "then doc, ef he had a hand in hit, es I'm a suspicionin'."

He leaned out the window and stared at his beloved hills, and in his eyes was the look of one who is seeing for the last time, perhaps, a well-loved face. That all this affluence of Esther's might be all right never once occurred to him. He would simply kill the man who was teaching Esther that there was no God and no wrong. Also, he would kill the scoundrel who had broken her heart and sent her to the devil. He was positive that this was none other than Dr. Barnes, and he could not altogether make up his mind whether to dispose of Barnes first or that heathen Frenchman, Grenville.

Barnes seemed the more feasible, as they were likely to catch him in New York before he could get out, and then the doctor would escape. Sam felt that he might outwit the Elvira police.

Yes, doc first—then the man who had no God.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

WOODLAND WATERS

DARK-MARGINED with the fallen leaves, they lie
Unrippled in the silence of the dell;
Nor all the dreamy blue of summer's sky
The shadow on their bosom can dispel.
Yet there is that within their depths that brings
Into the soul the quietude of rest,
And, though life's laughter dwells in sunny springs,
I love the cool, dark woodland waters best.

Harriet Whitney Symonds.

The Pearl of Venice

by Robert W. Sneddon

MESSER BANDELLO, with increasing bitterness, noted the gay costumes of those others in the duke's antechamber as he awaited his turn for audience. Even the lowest-paid mercenary in the service of the Borgia seemed better fitted than he to play the courtier. He had impatiently submitted himself to the deft fingers of his wife before he left their wretched lodging, yet nothing could efface the patches on his elbows and the rude cobbling of his oft-mended shoes. And the artist was young enough to set great store upon little things, and to magnify the pricking of poverty into a soul-searing agony of shame.

As the duke's secretary, horn spectacles on nose, pen behind projecting ear, came out and beckoned to each in turn, the artist started forward, only to fall back in chagrin. The secretary had promised him that that afternoon he should show his latest canvas to the duke, not for love of the arts, mark you, but counting on a share of the ducats which might come from his master's treasury.

Ducats! And had not his wife told him that day that between them and starvation, between them and a lodging under the stars, were but five beggarly soldi. Five copper pennies! *Dio mio!* And a wife who did nothing but weep or sit silent with eyes full of reproach.

"Messer Jacopo!"

He started.

The secretary, with familiar gesture, was beckoning to him, and, picking up his canvas, the artist followed him into the great room.

Cæsar Borgia, Duke of Valentinois, reclined on a couch behind a long table with half-closed eyes. As his eyes opened and fell upon the shabby painter, he hastily passed the gold, perfumed smelling-ball beneath his nostrils. The secretary whispered diligently in his ear, while the artist, with trembling hands, unwrapped the covering of the portrait and, setting it upon a chair, stood back. His burning eyes followed each movement of the hoped-for patron.

Behind the back of the duke the secretary motioned to the painter to stand farther back that his master's nostrils might not be offended by the odor of poverty which too plainly attended the suppliant.

"What think you, master secretary?" asked the duke at last.

"Messer Bandello is a youth of talent," the secretary answered humbly.

"The coloring is not bad," sniffed the duke daintily. "Who is your master?"

"I studied a short space with Messer Leonardo da Vinci, excellency," faltered the painter.

"So I was not wrong in my taste; but the subject, Messer Bandello, the subject pleases us not. A portrait?"

"My wife, excellency."

"Then it behooves you to get a new wife, my good fellow," said the duke briskly,

with a grim smile which brought terror to the painter. "Take the canvas away. When you have another subject we may talk further."

The painter wearily wrapped up the canvas. As he turned away blindly, the duke halted him at the door with a sharp command:

"Stay!"

Messer Bandello wheeled around eagerly. The duke had changed his mind.

"Do you frequent the ladies of the town, *messer?*"

"Excellency!"

The duke laughed carelessly.

"A lover of beauty might find delight in Madonna Beatrice, newly come from Venice to our town of Milan. Give Messer Bandello five ducats," he added to the secretary, "and see that none of them stick to your fingers on the way, my friend."

"Your excellency jests," protested the secretary.

"My ducats tell strange tales, Master Secretary," said the duke sardonically. "Good fortune speed you, and spend your ducats wisely in the quest of beauty, Master Painter."

As the door closed upon the bewildered artist, into whose hand the five ducats had fallen as if from heaven, the duke smiled cruelly to himself.

"He is the devil himself," thought the secretary, observing, as he hastened to set the letters for signature before his master; "and Messer Jacopo will rue this day the duke hath set about to trick his destiny."

Messer Bandello passed out from the palace with throbbing brow. He had eaten nothing that day, and the hours of waiting, the bitterness, the chagrin, the sudden change of fortune made him faint and sick within. He must get home. How heavy his canvas had become! That night they would eat—there would be something for their grasping landlord—a new cloak for himself. He might spare money for a dress for Anna, if only that he might not be compelled to look upon her rags, and those patient eyes which drove him to such fury.

He had married a woman of Flanders, O evil day, who had been traveling in Italy with her father, a silk merchant, who had fallen sick and died in Milan. Her fair beauty had seized upon his imagination. She had some money, and they married. Now the money was gone, and of her beauty but little remained. And her moods! Had she been of his own race they might have been endurable, but this passionless despair, the brooding silences. It was more than man could bear.

What had the duke said? Beauty. Beauty at the price of five ducats. The jest of a monster. The heat, the odors of the narrow streets, with their canopies of clothes a drying, the smell of oil, of sour wine, of damp decay from the cellars. He stumbled as a litter approached, carried by black slaves. He was conscious of a laughing face thrust out from the curtains, of a sudden cry, and then the world fell away from him.

When he awakened he thought himself in paradise. Soft, aromatic perfumes sprayed the air, kept in motion over his brow by a peacock-feather fan. The light of a silver lamp, suspended from the high, fretted ceiling, gleamed on the skin of the arm of a diligent, black slave, who burst into exclamation as the artist stirred into life. The fanning ceased and the slave ran out hastily.

With lazy, wondering eyes the artist surveyed the walls hung with Cordovan leather, the tall, black chairs, the ebony buffet set with Venetian glassware, the divan gay with brocaded cushions. To what heaven of luxury beyond his dreams had he been transported? He sighed, enraptured.

Entering the room was a woman of surpassing beauty, in a clinging robe of silk, which exhaled a wondrous fragrance, faint yet overpowering in its enchantment. She crossed, and stood looking down at him with a whimsical smile.

He raised himself from the silken sheets, amazed to find himself in a sleeping robe softer than any he had ever known, and stared at her in bewilderment, which increased as she laid her hand upon his brow.

"That is better," she said, in a rich, slow voice. "The fever is gone."

"How came I here?" he asked, still doubting the evidence of his senses.

"You fell in a faint in the street as I passed, *messer*— What you call yourself?"

"Jacopo Bandello, a painter, by your ladyship's leave."

"Then my ladyship is graciously pleased to see you in your senses again, Messer Bandello," laughed the lady. "*Dio mio!* Such talk we have listened to, I and Madonna Barbara, my nurse."

"I talked," faltered the artist. "Of what, I pray you?"

"Strange secrets—the quest of beauty, and of eating. You must have been starving, Master Artist. Never mind—you shall be fed now."

She clapped her hands and a blackamoor appeared. She gave her orders in a low voice, and in a moment a silver salver with a goblet was set by the bedside.

"Drink. 'Tis a nourishing cordial, and later you may eat."

The artist sipped the spiced drink slowly. As its warmth began to filter through his starved veins he sighed luxuriously.

"But why did you pick me up, madonna?" he asked as drowsiness crept over him.

"Could I leave a pretty boy to the ravens?" she said amorously. "Now sleep!"

"What is your name, lady?"

"Madonna Beatrice!"

"The courtesan of Venice!" he gasped. Then: "Oh, pardon!"

"The title shames me not. Sleep!" she commanded imperiously.

There was no anger in her voice, and he sank back upon the cushion.

When he came to consciousness again it was daylight, and sitting by his bedside was an old woman, dark-skinned and wrinkled, who nodded her head knowingly as his eyes met hers, small and cunning, with eyelashes that seemed to grow together. A hoarse chuckle came from her loose lips, and she quivered in her chair.

"My lord has slept well?" she inquired solicitously; but he was conscious of her mockery.

"Yes, I have slept," he answered, and flushed; "but I am no my lord, dame."

"No. Then 'tis strange, for none but lords have slept in this bed. The favor of my mistress is not lightly bought. She bade me watch you carefully."

"Where are my clothes?" asked the painter suddenly.

"What? You would rise?" the old woman demanded sharply.

"Yes, and when I am dressed, let me thank Madonna Beatrice, and then I shall be going."

"Going? What for? You are to stay here. Come, foolish boy, do you not know what happiness is in store for you? My mistress is weary of her lovers. She has taken a fancy to you. Do not be a fool and throw away your chances. Do nothing rash. Fortune as well as love is within your grasp, and you will not forget the good friend who advised you," she added cautiously, then tapped him familiarly on the hand. "If I were younger myself, who knows? But, there, I take my pleasure in seeing my mistress happy. Rise, if you will, and in the bath you will find new life."

A slave entered in response to the clapping of her hands, and she gave her instructions. A heavy mantle was thrown about the artist's shoulders, and he suffered himself to be led into the bath, to be bathed, perfumed, and his heavy locks curled. Without a word he allowed himself to be dressed in a perfumed shirt, in a splendid suit. A belt with a jeweled poniard was clasped about his waist, and shoes of the finest leather set upon his feet.

As the slave finished with him the curtains parted, and the old woman appeared again. She looked him over and chuckled in his ear.

"Do not forget one who wishes you well. My mistress cannot but be pleased. She bids you breakfast with her now."

As they passed a long mirror, the painter started. There was reflected no image of a beggarly painter, with patched elbows and botchy shoes, but of a noble cavalier, who bore himself proudly in handsome dress.

"My lord the unknown!" the old woman announced as she ushered him proudly into the room.

The painter faltered, then raised his head, and with the consciousness of his fine appearance stepped forward boldly.

"Oh!" cried his hostess as she clapped her hands gleefully. "I was right. What a fine bird this plumage of yours makes, Monna Barbara! Bid them serve us and then leave us. Well, Messer Jacopo, have you no word of greeting for one who loves you, or are you all painter and none poet?"

The painter bent his knee and kissed the white, ringed hand she held out for his lips.

"'Tis a tepid kiss at best, the kiss of the hand; but then, perhaps after breakfast you may be bolder," announced Madonna Beatrice laughingly. "Sit down, master seeker after beauty, and say if your quest be ended."

Messer Bandello regarded her with increasing boldness, the alluring darkness of her eyes, the red lips, the olive oval of her perfect face, the sleek outline of bare arms outstretched from the sleeveless robe of silk, each harmonious curve of body and limb against the dark background of the divan.

"Is it as painter or as man that you study me, Messer Jacopo?" she asked roguishly, as his gaze lingered.

"As both, Madonna Beatrice," he cried eagerly. "Oh, to paint you."

"Pooh! Listen to the man!"

"To love you," he added quickly.

"That is better. You shall do both, young man."

"Young man?" he sighed with drooping lip.

"Aye, young man. I am sick of graybeards. I am weary for a young and handsome lover. Come, sit beside me."

He felt her arm go about his neck like a silk-soft noose.

"Am I not beautiful?" she whispered a little wistfully, as she noted his hesitation.

The painter cast aside the last of his doubts.

"By Bacchus! More beautiful than the Queen of Love!" he cried, as he drew her to him, and his soul died upon her clinging lips.

A harsh chuckle broke in upon their raptures.

"Ah, my little love-birds, love is well, but you must eat, Master Painter; and you, too, my mistress, before the heat of the day."

"Hasten the meal, then, Monna Barbara, for I begrudge each moment of love we may lose," cried the courtesan. "And, Monna Barbara, I will not play with my ape to-day. See that he is chained. Draw the curtains and light the candles. Those chattering parrots in the cages tire my ears. I am at home to no one, not even the members of the council were they come post-haste to see her whom they call the Pearl of Venice. You see how I love you, my Jacopo. See that you do not fail me. You talked of a woman in your delirium," she added jealously. "Know that I am she whom you love, and love alone, am I not?"

And the painter stifled the memory of a pair of patient eyes as he looked into another pair, which burned with passionate entreaty.

A week went by before he bethought himself of his work. The lover had not killed the painter. On the contrary, his art was reborn, and he was devoured with longing to set the features of Madonna Beatrice on canvas for all time, that men might know the fame of Jacopo Bandello and the Pearl of Venice. He besought his mistress to permit him to go and get his palette, his brushes, his paints, and a canvas.

At first she would not hear of his going beyond the doors which had opened to no visitor for eight days. Was he not content? Did he intend to seek another woman? Let one of her slaves go to his lodging and bring his utensils, if, indeed, he must busy himself with his tiresome work. But when she began to see that his heart was set upon going, and that he grew morose as she denied him, she yielded, and bent her efforts to his plans with willing advice and practise of allurements which would not fade from his mind.

He must go alone and in plain dress. He must hold talk with none. If forced to speak, he must say he had been upon a journey and was setting forth upon another. He would have a purse of money for his wants, return by nightfall.

The painter eagerly agreed to all, and set out.

As he approached his lodging, he paused, drawing his nostrils tight with disgust. How had he ever endured the odors of the street, the squalor of his surroundings?

What reception was he about to receive from the woman—that woman he had almost forgotten? At the doorway he felt that he had been a fool to venture. He could purchase painting materials—only he had certain brushes with which he was familiar, old friends to his hand.

With sudden resolution he climbed up the worn steps, circling the dark stairway which seemed to sweat forth the moisture creeping up through the ancient walls.

The door of his chamber was open. The room was strangely dark. He stepped across the threshold and drew back with a shudder. In the center of the bare floor upon a low, wooden bed lay a white-sheeted figure, at the head of which candles burned with guttering wicks. There was a strange moisture on the stone floor, and in a worn depression a little pool of water. He drew a long breath and stumbled forward. For a moment he dared not look closer, then with trembling hand drew aside the sheet and looked down upon the face of his wife.

"*Dio mio!*" he gasped.

Her eyes were wide open, staring up into his with an intense questioning.

With a shudder of horror he let fall the sheet. The air of the room was chill and damp. An odor of death was in his nostrils. With groping hands he gathered his painting utensils, and, hastily laying a handful of money on a table by the door, fled as one accursed. As he ran down the winding stair from a half-open door he heard the murmur of voices and then the sound of his name. He paused and listened.

"The devil must have taken him, for he is gone, no one knows where, and the woman drowned herself. There was not a crust in the room to feed a dog on. My son Tito helped to pull her out—"

He slunk down, creeping by the wall, and out into the sunshine. As he walked briskly he felt his terrors abate. He stopped to buy a canvas at a store which had no acquaintance with him, and jested with the merchant. Anna! It was foolish of her to drown herself; but no man could say that he was to blame for her madness. He had meant well. He had intended giving her some of his ducats. By the saints, he had meant no hurt to her.

By the time he had reached the gateway of Madonna Beatrice's lodging he had persuaded himself that he was innocent of all blame. It was a pity, but it was done, and all for the best for each, no doubt. Their love had died a long time ago.

Madonna Beatrice welcomed him back as though he had been gone for years.

"I thought I had lost you, my gallant," she said again and again, "and that some other woman would get you."

"There is no other woman," he assured her, and shuddered as he remembered that this time he did not lie.

"Where have you been?" she asked, sniffing daintily. "Your clothes smell of damp, of the river, *mio caro.*"

"You are dreaming, surely," he answered, passing his hand over his cloak with a hasty gesture.

He sighed with relief as he found them dry, as he knew they were. What foolish fancies were these?

"It is strange, but I could have sworn it. Come! Off with this dull suit. I do not love you in somber plumage, my little lovebird. To-night we feast with music to woo our senses."

"And to-morrow I may paint, beloved?"

She shrugged her shoulders, then laughed gaily.

"What can I do with you, my lord? I must obey you now in all things. Have you no kisses for your mistress? It is well seen you must not go adventuring, if you return so forgetful. Persuade me now that you have not forgotten how you love me."

They feasted that night with music. Madonna Beatrice's dwarf played his merriest pranks before them. Monna Barbara told tales of frail ladies and bold lovers, of sorcery and matters magical, till her mistress told her:

"Enough, dame; would have us dreaming the night long?"

It was long past midnight when silence fell upon the house. All was dark in the sleeping chamber but the little silver night-lamp burning over the couch, lending deeper darkness to the outer shadows of the room. Beatrice moaned in her sleep; then sat up suddenly with a clutching cry of terror.

"Wake, Jacopo! Wake!"

"What is it?" he asked sleepily.

"I dreamed of water dripping, dripping on my face, so real that I wakened in fear. It was as though some one was dripping icy water, bent above me."

"You dreamed. See, there is nothing here."

"That is true, and you are by my side. You will not leave me?"

"No."

She sighed happily. He heard her soft breathing resume its regularity, but he was wide awake. There was an insistent rhythm in his ears. For a time he lay puzzling as to what it could be. Then, as the realization came to him, he shuddered and buried his head deeper in the soft cushions.

For the sound was that of water dripping slowly, relentlessly dripping, on the stone floor, gathering in a tiny pool in a worn depression.

He wished to shriek aloud. Then as suddenly as it had begun the sound ceased, and he fell into a disordered sleep.

"I have not slept a wink," said Madonna Beatrice peevishly when morning came. "Bring me a mirror, Barbara! There, do I not look a perfect fright! My eyes swollen—"

"Your mirror lies," cried Jacopo eagerly. "Do not forget that to-day I begin your portrait."

"A pretty picture I shall make with shadowed eyes. No. Do not try to persuade me to it."

"But, Beatrice, I am in the mood. Do not deny me. See, the day is bright. Come, sweetheart, do you place your mirror before your lover? Which speaks the truer?"

"If you must paint, paint Monna Barbara."

"The saints forbid," cried the old woman. "No image of mine shall be made for an enemy's evil purpose. Who knows but that some one thrusting a needle into my painted body be not working ill to this old body of mine. There be such things in magic. Come, my lady, you have no fears of such things. Your little bird is all agog to limn you on canvas. He will not be happy till 'tis done."

"That is true," cried the artist. "Shall men to come not see with their own eyes the beauty of the Pearl of Venice? You shall have lovers to eternity, Beatrice."

"Lovers to eternity," she murmured dreamily. "Ah, well, since it must be so, to work. Only let me not see the portrait till the last touch of your brush. And as you paint, let us be alone, that none may see the love in my eyes."

In an upper room of the house the canvas was set and the painter mixed his colors. Then in resplendent attire, her hair simply dressed, a single large pearl hung like a dewdrop in the center of her forehead, his model took her place on a carved chair, spread with glorious draperies. Each day as the sitting ended the canvas was turned to the wall so that no vulgar eye might see the masterpiece. And Madonna Beatrice, as she saw the intent rapture of the artist, measuring her with eyes in which there was no passion, grew weary.

Once Monna Barbara whispered to the painter in passing:

"Take heed. She can forgive all, but not neglect."

He stared at her in bewilderment.

"Neglect! I have no thought but for her."

"For her picture, Master Painter," chuckled the old woman grimly. "Ah, well, do not say I did not warn you."

The next day as the sitting drew to an end, Madonna Beatrice cried out:

"Do you love me still, Jacopo?"

The artist looked past the canvas edge with narrowed eyes.

"Yes, yes; but hold the pose. I beseech you, do not stir."

"Do you love me still?" she repeated with angry emphasis.

"Surely! A little while and I am done," he answered, and bent over his palette.

"Say no more!" cried his mistress in a shrill voice, and rising, swept from the room.

The painter stared abstractedly at the closing door, then turned again to his canvas. A stroke or two—a spot of light—and it was done. There would be time enough to win forgiveness from his mistress. He worked feverishly against the coming of darkness. There, it was done, and the fame

of Jacopo Bandello was secure for all time. He sank into the softly cushioned chair to gaze upon his masterpiece, and the falling shadows enveloped him as he slept.

When he awoke he tried to rise and found he could not. There was a strange constriction about his arms and feet. He was bound to the heavy seat.

He cried aloud, and the door opened softly to admit Monna Barbara, who smiled upon him hypocritically.

"You poor boy, so they have bound you."

"Why? Why?"

"That you might not do hurt to yourself, Master Painter."

"Hurt? Am I mad? Where is Madonna Beatrice?"

"Madonna Beatrice set out at nightfall for Venice. Did I not warn you, foolish fellow, that this would be the outcome of your heedlessness? A most noble lover sent to her a necklace of pearls, and she could not resist his appeal. So in the coach he sent hath she returned to Venice."

The painter uttered a heartrending groan.

"Come, it is not so bad, Messer Bandello," said the old dame. "You have been living and loving like a prince for close on a month now. The comedy is ended. It is time you were going. You will be set free outside the garden walls with the suit you are now wearing and your painting utensils."

"And the portrait?"

"That belongs to my mistress."

The painter sighed. The tears splashed from his eyes upon the puffing of his doublet.

"Ah, it was true, then, that you loved the portrait better than the woman," said the old woman not unkindly. "Had you but played your cards, Messer Jacopo, you had made both our fortunes; you had been the lover of one who was peerless and proud in her loving, master of her mansion and her slaves; aye, and my generous master, too, I warrant. But alas! See, I will do you a favor, then; I will have the portrait wrapped and sent down with you."

Messer Bandello choked.

"Of your kindness, Monna Barbara."

"There, I knew we should come to a bargain," cried the old woman, and clapped her hands. Two black slaves entered, and the painter was carried and laid outside the gate. He lay there till they returned bearing the canvas wrapped in a heavy cover, and then his bonds were cut.

With stumbling feet he went from the tomb of his happiness.

He felt in his pockets and drew out a scant few ducats. He laughed harshly, then shuddered as he thought of the noisome lodging that would be his henceforth, then started with sudden eagerness. The duke! He must to the duke with the portrait. Surely the canvas must win favor, and favor that spoke of ducats, many ducats, perhaps. And had not the duke himself hinted at the subject?

Carrying his canvas, he hastened to the palace. A ducat to the guards and he was admitted instantly to the antechamber. As luck would have it the secretary was there, and drawing him aside, he whispered his errand in his ear.

"Madonna Beatrice herself! Mark you, there is wealth for you, too, my good friend, in this. Let me but have audience with the duke."

The secretary hesitated; then hastened within, to appear again beckoning warningly.

"He is in ill humor. Do not cross him, Messer Jacopo."

"Not I," said the painter proudly. "Mark my words, we shall sup together like lords to-night. Lead on."

The duke looked up sharply as he entered.

"Messer Bandello again. Well, see that you show us no paltry gear this time, or you hang. What is your subject?"

"'Tis the Madonna Beatrice, the Pearl of Venice," said the painter.

"Ha! You look well fed and gallantly clad. You have spent our five ducats royally, then," cried the duke shrewdly, "and found beauty."

"Beauty, excellency, such as is given to few painters to set upon canvas."

"This is bold talk, that comes of fishing for pearls in the waters of Milan."

A sudden chill leaped upon the painter. The waters of Milan! Did the duke, then,

know of one that had been fished from these same waters?

"I pray you, excellency," he faltered.

"Enough!" cried the duke impatiently. "Stand back. Uncover me this canvas, Master Secretary. "The Pearl of Venice," we may find a place for her in our private gallery."

The secretary untied the strings and folded back the cover.

"By the eternal fires of hell!" cried the duke, his face ablaze with fury. "What foul jest is this you put upon us?"

"Jest, excellency?"

"Look!"

Messer Bandello stepped forward hastily and looked at the canvas. His heart leaped to his mouth. What wizardry was this? What working of divine vengeance? From the canvas there stared forth, not the voluptuous splendor of Madonna Beatrice, but the pallid face and seeking, mournful eyes of his wife. It was no new canvas glowing with rich color, but one bruised and marked, and it seemed at that moment as if its surface glistened with water.

With a gesture of fury, the duke struck upon a bell by his side. The cold menace of his blue eyes thrust like a knife into the reeling brain of the painter. Pushing aside the affrighted secretary, he ran to the window, and climbing upon the balcony, swayed an instant, then plunged headlong to the pavement many feet below.

The secretary shuddered and gasped:

"None could live after such a fall, excellency."

"Be more careful hereafter, Master Secretary," said the duke composedly. "See that the carrion be removed. Have that daub hung in the guard-room. They want women to amuse them there. Let it not be said that I tried not my best to please them."

That night Monna Barbara set out after her mistress. In the carriage she carried the portrait of the Pearl of Venice, for which she had substituted another which one of Madonna Beatrice's litter-carriers had sold her for a handful of soldi. He had found it, he said, near where they had picked up the young man of whom his lady had become enamored.

"'Tis better fitted to Madonna Beatrice's palace than to the lodging of Messer Bandello," she said complacently.

High and Low

EVERY one knows that six plus four equals ten—that is, every one except certain West African natives of my acquaintance, who knew only that "five and five" made ten, and were immeasurably confused if one tried to make them believe that "six and four" were the same thing!

But they could not read THE ARGOSY, anyway, and consequently have nothing to do with the case.

If I were to insist upon informing *you*, however, that the sum of six plus four was ten, that would be quite a different matter, because I would be expounding an arithmetical truth already quite obvious to any one who has had even a nodding acquaintance with the multiplication table.

In other words, though a public speaker may err very badly in talking over the heads of his audience, he surely errs much more heinously when he belittles his hearers' intelligence by spouting commonplaces that neither edify nor amuse, but only irritate.

Stories, for instance, that are *too* simple and *too* obvious, are infinitely worse than stories that are too subtle or too profound. The latter, at least, have the virtue of being thoughtful, even if they overdo it. The former are plainly insulting, because they just don't bother to think at all.

The cure for this sort of thing is largely a matter of editorial policy—according to what the editor thinks of the intelligence of his readers.

To my mind, the man in the street—meaning you and me and the rest of us—wants the kind of story that thinks enough to make *him* think, too. He wants to be stimulated as well as amused, and he doesn't want anybody in the world to write *down* to him!

THE LOOK-OUT MAN.

Cold Steel

by George C. Shedd

Author of "Ships Triumphant," "A Legacy of Adventure," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE THUNDERBOLT.

THE greater part of the number of bandits had stopped in a group a few yards from the base of the white dam core, though a few stragglers were some way behind. Among these Steele Weir made out the figure of one whom he recognized as a white man—he whom the guard from the spring had mentioned as directing the company; and when, at a sudden clamor of speech from Mexicans who perceived the engineer, the man lifted his face, Weir saw he was Burkhardt.

No more than this was needed to show whose was the hand behind this treacherous conspiracy. Clear, too, it was that Burkhardt, determined that no mistake or abandonment of the operation should occur, had come to see it through in person. Weir could ask nothing better; he had one of the plotters caught in the act.

Apparently orders had been to carry through the first part of the diabolical plan of destruction in silence, that of gaining control of the dam, for when two or three Mexicans flung up rifles to shoot at Weir a sharp word from another Mexican, seemingly their leader, checked the volley. Then the commander shouted to Burkhardt.

The latter stopped, stared for a few seconds at the man on the white wall above, and finally signaled with a wave of his arm.

"Come down here," he ordered.

But Weir made no move to obey. He continued to stand motionless, coolly regarding the party beneath. His eyes particularly considered two men who carried wooden boxes, square and stout, on their shoulders. At last he spoke.

"What do you want here?"

"Come down; then you'll learn," Burkhardt shouted up, making no effort to hide the enmity in his voice.

Weir puffed at his cigar, removed it from his lips to glance at its glowing end, while the Mexicans stared up at him in silence, puzzled by this lone guard who carried no rifle, who did not flee away to spread an alarm and seek aid, and who so unexpectedly had appeared as if anticipating their visit.

Murmurs broke out. Why were they not allowed to shoot him at once in the approved Mexican bandit method and proceed to their work? If he were not shot at once, he could yet escape for aid. The party had to ascend the hillside in order to mount to the top of the concrete work. Time would be required to place and fire their charges of dynamite—and they were eager to get at the loot in the buildings above.

"Kill him!" Burkhardt roared suddenly, jerking forth his revolver and blazing at the engineer.

The bullet sang past Weir's head. He did not duck; indeed, he kept his place calmly, while the Mexicans were raising their guns, as if to show his supreme contempt for their power. But at the instant Burkhardt fired again and a dozen rifles blazed he sprang back and dropped flat, leaving the deadly missiles to speed harmlessly above the dam.

Raising himself cautiously, he seized the end of a fuse projecting from one of the

This story began in The Argosy for April 5.

canisters, and held the crimson end of his cigar against it until a sputter of sparks showed that it had caught. From this fuse he turned to the one in the second can and repeated the operation.

This was the essence of his plan of defense. With guns, the defenders on the hillside would be outnumbered and probably killed in an attack. The information that the assailants were to steal up the cañon, however, was the key that would unlock a desperate situation, and his mind had grasped the mode and means of defeating the enemy.

With the first shots quiet had returned. The night seemed for Weir as peaceful as ever, the earth bathed in moonlight, the camp at rest. Only before him there was the sputter of the two fuses, one at the right, one at the left, as the trains of fire burned toward the holes in the canisters. He watched these calculatingly. His cigar, no longer of service, had been cast aside.

All at once he rose erect again. A few men were starting along the wall to climb the hillside, but the greater number were gathered about Burkhardt and the Mexican leader. Now Weir glanced at them, and now at the fuses.

"I warn you to leave this dam and camp, Burkhardt," he shouted when a few seconds had passed. "Don't say I didn't give you warning!"

Every head jerked upward at this surprising reappearance and voice. They had supposed him fled, the men down there, and were having a last, hasty conference, doubtless as to the wisdom of now first attacking the camp. A grim smile came over the engineer's face. Their astonishment was comic—or would have been at a moment less perilous and fraught with consequences less grave.

An oath ripped from Burkhardt's lips. An angry curse, it might have been, at Madden that he had failed to arrest and hold the engineer according to plan. He gestured right and left, yelling something to the men around him. He himself began to run toward one end of the dam.

Weir stooped, picked up one of the canisters, blew on the fuse now burned so near the hole. Some men, perhaps, at this instant would have quailed for their own safety and at the prospect of hurling death among others. For death this tin cylinder meant for those below. But there was no tremor in Steele Weir's arm or heart.

He was the man of steel who had won the name "Cold Steel"—calm, implacable, of steel-like purpose. With such enemies, he could hold no other communion than that which gave death. For such there was no mercy. By the same sort of law that they would execute let them suffer—the law of lawlessness and force. Destruction they would give, destruction let them gain.

He straightened. He took a last look at the snapping, sparking, smoldering fuse, then flung his burden full down upon the spot where the Mexicans were again pointing their guns at him. Swiftly picking up the second canister, while bullets whined by, he cast it down after its mate. A glimpse of startled faces he had, of men attempting to scatter from before the huge missiles, as he flung himself full length upon the dam.

Interminably time seemed to stretch itself out as, lying there, he listened, waited, sought to brace himself for the impending shock. Then a quick doubt assailed his mind. Had the charges failed?

All at once the earth seemed rent by a roar that shook the very dam. Followed instantly a second volume of sound more terrific, more blasting in its quality, more dreadful in its power, deafening, stunning, as if the world had erupted.

"The dynamite!" Weir breathed to himself.

His ear-drums appeared to be broken. His hat was gone. His body ached from the tremendous dispersion of air. But that he could still hear he discovered when through his shocked auditory nerves he heard as if far off faint, booming echoes from the hills.

He got to his knees, finally to his feet. Pressing his hands to his head, he gazed slowly about. Stones and a rain of earth were still falling, as if from a celestial bombardment. About him he perceived sections of woodwork shaken to pieces, collapsed.

Stepping to the edge of the dam, he peered downward. A vast hole showed in the earth before the wall, though the wall itself was uninjured and only smeared with a layer of soil. Huge rocks lay where there had been none before, uprooted and flung aside by the explosion, dispersed by the gigantic blast. On the hillside half a dozen men were picking themselves up and fighting wildly to flee. Nearer, a few other forms lay in the moonlight, mangled and still, or mangled and writhing in pain. Of all the rest—nothing.

Almost completely Burkhardt's predatory band had been blotted out. Weir's thunderbolt had struck down into its very heart; it had vanished.

As he turned and walked toward the end of the dam, he staggered a little. The sight had shaken even his iron nerve.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WEIR STRIKES WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.

IN his runabout, with Sheriff Madden at his side, and followed by Atkinson and other men for guards in two other machines, Weir sped along the road to San Mateo. They carried with them Burkhardt, who had been found stunned and slightly injured, and two Mexican bandits who had been captured. Those of the party of attackers yet alive but seriously hurt were being treated at camp by Dr. Hosmer, while the young engineers, armed and eager, were scouring the mountainside for the few Mexicans who had got away.

It seemed a miracle that Burkhardt had escaped death, but the explanation was found no doubt in the fact he had started from the spot where the canisters fell, and so at the moment of explosion was outside the area of its full destruction. To Weir the matter went deeper than that. Providence appeared to have saved him for punishment, for the long term of imprisonment he deserved for his crimes.

"I'd much rather have him alive than dead," Steele had remarked to Madden when the man was brought up from the cañon, a prisoner.

The tremendous thunder-clap of sound from the camp had quickened the return of the superintendent and his men, already reached and warned by the doctor. More, it had startled even the drunken workmen so that when some one shouted that the dam had been blown up the debauch came to an immediate end, the house was deserted, and the throng, incited by curiosity and wonder, went staggering and running for camp.

The first of these had arrived, and the rest were tailing behind for half a mile, when Weir and his companions set out for town, the blinding headlights of the machines scattering on either side of the road the approaching workmen. It was not likely many would go back to the house when they were told at headquarters how narrowly destruction of the works had been averted, and how their spree had been a move in the plot. Between shame at being duped and drowsiness resulting from drink, they would want to seek their bunk-houses after a look at the hole blown in the earth at the base of the dam.

As they sped toward town Weir and Madden rapidly made their plans, for the sheriff, having witnessed with his own eyes the enormity of the plotters' guilt, was all for quick action.

"These engineers of yours with us and the other men Meyers will bring down can be thrown as a guard around the jail," he stated. "I'll swear them all in as deputies. With Sorenson and Vorse locked up with Burkhardt — and I'll throw Lucerio, the county attorney, in with them on the off chance he's an accomplice—there will be high feeling running in San Mateo. As quick as I can make arrangements, we'll take them to safe quarters elsewhere—to-night if possible, to-morrow at the latest, in fast machines. These men have friends, remember."

"You've Burkhardt handcuffed. It might be well to gag him, too, for fear the crowd might make trouble if he yelled for help," Weir replied.

"Yes, we'll do that, though I think we can rush him into the jail before any one knows what's happening."

On the outskirts of the town, therefore, the cars stopped. When Burkhardt, who

had recovered his senses, and with them a knowledge of his plight, perceived the sheriff's intention, his rage burst all bounds.

"You fool! You muddle-headed blunderer!" he exclaimed, with a string of oaths. "Take these cuffs off! You'll lose your job for this trick. When I see Sorenson—"

"When you see him you'll see him, and that will be inside a cell," was the cool rejoinder. "I didn't know you were a dynamiter and would-be murderer until tonight, but I saw you at work, and saw you shoot twice at Weir."

"You'll unlock these, I say, here and now!" And the raging voice went off in a further stream of biting curses. "Look at me; I'm Burkhardt. You're crazy to talk of throwing me in jail, with my influence and—"

"Your influence be damned!" was the imperturbable answer. "You'll have a long time in a penitentiary to see how much influence you have, if you don't swing first."

Burkhardt struggled fiercely for a moment against the steel bands about his wrists and the men who held him.

"No crook like this Weir shall ever send me behind bars, or any other man put me there. Wait till Sorenson and Vorse and Senator Gordon learn what you're trying! Wait till they find out you've double-crossed us for this engineer! Wait till I'm turned loose with a *habeas corpus!* You'll sweat blood for this night's work, Madden!"

The sheriff shook out the red handkerchief with which he expected to bind the prisoner's mouth.

"I'll wait for a long time if I wait for them to obtain the writ," he remarked; "seeing that Gordon, in particular, is dead."

"Dead! You're a liar, you sneaking cur; you can't bluff me! And when I'm loose, if I don't fill you full of lead it will be because—"

But Burkhardt's explanation was never finished on that point, for Madden whipped the rolled handkerchief over his mouth and quickly knotted it behind, shutting off the flow of seething, vituperative speech. If looks could slay, those he received from the prisoner's bloodshot, maddened eyes would have dropped the sheriff in his tracks; as it was, they fell harmless against the law officer's person.

"Things have changed sort of sudden, haven't they, Burkhardt?" Madden stated sardonically. "Never can tell what's going to happen between supper and breakfast. Here I go out to serve a warrant on Weir, and, instead, I'm bringing you in for trying a low, I. W. W. trick. Surprising cards a fellow sometimes gets on the draw." With which he went back to his own car.

Counting on quickness for the safe delivery of his man in jail, Madden did not attempt to approach the court-house by a side street. On the contrary, he drove fast down the main way, with the other two cars following close, passing without pause through the crowd of Mexicans drawn forth in wonder at the booming report of the explosion that had sounded from the dam.

One could see that excitement was at a high pitch. With the rumors that all day had been in circulation, with later vague tales of the great debauch proceeding at the old 'dobe house half-way up the road to camp, with the thunder-clap that had burst from the base of the mountains coming on top of all—every man, woman, and child had run to the main street, where the men in the automobiles could see, by wagging tongues and gesticulating hands, that speculation was rife and curiosity afire.

"The talk this evening when I set out for your camp was that I expected to bring you in and hang you," Madden said dryly to the engineer. "Quite a crowd had come to town. Plain to see now that Burkhardt and his bunch had started the talk. I shouldn't be surprised if there had been some trouble had I arrested and locked you up. There are a few bad Mexicans around these parts that would do anything for money, and it's evident from what's happened that Sorenson's gang was ready to go the limit. What I'm trying to figure out is where these fellows Burkhardt had with him up yonder came from."

"I can tell you. From across the line. I've seen plenty just like them down there," Weir affirmed. "Just look at their hats

and clothes close—but you'll be able to make them talk after a while. But you won't find any of them speaking English. Offer one of them some money and a trip home and he'll give you the story quick enough, especially after you've thrown a scare into him. We can afford to let one go to get the facts."

"You better keep out of sight after we have the men in the jail. Slip behind the jail to the rear of the yard, and when I've locked them up and told Atkinson what to do about keeping the people away from the building, I'll join you there."

"I understand," Weir replied.

"And we can slip off and grab Vorse if he's in his saloon, and then Sorenson, before any one knows what's happening."

"That's right; don't want the game spoiled now. Here we are."

The cars had arrived at the gate before the court-house. Here, too, however, the crowd was densest, having gathered at the spot as if the roar of powder from the camp was an overture to Weir's arrest and appearance. It had proved a prelude to his appearance, at any rate. The crowd perceived him with Madden, and it believed him a prisoner, even if not handcuffed and marched with a pistol at his head.

A profound silence at first greeted the party as it alighted. Madden, assisting Burkhardt to alight, pulled the man's broad-brimmed hat low over his eyes to conceal his face from the revealing moonlight. A short struggle again ensued, but Burkhardt finally yielded to the pressure exerted by his guards.

A murmur of astonishment ran over the surrounding throng, each instant being augmented by others running to the place. Not only did it appear that the engineer was under arrest, but others, a handcuffed, gagged man, and two sullen Mexicans, strangers to the community. Yet a number of the onlookers, possibly men with Vorse's or Sorenson's money in their pockets, shouted as the newcomers moved through the press:

"Killer! Murderer! Hang him, shoot him!" And more voices began to join in the cry.

Clearly the intent was to stir up feeling in the crowd to a point where action against Weir would seem a spontaneous outbreak. Even women joined in the cry; curses followed; fists were shaken.

"Open up the way," Madden ordered, as a surge of the crowd threatened to surround him and his party. In his hand, as if to emphasize his command, a six-shooter swung into view, sweeping to and fro, and menacing the press of people.

Wildly the frightened men before the party struggled to get out of the line of the weapon, yielding suddenly a clear passage.

"Quick! Around the court-house and back to the jail!" Madden exclaimed to those with him.

Pushing forward from the moonlight into the shade cast by the cottonwoods, they dragged their prisoners past the first building toward the low, stout, stone structure at the rear, half illuminated and half concealed by the patches of light and shade falling from the trees.

A minute later Madden whipped out his keys.

"Two men remain here at the door, and don't be afraid to show your rifles to that bunch," he said. "In with you, Burkhardt; there's a nice, soft, stone floor to sleep on. Keep those Mexican camp-burners covered, Atkinson, till I get the cells open. You, Weir, slip on back there in the shadow and wait for me."

The engineer had taken but three steps into the gloom along the outside jail wall, glancing about to avoid any curious straggler of the crowd already hurrying around the court-house toward the jail, when he heard a call. In the advance was a slim, well-dressed Mexican, full in the moonlight and very important of bearing.

"You got him all right, sheriff?" he said.

"Yes. He came in with me," was the answer.

"But who are these others?"

"Step inside and I'll tell you, Lucerio."

The county attorney joined the sheriff, peered inside the doorway, and hesitated. It was dark within; no light showed, except a patch of moonlight at the far side of the building that fell through a barred window.

"Go right in!" Madden exclaimed. And laying hand on the other's shoulder, he forced him ahead. The door closed after the pair. Before the doorway there remained, however, the pair of young engineers, rifles in hands, whose threatening bearing and glistening gun-barrels were apparent even in the patchy light dropping through the boughs.

At a distance of about ten feet off the crowd of people halted, staring eagerly at the jail building, showing their white teeth as they carried on low talk in Spanish, and awaiting with impatience the return outside of Madden and Lucerio, that they might flood them with questions.

Weir remained to see no more, for the increasing crowd pushed out farther and farther on the flanks, a circumstance that would eventually result in his discovery. So slipping to the rear of the jail and keeping well in the shadows, he gained the fence. This he leaped, and, lighting a cigarette, examined his pistol, then proceeded to smoke calmly until Madden arrived.

"Hurry! Slip away!" the latter said. "They wondered what the devil I dodged back here for, and are as curious as cats."

The two men glided away, keeping well in the shadows until they gained the side street, and then passed to the main thoroughfare.

"What if Sorenson and Vorse are somewhere in that crowd?" Madden asked. "They're likely to be, expecting your arrest."

"Then we'll have to wait till they leave it. But I don't believe they're there. They won't want to show their hands even by being on the scene."

"Probably they've found out Gordon is dead."

"Probably. But, on the other side, they suppose now that the dam has been destroyed and that I'm locked up," Weir said. "Still, I guess that if they've learned Pollock and Martinez and I were at Gordon's all the afternoon, and he committed suicide, they'll be worrying some, just the same."

Madden glanced at his companion.

"I don't believe we'll bring Vorse in—alive," he said.

"That's the way I want him, and Sorenson, too. I want to see them go up for life, but if not that, then be hanged. But a life term for both, along with Burkhardt, is my choice. I want them to suffer as my father suffered. Only worse. Dying's too easy for them. Let them have hell here for a while before they get it on the other side. Let the iron bars and stone walls kill them. I hope they live for twenty years to gnaw out their hearts every day and every night behind steel doors. That would half pay what they owe.

"But if they finish in prison, knowing there's no hope, knowing I've put them there for what they did to my father and Jim Dent, knowing that all the money and cattle they stole has slipped through their fingers, that they've lost all they gained and more, that their curses and crimes are crushing their own heads, why, that will help.

"And Sorenson — Sorenson there every day, knowing his son lies a helpless cripple, without the money that has been piled up for him! I couldn't invent a worse hell for him. And that's the hell he's going to have!"

Though a man not easy to move, Madden, at Weir's cold, implacable expression of hatred, shivered slightly. Sorenson and his accomplices would be lucky indeed if they died by the rope.

CHAPTER XXIX.

VORSE.

ACROSS the main street the two men walked, wearing their hats low, and making no answer to shouted questions of those hurrying to the court-house yard. Already the grounds about the court-house and the street in front were jammed with eager, excited Mexicans, thrilled with an expectation of something to happen, though they knew not exactly what. "The murderer, the killer—they have taken the killer!" was the constant statement tossed from mouth to mouth.

"But not the killer they think," Madden said in a low aside to Weir as they moved ahead on their errand.

The pair were now advancing toward the saloon along the opposite side of the street, where a slight shadow afforded them concealment. By the time they came opposite the building they had escaped altogether from the crowd, though looking thither over their shoulders, they could see the black press of people in the moonlight at the public edifice. Here the street was empty except for a few belated women and children running toward the assemblage.

Madden's hand suddenly gripped the engineers' arm as they were about to step forth from the shadow to cross the street to the saloon.

"There he is," the sheriff whispered.

Vorse had pushed open the slatted door of his place and stepped outside. In the moonlight his figure and face were clearly visible; his thin, whipcord body and predatory face, and bald head as shiny and hard as a fish-scale. He wore no coat, while his vest hung unbuttoned and open as usual. About his waist was an ammunition belt carrying a holster, as if he were prepared for action.

Thus he stood for a time, hands on hips, motionless, his cruel, hatchetlike face directed toward the scene farther along the street. Presently a man came running to him—Miguel, his bartender, who had been one of the two men serving out whisky to the workmen at the old adobe house, and who, at the break-up of the spree, had run back to town to report to his employer. Now, it seemed, he had fresher news to give.

"Yes, it is the engineer, for a certainty!" he exclaimed, panting, as he stopped before Vorse. "The sheriff arrested him, and he now lies in jail there. It is said he fought and tried to shoot Madden, but that the sheriff was too quick, and blew the gun out of his hand. It is said, also, that the dam is blown into a million little stones, but men are riding there on horses to see for themselves. They will soon return.

"Anyway, a fight there was up there undoubtedly, for Madden brought in not only the engineer, but three other men, bound and handcuffed and struggling furiously, trying to strike and bite the crowd like mad dogs. From time to time the sheriff had to beat them on the heads with his pistol, especially the engineer, who is the worst. I did not see them, but those who did said their faces were streaming with blood."

"All right. Go find José Molina and 'Silver' Leon."

"Are they not up in the hills with their bands of sheep?"

"No. They are here. Look round till you find them; then send them to me."

"That means something lively to happen, eh?" Miguel said with a laugh.

He did not wait, however, for an answer, but set off at once for the court-house.

"I hope Meyer shows up soon with more men," Madden said to Weir. "Those two sheep-herders of Vorse's are a pair of snakes. He always hires that kind; and they probably have some more with them like themselves."

"Meyer is on the way with twenty men or so by this time. They had to come in wagons, as we had the cars. Atkinson ought to be able to stand off the crowd with the half-dozen boys he has until the others arrive."

While they had conducted this brief exchange of opinions they had kept their gaze on the saloon-keeper, who continued to stand before his door. The cold and merciless character of the man was never more revealed than now as he waited for his hired assassins to come to receive orders. Possessing already a full knowledge of the plot, Weir and Madden were able to guess what culmination was now contemplated, and measure the true depth of the conspirators' infamy. The sheriff especially boiled with inward wrath that they should expect to make him not only a dupe, but a tool in their crime.

"It's clear they never intended you to come to trial when arrested," he said.

"Certainly not. That isn't the way they play the game. And I suppose Vorse there imagines the cards are all falling his way at this moment."

"He's going in."

"Good! Now then!"

Weir struck off across the street, striding forward at a pace Madden found it difficult to keep. As they neared the door, Weir loosened the gun in his holster.

In this action the sheriff imitated him, and then, changing his mind, drew the weapon itself. Plain man that he was, he was an instinctive judge of character; he had encountered men of Vorse's type before, less shrewd but equally savage; their nature was to fight, not surrender; their way was to kill and be killed in the final issue. He anticipated no arrest.

He felt no necessity, however, to express this view to the engineer, who had proved himself, in the time he had been at San Mateo, wholly competent to deal with any situation that arose. Moreover, while Vorse had had a reputation of being a quick shot in the past, he was confident Weir was his master at that.

With a quiet movement the engineer pushed open the door and stepped into the saloon. Madden, following him, had allowed the slatted door to swing shut again, and the sound of its hinges caused Vorse, who was just starting away from the bar, to turn about. In his hand was a tray holding a bottle of whisky, a bottle of mineral water, and glasses, which, apparently, he had just lifted up.

For a space of ten seconds or so he remained unmoving, the tray in his hand, and his eyes regarding the visitors fixedly. Behind him in the rear of the saloon a second man had sprung up from the table where he sat, but after that first startled action he, too, had not stirred. The man was Sorenson.

With Madden at his side, with a grim smile on his lips, Weir walked slowly toward Vorse. In his tread there was something of the quality of a tiger's—the light, deliberate, poised advance, the easy and dangerous movement of body, the effortless glide of a powerful animal ready to spring and strike. His hands swung idly at his sides, but that did not mean they would not be swift once they responded to the call of the brain that controlled them.

"You gentlemen were just about to celebrate my downfall, I perceive, by pouring a libation," Weir said. "Don't let me interrupt. Only I must request you to conduct proceedings there where you're standing, instead of at the rear of the room; Madden and I wish a good view of the ceremony. If Mr. Sorenson will be so agreeable as to step forward, you may go ahead."

Sorenson did not join Vorse, but he here spoke.

"Why haven't you locked up your prisoner, Madden?" he demanded harshly. "And you're letting him keep his gun. Don't you know enough to disarm a murderer and throw him into jail when you arrest him?"

"I haven't arrested him yet," was the sheriff's answer.

"Well, do it, then. You have the warrant for the scoundrel. Perhaps you haven't heard he almost killed my boy Ed last night — and you're allowing him to walk around with you as if he were a bosom friend. Do your duty, or we'll get a sheriff who will."

"That's why I'm here—to do my duty."

"You didn't have to bring this man here to do it."

"I decided to bring him, however."

From Vorse had come not a word. Only his gleaming, evil eyes continued to rest on the two men without wink or change. For him explanations were unnecessary; he had divined instantly that somewhere—somehow—the plotters' plans had gone awry.

"Did you know that Gordon is dead?" Weir asked all at once.

Vorse lowered the tray to the bar and ran the tip of his tongue over his lips.

"No," he said; "we didn't know it."

"He deeded his property over this eveing, and then swallowed poison," the engineer stated. "He saw the game was up."

"You can't make me believe your lies," came in a sneer from Sorenson. "And you shall pay, you and that girl, for every broken bone in my boy's body. I'll spend my last dollar for that, if necessary. Madden, do your duty and lock him up."

The sheriff said nothing, but lifted his gun a little. Vorse, by a slight movement of his body, had edged from the bar as if to gain freedom for action.

"The game's up for you men, too," Weir said. "You've murdered and robbed and swindled in this country long enough; I've got the proof, and I'm going to remove you from this community. It's not I who will

be arrested. You killed Jim Dent after cleaning him out at cards and then made my father believe he was guilty of the crime.

"All I fear is that the court will hang you, instead of sending you up for life; that would be too good for you; I want your crooked souls to die a thousand deaths within stone walls before you die in body. The game's up, I say. I've Suarez's deposition, and I've the man, who was the boy looking in that back door there that day thirty years ago, and saw you shoot Dent, and he'll go on the stand against you."

A stillness so profound that one could hear the tiny insects hovering about the lamps succeeded this statement. If words had not been enough, Weir's cold, harsh face would have removed the two men's last hope, for on it was not a single trace of relenting. A stone could have been no flintier.

"Well?" Vorse inquired softly.

His arched, bony nose appeared thinner and more hawklike. His lips were compressed in a white, scornful smile, while his eyelids now drooped until but slits of light showed from the orbs.

"And you may be interested to know Burkhardt and some of the Mexicans he hired are now locked up in jail; the rest, or nearly all, are dead," Weir continued, with slow distinctness. "Your little scheme to blow up the dam and burn the camp failed. We caught Burkhardt at the spot, leading the gang.

"Your plot to make the workmen drunk and leave the dam unprotected worked well enough so far as that part was concerned, but a keg of powder dropped on your bunch of imported bandits stopped the main show. And we have Burkhardt! You gentlemen are going to join him in the jail, where we shall give you all the care and attention you deserve."

Vorse turned his head about toward Sorenson.

"Do you hear?" he asked.

"Madden, you've too much sense to believe all this trumped-up libel!" Sorenson exclaimed furiously. "About us, respected leaders of this town! Arrest the blackguard!"

Even facing assured proof of his complicity and guilt, the banker still believed in the power of his wealth and influence, in his ability to browbeat opponents, to command the man he had elected to office, to dominate and ruthlessly crush by sheer will-power all resistance, as he had done for years.

"I take no orders from you," the sheriff replied.

"Well, I suppose I can empty the till and lock the safe before going?" Vorse questioned.

"No. Keep in front of the bar where you are," the sheriff commanded.

"And have everything stolen."

"Your barkeeper will be back presently. He will look after things for you."

"You say Burkhardt is locked up?"

"Yes."

"That will hurt his pride," Vorse laughed. "He always swore that no one should put him behind bars. He wouldn't have minded so much finishing in a gunfight, but to serve a term in prison would surely go against the grain with Burk. Though I think with Sorenson—"

Weir's eyes had never left the speaker. Through the other's inconsequential talk and apparently careless acceptance of the fact of arrest, the engineer had noted the tense gathering of the man's body.

"Put your hands up!" he interrupted at this point.

Vorse had uttered no following word after speaking Sorenson's name; his voice terminated abruptly. At the same instant his right hand flew to his holster and whipped out his gun. It was the advantageous time for which he had waited, for Madden's look, which had been moving back and forth from Vorse to Sorenson so as to cover both, had passed to the cattleman. And Weir's weapon was undrawn.

But if Vorse drew fast, the engineer's motion was like a flash of light. His weapon leaped on a level with the other's breast. The report sounded a second before that of Vorse's, and three before Madden's, who also had fired.

Then, if ever, Steele Weir had displayed his amazing speed in beating an enemy to his gun, for Vorse had indeed been quick,

keyed by a knowledge that for him this meant imprisonment or freedom, a slow death, or liberty.

For a minute he stood, half crouching as he had been at the instant of shooting, his eyes glaring balefully at his enemy and the thin, cruel smile on his lips, while the two men in front stood warily waiting with weapons extended. Then Vorse clutched at his breast, muttered thickly, and toppled over full length on the floor.

The sharp, pungent smell of powder-smoke mingled with the reek of liquor.

"He's dead," Madden said.

"Yes."

"Are you hit?"

"No. His bullet went past my hip; he never got his gun up."

Madden glanced about toward the rear of the room. A command for Sorenson to stop broke from his lips. Next he fired. And Weir, swinging his look that way, saw Sorenson's figure, untouched by the bullet, vanishing through the rear door into the night. Using the minute that the two men's surveillance had been lifted, he had escaped.

"Hard luck when we had him," Weir growled.

"He can't get away."

"I'm not so sure. And he's armed."

"He'll strike for home to get his car."

"Or to his office for money!" Weir exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FOURTH MAN.

A LAST look Steele Weir had at the dead man on the floor before he turned to go in search of Sorenson. Not so astute or crafty as Senator Gordon, nor so intelligent as Sorenson, nor so belligerent as Burkhardt, he had been as rapacious and infinitely more cool-minded than any of the three. If anything, he was the one of them all to proceed to a crime, whether fraud or murder, in sheer cold blood and by natural craving. No uneasy conscience would have ever disturbed his rest; no remorse or pity ever stirred in his breast. He was the human counterpart of a bird of prey.

Well, he was dead now. Three of the quartet who had been joined by avarice and lawless actions were taken care of—Burkhardt a prisoner, Gordon dead by self-administered poison, Vorse by bullets. Almost did Steele Weir feel himself an embodiment of Fate, clipping the strands of these men's power and lives as with shears. Sorenson alone remained to be dealt with, and his freedom should be short.

Beckoning Madden, he went swiftly through the door where the cattleman had leaped into the shadows. Where the gloom ceased and the space behind the row of store buildings was clear in the moonlight—nothing was to be seen. Naturally the man had kept in his flight within black shade.

When they reached the rear of the San Mateo Cattle Company's building, they peered in through its barred back windows, but all was dark inside the structure so far as they could determine. To all appearance Sorenson had not stopped here; it was quiet, gloomy, untenanted.

"We'll have to try his home now," the sheriff stated. "If we don't find him there, we'll set the telephones going to warn all the ranches and towns around to be on the lookout and either to stop or report him if he shows up. He hasn't start enough to get away now."

They hastened on along the line of buildings until they reached a side street. But when they had proceeded a short way, Weir stopped.

"I'm not satisfied about his office," said he. "Suppose you go on to his house and I'll go take a look inside from the front. If you fail to find him, join me at Martinez's office, where no one is likely to be around and we can then lay further plans."

"That suits," Madden responded, and set off alone.

Weir's alert brain had been turning over the possibilities of Sorenson's course. Rather by pursuing what would be the man's line of reasoning than by depending on chance, he had come to the quick decision to turn back once again to the building. Sorenson would so act as would best serve his immediate escape and that of the future.

Would he expect the sheriff and the engi-

neer to look for him to flee by the speediest means, an automobile, and to the natural avenue of escape, the railroad? Yes. Therefore on that expectation he would adopt another way to throw off pursuit. And perilous as a delay would be in getting away from San Mateo, yet he must risk the few minutes necessary to get money. For to fly with pockets empty meant eventual, certain capture. Money a fugitive from justice must possess above everything in order to possess wings; and no one would know that better than Sorenson.

Though Madden and he had seen no light in the building, the cattleman nevertheless might have been within. If he had been in the vault, he could safely have lighted a candle without their perceiving its beams; and though the safe was modern it probably had no time lock. Sorenson could unlock it with a few twirls of the combination, stuff his pockets with currency and negotiable paper to the amount of thousands, and then slip away.

Fortunately the moonlight was to Weir's advantage. He quickened his steps, passed round the corner into the main street, and moved toward the structure. For him the crowd at the court-house at that moment had no interest; one person, and one person alone, commanded his thoughts.

How correct had been his logic—logic not unmixed with intuition, perhaps—appeared when he was yet some fifty yards away from the door he sought. A tall, bulky figure suddenly stepped forth from the low, brick building and instantly ran across the street and lost itself in the shifting, jostling crowd that was half-disclosed, half-concealed by the broken shadows of the moonlit trees.

Steele Weir proceeded to a spot near the office door and halted. His first impulse to rush after Sorenson had been promptly suppressed, as cooler judgment ruled. To seek his quarry in that throng would be labor wasted, while to reveal his identity would be to court a disastrous interference with the business at hand. From where he stood he should much better be able to see the cattleman when he did emerge, unless he chose to remain in the crowd, or stole away at the rear of the court-house yard.

Five minutes passed. The restless, talkative Mexicans continued to swarm and buzz with excitement, ceaselessly moving about, forming and reforming in groups, agitatedly repeating newer and wilder rumors concerning events.

Despite Weir's intent watch for Sorenson, the engineer could not but observe the mob's manifestations, observe them with sardonic humor. For their ebullition of the present would be nothing to what it would be if they learned he stood across the street from it, uncaged, unfettered, free and armed, a "gunman" loose instead of a "gunman" in jail.

All at once Weir noted out of the tail of his eye a slight stir among a number of horses standing, with reins atrail, before a store a little way down the street. The horses were partly in the light, partly in the shadow, so that all he could see was that one or two of them had jerked aside quickly, then resumed their listless postures.

He was about to withdraw his eyes when he saw a man swing up on the back of one of them and start off at an easy canter. Weir sprang toward the spot at a run. That big figure could only be Sorenson's, for no Mexican he had ever seen in San Mateo could match it. And the plan of escape showed the cattleman's craftiness in an emergency; gradually working his way through the crowd, he had at last gained the protective shadow of the building on that side of the street and slipped along in it until he had reached the horses.

Doubtless the man had conceived the plan at the instant he had stepped from the office door, sweeping the street by one gaging look. With the whole town assembled at the court-house, his departure was little likely to be noted by the Mexicans, while Madden and Weir would never suspect him of riding off on a horse, or suspect too late. Indeed, he rode at first as if in no great haste, but as he turned his mount into a narrow byway, more a lane than a street, that disappeared between two mud walls, Weir saw him strike his heels into the pony's flanks.

But for the startled movement of the near-by horses when Sorenson took stirrup, Weir would not have looked that way. He

might possibly have seen the horseman start off, but that is not certain. He unquestionably would have supposed him an ordinary rider if he had not noticed the man until he reached the mouth of the lane.

Meantime the engineer had made his best speed to the line of waiting horses. Slowing to a walk so as not to scare them, though, as he discovered on examination, most of them looked too bony and spiritless for that, he approached and carefully inspected the bunch. He took his time in the selection; the more haste in choosing a mount might prove less speed in the end. He tightened the saddle-girths and ran a finger along the head straps of the bridle of the horse picked to judge their fit, receiving a snap from the pony's teeth, which gave him satisfaction. Not only was this animal a wiry, tough-looking little beast, but he had life.

Up into the saddle Weir went, following Sorenson's line to the lane, down which he swung. Coming out into the next street, he pursued it to the next intersecting street, and there galloped for the edge of town without trying to guess the way taken by the cattleman. Once he reached the open fields he would quickly get sight of the man racing away somewhere on the mesa.

Evidently the man he pursued had not taken so direct a course as had Weir, for when the latter at length came forth where he could have a wide view he perceived the horseman a quarter of a mile off and farther east, galloping south. The engineer at once raced thither to gain the same road, and turning into it, made after Sorenson.

Thus the two men sped away from San Mateo. The wire fences and the adobe houses of Mexicans owning little farms adjoining soon ceased. The wide mesa lay on either side. Though a quarter of a mile had separated the men when Weir first observed the other, the distance between had been increased while the engineer was gaining the road, until now the interval was almost twice as much.

Weir guessed the fleeing man's plan. Instead of seeking the railroad for the present, he would disappear in the mountains, where with the assistance of some loyal employee, cow-man or sheep-herder, he would lie hid until the first fury of the hunt had subsided. Possibly his bold brain even conceived the idea of again returning to San Mateo some dark night soon and of further looting the office safe and vault, vigilance being relaxed.

In any case, he would expect to remain secure from pursuit in some mountain fastness until either on horseback or by automobile he could work his way out of the country. With what he had unquestionably carried off he would not be a poor man. In some spot far away he could assume a new name, start in business, and later be joined by his wife and crippled son.

Alas, for those plans, arising like mushrooms on the ruins of his life! Behind him followed the same inexorable antagonist who so swiftly had brought everything crashing about his head. Possibly Sorenson, once out of the town, had failed to look back; possibly looking back he had been unable to distinguish against the blur of houses and trees the horseman galloping in the moonlight along the same road.

But all at once when they were two miles away from San Mateo he discovered Weir, who had been gradually cutting down the space between until now again he was within a quarter of a mile of his quarry. Sorenson had been riding rapidly but not hard; he now beat his horse to a furious gallop—a good pony, too, from its speed, showing that the cattleman as well as Weir had picked his mount with care.

Weir did not urge his horse to a similar pace, only maintaining a fast, steady gallop that kept the other in sight though the space between once more widened. Apparently Sorenson realized the folly of attempting to outrun his pursuer at once, for he soon dropped back into a regular, mile-eating gallop. Gradually in turn Weir crept up to his old position.

To each the only sound was that of drumming hoofbeats. In front rode the fleeing man—dethroned leader, criminal, and murderer. Behind relentlessly came his Nemesis, the son of the man whom he had deceived and damned to mental suffering.

All about them as they flew along was the silent, moonlit, sage-covered mesa. At their right towered the misty, unchanging peaks,

as if watching unmoved this strange race of two human beings. A strange race, in truth—a race where vengeance rode.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE VICTOR.

TEN miles the two men had gone when Sorenson's horse began to fail. The rider's weight was proving too much for the sturdy little animal, and though he strove to maintain his speed the strain told on lungs and legs. Weir had reduced the distance first to three hundred yards, then to two hundred, and at last but a hundred separated him from the man and horse ahead.

The hard chase indeed was beginning to tell on his own mount. Flecks of foam flew from its lips; its neck was wet with sweat; the whistle of its breath was audible to the engineer at every stride. For as both men had realized that now the end could not be far off, they had pushed their horses to faster and faster galloping.

On a sudden Sorenson swung his animal into a dim trail leading from the main road skirting the mountain range to the base of the mountains themselves. The first slopes were but a mile away, covered with a scattering growth of piñon pines. Just in front too, for which the trail seemed pointing, was a dark ravine filled with brush that rose to the denser timber above. This was the fugitive's goal. Once he could fling himself from the saddle and plunge into the undergrowth, he would be safe from his pursuer.

The two ponies struggled on with exhausted leaps. Weir had reduced the interval to seventy-five yards by the time half the distance was covered, and to fifty as they drew near the mouth of the ravine. He measured his gain and the remaining two hundred yards or so with savage eyes, then drew his revolver. He desired to take Sorenson unharmed. But rather than that he should escape he would kill him.

The cattleman's horse stumbled, but a jerk of the reins saved him and kept him moving on. The engineer struck his own pony fiercely on the flank, which produced a tremendous effort in the striving beast that brought it within thirty paces or so of Sorenson. That, however, was the best it could do, labor as it would. Its knees were trembling at every stride, its head swinging heavily.

Sorenson's horse suddenly went to its knees. But the man, leaping clear, took the ground on his feet and instantly set off at a run for the line of brush in the draw some seventy or eighty paces away. A last spurt Weir's pony made, bringing his rider to within thirty yards of the cattleman, who, glancing over his shoulder, halted, swung about, fired a shot, and again started to run.

The pony under Weir came to an abrupt stop, shaking. He was done, whether from exhaustion or the bullet the engineer did not wait to see. Flinging himself out of the saddle he raced after his man, taking the rough trail leading up the slope in swift strides. On foot the cattleman was no match for him. But the latter had the start; he was now almost within reach of the thick screen of bushes; and he bent every energy to make the ambuscade.

Still running, Weir flung up his gun and fired. Close the shot must have gone to Sorenson, so close as to inject into the man's mind recollection of his pursuer's accuracy and a fear of a bullet in his back, for when within twenty feet of the bushes he dropped behind a small boulder, whence he fired twice at Weir, but without reaching his mark.

Neither man, after the furious ride and the concluding run on foot, was fit for sure marksmanship. This Weir realized, so stopped where he was some forty feet off from Sorenson's stone in order to regain his breath and calm his nerves. Of the cattleman he could see nothing; the man crouched low out of sight, perhaps reloading his weapon, perhaps steeling himself for a dash across that small, moonlit space that separated him from safety, or perhaps preparing for a quick upward spring and a fresh volley directed at his foe.

It may be questioned if in his heart Sorenson was not almost disposed to fight the matter out. He was no coward; his original hatred for the engineer had been

swelled by recent events to a diabolical desire to kill; and now even if he, Sorenson, succeeded in slipping away, his whereabouts would be known unless he destroyed the man. Safety demanded that he not only escape but escape without this witness.

Weir had not sought cover. He stood upright, his revolver ready, trusting to have the advantage in his speed when it came to an exchange of shots. Then he began an advance, a slow, noiseless, circling advance that while taking him closer to his enemy brought him round on his flank.

Sorenson's hand and pistol appeared and half his face while three shots rattled from his gun, two at the spot where Weir had been and one at him in his new position, which the hiding man had immediately located. The last shot ticked the engineer's sleeve. In return Weir fired twice, the first bullet striking the rock and ricocheting off with a loud whine, while the second struck the pistol from Sorenson's hand.

Instantly Weir sprang forward.

"Show yourself," he ordered. And the kneeling fugitive, disarmed, gripping his bleeding hand, arose sullenly to his feet.

"You've led me a chase, but I have you at last," the engineer continued. "Now you're going back to San Mateo and jail. Walk toward the horses."

Sorenson cast one bitter glance at the thicket in the ravine; by only the little matter of a few yards he had failed to gain liberty. For Weir his visage when he looked around again was never more hard, hostile, full of undying hatred. Though balked, he was not submissive and was the kind who kept his animosity to the end. Then he started off toward the horses, his own, which had staggered to its feet again, and Weir's, both standing with hanging heads and heaving, quivering sides.

All at once the cattleman halted and faced about.

"Most men have a price, and I suppose you have yours," he said, with forced calmness. "I'm ready to pay it."

"You're going to pay it," was the answer.

"How much will you ask to let me go?"

"If you offered me ten million, which you haven't got, I wouldn't accept it," Weir said, harshly. "There isn't enough money in the world to buy your liberty. You're going back to San Mateo, and from there to the penitentiary or the gallows, one or the other."

"It will be neither," Sorenson stated.

"You're mistaken, but I shall not argue the matter with you. Keep walking toward the horses."

Sorenson's lips became compressed. He glanced down at his bleeding hand, shook the blood from his fingers.

"I stay here," said he.

Weir went a step nearer and thrust his face forward, jaw set, eyes smoldering.

"Go on, I say!" he exclaimed.

But the other did not retreat before him or indeed move at all. A sneer lifted his gray mustache.

"You have a gun; you're a killer; here I am, unarmed and in your power," he said. "You intend to take me in; I propose to stay here. If I go to San Mateo, it will be as a dead man. I'll see whether you have the nerve to shoot me down where I now stand. If you have, go to it. You can then take my body to town, but I'll not have paid the price you name and I'll have the satisfaction of knowing I beat you at the last—in that, at least. Your bragging will be empty. Start your shooting any time you please." The tone spoke complete contempt.

Weir said nothing. The defiance, the supreme audacity of this assertion, coming so unexpectedly, surprised him and left him at a loss. He would not kill an unresisting man, even Sorenson, his worst enemy. Sorenson in his place probably would not have hesitated to do so, for he had no fine scruples in such matters; but for Steele Weir the thing was no more possible than striking a woman or a child.

It was not a question of nerve, as the other had stated. It was a test of brutality and consciencelessness. To shoot a man while escaping is one thing, to kill him while a prisoner, however contemptuous and brazen, was another. But there are means other than bullets for handling obstinate prisoners.

Weir shifted his weapon so as to grasp the barrel and have the butt free.

"I'll leave your execution to the proper officials, if an execution is what you want," he said. "Now will you go?" he demanded, threateningly.

His foe gazed at the clubbed pistol and turned as if to yield. Next instant he whirled, lunging at Weir and flinging his arms about his captor. An exultant exclamation slipped from his lips; his hot breath fell on the engineer's cheek; his eyes glared into those of the man his arms encircled. He had tricked Weir by his pretense of obstinacy, led him to weaken his guard and had him in his grasp to do with him as he liked.

Weir braced himself to resist the effort to force him down. Strong arms the man had, now doubly strengthened by hate and the belief in victory. All the power of Sorenson's great body was exerted to lift him off his feet, crush him in a terrific bear-hug, put him on his back and render him helpless; and Weir, in his turn, was tensing his muscles and arching his frame with every ounce of his lean, ironlike energy.

Thus they swayed and struggled in the moonlight, without witnesses. A sinister, silent fight, marked only by their fierce breathing and fiercer heart-beats. The pistol had dropped from Steele Weir's hand; instead of attempting to break the other's hold he had yielded to it and pushing his own arms forward had clasped his hands behind Sorenson's back in the wrestler's true defense to such an attack.

Once Sorenson almost had him on his knees, but by a quick, powerful upthrust of his legs he regained his upright position. However, it had been a close shave for Weir, for he well knew that his opponent would use any tactics, fair or foul, to kill him if he once lay on his back.

"You hound from hell!" Sorenson snarled. "You crippled my boy, and you shall die for that. You've ruined me in San Mateo, and you shall die for that. You jailed Burkhardt and poisoned Gordon and shot Vorse, and you shall die for that. I'm going to choke the life out of you, and grind your dead head into the dust, and then spit on you. That's how I treat snakes. Say your prayers, if you know any, for you'll never get another chance. Your friends won't recognize your remains when I'm done with you."

Venomous and impassioned, all the hate in the man's heart flowed forth in a fuming stream. For hate and murderous desire was all that was left him in the wreck of his life caused by the engineer. If he could no longer rule this object of humanity he could at least destroy him.

Weir had made no response to the fierce imprecations. He was working his hands upward, straining his arms so as to reach Sorenson's head.

"When the coyotes are gnawing your skull," Sorenson went on, raging, "when the worms are feeding on you—"

The words died in a gurgle of pain. Weir's hands had closed about his temples, a finger sunk in each eye, forcing his head back. Sorenson shook himself frantically to break the torturing hold. His head went further and further back as if it seemed his neck would snap; his mouth opened to gasp: "Oh, God!" and all at once his hug slipped apart.

Instantly Weir tripped him, falling on top. Reaching out like a flash he seized his pistol lying on the ground and brought it down on the head of his enemy, who, momentarily blinded and suffering, could not resist.

Sorenson went limp. From the savage beast of a minute before he had been changed to a huge, motionless, sprawling figure, with face upturned to the moon.

And on that face the victor of the life and death struggle could still behold, through the contorted lines stamped by pain, the man's brutal passion and fixed malevolence.

Weir arose.

"You felt the hound of hell's teeth," he muttered.

With thongs from one of the saddles he bound Sorenson's hands, pulling the knots tight and hard. The prostrate man moaned, opened his eyes. Weir jerked him, dazed and staggering, to his feet.

"Up into the saddle with you if you don't want another rap on the head," Steele ordered, bruskly. "And go straight this time. From now on I'll take you at your

word and put a hole through your black heart if you try any more tricks."

When his prisoner was mounted, he fastened his ankles together by another thong under the belly of the pony. Weir was taking no chances. Up into his own saddle then he swung himself.

No exultant curses now came from his captive's lips.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FINAL CHALLENGE.

THE hour was drawing near midnight when Weir and his prisoner entered the town. Most of the women and children of the crowd of Mexicans had gone to their homes, but men yet remained before the court-house and in the street, discussing and arguing the exciting events that had occurred that night.

In some mysterious manner knowledge that Burkhardt and not Weir was the prisoner in the jail, with news of Senator Gordon's suicide and Vorse's death, had spread from mouth to mouth. Amazement and incredulity had been followed by an aroused feeling of anger, for to the Mexicans it appeared that the crushing blow dealt the leaders of the town was the arbitrary act of the man they believed a lawless gunman. Were not Weir's foremen and engineers guarding the jail? Men who were strangers, not even citizens of the county?

But though an undercurrent of feeling ran among the talking groups, gradually increasing as the time passed, yet was there no active desire on the part of all or anything like concerted movement to drive away the seeming invaders of the law.

For any such attempt a strong leader was necessary. There was none: Madden frowned upon them, saying only as he moved about that he was executing the law; Sorenson, the dominating figure of the town, and Burkhardt, Vorse, and Gordon's friend, were strangely absent.

The determined guard about the jail was in itself a deterrent to mob action. Meyers had brought twenty or more men from camp, armed and alert, who with those already about the building constituted a force to make any crowd of Mexicans, however angry, think twice before seeking to rescue prisoners.

But the wish and the spirit were not lacking. Employees of the plotters, men who had received favors from Sorenson or Vorse or Burkhardt, Mexicans of a naturally vicious and unruly temper, were all for rushing the jail. The great number of the people, however, peaceful and indolent, preferred to content themselves with the satisfying of their curiosity by talk instead of seeking a taste of blood.

And so, as a result of this divided opinion, the hostility for Weir had not expressed itself in an effort to assail the keepers of the jail.

When he was discovered to have returned to town, this feeling assumed a menacing form. He approached the court-house by the side street, Sorenson riding at his side, for it was his plan to lodge his prisoner in the jail with as much secrecy as possible. Nevertheless in this he was disappointed; men saw him arrive, assist his prisoner to alight, and climb the board fence about the yard; and drawn by the expectation of new events, the nearer groups hastened toward him.

Weir impelled his man toward the jail.

"Stand back," he commanded the Mexicans.

The latter at first stared in astonishment at beholding the pair, one of whom was San Mateo's foremost citizen, now sullenly advancing with wrists bound. Exclamation burst from their lips.

A flash of hope filled Sorenson.

"To my rescue, friends!" he cried, beginning to struggle.

Weir jerked him ahead fiercely and cast fiercer looks at the Mexicans.

"This man is under arrest. And remember—I can still shoot straight," he warned.

Toward him came Madden running, who, in Weir's disappearance earlier in the night, had guessed a pursuit of the cattleman, and had therefore returned to the jail. He placed himself at Sorenson's right.

"Whoever tries to take Sorenson from the hands of the law does so at his own peril!" he exclaimed.

A few mocking shouts resulted. These were gradually increased until the Mexicans, now being joined by scores of others from the street, became a howling, cursing, hysterical mob, crying Sorenson's and Burkhardt's innocence, calling down imprecations on the heads of the sheriff and the engineer, stirred by certain lawless spirits to wilder and wilder passion.

Weir and Madden had not been standing still. The crowd was not yet numerous enough at first or bold enough to attack. Moreover the two men held their pistols well in view. Forcing Sorenson ahead, driving apart those who blocked their way, they pushed across the yard, until a few paces from the jail.

One Mexican, a ranch-hand from one of Vorse's ranches, wearing a great, high-peaked felt hat and chaps, insolently thrust himself before the trio, spitting at Weir's face and in Spanish begging companions to help him release Sorenson. His right hand was resting on his holster as if but awaiting an excuse to use his gun.

"Get to one side," was Weir's harsh order.

The man's answer was a string of foul curses. Like a panther the engineer leaped forward with raised hand and struck the fellow on the side of his head with revolver barrel, dropping him where he stood.

As the crowd remained suddenly mute, unmoving, their howls quenched at this swift reprisal, Weir spoke to Madden:

"Quick! To the door!"

Each with an arm in Sorenson's, they made a run for the jail, passed through the line of armed guards, and for the moment were safe. The sheriff lost no time in dragging the prisoner inside and when presently he stepped forth again, locking the door after him, he showed a relieved face.

"I put irons on him, hands and feet," he informed Weir. "He's out of the way, at any rate if we're in for a row."

That was exactly what appeared in prospect. Only the rifles in the grip of the two dozen men about the jail kept the now thoroughly aroused mob from rushing forward. From yelling it had changed to low, fierce murmurs that bespoke a more desperate mood.

"We ought to move the men somewhere else," Steele Weir stated. "Pretty soon they'll go for arms and then we'll have real trouble."

"I arranged while you were gone to transfer them to the county seat in the next county," Madden said. "Telephoned the sheriff; he's expecting them. To-morrow we can take them to Santa Fé, out of this part of the country, till time for their trial. I placed the automobile your man brought Burkhardt in from the dam and another machine back in the alley; they are there now in the shadow."

"Good. The quicker you take them, the better. They ought to be gagged when brought out. Get them here to the door; the men who are to drive should have the cars ready, engines going—"

"That's fixed. Your superintendent will drive one car and one of the engineers the other; they can slip back there at once. Six more of the guards are to go with us."

"All right. You know who they are. Station them here at the door to rush the prisoners back the instant you're ready. Have them go round to the rear on the dark side of the jail; they should get a good start before they're discovered."

Madden called from the line Atkinson and the men whom he had chosen to accompany him on the night ride. A brief parley followed. Then he and two of the engineers went inside the jail, while the superintendent and one young fellow stole away in the shadows toward the spot where stood the cars.

Meanwhile the throng had grown until it filled all the space about the rear of the court-house and formed a mass of human bodies on which the checkered moonlight played reaching to within half a dozen paces of the jail. A shot rang out and a bullet struck the jail. It was like a match lighted near powder that if allowed to burn would set off an explosion. One shot would lead to others from reckless spirits, to a volley, and in the end to an onslaught.

Perhaps that was the reasoning and the purpose of the man who had fired. In any case, it must not be repeated.

Weir strode forward toward the crowd.

"If that man, or any of you, want to

shoot this out with me, let him show himself," he said, threateningly, swinging the muzzle of his weapon along the line of faces.

A quick retreat on the part of those nearest marked the respect with which it was considered. Frantically they strove to push further back into the mob, clawing and elbowing.

"If you try any more shots," he continued, speaking in Spanish as before, "those rifles will open fire." He paused to allow this information to have full effect. "Finally, if you attempt wrecking this jail, the three hundred workmen from the dam will march down to San Mateo and teach you proper observance of the law. If you're really looking for trouble, those three hundred men will give this town sufficient trouble that will be remembered for twenty years."

Standing there in the moonlight between the two parties, the thin line of sentinels about the jail and the dense mob in front, Steele Weir's action seemed the height of rashness. A rush of the Mexicans and he would be overwhelmed, a cowardly shot from somewhere in the rear and he might be killed. It was like inviting disaster.

If, however, he recognized his danger, he gave no sign of it. By the power of his gun and his sheer boldness he faced them, calm, fearless, masterful. The unexpected advance of him had surprised the Mexicans, left them confused and uncertain. Wild and sinister tales concerning his prowess magnified him in their eyes notwithstanding their animosity. Now they seemed to feel his iron will beating against their faces.

During the pause that ensued Weir heard the jail door open. Madden was preparing to take his prisoners out.

"I'm not seeking trouble, but I'm not avoiding it," the engineer proceeded, for this was the critical minute, and he sought to have all eyes focused upon him instead of upon the activity at his back. "The sheriff represents the law here in San Mateo, and I give you plain warning that every man who attempts violence to-night will be called upon to pay the account. By to-morrow the governor may have soldiers stationed in your houses and in your streets, for the prisoners are now the exclusive prisoners of the State, arrested for stealing cattle—"

That was a happy inspiration. Had Weir stated the whole category of Sorenson's and Burkhardt's crimes, including murder and dynamiting, he would not have struck so shrewdly as in naming the sin of cattle-stealing. For this was a cattle country, and even the most ignorant Mexican could grasp the significance of this charge.

A visible stir answered the statement.

"For stealing cattle from other men"—he did not trouble to mention the fact the crime had occurred thirty years previous—"and for that, and other things, Sheriff Madden has arrested them. Because they are rich, their guilt is all the worse. Perhaps they have taken cattle belonging to you—who knows? That may come out in their trial; if they have taken them, you shall have them back."

From the rear of the grounds came the low sound of automobile engines being started. Weir dared not look about to learn if Madden and his party were safely on their way thither. As for the Mexicans, the speaker's words had created a sensation.

For men there were there who owned small herds now feeding on the range, and from anger their minds yielded to sudden anxiety; each saw himself a possible sufferer from cattle depredations; and in the minds of these, at least, thought of loss supplanted thought of Sorenson and Burkhardt.

"I helped Sheriff Madden arrest these men because they stole cattle, possibly some of your steers among them. Is that why you would like to lynch me, as I've heard you wanted to do?" he demanded, savagely. "Because I save your animals? Or is it because I shot that renegade Mexican whom Ed Sorenson hired to try and kill me?

"Ed Sorenson, yes. Sheriff Madden has the knowledge of it. Not only would Sorenson, the father, like to see me die because I know about his cattle-stealing, but Ed Sorenson, the son, hired that strange Mexican to shoot me from the dark because I stopped him from trying to steal a girl. Has

Ed Sorenson left your daughters alone? I would save your daughters from his evil hands, as I would your cattle from his father's."

A man all at once pushed forth from the crowd, wrathfully elbowing his way among neighbors. He was Naharo, the Mexican who had chatted once with Martinez in the latter's office.

"It is true," he shouted, facing his countrymen. "I, Naharo, vow it the truth. For I saw this engineer take a young girl away from Ed Sorenson in the restaurant at Bowenville that the scoundrel intended to seduce. It is so, the truth; the engineer saved her. And are there not men among you"—his voice gained a savage, rasping note—"whose girls have been betrayed by Sorenson's son?"

"Where is he—where is he now?" some one shouted, angrily. It might have been a father who stood in Naharo's case.

"He lies crippled," Weir stated. "Last night he tried to steal yet another girl from San Mateo, and fleeing when overtaken was pitched from his car and crushed against a rock. He will steal no more daughters of San Mateo."

Sensation on sensation. The crowd fairly hummed with new excitement resulting from these disclosures. Ed Sorenson's ways were known to most, and the revelations seemed true to his character; and from believing the statements of the son to accepting those concerning the father was but a step. Cattle—girls! It began to look as if this engineer, Weir, was in the right.

With half of his attention Weir was harkening for the sound of starting automobiles. He had heard the scuffle of feet when the party slipped away from the jail door into the shadows. He had almost measured their passage to the alley. Ah, and now! There was a quick grind of gears, the pop of exhausts, then a dying of the sounds as the cars made their way out of the grounds.

"You wished to kill me when you came here, but I had not then and have not now any intention of dying," he stated. "For I have work to do—and work for you if you want it. Instead of stealing your cattle and daughters as the Sorensons did, I'll give you jobs. We are about to begin digging canals and ditches on the mesa; I want men and teams—you and yours, at good pay for a good day's work. Our quarrel of the past need not be remembered. I have never been your enemy, only the enemy of the four men who deceived and oppressed you. And now they are gone, two dead, and two off to be tried for their crimes."

Weir stood for a moment silent, while they as silently stared at him.

"Ha, bueno, we shall work!" Naharo exclaimed.

"We shall work and build your ditches, *señor*," cried a score of voices.

Then the cry swelled to a noisy chorus. The crowd began to stir and disintegrate and break into groups, gesticulating, talking, discussing all the astonishing items of news given by the engineer, from the particulars of the Sorensons' depravity to announcement of renewed hire.

"*Señor*, we hold you in greatest respect," said a man to Weir, smiling in friendly fashion.

"And also your pistol," said a companion, laughing.

"No one will need to wear pistols here in San Mateo from now on," was his answer. And he politely bade them good night.

His belief was sincere. San Mateo had gained an end of violence, and henceforth his weapon would gather dust. He had triumphed. Not only had he subdued his enemies, but he had won the good will of the people.

One thing more alone remained to be won to bring him utter happiness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNDER THE MOON.

LIGHTS still were burning in headquarters when Steele Weir slowly drove his runabout up the hillside slope to the dam camp. The men who had acted as guards about the jail, except those who went with Madden, were somewhere on the road behind him, returning home in the wagons.

A reaction of mind and body had set in for Weir; after the previous night's loss of sleep and prolonged exertions, after the swift succession of dramatic events, after the tremendous call that had been made upon his brain power, nervous force and will, he experienced a strange unrest of spirit. His triumph seemed yet incomplete, somehow unsatisfying.

It was as he approached the camp that he saw a slender, girlish figure sitting on a rock in the moonlight. He swung his car off the road beside the spot where Janet Hosmer sat.

"What, you are still awake?" he asked, with a smile.

"Could I sleep while not knowing what was happening or what danger you might be in?" she returned. "Mr. Pollock said we must not think of returning home until quiet was restored in San Mateo. One of the engineer's houses was given to us by Mr. Meyers before he left, where Mary and I could sleep. But I could not close my eyes. So much had happened, so much was yet going on! So I came out here to be alone and to think and watch."

"And your father?"

"He's attending the wounded Mexicans in the store."

Steele alighted, and tossing his hat upon the car seat gazed out over the mesa, misty in the moonlight.

"There will be no more trouble," said he. "Sorenson and Burkhardt are Madden's prisoners, and on their way to a place of safe-keeping in another county. Vorse is dead. The people in town have a fairly good understanding of matters now, I think."

"How in the world did such a change of opinion occur?" Janet exclaimed.

"I had a little talk with the crowd and made explanations. The feeling for me was almost friendly when I took my departure; what enmity remains will soon die out, I'm sure."

Though unaware from Steele Weir's laconic statement of what had actually occurred, the girl divined that his words concealed vastly more than their surface purport. With the general hostility against the engineer that had existed, for him to swing the community to his side meant a dramatic moment and a remarkable moral conquest.

"Your friends have always known you would win," she said, smiling up at him.

He seated himself on the rock beside her.

"It is but a short time ago, Janet, that I had no friends, or so few they could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Business acquaintances, yes. Professional companions, yes. Men who perhaps respected my ability as an engineer, yes. But real friends, scarcely a one. And now I think I have gained some, which is the greatest satisfaction I have from everything that has happened here. After years the pendulum has swung to my side. Do you know the hour my luck changed?"

Janet shook her head wonderingly.

"No, I can't even guess," said she.

"Well, it was that afternoon, and that moment, I found you sitting in your stalled car in the creek down there. That was the beginning. From that time things began to run in my favor, and they haven't ceased to do so for a moment since, I now see, looking back over events. You brought good luck to me that day in your car."

"What an extraordinary idea! Then at bottom you're superstitious," Janet replied. "I shall have to give you a new name; I must no longer call you Cold Steel."

"I really never liked that name," Weir said quickly. "Perhaps I was cold steel once, but I have changed, along with everything else. And you're responsible for that, too."

Janet leaned forward and looked into his eyes.

"You were never truly hard to any one except to those who deserved it," she said. "I know! You would never have been so quick to help Mary Johnson, or me, or others who needed help, if your heart was not always generous and sympathetic. Only against evil were you as steel and in moments requiring supreme courage and sacrifice. And that's how you gained the name before you ever set your foot on this territory."

"Anyway, I've changed," said he. "I'm out from under the shadow which I felt al-

ways hung above me. As I say, you brought me good luck that day—and I see clearly that I shall continue to be superstitious."

"Why, all occasion for that is past now."

"No," said Steele Weir. "No, less than ever. For I'm certain you hold my good fortune in your hand yet and will continue to hold it. And that means—"

He paused, regarding her so intently that the blood beat up into her face. There was no mistaking that look and it thrilled her to her soul.

"Yes?" she managed to say.

"It means my happiness, now and for all time to come," he went on. "See, I shall have accomplished what I set out to do and what in justice had to be done, bringing these men to punishment—to punishment in one form or another. I shall have given my employer, the company, service worthy of the hire. I shall have rid you and San Mateo of an unscrupulous parasite in the person of Ed Sorenson, though my persecution of him now shall stop and I shall leave him enough out of the property recovered from his father to live somewhere with his mother in comparative comfort."

"Mr. Pollock states I shall have no trouble in getting legal title and possession of most of the wealth of these four men—I and any relatives of the dead Jim Dent who can be found. For thirty years' accumulated charges will swallow up all the men's properties. That, however, is only a material victory. I shall have relieved Johnson of fear of financial constraint; and saved his daughter from a serious mistake. I shall have started Martinez on the road to success—and I should not be surprised if he prospered, became the leading attorney in this country, is elected judge, and so on.

"In a way, too, I shall have helped to remove the oppressive weight of these men, Sorenson, Burkhardt, Gordon and Vorse, with their sinister influence, from this community and region. They have always held the natives in more or less open subjection, financial, political, and moral.

"There should be a freer air in San Mateo henceforth. The people will have a chance to grow. They no longer will feel the threat of brutal masters always over them; and with the completion of the irrigation project and the infusion of new settlers they will become better citizens and better men.

"I see all this," he concluded. "It pleases me; it gives me cause for satisfaction. But it doesn't give me the happiness I want, or the love. That is alone in your hands to bestow."

Janet felt herself trembling; she could not speak.

"I think I felt the stirring of love from the moment I saw you there at the ford," he exclaimed. "Last night when I knew that wretch had carried you off to the mountains, I could have torn him limb from limb. That was my love speaking, Janet. If I should have to go through life without you—oh, the thought is too bitter to dwell on! I should not think it worth living, but I have imagined that you might feel for me a little—"

Janet swiftly clasped his hand with her own.

"I love you," she cried softly. "I was sitting here when you came because I loved you. If I am necessary to your happiness, you also are necessary to mine. I honor you for what you have done and love you for what you are, a strong, true heart."

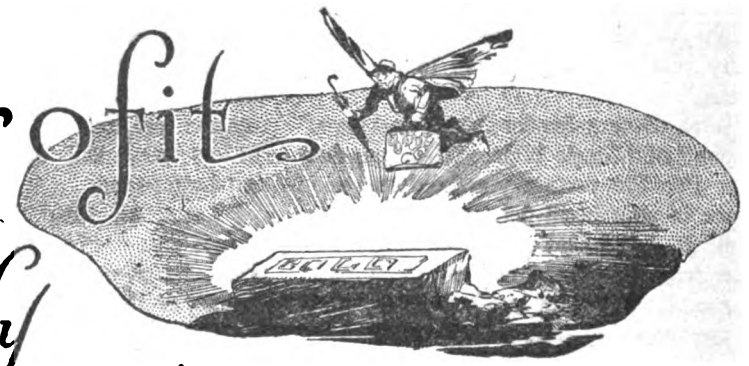
"Ah, Janet, you give me the greatest joy in the world," he whispered. "Love—that is more than all."

His arms drew her shrinking form to his breast. Her lips went timidly to his in the consecration of that love. Their hearts beat together as one in the exalted rapture of that celestial passion.

Over the silent peaceful mountains the moon spread its effulgent light. Over the mesa that was no more to know the fierce sound of strife. Over the town, at last free of its avaricious masters, of the savage spirit of an outlaw time. Over the Burntwood River flowing in a shimmering band to the horizon. Over the camp where centered so many men's plans and labors. And over the lovers, chief of all, that light fell as in a silvery halo.

(The End.)

Profit



by H. A. Lamb

I.

"WE'VE landed him!"

Albert Cawston, senior member and mainstay of the firm of Cawston & Heim, leaned back in his revolving chair, thumbs under a plaid vest, and smiled serenely. At his exclamation the bulky figure of Malcolm Heim thrust through the partition door which divided the sanctum of the senior member from the main office —so-called.

"Landed who, Al?" he wanted to know. Heim's rotund form was elaborately draped in the best creation of a Broadway tailor, from soft, green hat to brown spats. His mild blue eyes and clean-shaven cheeks bore out the stamp of prosperity reflected in his garments. Which was Heim's intention.

"The guy from Flint, Michigan." Cawston waved a typewritten letter in a lean hand. His close-set eyes focused on his partner exultantly. "He's coming to New York—to see us. I thought that third letter would get action from him."

Cawston spoke rapidly, clipping off his words with the precision of those whose minds work swiftly. That was his business —to think quickly, for the agility of the senior partner's brain enabled the firm of Cawston & Heim to keep one jump ahead of the law courts. And incidentally brought prosperity to the two.

"How much has he?" inquired Heim, whose wits—also sharpened by adversity—ran along more matter-of-fact lines.

"Enough. Martin Wilbur"—Cawston glanced at another letter on his desk—"owns a small manufacturing plant in Flint. Has several years' profits salted away. Proud of it. And it must be a fair wad, because he manufactures copper fixtures. Wants to invest it all in something safe and profitable."

"Sure he's a real come-along guy—not a wise one?" Heim asked indifferently. He trusted Cawston's judgment implicitly.

"Yep." A rare smile twitched at the senior partner's thin mouth. "Can't you see him, Mac? One of the prominent citizens of Flint—owns and operates a Henry Ford, f. o. b. Detroit; passes the plate in the church on Main Street; don't know beans about stocks and bonds; but he's interested in our offer of a safe and conservative investment that gives him a hundred per cent a year profit."

"I get you," grinned Heim. "And you ain't never seen him! Well, chief, what's the works?"

Cawston selected and lit a cigar without offering one to Heim. He cast a precautionary glance at the top of the private partition. In the office, however, was no visitor, only Miss Farley, the stenographer; Riggs, the clerk-of-all-work, and Blum, the lad of postage stamps and filing cabinets. These persons constituted the accessory members of the firm. Cawston and Heim were the firm.

"Well," he ruminated, for business was slack, and Martin Wilbur was an attractive prospect, "he gets in to New York t'morrow morning. Comes down here—see? When he shoves his face in the door, the people out there are all busy."

"Old stuff!" grunted Heim. "Anything new?"

"I'm telling you!" snapped Cawston, chewing at his cigar. "You pay attention. Where'd you be, if it wasn't for me—huh? The officers of the Department of Justice ain't as blind as you think they are, Mac. Well, Wilbur is shown in here. I'm busy as hell—see? Phone working overtime; Miss Farley will see to that. All right. Wilbur's impressed. Begins to see my time's valuable. Asks about the Silver Phœnix mine we're selling stock for. Well, I ain't so keen to sell it to him."

"Oh, no," muttered Heim, with what he considered wit.

"You weary me," said Cawston fretfully. "I'm director of this little money-maker in one reel."

He glanced again at Wilbur's letter, with the abstracted stare of a master worker planning a *chef-d'œuvre*.

"Here's how she goes, Mac. I tip Wilbur off that the Phœnix stock has gone up five points while he was hitting the ties getting here. All right. He's anxious about it now. More movie stuff—cut-in of me refusing a wealthy investor a five-hundred-share block over the wire, Miss Farley being the investor."

"Don't I figure in this, Al?"

"Then you enter. You're my broker—see? By the way, cut out that knowin' air. You're a busy man. You've just bought a four-hundred-share block in the stock market, and you give me the certificate. I tell Wilbur I ought to let my wealthy client have the stock; it's going up all the time. But as a favor I let him take it at eleven and a half. That's forty-six hundred and twenty dollars."

"But I thought Wilbur had five thousand to salt away?"

Cawston laughed shortly.

"You're right, Mac. But wrong on human nature. Wilbur 'll figure he's saving three hundred and eighty. That 'll go big with him."

"I got to hand it to you, Al!" Heim yawned and glanced at his watch. "After the show is over, I suppose I take Wilbur out, tuck a high-class feed into him, and see him back to his hotel."

"Yep. Steer him away from this part of the city. He might have a friend somewhere who'd tip him off that he'd been stung. Hold on, though." Cawston smiled thoughtfully. "Show him a stock-exchange ticker in the restaurant you go to. Let's see. Penn Steel is selling around twelve. The abbreviation for it on the ticker is Pen—that would pass for Phœnix."

"And he'd see two hundred dollars' profit in the stock in a half-hour. Fine work, chief."

"I guess that's all," meditated Cawston. "I'll look after the selling end. Hang around Durlan's Café after nine o'clock—Miss Farley'll give you a buzz when it's time to butt in."

"O. K." nodded Heim. "I'll get the certificate from Riggs as I go out. Say, Al, what d'ye guess these suckers do with the certificates after they find out they've been given the work. Frame 'em?"

"I'd say," responded Cawston, "that they burn 'em. Not one in a hundred raises a howl when he's been milked. Why? It's human nature. Especially a man from a small town—and ginks are thick in New York, too—he hates to let the neighbors know he's been speculating and lost his money."

"Well, handle Wilbur right, Al. I can use my two-fifths of that five thousand bucks. Can you slip me a century to-day, Al? I want to date up Miss Farley. She's a queen where the lilies grow."

Heim took the bills Cawston handed him, after noting the transaction in a memorandum. He strolled out to the office, where Riggs was drawing a tentative schedule of bets on the morrow's races in the cash ledger, and the stenographer was using a well-worn chamois cloth on her immaculate nails.

He stepped inside the railing and leaned over Miss Farley's desk. The girl raised cool, brown eyes in questioning appraisal. She was a grand looker, Heim thought, with her shining, chestnut hair and clear skin. She wore a modish dark skirt with a simple white waist, copied from one she had seen in the window of a Fifth Avenue modiste's.

"You're through for the day, ain't you, Miss Farley?" Heim wondered why he still

felt a trifle ill at ease in the presence of the stately brunette. "You ain't got nothin' on for to-night, have you? Well, suppose we hitch up for dinner at a swell place and the best show in town."

Geraldine Farley regarded the chamois cloth pensively. She liked shows. And her salary rarely permitted more than movies. But she did not like Mr. Heim, and her opinion once formed, was positive.

"I guess not, Mr. Heim," she said coolly. "I got a date with a fellow that's taking me to—to see 'When Roses Are Dead.'"

"Call him up and tell him it's off, then, Miss Farley," he persisted.

Riggs glanced up curiously from his ledger, and Blum forsook the sporting page, for the more interested spectacle of the junior partner "buzzing" the stenographer. Heim was a trifle flushed. He was accustomed to having his own way, especially when he was in funds.

The cool, brown eyes flickered a bit regretfully. It had been long since she had been a guest of Broadway for an evening. Not that she did not relish entertainment. But friends of the kind she sought were few.

"I guess I'd better not, Mr. Heim," she said quietly. "He'd be mad."

The junior partner scowled, fingering the money in his pocket.

"Oh, all right," he said, "all right." And slammed out of the door.

After an interval Miss Farley went to the coat-room and donned a smart fur coat and military hat, modeled after a French design. She sighed momentarily. The atmosphere of the office of Cawston & Heim was not inspiring. And—she had no engagement for that evening.

II.

CAWSTON'S telephone jingled, and he picked up the receiver.

"Mr. Martin Wilbur to see you, sir," Miss Farley's cool voice came to him.

"Bring him in in a minute—three minutes." Cawston reflected that it would be well to let the man from Flint wait, but not too long. "And Miss Farley—keep calling me every now and then. Don't forget the rich-investor stuff when I push the buzzer. When I give you two buzzes, call Heim quick—see? Keep Blum busy and camouflage some dictation yourself. Get it? All right."

He leaned back, stroking his chin gently. A glance around the sanctum satisfied him. An orderly pile of correspondence on the desk; a filing cabinet labeled "orders"; an enlarged photograph of the Phœnix mine on the wall; a pin-pricked map of the State of Texas. Everything was as it should be.

Outside, Riggs would be scribbling busily in the ledger. And Blum would be running in and out with stamps. The scene setting should satisfy Mr. Martin Wilbur.

Came a tap on the door and Blum ushered in the visitor. Cawston frowned momentarily. Miss Farley should have attended to that. It was not for nothing he had picked a pretty stenographer.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilbur." He glanced up from a letter. "Have a seat."

That instantaneous glance revealed his visitor to the promoter. Wilbur was a powerful, plainly dressed man, in the early thirties, with a heavy lined face. A trifle embarrassed and excited by his surroundings. He carried an umbrella, and his number eleven shoes were cased in rubbers.

"Good morning, sir," Wilbur's deep voice responded. "I reckon I'm intruding."

"Not at all, sir, not at all," smiled Cawston reassuringly. "It's true we're rather busy now. But we always make time for a customer. Excuse me—just a minute." The telephone had buzzed. It was only Miss Farley. Cawston hung up after a few brief phrases calculated to impress his visitor and swung around to face Wilbur, offering him cigars. The manufacturer accepted one.

"Let's see, Mr. Wilbur, you're interested in our Phœnix mine. We'll be glad to do all we can for you. Since we last wrote to you, the stock has gone up two points. I've asked my broker to try to get a block of it for you, but he says it's in heavy demand; he'll do the best he can."

Wilbur's wide-set eyes registered regret.

"Say, now, that's too bad," he rumbled. "I figured on getting it at the price you said. You think you can still get it, don't you?"

Cawston stroked his chin thoughtfully. Yes, Wilbur was nearly landed. Still, the man was not altogether a fool; would require careful handling. The promoter's brain worked swiftly.

"I want you to understand this, Mr. Wilbur. Our firm has none of the stock. It has all been sold. I don't want you to class us with the get-rich-quick gang that sells a lot of worthless paper just off the printing press. In the Phœnix mine we have a *bona fide* investment, and we have to buy the stock in the market when we want to get it for a customer. And it's going up all the time."

He pressed the silent buzzer under the surface of the desk with his knee—once.

In response Miss Farley, from the soundproof telephone-booth in the outer office, called him. There ensued an interesting conversation, of which Wilbur heard Cawston's end, and was convinced that a certain wealthy customer wanted Phœnix stock badly, and that Cawston had none to give him.

"Phœnix is up another quarter point, Mr. Wilbur," exclaimed the senior partner. "You see, people are getting wise to what a good thing it is, and we can't pick up enough of it to satisfy 'em. Those that have it aren't selling. I don't need to tell a business man like you what this heavy demand means — when nobody's selling. Phœnix will be at twelve before the market closes."

Wilbur nodded, and Cawston pressed the soundless buzzer twice. Then he showed Wilbur specifications and reports. They were artfully drawn up. Wilbur seemed convinced that the Phœnix was a money-maker. He himself knew copper. He saw the enlarged photograph and was impressed.

"Don't you reckon you can get some of the stock for me—before it goes up?" he asked anxiously.

He needed no diagram to see that if Cawston & Heim had to go into the open market to buy his stock, he would get it at a fair price, and that price rising all the time. If there was such a demand for it it would not be hard to sell the stock—at a good price—if he wanted to. He had come armed against the wiles of the city sharper.

The five-thousand-dollar check in his wallet represented hard-earned profits of several years. He could not afford to lose it. But Cawston had convinced him of the merits of Phœnix stock. Still, Wilbur had planned a further test.

"Just as a matter of form, Mr. Cawston," he said hesitatingly—the other appeared so busy—"suppose you take me around to your bank and have them vouch for you. It don't matter much"—he coughed, embarrassed—"but that's the way we do at home."

Cawston stared for half a second; then smiled readily. The firm of Cawston and Reim had no banker—since the money they took in went into their own pockets.

Heim entered in haste and spoke excitedly.

"We're in luck, Cawston," he cried, waving a green certificate of stock. "I had the hell of a time getting this! Got orders to buy Phœnix from a dozen others. I got this for you, hot off the bat, at—at—"

"Eleven and a half, I hope," cut in Cawston swiftly.

"Sure," beamed Heim. "You said it. Eleven and a half. It's gone up a—"

"Quarter point in the last ten minutes."

"Sure, that's right. Say, you're lucky. Going to give the stock to Mr.—"

"Hennessy," Cawston named the mythical wealthy buyer of Phœnix. "Well, I don't know. I may save it for Mr. Wilbur here. Mr. Wilbur, meet Mr. Heim."

The two shook hands, Heim effusively.

"As a favor, Mr. Wilbur," continued Cawston severely, "we'll let you have this block of Phœnix at eleven and a half; that's forty-six hundred and twenty dollars. A bargain. We'll waive the commission."

Wilbur nodded excitedly. Things moved swiftly in the big city, but he had his wits about him. There was his wife to think of, he said.

"And now about calling at the bank," he began.

"Mr. Wilbur wants to have us vouched for, Mac," cut in Cawston, looking at his "broker" steadily. "At the — the American Trust Company." He named a famous institution, situated near by. "Will you call up Mr. Johnson and ask him to

meet us, for a moment. We'll go right over now."

Heim stared, then grinned. Johnson he knew to be a fellow crook who had often been of service to them.

"Sure," he muttered. "I get you."

He accompanied Cawston out to the coat-room where the latter spoke a few swift, well-chosen words. Miss Farley they sent into the private office to see that Wilbur did not become curious about the papers scattered over the desk in their absence.

The stenographer entered the sanctum with a petulant toss of her dark head. She disliked being ordered about by the two partners. She disliked the partners. Wherefore, she flushed, making a pretty picture for the eyes of Mr. Wilbur.

The gentleman from Flint stared. As the girl bent over the desk with a soft, agile movement, Wilbur clutched his umbrella and whistled to himself.

Cawston had instructed Miss Farley to remain where she was until he returned. She stood by the desk irresolutely, and she glanced at Wilbur. Their eyes met.

Wilbur had a handsome and honest face. It was not strange that the girl's glance lingered for just a second. She had seen many victims of Cawston; but she felt suddenly sorry for Wilbur. On his wife's account, she told herself.

Cawston returned. When the men left the office Miss Farley looked after them meditatively. When the outer door snapped shut, she drew a quick breath. Her eyes sparkled as she skipped out of the office to her desk.

"She's a grand looker," said Blum to Riggs.

III.

At two o'clock that afternoon Miss Farley slipped from her small chair into the sanctum of Cawston. The flush that had been in her cheeks that morning still remained, and her fine eyes were alight.

Cawston, who had his feet on his desk, and his cigar aglow, paid no heed to these feminine storm signals. He considered the girl merely an ornament of the outer office, useful at times because quick-witted. He rather regretted, if he thought of her at all, that she must hear so much of what went on in the sanctum, over the partition.

"Is Mr. Wilbur coming in this afternoon, Mr. Cawston?" she asked politely.

"Rather!" grunted the sharper. "Oh, yes; I'd say he was coming in, with nearly five thousand in cash. Pretty soon, too."

"Then Mr. Heim is with him?" the girl wanted to know.

"No. Heim's through for to-day. Wilbur's coming straight here from the bank where he's cashed his check. We like cash here, Miss Farley. Heim took him to lunch and steered him this way. Nothing more for you to do, I guess."

He wondered momentarily why the girl asked her question. Miss Farley's next query explained the matter.

"Then can I go out for an hour, Mr. Cawston? I got a friend I'd like to meet."

"Sure, sure, Miss Farley."

He smiled amiably, thinking of the forty-six hundred in cash Wilbur was bringing. A good haul. The sucker-list of Cawston & Heim showed no better haul. A few more of that sort and it would be time to close the office and flit—somewhere else. Names were plentiful—and Miss Farley, Riggs, and Blum could get other jobs. This, however, did not concern him much.

The girl donned hat and coat and made her way out of the office. In the lobby of the office building, on the street floor, she hesitated. There were two entrances, and the man she wanted to meet might come by either. She took up a position by the wall facing the elevators. In this way she would be sure to see him.

Moments passed, while the girl chewed coolly at her gum. Men entered and left. She scanned them all with an alert eye.

Then she ran forward and caught a powerful individual by the arm.

"Oh, Mr. Wilbur," she cried, "I got a message for you."

The manufacturer from Flint swung around, recognition flashing into his glance. He took off his hat politely.

"I'm Miss Farley," hurried on the girl, "from Cawston & Heim. You remember me, don't you? I got something to tell you."

She hesitated, looking around. They

were in a crowd. Men jostled Wilbur, who stood in front of an elevator.

"Let's go out in the street, Mr. Wilbur," smiled Miss Farley, who had rid herself of the chewing gum by some sleight-of-hand. "We can talk better."

Wilbur buttoned together his overcoat with a heavy hand.

"I—I'd better go on up, Miss Farley," he rumbled anxiously.

The girl's smile grew colder.

"Oh, I know you got a load of coin, Wilbur," she said sharply. "I ain't going to lighten it any. Say, just get wise to this earfull: Hang on to those iron boys. Don't trade 'em for Phœnix stock. It's a fake. Get that? Keep the dough and let Cawston keep his stock. Beat it! This ain't the game you're able to swing. Back to Flint for yours!"

Wilbur fingered the umbrella and stared.

"I don't understand, Miss Farley. If the Phœnix stock wasn't good, I wouldn't buy it, would I? It 'll pay me a hundred per cent a year."

"Not it. Cawston's planning to close the coop. The whole thing's a frame-up. You're being played for a sucker!"

"Really, Miss Farley! I know what I'm buying. Why, Cawston had to buy it for me on the stock exchange. I saw it quoted on the—the ticker-tape."

His mild, gray eyes were troubled. The girl sighed impatiently.

"I didn't know they made 'em this way any more," she observed plaintively. "Say, what's your first name?"

"Martin."

"Well, Martin, your middle name in Gink. That stock came outer Cawston's desk-drawer. He has a pile of it a foot high. That broker feller's Heim—Cawston's partner. The quot you lamped on the ticker is Pen Steel, not Phœnix mine."

The manufacturer still stared at her. Miss Farley wondered why she took so much trouble to enlighten him. She decided it was his eyes—he had nice, friendly eyes.

"Say, Martin," she continued forcibly, "you ain't a Simon-pure simp, even if you do look like one of the fifty-seven varieties. Don't you get the idea? Cawston's a fraud. He's selling you a piece of paper—the Germans would call it a scrap of paper."

"But a man vouched for him at the American Trust Company," pondered Wilbur heavily.

"Sure — Art Johnson, the bucket-shop prince. He went in and waited for you by the enclosure where the bank officers are. Shot the bull that he was going out to lunch, didn't he? Said he'd known Cawston five years, didn't he? They worked that once before. Standin' room in the American Trust lobby is free. Sure, Art knows Cawston. They had a suite of two rooms without bath in cold storage up the river once."

Wilbur shook his head perplexedly.

"I reckon I know what I'm doing, Miss Farley. A hundred per cent profit a year ain't to be sneezed at." His gaze focused slowly on the angry girl. "Say, sister, you got a grudge against Cawston, ain't you?"

"Oh, I'm through, Martin. I've seen enough suckers skinned without a bleat. I ain't going back. I never liked Cawston and his kind. Say, Martin," her sharp voice took on a pleading note, "lay off Phœnix stock. You got a wife and kids. Keep the dough for them."

Wilbur smiled broadly, to the girl's surprise.

"My mind's kind of set to buy that there stock, miss," he said firmly. "I'm going to take the money right up to Mr. Cawston." He lowered his voice. "It's marked, girly."

Geraldine Farley blinked. Her brown eyes widened. Marked! How was that?

"Wha—what' d'ye mean—marked?" she asked, wondering if she had heard aright.

Wilbur still smiled. His gray eyes were still honest and mild. But one eyelid drooped significantly. Moreover, his words came, not drawling and nasal, but quick and alert—in the girl's own manner.

"With a tiny red-ink cross, under the claw of the eagle on the century bills, girly. Cawston won't see it. You're all right, girly. It's good dope to skip this joint. You got the idea. The coop 'll be closed—tight—this afternoon. I'll see to that. I, and them guys." He jerked his thumb at two thick-set individuals loitering near them. "You stay away, and you won't be none the worse."

The wits of Geraldine Farley were not exactly sluggish, but the changed aspect of Wilbur was not to be grasped in a second.

"How d'ye get this way?" she wondered. "Say, what's the mystery? You ain't a gink. Say, you're a wise one. You've got the plain-clothes bulls to pinch Cawston!"

"And Heim," grinned Wilbur, his smile broadening. "Likewise the guy Art Johnson you tipped me off to. Illegal use of the mails, girly." He pulled back his overcoat enough to show the glitter of a badge. "The Department of Justice wants to see 'em."

The girl's dark eyes sparkled, and she giggled.

"Is that right? And—pinch me, somebody—you ain't from Flint, and married?"

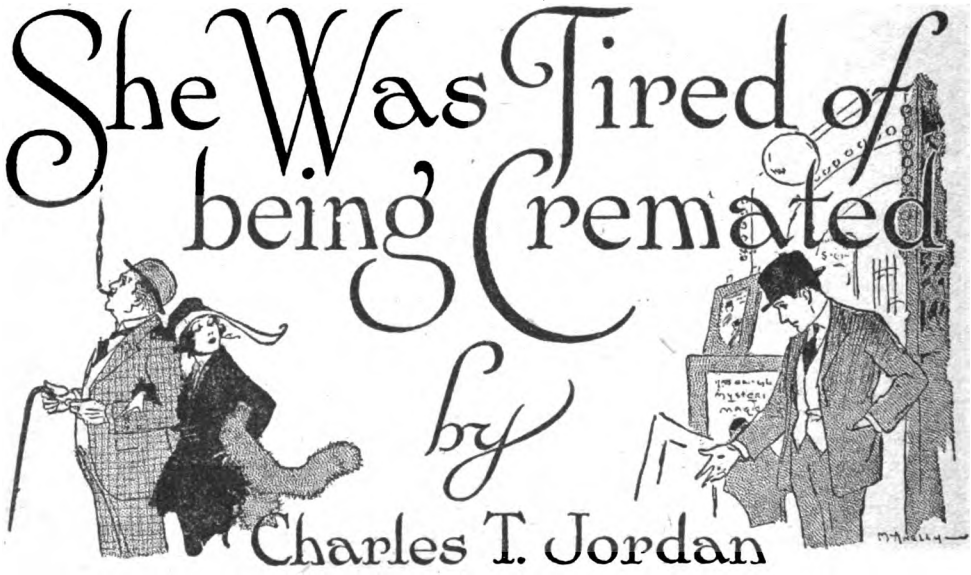
"Not yet, Miss Farley. But I'm not a member of the I. B. W.'s, either—Independent Bachelors of the World—see?" He beckoned to his companions, as an elevator appeared in front of them. He leaned closer to the girl.

"You was asking me for a bit of chatter, Miss Farley," he said quickly. Then, dropping into the drawl of Martin Wilbur, of Flint, Michigan, "I reckon, miss, I've got my mind set on taking you to the theater to-night, to 'When Roses Are Dead.' D'you think you could meet me in the lobby?"

"Well, of all—" gasped Geraldine Farley. "Well," the elevator door was closing, "maybe," she concluded.

But the smile that accompanied the word meant more than that.

She Was Tired of being Cremated



by Charles T. Jordan

IN reality she wasn't burned alive; but it looked mightily like it from your six-bit orchestra-chair. Nor was the cremation illusion new. It was so old that it had been entirely forgotten. So, on a present-day program, it was considered a novelty.

B. Higgins had purchased the paraphernalia second hand, and on the strength of it and his own personality, had secured forty weeks' time on the Calcium Circuit. But at the last moment the young lady he had engaged for the martyr's part had gumshoed with the brainless progeny of a tobacco potentate to the little church around the corner. She was too good-looking for vaudeville, anyway, Balboa H. had soliloquized when he read her note.

Higgins never dreamed but that he had lost his chance with the Calcium people; but they happened to be short of mystery acts. Luck was with him, and he was thrown into contact with Caroline.

Be it understood that any old chorus girl would not do as subject of the cremation illusion. Good looks were desirable, but the right build was necessary.

His delight, therefore, was keen when he discovered that Miss Humphrey possessed both looks and a trim, slim figure. She, having sought employment for weeks following the dissolution of the ties binding her to Oscar "Bughouse" Brady, was only too eager to accept Hig's offer.

Caroline had confided a good deal of her past to the genial wizard with the heavy eyebrows, the mobile countenance, and the abnormally long thumb. She seemed fitted for the part of *Helia* in "Burned Alive," and gave Higgins full value. One thing he did not know, though, nor did he even suspect it.

Miss Humphrey, no longer cavorting through her small-time dancing-specialty, and always an omnivorous devourer of chocolate-creams, had become cognizant of the subtle difference in her figure that this was making. Their watery arrival in Oakland that morning had rubbed Caroline the wrong way, and, when Hig was about to leave her to her own devices in the comfortable room he had engaged for her at the Asterpole, she brought him to a standstill with a curt beckoning that could not be misunderstood.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Mr. Higgins. Sit down a minute. I want to tell you a few things—a few important things."

"I may have been a little brusk on the car, Car'line," Balboa apologized. "But don't let that get to you. I was damp and out of sorts. I didn't expect to upset you so."

She had taken off her hat, and her auburn hair struck Hig as being primely dressed. Her forehead, too, again had taken on its enameled look. "Oh, that's all right," she said. "No doubt we both were a little on edge. What I've got to say is of more importance. It concerns our act."

"The act? What about it, Car'line?" He overlooked the "our."

"The cremation stunt. It's getting impossible! We'll have to substitute something for it."

Balboa Higgins's eyes widened. "Car'line, have you gone mad?"

"Hardly! It's a wonder, though. Hig, I've grown—that is, the trap-door is getting too small for me to hold up my end of the illusion with propriety and comfort." She was embarrassed and her eyes sought the carpeted floor.

A hollow noise sounded in Higgins's throat; a snort or a chuckle—you couldn't tell which. "Car'line, stand up," he ordered. "Now turn around very slowly. That will do."

She shot him a shy glance as she dropped to her chair. "Believe me now?" she asked.

"I believe it's your imagination," he rumbled. "The idea! Why, you only weighed a hundred and ten a little while ago."

"That may be," she acknowledged. "But I've been on the scales since and—oh, I can't tell you, Hig! The figures would frighten you."

Another snort. "I insist upon knowing them."

"Well, a hundred and thirty-three, then, if you must know."

Hig enjoyed watching the red mount in her cheeks. "That bad? You don't look it, Car'line. But I know what's wrong. You're stuffing too much. Eat less confectionery and butter fat—stop feeding yourself for slaughter."

"Hig!" She said it reproachfully.

"There, there, Car'line. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. If you don't want to diet I'll have a mechanic enlarge the trap-door."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Balboa!" She sat erect, her brown eyes drier than he had suspected. "I said we'd have to eliminate the cremation stunt, and substitute another. I've never liked it! I've put up with it, hoping every day you'd make a change yourself. How would you like to have to crawl through a miserable sixteen-inch-square hole in the top of a table twice a day for weeks on end—at thirty a week? It's difficult, and too—too undignified!"

"If that's all that's bothering you, Car'line—the thirty per—why, I suppose we could make it thirty-five in a pinch."

"The thirty-five goes!" she speedily acquiesced. "But the pinch does not! It's the pinch I'm sick of. If you don't—"

Hig's own dander was getting stirred. "Pinch or no pinch," he declared rabidly, "'Burned Alive' is our *pièce de résistance* —and our *pièce de résistance* it's going to remain. That's final!"

"Final, is it?"

Hig didn't relish her pronunciation. "Final."

"Well, Hig," she ultimatumed, "I won't leave you in the hole. I'll stick this week out. But if you don't rig up some illusion without a trap-door, I'm off you for good. That's final!" she triumphantly snapped.

"But, Car'line, we can't substitute. 'Burned Alive' is what I got the booking on. Be reasonable, won't you?"

"I am reasonable. I've put up with the cremation as long as I intend to. Brady wouldn't have stood for my doing as you've made me!"

"Mr. Brady was your husband, ma'am," meekly submitted Higgins.

She crimsoned. "Husband or no husband," she ranted, "Mr. Brady knew his place. Oh, how I wish I never had left him!"

"Left him, Car'line? I thought he engineered the disappearance act."

"Look here!" she spellbound him. "Either you are going to adopt a different tone or—"

This time a genuine snort escaped Higgins. He rose unceremoniously and left the room without a word. He absently descended the stairs — though he passed a waiting elevator—walked out through the lobby, and started up the street. The rain had ceased falling, but had it poured it is doubtful if he would have returned for an umbrella.

"I'm tired hearing that everlasting Brady stuff she's been pulling lately," he muttered as he walked. "I wish to the devil she could—"

He halted, open mouthed, at a line of printed-matter that stared him in the face. He found himself looking into the spacious lobby of the local Calcium house, directly at a large, framed, display photograph. It was the picture's caption that held his eyes.

"Of all the—" he ejaculated, as soon as he could get his lips close enough together to pronounce the words. For the legend he gazed upon was:

BUGHOUSE BRADY

Nut Comedian

THIS WEEK

"Speaking of the marvels of telepathy!" the astounded Mr. Higgins mentioned to himself. "If this isn't the limit! Here I'm thinking of nothing on earth but Car'line's former husband, and then to open my eyes and find myself staring—" With his long thumb and forefinger he seized the tip of his chin and twisted it—an old mannerism of his—then released his hold, his chin reddening as it unwound itself.

Hig's knowledge of the habits and appearance of Bughouse Brady had been obtained exclusively through Caroline's lucid accounts of the events which led to their disuniting. To judge from the photograph, Brady's face was almost handsome, yet there was a trace of weakness at the mouth and about the over-large and shallow eyes.

Higgins advanced into the lobby and scrutinized the picture more closely. "I wonder," he meditated—"I wonder if I can't cook up a little concoction that will cure Car'line of ever mentioning Mr. Oscar —and here his words must have become audible—"Bughouse Brady in my—"

"Did I hear you call my name?"

A rather tall and fleshy gentleman, standing near the box-office window had turned and approached the illusionist. Hig's eyes darted from the photograph to the round face of his interrogator. "Why—you are Mr. Brady himself!"

"I am. Anything I can do for you?"

"Eh—yes, Mr. Brady, I believe there is. If you happen to know of a place where refreshments may be—"

Already Mr. Brady was leading the way to the Elfin bar.

And, before they had passed through the small, swinging doors, Balboa Higgins had mapped a tentative course of action.

Over there tea, Hig introduced himself, and promptly bought again. "I—I have for my assistant a young lady," he chose his words carefully, "who has, of late, disturbed my mental balance somewhat. I

wondered if I might ask you—a stranger—a favor?"

"A favor? Assuredly, my dear Mr. Higgins. Already I have taken a profound liking to you." With his free hand he again manipulated a bottle of bonded. "If you will intimate the nature of your—"

"It's like this," Higgins proceeded, as the aproned man moved to the other end of the bar. "My assistant needs bringing down. I—eh—I have become very fond of her—but she doesn't reciprocate. I believe that, if you are willing to attend to a simple flirtation, she would rapidly see the matter from my view-point."

Mr. Brady winked knowingly. "You aren't afraid I might carry it too far—that she might grow so fond of me that—"

Higgins raised a finger. "Not a fear in the world, Mr. Brady. In fact, I'm not certain she'll stand for your advances at all."

Brady had another one. "What is your assistant's name?"

"That you'll learn when you meet her," smiled Hig, mentally rubbing his hands together. "No later than this afternoon."

"Any one here by the name of Brady?" asked the bartender, who had just applied his ear to the receiver of a telephone.

Mr. Bughouse B. advanced pompously on the instrument.

Hig didn't concern himself with the one-sided conversation his new-found companion carried on, but, rather, gave himself over to anticipating events to come. "I don't believe Car'line will even let him open his mouth," he consoled himself.

"Will you have another, Mr. Higgins?" Brady had finished telephoning.

Higgins would.

"'S my last for the present," Brady became informative. "A friend just rang up the box-office, and they said she'd be apt to find me here. Regular walking atlases, those box-office inhabitants! But I'll have to say ta-ta, Higgins. Got a date. Try not to let it interfere with our arrangement, though. See you some time this afternoon."

And, proffering a bulky hand which Higgins did not like the feel of, the nut comedian walked sedately out.

"Good to look upon," was Hig's mental comment; "but I can see readily enough how a nice girl would grow tired of him mighty soon. By George! It wouldn't be half bad if Car'line could see him with the dame he's just dated. But he'll be careful to keep that to himself."

Now Hig was not a hard or frequent drinker, and already he realized that he had had enough. So he crossed the street and ate a bite of something to keep his tongue from tasting bad. Then he returned to the theater lobby and whiled away a few minutes looking over the photographs and billing of the current week's acts. His gaze lingered fondly on his own easeled display.

"To think that Car'line wants me to ditch 'Burned Alive'!" he mumbled. "A hit from the first showing! We close the first half of the show on the strength of it. Ridiculous! Impossible!"

Then he regarded closely the trim figure of the young lady standing on the cremation table. "No getting round the fact that she's stoutened since that was taken," he declared. "I could see traces of it a while ago in her room—but she'd have got madder than she did if I'd as much as chirped a word. She knows she's bigger around, and she knows I know it — but Lordy! If I admitted it in so many words—"

He glanced at his watch. "Half past one!" he whistled. "I've been hanging around here too long!" Hig started for the Asterpole, only a block away. As he was about to enter the portal, a couple passed him coming out—Mr. Bughouse Brady and Caroline Humphrey.

Balboa Higgins experienced a severe mental shock. Here was the very thing he had intended bringing about coming true of its own accord—only it was coming ten times truer than he had anticipated or desired. Hig had believed that one look at the nut comedian would be enough for Caroline, and here she promenaded in full view with him!

The conjurer stumbled into the Asterpole and up to his room. He threw himself on the bed. Gradually the fog lifted. "What if she did humor him enough to take a walk with him?" he cogitated. "She hasn't seen

him for a long time. Perhaps she figures she can stand him a few minutes."

Later, as Higgins approached the stage door of the Calcium Theater, he beheld two familiar figures conversing there; but, as he neared them, one, the man, lifted his hat to his companion and vanished inside. Hig quickened his steps.

"What does this mean, Car'line?" he demanded in as soft a voice as he could summon.

Her nose tilted skyward. "What does what mean?"

"Why — er — your gallivanting round with Bughouse Brady."

Her tone became dangerous. "I'll have you understand, Mr. Higgins, that what I do outside our act is none of your business."

He begged her pardon, and she softened somewhat.

"I picked up a morning paper and saw Brady was booked for the Calcium this week, and acting on an odd whim, I called up the box-office. They told me I might find him at the Elfin bar, and I did."

"Oh!" gulped Higgins. "But—do you really care for him again, Car'line?"

She searched his mobile countenance with something akin to amazement. "Hig, does that make any difference to you!"

Balboa spluttered and bowed and scraped and looked anything but comfortable. "Your being legally separated from him, I—I only thought it strange that you'd be taking up with him again," he stumbled weakly.

"Brady's all right in some ways." She watched his face as she spoke. "In fact, I think I like him better than I imagined I would."

Higgins thought he'd better conceal his emotions in a coughing spell, but she had known him long enough to see through the subterfuge. Then, in confusion, he seized the tip of his chin and began winding it.

She laughed. "You're so funny, Hig. But isn't it time we go inside?"

He accepted the suggestion with pleasure, and they went to their dressing-rooms.

Fifteen minutes before time for their act to go on, Hig stepped to the wings and listened to the delivery of Bughouse Brady's monologue. The magician with the week-end face could see nothing funny in the big comedian's remarks, though the audience howled and held its sides. Perhaps Hig paid more attention to the man than to what he said. Balboa longed for a moment's conversation with the monologist, but realized there would be no chance until his own act had been presented.

Bughouse took three bows and an encore, and the street scene rose. Ensued ten minutes of magic such as only the dexterous Higgins could get away with. Then, Miss Humphrey, as *Helia,* was introduced.

She mounted a metal table, and screens standing on its top were drawn about her. Mirrors beneath the table reflected a surface the same color as the rear drapery, and the space under the stand offered plenty of sanctuary for a medium-sized woman.

No sooner had Hig screened *Helia* from view than she commenced the tortuous task of squirming through the trap-door in the table top. A torch was touched to the surrounding screens, and they burned brightly for a few seconds.

When they were extinguished, nothing but a heap of ashes and a couple of charred bones remained on the metal stand. Half of Caroline's day's work was done. Only once more would she be cremated before Monday—at the evening performance.

The curtain fell and rose again. Now *Helia,* escaped from her cramped posture beneath the table, at Higgins's side, bowed acknowledgment of the applause.

Balboa was in his street clothes first, and dashed from his dressing-room to find Brady. The comedian awaited him. Before Hig could put in a word, Bughouse queried: "How soon will Miss Humphrey be out?"

Higgins stopped short and took firm hold of his chin tip. "I—have a heart!" spluttered the magician contritely. "This thing isn't going as I expected it would. You—you got in ahead of time."

"Miss Humphrey is a splendid young woman," Brady strove to calm him. "She has promised to dine with me this afternoon."

Hig's chin turned red as he released his

hold. "Go easy, Brady. Go easy, please!" he implored.

Bughouse Brady smiled and Hig sought the open air.

Monday and Tuesday, Miss Humphrey and the nut comedian were as thick as molasses, and hourly Balboa Hig's heart beat more faintly. But what could he do about it? Even had he not incubated the plan, they inevitably would have met. He had sized Caroline up all wrong. She actually seemed fond of that ass with the beefy body! Hig was in despair.

Wednesday afternoon Miss Humphrey came upon him in the Asterpole lounging-room. "Take a walk, Mr. Higgins?" she purringly inquired.

Balboa grabbed for the straw and nearly swallowed it in his excitement. "I haven't seen you much lately, Car'line," he lamented.

"You'll see less after a few days," she said affectionately.

He frowned questioningly.

"Brady and I have about decided to do a double again," she explained languidly. "Of course I'll not leave you without notice. I'll stay with the act through next week."

It came like a bombshell. "But, Car'line! You can't—you mustn't think of doing that! I—I'll—"

"Mustn't, eh?" Her laugh was almost profane.

"I'll cut out the cremation—I'll see the management—I'll do anything—just so you stay with me! You'd grow tired of him soon, and then you'd wish you hadn't left—"

"Hig, you make me sick!"

"But have you really decided definitely to—"

"I told you we had *about* decided."

"Then there *is* hope! I'll see Maxwell to-day. I'll find another illusion—without a trap-door! Then you'll stay with me?"

"I'll promise you nothing, Hig. But it would be mighty nice, next week, if you got something different. Suit yourself, though. Don't let me influence you."

That very day, quoth Maxwell, a high official of the Calcium Circuit: "Sure thing, Higgins! We don't give a hang what you use, just so you put over the usual hit. Go to it! Your personality ought to see you by with most anything."

The conjurer made a trip to San Francisco after the matinee. After the evening show he sought Miss Humphrey. "Saw Myers. You know—the fellow who repairs magical apparatus, out on Golden Gate Avenue. He had a peach of a Noah's Ark on hand. I got it for seventy-five dollars. It 'll be delivered at the Calcium stage to-morrow morning."

If she was particularly interested she didn't show it. "All right," she said. "Better than the cremation, anyway."

"A lot better," he agreed. "Car'line, on the level, don't you realize you've come to mean a great deal to me? I've not harped much on the subject, but haven't you read it in my eyes? Honest, I'm jeal—"

"Hig, you talk like a child! I'm going now. I have an appointment with Mr. Brady."

"But you'll come to the Calcium to-morrow morning at eleven for rehearsal?"

"Sure. I'll be there. So-long."

Higgins spent a miserable night.

Next morning she accompanied him to the theater. The Noah's Ark apparatus had arrived, as also had a third individual.

"What on earth is Brady hanging round the stage door for at this hour?" Hig whispered to his companion.

"He's come to watch our rehearsal, Hig. What did you suppose?" And she looked queerly at him.

"But it would be much better if we rehearsed alone! We don't want every Tom, Dick, and Harry to learn the secrets of our act."

"Secrets? Hig, do you know how old Noah's Ark is? Why, they say Grant tumbled to the mystery the first time he saw it, a boy in his teens."

Balboa flushed. "It is old, I know, Car'line. But it won't seem to be so after we get through with it. You know my talent for imbuing a chestnut with up-to-dateness and life. For instance, the animals we'll use won't be of the old stock description. We'll add variety—produce a dozen different kinds of birds and beasts."

" How do you know you can get them?"

" Got a crate of them already."

Brady, watching them from a few feet away, now approached and lifted his hat. " Good morning, Miss Humphrey—you, too, Higgins."

Balboa H. had to reply. Caroline might do most anything if he didn't. But his answer was not noticeably cordial.

For Hig's part the ensuing hour was extremely uncomfortable. Brady was forever interposing a bit of advice, and the conjurer couldn't get in a word of what he intended to tell Caroline. After doing the stunt a dozen times, the perspiring Balboa decided to call it a day. He returned to the Asterpole alone.

Much to the magician's disgust, Brady saw fit to be present at all the rest of the rehearsals, and Miss Humphrey seemed to take increased pleasure in his company.

Sunday morning—the matinee would witness the first public presentation of their new finale—Hig could stand it no longer. At ten o'clock he demanded audience with Caroline, and she listened in silence for twenty minutes to the outpouring of his heart. Apparently he made little impression on her, though.

" Why have you kept this to yourself so long?" she asked, rather unfeelingly. " You wait until you think I'm going to pair off with some one else, and then—"

" But I thought you knew it, Car'line. I didn't think it was necessary to tell you in so many words."

" Look back at last Sunday morning," she reminded him. " Think of the way you treated me on the street-car! Was that any indication of what you thought of me? You don't interest me."

" I know I've a beastly temper. But I will be able to make you happy, Car'line. I know I will!"

" Maybe you could — maybe you couldn't. But let's talk about something else."

Hig couldn't think of anything else worthy of conversation. But he wasn't to have much further opportunity, anyway. A knock sounded on the door, and Caroline called: " Come in."

Bughouse Brady, fresh as a new-laid egg, entered.

Sunday houses always were good in Oakland. A quarter of an hour before the Calcium matinée began the " Standing Room Only " sign was displayed.

At twelve minutes after three the street drop before which Brady delivered his nut monologue was raised, disclosing the stage setting of Mysterious Higgins and Company. The conjurer with the rapidly shifting features had not varied the preliminaries of his entertainment; but after he had been on ten minutes, spectators who had witnessed last week's performance became cognizant that the act was going to finish differently.

Balboa H. advanced to the footlights. " For my closing item, folks," he addressed them in a soft, but distinct voice, " I shall present a brand-new illusion entitled ' Noah's Ark—or After the Flood.' "

The ark, which was wheeled on by a stage-hand, differed in some essentials from its ancient prototype of shittim-wood. For one thing, it was mounted on four slender castored legs.

Hig took charge, and swung the boxlike affair around, that the audience might view all sides. Then, wheeling it well forward, he lowered its rear door, then the front door. He also let down its hooded ends. Undoubtedly the thing was empty—you could look right through its skeleton to the rear of the stage.

But, had you viewed the ark from behind, you would have beheld Caroline Humphrey, erstwhile *Helia,* of " Burned Alive," firmly secured to the hanging rear door by two welt-raising straps. Assuredly the posture was uncomfortable.

The stage-hand helped Hig close the front door first—then the end hoods. Together they now lifted the back door into place without suggesting to the audience that it was heavier than the front one.

The conjurer produced from somewhere a large, tin funnel, and inserted its spout in a hole in the front left corner of the ark's flat top. He stepped back a moment, then: " On with the flood!"

Three stage-hands each made three trips

behind the scenes, at each appearance bringing on a twelve-quart pail of water in each hand. Lifting a pail dexterously, Higgins the Great eased its rim into the funnel bowl—and poured.

Caroline, safely ensconced inside the ark, unstrapped herself from the rear door and rubbed as best she could the bruises made by the straps. How pesky things smelt in the narrow confines of her prison! It must have been the menagerie packed tightly into the end hoods of the contrivance.

She released the miniature doors at either end of her coffinlike container, and, one by one, the furred and feathered occupants of the end compartments joined her. Rabbits, dogs, cats, chickens, geese—the place became a veritable barnyard.

Came the flood!

Now, a properly constructed Noah's Ark intended for magical purposes boasts of a hollow leg—the one directly under the hole in which the funnel is inserted. Higgins's newly acquired ark was equipped with this necessary adjunct, as rehearsals had proved, but—

Caroline twisted her head and watched the inch-thick stream of water from Hig's first bucket playfully descend straight for the hollow leg, whence, normally, it should have found natural outlet through a hole in the stage to a vessel placed beneath.

But things weren't going normally this afternoon, for, just as playfully as the stream had descended, did it hesitate, as the hollow leg overflowed, and gradually spread itself over the ark's flooring on which she lay.

"The leg's plugged!" she exclaimed softly, and apprehensively she awaited the coming of the second bucketful.

Its advent more than verified her finding. She pulled up her skirts and tried to support herself on the balls of her thin-soled pumps. The costume she wore was a clinging, silken affair, and she knew it wouldn't stand wetting.

What should she do? Halt the show by letting Hig know something was wrong? Descended a third pailful of aqua pura.

"The darned thing is water-tight!" she was bound to confess, as she watched the liquid reach a two-inch level.

Hig must have become excited, or else the whole behind-the-scenes force was assisting him, for, in rapid succession, came gallon after gallon of water through the funnel spout. Her ankles suddenly grew chill, and she knew it had risen that high.

With a shrill meow! a cat leaped to her shoulder. More water, and yet more. A duck quacked gleefully as it swam about.

"Hig!" she whispered softly, yet with force. "Hig!"

For answer came another torrent.

"I'll be drowned!" she realized in mortal terror. "Why doesn't he stop and begin producing the animals? Oh, for a Mount Ararat!"

The water was fast reaching the level of her knees. The animals were huddled in her lap, on her shoulders—those too small to keep their nostrils in the air.

She could stand it no longer—spoil the show or not. "Hig!" she screamed, with all the pent fury of a trapped wildcat. "Hig!"

No reply, save another avalanche.

"It's sound-proof, too! Hig! Open the door! I'm drowning! Let me out!"

She paused for breath. For an instant she recalled the wetting of her hat plume the Sunday before. That had been as nothing to her present predicament. Why didn't he answer?

The truth was, he had gone for more water; for the audience liked the jokes he cracked as he poured in each additional pailful. He had four more jokes on tap. Talk about putting over an old stunt in a new way!

Hig returned to the stage with two more brimming buckets. What was that? He thought he heard a sound from inside the ark. Could Caroline be signaling him?

Suddenly the whole contrivance—the ark and the legs supporting it—began rocking frightfully. Higgins regarded the phenomenon in astonishment. Then it rocked too far, and straight toward the auditorium it toppled.

A door burst open. A flood of water coursed toward the footlights. The musicians in the orchestra pit ducked to evade a waterfall. Chickens, ducks, cats, guinea-pigs, a bull pup—flew, quacked, sprang,

trotted, leaped from their forced imprisonment, and scattered themselves to the four points of the compass.

And finally, with a peculiar, rolling movement, emerged a form in rainbow-hued silks —a veritable mermaid—dampened Caroline!

The spectators rose to their feet as one. Cheers, howls, rumbling laughter filled the theater. The orchestra burst into a current seaside success, and Balboa Higgins, catching sight of a cork embedded in the bottom of an upturned, hollow, ark leg, shambled backward dizzily.

The figure in clinging silks got to its feet. The figure's eyes alighted on the cork. The curtain fell.

Fascinated, Higgins watched Caroline reach for the handle of one of the overfull buckets he had let thud to the floor. She lifted the heavy pail as though it were a feather, and advanced on the horror-stricken magician.

"Car'line!"

Probably the innocence she read in his eyes, rather than his voice, influenced her; for, suddenly swerving to the right, she strode toward a puffed-up effigy in the wings—an effigy that had not time to turn and flee before she reached him.

"You! You're the one! You tried to queer our act! Make a nymph of me!"

She helmeted him with the pail of ice-cold water, and the corpulent nut monologist fell without a murmur.

Her features cleared. She rushed to the amazed conjurer, and with an "Oh, Hig!" pillowed her wet head on his shoulder.

The stage door opened. A muscular six-footer with a red face confronted them. "Caroline," the newcomer faltered, "I want to thank you for sending for me. Where's—"

She pointed to the coming-to-life wreck in the wings, then, her nose tilted, her face pale, her tone cold: "You needn't thank me, sir!" And taking Balboa gently by the arm: "Come on, Hig."

They hadn't moved ten paces when a second person rushed in from the street—Maxwell, of the Calcium Circuit.

"Great, Higgins! Biggest laughing hit in years! Something went wrong, though, didn't it? Luckiest thing that ever happened! Play your magical skit exactly as you did to-day, and you can start right over the circuit again as soon as you finish this tour. An act like that's worth more money, too! How about it?"

"How 'bout it, Car'line?" Balboa passed the buck.

She hesitated. "I don't know, Hig," she smiled. "But I think I prefer the flood to the fire."

At her dressing-room door, receiving a glad affirmation to a leading question, Higgins ventured another.

"You didn't really care for Brady after all, Car'line?"

"I should say not! Nor the fellow I've been hobnobbing round with the last week, either. I only went with him to get you good and jealous, and make you cancel that cremation—"

"Wasn't the man who watched our rehearsals—"

"He was a pirate! He was using my former partner's stuff, all right, and was willing to pose as him for your benefit. But he was no more the original—I thought it only right, though, to wire Brady, so he could come on from the East and protect his material.

"But me care for him? Huh! Didn't you see the cold shoulder I gave him? Hig! Let go your chin! You'll break it off!"

The Log-Book

By the Editor

THEY were discussing stories.

"I don't care for stories of China, India, or, in fact, of any of the Oriental countries," said Brown. "The subject simply doesn't appeal to me."

"Hang the subject!" exclaimed Jones. "What difference does it make where the scene is laid or what the story is about, so long as it is interesting?"

"But what makes a thing interesting?" Brown wanted to know.

"The author," promptly retorted Jones. "That's his business. If he's any good at it, he should be able to make any theme he touches interesting."

"Still," persisted Brown, "if I don't care a rap about rajas or what happens to them, I don't see that the subject hasn't a lot to do with whether any particular story hits me."

"Hits *you*—yes," burst out Jones. "That's just it. We weren't talking about you, but about stories in general. I, for instance, know a man who's crazy over every yarn he runs across that begins with a hint of the Ganges or a scent of the cherry-blossoms of Japan. Serials and short stories aren't written for a class, but for the multitude."

"How are you going to know, though," rejoined Brown, "just how many of the multitude prefer one thing over against another?"

"Oh, that's the editor's job," airily answered Jones.

And it's some job, believe me.

* * *

Liquid fire—a cascading, fiery flood of flaming brilliance poured through his clutching fingers—strange flames that glowed but did not burn, eery lights like will-o'-the-wisps, burning blue in the enveloping darkness with a phosphorescent sheen. This was the secret of *Old Tom's* "madness."

"BLUE FLAMES"

BY ETHEL AND JAMES DORRANCE

Authors of "Scalps to the Brave," etc.

is a stirring tale of moonshining from a new angle, of rivalry, of a man's regeneration *despite* the aiding of friendship, and of a love which at the end burned clear and steady in the midst of wrack and storm. It is not too much to say that the authors have captured the very spirit of the mountains and of the people. And there is no moonshine about that. This begins as a six-part serial in THE ARGOSY for May 10.

"EASY GARVIN"

BY REX PARSON

Author of "The Desert Thrill," "Southwest of the Law," etc.

our complete novelette for next week, is truly an epic of struggle, although the title might lead one to think otherwise. We are accustomed to speak of inanimate steel,

of the tremendous dead weight of insensate metal, but the engine that he knew and loved was not this to *Garvin*—rather, it was a thing alive, sentient, carrying as it did the burden of the high hope which was his. Worthy to rank with the desperate hazards of achievement wherever men have toiled and fought in the face of almost insuperable obstacles, *Garvin's* fight both for himself and the machine which he served has something of this epic quality. There is the strength of tremendous drama in this unusual story, wherein at the end, despite the odds of a treachery which involved at the last her whom he loved, he *proved* himself, even in defeat.

Not only those who were wont to read the *Railroad Man's Magazine,* but everybody who is fortunate enough to come into possession of our next number, cannot fail to be delighted with "A NIGHT OFF," by Russell A. Boggs. The experiences of the third-trick operator at "RG" tower on a certain memorable night are not only vividly told, but are in themselves quite different from the sort of thing fiction writers are apt to hand you in this line. Baseball and motor-cars are dexterously intermingled in Samuel G. Camp's "PARADISE BOSSED," which, I am sure, will give you many a laugh as you follow the adventures of the unhappy joy-riders. Another of the May 10 shorts, "SLIPPING HIS CABLE," by Carl Clausen, brings a touch of pathos in the attitude of the old man toward the ship he loved, and there is real drama in the open-sea climax.

BUT IT IS A WEEKLY ALREADY

Fayetteville, Tennessee.

Well, here I come again. I have been keeping quiet for a long time, and reading the best magazine out; but I can't help telling you what I think about Mr. Willis L. Pond's plan. I say, if you make a change, to make it a weekly, and give us more like "His Dash to Frisco" and "Larkin of the Free Range," and another story like "At His Mercy"; and what about *Hawkins*—can't he come again? Hoping this misses the waste-basket, I remain, an ARGOSY fan,

J. R. HAMPTON.

A FAMILY FAVORITE

Brooklyn, New York.

All our family are constant readers of THE ARGOSY, and I thought I would send in a few words of appreciation. We always look for Neil Moran's stories. We certainly had a lot of laughs out of "Bringing Out Boothington." "The Red String" was also good. I could mention many others, but won't take up your time. THE ARGOSY is my companion when I commute to business, and I generally read one story each way. I will close now, hoping THE ARGOSY will retain its good qualities.

(MISS) FLOR PETZNICK.

P. S.—You may publish this letter.

AN ACCESSION FROM THE RAILROAD

Callaway, Nebraska.

am a reader of THE ARGOSY, and find it a very nice book for passing a stormy day. Some of the complete novelettes are fine. I like serials like "Forbidden Trails" or "The Whistling Girl." I have been reading the *Railroad Man's Magazine* and ARGOSY ever since "Harrigan!" was started, and found it a very good serial. I like exciting stories, as the latter was. Hoping to find some more good novels, as I think "The Hammer" is going to be, I am wishing you and THE ARGOSY the greatest success.

LEE MORRIS.

P. S.—I would like to see this in print.

WANTS STORIES OF DIFFERENT WARS

Kearney, Nebraska.

I am a new member of THE ARGOSY; have only read it constantly for a short time. I happened to glance over a copy when "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" was in; after starting it, started other stories, and look forward until Saturday so I can get it. I like Franklin, Lyman, and stories with pep in them. "Forbidden Trails" was good, so was "After a Million Years," only too improbable. Give us some good war stories, stories of our different wars. Use this for Log-Book if desired.

F. E. CHURCH.

SELTZER'S NEXT A WORLD-BEATER

Janesville, Louisiana.

Enclosed find money order for my subscription to THE ARGOSY for one year, beginning with February 8. I have been reading THE ARGOSY continually for several years, and I positively have not missed a number since the first I picked up. In the city I found THE ARGOSY very interesting, and now as we have moved to the farm I'm going to find it doubly so. So please hurry up and send my back numbers, as I want to find out how *Squint Taylor* made out from the waiting ambuscade in "Forbidden Trails," by Charles A. Seltzer. And, Mr. Editor, please keep this bird under your wing, for, in my opinion,

Charles Alden Seltzer can't be beat. Without him THE ARGOSY would lose some of its interest, though you have several other good authors. I close, hoping to see my friend, THE ARGOSY, soon.

C. C. LANING.

THE WEEKLY ISSUE JUST SUITS HIM

Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I don't make a specialty of sending in criticisms to magazines. I have been a reader and critic of THE ARGOSY ever since I can remember reading books of interest. I would like to state that when THE ARGOSY was a monthly magazine, I could hardly wait until it came, and at last I'm satisfied. The stories are improving, like wine with old age. I will say that the author of "Peter the Brazen" can have my praise any time; the same with "Square Deal Sanderson."

JOHN P. WILSON.

AS TO THE CLEVEREST TITLE

Brooklyn, New York.

In answer to your request as to the cleverest title you used in 1918, I would say my choice is "Getting Licked," by A. L. Crabb, for the short story; "The Runaway Skyscraper" for the novelette, and "Anything Goes," by Edgar Franklin, for the serial. I generally read the magazine straight through from cover to cover. I have never had a kick about your stories, and I am well content to have no changes except a longer novel as expressed by Mr. M. Willett, of Chicago, Illinois, in February 22 issue of THE ARGOSY. Wishing long life to THE ARGOSY, I am,

H. MUNTZNER.

A NEW ONE BY THE DORRANCES NEXT WEEK

Huntington Beach, California.

This is my first writing to the Log-Book, so I hope to see it in print. Pray tell me what is the matter with "Scalps to the Brave," as I have never noticed any comments on that story since it has been published, quite a while ago? Now, to my idea, that is *one banner story;* in fact the best I have ever read except "Sunnie of Timberline." Can we not have more of the Dorrances' fine Western stories? And when? To me they "go over the top" in anything they write. I prefer Western stories, domestic stories, tales of the north sea, north woods, with snow, ice, cold, *et cetera.* Wishing your magazine success, a sincere ARGOSY fan,

MRS. A. E. SMITH.

LIKES LOVE AND WESTERN STORIES

Portland, North Dakota.

I started to read your splendid ARGOSY three years ago, and I think it the best magazine on the market. Enclosed you will find ten cents, for which please send me THE ARGOSY for February 22, as I wouldn't miss that number or any others. I have been reading "Forbidden Trails," and I think it a fine story.

I have no favorite authors. I like love stories and Western stories. I thought "Vicky Van" was a fine story. I also like "After a Million Years." I suppose this will reach the waste-basket, but as long as the editor reads it, and knows what I think of his magazine, that's all I care about, although I would like to see it in the Log, as there hasn't been any in there from this town. This is a small town, but it sells a lot of ARGOSYS. Wishing you great success, I close,

M. I. E.

P. S.—Please use only my initials. I have a brother in camp at Oswego, New York.

WALKED MILES FOR THE ARGOSY

Boston, Massachusetts.

Please do not hesitate to throw this letter aside if it does not come up to your standard of letters you receive for the Log-Book. I have been an ardent ARGOSY fan for the last three years. I have walked for miles at times to secure it. I am in the Merchant Marine of the U. S., and therefore do not get a chance to get the magazine every week.

"The Whistling Girl" is a very good story, and I hope I will get the last series of it. Every story is very good. I have been in nearly every large city from Maine to Florida, and always had the fortune to get nearly every number. I am bound for Cuba now for a cargo of sugar. Wishing THE ARGOSY a successful year,

G. WALTER GOUGHER.

ALWAYS GETS HIS DIME'S WORTH AND MORE

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me January 25 ARGOSY. Somehow we were slighted last week, and I sure don't want to miss the conclusion of "Apache Gold." I like THE ARGOSY. I like your assortment of stories; it give every one a chance to enjoy it personally. I like most of all Western stories like "The Last of the Duanes," "Light of the Western Stars," "The Border Legion," "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," and now I'm enjoying "Forbidden Trails." I like the "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" stories, and—well, I don't like every story in every ARGOSY, but I can say I always get my dime's worth and some thrown in for good measure. My best wishes for THE ARGOSY.

F. V. G.

PLEASANT HOURS

Osseo, Michigan.

I began taking THE ARGOSY as a regular diet in 1906, and have not missed a number since. Had read it by spells before that. Was on the road at that time as traveling salesman. Bought the first number of the *Railroad Man's Magazine,* and stuck to it until you made it into a technical magazine, then dropped it.

Have no advice to give in regard to how to run THE ARGOSY; am perfectly satisfied that you know best. Some stories I like better than others, but the ones I do not like so well, some one else likes, and I am willing some one else should have his share. I have no particular favorite author, unless it is Zane Grey. Like the Western stories best, anyway; but they are all good. I am where I cannot get to the news-stand every week, so I subscribe for it, and you will find enclosed check

for four dollars, for which extend my subscription for one year to ARGOSY AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE. Thanking you for many pleasant hours, and hoping they may continue,

GEORGE C. BARKER.

THE STORY'S THE THING

Prescott, Arizona.

I have nothing but praise for THE ARGOSY. I am following closely "After a Million Years" and "Forbidden Trails," especially the first, as anything of that sort interests me in the extreme. I did not exactly agree with some of the ideas expressed in "The Web," but enjoyed it nevertheless. It is not to be surmised from the above, however, that I am at all partial to the serial form of story, for whether it be serial, series, novel, novelette, or short type, it is the story itself which appeals to me. My favorite authors are none; my favorite story that of mystery and the Orient and the West, and if these three are comingled I am especially delighted, more so if the unexpected is predominant. For the best to ye editor, and a long life to THE ARGOSY.

BELCHER COOLEY.

THE ONLY WAY TO IMPROVE ARGOSY

Columbus, Ohio.

Received your letter telling us you did not have one of the four magazines that we wanted. We were very much disappointed, but my husband happened to get them at a news-dealer's here. So please just hold the stamps to our credit, for maybe some time we will want some other magazine. We think your ARGOSY is the best magazine on the globe. "After a Million Years," by Garret Smith, is surely one fine story. I have just finished "The Web," by Achmed Abdullah, and would surely enjoy a sequel to such a fine story. Tell Mr. Neil Moran to give us another story like "Bringing Out Boothington," and give us one every week by H. A. Lamb. All your stories are fine. The only way to improve the dear old ARGOSY is to issue it twice a week. We always read every story in THE ARGOSY. Success and long life to THE ARGOSY.

MR. AND MRS. W. D. R.

P. S.—Please use initials only, if this is worth printing.

THE "NOWS" HAVE ALREADY GOT THE AX

Maymont, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I have been a regular reader of THE ARGOSY for some time, and have always enjoyed the stories very much until I started "One Fine Opening," by Samuel G. Camp, in the last issue. The plot of the story seems to be all right, as much as I read of it, at least; but the constant repetition of "now" got my goat. It made me feel like throwing the magazine out of the window. I would like to see letters from other readers about this, because I'm wondering if it affected more as it did me.

On the whole, THE ARGOSY is a dandy magazine, and I know it's impossible to please everybody all the time, so I suppose the best plan is to remember what you like and forget the rest. I know while I was overseas the news that a batch of ARGOSYS had just come would send us all flocking to the recreation-rooms in a mad scramble to see who would get them first. They certainly made a welcome change from the camp routine.

Will close now, hoping I haven't made this too long for the Log-Book.

H. D. NAAC.

"ONE WONDERFUL WRITER"

Bluffton, Indiana.

This is the first offense, so merey. Just had a laugh over the letter of Miss Howe. What she wants is a model, and you know what that means. No, thank you, not for mine. Ten to one she wouldn't want the article exchanged once she had it.

Have been a reader of your magazine for some years. The peer of your authors, to my way of thinking, is Achmed Abdullah. He is one wonderful writer, and knows what he is talking about, be it the mysticism of the East or a game of poker. The stories that appeal most to me are those of the Far East, the Orient—in other words, tales of adventure and detective stories. And as long as you, most wise young owl, continue as their editor, may your shadow remain the same.

MRS. HENRY GRABOWSKI.

ORIGINAL COVER WILL SOON REAPPEAR

Verona, New Jersey.

Here I am writing to you again! Yes, I just couldn't wait after finishing "The Web," by Achmed Abdullah. It was fine, great, tremendous! I want to congratulate Captain Abdullah for giving us such a splendid story. I doubt if I have ever enjoyed a story in THE ARGOSY as I did "The Web." It was a worthy successor to Captain Abdullah's other tale, "The Trail of the Beast."

You had some other splendid serials running about the same time as "The Web"; "After a Million Years" (worth waiting that number of years for); "The Sultana of Marib" (full of action and color); "Forbidden Trails" (another Western thriller by Seltzer); "The Whistling Girl" (weird and an excellent mystery), and "No Questions Asked" (another of Franklin's laugh-producers). Keep up the same quality by giving us more by the same authors, and don't forget Charles B. Stilson, G. W. Ogden, and Stephen Chalmers. Wish you would leave "Railroad Man's Magazine" off the cover, as it's the same old ARGOSY. Here's hoping that the good ship ARGOSY may continue her successful cruise.

S. K. S.

P. S.—Please let me know what other stories Garret Smith has written for THE ARGOSY and where I can obtain them. Just received the new ARGOSY. Was very glad to see what splendid stories we have in store for us, but wish you wouldn't announce for the future, as it spoils the weekly announcement, which I look forward to with a great deal of pleasure.

"On the Brink of 2000," Garret Smith's previous fantastic story for THE ARGOSY, appeared complete in the issue for January, 1910, mailed on receipt of twenty cents.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For the Ambitious Young Man


For the Modern Business Man


Invaluable for the Professional Man

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Here is a shorthand that people in all walks of life may learn with amazing ease and write with extraordinary facility. It is PARAGON Shorthand—an American invention. It is so simple, so easy to grasp, that anybody of average intelligence can learn it in the evenings of a single week **and be able to read their notes perfectly.**

Frankly, it **does** seem incredible. Yet we are not asking you to take our word for it at all. We simply ask to be allowed to send you the complete Course of Paragon Shorthand and have you keep it for a week and study it just as if it were your own. Then if you are not convinced of the simplicity of this shorthand and satisfied that you can learn it easily, we merely ask you to return it. Could anything be fairer? Could we do more to establish the truth of our claims?

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That is the extent of the Paragon System. The lessons are so arranged that you can complete each one in a single evening's study. To give you an idea of its brevity and simplicity so that you can appreciate **why** it can be mastered so quickly, realize that the entire System consists of: **The Paragon Alphabet; 26 simple word-signs; 6 prefix contractions and 1 general rule for abbreviations.** THAT IS ALL.

This is a decided contrast to the ponderously technical and involved old-time systems, with their intricacies of shading, position, 4,000 or more word-signs and maze of rules to memorize. No wonder it takes months of weary study to master them. In **Paragon this is all eliminated.** You have **very little** to commit to memory. That is why it is learned so easily and quickly. At the end of a week you begin speed practice if it is your intention to qualify for a stenographic position; otherwise you can begin using your newly acquired knowledge at once.

Shorthand—Its Possibilities

The world is full of examples of what a shorthand writer can rise to, **beyond** stenography. Young people beginning in business as stenographers soon learn the details of the business they are in—how it is conducted—the firm's policy—special conditions in the trade—trade secrets, prices, discounts and the most vital things concerning that business. **All of these things are dictated to you.** This in itself forms the basis of **valuable experience** in shaping the course of young men and women looking forward to **business careers.** And when vacancies occur, you are the logical candidate for promotion to a more responsible and better-paying position **because of your intimate knowledge of the business.**

That is how many of the biggest business men and women in America made their start. Prominent among those who began as stenographers are: Frank A. Vanderlip; Geo. B. Cortelyou; Edward Bok; William Loeb, Jr.; Geo. W. Perkins; Grace Hanson (from $6.50 file clerk to advertising manager of New York's biggest department store); Mary Orr; Katherine Harrison (said to make $40,000 a year); Olive A. Cole (once a stenographer, now advertising manager of Gillette Safety Razor Co.).

Everybody's Property Now

The usefulness of shorthand until recent years has been restricted chiefly to court reporters and business stenographers, for the reason that it was too difficult for the average person to master. It remained for PARAGON Shorthand to bring this valuable knowledge into **universal use—for everybody.** People now in **all walks of life** use it; executives and their subordinates; merchants and their clerks; professional men, such as lawyers, clergymen, physicians; nurses, journalists, etc.; Army and Navy men; salesmen, engineers, superintendents, farmers, etc.

Try This Lesson Now

Take the ordinary longhand letter *d*. Eliminate everything but the long downstroke and there will remain /. This is the Paragon symbol for **D.** It is always written **downward.**

From the longhand letter *e* rub out everything except the upper part—the circle—and you will have the Paragon **E.** e

Write this circle at the **beginning** of / and you will have **Ed.** /

By letting the circle remain **open** it will be a **hook,** and this **hook** stands for **A.** Thus / will be **Ad.** Add another **A** at the end, thus / and you will have a girl's name, **Ada.**

From *o* eliminate the initial and final strokes and *o* will remain, which is the Paragon symbol for **O.**

For the **longhand** *m*, which is made of 7 strokes, you use this **one** horizontal stroke —

Therefore, —*o* would be **Mo.**

Now continue the **E** across the **M,** so as to add **D**—thus / and you will have **Med.** Now add the **large** circle for **O,** and you will have / (medo), which is **Meadow,** with the silent **A** and **W** omitted.

You now have 5 of the characters. There are only 26 in all. Then you memorize 26 simple word-signs, 6 prefix contractions and one natural rule for abbreviations. That is all.

Adequate for Every Purpose

You can use PARAGON Shorthand for **dictation, taking down telephone messages, speeches, conferences, sermons, lectures, lessons, court testimony**—anything.

It is used in the offices of the largest corporations in the world, such as Standard Oil Co., United States Steel Corporation, the great Railway offices, etc.

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Think of it! For $5 you can have a complete education in shorthand, a life-long help—not only for yourself, but for your wife or children or any other relative. You can have **exactly the same course** that has been taught for 25 years by its inventor personally by mail at his regular fee of $25. With the seven lessons and the ingenious self-examination method devised by the inventor, you can learn PARAGON at home in seven evenings.

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Try it at our expense first. Simply fill out the coupon below and mail it to us. After you receive the Course, study it for seven evenings and if you believe you can be without this valuable knowledge any longer, mail it back to the Institute and **you will owe nothing.** Send in the coupon or write a letter **today.**

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You may send me the Complete Course of *Paragon Shorthand* with the distinct understanding that I have 7 days after its receipt to either remail the Course to you or send you $5.00.

Name.....

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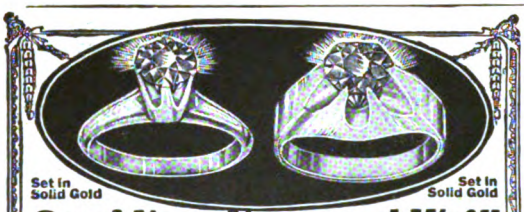
In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



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DON'T send a penny. Send your name and finger size and say, "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit $4.75 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send $2.50 a month until $18.75 has been paid.

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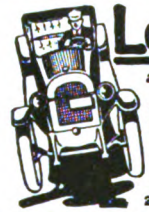

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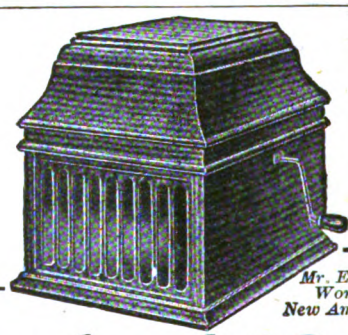
HINDERCORNS Removes Corns, Callouses, etc., stops all pain, ensures comfort to the feet, makes walking easy. 15 cents by mail or at Druggists. Hiscox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.



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Keep the New Edison Amberola—Edison's great phonograph with the diamond stylus—and your choice of records, for only $1.00. Pay balance at rate of only a few cents a day. Free trial in your own home before you decide to buy. Nothing down. **Write for our New Edison Book** and pictures, **free.**

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Wear It 30 Days Free at Our Expense Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs, chest and bust; relieves backache, curvatures, nervousness, ruptures, constipation. Comfortable and easy to wear. **KEEP YOURSELF FIT.** Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

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For Boys and Girls Also

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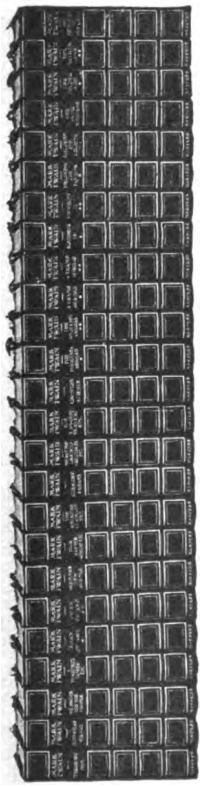
Come back and be a boy again. Mark Twain will lead the way. Come and plan and plot with Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn their ingenuous sins.



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All-Story-Arg.—5-3-'19

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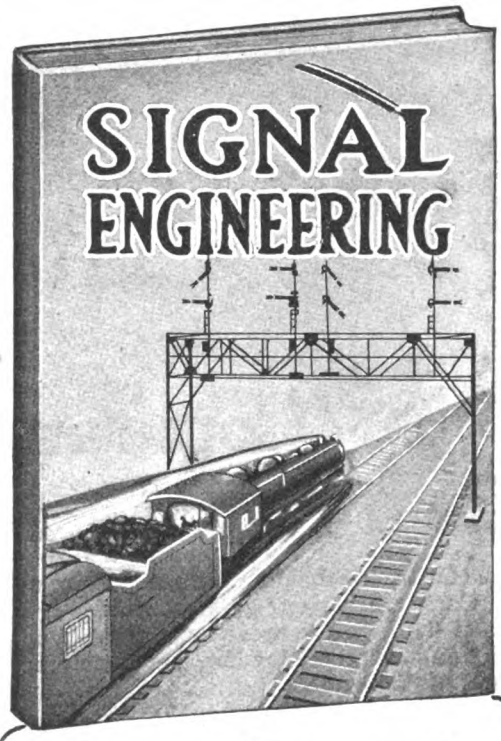

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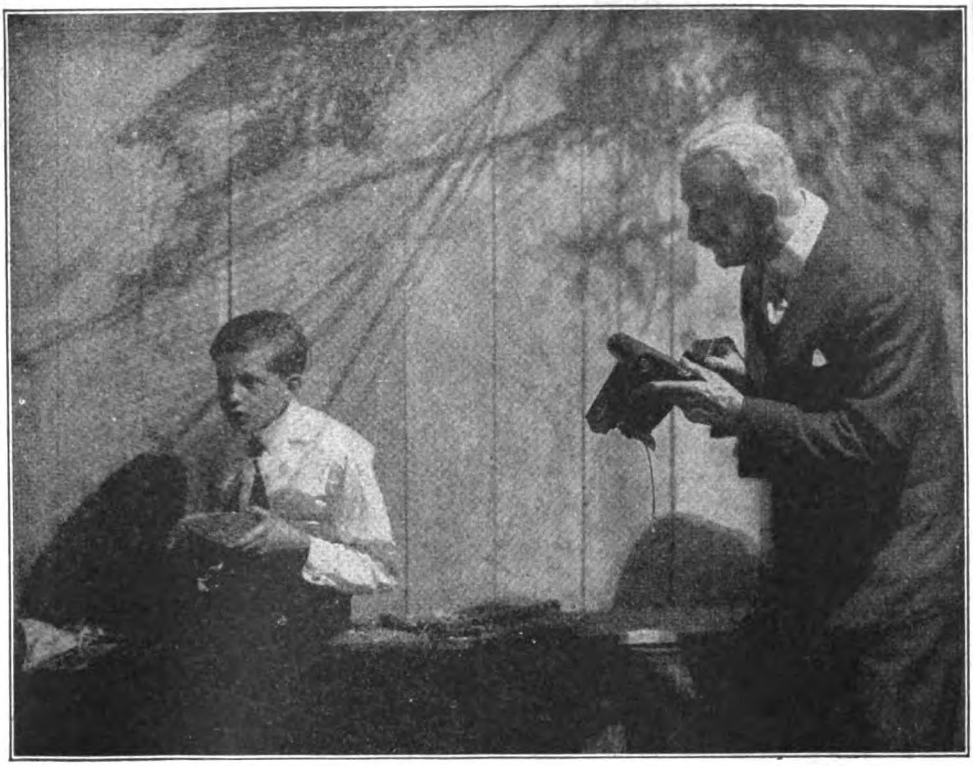
Make the Kodak Record Autographic.



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And Dad, with his Kodak, has caught the boyish story. Now he is writing the autographic record—the date and title on the film; the record that will give double value to the picture when time has played sad tricks with memory.

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